

Teacher's Teaching Practices in the Class of Mualaf (New Convert)

Asmawati Suhid¹, Fathiyah Mohd Fakhruddin¹, Noreha Che Abah¹, Zetty Nurzuliana Rashed², Abd. Muhsin Ahmad³, Zeinab Zaremohzzabieh¹

¹ Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

² Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor, Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia

³ Faculty of Law, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Correspondence: Asmawati Suhid, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia. Tel: 603-9769-8210. E-mail: asmawati@upm.edu.my

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Abstract

Education is highly emphasized in Islam because it can guide people to live righteous life according to Islamic law. The same also applies to *mualaf* or converts, who should be provided with proper education and guidance to perform their duties as true Muslims. In Malaysia, an increasing number of individuals are embracing Islam as their way of life. They are given an education and need to attend classes to ensure that they understand and practice the teachings of Islam properly. Therefore, teachers play an important role in achieving this goal by applying interesting and effective teaching methods. This study was conducted to identify the perceptions of *mualaf* students on their teachers' teaching practices in the classroom to ensure that they understand and practice what they have learned in class, besides strengthening their faith and morals. A total of 124 *mualaf* students from two educational institutions in one of the states in Malaysia were involved in this study using quantitative methods. Questionnaires were used to collect data based on the objectives of the study. The results showed that students had a positive perception of the teaching methods used by their teachers. This study also discussed some of the problems faced by *mualaf* students in their learning process. Overall, the findings of the study indicated that most students have a positive view of their teachers' teaching. The current findings are expected to provide input to relevant agencies and a guide to improving the quality of teaching for *mualafs*.

Keywords: teaching practices, Islamic Education, *mualaf*, faith, moral values

1. Introduction

Islam is an *ad-Din* or religion revealed to all beings. The Prophet, peace be upon him (PBUH), was sent by Allah SWT as a blessing for mankind. As stated in the Qur'an, "*Verily I have not sent you, O Muhammad, except as a mercy for all the worlds*", which means Islam is a religion revealed by Allah as guidance and goal of human life that ultimately leads to oneness with Allah SWT. This concept transcends race or ethnicity; any man can accept and practice Islam as a way of life. *Mualaf* or new relatives is a group that is given attention by Islam. For instance, the *mualafs* are one of the groups entitled to receive *zakat*. As mentioned by Allah SWT in surah al-Taubah (60:9), "*Indeed, [prescribed] charitable offerings are only [to be given] to the poor and the indigent, and to those who work on [administering] it, and to those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to [free] those in bondage, and to the debt-ridden, and for the cause of God, and to the wayfarer. [This is] an obligation from God. And God is all-knowing, all-wise.*" *Mualafs* consist of three groups: 1) teenagers, 2) adults, and 3) the elderly. Each group has the same rights in Islam as other Muslims (Mohamed & Muhamat, 2020). In the Malaysian context, *mualafs* are often referred to as new brothers or Muslim brothers (Che Mat et al., 2019). In most states in Malaysia, the term *mualaf* or convert refers to a person who has just converted to Islam and provided with *zakat* to strengthen their faith and life.

Education is a basic need for the development of human civilization. Human capital development is closely related to Islamic Education. The term '*Islamic Education*' refers to a comprehensive, integrated and continuous effort to help individuals master skills, build, and appreciate knowledge based on the Quran and Sunnah to perform their responsibilities as servants of Allah and caliphs on earth (Nik Pa, 2014). The word education itself was derived from the Arabic word ربي which means fertile, growing, and increasing. Therefore, *tarbiyyah* or education is human behavior in caring for, preserving, and educating a person until he becomes better than

before (Suhid et al., 2014). Furthermore, education should focus on individual development in a holistic and balanced manner. Suhid et al. (2019) stated that “education should not only focus on national development and unity, and the production of human resources, but also individual development as a holistic and balanced person, in terms of his physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and social capabilities.”

To instill understanding among *mualafs*, education is an effective medium in obtaining knowledge about their newly-embraced religion. Systematic and structured education not only attracts *mualafs* to understand Islam's teachings but also builds their confidence in the truth of the religion (Ab Rahmani et al., 2020). Thus, *mualafs* are not exempted from seeking Islamic knowledge to strengthen their religious beliefs. In addition, Kasim et al. (2017) stated that to ensure that a *mualaf* can understand Islam well, they require a basic understanding of the concept of faith because issues related to the conversion to Islam are closely related to the aspects of faith. Therefore, using appropriate teaching methods and techniques can positively impact the understanding of faith by *mualafs*.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been established to manage the affairs of *mualafs*, especially in their education, such as the Malaysian Muslim Welfare Association (PERKIM), Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA), and Malaysian Indian Muslim Congress (KIMMA) (Abu Bakar & Ismail, 2018). Moreover, *mualafs* are required to attend classes organized by the State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN) or the State Islamic Religious Department (JAIN). These classes expose them to several modules (basic, intermediate, and advanced levels) provided by the respective states. It was this issue that the educators needed to use effective teaching methods and provide adequate supervision to guarantee that the *mualafs* had a smooth teaching and learning process that they could apply in their everyday lives. They also have to know and understand what are the methods needed before coming into the classroom. Therefore, it is necessary to create a structured study module for *mualafs*, focusing on teaching and learning methods for their complete understanding of Islam. Furthermore, the modules can be used as a guideline in classes in each state to increase the beliefs of *tawhid* and faith among *mualafs*. Thus, this study surveyed the perceptions of *mualaf* students towards teachers' teaching practices and identified their delivery methods in classrooms. Subsequently, solutions to problems or issues that arise were proposed and discussed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Mualafs' Education System in Malaysia*

Muslims, especially *mualafs* who are still new in understanding Islam, need to seek knowledge, especially those related to Islam. However, because this group is new to the teachings of Islam, they need special attention and constant guidance to ensure that they are on the straight path. Furthermore, this effort should not be taken lightly because it is feared that their faith would deviate and return to their original religion due to the lack of guidance in knowledge procurement, especially in Islamic education. According to Suhid et al. (2019), *mualafs* should always be guided and monitored in terms of their understanding, appreciation, and practices to prevent conflict with Islamic law, and Allah SWT accepts all their practices. Therefore, *mualafs* must understand Islam through guidance and education by the responsible bodies to produce knowledgeable individuals with a balanced appreciation of human personality in all aspects of their lives (Norddin, 2017). In this regard, governmental bodies and NGOs have been established to manage and organize the education of *mualafs*. In Malaysia, individuals who have just converted to Islam are called new relatives, *mualaf*, or converts. It was mentioned in the Qur'an in surah al-Taubah verse 60, the term *mualaf* or "*mualafatu qulubuhum*" refers to an individual whose heart has been tamed to incline to Islam; thus, indicating that new relatives are also given attention in Islam (Che Abah et al., 2019).

In Malaysia, government bodies such as the MAIN and the JAIN are responsible for giving special attention and guidance to the *mualafs* in shaping their personality to lead the Islamic lifestyle and develop their Islamic knowledge (Abu Bakar & Ismail, 2018). In addition, *mualafs* are educated through various programs organized by the preaching bodies to build their understanding of Islam (Che Abah et al., 2019). Apart from that, these programs, courses, and classes aim to guide them and provide understanding, appreciation, and practice of the Islamic knowledge gained in their lives as Muslims.

2.2 *Teacher's Teaching Practices and Methods*

Classes conducted for *mualafs* is an important initiative to ensure that they can improve their Islamic knowledge, skills, and practices. These classes are held regularly and cover several essential aspects of Islam that act as a form of support for *mualafs* apart from financial assistance. However, appropriate and effective teaching methods are essential to ensure their understanding and provide continuous guidance for *mualafs* (Mohamad et al., 2017). Hakimi Shahimi and Kasim (2019) stated that there are no systematic guidelines for teachers who

teach modules for new relatives until now. Additionally, Yusri and Tan (2015) reported that some teachers do not master the appropriate and effective teaching methods for *mualafs*.

Teaching methods, in general, refer to the systematic action of teachers to achieve teaching objectives following the title of the lesson and the level of student's achievement (Johari et al., 2016). Appropriate and accurate teaching methods lead to effective learning and can affect students' understanding, changes in their practices and attitudes (Kiamsin & Talia, 2018). Therefore, teaching requires significant elements such as purpose and target, which lead to the results and changes that are expected in students (Md Nawati, 2011).

In Islam, *mualafs* are considered pure children who are free from sins. Therefore, they need to be molded and educated in the best way to perform good deeds as true Muslims. Therefore, the need for appropriate and wise teaching methods should not be underestimated (Abdullah et al., 2019). Moreover, the concept of wisdom is touched by Allah SWT clearly in *Surah Al-Nahl* (6:125) as the following:

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a best way. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.”

(16:125)

The “wisdom” mentioned in the Quran is in line with the findings by Mohamad et al. (2017), who reported that the method used in PERKIM Islamic Dakwah Institute in Kelantan includes the method of wisdom, apart from the various presentation and problem-solving techniques. This method of wisdom or prudentness in combination with other techniques improved the level of understanding and practices of the *mualafs*. Furthermore, a study conducted on 60 *mualafs* in one of the *dakwah* institutions in Melaka showed that the delivery or teaching methods of the teaching staff were at a moderate level (mean = 3.79) (Mat Sah & Ismail, 2003). The excellent and clear presentation by the teaching staff is contributed by their experience in teaching and educating converts for over a decade.

These findings indicate the importance of appropriate and effective teaching or delivery methods during the *mualafs*' class. Without appropriate and effective teaching methods, it will affect the level of understanding, skills to perform worship, and the level of practice and appreciation of religion in the lives of *mualafs*. The contents and teaching methods should also be in accordance with the level of understanding of *mualafs* as a person getting to know Islam. The important syllabi as an initial exposure before moving on to a broader field include the knowledge of *fardhu ain*, *tawhid*, worship, morals, *sirah* and Quranic studies (Abu Bakar & Ismail, 2018; Ismail et al., 2015). In conclusion, the variety of methods used by teachers when teaching *mualaf* students with the help of modules as the basis of guidance have successfully enabled students to understand their lessons better.

However, this module only acts as a guideline for teachers. Some teachers even take the initiative to prepare Weekly Lesson Plans by term for their classes. On top of that, teachers put in the effort to be creative and diversify their teaching approaches according to the level of their students to attract students' attention and make their lessons more effective. This initiative is critical, especially nowadays; it requires teachers to act creatively and innovatively in imparting knowledge, including Islamic Education, to attract students and for their teaching to be effective. According to Asmawati Suhid et al. (2021), in Islamic Education, innovation comes in the form of a new pedagogic theory, a methodological approach, a teaching method, an instructional tool, or a learning process, all of which, upon implementation, brings about significant changes in teaching and learning in terms of improved student outcomes. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the perceptions of convert students on the teaching practices of their teachers in the classroom.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A case study was conducted in one of the states in Malaysia. The reason for employing a case study is that it is a detailed, in-depth analysis of a specific situation in a real-world setting. The quantitative data obtained were analyzed using Statistical Package for The Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0.

3.2 Sample and Study Location

The researchers used a basic random sampling technique. Every member of the population has an equal probability of getting chosen under this technique. The study population consisted of 124 *mualaf* students from two educational institutions. Both are centers of studies for *mualaf* in Kelantan, Malaysia. This location was chosen because it had the most significant number of *Mualafs* in Malaysia. Because of the sensitivity of the

subject, the names of the centers are kept private. The majority of statisticians agree that a sample size of 100 is required to obtain any type of significant conclusion (e.g., Hair et al., 2007).

3.3 Measures

Descriptive statistical analysis involving the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data obtained. Van Geel et al. (2016) created the student perception questionnaire that was utilized in this study and modified for Malaysian context. The research instrument was built using Cohen et al.'s (2000) suggestions in mind and was then verified by a panel of specialists. The built instrument had a dependability index and an alpha value of 0.956.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The procedures were authorized by Universiti Putra Malaysia before the study's implementation. Prior to data collection, researchers got permission from the state's Islamic Religious Council (MAIWP) for conducting this study. Students were told that they may withdraw at any moment, even if they had already begun, and that the information gathered would be kept private and anonymous. In addition, each participant's written permission was acquired, as well as parental consent. The consent form was provided to the participants one day before the questionnaires were delivered, and the consent form was collected before the questionnaires were distributed. After receiving the consent form, respondents were requested to complete the surveys.

3.5 Pilot Testing

Before actual data collection, researchers distributed 24 questionnaires among Mualafs in selected educational intuitions to assess the validity of the instrument as recommended by Saunders et al. (2012). Changes to the questionnaire were made based on the comments and recommendations of the respondents.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Demographics of Mualaf Students

Out of 124 respondents, 87.1% were male, and 12.9% were female. Most participants were Thai or Siamese (87.1%), followed by Chinese (25.0%), Indians (1.6%) and others (21.0%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics of *mualaf* Students (N=124).

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Women	16	12.9%
Man	108	87.1%
Nation		
Thai	65	52.4%
Chinese	31	25.0%
Indian	2	1.6%
Others	26	21.0%

4.2 Perceptions of Mualaf Students towards Teacher's Teaching

4.2.1 Beginning of Teaching Stage

Table 2. Perceptions of *Mualaf* Students on the Beginning of Teaching (N=124).

No.	Item	Mean	SD
	My teacher		
1	begins the lesson with a prayer recital.	4.66	.475
2	asks about the students' well-being/health.	4.22	.669
3	starts teaching when all students are ready.	4.40	.637
4	starts the lesson interestingly.	4.27	.745
5	offer reminders of moral values before teaching.	4.33	.647
6	punctuality in starting lesson.	4.38	.564
7	relates the content of the lesson to the students' experience.	4.18	.699
8	asks questions that stimulate students' enthusiasm in learning.	4.28	.760

4.2.2 Teaching Development Stage

Table 3. Perceptions of *Mualaf* Students on Teaching Development (N=124)

No.	Item	Mean	SD
My teacher			
1	always attracts the attention of students.	4.40	.568
2	always inserts the words of advice.	4.46	.516
3	gives examples related to the realities of life.	4.38	.519
4	praises the students who answer questions correctly.	4.33	.552
5	using language that students easily understand.	4.40	.538
6	using interesting teaching techniques.	4.35	.544
7	provides examples related to the realities of life while teaching.	4.23	.543
8	always listens to the views of students.	4.32	.486
9	provides students with the opportunity to offer insights.	4.37	.502
10	gives students the opportunity to ask questions.	4.41	.494
11	always encourages the students to do good.	4.48	.631
12	constantly reminding students not to commit crimes.	4.44	.545
13	emphasizes manners with family members.	4.44	.515
14	Reminds students to always respect the sunnah of the Prophet PBUH.	4.60	.493
15	tries to shape morals by telling the stories of the apostles and exemplary individuals.	4.54	.500
16	strives to ensure that teaching has an impact on students.	4.41	.570
17	takes into account the interests of the students.	4.29	.506
18	takes into account the abilities of the students.	4.25	.550
19	answers the students' questions clearly.	4.47	.562

4.2.3 Closing Stage

Table 4. Perceptions of *Mualaf* Students on the Closing of the Lesson (N=124)

No.	Item	Mean	SD
My teacher			
1	repeats important contents.	4.38	.550
2	asks if students do not understand.	4.43	.573
3	conclude the lesson by reciting Surah al-Asr.	4.57	.665
4	ends the lesson by reciting a prayer.	4.62	.535
5	advises the students to practice moral values in life.	4.52	.548
6	reminds the students to perform prayer.	4.61	.537
7	always motivates the students to continue to practice the teachings of Islam.	4.60	.507
8	says thank you.	4.54	.590

Based on Tables 2, 3, and 4, it was found that the average student had a positive view of their teachers' teaching practices. The mean obtained was between 4.18 - 4.61. What attracted the researcher's attention during the beginning of the teaching session was that the teacher always started the class with a prayer reading (mean = 4.66, $SD = .475$) and reminders about moral values (mean = 4.33, $SD = .647$) before starting the lesson to strengthen the spiritual aspect of students to constantly practice the commandments of Allah SWT and stay away from His prohibitions.

Similarly, at the teaching development stage, students agreed that the teacher reminded them always to respect the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH (mean = 4.60, $SD = .493$) and encourage them to do well (mean = 4.48, $SD = .631$) and offered meaningful advice (mean = 4.46, $SD = .516$). This practice is praiseworthy and should be emulated by other teachers because the *mualafs* should always be guided and reminded of good deeds pleasing to Allah SWT. According to Suhid et al. (2019), *mualafs* require constant guidance and monitoring in their understanding, appreciation, and practices to avoid conflict with Islamic law. Meanwhile, at the closing stage of the lesson, teachers constantly reminded students to perform prayers (mean = 4.61, $SD = .537$) and motivate them to continue practicing Islamic teachings (mean = 4.60, $SD = .507$). Finally, before ending the class, the

teacher recited prayers with the students (mean = 4.62, $SD = .535$) and instructed them to practice moral values in life (mean = 4.52, $SD = .548$). Abdullah et al. (2019) reported that educational programs specifically for *mualafs* are a crucial social support platform to enhance their level of understanding of Islam and thus practice the Islamic way of life.

From the teaching aspect, students were found to have a positive view of their teachers' teaching practices. For example, teachers begin the lesson only when all students are ready (mean = 4.40, $SD = .637$) and were punctual in starting the class (mean = 4.38, $SD = .564$). At the teaching development stage, most students agreed that their teachers gave students the opportunity to ask questions (mean = 4.41, $SD = .494$), used a language that was easily understood by students (mean = 4.40, $SD = .538$), gave students the opportunity to voice out their views (mean = 4.37, $SD = .502$) and used interesting teaching techniques (mean = 4.35, $SD = .544$). In addition, to ensure that students were clear and understood the content, the teachers ask students if they have questions about the lesson (mean = 4.43, $SD = .573$) and repeat the important content (mean = 4.38, $SD = .550$). Overall, the teachers successfully employed appropriate teaching methods that attracted interest and improved students' understanding.

Generally, *mualaf* students consist of various races and ages from different social and cultural backgrounds; thus, continuous guidance is necessary to help them build a new self-perception after conversion and transition (Yusri & Tan, 2015). Furthermore, these new relatives need all the help and support they can get to adapt to the new environment and lifestyle within the society. Most importantly, as Muslims, differences in race, culture, and ethnicity should not be a reason to discriminate against converts in the Muslim community (Suhid et al., 2019).

5. Conclusion

Teachers that teach *mualafs* were devoted to educating and mentoring their students, according to the findings of this study. They worked hard to develop their teaching abilities in order to attract students and keep their ideas and practises alive, as well as to strengthen student-teacher relationships. On top of that, the teachers diversified their teaching methods to improve students' understanding during their lessons. Furthermore, a structured teaching method is an added value in facilitating the learning process of the *mualafs* who constantly strive to obtain precise information and guidance to understand Islam. Apart from that, a particular religious guidance and improvement curriculum for *asnaf mualafs* might help them maintain and deepen their religion. Aside from *fardhu ain*, the *mualafs* education curriculum should also focus on socio-economic support to help *mualafs* cope with their emotional and financial responsibilities and prepare them for any problems that may arise after their martyrdom.

6. Limitations and Direction for Future Studies

The outcomes of this study were the study's primary weakness. Initially, *Mualafs* were used as respondents in questionnaire research. As a result, the sample can only be applied to students who fall within these categories. The statistical analysis, on the other hand, simply offered numerical relationships. The researcher's subjective assessment determines how these statistics are understood. However, the findings are consistent with those of other research, boosting confidence in the conclusions. For a deeper understanding of the phenomena, more study utilizing in-depth methodologies is needed.

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