

Penghulu Institution Credibility and Leadership: Critical Challenges in Administrative Reform

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ABSTRACT

The institution of Penghulu is the oldest and longest in the history of government administration in Malaysia. Since 50 century ago the credibility and leadership of Penghulu is maintain at higher respect of society and government structure. However the credibility of the institution getting weak due to rapid urbanization, lower entry level requirements and inadequate staffing diminish the power and influence of Penghulu. They are no longer seen as the authoritative figure for rural development, deliver their functions and existence have been questioned. Building upon this framework, this paper attempts to examine the challenges facing by institution of Penghulu in deliver duties in Kedah state administration. The study utilizes a qualitative method that involves personal interviews of 10 currents and former Penghulu as well as former state secretary in Kedah. The findings of the interviews are classified based on three major themes: entry level requirements, human resource development, and symbol of reference.

Key words: *Administrative Reform, District Office, Penghulu, Head of Mukim, Kedah*

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INTRODUCTION

The Rural Development Policy (DPLB) was launched in 2019 with aim to transform rural areas to be liveable area for work, live, gain education

and many more. Align with the aim and vision towards Prosperous Rurals (Luar Bandar Sejahtera), Malaysia government is working seriously to strengthen rural communities' facilities including in aspects of management and leadership at village level (Kementerian Pembangunan Luar Bandar, 2019). In this regards, the Ministry of Rural Development has put initiatives to strengthen human capital capabilities through joint ventures with other agencies including private sector. In an effort to attract investors to develop the rural areas, the government should also be focus on enhance the rural administration capability to control and jointly enhance the progress of their villages. In this regard, Penghulu is an institution that can act as a liaison between government and people in delivering the policies and programmes that have been planned (Izzuddin, 2013). Thus, it is timely to assess the credibility and understand the challenges faced by the rural leaders such as Penghulu in keeping with the present day demands on administrative reform in the institution. In this study will focus on Penghulu institution in Kedah as case study due to the target of federal government through the Shared Prosperity Vision 2021-2030 will give attention on Kedah for the Prosperous Rurals programs and activities (Zain, 2019).

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The political structure of Kedah was typical of the Malay political system in which the largest unit was the state or called as Negeri Kedah. Under the district administration is a sub district headed by Penghulu. The appointment of Penghulu is suggested by regional authorities who were from royal family and approved by Sultan. The regional authorities would collect either a share of annual crops, fruits and livestock from the cultivators (Bonney, 1971).

The Penghulu has wide jurisdiction including religious matters such as preventing acts of superstition and religious activities, gambling, drinking liquor, smuggling, arresting and prosecuting people who do not fast and pray. There were many duties and responsibilities of the Penghulu which include to assist the police orders, to enquire into any offences and bring offenders to justice, and to protect the society (Ali, 1975). Furthermore, Penghulu also responsible to ensure the tenants pay their tenth of the produce, to settle all cases of marriage and religious matters and to keep a list of all persons demographic information in his district such as age, trade, time of departure, births, deaths and marriages.

During the colonial period, the roles of Penghulu have been changed as well as the power of appointment. In the previous time before the colonial period, Sultan has the power to appoint Penghulu to administer the sub district on behalf of Sultan (Bonney, 1971). However, during the colonial period the British government appointed Penghulu by the qualification, administrative capability and not through the inheritance as he had been before. After the independent, thus Penghulu became a government officer. They were representative of the government and also representative of local society. These days, the appointment of Penghulu is made through Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam Negeri. While, in some states such as Kedah, the appointment of Penghulu is made by the consent of the Sultan.

Thus, the roles of Penghulu are more focused on the administrative rather than acted on behalf of the Sultan as in the pre colonial period. However, the traditional characteristics of the Penghulu are still been followed. Penghulu still act as the middleman between the local society and government (Izzuddin, 2013; Wan Rabiah, Kushairi, & Suharto, 2015). Penghulu also play a role of development agent, unity, role model and referee among villagers. Local society in the rural areas idolised the Penghulu who is very kind, generous, hardworking, friendly and easy to mingle around within community. If there are any problems or issues arise in the village, the local society will refer these problems to Penghulu. Penghulu will act as the problem solver for any problem raised by local society. This situation has brought opportunity to the Penghulu to shape the society as outlined by government policy (Nor Razinah, 2016). The capabilities of Penghulu to influence society really help them in delivery duties easily and also create impact for rural development. The development of rural areas also has create disadvantage to the capabilities and narrow down the job scope of Penghulu area (Yusof, 2011). The impact of development on Penghulu responsibilities can be seen in a few aspects.

Firstly, the impact of urbanization has diminished the power and influence of Penghulu. For example, it used to be that villagers tend to go to Penghulu to make report regarding birth, death, marriage and divorce. However, these cases are now being handle by specific government agencies such as National Registration Department and Islamic Religious Affairs Department. In addition to that, job referral is normally been part of the responsibility of Penghulu especially for those who are seeking for employment. But now prospective employee can go and get the referral from any government officers (Izzuddin, 2013).

Secondly, in regards to entry level qualification for Penghulu, the position of Penghulu only requires a diploma. Such requirement down grade the position of Penghulu in the district administration. Even though Penghulu tend to have years of experiences in dealing with rural development issues, there still become subservient to the younger junior officer. These causes problem when their advices or recommendations are being ignored by the officers.

Thirdly, the issue of inadequate staffing also impacts the ability of Penghulu to effectively perform their job and responsibilities. As of today, the office of Penghulu only has one staff. This clearly inhibit the ability of the Penghulu to solve a lot of administrative and developmental issues put forward by the villages in the sub district. Many of the actions are delayed due to the shortage of manpower. This has caused arise in the number of complaint received in the district office. The difficulties of Penghulu in deliver their work become an argument and underlying factors inform that further study need to develop to assist state government in design human capital development framework for Penghulu institution. Thus, objective of this paper is to examine the challenge facing by Penghulu in deliver administration task.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Administrative of Penghulu Institution

The institution of Penghulu have been said to be the oldest and the longest in history of administration in Malaysia. Perhaps it was the oldest in the Malay sultanate era as the Kedah Ancient Kingdom started as early as 50 century A.D (Bonney, 1971). According to the history of Malay sultanate, Kedah was the oldest sultanate in Malaysia which started about 1400 years ago with the two Malay head of community named Tun Derma Dewa and Tun Perkasa (Shariff, 2012).

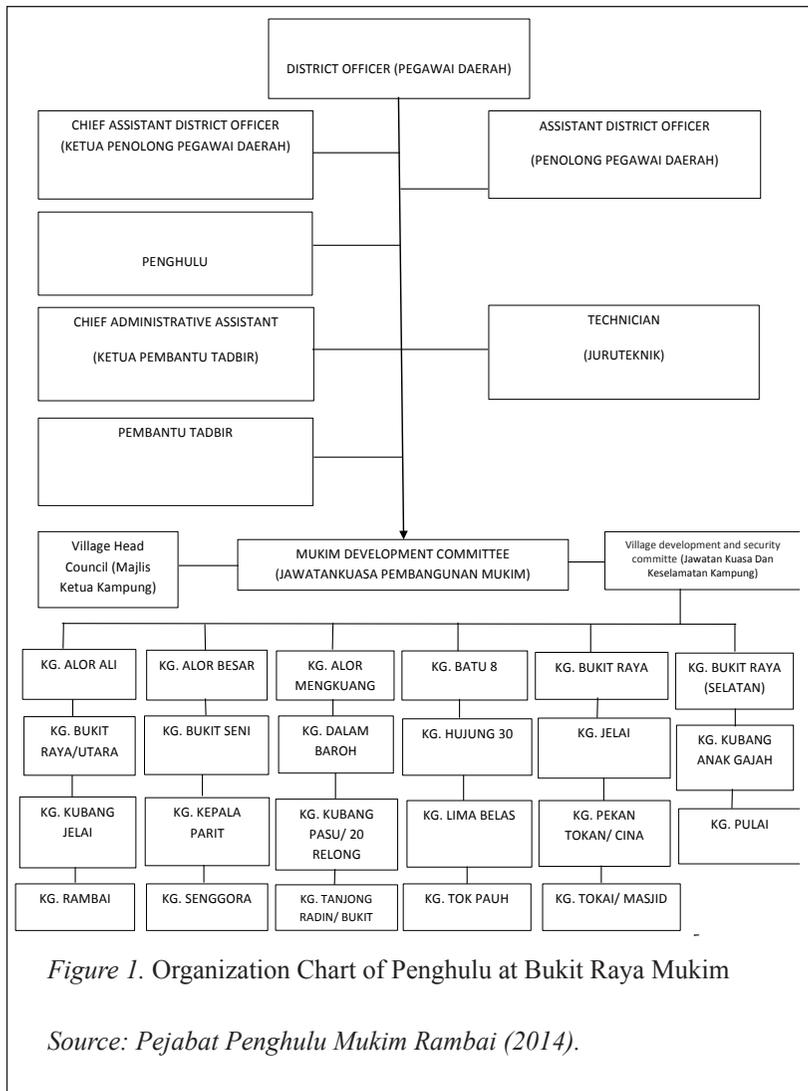
In the Malay sultanate era, the appointment of Penghulu is made by the regional authorities and was approved by the Sultan. However, during the colonial period, the Penghulu was appointed by the British and they become a government servant. After independent, Penghulu was appointed by election held in the mosque on Friday. The villagers will raised their hands and choose the candidate whom they like to be the Penghulu. It was important for the British who had to launch colonial administration under such unstable condition, to find key people locally and to rule the country through them. Therefore, the British chose Penghulu for this task and the

basic unit chosen for administration to be managed by Penghulu was sub district. The Penghulu posted in each sub districts were to play the most important role in the colonial rule in the local society (Bakar, 2008; Ghazali, 2008).

The chronology of administrative reform in Penghulu institution was started in year 1969 when the appointment of Penghulu made by Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam Kedah until today. In the year 2008, the position of Penghulu is called Assistant Administrative Officer or Penolong Pegawai Tadbir Penghulu (N27). However, this position was changed to “Penghulu (NP27)” in the year 2009. Public Service Circular Year 2009 has informed the Malaysian government’s decision to separate the Penghulu’s services from the Assistant Administrative Officer scheme by establishing a new scheme of service, Penghulu grade NP27, NP32, NP36, NP40 (Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Awam Tahun 2009). This position was changed again in the year 2016 to “Penghulu (NP29)” until to date. The qualification for the position of Penghulu is STPM or STAM, 4 “senawi” and Diploma in Public Administration (Hamzah, 2008).

In regards to political involvement shown that Penghulu are advised not to involve with the party politics. However, they must be sensitive to the current political situation. Therefore, Penghulu needs to have good relationship with the politician especially with the assemblyman for the sake of the development in the district. The Penghulu who is creative and innovative can use his influence for the unity of the people and to deliver the government messages through society’s events and programmes organized (Hamzah, 2008).

In terms of hierarchy of power that inform responsibilities of Penghulu can be seen in the organisation chart at the district level as in figure 1. In the figure 1 indicates that Penghulu has direct involvement with administration at the district level and the people at the lower level. This relationship can be seen in several aspects such as human development and infrastructure facilities in the Mukim, religious, social, economics, safety and education in community. Penghulu is assisted by administrative assistants (pembantu tadbir) who are directly involved with the community at the lower level. The duties of administrative assistants include general office administration, administrative of the village development and security committee (JKKK), mukim information management, community info, poverty eradication programme info, human development and development at rural areas. In addition, Penghulu also responsible for monitoring the implementation of duties among the village chief (Bakar, 2008; Ghazali, 2008).



METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this case study is qualitative methods. Qualitative methodology is using interviews and observations to collect data. Qualitative methods provide rich, contextual explorations of the topic that are often personally or culturally meaningful (Ayob, 2007). In order to complete this case study, several interviews had been carried out for the past three

months in order to obtain the information about this topic. The interview is based on the questions that have been designed based on previous studies. Some scholars suggested that interview methods as interactive form of data collection techniques (Kerlinger, 1973; Majid, 2000), that lead to more information can be obtained from respondents. There are few important persons that had been interviewed such as the Pokok Sena District Officer, the Penghulu in the District of Pokok Sena, the former State Secretary of Kedah, the former and well-known Penghulu and finally the historian of Kedah as in table 1.

Table 1

List of Personal Interviews

Respondent	Position
1.	Pokok Sena District Officer
2.	Penghulu of Gajah Mati
3.	Penghulu of Jabi
4.	Penghulu of Derang
5.	Penghulu of Bukit Lada
6.	Penghulu of Tualang
7.	Penghulu of Lesong
8.	Former Kedah State Secretary
9.	Former Well-known Penghulu
10.	Kedah Historian

Apart from these interviews, the data are also obtain from articles, journals, books and books from Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN). Data obtained from interview was analyzed used Nvivo 11 software program. Data is reviewed and graded from translated audio form in manual form (writing) until the desired category is formed. The use of the source is to collect all data acquired after the coding is completed for the purpose of analyzing data. Then, tree nodes performed based on the category of analyzing that has been created coding by the previous code and is used to ensure that the selected

category does not overlap each other based on the encoding that has been made. After all data is included in the tree nodes according to their category, the next action is to obtain the frequency of data to seek quantitative frequency results based on each research objective. Last step is to provide detail theme and sub-themes of study based on the findings from tree nodes produced.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The credibility as a leader and challenges facing by Penghulu was evaluated through a Penghulu's interview in the area of study. The challenges facing by Penghulu who may prevent the community leadership works. The study has found that Penghulu as community leaders have the characteristics of honest leaders and have credibility to be the administrator or chief of Mukim. The credibility of Penghulu can be seen from personality and knowledge. Penghulu's personality includes having self esteem, being true, patient with society behavior and acting in a fair manner. In duty, Penghulu has to go down the field to look for people's problems and solve problems of the people. Ability of Penghulu to solve people's problems will lead to higher honor of the Penghulu.

Penghulu also has knowledge, specifically on the functions of other government departments. Knowledge is very important to the Penghulu as they serve as the government's policy spokesman to the community, caring for the people and society in need of help, for example poor people, single mothers, disable people and others. Penghulu is also responsible for the distribution of aid or service of the grant not to give up the faction and provide assistance to those in need. But depending on the ability of the self-reliance. He is also became source of reference regarding land and estate and family problems. However, there are still several challenges faced by the Penghulu in performing their duties.

Challenges of Penghulu Institution

The challenges faced by the Penghulu as community leaders in implementing administrative and community development works can be seen in the following themes;

Entry level requirement

Respondent 9 who has started his service as Penghulu in the year 1969 and he was the President of the Malaysian Penghulu Association for 14 years until

the end of his service. From his point of view, he said that it would be great if the post of Penghulu could be upgraded. This is because the Penghulu now are facing many challenges in this new era. Before this, Penghulu was well-known to all local society in his sub district. However, recently, some of the local society does not know who the Penghulu in the sub district is. It happened because of the Penghulu's mistakes as they do not know how to be the head of the sub district, do not mingle around with all local society, lack of public relation skills and low self-esteem. Respondent 3 also agreed to this statement that entry level requirement should be upgraded to degree holder as Penghulu will need to deal with many challenges and issues in the new era. Meanwhile, Respondent 8 said that the title Penghulu needs to be changed to Officer in order to expand and administer the district.

Human Resource Development

Many of the Penghulus lack of critical trainings such as information technology, counselling, decision making, conflict resolution, and leadership. As such, they are not well equipped to face problems in the villages. These were told by the Respondent 8 whom had served the government from the year 1962 until 1992. He had become the State Secretary from the year 1989 until 1992. He told that the Penghulu will convey messages and demands from the local society that they needed proper roads and bridges as part of the infrastructure. He said that Penghulu needs to know all administration system, technology, development, skills and knowledgeable. Penghulu must have the urge to help the poor by giving speech or advice for them to change their style of living to a better lifestyle.

Symbol of Reference

According to an interview with Respondent 1, he said that the institution of Penghulu is very important and need to be maintained as it acts as intermediaries between the District Office and the local society. Although some may say that the institution of Penghulu is no longer relevant in this new era of information technology, however, the District Officer said that Penghulu is an important person to the local society. The local society especially who live in the village and rural area mostly will refer to the Penghulu if they need to repair or build new house, a new road, to repair the road, to repair surau or masjid, to ask for help in term of children's education, land issues, social problems, small estate distribution and to increase their life's revenue. Penghulu in each sub districts will convey all of the

villagers' voice to the District Officer. From there the District Officer will know the needs and people's complaints that need to be solved.

Respondent 2 who is the senior Penghulu in the district said that local society needs Penghulu to tell problems and find solutions to the problems as Penghulu is the middle person between the local society and the government. Respondent 6 said that it will be easier for the local society to tell and submit their problems to the Penghulu as Penghulu is the head of the sub district which they are always meet the local society at the village. Respondent 5 and Respondent 7 said that not all local society live near the town and some of them live in the rural area which are far from town and they do not have the transport to go to the relevant agencies asking for help. This means that the Penghulu is the easiest person that they will turn for help. Respondent 4 said that this is the responsibilities of Penghulu to help ease the burden of the local society by providing what are needed by them. Respondent 10 agreed to this statement when Penghulu is a symbol of reference to the villagers since the traditional administration system during the Malay sultanate era.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the study, it has recovered two major reforms. Firstly, the state government has to increase the entry level requirements to ensure the position of Penghulu is upgraded to the officer status. The Penghulu in Kedah are more than 60% are degree holders. Therefore, the Human Resource Department need to upgrade the post of Penghulu to a higher level and the candidates must have a degree in order to apply the post of Penghulu.

Since future changes are unpredictable, then knowledge and skills become increasingly important to determine what modifications should be accepted and implemented and which should be rejected by the Penghulu. However, Penghulu as the development agent must determine the big challenges and to make sure the changes carried out and implemented are really beneficial to the people. Penghulu must change their attitude and become more responsible and work harder.

Secondly, once the position is upgraded, the state government needs to provide continuous training to better equip the Penghulu with relevant knowledge, skills and abilities to ensure that they can perform their jobs with improved and increased competency. When the position of Penghulu

has been upgraded, the Penghulu will be more knowledgeable in some critical areas which should be given priority such as religion, societal and economy.

Skills in various fields are a necessity and advantage to Penghulu. This is because the field of duty of the Penghulu is like a consultant who provides advice and guidance to his customers. The planning and implementation of projects and religions is a good and relevant example. These skills can also be obtained through training and workshops that can be attended locally and overseas. Usually, the Human Resource Department in Wisma Darul Aman and Institute of Management and Integrity Kedah (INSPIN) will organise these training and workshops.

Attitude is a subjective element of being a very important component in the construction of a person or character, in particular the character of a civil servant such as a moderate, positive, responsible and willing to sacrifice is a form of superior attitude. Penghulu need to have all of these characters in order to be the best Penghulu that can serve the people and the government. By attending all the trainings and courses that has been organized by the state government, the Penghulu will change their attitude and develop to be a better Penghulu.

CONCLUSION

The relevancy of the Institution of Penghulu in Kedah depends upon a number of reforms. First, the institutional reform should seek to change the current entry level requirements to a university degree. This is important to ensure that the work and responsibilities of the Penghulu are reflected by their professional status. The official position of Penghulu that is based on a minimum bachelor degree will held uplift the professional status and prestige of the Penghulu. Second, the increased qualification of the Penghulu should be also be equipped with necessary knowledge, skills and abilities. The important of training in areas such as information technology, counselling, decision making, strategic development, conflict resolution and leadership will better equip the Penghulu to solve and real issues in the sub district. Once these reforms take place, it is hopeful that the Institution of Penghulu can be looked upon highly by the society and the Penghulu can again be relevant as the agent of change in the development of rural areas in Kedah.

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