

Students' Perceptions of the Urgency of Hajj as the Fifth Pillar of Islam in the Modern Era: A Case Study at Institut Madani Nusantara

Latif¹

¹Institut Madani Nusantara

Latif, e-mail: latif.tqn165@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The study purpose was to explore the perceptions of students at Institut Madani Nusantara regarding the urgency and relevance of Hajj as the fifth pillar of Islam in the modern era. In today's rapidly changing world, where religious practices often intersect with technology, global mobility, and modern lifestyles, understanding how young Muslim students view the obligation of Hajj is essential. This research aimed to assess their level of awareness, the influencing factors behind their perceptions, and how they interpret the spiritual and social roles of Hajj today.

Materials and methods. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions involving 15 students from the Hajj and Umrah Management program. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevant academic and spiritual engagement. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common patterns, insights, and divergent views among the participants.

Results. Findings showed that most students perceive Hajj not only as a religious obligation but also as a symbol of spiritual awakening, unity, and submission to God. However, some challenges were identified, including financial limitations, limited understanding of procedures, and the assumption that Hajj is only relevant for older adults. Technological exposure and educational background influenced their awareness and attitudes significantly.

Conclusions. The study concludes that while the urgency of Hajj is acknowledged by students, there is a need for more contextualized educational efforts to enhance both spiritual understanding and practical readiness. Integrating experiential learning in manasik training and using digital platforms may increase interest and preparedness among the younger generation.

Keywords: Hajj, student perception, fifth pillar of Islam, religious awareness, modern era

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, the practice of religion is increasingly influenced by global developments such as digital transformation, cultural pluralism, social mobility, and economic fluctuations. Islam, as a comprehensive way of life, emphasizes the fulfillment of its five pillars (arkan al-Islam) as a foundation of religious identity and spiritual obedience. Among these five pillars, Hajj holds a unique and powerful position due to its complexity, spiritual depth, and collective dimension. As the fifth pillar, Hajj is not only an individual obligation for Muslims who meet certain conditions but also a communal experience that symbolizes the unity of the Muslim ummah across the world (Nasr, 2003).

However, in contemporary contexts, the urgency and relevance of performing Hajj have become subjects of discussion among younger generations, especially students in higher education institutions. These discussions are not limited to religious commitment, but also intersect with personal priorities, financial realities, sociopolitical environments, and exposure to global Islamic discourse (Mohammad & Rahman, 2020). Students today are often part of Generation Z, a group raised with digital literacy and influenced by dynamic global values. Understanding how this

generation perceives religious duties particularly Hajj is vital for religious educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers (Said, 2021).

The Hajj pilgrimage is one of the oldest and most significant religious rituals in the world, performed annually by millions of Muslims in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The spiritual impact of Hajj is profound: it symbolizes submission to Allah, self-purification, and equality among Muslims. Yet, for many young Muslims, Hajj remains a distant goal—something they associate with later stages of life. This perception often stems from a lack of early spiritual preparation, limited knowledge of the rituals, and the assumption that Hajj is a financial or logistical burden more suitable for older or retired individuals (Yusof & Fauzi, 2019).

At the same time, Islamic education in institutions like Institut Madani Nusantara plays a crucial role in shaping students' religious understanding, including the theological and practical aspects of Hajj. Students in programs such as Hajj and Umrah Management are not only expected to understand the rites of Hajj but also to promote its spiritual and institutional significance to the broader Muslim society. Thus, their perceptions are essential in measuring how effective religious education has been in building awareness, motivation, and readiness to fulfill this obligation (Ismail & Zain, 2020).

The relevance of Hajj in the modern era must also be understood in relation to broader issues such as religious identity in secular societies, economic stratification among Muslims, the commercialization of religious rituals, and the role of digital platforms in delivering religious knowledge (Roy, 2004). These factors often shape the way youth interpret the meaning, priority, and feasibility of Hajj. For example, while some students may appreciate the transformative spiritual dimension of Hajj, others may be more concerned about its affordability, accessibility, or alignment with contemporary values (Hamdan, 2021).

Scholarly discussions in the field of Islamic studies have shown that religious perception is not static—it evolves with education, personal experience, community influence, and media exposure. Therefore, understanding students' perceptions is not merely descriptive; it has deep implications for policy design, religious pedagogy, and strategic planning in hajj institutions (Azra, 2013). This study thus seeks to explore the perceptions of students at Institut Madani Nusantara regarding the urgency of Hajj as the fifth pillar of Islam in today's modern and digital society.

The urgency referred to in this context is both normative (as an Islamic obligation) and contextual (as a contemporary spiritual necessity). By examining how students perceive the timing, purpose, and relevance of Hajj, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how young Muslims internalize and prioritize their religious duties. The findings can also support the development of innovative educational programs and practical modules that better align with the spiritual needs and worldviews of the younger Muslim generation (Huda, 2022).

This study is also significant in the framework of Islamic higher education development, especially in institutions offering programs such as Hajj and Umrah Management. As future practitioners, administrators, or educators in the Hajj sector, students' perceptions of the urgency of Hajj may directly influence how they design, manage, or advocate for pilgrimage services in the future. Therefore, capturing their perspectives is not only academically relevant but also practically urgent (Fauzan, 2018).

The study purpose was to analyze the perceptions of students at Institut Madani Nusantara on the urgency of Hajj as a core religious obligation in the modern era, and to identify factors that shape or influence those perceptions. The research also aimed to assess the role of Islamic education, spiritual awareness, and socio-technological influences in shaping students' understanding and motivation to perform Hajj.

METHOD

Study participants

This study involved 15 students from the Hajj and Umrah Management Study Program at Institut Madani Nusantara. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their academic engagement, active participation in manasik activities, and willingness to contribute to in-depth interviews. The sample consisted of both male and female students from the third and fourth

years, representing a mix of urban and rural backgrounds. All participants were Muslims and had received formal education related to the pillars of Islam, particularly the theory and practice of Hajj. Prior informed consent was obtained from each participant, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

Study organization

The research applied a qualitative descriptive design using a case study approach. Data were collected over a period of one month (May–June 2025) through a combination of in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The research setting was on the campus of Institut Madani Nusantara and several online sessions via Zoom for participants unable to attend in person. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions focusing on students' understanding, personal views, and perceived urgency of Hajj in the context of their religious life and modern challenges. Field notes and audio recordings were used to ensure accuracy of data collection. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

Statistical analysis

As this is a qualitative study, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, based on the framework of Braun & Clarke (2006). The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded manually, and categorized into themes and subthemes. Data triangulation was applied by comparing interview findings with observational notes and participant feedback to enhance credibility and trustworthiness. The final interpretation of results was validated through member checking with selected participants. No quantitative or inferential statistical methods were employed, as the aim was to explore perceptions and meanings rather than measure variables.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the perceptions of students from the Hajj and Umrah Management Program at Institut Madani Nusantara regarding the urgency and relevance of Hajj as the fifth pillar of Islam in the context of modern society. The data, collected through qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 20 students, revealed various insights categorized into four major themes: (1) Awareness and Understanding of Hajj as a Pillar of Islam, (2) The Perceived Urgency of Performing Hajj in the Modern Era, (3) The Influence of Technological and Social Change, and (4) The Role of Education and Institutional Support.

1. Awareness and Understanding of Hajj as a Pillar of Islam

All participants demonstrated a fundamental awareness of Hajj as one of the five pillars of Islam. Most were able to articulate the significance of the pilgrimage both as a religious obligation and a spiritual journey. They emphasized that Hajj is not merely a ritualistic event but a profound act of submission and reflection. As one respondent noted, *"Hajj is not just a duty—it's the culmination of a believer's journey. It represents surrender, discipline, and the unity of the Muslim ummah."*

The students' understanding reflected a cognitive and spiritual maturity that can be attributed to their academic background. Their interpretations often went beyond the legalistic obligation and ventured into philosophical and existential reasoning. This aligns with the findings of Nasr (2003), who asserted that Hajj encompasses both outward observance and inward transformation, combining devotion, purification, and moral realignment.

Interestingly, although all participants acknowledged Hajj's status as a wajib (obligatory) practice for those able, there was a noticeable spectrum in how "urgency" was defined. Some considered urgency as a spiritual priority that should be pursued as early as possible. Others interpreted it practically Hajj is urgent when one has fulfilled financial and physical readiness.

2. The Perceived Urgency of Performing Hajj in the Modern Era

A key finding from this study was the diversity in perceptions about the urgency of Hajj in today's context. Several students argued that while Hajj remains fundamentally obligatory, the modern lifestyle, economic uncertainty, and global challenges such as pandemics, visa regulations, and travel limitations create practical barriers that affect one's ability to prioritize it.

Others emphasized the increasing costs of Hajj and how this has shifted perceptions among younger generations. One participant explained, "For many youths, buying a house, investing in education, or starting a business feels more urgent than going on Hajj." This sentiment reflects the broader economic consciousness of Gen Z Muslims and resonates with studies such as those by Said (2021), who identified material prioritization as a challenge for religious observance among younger demographics.

Nonetheless, a significant number of respondents maintained that despite modern constraints, the spiritual and communal relevance of Hajj is even more important today. In an era of moral relativism and spiritual confusion, Hajj serves as a counterbalance—a grounding force. This viewpoint is supported by Roy (2004), who described modern religiosity as increasingly individualized, making communal rituals like Hajj even more crucial.

3. The Influence of Technological and Social Change

Students also commented on how technology and digital media have reshaped perceptions and experiences of religious obligations. Social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube have made Hajj more visible and "relatable" to younger generations. Virtual manasik programs, Hajj vlogs, and online testimonials help demystify the process and inspire early interest.

Several participants shared that digital exposure to Hajj through influencers, documentaries, and academic platforms has increased their aspiration to perform the pilgrimage. One student stated, "Watching videos of people doing Hajj makes me feel like I am there. It motivates me and makes it feel more real and attainable." However, there were also critical views regarding the commercialization and performativity of Hajj on digital platforms. Some students expressed concern that such representations could shift the intention from devotion to exhibition. This aligns with the critique by Mohammad and Rahman (2020), who warned of the emerging trend of religious commodification among Muslim millennials.

In parallel, digital transformation in Hajj management—such as smart cards, biometric visas, and mobile apps—was seen positively by most students. They appreciated the convenience and efficiency these innovations bring, especially for first-time pilgrims. This resonates with findings by Yusof and Fauzi (2019), who emphasized the need for digital competence among prospective pilgrims in the modern era.

4. The Role of Education and Institutional Support

Another recurring theme was the role of Islamic higher education in nurturing awareness and commitment to Hajj. Students highlighted that courses in Hajj and Umrah management have deepened their understanding not only of rituals and procedures but also the spiritual essence and historical development of the pilgrimage. Educational initiatives like simulated manasik sessions, guest lectures from returned pilgrims, and field studies at travel bureaus were viewed as highly impactful. Such experiential learning fosters a sense of preparedness and connection, echoing the framework proposed by Ismail and Zain (2020), who advocated for integrative pedagogy in Hajj education.

Moreover, participants expressed that the institutional environment at Institut Madani Nusantara plays a crucial role in shaping their perceptions. The academic culture, combined with spiritual mentoring, cultivates a balanced understanding—one that acknowledges both the religious imperative and the contemporary challenges of performing Hajj. One participant reflected, "Being part of this program helps me see Hajj not just as something for the future, but as a life goal I'm preparing for now—spiritually, financially, and intellectually." This statement reinforces the importance of proactive education in transforming Hajj from a distant obligation into a lived aspiration.

5. Discussion in Broader Context

The findings reveal a generation of Muslim students who are navigating between tradition and modernity with a nuanced perspective. Their perceptions of the urgency of Hajj are shaped by multiple intersecting factors: economic realities, spiritual goals, technological exposure, and institutional frameworks.

The data confirms that while the doctrinal significance of Hajj remains unchallenged, the subjective sense of urgency is negotiable, especially among young adults balancing competing priorities. This complexity echoes Azra's (2013) observation that Islamic practices in Indonesia are highly adaptive and contextually shaped by social developments. Moreover, the students' critical engagement with digital religious content reflects both opportunity and risk. Digital platforms can be powerful tools for religious motivation, but they also carry the risk of diluting sacredness through spectacle or superficiality. As Huda (2022) notes, religious education must adapt to these trends by fostering media literacy and spiritual depth simultaneously.

In terms of educational implications, this study underscores the need for higher education institutions to integrate both theological and practical aspects of Hajj in their curricula. A holistic approach combining fiqh, ethics, history, and management can equip students not only to perform Hajj personally but also to guide others professionally. From a management perspective, the insights also suggest that future Hajj organizers must consider generational expectations around transparency, digital access, and affordability. Effective Hajj management in the digital age will require not just logistical efficiency but also emotional and spiritual resonance.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that students at Institut Madani Nusantara hold a strong and well-informed perception regarding the urgency of performing the Hajj pilgrimage as the fifth pillar of Islam, especially in the context of the modern era. Their understanding goes beyond religious obligation, viewing Hajj as a spiritual necessity in an increasingly uncertain and morally complex world. This perception is shaped by a combination of religious knowledge, personal spiritual motivation, and the sociocultural realities of contemporary life.

Furthermore, the students recognize the importance of preparing for Hajj from an early age, considering the long waiting lists and increasing logistical challenges in Indonesia. Their readiness is also influenced by the accessibility of information through digital platforms and the availability of structured manasik programs. However, economic and informational barriers remain, and many students express the need for enhanced institutional support, including mentoring, simulations, and digital tools.

In conclusion, the urgency of Hajj for students is not only a theological imperative but also a response to the social, economic, and technological conditions of the modern world. Educational institutions and religious organizations must innovate and strengthen Hajj preparation services, particularly for the younger generation. Doing so will ensure that the values and practices of the Hajj are preserved, internalized, and meaningfully lived out in both personal and communal dimensions of Muslim life.

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