

Polemic regarding the Issue of Accreditation for Islamic Religious Teaching in Malaysia

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Abstract

The polemic regarding the issue of accreditation for Islamic religious teaching in our country continues to rage every year. Thus, a qualitative case study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with seven selected Malaysian da'wah experts to identify the causes, processes, and actions of religious authorities, as well as solutions for this issue. Preachers should adhere to state laws, refrain from polemics, understand diverse preaching methods, engage with religious authorities, uphold ethical teachings, establish a centralized certification system, and implement a recognized professional qualification framework to enhance accountability and consistency across the state. Enhance SOP for quality, ethical, locally aligned preachers.

Keywords: Polemic; Issue; Accreditation; Islamic Religious Teaching

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1.0 Introduction

The polemic surrounding the certification to teach Islam in our country remains heated this year, involving not only preachers and religious scholars but also celebrity evangelists such as Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Ustaz Wadi Anuar, Ustaz Abdullah Khairi, and others. This issue arose due to the cancellation of their lecture series because they lacked teaching certification or had their certification revoked by the State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN), as reported by Md Zin (2023) and Wan Mansor (2023), involving the Selangor Islamic Religious Council (MAIS), the Perlis State Islamic Religious Department (JAIPs), and the Negeri Sembilan State Islamic Religious Council (MAINS). According to Ibrahim and Samudin (2022), three elements of wrongdoing must be met to enforce action against individuals teaching religion without certification according to legal provisions, namely: (i) Failure to submit a valid teaching certification from the State Islamic Religious Council unless there is an exception, (ii) The teaching must be conducted in a public place, and (iii) The teaching delivered to the public must pertain to religious matters with proof. Additionally, the revocation of teaching certification is

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enforced if an individual is found to deliver content that deviates from the proper understanding of a religion or a view that could confuse the general public, ultimately leading to division and discord (Nasri & Noor, 2020).

According to Mohd Ali (2023), the frequency of interview sessions is the primary cause of this issue persisting until now, in addition to the long waiting period for interview calls and the short application period. This situation highlights the difficulties and delays in the Islamic preaching process compared to the more straightforward and unrestricted permit process for organizing festivals and other social activities. This situation makes teaching certification unfriendly to evangelists, even though the categories of teaching certification for religion in most states are almost the same, including certification for teaching the Quran, *Fardu Ain*, public speaking, and special certifications such as motivation, funeral management, and Hajj and Umrah. Although it is publicly known that regulations related to teaching certification are not uniform and are subject to the authority and legislation of each state (Dimon et al., 2022), it is believed that they can be standardized inclusively and holistically to be more evangelist-friendly. The former Minister of Religion of Malaysia and former Mufti of the Federal Territory, Dato' Seri Dr. Zulkifli Al-Bakri, proposed that the application process for teaching certification be aligned nationwide with the consent of the Sultan of Selangor as Chairman of the National Council for Islamic Affairs (MKI) and the rulers at the state level. Thus, the objectives of this study are to identify the causes of this polemic and to understand the processes and actions of religious authorities regarding the issue. This study also suggests potential solutions to the ongoing polemic surrounding the teaching certification of Islam in Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review

Tauliah refers to the authorization or appointment given to an individual to carry out religious duties such as serving as an imam, delivering khutbah, teaching, giving lectures, or any activity involving the dissemination of Islamic teachings to the public, based on the religious administration laws of each state (Abdullah et al., 2022). The state religious authorities, also known as Majlis Agama Islam Negeri (MAIN), hold full responsibility for safeguarding the welfare of Muslims in their respective states, particularly in matters of *aqidah* (creed) and *syariah* (Soroni et al., 2022). Therefore, the issuance of *tauliah* is conducted by an authoritative and qualified committee that recognizes the level of understanding, credibility, and expertise of religious teachers in delivering knowledge to the public (Dimon et al., 2022). MAIN strives to regulate existing religious teachers in each state through the issuance and periodic renewal of *tauliah*, aiming to prevent the spread of deviant and extremist ideologies within the community. This is achieved through monitoring activities that align with the procedures of *dakwah* conducted by MAIN (Mohd Hasrul et al., 2020). The issuance of *tauliah* is viewed as a measure to prevent the spread of deviant teachings and false or weak *hadith* by ensuring that formal education is provided by authorized bodies, particularly in mosque-related activities (Junoh et al., 2022).

The process of applying for *tauliah* falls under the religious administration of each Majlis Agama Islam Negeri (MAIN), with varying procedures and qualifications required by each MAIN. Some MAINs do not stipulate formal education levels for applicants, while others, such as Majlis Agama Wilayah Persekutuan (MAIWP), require applicants to hold a recognized higher education qualification in Islamic studies from a local or foreign university accredited by the Malaysian government (Dimon et al., 2022). This situation poses challenges for preachers, especially those with official qualifications in teaching religious knowledge from one state when delivering lectures in another state. However, the issue of *tauliah* cannot be ignored to prevent divisions within the community. The categories of *tauliah* also differ by state; for example, Selangor categorizes *tauliah* into teaching religion, *fardu ain*, al-Quran, and special *tauliah* (Mohd Hasrul et al., 2020), while Negeri Sembilan categorizes *tauliah* based on the expertise of the teacher, such as al-Quran, Tafsir, *Hadith*, Akhlak, Fiqh, Tauhid, Tasawuf, and Asas Fardhu Ain.

Additionally, the validity period of *tauliah* depends on state regulations, such as Selangor (5 years), Wilayah Persekutuan and Negeri Sembilan (3 years), and Pahang (2 years), as stated by Dimon et al. (2022). It creates challenges for preachers applying for *tauliah* in different states, especially those frequently invited to programs organized by various states. Furthermore, *tauliah* is also a matter related to the Sultan's authority in overseeing religious affairs in their respective states. In states with a Sultan or Raja, the Sultan serves as the head of the Islamic religion, while in states without a Sultan, the Yang Dipertuan Agong holds this position. MAIN plays a role in assisting and advising the Sultan on religious matters in each state, as governed by the respective state administrations (Husain et al., 2017).

Furthermore, MAIN is part of the three main principles of Islamic sovereignty in Malaysia, known as the Pihak Berkuasa Agama Islam, which is directly under the authority of the Sultan or Raja (Disa et al., 2019). Therefore, the dissemination of Islamic teachings, *dakwah*, and the issuance of *tauliah* fall under the jurisdiction of MAIN, which has specific policies related to the administration of religion in each state, overseen by the Sultan or Raja for that state. In addition to MAIN, there are religious institutions that coordinate the management of Islamic affairs between states at the federal level, namely the Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) and the Majlis Kebangsaan Hal Ehwal Islam (MKI). These institutions advise the Rajas, State Governments, or Majlis Ugama Islam Negeri on matters related to Islamic legislation or administration, aiming to improve, standardize, or promote uniformity in laws and administration. With institutions like JAKIM and MKI, the management and administration at the federal level have become more efficient and present a positive image of Malaysia in managing religious affairs effectively (Yaacob, 2021).

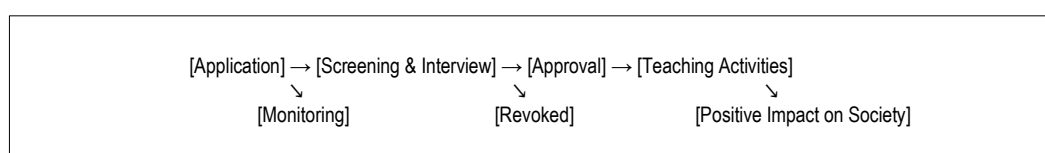


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model of Accreditation for Islamic Religious Teaching in Malaysia (Adaptation from Application Guide e-Tauliah MAIS)

Figure 1 outlines the structured process for obtaining and maintaining *tauliah* (official authorization) for conducting religious teaching. It begins with the application stage, where individuals submit their request along with the required documentation. This is followed by screening and interviews to evaluate the applicant's qualifications, teaching approach, and alignment with recognized Islamic teachings. If the applicant meets the criteria, they receive approval, granting them the authority to carry out teaching activities within the community. Throughout the process, monitoring is conducted to ensure continuous compliance with the guidelines and expectations set by the religious authorities. If the individual is found to breach any conditions or teach in a manner contrary to accepted norms, their *tauliah* may be revoked. Once teaching activities are underway, they are expected to generate a positive impact on society by enhancing religious knowledge, promoting moral values, and preserving social harmony. This flow ensures that religious instruction is delivered responsibly and under proper oversight (Ahmad et al., 2017).

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design, with the primary research instrument being a semi-structured interview conducted with seven distinguished da'wah experts in Malaysia (see Table 1). This study employed purposive sampling, focusing on well-known Malaysian preachers as the most relevant respondents to identify issues related to the accreditation polemic. Stake (2001) noted that case studies typically focus on individuals or groups closely associated with the case. The sampling technique used in this study included seven participants, which was considered sufficient for a qualitative case study (Darusalam & Hussin, 2018). The interview data were meticulously analyzed through thematic analysis, facilitated by ATLAS.ti9 software, revealing two overarching themes: (i) Reasons, process, and action taken by religious authority, and (ii) Steps to resolve the polemic. The identified themes, meticulously established by the research team, fully align with the study's objectives.

4.0 Findings

This section presents the results of the semi-structured interview. Table 1 presents a brief profile of the study participants, consisting of seven selected Islamic preaching experts in Malaysia. All P1-P7 are from the category of lecturers, preachers, freelance writers, or celebrities who are icons of Islamic preaching in our country.

Table 1: Participant's Coding of the Study

Profile	Codes
CEO Telaga Biru Sdn. Bhd. / Freelance Preacher / Celebrity Preacher	P1
Senior Lecturer FPQS USIM / Celebrity Preacher	P2
Deputy CEO LZNK / Sarjana Tamu KITA UKM / Speaker	P3
Medical Doctor / Freelance Consultant Psychologist / Celebrity Preacher	P4
Preacher/Speaker / Celebrity Author	P5
Deputy Director of the Policy Division at JAKIM / Celebrity Preacher	P6
Preacher / Celebrity Speaker	P7

(Source: Study Sampling)

4.1 Reasons, Process, & Actions by Religious Authorities

The polemic surrounding the teaching of Islam in Malaysia arises due to issues such as deviations and misconceptions in *aqidah* (creed), differences in knowledge and perspectives among preachers, variations in legal interpretations between states, bureaucratic challenges, lack of transparency, and complex or differing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) between states. Additionally, the lengthy application process, political influences or tendencies, teachings that conflict with societal practices, *khilafiah* issues, the spread of false *dalil* (evidence), and the negative perception of *tauliah* as a restriction on preaching contribute to this issue. All study informants (P1-P7) agreed that the process of applying for *tauliah* to teach Islam in Malaysia is fair, sufficient, strict, and achieves its objectives.

Table 2: Participant's Feedback

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
- Reasons: Misguidance and deviation in <i>aqidah</i> , injustice towards <i>asatizah</i> , differences in knowledge and perspectives among preachers, and widespread exposure to religious information. -Process for Ensuring the	- Reasons: Political issues, differences in <i>mazhab</i> (schools of thought), ideology, and local practices. -Process: Adequate, fair, and strict. -Screening is conducted through readings, evidence from kitab (religious texts), verification of academic	- Reasons: Differences in legal interpretations between states, bureaucratic processes, concerns over the spread of <i>aqidah</i> contrary to ASWJ, and issues of transparency in granting <i>tauliah</i> . -Process: Can still be improved to be more inclusive and fairer. Certain limitations exist, including strict standard operating	-Reasons: Emergence of issues related to political influence or tendencies, lack of genuine qualifications, teachings conflicting with societal practices, and the inclusion of unsubstantiated stories or myths. -Process: The existence of political influence.	- Reasons: Emergence of issues related to differences in religious ideologies, political beliefs, and interactions with non-Malays. -Process: Adequate and fair. -Recommendation: Improvements should be made based on current needs and issues.	- Reasons: Emergence of issues due to differences in religious authority between states, complex and bureaucratic SOPs, challenges for high-profile preachers, political interference, and a lengthy application process.	- Reasons: Emergence of issues related to politics, deviant teachings, the spread of false <i>dalil</i> , <i>khilafiah</i> issues, differing SOPs for applications in each state, and the perception of restrictions on da'wah. -Process: Requires stricter screening, close monitoring,

Quality of Preachers, Minimum Requirements for Application, and Mutual Respect Among Preachers.	background, providing reasons for rejection, and refining SOPs	procedures (SOPs), lengthy approval periods, and a lack of mechanisms for reviewing rejected applications.	-Process: Fair, adequate, and can be improved.	ensuring quality preachers who do not harm the image of the religion, and ensuring fairness.
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P= Participant
(Source: Study Interview)

The reasons for the polemic and the explanation regarding the accreditation procedures were analyzed from these statements of participants:

"Religious authorities are responsible for enforcing existing laws and regulations." (P1)

"Establish clear guidelines or laws, accept and open applications from others, and enforce them wisely as long as they do not conflict with existing regulations" (P2)

"Enforce the law, hold dialogues with preachers, and establish a special committee to oversee content and teaching." (P3)

"Create guidelines based on academic qualifications, experience, and free from political influence, with monitoring to prevent the spread of deviant teachings and narrow political narratives." (P4)

"(i) Accept and respect differences, (ii) Hold private and specific discussions, (iii) Avoid media statements if conflicts arise, (iv) Call and give a hearing if controversy arises, and (v) Be firm in adhering to ASWJ." (P5)

"Ensure *tauliah* aligns with ASWJ and rejects conflicting ideologies." (P6)

"Religious authorities can revoke or suspend teaching *tauliah*, issue verbal warnings, propose uniform guidelines, and hold discussions between preachers and MAIN." (P7)

4.2 Steps to Resolve the Polemic

Table 3: Participant's Feedback Regarding Potential Solutions

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
"...the most basic thing is to encourage open-mindedness."	"First, preachers must comply with the established <i>tauliah</i> laws. Second, refrain from creating polemics if approval is not granted, the criteria are not met, or the <i>tauliah</i> is revoked. Third, try to understand the methodologies or ideologies of different schools of thought."	"...actively engage in dialogues with religious institutions to find the best solutions. Additionally, ethical knowledge delivery, such as avoiding controversy and respectfully spreading knowledge, can help reduce tension."	"Preachers must understand their reality: the government and Sultan in each state have the authority to grant <i>tauliah</i> . They should not turn mosques or suraus into platforms for spreading narrow political ideologies. They must appear neutral in their political tendencies, disseminate knowledge honestly based on accurate references, and adhere to the fundamentals of the Muslim community in Malaysia. Accept any decisions made by the granting authority without suspicion or resentment."	"Avoid making statements that provoke polemics in the media or during lectures. Address conflicts directly and respectfully between preachers and religious authorities."	"...ethics and adab in teaching religion, managing differences of opinion, the character of preachers, a centralized <i>tauliah</i> application system, a fast-track <i>tauliah</i> system, and introducing a recognized professional qualification system across all states."	"...self-improvement, building a healthier da'wah community, collaborating with MAIN, and reviewing topics before delivering lectures."

P= Participant
(Source: Study Interview)

From the above responses, the proposed steps to resolve the polemic include:

- (i) Preachers must comply with the existing laws established by the respective state authorities.
- (ii) Avoid creating further polemics.
- (iii) Understand the different perspectives, ideologies, and methodologies of various parties involved in da'wah.
- (iv) Actively participate in dialogues with state religious authorities.
- (v) Practice proper ethics in delivering knowledge.
- (vi) Establish a centralized and fast-track *tauliah* application system.
- (vii) Introduce a recognized professional qualification system across all states.

5.0 Discussions

Ongoing polemics surrounding the issuance of teaching licenses (*tauliah*) for Islamic teachings in Malaysia need to be resolved immediately to continue the da'wah of Rasulullah SAW in fostering a society with noble character. Although it is widely known that the authority to grant teaching licenses falls under the jurisdiction of each state's religious authorities, commonalities and harmonious solutions can still be achieved through the intervention of the government, muftis, and the National Council for Islamic Affairs (P2-P3). This aligns with the role of religious institutions at both the federal and state levels in providing advice to the Rajas, State Governments, or State Islamic Councils on matters related to Islamic legislation or administration, aiming to improve, standardize, or encourage uniformity in laws and administration (Husain et al., 2017). Additionally, P4 and P7 suggest a general guideline for the issuance of teaching licenses in Malaysia, as it serves a common goal (P5). This aligns with Dimon et al. (2022), who state that an authoritative and qualified committee issues teaching licenses to recognize the level of understanding, credibility, and expertise of religious teachers in delivering knowledge to the public. This is supported by the agreement of all informants (P1-P7), who believe that the process of applying for a teaching license in Malaysia is fair, sufficient, strict, and achieves its objectives. However, the existing SOP can still be improved and enhanced according to current needs, with more rigorous screening and the need for close monitoring to produce quality preachers who align with local wisdom.

Each state in Malaysia has its own laws regarding Islamic affairs, so preachers must comply by obtaining a teaching license before delivering sermons. These laws ensure that the preaching aligns with the teachings of Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah and avoids confusion. Preachers should also refrain from engaging in polemics and sensitive issues that could threaten the unity of the ummah and cause division (Anas et al., 2024). Furthermore, understanding various approaches to da'wah, such as Salafi, Sufi, traditionalist, or contemporary, will foster an open attitude and tolerance among preachers. Cooperation with religious authorities needs to be strengthened to clarify issues related to teaching licenses and the content of sermons. The delivery of knowledge should be ethical, respectful, free from slander, and based on authentic sources (Ismail & Osmani, 2024). To improve the efficiency of the teaching license system, considering the proposal to establish a centralized application system and a fast-track process is advisable. The establishment of a recognized professional qualification system across all states is also essential to ensure that only authoritative individuals are allowed to preach. These measures will create a more effective, experienced, and unified atmosphere for da'wah.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The ongoing debate over accreditation for Islamic religious teaching in Malaysia underscores the complex intersection of religion, education policy, and national governance. While accreditation seeks to ensure standardization, quality, and professional recognition of Islamic education, it has also raised concerns over autonomy, traditional religious authority, and potential bureaucratic interference. Balancing these elements requires a nuanced approach that respects the spiritual and cultural significance of Islamic teachings while ensuring educators meet professional and academic benchmarks. Moving forward, inclusive dialogue among religious scholars, educators, policymakers, and the broader Muslim community is crucial to developing a fair, transparent, and culturally sensitive accreditation framework that strengthens Islamic education without undermining its authenticity or heritage.

However, this study was limited to Islamic preachers only, as the respondents did not discuss the accreditation process with the relevant authorities. This scope of study involved analyzing the initial perception of the first party regarding the issue, excluding the second party at this stage. Thus, it is significant to study the perspective of the responsible authorities and experts regarding the issue for further research. Furthermore, to address the ongoing polemic surrounding the accreditation of Islamic religious teaching in Malaysia, it is recommended that a standardized, transparent, and inclusive accreditation framework be established. This framework should be collaboratively developed by the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs), religious authorities such as JAKIM, academic institutions, and relevant stakeholders from the Islamic education sector. The aim should be to harmonize traditional religious instruction with modern educational standards while respecting Malaysia's diverse Islamic traditions. Additionally, there must be consistent mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and dialogue to ensure that the accreditation process remains fair, credible, and adaptable to evolving educational and religious needs.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

Educational / Learning Environment

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