



# The Implementation of Islamic Religious Guidance Classes Among Mualaf During the COVID-19 Pandemic Season

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the whole world has a great impact on the teaching and learning system, including in the implementation of Islamic religious guidance among mualaf at MACMA Johore State. This study aims to see how Islamic religious guidance classes are implemented among mualaf at MACMA during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study uses qualitative methods through interviews, observations and document collection to answer the research questions. The results of the study show that during the COVID-19 pandemic season, the converts followed the Islamic religious guidance class through the Google Meet application that had been prepared by the instructor. While the problem faced by converts is the difficulty in handling Google Meet, in addition to that, their understanding of the subject presented by the instructor is also reduced.

**Keyword:** Islamic religious guidance, mualaf and the COVID-19 pandemic

## 1. Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic spread all over the world, human life activities had to change one hundred percent, usually they would go out of the house to earn a living, seek knowledge and so on, but after the COVID-19 pandemic hit they had to sit quietly in the house and were not allowed to leave the house except for food purchases. For school students, they learn from home online by using various learning applications provided by teachers. The same is the case with muallaf who still need a lot of Islamic religious guidance, they are forced to attend religious classes online which they have never done before. Learning during the movement control order (MCO) is a challenging first experience for those who have never taught and learned online. This study will focus on the implementation of Islamic religious guidance classes for muallaf during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially when the MCO is implemented throughout the country. The study also wants to know the problems faced by muallaf when online classes are conducted.

## 2. The Importance of Islamic Religious Guidance for Muallaf

Consolidation of belief is very important for a Muslim because a strong belief can prevent negative elements such as heresy, symptoms of apostasy, social problems and outside influences. For that, as a new brother, muallaf really need a moral and spiritual support system because they face various kinds of problems. According to Khadijah et al. (2017) that the problems faced by new brothers require a system of support and spiritual and physical assurance because religious conversion involves a process of transformation of various aspects of life and requires mental strength and good social relations with both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

This kind of support pushes towards the strengthening and conservation of the faith of monotheism that has just sprouted in the soul of a Muslim who has the title of new brother. Because of that, a religious program needs to be organized for this group of muallaf, which is through Islamic religious guidance classes. The purpose of this religious class is to make them understand that Islam is a way of life that will bring happiness in this world and the hereafter. In addition, this Islamic religious guidance class aims to motivate the muallaf towards strengthening their faith and understanding of Islamic teachings. Activities in this religious guidance class can also be a center of friendship between fellow muallaf as well as a source of obtaining Islamic religious knowledge.

In addition, muallaf also need a solid and powerful support system from the original Muslims so that they do not bear the burden of problems alone. One of the support systems they need and can get is the support of NGOs that care about welfare matters and understand the challenges and dilemmas they face as new brothers. As stated by James Laeng (2014), NGOs are synergistic partners to the Councils and Departments of Islamic Religion in states that face time and human resource constraints. With that, the mobilization of energy and cooperation between the two agencies; Department of Religion and NGOs, in meeting the spiritual and welfare needs of the new brothers in Malaysia is an urgent matter, needs to be implemented systematically, and earnestly (Siti Adibah & Siti Zubaidah, 2018).

Therefore, as an effort to help new brothers in Malaysia, there are five main requirements that should be met and managed by the responsible party; namely identity, religious education and guidance, finance and welfare, da'wah and counseling and legislation. First, the intended identity includes obtaining a suitable name and obtaining a valid card or certificate of embracing Islam after the process of conversion to Islam and registration. The acquisition of a card or a certificate of acceptance of Islam can be conclusive proof when there is any dispute regarding the religious status of the new relative, either while they are still alive or after they have died. Second, religious education and guidance is also very necessary for a new brother who moves from formal conversion to practical conversion (Azaruddin & Khadijah, 2015). This education and guidance can be obtained through involvement in classes provided by either Islamic agencies or NGOs.

MACMA's involvement in providing Islamic religious guidance classes helps muallaf a lot to obtain information related to Islam, in addition to that through several religious programs implemented at MACMA has a positive effect on them, such as fardhu Ain classes, recitation classes, jawi classes and so on. Through the observation conducted by the researcher, MACMA is very active in conducting Islamic religious guidance classes for new muallaf to Islam, especially from China. This is in accordance with the study conducted by James Laeng (2014) showing that MACMA plays a role in the development of the education of muallaf between the Chinese and their children. In addition, MACMA also helps in improving their economy through various types of training, such as holding sewing classes, making bread, making noodles and so on. After following the basics of this training, it is hoped that they will be able to improve the economy to live a better life.

MACMA is also involved in helping muallaf to solve various problems, such as emotional problems arising from the rejection of Islamic teachings among members of the convert's family as well as apostate problems arising as a result of their lack of faith. The problem of apostasy is a big problem that needs to be overcome, because it involves the issue of faith in Allah SWT. And the Messenger. For that, various parties need to join hands to help in solving their problems.

### 2.1 Use of ICT in Islamic Religious Guidance During The COVID-19 Pandemic Season

The 21st century has shown changes in the learning system, this is in line with current technological advances. Apart from that, the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the world at the beginning of the 21st century was also one of the reasons for the implementation of all activities online. The Islamic religious guidance classes that were conducted at MACMA before the outbreak of the pandemic were physically in the classrooms that had been prepared, however after the COVID-19, the classes were initially still on vacation until the idea of conducting Islamic religious guidance activities online appeared.

The effort to change the way and strategy of applying Islamic religious guidance online is one of the best decisions in the face of a situation that threatens all parties. Although the convert is far away from the ustaz and the ustaz who taught him, this guidance activity can be carried out. The instructors use all their creativity to interact with the muallaf, since this online method is still new for the instructors and the muallaf themselves.

The use of technology that is constantly developing from time to time can facilitate a process of Islamic religious guidance as well as attract the interest of muallaf and save time. However, there are several obstacles in supporting the process of Islamic religious guidance online, such as lack of equipment facilities, lack of understanding, lack of skills in using ICT and slow internet connection (Nurayuni, 2019).

Based on a study conducted by Mohd Fairuz Jafar (2021), he found that, overall, the acceptance of respondents for the subject of Aqedah and Fekah online is at a moderate level. The students can accept and adapt online teaching methods even if they face difficulties in facing the new form of education norm. However, students say face-to-face learning is better than online. In this case, due to the limitations of the Covid-19 problem, this online method has been chosen so that learning and imparting knowledge to students continues and does not fall behind. Students, teachers and the muallaf education management have been prepared with online learning in line with the current of IR 4.0 digital era education development.

Online Islamic religious guidance classes during the pandemic are a new method in learning that enables a convert-focused and convert-centered approach, considering that they are in dire need of an appreciation of the Islamic religion. During the implementation of this religious guidance class, all learning materials will be shared by ustaz and ustazah online as well, question and answer activities and everything is also implemented online. This learning concept is also known as e-learning. This method is influential in the process of changing traditional education into a virtual world, both content and method (Mohd Fairuz Jafar, 2021). During that period, the instructors in Malaysia have taken action by teaching and learning online.

According to Siti Balqis (2021), explaining that the implementation of Islamic religious guidance online becomes a virtual learning field in forming a closer communication between the instructor and the convert. Online learning can also produce positive behavior among muallaf, this is because they feel they can keep up with technological progress even though they are getting older.

### 3. Methodology

This study is a case study that uses a qualitative approach. The researcher uses interview methods supported by observation and document collection methods to obtain detailed information about the research problem. This study involves 8 study participants who will be interviewed, consisting of 2 Islamic religious guidance teachers and 6 muallaf. The sampling method used in this study is purposive sampling. This type of sampling was chosen because the focus of the study is on New Brothers who have just converted to Islam as well as teachers who teach Islamic Religious Guidance.

Chua (2006) mentions purposive sampling refers to a sampling procedure that involves a group of subjects with certain characteristics who are selected as study participants. In this study the selected participants are teachers who teach muallaf as well as some new relatives in the State of Johor. The location of the study is at the New Brotherhood Activities Center (MACMA) throughout the State of Johor. Qualitative data analysis involves three processes namely sampling, data collection and analysis. These three processes occur linearly but always overlap and alternate between one process and another. This data analysis and collection process can also be carried out continuously and in parallel to enable the researcher to manage the data systematically.

In order to obtain good research results, data analysis techniques in qualitative studies need to be done in conjunction with data collection. Continuous data analysis also aims to facilitate the data collection process, and further assist the data analysis process. The interview method is conducted online through a conversation through Google Meet and also a regular phone to get information directly. It is also a method to gather important information in the survey research that will be done orally (conversation) and the writer in writing and through cassette recording, video and other electronic media will record the answers.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The results of the study and discussion in this chapter will explain the implementation of Islamic religious guidance classes among muallaf during the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the world, especially in Malaysia. In addition, there are also problems experienced by muallaf while following this religious class online.

#### 4.1 Implementation of Islamic Religious Guidance During The COVID-19 Pandemic

Based on the results of interviews and document collection, it was found that Tuan Haji Johari Chang established MACMA Johor Bharu in December 1996. While PERKIM was established in 1960 after Malaysia's independence. He got inspiration on the hill of Arafah during Umrah. In 2021, there are around 800-900 people who embraced Islam and among them there are 300 people from the Chinese group. The total number of muallaf under MACMA in the State of Johor itself is 450 people who come from various districts in the State of Johor, such as Batu Pahat, Muar, Kota Tinggi, Segamat and so on. MACMA in the State of Johor can be found in four districts as shown in the following table:

**Table 1 - List of MACMA branches in Johor state**

No	List of MACMA	Year of Establishment	Address
1	MACMA Johor	1996	24-02, Geroda 1 street, Larkin Jaya, 80350 Johor Bahru, Johor
2	MACMA Muar	2015	21, Sayang Street, Pekan Muar, 84000 Muar, Johor
3	MACMA Batu Pahat	2019	22b, Teratai Street, Istana Village, 83000 Batu Pahat, Johor
4	MACMA Pontian/Kluang	2019	Parit Betak, Benut, Pontian, Johor

While the number of muallaf throughout Malaysia is estimated at 3000 to 4000 people. They can also focus on the preaching efforts of preachers against other races such as India. This organization is very helpful for muallaf who have just embraced Islam, because this organization helps muallaf to get to know Islam more deeply such as holding fardhu ain classes, lectures from preachers and advanced guidance classes that teach various languages especially in Chinese and Malay. This organization was established by Chinese Muslim people in Malaysia (Asmawati Suhid, 2019).

All muallaf at MACMA are required to attend Islamic religious guidance classes, this aims to provide knowledge about Islam as well as matters related to Islam, especially aqedah, worship and so on. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, Islamic religious guidance sessions were carried out physically, usually at Pusat Saudara Baru or MACMA close to where they live.

However, this situation changed when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Islamic religious guidance classes throughout the country, especially in the State of Johor, were conducted online. The Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA) also took an initiative to hold Islamic religious guidance classes such as Ain fardhu classes and reciting and Tadarus al-Quran classes online using the "Google Meet" platform following the Movement Control Order (MCO) or lock down. Although this activity is conducted online, indirectly it can strengthen the brotherhood between them, especially during the MCO period they are not allowed to leave the house.

In addition, an online platform called "BeDaie" was recently launched to expand the study of the book digitally to help muallaf deepen their understanding of Islam. Especially Chinese muallaf. According to the founder of BeDaie, Muhammad Amar Mirza Ab Kadir Jailani (2021) that the BeDaie platform can help muallaf to answer their various questions and concerns related to religious issues with the participation of hundreds of religious scholars from various countries.

According to him, for the first phase, he is targeting 3,000 muallaf from all over Malaysia to join the BeDaie platform, but requires a sponsorship fund of RM250 for each convert with a total cost of RM750, 000 to help him or her get organized digital religious studies. This sponsorship is to give muallaf the opportunity to continue their studies in the BeDaie platform and their study period is between one to two years. BeDaie also provides a special module for muallaf to learn so that they can get closer to the study of books such as tauhid, morals, fiqh, and Sufism which are provided in five languages, namely Malay, English, Arabic, Mandarin and Urdu. BeDaie is the first project in Malaysia that combines eight countries including Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand (Pattani Region), China, India, Yemen, Africa and Sri Lanka in one platform to share knowledge in religious learning according to their respective expertise.

For that, it is necessary to have the cooperation of various parties in realizing the implementation of this activity, as a first step the MACMA has created an Islamic religious guidance class online, especially when the MCO is enforced for all Malaysians. All muallaf will follow this class online through the Google Meet application. To help ease their financial burden, these muallaf get a facility from MACMA by giving a monetary consolation of RM 15 every time they attend this online class in exchange for purchasing internet data. The implementation schedule is also limited since it requires the use of many internet data. Because of that, this class can only be implemented in one week for 4 days only. The following is the schedule of online Islamic guidance classes during the COVID-19 pandemic:

**Table 2 - Implementation of Islamic religious guidance classes at MACMA during the COVID-19 pandemic online**

No	Days	Time	Subject
1	Friday	08.00 - 09.00 PM	Tawheed and Sirah
2	Sunday	10.00 - 11.00 AM	Fardhu Ain or Reading al-Quran
3	Tuesday	08.00 - 09.30 PM	Al-Quran or Iqra
4	Thursday	08.00 - 09.30 PM	Akhlak or Reading al-Quran

The table above shows the time and subject in the implementation of Islamic religious guidance classes during the COVID-19 pandemic season. The subject of Tawheed is the main subject that is first taught to muallaf. It can be understood that the implementation of Islamic religious guidance for muallaf begins with the learning of Aqedah, where teachers will teach and demonstrate the principles of Islamic faith and what they need to do when embracing Islam. They also teach the muallaf about the meaning of aqedah, faith and Islam. In addition, the ustaz/ustazah also held a lecture about the aqedah, which is the basis or foundation for every Muslim so that the convert better understands and deepens the aqedah.

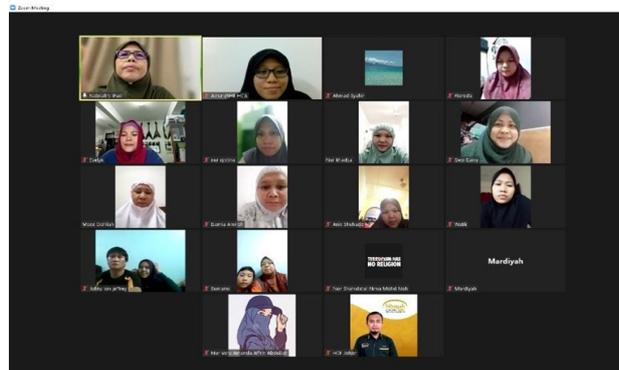
In this online learning, teachers will also refer to the book Our Brother's Guidance Module. In this module it will be explained about the need to learn aqedah, this is a very important thing when embracing Islam because it is knowledge that is the basis of measurement to determine the individual's status as a Muslim. The Islamic faith is a science that teaches people to know Allah SWT as the Creator of the universe and can be a fortress to protect Muslim individuals from all confusion, error and deviation.

In addition to this online guidance class, the muallaf will also be taught about the subject of fardhu ain regarding purification, prayer, fasting and so on. In this subject, usually these new brothers will learn the fiqh of worship so that when they perform worship such as prayer they must be in a state of purity and clean from impurity. The science of fiqh also includes the procedure of taking prayer water, purification, tayammum and the performance of salat. Linguistically, the word fiqh is al-ilm, which means understanding. Hence, fiqh can be interpreted as profound knowledge. While in terms of fiqh, it is the knowledge that explains the laws of syar'a related to the actions of mukalaf (responsible people) which are derived from their detailed arguments. (Amir A.S., 2019)

In addition to Fiqh, they also learn to read Iqra as a basis for reading the Quran. That is why all Muslims must study the Quran, especially for muallaf who are new to Islam. Before learning the Qur'an, muallaf are usually introduced and taught first with Iqra, which is a guidebook for early learning to recognize the letters and how to read the Qur'an. The Iqra' method is a method of learning the Qur'an that is famous today. This method is collected in 6 volumes of a small thin book for those who want to learn the Al-Quran. This Iqra method is very friendly to children as well as adults. This can make it easier for muallaf, especially Chinese muallaf, to learn the Qur'an by using the Iqra book guide first. This Iqra book is easy to understand and easy to take anywhere to review because the book is thin.

Moral learning is also taught to all muallaf, this aims so that they have noble morals. In this subject, the function of morality is also explained, which is to study and examine aspects of human behavior and actions. It judges in terms of the good or bad of the act, what should and what should not be done by a person. For a Muslim, the best morals are those found in the Prophet Muhammad sallallahu alaihi wasallam because the qualities and behaviors found in him are praiseworthy qualities and are a good example.

The following is a picture of the implementation of online Islamic religious guidance classes that have been implemented by MACMA during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Fig. 1 - Islamic religious guidance class online**

The picture above shows that although the Islamic religious guidance class is conducted online, it gets positive and extraordinary participation. This shows that online classes also have a positive effect on muallaf, they have an extraordinary interest in learning Islam even though it is done online. May their efforts be made easy and blessed by Allah SWT.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic that hit the whole world, did not stop the muallaf at MACMA from continuing to study Islam. For that reason, various ways are being worked on by MACMA so that Islamic religious guidance classes can still be implemented. In order to make this happen, an online Islamic guidance class through Google Meet has been conducted, this is intended so that the muallaf can still follow the learning of Islam even though the MCO is implemented throughout the country. Hopefully the findings of this study can provide input to all parties, especially the muallaf them selves as well as related parties.

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