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Development of a Conceptual Framework for *Had Ta'lif* of Muslim Converts (Mualaf) in Sarawak, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes a conceptual framework to define the limits of ta'lif for Muslim converts (muallaf) in Sarawak, grounded in local socio-cultural conditions and community realities. The absence of a clearly defined duration for muallaf status has resulted in inconsistencies in zakat distribution, welfare assessment, and religious guidance. To address this gap, the framework is structured around two core constructs: Had Kifayah (Sufficiency Threshold) and Had Ta'alum (Learning Threshold). A sequential mixed-methods design was employed. The qualitative phase involved thematic synthesis of document analysis to develop the initial framework, followed by a quantitative assessment of content validity using the Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI). The validated framework demonstrates satisfactory content validity and integrates Had Kifayah (basic needs, cost of living, social support) and Had Ta'alum (Islamic education, teaching aids, programme effectiveness, instructor competency). The framework is theoretically grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, and Maqasid Shariah, offering a context-sensitive foundation for zakat governance and policy development.

Keywords:

Conceptual framework, mualaf, ta'lif, Muslim converts, Sarawak.

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Introduction

According to Ibn Manzur (1998), *mu'allafah* derives from the word *allafa*, which carries various meanings, such as gathering after separation, reconnecting parts and consolidating information. In the context of *ta'lif al-qulub*, the term refers to softening the hearts to make them more receptive to Islam. Meanwhile, *ta'lif al-Nas* means fostering cordial relationships with others. However, the specific meaning of the term is detailed in the Quran:

Indeed, the charities (zakat) are only for the poor, the needy, those employed to administer it, those whose hearts are to be reconciled (mu'allaf), for freeing slaves, for those in debt, for the cause of Allah and for the stranded traveler. (This is) an obligation from Allah. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise (Al-Quran, al-Taubah 9: 60)

The group *mu'allaf* (those whose hearts are inclined toward Islam) is categorized as one of the eligible recipients (*asnaf*) of zakat. This provision aims to strengthen their faith and conviction in the truth of Islam. The implementation of *ta'lif* in Islamic fiqh depends on the context and the needs of individuals. By examining the life of the Prophet Muhammad, there is no clear guidelines for measuring the limits of *ta'lif* for *mu'allaf* (Saudara Kita -our brothers and sisters). Surah al-Taubah, verse 60, mentions that zakat is given to *mualaf* with the purpose of softening, strengthening and maintaining their adherence to the teachings of Islam. The four main fiqh schools merely discuss the rulings and objectives of zakat being given to *mualaf*. However, no fixed time limit is prescribed for the status of a *muallaf*.

The Had Ta'alif conceptual framework is firmly grounded in *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* (Maslow 1954), *Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory* (Mezirow 1991), and the objectives of *maqasid shariah* (Auda 2008). At its core, the framework recognises that the journey of *muallaf* requires addressing both material and spiritual needs in a structured and supportive manner. Drawing from Maslow's theory, the framework ensures that basic physiological and safety needs are fulfilled through provisions such as cost of living support and social assistance, creating a stable foundation upon which *muallaf* can pursue higher-order needs such as belonging, esteem, and ultimately self-actualization within the Muslim community.

Aligned with Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, Had Ta'alif also emphasises the importance of providing access to Islamic education, effective teaching aids, and guidance from qualified instructors. These elements facilitate critical reflection, dialogue, and the adoption of new beliefs and practices, supporting *muallaf* in their process of internalising Islamic values and navigating the significant personal transformation that accompanies their conversion to Islam (Mezirow 1991). Furthermore, the framework is consistent with the higher aims of *maqasid shariah* (Auda 2008), as it holistically addresses the preservation of religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), lineage (*hifz al-nasb*) and wealth (*hifz al-mal*). By integrating these theories, Had Ta'alif provides a comprehensive model that supports the material, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development of *muallaf*, ensuring their resilience and meaningful integration into the Muslim ummah.

In Malaysia, the issue of determining the duration for referring to and designating someone as a *mualaf* is guided by *'urf* (local customs) and the decisions of each state's Fatwa Committee. Nine states, Perlis, Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Kelantan, the Federal Territories and Sarawak, do not set a specific timeframe for the *mualaf* classification. In contrast, states such as Selangor, Pahang, Terengganu and Sabah generally establish a timeframe ranging from three to seven years (Rahman et al. 2015; Bhari et al. 2019). This situation highlights the lack of uniformity and standardization in

the duration of the mualaf classification across Malaysia. Each state has the authority to determine the timeframe based on its unique circumstances and needs. Some states do not impose a fixed duration for the classification, allowing mualaf to receive continuous support due to factors such as the needs for guidance and poverty.

The Malaysian National Fatwa Committee (2005) concluded that the duration of the mualaf status is more influenced by *'urf* (local customs). However, an objective determination of the scope of ta'lif is necessary to ensure that mualaf receive adequate support through constructive religious education programs (Shapik et al. 2021). In the context of this study, ta'lif aims not only to support the integration of mualaf into the Muslim community but also to strengthen religious values as a key indicator for assessing the status of mualaf in Malaysia. In Sarawak, there is no official determination of a specific duration for the mualaf status, unlike other states such as Pahang, Selangor and Terengganu, which limit the mualaf designation to a period of three to seven years. In Sarawak, individuals who have embraced Islam for many years are no longer referred to as mualaf. This flexible approach, which depends more on individual circumstances, considers the socio-cultural context in measuring the scope of ta'lif (Ismail & Ali 2023).

However, the absence of a time limit can lead some mualaf to become overly dependent on financial aid and social support without taking initiative toward self-reliance. Mualaf may lack encouragement to deepen their understanding of Islam and achieve economic independence during their early years as Muslims. This situation can result in a lack of motivation to strengthen their faith and religious commitment. Additionally, the absence of a time limit may lead to equal distribution of resources to both new and long-term muallaf, despite differing needs. This prolonged mualaf status could limit opportunities for other eligible asnaf (zakat recipients) to receive zakat assistance, thereby impacting fairness and efficiency in zakat management.

This situation creates confusion in identifying the specific needs of this group and determining the best methods of support. Consequently, Islamic institutions such as the Sarawak Islamic Council (MIS) and the Islamic Movement Organization (HIKMAH) face challenges in planning support programs due to the lack of guidelines on time limits. Without a clear distinction between the needs of new and long-term mualaf, planning becomes difficult. Furthermore, long-term mualaf often continue to be labeled as mualaf, leading to feelings of isolation and lack of full acceptance in the Muslim community. This debate highlights the need for a contextual ta'lif framework that reflects local traditions and the socio-economic challenges of muallaf. Through such a framework, Islamic institutions in Sarawak can ensure fairness and transparency in the distribution of zakat to mualaf recipients. Therefore, establishing a conceptual framework is essential to ensure systematic and strategic support for muallaf, taking into account Sarawak's unique cultural, religious and socio-economic context. This study also offers a standardised guideline for state Islamic institutions to gauge the scope of ta'lif based on local conditions and current needs.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative design using document analysis of secondary sources such as journals, conference proceedings and reports. A narrative review approach was used to examine content related to the conceptual elements of Had Ta'lif for Muslim converts (mualaf) in Sarawak. The analysis referred to authoritative Islamic sources, including *Fiqh Zakat* (Al-Qaradawi 1969), *Mukhtar al-Sihah* (al-Razi 1989), *Fath al-Qadir* (al-Shawkani 1973) and several authoritative Qur'anic exegesis works (tafsir), including *Tafsir al-Maraghi* (Al-Maraghi 1974), *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* (Al-Qurtubi 1998),

and *Al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-'Aqidah wa al-Shari'ah wa al-Manhaj* (Al-Zuhaily 1998), to ensure that interpretations of the concept of ta'lif in Surah al-Taubah, verse 60, were grounded in both classical and contemporary scholarship. The conceptual framework of Had Ta'lif is further underpinned by three principal theoretical references: *Motivation and Personality* (Maslow 1954), *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (Mezirow 1991) and *Maqasid Al-shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (Auda 2008), which collectively provide a theoretical basis to address the material, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of muallaf and to ensure their holistic development and integration into the Muslim ummah.

An inductive method identified emerging themes directly from the data, without a predefined theoretical framework (Patton 2002). Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition and final narrative construction. The aim was to uncover key elements, themes and dimensions to inform an initial conceptual framework. Subsequently, a content validity process was carried out involving 10 experts from various backgrounds, including academia, dakwah management for Saudara Kita (Muslim converts), religious institutions and Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within the Sarawak region. This expert evaluation employed the Item-Content Validity Index (I-CVI) method to measure the relevance and clarity of each element in the framework based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Very Irrelevant, 2 = Irrelevant, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Relevant and 5 = Very Relevant).

The findings from the expert assessments were then used to improve the initial framework, ultimately leading to the development of a final conceptual framework that is content-valid and suitable to serve as a foundation for further research or instrument development. The following is the list of experts selected to validate the research instrument:

Table 1: List of Experts for Instrument Content Validation

Experts	Area of Expertise/Position	Institution / Organisation
Expert 1	Dakwah Volunteer	Urus Setia Saudara Kita (USK), Balingian Branch
Expert 2	Dakwah Officer	Harakah Islamiah (HIKMAH), Mukah Branch
Expert 3	Islamic Affairs Officer (Conversion Registration Division)	Pejabat Agama Islam Bahagian Mukah, Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak (JAIS)
Expert 4	Senior Lecturer	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), S'wak Branch
Expert 5	Senior Unit Head, Liaison Unit (Dakwah Section)	Tabung Baitulmal Sarawak
Expert 6	Division Manager	Tabung Baitulmal Sarawak, Mukah Branch
Expert 7	Dakwah Officer	Harakah Islamiah (HIKMAH), Bintulu Branch
Expert 8	Dakwah Officer	Harakah Islamiah (HIKMAH), Sibul Branch
Expert 9	Islamic Affairs Officer (Conversion Registration Division)	Pejabat Agama Islam Bahagian Miri, Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak (JAIS)
Expert 10	Senior Lecturer & Member of the Supreme Council	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Sarawak Branch & Majlis Islam Sarawak

The instrument comprises 21 items representing two core constructs of the Had Ta'lif framework for muallaf in Sarawak: Had Kifayah (Sufficiency Threshold) and Had Ta'alum (Learning Threshold). Content validity was assessed using the Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI), based on the percentage of experts rating each item as 3 or above. Items rated 4 or higher by most experts were considered relevant and retained.

The determination of content validity in this study was guided by the Content Validity Index (CVI) scale as recommended by previous researchers. This scale considers the number of experts involved in the assessment process and the acceptable threshold values required to ensure sufficient content validity. The reference to the scale is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: The number of experts and its implication on the acceptable cut-off score of CVI

Number of Experts	Acceptable CVI Value	Source
Two experts	At least 0.80	Davis (1992)
Three to five experts	Should be 1.00	Polit & Beck (2006), Polit et al. (2007)
At least six experts	At least 0.83	Polit & Beck (2006), Polit et al. (2007)
Six to eight experts	At least 0.83	Lynn (1986)
At least nine experts	At least 0.78	Lynn (1986)

Source: Yusoff et al. (2019)

Result and Discussion

There are various interpretations regarding the meaning of muallaf, though scholars agree on their eligibility to receive zakat. According to al-Qaradawi (1969), ta'lif in zakat distribution applies to both Muslims and non-Muslims. For Muslims, zakat is given to new converts to strengthen their faith and help them face challenges, to Muslim leaders with weak faith to reinforce their commitment (as practised by the Prophet Muhammad with wealth from the Hawazin spoils of war after the Battle of Hunayn) (al-Shawkani, 1973; al-Zuhaily, 1998), to influential leaders who can attract non-Muslims through their example, to Muslims in border areas for protection against threats, and to amil responsible for enforcing zakat compliance (al-Razi 1989).

For non-Muslims, zakat may support potential converts and their communities to encourage broader acceptance (as seen in the case of Safwan bin Umaiyah during the Conquest of Makkah) (al-Qurtubi, 1998), prevent harm from those capable of oppressing Muslims (as mentioned in a hadith narrated by Ibn 'Abbas), and reward protectors who safeguard Muslim communities in strategic areas such as ports and borders (Tafsir al-Maraghi 1974). Overall, ta'lif highlights the role of zakat as a tool to foster social harmony, strategic alliances, and the security of Muslims.

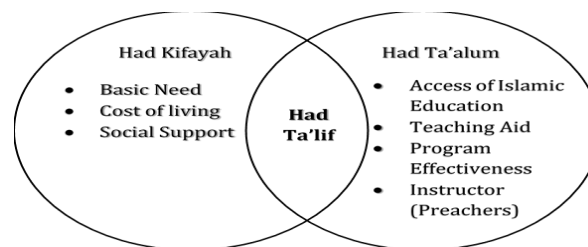


Figure 1: Main Components of the Ta'lif Framework

Based on Figure 1, the conceptual framework combines Had Kifayah (Basic Need, Cost of Living, Social Support) and Had Ta'alum (Access to Islamic Education, Teaching Aid, Program Effectiveness, Instructor/Preachers) to address the comprehensive needs of muallaf. These elements align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow 1954) by ensuring that physiological, safety, and belonging needs are met as a foundation for higher-level growth and spiritual development. They also reflect

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow 1991) by facilitating critical reflection, dialogue, and personal transformation through structured educational support and guidance. Together, they embody the objectives of maqasid syariah (Auda 2008), which ensuring muallaf receive holistic material and spiritual support that strengthens their faith and integration into the Muslim ummah.

Had Kifayah and Mualaf Welfare in Sarawak

Had Kifayah is a dynamic benchmark that adapts to societal needs, cost of living and customs (Sulaiman et al., 2013; Hisyam, 2023). It encompasses beyond basic needs, focusing on economic upliftment. Variations in state-level methodologies highlight the need for a unified national standard. (Talib & Ahmad 2019; Rahman et al. 2020).

Changes in customs call for updates in support items, such as educational and transport assistance (Mamat & Hamad 2018). The rise in poverty is not due to reduced zakat collections, but to insufficient distribution in meeting actual needs. (Rohaizan et al. 2020). Zakat distribution must align with Maqasid Syariah, requiring ijthad to match current realities (Sugeng & Rahman 2016).

In Sarawak, muallaf face unique post-conversion challenges such as job loss, denial of inheritance rights and social exclusion, particularly among Chinese converts (Kawi & Abdullah, 2020). Financial hardship restricts access to religious education, notably for single mothers and rural dwellers (Abdullah et al. 2022). These conditions require economic and religious support. Studies show many muallaf wrongly expect lifelong zakat aid due to misunderstandings about eligibility (Abdul et al. 2021). Varying state durations for muallaf status create inconsistencies, with some, like Sarawak, imposing no limits (Rahman et al. 2015; Bhari et al. 2019).

Rahman et al. (2020) propose a standardized measurement tool incorporating rationality, maturity and religious practice to assess mualaf readiness. Ismail & Ali (2023) recommend a five-year support period to aid transition and societal integration. Unified zakat policies and continuous support (3–5 years) will ensure fairness and reduce negative public perceptions (Omar 2019). Periodic reassessment of had kifayah is vital due to inflation and urban-rural disparities. Localized studies are needed for accurate needs assessment (Rohaizan et al. 2020).

Had Ta'alum and Spiritual Empowerment

Had Ta'alum refers to the period given to new converts to understand and practice Islam. Initiatives like PERKIM's IDIP and IPDAS in Sabah have strengthened educational access (Abdullah et al. 2013; Puteh et al. 2013). In Sarawak, JAIS and HIKMAH spearhead dakwah efforts in rural areas, promoting inclusive learning environments like the HIKMAH new convert village project (Razali 2018; Mustapha 2018). Outreach and training programs help integrate new converts and foster leadership.

Despite these efforts, many mualaf remain inconsistent in practice. Factors include weak religious foundation, cultural adherence and rural isolation (Mohamad et al. 2014; Ismail 2021; Mazlan & Mohad 2022). Some cease practicing Islam while retaining Muslim status on documents, resulting in zakat misallocation (Rahman 2018).

Had Ta'alum plays a crucial role within Had Ta'lif to gauge readiness for religious independence. It includes the mastery of fardu ain and Quranic understanding, guided by structured programs (Don et al. 2023). This learning threshold must be flexible to account for individual growth, emotional needs, and faith development. A shorter ta'alum period may suffice academically, but continued support ensures sustained religious commitment. Together, structured applications of

Had Kifayah and Had Ta'alum provide a balanced model of economic and spiritual aid for mualaf, safeguarding their rights and promoting holistic integration.

Elements of Measurement in Had Kifayah

Had Kifayah or the assistance provided to converts in the context of zakat distribution, is influenced by various factors. These factors are important indicators in determining the form, amount and methods of aid that are relevant and suitable to the current needs of the converts. This discussion elaborates on key factors influencing Had Kifayah for converts, considering individual, community, and institutional contexts.

Basic Needs

Converts require access to basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing and healthcare. Providing basic necessities enables them to focus on learning and practicing their faith without the burden of survival issues. According to Ismail & Ali (2023), zakat distribution for muallaf should address their specific needs, including basic necessities, education, skills training, and employment support. It should also aid their understanding of Islamic practices to support integration, and to be conducted transparently and responsibly in line with Islamic principles. The following is a table of item distribution according to the level of needs in Maqasid Syariah:

Table 3: Basic Needs of Muslim Converts According to Maqasid al-Shariah

Level of Needs	General Items	Specific Items (Mualaf)	Maqasid Justifications
Darruriyat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food • Clothing • Home • Transport • Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food • Clothing • Home • Transport • Education • Religious guidance 	Basic needs that must be met to ensure the continuity of life and the safety of humans.
Hajjiyyat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical • Utilities • Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical • Food utilities • Clothing • Home • Transport • Education • Communication 	Additional needs that provide ease and comfort in life and reduce difficulties.
Tahsiniyyat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debts • Tokens of conversion to Islam • Skills and entrepreneurship training 	Complementary needs that help improve the quality of life and ensure the well-being of individuals."

Table 3 shows the prioritization of items in the distribution of zakat according to the level of needs, where daruriyyat is the primary priority, followed by hajjiyyat and tahsiniyyat, depending on the individual's situation and context (Rahman et al. 2017). This classification can be used as a guide to ensure that the needs of new converts (mualaf) are met in a phased manner and in accordance with the level of priority in Maqasid Shariah.

Thus, according to Ahmad (2005), zakat payments are necessary as a means of giving the mualaf group social security and assisting them in escaping poverty and destitution, which eventually has an impact on their faith. Based to research by Johari et al. (2013) and Johari et al. (2018), most of

the zakat monies were utilised to support Islamic dakwah organisations so they could design programs that would improve their living standards by fostering faith and tauhid. Additionally, the availability of zakat is positively correlated with muallaf success, encouraging continued learning about Islam and improving their family's financial well-being.

The study by Rahman et al. (2014) found that the State Islamic Religious Councils and Zakat Centers in Malaysia have provided various assistance schemes to the asnaf (the deserving poor) including new converts (mualaf). This assistance not only fulfills an obligation but also reflects the unity of faith and Islamic brotherhood. Zakat assistance to new converts covers five main aspects, namely social, education, economy, welfare and dakwah (religious outreach). In the social aspect, the aid provided includes monthly financial support, festive aid, house construction, medical assistance and marriage support. In terms of education, new converts receive school assistance and scholarships to further their studies at the higher education level. In the economic aspect, there are business capital, entrepreneurship courses and taxi rental schemes. The welfare aspect includes disaster aid, legal aid and assistance during Ramadan for new Muslims. Meanwhile, the dakwah aspect involves funding for religious classes, lectures, courses and attendance allowances for special classes.

However, the analysis shows significant variation in state-level implementation. While states like Sarawak offer specialised aid, others provide general support to all eligible recipients of zakat (asnaf), including muallaf. Beyond material assistance, muallaf must also strengthen their Islamic knowledge and faith to ensure continued guidance and prevent reversion to their former beliefs.

Cost of Living

A significant portion of our brethren face financial difficulties due to being ostracized by their families and dismissed from their jobs. This situation impacts the effectiveness of religious programs organized by state dakwah bodies. The findings of Jama'in (2005) on the Indian Muslim community demonstrate that poverty is one of the major challenges faced by converts (mualaf) in attending religious classes organized by religious institutions.

This experience has been personally shared by prominent preachers such as Ustaz Mohd Farhan bin Abdullah, who was cut off from receiving financial support from his family as soon as he embraced Islam. He subsequently depended on zakat and charity to sustain his livelihood and pursue religious education (Ali & Ismail 2013). A similar experience was shared by Dr. Nur A'thiroh Masyaa'il Tan Abdullah, who had to endure extreme hardship, even resorting to eating mouldy bread due to financial constraints after embracing Islam. Her educational expenses were fully sponsored by zakat funds (Ahmad 2014).

In Sarawak, the cost of living varies depending on the area, particularly between urban and rural regions. Financial or material support needs to be compatible to the local cost of living to help converts (mualaf) meet their daily needs. Many of our brethren face poverty as they come from underprivileged families. The limited financial allocations from Baitulmal Sarawak make it difficult to provide continuous assistance. According to Ahmad et al. (2018), financial resources are one of the main strengths for missionaries of other religions to propagate their faith in rural areas. This is because the provision of fees, books, clothing and basic needs can influence the strength of faith and belief among converts. Bakar & Ismail (2018) also acknowledged that Sarawak is one of the states that does not provide allowances or incentives for embracing Islam to converts (mualaf), as such assistance is only given upon their own application. Additionally, Sarawak does not allocate attendance allowances for religious guidance classes organized by the State Religious Council or

Department. Both forms of assistance are crucial to cover the educational costs of converts at selected institutions. However, rewards and incentives are considered important elements to encourage consistent participation in dakwah programs, such as providing meals at every event. Based on observations by preachers, favouritism in the distribution of gifts and contributions to certain converts can lead some to revert to their original faith.

Social Support

Social support is a critical element in assisting new converts in their adjustment to life as Muslims. This includes support from family, the community and religious institutions. These elements encompass emotional support, appropriate religious education, financial assistance, employment opportunities and a wise approach to dakwah, which can strengthen their confidence and commitment to Islam. In addition, effective religious guidance and counselling play a vital role in addressing psychological challenges and ensuring that new converts feel accepted and valued within the Muslim community. This holistic approach not only enhances their psychological well-being but also contributes to the development of a more meaningful and stable life in terms of faith and social integration (Ahmad & Rahman 2020).

According to Rahman et al. (2022), social support programs for converts in Malaysia include education, basic necessities and psychological assistance. Educational programs, such as religious guidance classes, not only improve religious knowledge but also foster closer bonds among participants. Basic necessities, such as financial aid, food and clothing, ensure their welfare, while counselling programs address mental challenges during the religious conversion phase. However, programs focusing on psychology and motivation are still underemphasized. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach is needed, integrating education, assistance and psychological support to empower converts holistically.

Measurement Elements of *Had Ta'alum*

Had Ta'alum refers to a flexible learning period designated for new converts to Islam, aiming to instill foundational religious knowledge, personal development and social adaptation. Its duration varies based on individual needs and learning progress. The primary goal is to spiritually equip converts for independent Muslim life, while also facilitating their transition from zakat dependence. This concept aligns closely with *Had Ta'lif*, which emphasizes long-term spiritual and personal growth (Don et al., 2023). This discussion explores the key components shaping *Had Ta'alum*, namely emphasizing access to religious education, the quality of educational support, programmatic effectiveness and the instrumental role of dakwah agents in fostering sustainable spiritual development among new converts.

Access to Islamic Education

Islamic education must be easily accessible to converts, especially in the rural areas of Sarawak, where there is often a lack of religious educational institutions or significant distances to learning centers. One of the common challenges is the geographical factor, which complicates the implementation of consistent and frequent dakwah programs for converts in Sarawak, particularly in remote areas. Mohamad et al. (2014) described Sarawak's diverse terrain, scattered settlements, poor road networks and inadequate infrastructure, such as unreliable electricity and water supplies,

as major barriers to connecting with new Muslim communities in rural areas. This situation makes it difficult for preachers to regularly monitor and oversee the understanding, appreciation and practice of Islamic teachings by new converts after their conversion process.

At times, dakwah programs cannot be conducted due to logistical and transportation issues, as some areas are only accessible via air or river routes, requiring the use of airplanes and express boats. Moreover, some preachers have to rely on their own transportation to reach rural areas to carry out programs, often without considering the expenses, time, effort and risks involved in the journey. This is because some preachers do not live in the same villages as the converts and cannot interact with them informally on a daily basis.

Furthermore, preachers in Sarawak face challenges in encouraging muallaf to attend courses and programs due to their demanding work schedules, as many are farmers, planters or fishermen. Effective engagement often requires coordination through community leaders to avoid scheduling conflicts. Additionally, the remote location of learning centers, coupled with high travel costs and time, further reduces their motivation to participate in dakwah programs. (Basir et al. 2019).

Teaching Aids

Teaching materials must be relevant, culturally appropriate, and suited to converts' knowledge levels to ensure clear understanding of Islamic. Most teaching materials for converts in Sarawak overlook curriculum requirements and lack approaches suited to their thinking and education levels. This issue was also highlighted by Yusri & Abdullah (2015), who noted that the existing curriculum for convert teaching is too general and incomplete, with no appropriate methods available to effectively teach these modules. As a result, preachers for converts lack specific and clear guidelines for teaching, relying instead on their own methods and abilities.

According to Abdullah & Yasin (2013) & Kohar et al. (2025), poorly chosen teaching techniques can negatively impact converts' understanding of Islamic values by presenting complex religious matters beyond their knowledge level. A study by Ellin et al. (2024) found that no comprehensive teaching and learning modules have been developed by the dakwah bodies in Sarawak to guide converts in understanding and internalizing Islamic teachings. This situation takes into account the typical educational level among local converts, who generally have completed at least the Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) or the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), with some being illiterate. They may struggle to easily and quickly grasp religious knowledge directly. As a result, converts may easily become bored without programs that emphasize relaxed, yet effective, methods of delivery that wisely interact with their cultural and psychological needs. This situation could lead to isolation of new converts from other Muslim communities due to feelings of inferiority (Kawi & Abdullah 2020).

Program Effectiveness

Islamic education programs for converts must be carefully planned, taking into account their diverse needs. The effectiveness of these programs depends on interactive, systematic and results-oriented teaching approaches. According to Abdullah (2013), Program success depends on converts' positive perceptions of its delivery, timing, location, content, and instructors. The effectiveness is assessed based on the converts' level of understanding in areas such as tawhid, fiqh, akhlaq, the Quran and the life of the Prophet.

Therefore, Mokhtar et al. (2020) concluded that for the effectiveness of dakwah programs, peer influence, religious understanding and satisfaction play crucial roles in shaping the acceptance of dakwah programs. Rosli et al. (2020) highlight the need for every dakwah activity conducted by NGOs to contribute to providing a deeper understanding of Islam to converts, as well as improving their quality of life and education. Programs can positively impact converts by enhancing their understanding, practice and strengthening of Islamic faith, providing proper guidance on worship practices, emotional changes after conversion to Islam and the benefits of zakat on their welfare (Mohamed & Muhamat 2020). Abdullah et al. (2017) and Adenan et al. (2020) evaluated the modules used in teaching and learning sessions for convert education. Instructors are advised to revise these modules to make them easier to understand for students from diverse backgrounds, languages and ages. According to Abdullah et al. (2019), effective modules for teaching converts have a positive impact on their learning and understanding. These modules can influence the religiosity of converts by focusing on key themes such as faith, prayer practices, Quranic learning, moral values in social relationships and fasting. The process of religious development is influenced by factors such as determination, age, education level and time spent in Islam.

The compilation of previous studies shows that the level of basic Islamic knowledge and the proper execution of specific acts of worship is essential to meet the spiritual needs and fundamental obligations as Muslims among converts in Sarawak (Guleng et al. 2018). However, the focus of monitoring is less on the implementation of worship compared to the understanding of Fardhu 'Ain knowledge among Sarawakian converts' children (Jalil et al. 2017). The same scenario occurs in remote communities, such as the Penan, where there are issues in the practice of obligatory and Sunnah prayers, even though they can understand the pillars of Islam and faith well (Yusoff 2010). However, Chek's (2019) study found that religious life influences the thought patterns and behaviours of Bidayuh Muslims in Sarawak, particularly in terms of interaction, dressing and speech. This shows that their understanding, practice and acceptance of interfaith interactions are at a high level, reflecting a strong adherence to Islamic teachings in their overall behaviour.

The effectiveness of any program is often measured by how well it achieves its set objectives and its impact on the target group. In the context of convert programs, effectiveness can be seen through the improvement in religious knowledge, the strengthening of faith, participant satisfaction and the success in building sustainable social support. Effectiveness also depends on the quality of program implementation, including the relevance of content, accessibility of resources, facilitator efficiency and participant acceptance. A comprehensive assessment of these dimensions can provide a clear picture of how much the program contributes to improving the quality of life of new converts and their integration into the Islamic community effectively

Instructors (Preachers)

The instructors (preachers) play a crucial role in delivering Islamic education to converts. Instructors who are trained, understand the local cultural context and show empathy towards the challenges faced by converts are key assets in ensuring the success of these educational programs. A lack of well-trained and highly credible human resources among preachers is a critical issue for many Islamic NGOs in Sarawak. Some preachers serve voluntarily without expecting any salary or wages. Moreover, the existing preachers come from various academic backgrounds and levels of experience in the field of dakwah. This scenario often arises in non-governmental dakwah organizations due to financial constraints in hiring preachers on a permanent basis (Mat et al. 2009; Mohamad et al. 2014).

The limited resources for preachers contribute significantly to the issue of poor task coordination, thus hindering the smooth implementation of dakwah programs in remote areas. Studies by Yusoff (2019) and Mutalib (2017) found that many dakwah activities in remote areas heavily rely on the involvement of young people, government teachers and independent preachers in Sarawak, who voluntarily contribute their religious knowledge to converts. Additionally, Tibek et al. (2018) acknowledge that HIKMAH itself faces a shortage of trained preachers among the converts, particularly among illiterate women in Sarawak.

Meanwhile, Bujang et al. (2012) examined the weaknesses of existing HIKMAH preachers in their mastery of English language and multimedia technology skills due to a lack of teaching aids such as computers and projectors. This aligns with the recommendation from the Chairman of the Sarawak Baitulmal Fund (TBS), Datu Abang Mohamad Shibli bin Abang Mohd Nailie, urging HIKMAH preachers to adopt a simpler and interactive dakwah approach by utilizing existing technology to engage youth and new converts in HIKMAH dakwah programs (Anon 2016).

Therefore, the shortage of trained preachers is a significant concern, as it is likely to confine Dakwah programs to urban areas, while the remote regions receive inadequate attention. This situation is worsened when other dakwah organizations have varying impacts, effectively overshadowing the work of other groups and rendering their efforts seemingly ineffective.

Had Ta'alum is theoretically grounded in Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1991), which posits that meaningful learning occurs when individuals critically reflect on their assumptions, leading to a shift in worldview and behaviour. For mualaf, this involves not only acquiring Islamic knowledge but also reinterpreting their life experiences in light of new religious paradigms. Through structured religious education, mentorship and community engagement, converts gradually internalise Islamic teachings, moving from passive recipients of information to active agents of their faith (Pranoto 2021).

Furthermore, Had Ta'alum aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954), particularly the higher-order needs of self-actualisation and transcendence. Once basic physiological and safety needs (addressed under Had Kifayah) are met, individuals are more capable of pursuing spiritual growth, purpose and religious commitment (Bouzenita & Boulanouar 2016). Thus, Had Ta'alum reflects the maturation of faith marked by increased understanding, conviction and the ability to contribute meaningfully to the ummah. In sum, Had Ta'alum is not merely an endpoint of religious education but a dynamic, ongoing threshold signalling the readiness of mualaf to engage Islam with autonomy, purpose and responsibility.

Although Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei share similar geographical and socio-cultural contexts, their approaches to the implementation of ta'lif assistance for Muslim converts vary significantly in terms of structure, sustainability and institutional commitment (Saat 2024). In Sarawak, ta'lif support remains fragmented and largely application-based, lacking an integrated policy framework that defines the minimum threshold of material needs or religious learning for new converts. In contrast, Sabah has institutionalized a more structured support system through the provision of monthly allowances, religious training and residential facilities managed by the Sabah Islamic Religious Affairs Department (JHEAINS) (Jusup 2023). Brunei Darussalam, meanwhile, offers a more comprehensive state-driven model in which ta'lif is embedded within national Islamic development policy, administered by the Majlis Ugama Islam Brunei (MUIB) and includes financial assistance, religious education and social integration mechanisms such as employment placement and subsidized housing (Muhammad Zul Hamzi Faiz 2024). The structural weaknesses in Sarawak's current model underscore the need for a formalized conceptual framework, namely the Had Ta'alum

and Had Kifayah to balance physical aid with spiritual development and ensure that the integration of Muslim converts is systematic, measurable and guided by normative thresholds.

Expert Validation of a Conceptual Framework on Had Ta'lif for Muslim Converts through the Content Validity Index (CVI)

The table below presents the feedback from 10 experts, showing their evaluations of each item in the research instrument. This table reflects the level of agreement for each item based on the 5-point scale provided by the experts.

Table 4: Expert Validation Results for the Elements of the Had Ta'lif Conceptual Framework

No. Item	Exp 1	Exp 2	Exp 3	Exp 4	Exp 5	Exp 6	Exp 7	Exp 8	Exp 9	Exp 10	I-CVI	Status
Item 1	5	5	5	3	4	5	4	5	5	5	0.9	Accepted
Item 2	5	5	5	3	4	5	4	5	5	5	0.9	Accepted
Item 3	5	5	5	3	4	5	4	5	5	5	0.9	Accepted
Item 4	5	5	5	3	3	4	4	3	5	5	0.7	Rejected
Item 5	5	5	5	3	3	4	4	3	5	5	0.7	Rejected
Item 6	5	5	5	3	3	4	4	3	5	5	0.7	Rejected
Item 7	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	1.0	Accepted
Item 8	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	1.0	Accepted
Item 9	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	1.0	Accepted
Item 10	5	5	5	2	3	5	5	2	5	5	0.7	Rejected
Item 11	5	5	5	2	3	5	5	2	5	5	0.7	Rejected
Item 12	5	5	5	2	3	5	5	2	5	5	0.7	Rejected
Item 13	5	5	5	3	4	5	5	3	5	5	0.8	Accepted
Item 14	5	5	5	3	4	5	5	3	5	5	0.8	Accepted
Item 15	5	5	5	3	4	5	5	3	5	5	0.8	Accepted
Item 16	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	1.0	Accepted
Item 17	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	1.0	Accepted
Item 18	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	1.0	Accepted
Item 19	5	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	0.9	Accepted
Item 20	5	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	0.9	Accepted
Item 21	5	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	0.9	Accepted

Based on the table 4, a total of 15 out of 21 items (71.4%) achieved an I-CVI score of 0.78 or higher, which meets the minimum acceptable threshold for content validity when ten or more experts are involved (Polit & Beck 2006). These items demonstrated a high level of consensus among the experts and were therefore retained in the conceptual framework.

Conversely, 6 items (28.6%) recorded I-CVI scores below the 0.78 threshold, with each scoring 0.7. These item, specifically Item 4, Item 5 & Item 6 (Cost of Living) and Item 10, Item 11 & Item 12 (Access of Islamic Education) were considered to have insufficient content validity due to lack of clarity, overlap or low perceived relevance by some experts. As such, these items were either marked for revision or considered for removal from the framework.

The results indicate that the Had Ta'lif framework possesses a satisfactory level of content validity yet still requires refinement in certain areas. Recommended actions include: (i) reviewing the conceptual and operational definitions of rejected items; (ii) revising the wording of items to enhance clarity and contextual relevance (especially in the Sarawak context) and (iii) merging or eliminating redundant items where appropriate.

Overall, the analysis indicates that the research instrument possesses strong content validity and is supported by unanimous expert agreement. The use of the CVI approach enabled the researcher to ensure that each item of the instrument is valid, relevant and aligned with the proposed conceptual framework. The outcome of this validation process contributes to more accurate and meaningful findings, serving as a solid foundation for developing the full set of items for pilot testing and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). These steps will further strengthen the internal structure and practical utility of the Had Ta'lif framework in addressing the needs and development of Muslim converts in Sarawak.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of Had Ta'lif offers a flexible and context-sensitive mechanism for determining the ideal support period for mukallaf (responsible converts), taking into account local customs and the specific needs of new Muslims in Sarawak. This study proposes a conceptual framework for Had Ta'lif that comprises two core components: Had Kifayah, which focuses on fulfilling basic needs such as necessities, cost of living, and social support; and Had Ta'alum, which centres on educational development through access to learning infrastructure, preacher competency, effective teaching aids, and program delivery. Together, these components ensure that zakat distribution is fair, transparent and aligned with the holistic development of converts.

The framework is underpinned by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which highlights the importance of fulfilling material and emotional needs as the foundation for higher-order growth; Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, which emphasises critical reflection and learning as drivers of deep personal and spiritual change; and the theory of Maqasid Shariah, which seeks to protect essential human interests including religion, life, intellect, lineage and wealth. This integrated model not only aims to enhance zakat policies but also empowers muallaf in their journey of faith, contributing to the strength of multi-ethnic dakwah initiatives in Sarawak.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Author's Contribution Statement

1. **Mohd Zuhaili Kamal Basir:** Conceptualization, methodology, software, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, project administration.
2. **Fariza Md Sham:** Conceptualization, methodology, validation, supervision, writing—review and editing, funding acquisition.
3. **Nur A'throh Masyaa'il Tan Abdullah @ Tan Ai Pao:** Conceptualization, methodology, validation, supervision.
4. **Isdawati Ismail:** Writing—review and editing, visualization.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Ethics Statement

This study involved expert validation of the proposed conceptual framework. All experts were informed of the objectives and scope of the study and voluntarily consented to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and the research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

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