

# Islamic Education Awareness in Malaysian Armed Forces

1. \*Burhanuddin Jalal, PhD, Islamic Studies, National Defence University of Malaysia, burhanuddin@upnm.edu.my
2. Sa'adiyah Hussin, PhD, Islamic Studies, University of Kuala Lumpur, saadiyah@unikl.edu.my
3. Sayuti Ab Ghani, PhD, Islamic Studies, National Defence University of Malaysia, sayuti\_70@yahoo.com
4. Abdul Rashid Nordin, Business Studies, National Defence University of Kuala Lumpur, rashidahmad@upnm.edu.my
5. Amnah Saayah Ismail, Phd, Islamic Studies, National Defence University of Malaysia, amnah.ve5@gmail.com

\*Corresponding Author

## Abstract

The stability and strength of a military organization is generally based on three main aspects: the strength of firepower, the ability of maneuver, and the strength of the fighting spirit among its members. To enhance the strength of fighting spirit among members of the Malaysian Armed Forces, the Malaysian Armed Forces Religious Corps (*Kor Agama Angkatan Tentera* – KAGAT) has been tasked to achieve this via Islamic Education approach. One of the modules implemented by KAGAT for this purpose is using Fardu Ain Education Module (*Modul Pendidikan Islam Fardu Ain* – PIFA). This paper discusses the development and implementation of the PIFA module from the history of execution until it becomes a compulsory requirement for the promotion process and career path especially among members of different ranks in the Malaysian Armed Forces. This paper employs the qualitative design methods where historical

review and analysis of available documents are carried out. The findings indicate that Islamic education in the Malaysian Armed Forces that started since the establishment of KAGAT in 1985, has undergone several improvement processes until the PIFA module was received as a module that must be attended by members of different ranks. It was found that this module has had important implications in strengthening and appreciation of Islam among members of the Malaysian Armed Forces.

**Keywords:** Islamic education, fighting spirit, army, faith, spiritual

## **Introduction**

Islamic education and Fardu Ain are essentials for Muslims, as it is able to create awareness for Muslims to revert back to true Islamic teachings. The Fardu Ain Islamic Education (PIFA) programme is one of the education elements in developing human capital in Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF). The task to impart this Islamic education to members of the MAF is the responsibility of the Malaysian Armed Forces Religious Corps (Kor Agama Angkatan Tentera), also known as KAGAT.

Human Capital Development refers to individuals who are knowledgeable, confident, skilled, have high moral values, ethical, virtuous, polite, disciplined, innovative and creative. These individuals are the ones that will determine the direction of MAF in the future and the core of a comprehensive national defense. This statement coincides with what was stated by Dato' Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Former Malaysian Defense Minister, *"without human capital with exemplary fighting spirit, large organizations like MAF may have not been able to safeguard the security and sovereignty of the nation to the point of receiving international recognition. As a uniformed team, the public will see MAF as an organization of high quality with human capital that is disciplined, skilled, and knowledgeable."* (Amir Sarifudin, 2009).

General Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Zainal, 14th Chief of the Malaysian Armed Forces, in his book titled 'Marksman: The Target for the Malaysian Army', wrote: *"The value of religion will form religious principles, positive morals and commitment to human dignity. It nourishes one's soul and prevents them from committing crimes. This value should be nurtured continuously to maintain the best behavior in a person."* (Abdul Aziz, 2008).

To ensure military personnel to become valuable assets with credible human capital values, an Islamic Education and Fardu Ain module has been introduced in MAF so that they are equipped with necessary fundamental religious knowledge and also knowledge of Fardu Ain concepts. Brigadier General Dato' Hj Mustafa Abd Manap, 4th Director of Armed Forces Religious Division, describes this module as having the aim to ensure clear understanding of core Islamic law and concepts. The appreciation of this law and concepts amongst military personnel shall be the self-defense mechanism in their challenging life in the army. Without the knowledge of Fardu Ain, it is feared that they will lose their way hence the wrath of Allah shall befall upon them (KAGAT, 2008).

### **Background of Islamic Education in the Malaysian Armed Forces**

Islamic religious education was first introduced as early as 1933, about six months after the establishment of the Malay Regiment. Its role in the early stages was limited to guiding specific daily religious affairs such as death management, Yasin and Tahlil recitation and also prayers (Nadzri et al., 2005).

The task of providing Islamic religious education to military personnel was taken up by Public Religious Teachers during the British occupation era until KAGAT was officially established on 16 April 1986. The British administration was at first reluctant and cautious of religious sentiments, but after much insistence, they finally allowed the teaching of Islam to the Malay Muslims upon their completion of military training (Abd Rahim, 1997). According to Abd Rahim (1997), the British military's authorization to create religious posts and implement Islamic education in the service of Malay military personnel does not mean that the colonial government has given religious functions to determine the direction of the military profession; the consent is merely to serve the demands of Malay Muslims by limiting the religious functions within the scope that does not challenge the colonial system. Religious programmes are permitted within a limited scope to activities that are of special worship only. The religious programmes are usually not formalized in team activities but occur within prayer rooms (surau) only and once the military personnel are out of the area, no religious programmes are to take place. The isolation of religious activities from other aspects of military functions has been the major factor that separates religion that results in religion as religion and life

as life, not religion as a way of life. Abd Rahim viewed this as an act for the purpose of delaying independence of the country then.

The main objective of the establishment of the Islamic Education Syllabus is a guide in the process of learning to become military personnel who are full of knowledge and at the same abide by the rules of Allah, which could be seen through their understanding of, appreciation of, and alignment to Islamic teachings, that result in devout and pious Muslims in the military. True understanding of Islamic teachings shall then lead to members of the military willing to sacrifice in defending religion, race, and the nation (*Arahan Pentadbiran KAGAT No. 5, 1990*).

According to *Arahan Pentadbiran No. 5 (1990)*, the aims of establishing the Islamic Education Syllabus are as follows:

- a. Form a healthy faith based on the true nature of divinity.
- b. Reject non-God-given beliefs, shirkism, and beliefs that are contrary to the true nature of Islam.
- c. Make military personnel understand fully the implementation of daily *ibadah*.
- d. Avoid crisis in marriage institution of military families hence strengthening family dynamics.
- e. Guide members to always be honest, dedicated, and sincere in performing daily tasks.
- f. Empower members to be strong-willed in controlling worldly temptations and be able to cleanse themselves from sins of the soul.
- g. Inculcate the interest to read, understand, and appreciate the Quran, and improve their reading quality.
- h. Develop the essence of fighting spirit based on the Quran and Sunnah, taking into perspective the history of the struggles undergone by the Prophet (pbuh), his companions and other Muslim fighters.
- i. Produce military personnel who are capable of practising Islamic teachings and alienating themselves from any crippling crimes forbidden in Islam.

The Islamic Education lessons provided cover topics that are suitable, easy to understand, appreciated, and practised by every member of the military. The summary of lessons are as described below:

- a. **Aqidah Studies.** This lesson discusses the creation of humans, their roles as caliphs on earth, and faith. Debates on *Rukun Iman*, heaven and hell, development of attitude and personality based on Islamic faith are carried out.
- b. **Shariah Studies.** The lesson covers *fiqh ibadah* such as cleansing oneself, prayers, fasting, zakat, hajj pilgrimage, *aqiqah* and slaughtering, and *fiqh muamalat* (sales transactions, debts, loans, and stock markets). For *fiqh munakahat*, matters related to marriage and family institutions, and also *fiqh* related to crimes such as *hudud*, *qisas*, *takzir* and apostasy are covered.
- c. **Akhlak Studies.** This lesson addresses human relationship in various aspects: neighbours and neighbourhood, filial piety, obedience to rulers, and honesty and trustworthiness. Other than that, relationship between the Creator and His creations, covering the concepts of *ubudiah*, discussions on traits of self-perfection covering good and bad deeds, the concept of courtesy, conviction, bondage and positive qualities that military personnel must possess are addressed too.
- d. **Quran dan Hadith Studies.** The lesson contains the preparation and guide to reading the Quran, translation of the Quranic verses and hadith, and elaboration on *tajwid* rules.
- e. **Enrichment.** This lesson provides information and necessary guidance for members of the military to properly familiarize themselves to and appreciate Islamic teachings. It covers the system and concepts related to Quranic studies, *akidah*, and *shariah* as reinforcement elements to enhance understanding and skills in Islamic education.

To further support the implementation of Islamic education in MAF, there needs to be a decree; hence, in 1991, *Perintah Majlis Angkatan Tentera Bilangan 9 Tahun 1991M (PMAT 9/91)* was established. PMAT 9/91 then introduced a new policy, *Dasar Pembinaan Mental dan Kerohanian Islam dalam Angkatan Tentera Malaysia*. This gazetted policy has since become a reference point and support the implementation of Islamic education in MAF.

The policy *Dasar Pembinaan Mental dan Kerohanian Islam dalam Angkatan Tentera Malaysia* is based on two fundamentals to provide physical, mental, and spiritual strength. The two fundamentals are:

- a. Mental strength, through Islamic knowledge that covers *Fardu Ain* and *Fardu Kifayah*.
- b. Spiritual strength, through trainings and appreciation of true Islamic teachings.

After having gone through the mental strength programmes, each Muslim member who serves in the Malaysian Armed Forces shall be capable of appreciating and practising *Fardu Ain* and *Fardu Kifayah* requirements accurately. Any conduct, attitude, and practice that do not abide by Islamic teachings are prohibited while the members are still serving MAF, and it compulsory for them to:

- a. Possess a mature and steady Islamic mindset that is free of any negative and inaccurate elements and influence that deviate from the true teachings of Islam.
- b. Receive fundamental Islamic education which covers the following:
  - (1) *Fardu Ain* Fundamentals
  - (2) *Fardu Kifayah* Fundamentals
  - (3) *Jihad* Lessons
  - (4) Family Affairs Education
  - (5) *Akhlak* Education
  - (6) Leadership Education
  - (7) Quran and Sunnah Education
  - (8) *Ibadah* Education
  - (9) Islamic Civilization Education
  - (10) Islamic Tasawwur

All training centres, formations, and teams shall be obliged to provide no less than 857 hours annually of Islamic education to members. As for spiritual strength, all Muslim members of the military shall be provided with lessons and trainings to become an individual with Muslim, *mukmin* and *muhsin* characteristics (PMAT 9/91). Table 1 illustrates the detailed time allocation to develop Islamic spiritual strength in MAF.

**Table 1: Perintah Majlis Angkatan Tentera Bil. 9 1991**

**Time Allocation for Implementation of Developing Islamic Spiritual Strength**

No	Activities	Frequency	Total Hours
1.	Friday nights activities	1 hour x 52 weeks	52 hours
2	Friday prayers sermons	1 hour x 52 weeks	52 hours
3	Eid sermons and Takbir	2 hours x 2 days	4 hours
4	Islamic Holy Days	2 hours x 9 days	18 hours
5	Khatam Al-Quran	2 hours x 1 day	2 hours
6	Prayers Congregation	1 hour x 365 days	365 hours
7	Ibadah Camps	3 hours x 2 days	6 hours
8	Qiamulail	12 hours x 1 kali	12 hours
9	Ramadhan Tarawikh prayers	1 hour x 30 days	30 hours
10	<i>Tahlil on Selected Birthdays/Anniversaries</i>	2 hours x 2 weeks	4 hours
	a. MAF Anniversary		
	b. Team members birthdays		
11	Religious classe in surau / mosques after Maghrib prayers	3 hours x 52 weeks	156 hours
12	Extra religious classes (formal – arranged by teams)	2 hours x 52 weeks	104 hours
13	Readings of religious books/materials	1 hour x 52 weeks	52 hours
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>857 HOURS</b>

Source: Burhanuddin Jalal, (2011)

**Development And Implementation of Islamic Education Fardu Ain In The The Malaysian Armed Forces**

Islamic education, in its most basic form, means *tarbiyah Islamiyah*. More deeply, it means efforts taken to know, understand, and appreciate Islam to the point of practising true Islamic teachings as prescribed in the Quran and hadith to become a devout and pious Muslim, which is achievable through guidance, teaching, training, and experience (Zuhairini, 1995). According to Mohd Kamal Hassan (1987), Islamic education is defined as *aqliyyah, jasmaniyyah* dan *ruhiyyah* exercises for the purpose of producing human beings, both man and woman. Abdul Hafiz and Ahmad Munawar (2012) describe Islamic education as being able to improve human life and create personal balance. Muslims should have faith, morals and knowledge; without these features, there will no meanings to the education system, as these features are basic fundamentals and requirements in order to succeed and excel in life.

According to Burhanuddin Jalal (2011), the purpose of Islamic education in the Malaysian Armed Forces is to develop thinking capability of its members and guide their attitude and conduct in their life as individuals and as a community based on true Islamic teachings. As for Arifin (2003), he described Islamic education as having the purpose to institute change through educating individuals with commendable attitude in their personal as well as community life, with the ultimate aim of achieving perfections of the mind and body.

The Malaysian Armed Forces is an essential organization that is akin to being the backbone of the nation. As one of the security agencies tasked with defending the nation from any unwanted intrusion, its preparedness not just in terms of armoury but also in terms of personnel must be scrutinized accordingly. Highly trained personnel, both physically and mentally, are of utmost importance, which is where KAGAT comes into the picture: training personnel emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The development of PIFA module is seen as just the mechanism to instill spritual combat power amongst military personnel in MAF.

To add value to the Fardu Ain Islamic Education module in the contexts of career advancement of members of MAF, KAGAT has proposed to include the module as a prerequisite before members are promoted to a higher rank in all three services in MAF. In response to this proposal, the Armed Forces Council has decreed in its *Perintah Majlis Angkatan Tentera bilangan 1/2013* that as part of the requirements for members of different ranks to be promoted to a higher rank, they shall undergo the PIFA module and pass in the test, as stated below: (Zulkifli Mustafa, 2016).

- a. Promotion from Private to Lance Corporal – Passed PIFA Level 1.
- b. Promotion from Lance Corporal to Corporal – Passed PIFA Level 2.
- c. Promotion from Corporal to Sergeant – Passed PIFA Level 3.
- d. Promotion from Sergeant to Staff Sergeant – Passed PIFA Level 4.
- e. Promotion from Staff Sergeant to Warrant Officer II – Passed PIFA Level 5.

### **Effects Of Fardu Ain Education To Members Of The Malaysian Armed Forces**

Islamic education emphasizes on cultivation of *aqidah* and spiritual enhancement since *aqidah* is the core of Islam. The significance of *aqidah* is mentioned in many Quranic verses and hadith that relate to morality and faith. For instance, “*The believer with the most perfect faith is the one with the moral and character.*” (Imam Ahmad, Juz 3, no. 7406) and “*None of you will believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself.*” (Sahih Bukhari, Vol 1, No 10). In the same manner, Tunku Sarah Tunku Mohd Jiwa once said, as explained by Asmawati Suhid (2005), the application of moral values starts with the essence of *Tauhid* to Allah SWT in order to produce devout human beings with commendable moral values. Mohd Kamal Hassan (1987), in supporting this, added that to identify one’s *Iman* as strong or weak, it can be measured through his attitudes and good behaviours, as good behaviours are a reflection of strong *Iman*.

Hence the implementation of PIFA shall necessarily enhance the emotional and spiritual strength of the military. This is reflected in more members of the military enrolling in PIFA module as it is now one of the requirements for career advancement (promotion to a higher rank). The earlier requirement for every member to fulfill 857 hours per annum for religious activities was regarded by some members as not really necessary; however, having to pass PIFA as a prerequisite before being promoted to a higher rank emphasizes the significance of the module.

Making PIFA as a requirement is now an important matter that must be fulfilled by every member, and this is considered as a means to build and enhance mental and spiritual strength; hence the sudden spike in the number of members attending the PIFA module.

The statistics released by the Religion Departments of the Army and Navy stated that 761 personnel from the Army and 585 personnel from the Navy successfully underwent the PIFA module as of March 2014. Data as of July 2014 from Division 1 Headquarters stated that 640 personnel successfully completed the module within three (3) months (Zulkifli Mustafa, 2016).

Verily, the strength of spiritual fighting spirit comes from faith and belief in religious education, whatever religion that may be. This strength undoubtedly produces strong,

abled, and disciplined lines of armed forces who will fight cooperatively in battles and wars and win them.

The strength in mental and spiritual is the direct result of respective religious nurture and education, without a doubt. This has been proven time and again from the studies of past fighters and warriors who excellently emerged victorious in wars and battles they fought.

Balance in physical and spiritual strength is essential to maximize the ability of an army. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) could not have emphasized this more given his role not just as a messenger of Allah but also as the admiral of his armies. He (pbuh) led the Muslim warriors to 28 battlefields and won 26 of them, the two they lost being *Uhud* and *Hunain*, aptly as a direct result of the thought that they would surely win since there were many of them, and as such, they were undisciplined.

Fazlur Rahman (2001), in describing the strength of the Muslim army during the years of the Prophet's ruling, stated, "*Muhammad (pbuh) was very realistic, so he did not ignore preparations for war or slacken in his efforts. He achieved wonderful balance between the spiritual and the material power.*"

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the efforts to instill Islamic teachings in the Malaysian Armed Forces through PIFA should be continued and improved further. KAGAT, as a division, should be strengthened and reinforced. The significance and relevance of du'a and *ibadah* should be further acknowledged as much as having sophisticated weapons; spiritual and emotional strength should go hand in hand with physical and mental strength. The words of Allah in Surah Al-Anfal verse 45 (8:45) on the sweetness of being able to defeat an enemy says: "*O you who believe, when you face a group (in battle), stand firm and remember Allah abundantly, so that you may be successful.*"

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