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A Comprehensive Review on the Implementation of Islamic Pre-Marital Course in Malaysia

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Abstract

Marriage is one of the religious requirements in Islam that purposes to fulfill one's needs to spouse. Continuity of a marriage depends on mental, physical, emotional and spiritual preparation of the spouses. For this reason, Islam places a great deal of emphasis on the marital and familial management and system, not only for the benefit of the families but also for the interest of the national and global society as a whole. However, even with the meticulous benchmarks that Islam has provided, there are still issues that are encountered by Muslim spouses today that lead to divorce, which then as a result taint the image of Islam itself. Divorce cases in Malaysia keep increasing in number from year to year and affect not only the ties between the spouses but among the family members involved as well. Looking at this increasing rate of divorce, the author feels the need of the Pre-Marital Course currently made mandatory in Malaysia to give better exposure on marriage and family life with reference to current scenarios. This article will give an insight on the background of Islamic Pre-Marital Course that has been ongoing since 1996 as well as its system and form of management in chronological order. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used. Library research is required to obtain current information and clear understanding on the issues studied, and participation and observation methods are also executed to gain actual and clear picture of the occurring situation. Plus, interviews involving varying parties are also done to aid this study. It is hoped that this article will create awareness and give useful input to help in strengthening the family institution in Malaysia.

Keywords: Pre-Marital Course, Family, Institution, Divorce, History.

Introduction

A great society comes from organized and preserved family institution. Family functions as a base for construction of civilization, and communal culture and its development (Hasliza and Hanizam, n.d.), while marriage acts as the sacred ties between two people to fulfill their outer and inner needs, as Allah said in the verse below:

And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for people who give thoughts.

(Ar-Rum: 21)

Preparation in terms of knowledge and understanding on family life is very essential to every individual who is about to be in a marriage. Good personality among humans especially husbands and wives is mandatory in Islam to produce harmonious, happy, affectionate, empathic, sympathetic, stable and excellent families on the road to create a loving and harmonious society which has long since become one of the national missions of Malaysia (Ghazali and Abdullah Al-Hadi, 2004). Not only that, leadership, management and decision-making skills are also required in those who are about to be a husband or a wife. Many challenges will be faced by them once they are in marriage life, so these skills will be helpful for them, along with the truthfulness trait, to handle whatever conflict that may come (JAKIM, 2002). If these individuals are not capable of managing their families well, it will give bad impact to the family institution as a whole.

Aware of the significance that family institution has on national stability, Malaysian government introduced *Modul Bersepadu Kursus Praperkahwinan Islam* (MBKPI) or Integrated Modules for Islamic Pre-Marital Course to be executed as a primal requirement for Muslim couples who are about to get married (JAKIM, 2002). This alternative provenly eases the religious department(s)' burden in handling marital conflicts among these Muslim couples, that mostly may lead to divorce (Ruhil Hayati, 2011). These modules oblige every Muslim couple to participate with the purpose to give them an insight and understanding on the process of forming a family that they will go through ahead. This course has been ongoing since 1996 with some reconditionings made along the way. The main reason for the execution of this course is due to current alarming phenomenon of the collapse of family institution that keeps worsening time by time particularly in Malaysia.

Problem Statement

Latterly, the rate of divorce cases among Muslim families in Malaysia has been showing a hike. This is proven in the statistics released by the Judiciary Department of Malaysia that manifest the significant tenseness of the divorce phenomenon from year to year. In 2010, the number of divorce cases that are in records is 41,544. In 2011, the number increases to 43,749. Consecutively, the number goes higher at 48,029 and 49,663 in 2012 and 2013 respectively, and it continues to rise to an even higher degree when it reaches 53,870 in 2014. This makes the total number of divorce cases that happen within the span of five years become 236,855. This is a very worrying number, indicating that the phenomenon of divorce among Malaysian Muslims is not something we can overlook. The statistics are as presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Statistics on Divorce Cases from 2010 to 2014

Year	Cases
2010	41,544
2011	43,749
2012	48,029
2013	49,663
2014	53,870
TOTAL	236855

Adapted from the Judiciary Department of Malaysia (2016)

A research done by the Department of Islamic Development in Malaysia shows that 32.2 percent of marriages aged five years and 27.7 percent of those aged six to ten years in 2007 ended up with divorce, which makes the total percentage 59.9 percent. This situation evidently proposes that the first ten years are the most critical years in a marriage (Othman, 2011).

Research Objectives

This research is meant to serve for these purposes:

1. To review the history of formation of Islamic Pre-Marital Course in Malaysia.
2. To identify the form of management of Malaysian Islamic Pre-Marital Course

Research Methodology

In this research, both qualitative method is used. Library research is needed to obtain current information and clear understanding on the issue studied. Documented materials as well as publishing writings are also referred to, either directly or indirectly. Observation and participation methods are executed as well to get a clearer and better picture of what is currently happening. Interviews are done not only to those who attend the course, but also to the individuals involved in making it successfully happen.

Finding and Research Discussion

The following are some of the aspects that are analysed here:

History of Formation of Islamic Pre-Marital Course in Malaysia

Islamic pre-marital course has been ongoing in Malaysia since 1990s. Its purpose is to provide marital knowledge to serve as a preparation for the couples who are about to get involved in a marriage. This course was initiated by the Family, Social and Community Section of the Department of Islamic Development in Malaysia (JAKIM), and continued by the State's Islamic Department. In 1996, the Section of Family, Social and Mosque Management reformed this course by adding and introducing the Integrated Modules for Islamic Pre-Marital Course (MBKPPI) in their existing modules with the aim to consolidate Islamic family institution (Hayati, 2011).

The Integrated Modules for Islamic Pre-Marital Course (MBKPPI) were established as the guidelines of knowledge and information that need to be comprehended by the brides- and grooms-to-be before stepping into marriage life. Not only that, this course also purposes to open their eyes on the circumstances and processes that they will have to go through, so they will be at least mentally (and better, financially) prepared for those situations (Hayati, 2011). This is important as the degree of knowledge and preparation an individual has determines his/her latter actions when dealing with difficulties.

With the establishment of these modules, every state in Malaysia is required to implement the pre-marital course using the modules as a benchmark. This is so that pre-marital courses all over the country offer coordinated contents. MBKPPI 1996 was consecutively followed by the introduction of *Garis Panduan Pengawalan dan Pelaksanaan Modul Bersepadu Kursus Pra Perkahwinan* or the Guidelines for Regulation and Implementation of the Integrated Modules for Pre-Marital Course (1997). In 2002, a review was made and the guidelines were then officially added in the Islamic Pre-Marital Course modules. This resulted in the publication of Modules for Islamic Pre-Marital Course version 2 (2002) with updates on (JAKIM, 2002):

1. Content with additions on Quranic and Hadith evidence, explanations and descriptions
2. Arrangement of chapters based on their importance and significance
3. Addition of a new chapter which is Consultancy Service in the State's Islamic Department
4. Additional time for every chapter's slots

The modification made in these modules is seen fair to ensure the modules offered suited to current situation and intellectual development among society. After the modification of MBKPPI was established, *Garis Panduan Kawalan MBKPPI* (Guidelines for Regulation of MBKPPI) and *MBKPPI Saudara Baru* (MBKPPI for Muslim Converts) were then published as further guidelines for those who involve in implementing the pre-marital course. The formation of special modules for Muslim converts aims to provide information on marital issues based on their degree of Islamic knowledge that is still low. These modules are used by all organizers of pre-marital course and also referred to by JAKIM and the State's Islamic Department (JAIN) for systematic monitoring on the implementation of MBKPPI.

The Modules of the Pre-Marital Course were once again updated in 2013 with continuous modification on the contents, including graphic and video additions for every slot. These additions were made after taking into consideration the participants' background, who were mostly from Generation Z whose learning method was more inclined to modern application. Learning environment was also diversified in terms of methods and teaching materials to adapt to participants' mentality and interests to make them see and obtain the information more effectively.

Comparison of the three versions of MBKPPI is as follows:

Table 2: Comparison of MBKPPI Modules

	VERSION 1	VERSION 2	VERSION 3
Year	1996	2002	2013
Contents	10 chapters with order: 1. Marriage and Procedures 2. Relationships in a Family 3. Morality 4. Communication between Husband and Wife 5. Management of Family Resources 6. Stress and Conflict Management 7. Creed 8. Acts of worship 9. Health Management 10. Marriage Annulment	11 chapters with order: 1. Creed 2. Morality 3. Acts of Worship 4. Marriage and Procedures 5. Communication between Husband and Wife 6. Relationships in a Family 7. Financial and Time Management 8. Family Health Management 9. Stress and Conflict Management 10. Consultancy Service in the State's Islamic Department 11. Marriage Annulment	Maintaining the existing chapters and order
Delivery Method	Lectures	1. Lectures 2. Slide presentations	1. Lectures 2. Slide presentations 3. Videos

Form of Management of Islamic Pre-Marital Course

The effectiveness of the modules prepared was ensured once this pre-marital course started to take effect. In order to get a clearer picture on how the management of this course works, several aspects should be viewed at both national and state levels. The following are some of the elements that are found existent in the management of Malaysian Islamic Pre-Marital Course:

Facilitator Election

Facilitators play an important role in ensuring a program or course going smooth and effective. Therefore, JAKIM has set certain characteristics for a person to be eligible to be appointed as a facilitator for this pre-marital course. The general requirement is that the person must have a degree in certain field, and if they do not, it is up to JAKIM to still elect them based on their expertise or experience on certain matters (JAKIM, 2002).

If a person is interested and wishes to fill the position as a facilitator, they have to apply via their respective State's Islamic Department (JAIN). The selected applicant then has to attend a course called Course of Integrated Modules for Islamic Pre-Marital Course for Facilitators organized by the Department of Islamic Development in Malaysia (JAKIM) or the State's Islamic Department (JAIN) itself. Only those who successfully complete the course will be appointed as facilitators. JAKIM then will issue a certificate to each of the appointed applicants as an acknowledgement for their post as the facilitator for the Pre-Marital Course (JHEAT, 2013).

All facilitators are required to attend every course and workshop occasionally organized by JAKIM and JAIN. These courses and workshops are very important for the facilitators to keep track on every instruction or occurrence that might come up. They are also required to follow the regulations and ethics as set by JAKIM in the Guidelines for Regulation and Implementation of the Integrated Modules for Pre-Marital Course. If happens any misconduct, the facilitator(s) involved can be dismissed and JAKIM is entitled to withdraw the certificate(s) issued for them (JHEAT, 2013).

In the state of Terengganu specifically, the State's Islamic Department (JAIN) has allotted the position of facilitator only to government officials with grade 4 and above, except for those who are in certain areas like health, finance and counseling. The appointment of a facilitator in Terengganu can also be made based on suggestion and recommendation from JAIN itself on an individual's qualification and credibility (Nazihah, 2016).

Administrative System of Islamic Pre-Marital Course

At national level, the administrative system of Islamic Pre-Marital Course is run by the Social, Family and Community Section (KSK) of the Department of Islamic Development in Malaysia (JAKIM). Under KSK, there are three main divisions which are the Division of Family and Social Development, the Division of Marriage, Divorce and Return (NCR), and the Division of Administration of the Islamic Pre-Marital Course which is particularly handled by the first division mentioned above. KSK is responsible in ensuring the lecturers and facilitators get the adequate insight and training regarding the topics issued in the modules published by JAKIM. While at state level, the system of the Pre-Marital Course is run by either the State's Islamic Department or any company appointed by the former, meaning the administrative system of Islamic Pre-Marital Course is solely subject to the state (JAKIM, 2016).

In Terengganu, the committee responsible in carrying out the Pre-Marital Course consists of the officials of the Department of Family Law from the Department of the State's Religious Affairs as well as the Department of Family Law from the Regional Religious Office (Marina, 2016). The

execution of this pre-marital course in Terengganu is mainly under the responsibility of the Department of the State's Religious Affairs, while the Regional Religious Office is in charge of conducting the course in their respective regions. The State's Islamic Department, on the other hand, is at the helm of the conduct of the course by other agencies including non-governmental organizations and higher education institutions (Noor Huda, 2016).

This Pre-Marital Course is normally held on weekends (Friday and Saturday or Saturday and Sunday depending on the place) starting from 8.00 am to 5 pm. 11 topics are covered in each course for 12 hours in total, dealing from the matter of preparation before marriage until the matter of marriage annulment with discussions on courtesy and ethics within a marriage in between. The topics and the amount of time allocated for each of them are as follows:

Table 3: Contents of the Modules for Pre-Marital Course

NO.	TOPIC	TIME ALLOCATED
1.	Creed	1 Hour
2.	Morality	1 Hour
3.	Acts of Worship	1 Hour
4.	Marriage and Procedures	2 Hours
5.	Communication between Husband and Wife	1 Hour
6.	Relationships in a Family	1 Hour
7.	Financial and Time Management	1 Hour
8.	Family Health Management	1 Hour
9.	Stress and Conflict Management	1 Hour
10.	Consultancy Service in the State's Islamic Department	1 Hour
11.	Marriage Annulment	1 Hour
TOTAL		ours 12

Procedures to Participate in Islamic Pre-Marital Course

For those who intend to participate in the Pre-Marital Course, they first need to get the application form from their Regional Religious Office and submit it, either by hand or on the Department of the State's Religious Affairs' website. The application form should be submitted at least a week before the course's date applied. The fee, in Terengganu specifically, is fixed to RM50, inclusive of meals, a certificate and speakers' speaking fees (JHEAT, 2013).

Every participant is required to attend all the slots in this course to attain the Pre-Marital Course certificate. The certificate is compulsory for individuals who are about to get married to have in order for them to be legally registered as husband and wife. This requirement is set by Malaysian government to make sure that every couple has the adequate insight and preparation on marital and familial issues before they step into a real marriage.

The distribution of the certificate is done on the second day of the course during the closing ceremony. It is granted only if the participant attends and completes all the slots held. If they miss one or more slots or encounter any other issue with the slot(s), they will have to repeat the slot(s) in another course, and the certificate will be granted after they have completely finished all the slots. For those who have received the certificate but lost it at some point, they have to get a declaration letter from the Regional Religious Office or any other agency (depending on who organized the course they previously attended) and bring it to the Department of the State's Religious Affairs (JHEAT) to be verified. The new certificate will then be given (Marina, 2016).

Conclusion

The Malaysian Government's effort in organizing the pre-marital course for couples who are getting married should be commended. Preparation of modules and training of the facilitators by JAKIM proves the commitment of the government in ensuring every marriage in Malaysia will be provided with sufficient knowledge and skills from the couple. However, the short duration of the course which is only two days, and the compact contents in the modules might lower the effectiveness of the course. Also, this type of courses should not only offered once before marriage but regularly in the next phases of marriage.

To produce good home management, knowledge and earnestness from both husband and wife are needed. Islam demands its people to form a marital relationship based on strong faith and morality so the family that will be produced will be a high-minded one. Tolerance and thoughtfulness are also two essential traits that the spouses must possess for a happy marriage. These are among the things that are instilled in the Islamic Pre-Marital Course as discussed above. Thus, individuals who intend to get married need to take this Pre-Marital Course wholeheartedly as it provides important knowledge and information on marriage and family management so future families, or generations as a whole, will mentally, physically and spiritually lead peaceful and prolific lives in accordance with Islamic teachings.

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