

Management Issues in the Education of New Muslim (*Muallaf*) in Malaysia

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Abstract

The management of education for New Muslims or in Arabic *muallaf* is important to ensure a knowledgeable and visionary future for them. The purpose of this research is to examine the role of government and non-governmental bodies in systematically managing the educational aspects of converts. Additionally, the author aims to study the management issues in the education of converts in Malaysia. The methodology used in this study includes library research and content analysis. All information and data obtained through the reading of scholarly books in the field of Islamic propagation, such as books, journals, theses, papers, and authoritative websites. The results of the study found that there are issues in the management of education for converts in Malaysia that should be dealt with. Among them are mismanaged aid programs, issues with the administration of inheritance, inadequate information technology infrastructure, unstructured modules and syllabus, and the selection of incompetent teachers, which can slow down the teaching process in the classroom. In conclusion, the authorities need to be more attentive in meticulously organizing and planning the management of education for *muallaf* to improve the existing educational process for them.

Keywords: Management Issues, Education, *Muallaf*, Converts, Da'wah.

Introduction

Converts' education is one of the matters that needs to be emphasized in the aspects of faith (*akidah*), Islamic law (*syariah*), and morality (*akhlak*). These three sources inevitably require a long time to be studied and understood. Among the problems in the field of converts' education are psychological issues. According to Nur A'thiroh & Fariza (2009), converts who experience problems face stress related to the level of belief conflict, tranquility, urgency in seeking religious truth, and regaining tranquility. Additionally, difficulties in acquiring knowledge, lack of shelter, and difficulty finding employment are also categorized as issues that affect them after they embrace Islam (Ibrahim 1995; Ramli 1993). According to Wan

Fauziah (1992), in her study, the issue of education affecting converts is that they find it difficult to learn and understand everything conveyed by their teachers due to the diverse mix of subjects in class sessions. Some of them are still unclear about the purpose of their studies, including what should be prioritized first or where to start learning. This causes converts to feel lost and confused about which classes they should attend. Therefore, there needs to be a well-organized system with a strong structure so that every learning process runs systematically and makes it easier for converts to fully understand Islam.

Furthermore, the converts' education system in Malaysia has administrators or units that manage all matters related to the management of Islamic conversion, finances, welfare, and especially converts' education. This is stated in Adibah Abu Bakar & Zubaidah Ismail (2018), who listed the agencies involved in managing converts' education, including government and non-government agencies. Both types of agencies function to guide converts using effective and systematic methods to produce converts with strong Muslim character. A Muslim with a strong character certainly obeys the commands of Allah SWT and avoids prohibited actions. Additionally, Mariam Majid & Noraini Mohamad (2017) state that Islamic teachings with appropriate approaches can provide a deeper understanding and appreciation of religion for converts. However, in learning religion, there are issues that exist within the converts' education system in Malaysia, especially regarding the management of converts' education. Therefore, this article will discuss the management issues related the education of converts in Malaysia.

This study has significance in two aspects. First, from the perspective of the subject or focus of the study. Second, from the perspective of the target audience. The significance of the study from the focus perspective is to examine the aspect of education for converts (*muallaf*) in line with various guidance approaches that have been implemented for them by government da'wah institutions and NGO da'wah organizations. Meanwhile, the significance of the study from the perspective of the target audience is directed towards academics, researchers, government bodies, non-governmental organizations, especially Islamic organization and individuals involved in the guidance of converts in Malaysia.

The Concept of Converts' Education in Malaysia

Malaysia is an educated country through its citizens who are conscious of knowledge. According to Aderi Che Noh (2014), an individual who has goals and philosophy in Islamic education will surely have high character. Al-Syaibani, as cited by Noor Hisham (2011), opines that an individual with perfect self-identity is shaped in terms of physical, spiritual, intellectual, and practical aspects that guide them to the path of the righteous. Education based on Islamic principles will guide people to obey the commands of Allah SWT and the Prophet SAW. Ultimately, Islamic education with a true concept can train Muslims, especially the underprivileged groups such as converts, in developing good attitudes in their lives (Syed Ali, as cited by Mohd Aderi, 2014) to be able to defend themselves and achieve strong faith and piety.

Converts' education is closely related to tauhid (the oneness of Allah). Properly established tauhid can guide converts to the straight path. According to Halim Tamuri (2021), Malaysia faces significant issues with various ideologies such as materialism, hedonism, and atheism, which inevitably influence societal thinking. Such ideologies will bring negative

consequences to society. Islamic values are needed to eliminate these issues by enhancing the mastery of tauhid within individuals. Therefore, tauhid education should be introduced to converts to instill confidence in Allah SWT and bring about a prosperous life. This is explained in the Quran(Surah al-Anfal, verse 25)

Understanding the direction and purpose of Islamic education is crucial to grasping the concept of effective converts' education. Converts can comprehend Islam more deeply if the system run by certain organizations is systematically and firmly organized. An education system with a strong objective structure will enhance a person's faith, accompanied by teaching content based on Islamic law and good educational philosophy (Jasmi & Tamuri 2011). According to Syed Ashraf (1988), converts who emphasize faith (akidah) and human function will develop leadership qualities. He further asserts that Islamic education and Western education differ in their emphasis on faith and piety to Allah SWT. Thus, a well-planned education system with an organized structure can produce converts who are faithful and pious.

In Malaysia, the education system has a robust Islamic education curriculum that incorporates four elements: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical aspects (Halim Tamuri, 2021). In Malaysian Islamic education, these four elements can produce well-rounded individuals. This is different from the Western education curriculum, which focuses only on one element compared to the Islamic education curriculum. The balance of the tauhid-based education concept can produce converts with religious values, especially in spirituality (Tamuri, 2021).

Continuous education and guidance are essential for new converts who are just beginning to understand Islam. According to Asmawati, Abd Muhsin, Fathiyah, and Noreha (2021), converts need continuous guidance and monitoring in their understanding, appreciation, and practices to align with Islamic law so that all their practices are accepted by Allah SWT. This is crucial to ensure that converts do not engage in practices contrary to Islamic teachings. With continuous monitoring and guidance, converts can gain a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings, deepen their appreciation of the religion, and ensure they practice Islam correctly. Consequently, they can live according to Islamic values and perform acts of worship that are accepted by Allah SWT.

Malaysia also has bodies responsible for guiding converts to understand Islam. Education aims not only to increase individual knowledge but also to develop a balanced appreciation of personality in all aspects of life. In this context, government bodies and non-governmental organizations have been established to manage and provide guidance and education to converts. However, the problem lies in the lack of coordination in management among the involved organizations. Research by Azman (2017), indicates that the activities carried out by these bodies are not coordinated, and the management implementation is inappropriate. This results in confusion and difficulties for converts in understanding and appreciating Islam. Additionally, converts participate in guidance classes organized by responsible bodies, providing understanding and enlightenment about Islamic teachings through classroom learning or beneficial programs. These study classes are crucial in increasing their knowledge of Islam. These classes are conducted regularly and cover

important aspects of Islam as a form of support for converts, in addition to financial support provided (Asmawati et al., 2021).

Appropriate and effective teaching methods can aid the understanding of new converts who need continuous basic guidance. However, research cited from studies by Faris & Yunus (2019), shows that there is no clear guidance for teachers in systematically delivering teaching modules to converts. Similarly, Siti Fathimatul Zahrah & Nur Masyaa'il (2015) highlight the lack of teacher proficiency in using suitable and effective teaching methods for converts.

In conclusion, it is important for responsible bodies to be sensitive to these issues. Improving the quality of teaching and effective methods can streamline the teaching process for converts.

Management of Converts' Education in Malaysia

The legal system in Malaysia, particularly the administration within the Islamic religious departments, has methods and approaches in managing the religious institutions responsible for overseeing all affairs related to new converts (*mualaf*). This includes aspects such as admission, registration, provision of housing, financial assistance, and education (Bakar & Zubaidah Ismail 2018). The bodies responsible for these activities are the State Islamic Religious Councils (MAIN) or the State Islamic Religious Departments (JAIN), which provide facilities to other Islamic agencies in conducting da'wah (propagation) activities in Malaysia. Simultaneously, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also collaborate in assisting marginalized mualaf in every state and country. NGOs such as PERKIM, MACMA, KIMMA, ABIM, and others play significant roles in organizing study classes and other activities at their respective agency levels.

The number of mualaf in Malaysia has been steadily increasing over time. The Muslim population in Malaysia has grown with the inclusion of other ethnic groups such as Chinese, Indian, indigenous people from Peninsular Malaysia, and native people from Sabah and Sarawak, as well as foreign nationals from neighboring countries. According to records from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), the number of *mualaf* in Malaysia up until 2012 was 106,747 individuals. In Sabah, based on reports from the Sabah State Islamic Religious Affairs Department (JHEAINS), the number of mualaf from 2000 to 2019 was 26,161 (Suraya et al., 2018). According to a study by (Noreha Che Abah et al., 2019), it was reported that in 2016, the number of individuals converting to Islam was 9,400, in 2017 it was 9,200, and in 2018 it was 8,340. This reflects a form of success in Islamic da'wah within Malaysian society. As a result of the success in the acceptance of Islam in the country, many non-Muslims from major ethnic groups such as the Chinese, which is the largest group followed by Indians and other minority groups, have embraced Islam. Therefore, the increasing number of mualaf needs to be emphasized by both governmental and non-governmental bodies to help them understand Islam correctly.

There are several roles of government bodies and NGOs in ensuring the educational journey of mualaf in Malaysia is achieved. Among them are:

The Role of Government Bodies in Managing Mualaf

The administrative management of government bodies such as MAIN and JAIN provides education to mualaf through guidance classes, courses, and workshops. The State Islamic Religious Departments (JAIN) are responsible for providing religious education to mualaf at the state level. They offer Islamic religious guidance classes, conduct educational programs, and provide resources to help mualaf learn Islamic teachings. Initially, most states conduct introductory courses on Islam lasting three to five days with overnight stays. These courses aim to provide initial exposure to mualaf about the basics of Islam, both in theory and practice, such as monotheism (tauhid), prayer (solat), obligatory bathing (mandi wajib), and others. Additionally, these courses also aim to attract mualaf who have converted to Islam for specific reasons such as marriage, encouraging them to continue deepening their knowledge of Islam.

The implementation of these classes varies between states in several aspects, such as the frequency of meetings, days and times of classes, number of classes and involved instructors, the language of instruction used, and the place of study. Although the syllabus or modules used also differ between states, all states emphasize the teaching of Islamic fundamentals.

Government bodies in Malaysia play a crucial role in providing education to mualaf. Therefore, there are several government agencies that play significant roles in providing education to mualaf, including:

The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM)

JAKIM plays a crucial role in guiding and providing education to mualaf in Malaysia. They manage educational programs, offer advisory services, and provide support to mualaf in learning and practicing Islam. JAKIM has conducted courses such as the strengthening of faith (akidah) courses, which aim to enhance understanding and solidify the faith of mualaf and indigenous communities. Additionally, *fardu ain* (obligatory acts) classes are held at the mualaf level, focusing on the basics of fardu ain, conducted weekly by indigenous community leaders. This program helps new mualaf to understand and practice Islamic teachings in their daily lives (Jamilah & Zaki, 2014).

Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia (YADIM)

YADIM is a foundation established in 1974 by the Malaysian government. YADIM's mission is to implement and coordinate da'wah (propagation) activities across ideologies and methodologies. Their vision is to be a leader in da'wah based on the Quran and Hadith, continually striving to be an effective catalyst in utilizing the potential of the ummah through Islamic propagation approaches. YADIM is also involved in programs related to Chinese *mualaf* in Malaysia, including in Kelantan. They collaborate with the Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA) in several programs aimed at assisting and supporting Chinese converts to Islam. Through this collaboration, YADIM and MACMA work to provide religious education, guidance, and support to Chinese mualaf. These programs include religious guidance classes, courses, and self-development programs specifically designed for Chinese mualaf. The primary goal is to help them understand and practice Islamic teachings effectively (Zain et al, 2020).

Through the collaboration between these government agencies, mualaf in Malaysia can receive comprehensive and quality religious education. These agencies provide guidance classes, educational programs, training, and resources necessary to help mualaf understand and practice Islam effectively.

The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Managing Mualaf

The role of NGOs in managing mualaf in Malaysia is very important and involves various organizations such as the Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organization (PERKIM), Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA), Malaysian Indian Muslim Congress (KIMMA), Islamic Outreach ABIM (IOA), and many more. These NGOs operate at the local or national level and play a role in assisting and guiding mualaf in understanding and practicing Islam. PERKIM, for instance, is an Islamic NGO in Malaysia that conducts educational and religious activities in accordance with Islamic law. As stated by (Anuar Puteh et al, 2014), PERKIM strives to shape and guide mualaf through study classes that provide a solid understanding and knowledge of Islamic teachings, as well as activities related to property management, wills, and so on.

Additionally, organizations like MACMA help mualaf from the Chinese community by organizing the Strengthening of Faith (Akidah) Program, one of the programs organized by PERKIM in collaboration with MACMA. This program aims to provide a deeper understanding of the concept of Islamic faith (akidah) to participants, especially Chinese mualaf, so that they can understand the faith correctly (Nur A'thiroh Masyaa'il Tan et al, 2014). KIMMA, on the other hand, focuses solely on mualaf from the Indian community. Furthermore, IOA is an organization dedicated to helping mualaf, particularly from the indigenous communities.

Among other non-governmental organizations are:

Islamic Information & Services Foundation (IIS)

IIS initially started as a business known as Saba Islamic Media, with the aim of conducting da'wah through business by selling da'wah books to non-Muslims. As an alternative way to expand da'wah through business, IIS was later established as a foundation registered on December 16, 2004. IIS uses its platform to convey da'wah and has developed approaches through dialogues and programs aimed at correcting non-Muslims' misunderstandings of Islam. One notable figure in IIS is the Chief Da'wah Officer, Mr. Shah Kirit Kakulal Govindji, a well-known independent preacher (Zain et al, 2015).

Hidayah Centre Foundation

Hidayah Centre Foundation is one of the centers providing care and guidance to mualaf, founded by members of Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM) in November 2005. By 2012, it was established as a foundation under the Prime Minister's Department and led by Haji Nicholas Sylvester Muhammad Abdullah, who was also the head of the Da'wah Bureau of JIM at that time. The objective is to assist mualaf facing family and social issues and needing shelter. They also offer weekly religious study classes for mualaf led by skilled and knowledgeable instructors (Mahathir, 2019).

Dar al-Hikmah College (KDH)

Established in 1989, KDH is one of the earliest private Islamic educational institutions in Malaysia. KDH was founded by Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), an NGO active in

da'wah and community activities. Initially known as the Institute of Islamic Studies (IPI), KDH was established to meet the needs of the general public, especially Muslims seeking knowledge, particularly Islamic knowledge. In 2008, Dar al-Hikmah College (KDH) was selected as one of the higher education institutions by the Selangor Islamic Council (MAIS) to meet the educational needs of mualaf. MAIS sent eligible students to continue their studies at KDH at the diploma level, sponsored by MAIS (Haffiz et al, 2017).

The role of NGOs in managing mualaf includes providing religious guidance, educational classes, social assistance, psychosocial support, and development programs. Thanks to the efforts of these NGOs, mualaf can learn Islamic teachings and adapt to their new life as Muslims.

Issues in Management of Muallaf Education

Managing an organization is not an easy task and certainly comes with its challenges. Every agency, whether governmental or NGO, faces issues in managing matters related to converts from their initial entry into Islam until they become well-mannered and practicing Muslims. There are several management issues in the education of converts (Mualaf) in Malaysia:

Administrative Issues

Administrative issues are problematic in the management of religious education classes for converts, as managed by the Kelantan Islamic Council (MAIK). Previous studies indicate that there are still cases of apostasy among converts due to factors such as the pressures faced (Afifah & Aisyah, 2015), poorly managed assistance programs (Azman et al., 2015; Ghazali & Hamid, 2014), and lack of knowledge and practice of Islamic teachings (Zahrah & Tan, 2015). Additionally, more than 50% of apostasy cases are caused by divorces, which lead to loss of guidance and support. The findings show that there is dissatisfaction among converts regarding the management of religious education classes organized by MAIK, which is at a moderate level. MAIK needs to reassess aspects that can be improved in the management of the guidance classes to enhance the quality of personal guidance for converts, producing accurate and impactful guidance (Mohammed & Kawangit, 2019).

Furthermore, the curriculum for teaching the fundamentals of Islamic teachings needs to emphasize aspects such as prayer, the life of the Prophet, how to read the Quran, and etiquette in social interactions for converts. A structured module for worship will facilitate converts' understanding of these Islamic fundamentals in a more enjoyable and organized manner. However, there are issues with teaching methods by instructors, such as Ustaz/Ustazah, where the teaching methods are less engaging for most of them. The use of Arabic terms in the guidance process makes it difficult for them to understand the content. As noted in the study by Aini, Don, Puteh & Sad (2019), the appropriate language for teaching indigenous people in Selangor is Malay rather than other languages. This will ease the learning process in convert guidance classes and align with the Sunnah of the Prophet, who used specific languages for effective communication. Therefore, such issues need to be addressed by adapting teaching methods and content to better engage converts in learning Islam effectively and systematically (Zulkiple Ghani, 2021).

In addition to this, the issue of administering inheritance also needs to be addressed in the management of convert education in Malaysia. Inheritance issues are closely related to

converts, involving inheritance certification. When a convert dies and their heirs are not Muslim, this creates complications in managing the inheritance according to Islamic law. By 2006, statistics showed over a million inheritance claims in the country, with claims reaching up to RM 38 billion still unresolved (Rusnadewi Rashid & Inayah Yaakub, 2010). Furthermore, Ahmad, Nor, and Azhar (2018), state that provisions for administering Muslim inheritance are not aligned with other issues such as criminal offenses, Muslim marriage and divorce administration, court testimonies, mosque administration, waqf, and the administration of converts (Mualaf). This issue needs to be addressed and revised to prevent disorganized inheritance management from recurring.

In conclusion, the management and administration of convert education in Malaysia still face several issues that need resolution. To improve the quality and effectiveness of convert education, increased moral and financial support, and effective management practices are essential. Cooperation between authorities, agencies, NGOs, and the community is also necessary to ensure comprehensive education and support for converts in understanding and practicing Islamic teachings easily.

Issues in Education

Education that is well-organized and disseminated with clear objectives can provide understanding and transform the identity of a convert into a better person. Converts are special individuals who need appropriate education based on their age and suitability when they first embrace Islam. In fact, the education provided by instructors and involved agencies has yielded results, with many converts gaining beneficial knowledge for themselves and others. However, there are several issues in the education of converts that involve management systems that need to be examined and improved in the future.

One issue is the difficulty in understanding Islamic teachings due to the prescribed reading phrases. This issue is serious because some converts have trouble pronouncing Arabic or Jawi script. This problem arises because they are not exposed to proper training in speaking and pronunciation in Jawi or Arabic. Words contained in the pillars of Islam also complicate their ability to pronounce them correctly. This can prevent them from practicing the true teachings of Islam (Shukri Draman, 2010). Studies show that 23.6% of converts experience problems with understanding Islamic teachings due to illiteracy (Selangor, MAIS, 2013). Therefore, authorities such as educators or teachers need to train and assist converts, especially new ones, to fluently pronounce difficult readings.

Furthermore, the development of convert education in Malaysia appears to be progressing well. This is due to the existence of classes for converts that are taught based on authentic and easily understandable sources. However, there are issues related to instructors and reference materials for converts. Problems with incompetent instructors occur when their teaching methods are unsatisfactory and they lack skills (Zahrah & Masyaa'il, 2015). Moreover, there are no specific guidelines for teaching converts, which leads instructors to teach according to their own methods (Mohd Zaid, 2010). Therefore, relevant authorities need to address this issue carefully and create a comprehensive and systematic learning system to produce dedicated and trustworthy instructors.

A well-organized teaching module leads to knowledgeable individuals in the learning process. Many agencies or guidance centers for converts in the country provide education

based on accurate sources that are easy to understand. However, there are also problems with the preparation of educational modules or syllabi for converts, which may be based on delivery methods that are seen as unsuitable and less impactful for both converts and teachers. For example, Noraini Mohamad, Mariam Majid, and Ain Natasha (2017) state that the PERKIM Islamic Dakwah Institute (IDIP) in Pengkalan Chepa, Kelantan, is a successful center for producing many scholars and preachers in Malaysia. Additionally, this center has implemented programs to help, guide, and produce converts who become exemplary role models in the community. However, there is a problem with the module used, as the syllabus focuses only on aspects of faith and lacks fundamental educational elements for converts.

Moreover, research by Rahman et al (2015), on converts' perceptions of conversion education and development programs in Negeri Sembilan found that the content provided to converts is insufficient. Respondents also suggested extending the duration of courses. Additionally, researchers proposed improvements to modules and course durations. Longer course durations would allow converts to understand more comfortably, especially for those who learn slowly. According to Faezy Adenan, Asmaa Arshad, Afandi Rani Izzat Amsyar, Bhari, and Afifah (2021), there is still no effective convert education module covering all aspects of obligatory and non-obligatory knowledge, and that goes beyond just religious education to include all aspects of a Muslim's daily life. Based on these studies, authorities are advised to organize and structure convert education modules comprehensively and filled with beneficial knowledge.

Today's globalized era, with advanced technology, makes learning activities easier and saves time. E-learning or online learning can also benefit converts by allowing them to gain knowledge without attending classes physically. This became particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted people from leaving their homes for daily activities like work, shopping, recreation, and learning. Although online learning access for converts appears effective, there are problems and challenges in convert education in Malaysia. These problems indirectly slow down the learning activities for converts.

Problems in online learning sessions include inadequate equipment for preparation, such as laptops, mobile phones, and tablets, which are crucial for starting online learning sessions between converts and their teachers. Zulkifli (2020), notes that incomplete equipment and unappealing materials can hinder online learning for converts. Additionally, Internet issues are a topic that needs attention from responsible agencies in educating converts, as Saad (2021), mentions slow Internet access and poor sound quality as issues that complicate interactions between students and teachers. Zulkifli (2020), also states that low Internet coverage is a common problem in online learning sessions.

In the context of online learning, there are issues and challenges related to the use of tools and smartphones, especially for low-income families who cannot afford devices for their educational journey. Therefore, relevant authorities should take the initiative to help and provide Internet devices to students to facilitate their learning. This is important for producing technologically adept converts in this advanced era.

In conclusion, convert education in Malaysia faces several complex issues, problems, and challenges. The main problem is the lack of support and assistance from both government

and non-governmental organizations in helping converts through the learning and adjustment process in Islam. Additionally, limitations in the use of information technology resources also need to be addressed to create knowledgeable converts in this modern world. Furthermore, discrimination and prejudice in the Muslim and non-Muslim communities against converts also pose problems. To address these issues, better cooperation and awareness between authorities and society are necessary to strengthen convert education and produce high-character and humane converts.

Conclusion

Muallaf education in Malaysia requires effective management to address the issues and challenges faced by converts. Cooperation between governmental and non-governmental bodies needs to be enhanced by establishing a more organized management system in administration and education, so that problems related to facilities for converts are avoided. To produce well-educated converts, it is essential to implement accurate and authentic teaching materials and contexts to prevent confusion in learning various subjects. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will benefit and provide guidance to readers and researchers in expanding knowledge and as a reference for scholarly research.

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