

## Development of Innovative Executive Programme: Imam Profesional

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### Abstract

The Professional Imam Executive Program, the only academic program in Malaysia provides an opportunity for the community to improve knowledge, skills, and abilities for the duties of an imam, along with mosque and community management through a systematic lifelong learning process and becoming an excellent imam in guiding the Muslim community. Thus, Institut Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah (iSWAJ), Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) has developed such a programme since 2016 together with the Department of Islamic Religious State of Johor (JAINJ) and has graduated almost 70 students starting the first intake in 2018. The structure of this new program is designed to meet the demands and needs of the Mosque Management Division, JAINJ and to meet the gaps in the Imam's needs. This programme has four modulars – Tawhidic Foundation, Revelation Sciences, and Mosque and Community Management, and concluded with a Community Project that has been developed. Each modular cover three modules by itself. Those who attain 80 marks (A grade) and above from all modules in each modular will receive a *Sijil Kemahiran Agama* (Religious Skill Certificate) from the Johor State Islamic Religious Department (JAINJ), the only special award certificate to students of Imam Profesional™. This innovative executive program is recognized by Johor Islamic Religious Council (MAIJ) and can be credited to prior experience-based learning (APEL). It will continue to accept applicants nationally and internationally for future intake and certainly offer many benefits for itself and the community.

### Kata Kunci

Imam profesional, sijil kemahiran agama, sijil profesional

### Abstrak

Program Eksekutif Imam Profesional, satu-satunya program akademik di Malaysia memberi peluang kepada masyarakat untuk meningkatkan pengetahuan, kemahiran, dan kebolehan untuk tugas seorang imam, bersama-sama pengurusan masjid dan masyarakat melalui proses pembelajaran sepanjang hayat yang sistematik dan menjadi imam yang

cemerlang. dalam membimbing masyarakat Islam. Justeru, Institut Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah (iSWAJ), Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) telah membangunkan program sebegini sejak 2016 bersama Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri Johor (JAINJ) dan telah meluluskan hampir 70 pelajar bermula pengambilan pertama di 2018. Struktur program baharu ini dirangka bagi memenuhi tuntutan dan keperluan Bahagian Pengurusan Masjid, JAINJ serta memenuhi kekosongan keperluan Imam. Program ini mempunyai empat modular - Yayasan Tauhid, Ilmu Wahyu, dan Pengurusan Masjid dan Masyarakat, dan diakhiri dengan Projek Komuniti yang telah dibangunkan. Setiap modular meliputi tiga modul dengan sendirinya. Mereka yang mencapai 80 markah (gred A) dan ke atas daripada semua modul dalam setiap modular akan menerima Sijil Kemahiran Agama (Sijil Kemahiran Agama) daripada Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri Johor (JAINJ), satu-satunya sijil anugerah khas kepada pelajar Imam Profesional™. Program eksekutif inovatif ini diiktiraf oleh Majlis Agama Islam Johor (MAIJ) dan boleh dikreditkan kepada pembelajaran berasaskan pengalaman terdahulu (APEL). Ia akan terus menerima pemohon di peringkat nasional dan antarabangsa untuk pengambilan masa hadapan dan pastinya menawarkan banyak faedah untuk dirinya dan masyarakat.

## 1. Introduction

Imam is a significant individual in Islamic society as a referral point for community problems. Imam continued and performed the tasks by the Prophets and Khalifah and is not limited to prayer matters but plays a vital role in the Muslim community (Al-Krenawi, 2016). Imam helps them to solve problems and issues related to all sorts of lifestyles among parishioners throughout their lifetime (Padela *et. al*, 2011). The position of imam has its own influence and acted as a mirror for the local communities. Sometimes imam is more prominent when compared to other notable scholars or Islamic leaders.

As Allah SWT said in Surah Al-Anbya Verse 73 which carries meaning by Sahih International (Assami, Kennedy & Bantley, 1997):

*“And We made them imams guiding by Our command. And We inspired to them the doing of good deeds, establishment of prayer, and giving of zakāh; and they were worshippers of Us.” [21:73].*

Following the community's recognition and trust in imams, it is easier and more comfortable for them to refer any religious matters and muamalah legal problems to local imams. Issues related to religion that are often raised through media information will be referred to imams before the community believes and is confident to practice (Mattson, 2003). This situation requires an imam, who has mastered the fundamentals of Islam for him to provide views and comments to parishioners on the matters.

As mentioned in Surah Al-Isra' Verse 71 which carries meaning by Sahih International (Assami, Kennedy & Bantley, 1997):

*“One day We shall call all people according to their Imams. Whoever is given his book in his right hand will read it and will not be subject to the slightest injustice. But whoever was blind in this world will be blind in the next and completely astray from the path.” [17:71].*

A market study which was carried out by the Mosque Management Division, JAINJ by Isnin (2016) found that approximately 40% of those holding the position of an imam have a background in religious studies at the lower level. The finding also found that only approximately 40% of imams doing full-time jobs while 60% are part-time due to other essential duties. Full-time imams without side jobs and receiving a small allowance from the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) are still insufficient to support their families. Further his study found that there are approximately 40% of full-time imams are over 65 years of age. Therefore, there is a need to establish a lifelong learning professional course for imams to train and provide the necessary skills to help the local Muslim community.

The objectives of this developed course executive programme are (1) to provide prospective imams with the basics of knowledge in various disciplines of religious and social science; and (2) to provide disclosure regarding current information to the prospective imam in accordance with their role in solving community issues. For this reason, an innovative executive programme, the Imam Profesional™ has been designed, developed, and become the only programme offered in Malaysia.

## 2. Programme Development

This Imam Profesional™ Executive Programme course has been designed and developed was at the request of the Mosque Management Division, JAINJ to be implemented for the imams appointed and served in all Johor State Mosques. It aims to upgrade the position of the imam in line with the Johor state's Islamic development. Nonetheless, the admission offers are open to all states in Malaysia. It consists of four modulars – Tawhidic Foundation, Revelation Sciences, Mosque and Community Management, and concluded with a Community Project as demonstrated in figure 1.

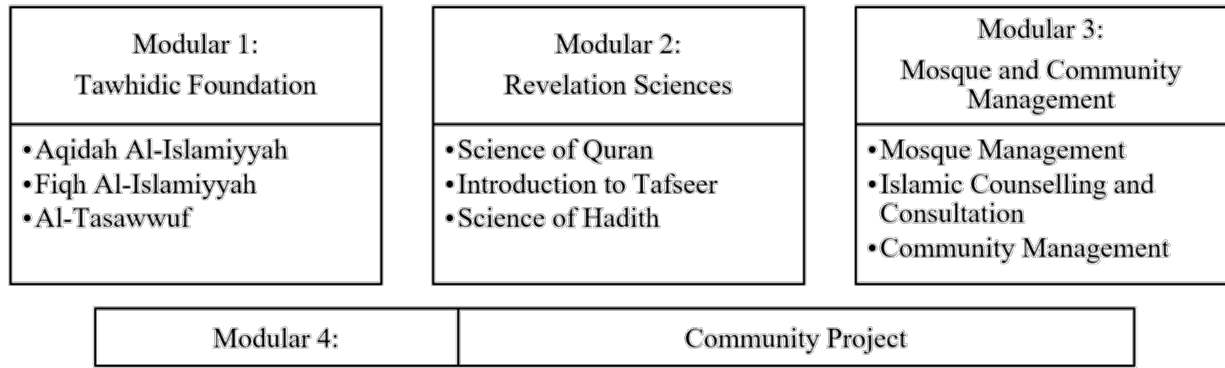


Fig. 1 Four modular of Imam Profesional™ course

This programme is conducted part-time for a minimum of 12 months in 4 modulars with 10 modules for a total of 36 credits as shown in TABLE 1 (also showing hours for student learning time (SLT). Each modular will be awarded a *Sijil Kemahiran Agama* with a minimum of grade A (80 marks and above) for every module listed. This programme can be credited to prior experience-based learning (APEL) and is recognized by Johor Islamic Religious Council (MAIJ).

Table 1 Programme structure of Imam Profesional™

Modular	Course Code	Course Name	Credit	SLT		Total SLT
				F2F	NF2F	
1	<b>Tawhidic Foundation</b>					
	DPI10103	Aqidah Al-Islamiyyah	3	32	88	120
	DPI10203	Fiqh Al-Islamiyyah	3	32	88	120
2	<b>Revelation Sciences</b>					
	DPI10303	Tassawuf Al-Islamiyyah	3	32	88	120
	DPI20403	Science of Quran	3	32	88	120
3	<b>Mosque and Community Management</b>					
	DPI20503	Introduction of Tafseer	3	32	88	120
	DPI20603	Science of Hadith	3	32	88	120
4	<b>Community Project</b>					
	DPI30706	Community Management	6	56	184	240
	DPI30803	Islamic Counselling and Consultation	3	32	88	120
	DPI30903	Mosque Management	3	32	88	120
	DPI41006	Community Project	6	32	208	240
			<b>36</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>1104</b>	<b>1320</b>

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### 3. Delivery Method and Assessment

The programme's delivery method focuses on improving students' knowledge and skills using student-centred learning methods. It covers lectures, project discussions, seminars, and case studies. Formal courses are conducted based on systematic modules. All modules require students' presence at each lecture, case study, workshop, etc. Each student must complete all ten (10) modules within 336 hours of face-to-face (F2F)/online classes including undertaking project work to be graduated as partial fulfilment for the requirements of Imam Profesional™ Executive Programme. The project work is based on activities/programmes that can benefit the respective organization and local community around the designated mosque selected.

Assessment for this programme is 100% based on coursework without final examination. The coursework is made based on an individual assignment, group project, group presentation, and written test which covers theory and skills, personal involvement, behaviour, and commitment of students actively in or outside of class. It includes all the elements of soft skills specified in the learning outcomes.

### 4. Entry Requirement and Career Opportunity

This programme requires candidates to be at least 21 years of age and above with relevant work experience for admission into this programme. Aside from having an SPM certificate, the candidates must show proof of other certifications in religion or related fields to the programme. In addition, the candidates must attend and pass the interview intake before an offer letter is issued to the candidates for commencing the programme.

As for the career opportunity, this program was developed to meet the needs of positions and jobs and is not limited to mosque institutions. Similar positions are Imams and Mosque officials; nazir or manager of Islamic study centres, mosques, and musollas; assistant manager or officer or registrar at the Islamic organization; assistant counselling officer or consultant in a private organization; and independent Preacher.

### 5. Conclusion

In general, the implementation of the Executive Diploma Program for Imam Profesional™ is specially designed to improve the professionalism of the imam and also as a professional qualification for imams. This program aims to produce knowledgeable and pious people based on the concept of absolute devotion to God in order to become superior imams in guiding the community towards success and appreciation of Islam. The positive impacts they had through this process have helped them understand the contents to achieve the learning objectives and the course learning outcomes (CLO).

An imam is very necessary for various affairs of the Muslim community such as teaching recitation of the Qur'an, funeral management, ceremonies, treating the disorders of ethereal beings, family guidance and so on. All these things were unable to be implemented unless the imam was provided with knowledge in various disciplines such as the knowledge of *fardhu 'ain*, the ability to treat psychological disorders, counselling and so on. Mosque officials who have attended this innovative executive programme and succeeded in the course have the opportunity to become Takmir Teachers, Al-Quran Tutors, *Amil Zakat Harta* and are able to perform *fardu kifayah* tasks required by the community without being hindered by other essential tasks.

As mentioned in Surah At-Tawbah Verse 18 which carries meaning by Sahih International (Assami, Kennedy & Bantley, 1997):

*"The mosques of Allāh are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish prayer and give zakah and do not fear except Allah, for it is expected that those will be of the [rightly] guided." [9:8]*

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### Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

## Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Muhammad Suhaimi Sulong, Sabaruddin Isnin, Nur Zainatul Nadra Zainol; **data collection:** Muhammad Suhaimi Sulong, Sabaruddin Isnin, Nur Zainatul Nadra Zainol; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Muhammad Suhaimi Sulong; **draft manuscript preparation:** Muhammad Suhaimi Sulong, Nur Zainatul Nadra Zainol, Che Adenan Mohammad, Siti Nur Akmal Nor Rizan. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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