

The Relevancy of Islamic Education for Children in Muslim Convert Families

Relevansi Pendidikan Islam terhadap Kanak-Kanak dalam Keluarga Mualaf

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the dynamics of Islamic education among children aged 7–12 in Muslim convert families in Malaysia—an area often overlooked in existing research. While the religious learning of adult Muslim converts has been widely studied, limited attention has been given to the experiences and challenges faced by their young children. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the religious education of children in convert families from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders: convert parents, Islamic education teachers, NGOs supporting converts, religious guidance officers, Islamic creed experts, early childhood education specialists, and Islamic management experts. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, the study also conducts a needs analysis for children's religious learning. Findings reveal that Islamic education in these families is complex and multifaceted. Parents—often new to Islamic teachings—play a central role in nurturing their children's faith, commonly through participation in Islamic classes. However, families face significant challenges, such as adjusting to new religious norms, navigating cultural differences, and managing identity transitions. This research highlights the importance of understanding the religious educational experiences of children in Muslim convert families and identifying factors that influence their spiritual development. The findings offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and community leaders to develop targeted support and resources that foster effective religious education in this unique context.

Keywords: Da'wah; Religious Learning; Children; Muslims Convert; Family

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini meneroka dinamika pendidikan Islam dalam kalangan kanak-kanak berumur 7–12 tahun dalam keluarga mualaf di Malaysia, iaitu satu bidang yang kurang diberi perhatian dalam kajian sedia ada. Walaupun pembelajaran agama dalam kalangan mualaf dewasa telah banyak dikaji, pengalaman dan cabaran yang dihadapi oleh anak-anak mereka masih kurang diterokai. Kajian ini bertujuan mengisi jurang tersebut dengan meneliti pendidikan agama anak-anak mualaf dari perspektif pelbagai pihak berkepentingan: ibu bapa mualaf, guru pendidikan Islam, NGO yang menyokong mualaf, pegawai bimbingan agama, pakar akidah, pakar pendidikan awal kanak-kanak, dan pakar pengurusan Islam. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif, termasuk temu bual mendalam, serta melaksanakan analisis keperluan terhadap pembelajaran agama anak-anak. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa pendidikan Islam dalam keluarga mualaf adalah satu proses yang kompleks dan berlapis. Ibu bapa—yang kebiasaannya masih baru dalam ajaran Islam—memainkan peranan utama dalam menyampaikan nilai dan amalan agama, lazimnya melalui penyertaan dalam kelas agama bersama anak-anak. Namun, mereka menghadapi cabaran besar seperti penyesuaian terhadap norma agama baharu, perbezaan budaya, dan isu pembentukan identiti. Kajian ini menekankan kepentingan memahami pengalaman pendidikan agama anak-anak dalam keluarga mualaf serta faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi perkembangan rohani mereka. Dapatan ini memberikan panduan berguna kepada pendidik, pembuat dasar, dan pemimpin komuniti untuk merangka sokongan dan sumber yang lebih bersasar bagi memperkukuh pendidikan Islam dalam konteks keluarga mualaf.

Kata kunci: Dakwah; Pembelajaran Agama; Kanak-Kanak; Mualaf; Keluarga

INTRODUCTION

The integration of Muslim converts into Islam necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the religion. This is particularly critical for those who have recently become Muslim converts, underscoring the need for increased focus on their religious education. Islamic education for Muslim converts is designed to provide guidance and training, enabling them to understand and fully embody Islamic teachings in their lives. For Muslim converts to effectively implement the teachings of Islam in their daily lives, it is crucial to provide them with foundational instruction in Islamic knowledge, ethics, and appreciation (Taubah, 2015). This initial understanding is essential for Muslim converts to fully embrace Islam as their new faith and apply its teachings in everyday life (Muhamat@Kawangit & Saringat, 2014). Without such religious education, families of Muslim converts, particularly their children, may encounter various challenges. Among the internal challenges faced by Muslim converts in seeking Islamic education are emotional management, self-confidence, the desire to become a role model, and low motivation to learn.

Meanwhile, the external challenges include negative perceptions and acceptance by the Muslim community, opposition from family members, and financial difficulties. These challenges also affect the young children of converts, who are indirectly impacted when their parents struggle to remain committed to pursuing Islamic education after embracing Islam. These families often include children whose parents are newly acquainted with the fundamental principles of Islam. As these parents are still developing their religious understanding, they may find it challenging to provide comprehensive Islamic education to their children (Salasiah, 2021).

Thus, it becomes clear that religious education should not only target Muslim converts but also their children, fostering a solid Islamic faith in the next generation (Hermawansyah & Suryani, 2017). However, in Malaysia, there is a noticeable scarcity of discourse and research on the availability and effectiveness of Islamic education for the children of Muslim converts. This lack of focus is significant given Malaysia's status as a predominantly Muslim country, with Islam as the official religion. While most studies have concentrated on religious learning for adolescents and adults through da'wah institutions, there is an urgent need to address the educational needs of children in Muslim-convert families, particularly in the Malaysian context (Abdul Jalil, Hamzah, & Lubis, 2017). Fakhrudin and Awang (2020) emphasized the need for special guidance for children born and raised in newly converted Muslim families. Therefore, it is important to instill religious values in the children of Muslim converts from an early age in order to foster their religious enthusiasm. Ghafar (2021) stated that Muslim converts, as new families embracing Islam, require consistent and dedicated guidance so that they can understand Islamic teachings and continue to apply Islamic values in their daily lives.

The Federal Constitution of Malaysia even allows for governmental funding to enhance Islamic educational efforts for Muslims, including Muslim converts, in Malaysia. Children in Muslim convert families face unique challenges in acquiring Islamic education due to their parents' limited religious background, emotional struggles, and lack of structured support. These children often lack foundational Islamic knowledge and may experience confusion in religious identity, especially when parental guidance is inconsistent. Social exclusion and limited community support further impact their confidence and motivation to learn Islam. Additionally, there is a notable absence of targeted educational programs, curriculum, and policies that address their specific needs within the Malaysian Islamic education framework. Financial constraints and accessibility also hinder their ability to benefit from existing resources. Therefore, a comprehensive, inclusive, and family-based approach is essential—one that equips both parents

and children with age-appropriate religious instruction, emotional reinforcement, and community integration to foster a strong Islamic identity and practice from an early age. Therefore, this article aims to explore religious education for children of Muslim converts, examining the perspectives of various stakeholders and presenting a needs analysis for their religious education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted on religious converts, focusing on their religious education and learning. These studies explore Islamic learning post-conversion and examine religious learning in contexts other than Islam and outside Malaysia. However, previous studies have mostly focused on the education of adult Muslim converts, rather than the children of converts — with the exception of studies in Indonesia, which have examined the effectiveness of Islamic education for children of Muslim converts (Putri Tazfiah, 2021), (Toni, 2020), Siti Nur Isnaini (2019), (Waenoful, 2018) (Rahmi, 2018) & (Hermansyah & Suryani, 2017). In the United States, for example, there is a growing trend of classes specifically designed for converts across different religious communities, including evangelical Christianity. The 2006 National Congregations Study revealed that approximately 74 percent of evangelical churches offer classes for prospective or new members (Chaves, Mark, & Anderson, 2008). Such conversion classes are crucial in guiding converts on their educational journey, helping them become religious individuals and gain recognition within their faith communities (Balch, 1980). Mountain Church, an evangelical church in South Florida, serves as a case in point. This church, with many new converts, primarily from Catholic or nonreligious backgrounds and broadly identifying as Latino or Latin American, includes bi-weekly services, youth group meetings, and outreach efforts among its primary activities. They also offer a specialised class for recent converts named “New Life,” encompassing five sessions. These weekly sessions by church leaders and volunteers cover topics essential to Christian teachings, such as salvation, baptism, tithing, family values in Christianity, and evangelism. Despite varying teaching styles, all instructors use a standard workbook with interactive exercises to engage students. Completing these sessions and a subsequent take-home exam is mandatory for new church members seeking baptism or volunteer roles (Galonnier, 2016).

Regarding Muslim converts in other countries, they predominantly engage in religious learning through private educational institutions and mosque-affiliated organisations. Courses offered include the Prophet’s biography, Quranic interpretation, hadiths, and Arabic language. Islamic conferences, youth gatherings, and lectures by visiting preachers also play a significant role. A notable finding from The American Mosque Survey is that 23 per cent of American mosques offer “New Muslim” classes (Beekers, 2014). The American Da’wah organisation, for instance, hosts monthly discussion groups for new Muslim converts and those born into Islam who wish to deepen their understanding. These discussions cover topics ranging from family communication post-conversion, Islamic practice in the workplace, community integration, Quran study, spirituality, and the life of the Prophet. There is also a weekly class titled “Being Muslim,” which is based on a textbook of the same name and covers fundamental Islamic beliefs and practices. It provides a supportive environment for participants to discuss their challenges and lifestyle issues (Galonnier & De Los Rios, 2016).

Muslim converts often face challenges from their families and society after embracing Islam. To address this, community initiatives such as potlucks in parks during Ramadan have been organised, like the one by the Women’s Mosque of America in Los Angeles, where nearly twenty

new female converts gathered (Women's Mosque of America, 2016). In the U.S., da'wah prison efforts aim to guide inmates towards better education, human values, financial growth, and responsible citizenship, benefiting Muslim converts within these facilities (Chen & Dorairajoo, 2020). Additionally, Sunday schools for new converts and inter-faith dialogues, including roundtable discussions at mosques, are conducted in the United Kingdom to support British-born Muslims and converts (Kose, 1996).

In Indonesia, knowledge management, government support, and academic research contribute to the development of Islamic preaching (Don & Jaafar, 2009). Madrasahs, or religious schools, offer specialised religious education alongside other academic subjects, often attended by children of converts. Convert development centres, established by private individuals or entities collaborating with the Indonesian government, provide religious learning for Muslim converts (Bustomi et al., 2022). The education here caters to various age groups and aims to spread Islamic teachings by integrating formal and non-formal education methods, combining religious and logical approaches. Despite shortcomings, competent teachers, well-equipped facilities, and student enthusiasm contribute to successful learning experiences (Haryanto, 2016).

In Malaysia, the federal government ensures Islamic education for all Muslims, including converts, by making Islamic studies compulsory in government schools at both primary and secondary levels (Abu Bakar & Ismail, 2018). Financial assistance is provided to Islamic private schools, madrasahs, and NGOs involved in da'wah work for Muslim converts. A federal minister overseeing Islamic affairs oversees Islamic departments and agencies, organising numerous da'wah activities and offering religious guidance classes for Muslim converts and their families (Abu Bakar & Ismail, 2018). Allowances for attending these classes are provided by State Islamic Religious Departments or State Islamic Councils, with exceptions like Sarawak. For example, in Selangor, Muslim converts receive welfare assistance, educational support, scholarships, and allowances for religious classes funded by zakat through the Human Development Division of the Selangor Islamic Religious Council. NGOs specifically for Muslim converts, such as Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organization (PERKIM) and Islamic Outreach ABIM, also conduct Islamic religious guidance classes (Muhamat@Kawangit & Saringat, 2014). Additionally, family members who are converts, including their children and adolescents attending secondary school, receive guidance in the Basic Principles of *Fardhu Ain* (KAFA) as part of their Islamic Education curriculum. Assessments ensure that each Muslim student comprehensively understands and can practice these basic practices in accordance with Islamic teachings (Asma & Azarudin, 2020).

Religious education which encompasses components such as morality (akhlaq), creed (*aqidah*), Islamic law (*syariah*), and acts of worship (*ibadah*), must be learned by every individual, including Muslim converts (Asma, 2023). Muslim converts in Malaysia is essential for their spiritual growth, social integration, and overall well-being. It helps them overcome challenges, strengthen their faith, and become active members of the Malaysian Muslim community. Many converts come from backgrounds with little or no exposure to Islam, making it difficult for them to practice their new faith effectively. They face challenges acquiring basic religious knowledge, learning to read the Quran, and understanding Islamic principles and practices. This lack of knowledge can pose significant challenges not only for the converts themselves but also for the religious education of their children (Abd Karim, 2022). According to Loo et al. (2019), after converting to Islam, converts typically follow Islamic teachings and laws daily as Muslims. They gain knowledge of Islam through informal learning, such as attending religious gatherings and self-study. They may also acquire knowledge through formal education by enrolling in Islamic courses. Devotees participate in structured religious lessons to learn more about Islam. Converts

attend organised educational programs, such as Islamic classes at schools or Islamic centres, which are led by religious instructors and follow a set curriculum. Muslim converts can also acquire knowledge through informal settings like interacting with friends, self-study, and attending non-formal courses. They also gain an additional understanding of Islam by reading and consulting their Muslim friends, which proves that informal learning is one of the essential ongoing learning processes.

Religious education also plays a crucial role in helping Muslim converts in Malaysia integrate into their new religious community and receive the necessary support (Abdullah et al., 2024). This education provides them with a deeper understanding of Islam, which is essential for their spiritual growth and adherence to Islamic values. It equips them with the necessary knowledge about the Islamic faith, worship, Sharia, and moral values (Fakhruddin & Awang, 2020). Furthermore, this education is crucial for converts to understand and practice their new religion effectively, ensuring they can become true Muslims and fully participate in religious and social activities. This education helps converts navigate the complexities of their new religious identity in the Malaysian context, especially when they come from non-Malay ethnic groups who previously identified with religions other than Islam (Awang, Mat, & Ghani, 2022). Muslim converts can develop greater resilience and a stronger faith by offering tailored guidance and support through religious education. This is particularly important as they may face challenges in their personal and social lives. Previous research has documented that converts in Malaysia encounter various challenges, typically including opposition from their families, difficulties in relationships with non-Muslim family members, language barriers in religious learning, financial issues, challenges in the upbringing and education of their children, and limitations in accessing religious education (Norhana, 2024; Abdullah et al., 2022; Abdullah et al., 2024).

In addition, religious education also helps converts better understand and adapt to the prevalent Malay-Muslim culture in Malaysia. Religious education enables converts to integrate more effectively into the Malay-Muslim community and understand the cultural norms of the dominant Muslim society (Shaharuddin, Usman, & Marlon 2016). This is because the Islamic culture in Malaysia is quite different from the practices and culture in other countries, such as in the Middle East, given that the Malay society lives alongside non-Muslim communities of diverse ethnicities and cultures. This is important for their social integration, as Islam plays a significant role in Malaysian society and culture. Religious classes also offer converts the opportunity to connect with other Muslims, especially locals, and build a support network for themselves.

Despite these significant efforts by the Malaysian government and NGOs, there is room for improvement in guiding Muslim converts in their faith (Abu Bakar & Ismail, 2018). Research on Islamic education for Muslim convert children remains limited (Mat Rani et al., 2022). Between 2016 and 2025, only 13 studies focused on six themes related to Muslim convert children in the Malaysian and Indonesian context: Muslim convert family education, roles of Muslim convert parents, challenges faced by Muslim convert families, internalisation of Islamic values, and knowledge and religious practices Mahmud (2019), Yani (2019), Mahfud (2017), Utami (2018), Siti Nur Isnaini (2019), Muftihah (2017), Waenoful (2016), Fakhruddin & Awang (2020), Hermawansyah & Suryani (2017), Bima (2018), Abdul Jalil, Hamzah Lubis (2017), Shafiqah et al., (2023 (Asma, 2023). These studies indicate that more work is needed by all involved parties to ensure that Muslim convert children receive adequate Islamic knowledge and understanding, guiding them to become devout Muslims with solid faith. This indicates a gap in research concerning the understanding of Islamic teachings among children of converts, as well as the issues surrounding their development.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of qualitative research is to explore fundamental, often overarching, characteristics of phenomena that are under-researched or poorly understood, typically through comprehensive, nuanced descriptions (Creswell, 1998). In this study, the phenomenon under scrutiny is the religious education of children in Muslim convert families in Malaysia. The study employed an interview methodology to understand this studied area better. The data collection process is carried out through interviews using the semi-structured interview method as the research instrument for the purpose of gathering primary data. Othman Lebar (2015) states that there are three types of interviews: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. The interview method is important in academic research and is one of the approaches to obtain valid and reliable information required for the study. Through this method, the topics and issues to be examined will be identified and summarized into a set of interview questions to be presented to informants in order to obtain comprehensive and systematic research data (Yin & Gwaltney, 1982). These interviews aimed to gather insights into the experiences and processes of religious learning from the perspectives of both educators and Muslim converts with children engaged in the Islamic religious education process. The interview process involved three key stages: selecting or identifying the sample, conducting interviews with the selected participants, and analysing the collected data. This section will elaborate on each of these stages: (a) sample selection, (b) interview procedures, and (c) data analysis.

SAMPLE SELECTION

Qualitative research design is particularly apt for investigating phenomena or concepts that have limited existing research. The sample for this study included a diverse range of participants (N= 20): firstly, parents (N = 5); secondly, teachers of Muslim converts at the Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organization (PERKIM), an NGO catering to Muslim converts (N = 5); thirdly, the officers of PERKIM (N = 5); fourthly, a Convert Guidance Expert from Mualaf Hidayah Centre (N = 2); fifthly, an expert on Islamic creed from the Selangor Islamic University (N = 1); sixthly, a child education expert from Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) (N = 1); and seventhly, an expert on Islamic management from the Selangor Islamic University (N = 1). This sample was varied in several respects: (a) the participants' ages ranged from the early 30s to early 60s; (b) they included several ethnicities (Malay, Chinese, and Indian); and (c) they represented a wide range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, from those without a high school diploma to those with doctoral degrees.

The sample was obtained through a two-stage selection process. Initially, a snowball approach was employed, and a teacher at the PERKIM Centre was contacted. The researchers requested recommendations for Muslim convert parents who met specific criteria, such as being involved in religious classes at PERKIM. Subsequently, the identified families were contacted and invited to participate. The head management of PERKIM was consulted to identify individuals with extensive knowledge and experience regarding Muslim converts to select experts. These individuals, considered stakeholders in the study, were invited to participate.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

Employing a case study approach, this qualitative research delved deeply into the experiences of individuals involved in a specific program, event, activity, or process. Defined by particular timeframes and activities, the study gathered comprehensive data through various methods over a prolonged period. The expert interviews, conducted between March 2022 and March 2023, were carried out at their respective offices, with each session lasting between one to three hours. For the remaining informants, the interviews were conducted in their homes. Interviews with spouses were conducted jointly (Marks & Dollahite, 2012), aligning with research suggestions that joint interviews can yield valuable insights into marital dynamics and interactions and co-create meaning through narratives (Marks et al., 2008). This approach enhances data validity, as individuals might otherwise embellish their religious experiences (Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1998). The participants engaged in in-depth, semi-structured interviews, viewed as authorities on their experiences and fully capable of articulating their perspectives on the subject matter (Marks & Dollahite, 2012). The study covered three main topics: the concept of religious learning for Muslim convert children, the conduct of religious learning courses for these children, and the overall impact of religious learning on them. Due to the semi-structured nature of these interviews, numerous follow-up questions were posed to gain deeper insights.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher meticulously transcribed all audio recordings to uphold the high standards required for interview transcripts (Hansen, 2020). NVIVO software facilitated the coding process during data analysis. Employing a thematic approach, various themes emerged such as *“Importance of Religious Learning for Children in Muslim Convert Families, Current Situation of Religious Learning for Children in Muslim Convert Families, Overall Experience of Religious Learning”* with related nodes grouped namely *“Lack of Guidance from Parents, Inadequate Support System (Mobility, Welfare, and Financial Assistance), and Weaknesses in the Islamic Education System for Child Converts”*, to represent the overarching findings of the interviews. Given the broad scope of this research, which encompasses the religious education of children in Muslim convert families, this article will specifically focus on findings related to the participants’ narratives on this subject.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section outlines three key findings from the interviews 20 participants which includes parents (N = 5); teachers of Muslim converts at the Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organization (PERKIM), an NGO catering to Muslim converts (N = 5); the officers of PERKIM (N = 5); a Convert Guidance Expert from Mualaf Hidayah Centre (N = 2); an expert on Islamic creed from the Selangor Islamic University (N = 1); a child education expert from Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) (N = 1); an expert on Islamic management from the Selangor Islamic University (N = 1). that were conducted, which relate to the participants’ narratives on religious learning for children in Muslim convert families.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN MUSLIM CONVERT FAMILIES

CLARIFY WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The stakeholders in this interview are mostly the teachers of Muslim converts at the Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organization (PERKIM) and the officers of PERKIM. The justification for selecting PERKIM as one of the stakeholder because PERKIM nationally recognised NGO that has long been at the forefront of supporting Muslim converts (mualaf) in Malaysia. Its mandate includes providing religious guidance, social welfare, and spiritual development for converts, making it a primary institutional actor in the lives of many mualaf families. PERKIM also organises Islamic learning programs, classes, and outreach efforts specifically tailored to the needs of new Muslims. This makes its officers and educators key informants in understanding how Islamic education is conveyed not only to adult converts but also indirectly to their children (Ghafar, 2021).

As an organisation that directly engages with mualaf households, PERKIM officers and teachers possess insider perspectives on the unique challenges faced by Muslim convert families, including issues of educational continuity, identity formation, and integration into the broader Muslim community. With branches and outreach centres throughout Malaysia, PERKIM has a wide geographical reach and experience across diverse social and cultural contexts. This allows the study to draw insights from a broad and representative pool of experiences related to Islamic education among converts. The study aims to assess the relevancy and challenges of Islamic education on children in mualaf families. PERKIM's role in offering formal and informal religious guidance, welfare support, and educational programs aligns directly with the study's objectives of evaluating support structures and identifying gaps or needs (Ghafar, 2021).

The PERKIM National Islamic Learning Classes (KPIPK) are designed for adult Muslim converts aged 18 to 80. Students are divided into five learning levels: Pre-Basic, Basic, Intermediate, Advanced, and Tahsin. The subjects offered include *Fardu Ain* (in Malay, Tamil, and Tagalog), *Aqidah* (in English), Comparative Religion (in English), *Iqra'* and *Quran* Recitation, *Tajwid* and *Tarannum*, Arabic or *Tajwid* and *Hadith* 40. Currently, no classes or modules are offered for convert children, as the program focuses solely on adult learners (Ghafar, 2021).

Interviews with stakeholders underscored the significance of religious learning for children in Muslim convert families, highlighting three main benefits: empowering children to embrace their new faith, assisting parents in guiding their children's religious path, and providing children with suitable pedagogical approaches to Islam. The head of the Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organization (PERKIM), a key NGO for Muslim converts in Malaysia, emphasised the necessity of developing a children-specific module for religious learning. Observing the increasing demand, PERKIM is considering implementing classes tailored for Muslim convert children. The need arises primarily for those who join religious schools at a later stage, thus facing challenges in catching up with their peers in Islamic studies. He said:

"Yeah, creating a module just for kids is a real need. If we see enough demand from the children of Muslim converts, PERKIM could set up classes for these youngsters to learn about their faith. It is like, once the parents convert, there is this wake-up call, and they start thinking about sending their kids to religious schools. But you have kids, say in the 4th grade, who are just stepping into this world of religious education. They are playing catch-up with Islam, trying to learn the ropes way later than their classmates."

This perspective was echoed by a Muslim convert mother who advocated for more camps and guidance programs at PERKIM. These would enable Muslim convert children to acquire knowledge about Islam rapidly. A PERKIM teacher also highlighted the unique needs of converted children, given their parents' limited understanding of the religion due to their recent conversion. He said:

"Considering that these parents are new to the faith, their foundation in Islam can be quite delicate. That is why their kids must have a mentor or even adoptive parents—someone who can guide them closely in their Islamic journey. Maybe we need a coaching camp or program the Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organization could kick-start. This could be a solid step in the right direction."

Furthermore, the officers of PERKIM suggested organising specific religious guidance classes for Muslim convert children. This approach ensures a sense of belonging and mutual understanding among these children with similar backgrounds. Practical pedagogy for these classes should consider the children's spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and psychological aspects, differing from adult-oriented approaches. A teacher at PERKIM stated that:

"Teenage years are tricky, aren't they? Kids face so many pressures that can shake their faith. Without solid religious grounding, they can end up unsure about their Islamic identity. Parents who have converted have got their work cut out for them — they have got to get a handle on the basics, the fardu ain, since it is what every Muslim's got to know. However, going it alone is tough, so a little help from the government and NGOs could be a game-changer. They need that support to get a good grip on Islam so they can pass it on to the kids. Maybe we need special classes or modules just for these kids to give their parents a hand in teaching them the right way."

It is evident from the study conducted by Marhamah et al. (2022) that converts have diverse educational needs, particularly regarding the profile of educators. However, the converts do not explicitly specify the exact type of educator they prefer in this context. The converts emphasised their desire for educators to guide them in learning the Quran. They want someone who can teach them how to read the Quran step by step and at a slow, manageable pace. Furthermore, they wish for the instructor to consistently be patient, diligent, and skilled in teaching them. The teacher should continue instructing them without interruption until they can thoroughly read the Quran.

CURRENT SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN MUSLIM CONVERT FAMILIES

Despite efforts by the government and NGOs, there is a gap in religious learning opportunities specifically for children of Muslim converts. Most existing classes cater to adult converts, with limited options for children. For instance, classes conducted by PERKIM predominantly target adults, with children aged from seven until twelve years old occasionally attending alongside their parents. A representative who is a Convert Guidance Expert from the Hidayah Centre Foundation (HCF) noted the lack of special classes for Muslim convert children, although they do offer programs like prayer camps during school holidays. Similarly, PERKIM acknowledges the absence of a specialised Islamic guidance class for converted children, a gap highlighted by various participants. Another participant, a Convert Guidance Expert from the HCF, stated that Muslim convert parents also bring their children to guidance classes during school holidays. However, the children should have paid more attention during the class. Their purpose is only to accompany their parents in the class. A convert mother who brought her children to the classes also stated that her children needed to be more focused in the class. The teacher at PERKIM also admitted:

“We have noticed instances where children accompany their parents to class but fail to engage, possibly due to a language barrier, such as not understanding English. Instead of paying attention, they often get distracted and play on their phones. This indicates that having joint sessions for children and parents may not be the most productive strategy.”

Currently, there is no distinct module for Muslim convert children in the classes offered by government institutions and NGOs. Children often rely on adult-oriented modules, which do not align with their cognitive development and understanding levels. This situation poses a challenge as the educational needs of children differ significantly from adults, especially in religious learning (Asma', 2023). This includes psychological, intellectual, experiential, emotional, and cognitive maturity aspects. Therefore, the approach used in guiding Muslim convert children must take into account these differences to ensure that the methods used are appropriate and suitable for their developmental stage (Zulkiple, 2020).

Accordingly, mualaf management authorities and guidance instructors must seriously acquire the necessary knowledge of child pedagogy before conducting Islamic creed (aqidah) guidance sessions for convert children. Furthermore, it is important to consider the background of these children, who are raised by parents who have only recently embraced Islam. This situation naturally requires greater attention and tailored methods suitable for their unique circumstances (Asma' & Azarudin, 2022).

As highlighted by Muhamad Zahiri & Adnan (2021), sociological studies on converts are essential in designing appropriate guidance processes and in developing suitable educational modules for converts. Ab. Halim (2021) also emphasized that the philosophy of Islamic education for converts must be based on the concept of tawhid, which aims to produce God-conscious individuals with good character and a strong sense of responsibility as *khalifatullah*. The curriculum for Islamic education should focus on all four elements of human development — spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical — with the spiritual element serving as the guide for the others, in order to shape a balanced individual.

Therefore, the role of teachers is critical in ensuring that instruction is delivered in an engaging manner while considering these various important aspects of teaching methodology. In addition, Saffanah Najwa et al. (2024) stressed the importance of instilling Islamic creed education from an early age, as values taught in early childhood tend to become deeply rooted and play a major role in shaping the child's future character.

Interview findings indicate that many Muslim convert parents face challenges in attending religious guidance classes conducted by PERKIM, largely due to time constraints, transportation issues, and financial hardship. Teachers hope that at the very least, these parents can educate their children at home after gaining religious knowledge through PERKIM National Islamic Education Class (KPIPK). However, many are overwhelmed with responsibilities, such as caring for many children, working to support the family due to a spouse's illness, living in poverty, or lacking transportation to attend classes (Siti Adibah & Siti Zubaidah, 2018).

This situation becomes more concerning when parents have no initiative to send their children to religious school. Some face financial difficulties, while others find that the Islamic schools are already full (Asma' dan Azarudin, 2020). This is worrying because, according to Ahmad Yunus et al. (2017) and Suariza et al. (2018), the lack of a strong foundation in Islamic creed can cause a person to go astray from the true teachings of Islam. In some cases, this may even lead to apostasy in adulthood, due to the absence of proper religious guidance.

This risk is compounded when Muslim convert parents themselves lack sufficient religious knowledge, either due to being newly converted or having come from non-religious backgrounds (Asma et al., 2020; Mohd Husni, 2022; Waenoful, 2016). An expert on Islamic creed from the Selangor Islamic University and a Muslim convert mother confirmed the lack of child-specific modules, emphasising the need for age-appropriate content. Existing modules at institutions like PERKIM are more suited to adults, with only elementary levels partially fitting children's needs. a Muslim convert mother explained as follows:

"...we currently do not have modules specifically designed for children; our resources are primarily aimed at converts in general. Our program is structured into three levels, and the instructors are tasked with teaching children from families who have recently embraced Islam. They tailor their approach based on the age of the children, utilising KAFA textbooks, which are standard in religious schools, as a teaching aid. However, most of our students are over 18, which means the content of our modules is more suited for adults. We find only the level one module quite appropriate for the younger ones."

OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS LEARNING

This study found that the overall experience of religious learning for children in Muslim convert families encompasses several aspects:

LACK OF GUIDANCE FROM PARENTS

Many Muslim convert parents, particularly those who converted after having children, lack sufficient Islamic knowledge to educate their offspring effectively. This gap necessitates specific religious learning classes for children in Muslim convert families. Additionally, children born after their parents' conversion often miss out on foundational Islamic guidance at home. A convert father and mother shared their struggles with limited knowledge in teaching their children about Islam. For example, a convert mother also stated that she has some problems in answering some questions relating to Islam posed by her children. While her husband is a born Muslim, she admitted:

"I find myself at a crossroads when it comes to educating my children about Islam. My husband has been a great source of knowledge for me, yet I am still learning. There is uncertainty in teaching them when I still grapple with the concepts myself. At this point, I feel confident in teaching them about the aspects I am familiar with, such as menstruation, obligatory prayers, and fasting. However, when their questions go beyond my understanding, I do not hesitate to ask my teacher for guidance and answers."

INADEQUATE SUPPORT SYSTEM (MOBILITY, WELFARE, AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE)

Many Muslim converts, often from lower-income backgrounds, require multifaceted support, including financial aid and counselling services. PERKIM assists in various forms, yet challenges persist. Some convert parents face logistical issues, such as transportation, which hinder their participation in religious classes. This financial strain can also impact their children's religious education, leading some parents to postpone formal Islamic learning for their children. Furthermore, some convert families prioritise academics over religious education, not recognising that a balance of both is vital for developing well-rounded individuals with a strong faith foundation. An officer of PERKIM explained the reality of a poor convert family that affects the whole family, especially their children's religious learning:

“Reflecting on our recent religious camp, the impact of parental guidance is clear in the behaviours of the converted children. Children come from homes where education and nurturing are lacking. The reality for some is harsh; with a sick father at home and a mother working tirelessly as a dishwasher to support the family, the children often end up neglected. Their home environment is not conducive to learning or growth. We at PERKIM have contacted these families, suggesting that sending their children to Quranic schools could be beneficial, but some children are hesitant. Our organisation is committed to supporting these families through welfare, financial aid, zakat, and educational assistance. However, there are families and children who, for their personal reasons, choose not to stay in Quranic boarding schools.”

LACK OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR CHILD CONVERTS

There are inherent shortcomings in the current religious learning system for child converts. These include inadequacies in teaching styles and learning approaches that fail to cater to the unique needs of Muslim convert children. As child education experts point out, teaching should be child-centric, starting with basics and gradually progressing to more complex topics. She said:

I believe the education journey should begin as early as possible, with a curriculum tailored to each child's abilities. It is crucial not to hurry them into complex religious scriptures like al-Fatihah but to start by teaching them the Arabic alphabet, starting with Alif, Ba, and Ta, and then gradually introducing more complex topics. Children are incredibly diverse in their capabilities. You are looking at ten distinct abilities if you have ten children.”

Limited capacity in religious schools and differing stakeholder perspectives also contribute to these challenges. Some argue there is no urgent need for specific classes for child converts, as regular religious schools and programs already provide adequate education. As argued by Wardekker & Miedema (2001), in religious education, it is essential not to entirely separate the acquisition of religious experiences and attitudes from the acquisition of other life experiences and attitudes. There should be a two-way connection between religious education and daily life, where schools acknowledge the religious aspects present in different experiences. The distinction between religious and non-religious experiences must be removed. In simple terms, religious education is more than just learning about religion. It also means that religious education should be inclusive, non-dogmatic, and non-coercive, giving students sufficient opportunities for creative exploration.

These findings illuminate the complexity of religious learning for children in Muslim convert families, underscoring the need for tailored educational approaches and support systems. The insights gathered from various stakeholders highlight the successes and challenges in this area, offering a foundation for future improvements in religious education for this unique demographic.

DISCUSSION

These findings contribute insights into religious learning experiences among children in Muslim-convert families. The research highlights the essential nature of religious education in these contexts, emphasising (a) the empowerment of children through custom-designed modules and syllabuses tailored to their new faith, (b) assistance for parents in offering religious guidance, and (c) the implementation of suitable pedagogical methods in Islamic studies tailored for children. Given their recent embrace of Islam, these children require specialised approaches as the content in modules designed for adult converts, which often involve a higher-level syllabus, is not pedagogically suitable for them.

These findings align with prior research indicating the positive impacts of specific religious guidance classes for children in Muslim convert families (Asma & Azarudin, 2020). Additionally, this study contributes to the limited literature on religious learning for Muslim convert children in Malaysia. The religious education of Muslim convert children encompasses two critical stages: early childhood and adolescence. Both stages are pivotal for Islamic education, particularly in cases where only the parents have converted to Islam. Without proper Islamic education, these children might only nominally identify as Muslims and might revert to the former faith when they reach adulthood, as discussed by previous researchers (Samuri & Quraishi, 2014).

Furthermore, the role of converted parents is crucial in providing Islamic guidance. However, their limited religious knowledge can be a significant barrier. Therefore, government agencies and NGOs must assist these parents by offering religious guidance classes, including transportation assistance for those in need. The study's findings also suggest that structured and well-managed Islamic creed (aqidah) guidance classes for Muslim convert children should be conducted regularly—preferably once a week on weekends as a starting point—by mualaf-focused NGOs such as PERKIM.

The use of child-friendly language, appropriate teaching aids, conducive classroom environments, specially developed aqidah modules tailored for Muslim convert children, and the involvement of trained and skilled instructors are key elements that need to be enhanced to strengthen the management system of creed guidance for these children.

These findings are in line with the study by Rosni Wazir (2014), which discussed the Islamic creed education of children by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). She noted that the Prophet's methods of educating children were wise and strategic, taking into account the four key elements of human development: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical.

The role of teachers is therefore crucial in mastering the educational methods exemplified by the Prophet to ensure that the teaching process is engaging and considers various essential aspects of pedagogy (Asma' Fakhruddin & Azarudin Awang, 2021). Without an effective educational system to guide the Islamic creed of Muslim convert children, it would be difficult to achieve the goal of raising individuals who truly understand, internalize, and practice Islamic teachings as they grow into adulthood (Asma' Fakhruddin & Azarudin Awang, 2021).

The Department of Islamic Religious Affairs of Negeri Sembilan (JHEAINS) has established a dedicated unit known as the "Conversion Unit" to manage all matters related to Muslim converts (mualaf), from registration to religious guidance classes. Each state in Malaysia has its own State Islamic Religious Department (JAIN) or State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN) responsible for managing mualaf affairs. However, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also play an important role, in line with the findings of Mohd Aswan and Abdul Ghafar (2021), who emphasize the importance of cooperation in da'wah efforts. Zakat funds for mualaf, managed by JAIN or MAIN, are often channeled to NGOs due to the shortage of instructors in government agencies. Collaboration between government agencies and NGOs has further strengthened Islamic outreach (da'wah) activities, particularly in Sabah.

JHEAINS implements various programs to help mualaf deepen their knowledge and fulfill their responsibilities as Muslims. These include faith reinforcement courses, funeral management workshops, Islamic appreciation programs, Fardu Ain classes, Quran reading classes, and special mualaf conventions. These programs are supervised by trained officers to ensure effectiveness, and the Fardu Ain and Quran reading classes are conducted consistently every weekend (Sharifah Sari et al., 2022). Collaboration between JAIN, MAIN, and NGOs also plays a critical role, particularly in curriculum coordination and information dissemination in rural areas, helping to

address the shortage of instructors and ensuring that mualaf guidance classes can be conducted effectively in both urban and rural areas. This cooperation should also be extended to Muslim convert children in terms of activities, classes, and other forms of guidance. Such initiatives would provide learning opportunities for convert children who are unable to attend KAFA classes due to unavoidable constraints, ensuring that they too receive religious education and support through programs coordinated by JAIN, MAIN, or NGOs (Asma' dan Azarudin, 2020)

The pedagogical approach for Muslim convert children should include advice, motivation, questioning, demonstration, and emphasis on positive aspects. The teaching content should cover worship, morality, and social interaction. Study findings highlight the need to develop a dedicated Islamic creed (*aqidah*) guidance module tailored for Muslim convert children, taking into account their psychological maturity and cognitive development. The module should use child-friendly approaches such as colorful infographics, large illustrations, and age-appropriate pedagogy. Children should be grouped by age; 4–6 years (early childhood); 7–12 years (middle childhood) and 13–17 years (teenagers). This categorization reflects the distinct educational needs of each developmental stage. Suggested module contents include; Tawhid (Uluhiyyah, Rububiyyah, Asma' wa Sifat); Pillars of Iman and Islam; Ihsan; The 20 Attributes of Allah (*Wajib, Mustahil, Harus*); Stories of the Prophets, Companions, and the Righteous, using storytelling instead of pure theory.

It is also proposed that the existing Islamic Education syllabus in national schools be integrated, as it has been developed through thorough research. Key elements such as *aqidah*, worship, morals, *shariah*, and *sirah* should be interlinked to help children understand the meaning and purpose behind Islamic practices, especially before reaching puberty. The module should also include daily *du'a* recitations, instilling *taqwa* and God-consciousness. Logical and scientific reasoning is suggested as an additional method to strengthen children's belief in Allah SWT.

Technological enhancements are recommended, such as interactive buttons with audio (e.g., *nasheed* of prophets' names) to make learning more engaging. Activities such as pop quizzes, puzzles, nature reflections (*tadabbur*), and riddles can reinforce learning in fun and meaningful ways. These findings align with Mohd Afandi et al. (2022) on the value of comprehensive modules with appropriate language for converts. Saffanah Najwa et al. (2021) on early *aqidah* education and the effective use of ICT tools. Hanifah (2010) on Islamic teaching methods like storytelling, analogies, and role modelling. Plus, Hartati et al. (2021) also emphasized on the importance of sufficient teaching tools and references for effective guidance.

This suggestion also aligns with a study at the Mualaf Center in Yogyakarta, which indicated that religious understanding among children in convert families is often superficial and imitative, requiring both direct and indirect educational approaches (Utami, 2018). However, convert families face barriers, including limited parental knowledge and negative social influences on teenagers. Therefore, the government and NGOs must provide comprehensive support and practical guidance classes. The challenges in religious education for Muslim convert children in Malaysia are multifaceted, including diverse learning styles, limited school capacity, financial constraints, and varying priorities. Parents, educators, and religious organisations must collaborate in addressing these challenges, ensuring that these children receive the comprehensive religious education necessary to sustain their faith and identity in a diverse society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the insights from the stakeholders' perspectives underscore the critical need to enhance children's religious education in Muslim convert families. This involves developing specialised modules with appropriate syllabi to aid these children in learning about their new faith, supporting parents in religious guidance, and employing suitable pedagogical methods tailored to young learners' understanding of Islam. The consensus among stakeholders is clear: there is a significant need for focused religious guidance for converting children. This aligns with previous research demonstrating the positive impacts of dedicated religious guidance classes on solidifying the Islamic faith of children in Muslim convert families. Therefore, the government and related NGOs must consider these findings to bolster these children's religious education.

Furthermore, additional measures such as financial aid and transportation assistance to religious classes, provided by NGOs with government support, could greatly facilitate this educational process. The lack of religious guidance not only affects the converts but also extends to their children, who often grow up in households where Islamic principles are not fully understood or practised due to the parents' recent conversion. To address this, it is vital to expand religious guidance to include these children, thereby ensuring a stronger foundation in their Islamic faith. This comprehensive approach to religious education is essential for cultivating a well-rounded and deeply-rooted understanding of Islam among children in Muslim convert families, thus supporting their spiritual growth and integration into the Muslim community.

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