

## THE ROLE OF THE ISLAMIC GUIDANCE CENTER AS AN INFORMATION AND INTEGRATION SITE FOR *MUALAFS* IN SELECTED ZONES OF PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

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### Abstract

The widespread establishment of Islamic Guidance Centres in Malaysia highlights the importance placed on providing guidance and support to new converts. Apart from describing the development of da'wah in Malaysia and its stages, Muslim converts are also able to channel information about the truth of Islam to the original community and rectify the misconception of being Muslim to the original Muslim community. Thus, this study aims to examine the role of the Islamic guidance center as a center of information about Islam for *mualafs* (Muslim converts). as well as to identify its role as an Islamic resource for converts in terms of inter-racial integration. This study used a qualitative method, by interviewing five individuals who are directly involved in the management of Muslim converts in Malaysia. The study results found that the Islamic guidance center, whether managed by the Religious Department or NGOs, functions as an

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Islamic information center by providing basic information about Islam such as Islamic beliefs, Syariah and morals. In another aspect, this guidance center also serves as a source of integration to re-establish intra-ethnic relations with different beliefs and inter-ethnic relations. This research investigates the effectiveness of services designed to assist Muslim converts in integrating with the Muslim community. It explores both the strengths and weaknesses of these services to identify areas for improvement. On the other hand, it provides additional information to the missionary organizations either at the government or NGO level to further strengthen its role in disseminating information about Islam and catalyzing national integration.

**Keywords:** Guidance Center; Islam; *Mualafs*; information; integration.

#### **Khulasah**

Kewujudan pusat bimbingan Islam yang beroperasi di serata Malaysia memperlihatkan betapa penting pengurusan mualaf di negara ini. Selain menggambarkan tahap perkembangan dakwah di Malaysia, mualaf juga mampu menyalurkan maklumat berkaitan kebenaran agama Islam kepada komuniti asal dan membetulkan salah faham terhadap isu-isu yang berlegar 'menjadi seorang Islam' kepada masyarakat Muslim asal. Justeru, objektif kajian ini adalah untuk meneliti peranan pusat bimbingan Islam mualaf sebagai tapak informasi Islam. Keduanya mengenal pasti peranan pusat bimbingan Islam sebagai tapak informasi Islam kepada golongan mualaf dalam aspek integrasi antara kaum. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif, iaitu sesi temu bual dilakukan ke atas lima orang tokoh yang terlibat secara langsung dalam pengurusan mualaf di Malaysia. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa pusat bimbingan Islam sama ada yang diuruskan oleh pihak Jabatan Agama atau badan-badan bukan kerajaan (NGO) bertindak sebagai

tapak informasi Islam dengan menyalurkan segala ilmu-ilmu asas Islam berkaitan tentang akidah, syariat dan akhlak Islam. Dari aspek yang lain, pusat bimbingan ini juga berperanan sebagai tapak integrasi bagi mengukuhkan semula hubungan intraetnik yang berbeza kepercayaan dan interetnik yang berlainan bangsa. Dengan kata lain, kajian ini penting kerana ia memberi maklumat tambahan kepada badan-badan dakwah mualaf sama ada pada peringkat kerajaan atau NGO bagi memperkasakan lagi peranannya sebagai penyampai maklumat tentang agama Islam dan pemangkin terhadap integrasi nasional.

**Kata kunci:** Pusat Bimbingan; Islam; mualaf; informasi; integrasi.

### **Introduction**

With the steady rise in conversions to Islam each year, a dedicated guidance center has emerged in Malaysia to bolster the Islamic education of the *Mualaf* community. This influx of new Muslims necessitates a tailored approach to deepen their understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of Islamic religious disciplines. Beyond navigating internal and external challenges during their initial stages of conversion, the Islamic Guidance Center serves as a vital resource and integration platform for *Mualafs*. This study recognises the crucial role these conversion centers play in Malaysia, fostering self-confidence, nurturing religious understanding and appreciation, and promoting integration between new Muslims, native Muslims, and non-Muslims. Therefore, this research holds significance as it delves into the effectiveness of these centers in supporting convert integration. By identifying their strengths and needs, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing development of these crucial support systems.

## **Issues and Problems of the *Mualaf* Community in Going through a New Life**

Research by Kamarulzaman and Nur Athirah highlights the diverse backgrounds of *mualafs*, encompassing variations in race, age, and educational attainment. These differences can affect a *mualaf's* ability to grasp and value the Islamic education provided.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, limited Malay language proficiency can hinder their understanding of the delivered lessons. Faezy et al. further identify factors contributing to the challenges faced by *mualafs* in acquiring Islamic knowledge. These include limited access to educational resources due to geographical constraints, diverse individual needs, varying levels of prior Islamic knowledge, cultural differences, the quality and effectiveness of teaching methods, and the overall management of the guidance centers themselves. In light of these challenges, Faezy et al. propose the establishment of dedicated convert community centers. These centers would focus on fostering a sense of identity among converts and provide Islamic education tailored to their needs. The curriculum would encompass both Islamic beliefs and practical applications within the Islamic framework.<sup>2</sup>

Studies indicate that some *mualafs* struggle to maintain a fulfilling life after embracing Islam. Initial support from the Muslim community may dwindle over time, leaving *mualafs* feeling isolated. This lack of ongoing support, coupled with challenges in understanding Islamic teachings and potential pressure from their original communities, can increase the risk of apostasy (reversion to

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<sup>1</sup> Kamarulzaman Kawi & Nur A'thiroh Masyaa'il Tan Abdullah @ Tan Ai Pao, "Isu dan Cabaran Saudara Kita di Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak," *Bitara: International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Science* 3(2) (2020), 29

<sup>2</sup> Faezy Adenan et al., "Analisis Modul Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran (P&P) Kelas Pengajian Mualaf di Pusat Perlindungan Baitus Salam Selangor," *Jurnal Kesidang* 5(1), (2020), 20.

their previous religion).<sup>3</sup> Suariza et al. support this concern, reporting 81 cases of apostasy among converts in Selangor between 2011 and 2015.<sup>4</sup> Beyond these immediate challenges, *mualafs* often grapple with questions of self-identity as Muslims and how to serve as positive examples for both their non-Muslim families and the Muslim community.<sup>5</sup> Rebuilding relationships with their original families and adapting to their new Muslim environment can be particularly difficult. This is where guidance centers play a crucial role. They provide a platform for ongoing support, fostering academic development in Islamic knowledge while also helping converts rebuild connections with their families and integrate into the local Muslim community.

### **The Importance of Islamic Education Guidance for *Mualafs***

*Mualafs*, also known as 'new brothers' or 'our brothers', are individuals who have recently embraced Islam. The Arabic word '*muallaf*' originates from the root '*a-li-fa*' (ألف), which carries connotations of gentleness, kindness, and love, according to *Lisan al-'Arab* by Ibn Manzur.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the Qur'an uses the term '*muallaf*' only once, appearing in Surah al-Tawbah verse 60. Islamic scholar al-Qurtubi, in his commentary on this verse, highlights that

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<sup>3</sup> Siti Aishah Samudin & Aisyah Mohd Cabidi, "Kajian Isu Keluar Islam di Malaysia: Kebebasan Beragama Atau Jenayah Syariah," *Jurnal Pengajian Islam* 16(2) (2023), 33.

<sup>4</sup> Suariza @ Hidayah Muhammad, N. R., "Faktor Permohonan Isytihar Murtad dalam Kalangan Mualaf di Selangor," *Jurnal Usuluddin* 46(2) (2018), 123.

<sup>5</sup> Azarudin Awang & Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, "Bentuk-Bentuk Hubungan Muslim-Non-Muslim Selepas Pemelukan Agama: Kajian Kes Dalam Kalangan Mualaf Cina Terengganu," *Jurnal Kemanusiaan* 12(2) (2014), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Abu al-Fadl Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab* (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), 9: 11.

*mualafs* represent a community with a nascent faith requiring support from the established Muslim community. Al-Qurtubi's interpretation emphasises the importance of providing guidance and encouragement to this group. Their recent conversion means they are likely still developing their Islamic knowledge and practices. Offering support helps them integrate into the Muslim community and reduces the risk of reverting to their previous religion.<sup>7</sup>

According to *Kamus Dewan* (the Malay language dictionary), '*mualaf*' can be referred to as *orang yang baru memeluk Islam* (people who have just embraced Islam) or with terms like *saudara Muslim baru* (new Muslim brothers/sisters) or *saudara kita* (our brothers/sisters).<sup>8</sup> Siti Nor Haliza et al. further clarify that *saudara Muslim baru* specifically refers to non-Malaysian converts (Chinese, Indians, Indigenous people, etc.) who have recently converted to Islam.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, *saudara kita* (our brothers/sisters) is a broader term encompassing all Muslims, regardless of their ethnicity, time of conversion, or social background. This term emphasizes the concept of brotherhood and love within the Islamic community.<sup>10</sup>

Following conversion to Islam, Malaysian Islamic conversion ordinances mandate a series of processes and phases designed to strengthen the convert's faith. These may include religious guidance, counseling, financial assistance, and advanced Islamic education. However, the

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<sup>7</sup> Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Hassan al-Tarki (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1967), 8:178-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Kamus Dewan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015), 1046.

<sup>9</sup> Siti Nor Haliza Abd Zamani et al., "Pendekatan Dakwah kepada Saudara Baru di Malaysia: Satu Sorotan," *Jurnal 'Ulwan Special Issue I: Kolokium Penyelidikan Ijazah Tinggi* 6(1) (2021), 202.

<sup>10</sup> Aimi Wafa Ahmad & Nur Najwa Hanani Abd Rahman, "Sokongan Sosial: Satu Keperluan dalam Pemerkasaan Saudara Baru," *Jurnal Pengajian Islam* 13(2) (2020), 239.

designated timeframe for a person to be officially considered a convert varies across the country. Research by Irwan et al. indicates that nearly half of Malaysian states lack a standardized timeframe for this designation.<sup>11</sup> While the specific time frame for considering someone a *Mualaf* varies across Malaysian states, some states do not set a specific period at all.<sup>12</sup>

As a newly converted group, *mualafs* require appropriate guidance, attention, and motivation, particularly regarding the fundamentals of Islamic teachings, as outlined in Articles 74 and 80(1) of the Federal Constitution. Therefore, *mualaf* management falls under the purview of the State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN) or the State Islamic Religious Department (JAIN) in each state.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing the increasing number of conversions, the State Department of Islamic Religion established a specialised unit to cater to *mualafs*' needs, providing them with specific Islamic information and resources. In addition to government initiatives, numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) actively contribute to *Mualaf* development in Malaysia.

Prominent examples include Persatuan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia (PERKIM), Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA), Malaysian Indian Muslim Congress (KIMMA), and Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM). These NGOs often act as crucial information sources and support networks for *Mualafs*, complementing the government's efforts.<sup>14</sup> The Malaysian context

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<sup>11</sup> Irwan, M. S, et al., "Penerimaan Penggunaan Istilah Mualaf dalam Kalangan Mualaf di Malaysia", *Jurnal Pengurusan dan Penyelidikan Fatwa* 1(6) (2015), 114-115.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Siti Adibah Abu Bakar & Siti Zubaidah Ismail, "Pengurusan Mualaf di Malaysia: Kerjasama Dinamik Antara Agensi Kerajaan dan Bukan Kerajaan", *Journal al-'Abqari* 16 (Special Edition), (2018), 134.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

highlights a collaborative approach to *mualaf* identity reconstruction. This involves government initiatives, NGO efforts, and partnerships between the two.

Faezy Adnan et al. highlight the challenges in delivering Islamic education to *mualafs* compared to native Muslims, attributed primarily to differences in prior knowledge. Native Muslims receive fundamental Islamic education early, often in pre-school and primary school, equipping them with essential skills like prayer performance, the Qur'an knowledge, and Islamic ethics.<sup>15</sup> Conversely, *mualafs* embrace Islam at varying ages and educational backgrounds, impacting their ability to grasp and appreciate gradually presented information. This situation is further complicated by language barriers, where limited Malay proficiency hinders *mualafs*' full comprehension of educational content.<sup>16</sup>

While most native Muslims warmly welcome *mualafs*, some unfortunately hold negative perceptions, viewing them as second-class Muslims or questioning their sincerity. These misconceptions can lead to prejudice and social isolation, making it difficult for *mualafs* to adapt and integrate into Muslim society.<sup>17</sup> This lack of acceptance and negative scrutiny can cause emotional stress and impact *mualafs*' psychological well-being, especially when they are placed in the same learning environment as native Muslims.<sup>18</sup> Recognizing these challenges, Nur Zufhika and

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<sup>15</sup> Faezy Adenan et al., "Analisis Modul Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran", 24.

<sup>16</sup> Norhana Abdullah @ Ng Siew Boey et al., "Development of Human Capital Through the Islamic Education of Our Brothers (*Mu'alaf*) in Terengganu", *Afkar* 25(1) (2023), 170-171.

<sup>17</sup> Kamarulzaman & Nur A'thiroh, "Isu dan Cabaran Saudara Kita di Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak", 33.

<sup>18</sup> Nazri Yasin et al., "Pengaruh Penghargaan Kendiri Terhadap Kesejahteraan Psikologi Mualaf", *Journal of Sciences and Humanities* 13(3) (2018), 175.

Khazri advocate for dedicated educational programs and support systems tailored specifically for *mualafs*.

Such programs offer a safe space for *mualafs* to learn about Islam at their own pace, free from judgment and social comparison. By creating separate learning environments, *mualafs* can feel more comfortable asking questions, participating in discussions, and overcoming feelings of shyness and awkwardness.<sup>19</sup> This approach fosters a sense of belonging and community, ultimately empowering *mualafs* to confidently embrace their faith and integrate into Muslim society. By fostering understanding and acceptance, both native Muslims and *mualafs* can benefit from enriching intercultural interactions and creating a truly inclusive Muslim community.

### **Reconstruction of *Mualafs* Social Integration**

Promoting social integration between religions and ethnic groups is a complex endeavor, demanding compromise and tolerance from the grassroots community. This 'togetherness' requires fostering interaction and shared experiences through everyday activities like shared meals, living arrangements, and participation in religious and festive celebrations.<sup>20</sup> Integration, in essence, aims to unite diverse groups under a single governance structure, fostering either accommodation, acculturation, or assimilation.<sup>21</sup> Religious guidance centers, both

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<sup>19</sup> Nur Zufhika Zamzuri Arif & Khazri Osman, "Pendekatan Dakwah Terhadap Golongan Mualaf", in Seminar Dakwah & Wahdah Al-Ummah 2022, Interaksi Dakwah di Malaysia Merentas Zaman, Faculty of Islamic Studies, UKM, July 14-15 2022, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Suraya Sintang et al., "Kesepaduan Sosial dalam Hubungan antara Agama di Pedalaman Sabah", *Borneo International Journal* 2(1) (2019), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Hasnah Husein, "Integrasi Kaum dalam Rancangan Pembangunan Negara: Tumpuan Selepas Dasar Ekonomi Baru," *International Journal of Humanities Technology and Civilization (IJHTC)* 4(1) (2018), 59.

governmental and non-governmental, play a crucial role in managing converts. They act as a voice for the *mualaf* community, advocating for their rights in education, humanitarian aid, and welfare.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, *mualafs* can contribute positively to *da'wah* efforts by sharing non-Muslim celebrations, entertainment, and arts with their families and communities, adhering to Shari'ah principles. This highlights the dual function of religious guidance centers: providing *mualafs* with the fundamentals of Islamic education while also serving as an integration platform that strengthens the tripartite relationship between *mualafs*, non-Muslim communities, and native Muslims.

Preserving racial integration in Malaysia poses significant challenges, particularly concerning religious and cultural differences. Studies have identified various dynamics within the tripartite relationship between *mualafs* (converts to Islam), native Muslims, and non-Muslims, ranging from neutrality and conflict to accommodation and mutual support.<sup>23</sup> However, insensitive treatment from native Muslims can negatively impact *mualafs*, potentially leading them to abandon their newfound faith.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, self-esteem in converts fluctuates over time, influenced by factors like environment, family, and friends. Consequently, *mualafs* may experience depression due to

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<sup>22</sup> Sharifah Fadylawaty Syed Abdullah et al., "Peranan Multiracial Reverted Muslims (MRM) dalam Memperkasa Pembangunan Dakwah Muallaf di Malaysia", in *Potensi Muallaf Mendepani Cabaran Era Kontemporari* (Shah Alam: Lembaga Zakat Selangor, 2019), 86.

<sup>23</sup> Azarudin & Khadijah, "Bentuk-Bentuk Hubungan Muslim-Non Muslim", 14.

<sup>24</sup> Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali et al., "Muhajir Penjana Interaksi dan Toleransi Beragama Saudara Baru-Muslim-Non-Muslim", *Jurnal Akademika* 87(2) (2017), 65.

social rejection, loss of family support, unemployment, and even threats.<sup>25</sup>

To address these challenges, *da'wah* institutions need to diversify their strategies and mechanisms in reaching non-Muslim communities. These efforts should be tailored to contemporary needs and actively address negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims.<sup>26</sup> Related to this, Khadijah et al. stated that the interaction that takes place must use the words *lita'arafu* and *jadilhum* which mean 'to know' and 'debate' between them in a good way.<sup>27</sup>

Several studies illuminate the vital role of guidance centers in empowering Muslim converts in Malaysia. Haziman Mahathir examined the Hidayah Center Foundation, an NGO actively involved in Islamic preaching and support for *mualafs*. Their initiatives include recruiting preachers, empowering converts, and organizing non-Muslim outreach programs.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, Ahmad Yunus et al. investigated the role of PERKIM, a prominent religious teaching center, specifically focusing on their Dakwah Institute. Their study emphasized the "wisdom of practice" and "wise practice" approaches tailored to teaching *mualafs*, fostering a strong faith and identity.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Nazri Yasin et al., "Pengaruh Penghargaan Kendiri", 174-175.

<sup>26</sup> Mohamad Nasir Noor Azemy & Rosmawati Mohamad Rasit, Pendekatan Street Dakwah Kepada Bukan Islam dalam Kalangan Pendakwah NGO Muslim di Pulau Pinang", *Jurnal al-Hikmah* 11(1) (2019), 63.

<sup>27</sup> Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, Nur Hidayah Mohd Paudzi, Abdul Nasser Sultan Mohsen Sallam, "Islamic Perspective on the Concepts of Interaction Among Multicultural Society, *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 23(2) (2023), 251.

<sup>28</sup> Haziman Mahathir Abdul Hajis, "Peran Hidayah Centre Foundation dalam Perkembangan Dakwah Islamiyah di Malaysia Tahun 2005-2017M," (Master diss. Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Surabaya, 2019), 19-20.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmad Yunus Kasim, Samsuddin Abdul Hamid & Misnan Jemali, "Pengajaran Akidah dalam Kalangan Mualaf di Institut Dakwah Islamiyah PERKIM", *Jurnal Perspektif* 1(Special Issue) (2017), 99.

Abdullah et al. investigated the role played by the Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah Islamic Guidance Center (PUSBA) in Kedah, managed by the State Department of Religion. Their study specifically examined PUSBA's impact on prayer practices among *mualafs*. The findings revealed that practical prayer training not only enhanced trainees' appreciation for prayer but also strengthened their faith. Additionally, PUSBA implemented congregational prayer sessions to foster a sense of brotherhood and community among *mualafs* and staff members.<sup>30</sup>

Muhamad Nurazan et al. conducted a study at Asrama Darul Hidayah, a boarding school under the jurisdiction of JAWI. Their research aimed to unravel the concept of the boarding education model, analyze its implementation at Darul Hidayah, and identify the embedded Islamic values. The study revealed that the guidance offered through the boarding model comprised elements of learning, prevalence, self-development, exemplification, and communication fostering between missionaries (teachers) and students.<sup>31</sup> These elements collectively contributed to enhancing the quality of *mualafs*' Islamic knowledge, religious practice, and social interaction skills.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilising both document research and field studies. The initial stage involved document research, focusing on secondary

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<sup>30</sup> Abdullah, Syahrul Faizaz et al., "Program Bimbingan Muallaf di Pusat Bimbingan dan Latihan Saudara Baru (PUSBA): Pelaksanaan Proses Pengajaran Solat", in International Conference on Zakat, Tax, Waqf and Economic Development (ZAWED), Adya Hotel Langkawi, Malaysia, 2019, 588.

<sup>31</sup> Mohd Nurazan Bin Ayub, Abd Ghafar Bin Hj Don & Afriyanto Afriyanto, "Bimbingan Saudara Baru Melalui Model Pendidikan Berasrama di Asrama Darul Hidayah, Kuala Lumpur", *Sari* 5(1), (2017), 5.

sources like books, journals, theses, dissertations, and relevant articles. This approach aimed to acquire background knowledge, grasp the existing body of research, and identify potential gaps in previous studies. This informed the subsequent field study and helped to define the research scope.

The justification for this study was only carried out in Peninsular Malaysia because West Malaysia and East Malaysia have different histories in terms of religion. The history of colonisation can influence the development of religion in both regions, as well as provide a different cultural heritage related to tolerance and interaction between religions. Field research was conducted in four key zones across Peninsular Malaysia. In-depth interviews were held with four key informants directly involved in managing Muslim converts at relevant institutions. These interviews took place at the Darul Hidayah Mualafs Training Center in Kuala Terengganu (East Zone), the Mualafs Training Center at PERKIM Johor Bharu (Southern Zone), the Mualafs Training Center at PERKIM (West Zone), and the Mualafs Training Center at PUSPA Sungai Petani, Kedah (North Zone).

This study uses the purposive sampling method which refers to a group that has the characteristics of the sample desired by the researcher.<sup>32</sup> While this study doesn't encompass the entirety of the *mualaf* experience in Peninsular Malaysia, it offers valuable insights into their real-life situations. The chosen states were selected because they represent Malaysia's diverse regions, providing a broader perspective. Focusing on guidance centers was strategic as they function as the primary training hubs within each state, effectively capturing the local context.

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<sup>32</sup> Mokhtar Ismail, Kaedah *Penyelidikan Kuantitatif dalam Pendidikan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 2011), 57.

Furthermore, this approach allows researchers to consider demographic variations, cultural nuances, and socioeconomic factors, potentially revealing issues more relevant to specific *Mualaf* communities.

To gather in-depth information, the researcher team will conduct semi-structured interviews guided by a protocol reviewed by relevant experts. This protocol will include focused questions built around pre-identified themes. A pilot interview will be conducted beforehand to refine the questions based on respondent feedback, ensuring they elicit clear and consistent answers. The pilot study also allows us to assess the chosen data collection methods and identify any potential challenges. This study involved key figures directly responsible for supporting *mualafs* in the selected regions. To protect participant confidentiality and simplify analysis, participants were assigned codes (Info #1 to Info #5) instead of their names. Interviews continued until data saturation was reached, ensuring the research questions and study objectives were adequately addressed. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim using a manual coding method to extract relevant themes.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Delivering Basic Information on Islamic Education***

For *mualafs*, religious guidance classes are a very important exposure to help them recognize basic Islam but yet in-depth and make it easier to perform worship (*'ibadah*) correctly.<sup>33</sup> Basically, when someone embraces Islam, the religious department suggests that these *mualafs* attend classes that are provided in a place that is easy for them to visit. For example, Info#1 stated that the State Religious Council provides classes for the *mualaf* community in each

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<sup>33</sup> Yasmoon Mohamed & Razaleigh Muhamat @ Kawangi, "Tahap Kepuasan Mualaf Pengurusan Kelas Bimbingan Agama oleh Majlis Islam Kelantan (MAIK)", *Al-Hikmah* 11(2) (2019), 96.

district frequency of two times a week. To make it easier for this community to understand early information about Islam, the council provides separate al-Qur'an guidance classes and *Fardu 'Ain* guidance. To further strengthen the knowledge of this community, courses, workshops or seminars to strengthen Islamic knowledge are provided either at the district or state level.

To ensure effective management and education of *mualafs*, the Department of Religion or the State Religious Council cooperates with non-government agencies (NGOs) that manage *mualafs*. In addition, there is a problem of lack of manpower at the level of religious councils or religious offices to serve all the growing needs of *mualafs*.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Islamic guidance classes organized by NGOs such as the Islamic Welfare Association of Malaysia (PERKIM) reinforce the education provided by the Department of Religion or the Religious Council under the management of the national government. This was explained by Info#2 as follows:

"The religious department provides classes either in the morning or in the evening... such as PERKIM here only helps, which is morning classes with three times a week. We provide classes for *mualafs* for as long as they want to study. just like us, we also mix this new brother with our own brother who wants, like when he was working before, he didn't have time... from Singapore, there are also. Only after he retires, he will go back to study."

The learning of Islamic education covers the basic aspects of *Fardu 'Ain* that touch on questions of faith, Shari'ah and morals. For example, the Sultan Abdul Halim

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<sup>34</sup> Siti Adibah & Siti Zubaidah, "Pengurusan Mualaf di Malaysia", 136.

Islamic Guidance Center (PUSBA) in Sungai Petani uses the basic *Fardu 'Ain* guidebooks for *mualafs* as follows:

Table 2: Basic Handbook used in Guidance Centers

No	Name of book	Author
1	<i>Indahnya Hidup Bersyariat, Modul Fardu Ain Diri, Keluarga dan Masyarakat Sepanjang</i>	Ismail Kamus dan Mohd Azrul Azlen Ab. Hamid
2	<i>Mari Kita Bersembahyang</i>	Mohamed Arsyad Ahmad
3	<i>Sejarah Rasulullah saw dan Khulafa ur Rasyidin</i>	Sharifah Fakhruddin
4	<i>Al-Ruh Al-Amin resam Uthmani Belajar Membaca Al-Quran Bertajwid dalam Masa 50 jam</i>	Muhammad Raihan Hasbullah
5	<i>Doa-Doa Harian: Daily Doa</i>	Mohamed Arsyad Ahmad
6	<i>Akhlak ke arah Membangun Akhlak Ummah</i>	PUSBA

Islamic education is very important and needs to be strengthened for *mualafs* who embrace Islam since the superficiality of religious knowledge will encourage them to return to the original teachings. This educational program, designed specifically for *mualafs*, serves as a crucial social support platform. It aims to enhance their understanding of Islam across various aspects, including faith (*Iman*), Islamic law (*Shari'ah*), Islamic ethics (*Akhlaq*), the Prophet's biography (*Sirah*), and Qur'an recitation. Research by Siti Fathimatul and A'thiroh Masyaa'il highlights the effectiveness of formal Islamic education in deepening converts' Islamic knowledge. This structured approach strengthens their commitment to Islam and fosters long-term faith.<sup>35</sup> This is stated by Info#4 as follows:

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<sup>35</sup> Siti Fathimatul Zahrah Yusri & A'thiroh Masyaa'il Tan Abdullah, "Pengajaran Pendidikan Islam Terhadap Mualaf: Satu Tinjauan

"The main factor the apostate among *mualafs* is ...that no basic education is given, there is no guidance... when *mualafs* become Muslim, they are left like that."

The issue of effective methods of delivering Islamic education and further ensuring that *mualafs* can understand the teachings well is a complex issue that requires a lot of patience. Thus, Info#3 states as follows:

"Because when you follow this Islamic teaching, if you follow a lot of Arabic writing if you want people (*mualafs*) to understand it, we have to be patient. Then they have to learn a lot... about *Fiqah*, *Tawhid*... sometimes we must prioritize *Fiqah* sometimes we have to prioritize *Tawhid*, then sometimes we have to keep up."

While delivering effective education to *Mualafs* can require significant patience, the curriculum for their learning program is meticulously designed to achieve optimal results. This careful planning emphasizes fostering a strong relationship between teachers and students. A positive rapport allows *mualafs* to better absorb the Islamic knowledge being imparted. This approach aligns with research by Siti Afifah et al. which highlights the importance of guidance as an educational tool that provides moral support and strengthens the teacher-convert bond.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Motivating Mualafs to Follow Learning Sessions***

Usually, the learning sessions will be held in the classes provided according to the *mualaf's* time. This means that

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Literatur," *Prosiding Seminar Pengurusan Islam: Ke Arah Pemantapan Ummah*, Fakulti Pengajian Islam UKM, Bangi, Selangor.

<sup>36</sup> Siti Afifah Mat Rani et al., "Pemeriksaan Modul Pendidikan Mualaf: Aspirasi Kecemerlangan Pembangunan Ilmu di Negeri Selangor," *Al-Qanadir: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 25(2) (2022), 50.

the *mualaf* can choose a suitable time to attend class due to time constraints, busy work, or other factors. However, the Malay language is the medium of delivery in the conducted classes. This is stated by Info#4 as follows:

“Because we teach everything in Malay, right, so what we can’t do is usually people with friends, usually Thai people, friends will help, maybe it’s the initial stage where he can’t speak the language, but over time when he gets used to it.”

Language proficiency plays a critical role in *mualaf* students’ understanding of Islamic teachings. However, the New Brother Education Center caters to a diverse range of ethnicities and races. This diversity creates challenges for teachers who rely solely on Malay as the medium of instruction. Furthermore, the students’ varying educational backgrounds can hinder their grasp of Islamic knowledge. To address these barriers, fostering peer support among students of similar backgrounds becomes crucial. This support system, as Mohd Afandi et al. suggest, can act as a form of coaching, boosting their motivation to learn. Effective peer support involves activities like experience sharing, offering assistance, building trust, and cultivating close friendships. These elements foster a positive learning environment, encourage positive behavior, and reduce stress, ultimately promoting self-directed learning among the students.<sup>37</sup>

As motivation, to ensure that converts attend the organized classes, certain allowances are given to them either organized by the Religious Council or NGO bodies. This is explained Info#4 as follows:

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<sup>37</sup>Mohd Afandi Mat Rani et al., “Rakan Sebaya sebagai Pembimbing: Kesan Sokongan Rakan dalam Motivasi Pendidikan Saudara Baru,” *Jurnal Islam dan Masyarakat Kontemporari* 22(2) (2021), 87.

"The PUSBA gives in the form of an allowance, such as the monthly one who stays in the dormitory here for four months for example, we give them RM300 a month... then we give daily clothes, toothpaste, toothbrushes, including books for free only weekly rights that the district that we will share with a single attendance equivalent to RM35."

However, the effectiveness of understanding and appreciating the Islamic knowledge information provided depends a lot on the honesty and sincerity of the *mualaf* himself. This is because there are cases among *mualafs*, even though they have embraced Islam for more than two years and always attend classes, they are still not able to read and remember the verses that need to be read in prayer. This situation is stated by Info#1 as follows:

"In understanding and appreciating the teachings of Islam, he depends on a convert, if he embraces Islam because he is sincere in the true sense of the word, then he tries to deepen the knowledge of the religion without depending much on us ... because we see many who have converted to Islam even though 2, 3 years but still can't read surah al-Fatihah, can't read *tahiyat* and so on... so we feel it's not worth it and it's not right for us to give that kind of money."

In trying to get closer to these *mualafs*, there is no more effective way except by establishing a good relationship and always taking care of them. This matter is stated by Info#3 as follows:

"Apart from that, we give other help in terms of motivation... like when we call, the first time we say hello, the second time we ask how things are now... take care. From that motivation we

communicate, take care with him... like the first time we built a relationship with him... Even though we never met him right, we build that relationship so that he feels that we (the Council) really care about him."

The motivations driving *mualafs* can be categorized into spiritual and physical aspects. Spiritually, *mualafs* are primarily motivated by faith development, acquiring knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunnah, understanding Islamic laws related to worship and prayer, and internalizing Islamic morals and manners. Additionally, they seek moral support from the Muslim community. Physically, *mualafs* often require practical support from their new Muslim 'family' in the form of *zakat* (charity), alms, gifts, and protection. Abdul Ghafar et al. highlight the unique challenges faced by *mualafs*, particularly those who *mualaf* at a young age and remain dependent on their non-Muslim families. Social support and motivation are crucial for these young *mualafs* to navigate their new life and build a strong foundation in Islam.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Integration of Relationships Based on Family Bond***

In the process of readjusting to life as a new Muslim, integration is very important. Integration among *mualaf* is seen as a process of bringing together and then building unity from several communities that were previously separated from each other. The need for the integration among *mualaf* arises from problems after they embrace Islam but in the context of social phenomena that are seen as 'problems' need to be dealt with in the best way. Among the problems that often plague the *mualaf* community are the exclusion and ostracism of the original family, loss of residence, loss of job and threats that cause them to be at

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<sup>38</sup> Abdul Ghafar Don et al., "Had Ta'lif dan Sokongan Sosial dalam Mensejahterakan Mualaf," *Al-Hikmah* 15(2) (2023) 121.

the crossroads of dilemmas.<sup>39</sup> Thus, for *mualafs* who are faced with the situation of being expelled and have no place to rely on, the guidance center usually provides temporary accommodation to take care of their welfare and safety. This is explained by Info#2 as follows:

"If a *mualaf* who embraces Islam receives opposition from the family..., the authorities will place them anywhere... as long as the family cannot find out."

Disagreements on religious beliefs between Muslim converts and their families of origin can lead to various conflicts, some of which may be challenging to resolve. Khadijah similarly observed that religious differences can trigger diverse perspectives and create problems, particularly within families.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, managing these differences with maturity and understanding is crucial, especially those related to religious practices, as they have the greatest potential to disrupt both family harmony and national unity.

Nevertheless, the *mualaf* explained that even though they had converted to religion, the status of their family relationship still remained permanent. Info#2 further said:

"For this relationship, the party at PERKIM will talk earlier... if you convert to Islam, the relationship with your family will not be broken, even if the family is not Muslim... a *mualaf* has asked me if I want to go home and pray, can I not do it when there is a temple near the house? I answered... there is no problem... we pray sitting in the room instead of praying in front of the temple... so maybe in terms of doing

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<sup>39</sup> Nazri Yasin et al., "Pengaruh Penghargaan Kendiri", 176.

<sup>40</sup> Mohd Khambali, K. (2020). Diversity and Unity in Fiqh Al-Ta Ayush Context in Malaysia According to Islamic Perspectives. *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 22(1), (2020), 75.

good with the family it is not broken... and the family relationship can continue.”

Indeed, Islam advocates for peace and harmony in life by way of advising each other. Therefore, friendliness in association with non-Muslims is highly recommended by the Islamic religion itself, as a step to show that Islam is not hostile to other religions, let alone if there is a family relationship. What is expected is that the socialization process of converts with non-Muslim families can reveal the beauty and harmony of Islam as well as nudge their hearts to understand and adhere to Islamic teachings well.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, to prove that Islam cares about the original family, the religious department made a goodwill visit to the *mualaf*'s family. Info#1 stated the situation as follows:

“We make visiting to *mualafs* home whose families (non-Muslims) are still there and sit together in Terengganu.”

To facilitate the delivery of information, visiting activities involving more senior *mualafs* within the community are also carried out. This is stated by Info#4 as follows:

“Our old participants (*mualafs*)... who are married, we make them mentors to go on visiting... there are people of various nationalities, there are Indians, Chinese and so on to go on visiting... We visit his family... so, to neutralize we also invite our students (*mualafs*) to go on their visit and speak in their language.”

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<sup>41</sup> Mohd Faqih Baharudin and Zuliza Mohd Kusrin, “Interaksi Mualaf India Dengan Keluarga Bukan Islam Berkaitan Upacara Pengebumian Jenazah”, *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Law* 4(2), (2019), 5.

Even non-Muslim family members are also invited together to social activities organized by the guidance center. This is explained by Info#1 as follows:

"The family of the non-Muslim *mualaf* we invite him to attend our programs such as Chinese New Year, breaking the fast program, we invite his family and at the same time we make a visiting of love... we bring hampers to families who are not yet Muslim... we are MAIDAM who went to visit his house."

The implication of this is that non-Muslim family members get a true picture of Islam and correct the negative prejudices playing on the heads of non-Muslim families. This is explained by Info#4 as follows:

"You are afraid that there will be fewer of your family members who share the same religion as you but he does not live with you... he said where is the proof that he does not live... where is there a religion that says to live with family... When he asks us we say it is in the Qur'an, this is our text have... he didn't tell us to stay as a family... we have to respect... but if *shirk* we have principles... yes it's okay that means we meet a convert family by giving them the right knowledge... he (a non-Muslim family member) said his sister converted to Islam... he thought his sister could not return home... this situation caused a strained relationship when he thought his sister had to leave the house... when the council explained the real situation, the situation became harmonious.. I also said how can you get this information... He said that his family said it... I have a friend at work... but what you said is not like that... I told him that we (Muslims) want to step on and have ethics..."

He said: Yes... I don't know either... Not everyone knows all this right... like you Hindu... you don't know everything... not to mention what is in other books."

Strong human relationships are fundamental to a stable and harmonious society. Islam emphasizes the importance of maintaining and respecting these connections, even amidst differences in tradition, religion, or ideology. Khadijah underscores this concept, highlighting the Islamic obligation for compassion (*shafaqah*) and mercy (*rahmah*) in human interactions. This includes practicing noble characteristics like forgiveness for one another's shortcomings, generosity of spirit, open-mindedness, and fostering love that seeks well-being for others.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Integration of Relationships Based on the Islamic Brotherhood***

Kamarulzaman and Nur Athirah explained that *mualafs* are faced with internal challenges, that is, experiencing difficulty in adapting to the new environment as a Muslim. *Mualafs* are a new group who have readjusted their lives according to the actual framework of Islam. Usually, the native Muslim is seen as a source of reference in making life adjustments. In the initial stage, the *mualaf* community was brought into the middle of the native Muslim community to nurture the relationship between Muslims even though they are different races.<sup>43</sup> This is explained by Info#2 as follows:

"We made a feast to celebrate the Chinese New Year, he (native Muslim) said no because we have to change the name... it's like to celebrate the Chinese New Year, we changed it for a goodwill feast (*jamuan mahabbah*), we

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<sup>42</sup> Khadijah, "Diversity and Unity in *Fiqh al-Ta'ayush*," 79.

<sup>43</sup> Kamarulzaman & Nur A'thiroh, "Isu dan Cabaran Saudara Kita", 35.

changed the name so as not to cause misunderstandings... but that's the approach which we do with the mosque congregation... because in this mosque he usually celebrates people who want to convert to Islam... so we make a feast... because he appreciates people who want to convert to Islam... so, from that, the new brother who wants to convert to Islam thinks that the good thing is that there are many native Muslims support them."

Guidance centers can play a crucial role in supporting *mualafs* by fostering understanding and respect for their cultural heritage. This includes educational programs that highlight the importance of celebrating and honoring traditional festivals, while also providing guidance on integrating Islamic values into these celebrations.

Collaboration with the local Muslim community is key to fostering an inclusive environment. This can be achieved by developing programs that celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds of *mualafs*, recognizing them as valuable aspects of the broader Muslim community. Furthermore, guidance centers can serve as a bridge between *mualafs* and the established Muslim community. By providing information and promoting awareness, they can help the community understand that *mualafs* can maintain certain traditions from their native festivals, as long as these practices do not contradict Islamic teachings.

From another aspect, *mualafs* are exposed more closely to the life of the real native Muslim community. The purpose is to expose this community to the ins and outs of things related to the routines and values of other people's daily lives. This is explained by Info#1 as follows:

"We take the *mualaf* out to the village to interact with the village community...we bring him to the village so that he can see people's houses in

the village and similar to the Chinese, Indian community is a bit less problematic because they mingle every day with the Malay (native Muslim) community.”

What is certain is that the values in the Malay community are based on the framework of Islamic values itself. In other words, any values that conflict with Islamic teachings should be discarded and the Islamization process carried out.<sup>44</sup> Thus, through exposure and cross-cultural sharing, over time the shared values can develop and strengthen positive universal Islamic values that can be adopted by the convert community such as loyal friends, noble morals, responsibility, consensus, caring culture and so on. On the other hand, understanding the history and traditions of the existing Muslim community allows *mualafs* to build stronger social bonds and fosters a sense of belonging. This, in turn, facilitates a smoother and more successful integration process.

### ***Development Human Capital Skills of Mualafs***

A civilized society starts with developing a balanced humanity, known as human capital development which involves the development of internal and external aspects. The main objective of human capital development is to develop the talent that exists in everyone to produce a commensurate return in the future. In the context of organizational development, human capital involves aspects of experience, skills, potential and capabilities. Therefore, human capital is seen as a valuable resource that will determine the glory of a country or organization.<sup>45</sup>

The main challenge faced by Islamic guidance centers is the issue of *mualafs* choosing Islam because they are

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<sup>44</sup> Azhar Wahid, "Pembangunan Teras Modal Insan dalam Adat Budaya Melayu", *Jurnal Peradaban Melayu* 12 (2017), 12.

<sup>45</sup> Siti Nur Aafifah Hasyim, "Pembangunan Modal Insan melalui Konsep *Tazkiyah Al-Nafs*", *Jurnal Maw'izah* 3(1) (2020), 17-27.

unemployed. There are even some of them who make the reason for embracing Islam is because they want to get help from the guidance center. This is stated by Info#1 as follows:

“Among the problems of the group who converted to Islam is that there are no jobs... he said, he converted to Islam because the council can provide assistance... so from there, he will try to find an excuse not to find a job.”

This was also stated by Info#1 as follows:

“The most significant challenge is that they always expect help... so there is no effort to not be an applicant... he has no effort to come out as an applicant for help.”

From an Islamic standpoint, human development is a multifaceted process encompassing moral refinement, material well-being, and spiritual growth. This concept finds its foundation in the doctrine of *tawhid* (oneness of God) and the notion of humanity as Allah SWT's vicegerents on Earth.<sup>46</sup> To develop *mualafs* so that they do not become ‘recipients’ of aid for a long time, the Department of Religion provides several aid schemes to develop the human capital of *mualafs*. Mualaf Guidance Center serves as a platform to empower *mualafs*, fostering their competitiveness, noble character, strong Islamic identity, competence, and innovation. The center equips *mualafs* for self-sufficiency through Sharia-compliant aid programs, ensuring they benefit ethically as zakat recipients. This matter is stated by Info#1 as follows:

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<sup>46</sup> Hajar Opir et al., “Pembangunan Insan Terhadap Saudara Baru Melalui Pendidikan Berasaskan Filantropi di Hidayah Centre Foundation,” *Al-Qanadir: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 30(2) (2023), 123.

“We have independent capital assistance... such as for business, for sewing machines... for flour kneading machines to make cakes and so on.”

Therefore, the *mualaf* guidance center in Malaysia clearly plays an important role in determining the direction of the community that has just embraced Islam. Considering that the group of *mualafs* consists of various age levels, different educational *backgrounds*, and cultures, surely the results of the human capital obtained either in terms of personality or intellectual reflect the success of the guidance center in developing the human capital of *mualafs*.

### ***Cooperation Network of Religious Bodies and NGOs Developing Mualafs***

Among the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that manage the affairs of *mualafs* in Malaysia are the Malaysian Welfare Association (PERKIM), MACMA, KIMMA and so on. To have a greater impact, there is usually good cooperation between state religious offices and NGO bodies at the state level. If the da'wah entity carries out activities alone, it will certainly face difficulties in getting many participants. This matter is explained by Info#1 as follows:

“Most of the time we organize programs jointly (NGOs and religious offices), but rarely we do programs alone... because it is difficult for one person to get participants, for example, MACMA when organizing a seminar on the appreciation of Islam in Malaysia, like us...will handle to get Johor state level participants only.... so, there are many participants.”

The program is two-pronged. This means that in addition to conducting common activities with Muslims such as Islamic appreciation, *Fardu 'Ain* guidance, faith-

strengthening courses and so on, the NGO also conducts cultural activities of the *mualaf* community by also inviting non-Muslim family members. The purpose is to re-harmonize family relationships and correct their perception of Islam and its followers. Collaboration between religious institutions and NGOs focused on *mualafs* can significantly enhance their social integration into the Muslim community and broader society. This can be achieved by facilitating opportunities for interaction with local Muslims, participation in social and religious events, and fostering a sense of belonging within the community. This is explained by Info#2 as follows:

"It's like we did an *iftar* party with non-Muslims starting at 5 o'clock... we did the program near the mosque... people (non-Muslims) couldn't eat... wait for us to *iftar*... but people were entertaining it's break time... he (non-Muslim) likes it because he said he didn't know that non-Muslims can enter the mosque... we have the right for him to enter so he can feel what it feels like to sit in this mosque... the Sultan's mosque In Iskandar, there are two or three people who converted to Islam after we did this kind of program... besides that, we made a gallery about Islam, showed pictures of the Kaaba and so on... so we can attract people to Islam."

While Info#3 stated as follows:

"When you've converted to Islam, you can't leave your family... haa so they already have had that kind of understanding, so after their conversion to Islam, we have a program where we will invite him and tell them to invite his parents once, people have converted to Islam,

right, we want to harmonize so that he does not lose contact with his family members."

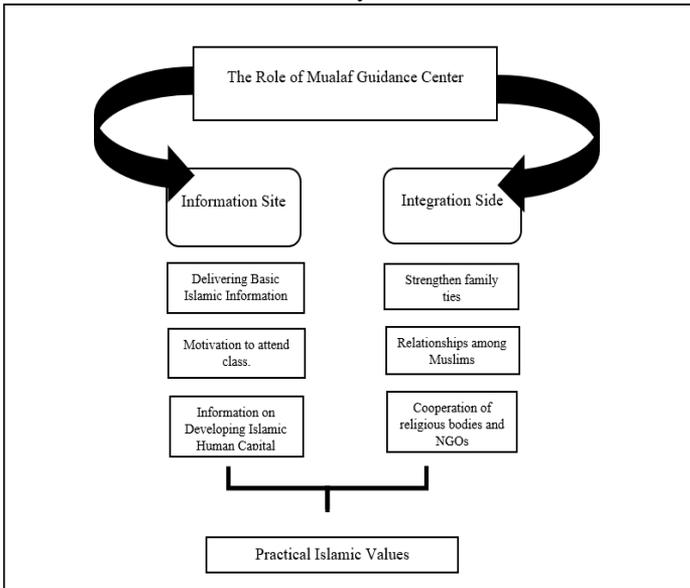
The Dialogue of Life program fosters understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim communities by creating a platform to discuss everyday issues relevant to both groups. These discussions can range from child-rearing practices and upholding good values to fostering peaceful coexistence.<sup>47</sup> From the point of view of *da'wah*, the cooperation of the Department of Religion and NGO Muslim convert bodies is very important and seen as an urgent need. This is because the process of Islamization and strengthening of Islam can happen to anyone, anytime and anywhere. However, the official collaboration between the religious department and convert NGO bodies in Malaysia is seen as a systematic effort and at the same time it can give awareness to the NGOs involved in following convert management procedures in the best way possible.<sup>48</sup> Based on the findings above, the role of the Islamic Guidance Center as an information and integration site for *mualafs* in Malaysia is shown in Figure 1 below:

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<sup>47</sup> Azarudin Awang & Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, "Peranan MAIDAM dalam Pengurusan Saudara Baru Melalui Pendekatan Dialog Kehidupan," *Global Journal al-Thaqafah* 6 (2016), 118.

<sup>48</sup> Siti Adibah & Siti Zubaidah, "Pengurusan Mualaf di Malaysia", 136.

Figure 1: The Role of *Mualaf* Islamic Guidance Center in Malaysia



## Conclusion

*Mualaf* Guidance Centers in Malaysia play a crucial role. They provide a platform for converts to deepen their understanding of Islam and integrate its teachings into their daily lives. This guidance extends beyond religious knowledge to encompass crucial aspects like family relationships and navigating interactions with fellow Muslims. Moreover, these centers act as integration hubs, fostering harmony between Muslims and non-Muslims, and promoting unity within the Muslim community based on shared values and principles outlined in guidance class syllabuses.

Research on *Mualaf* guidance centers yields significant societal benefits by fostering a deeper understanding of the convert experience, facilitating social integration, and informing both religious and sociological

practices. The researcher suggests that government or NGO institutions managing *mualaf* guidance classes should prioritize a comprehensive and accessible framework for their programs. This includes readily comprehensible learning materials, practical applications of Islamic principles, and guidance on building positive relationships with both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

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