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Exploring Digital Learning Opportunities for Muslim Convert Education in Penang, Malaysia

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Abstract

This article examines how digital resources could strengthen the existing Islamic education programme for Muslim converts at Kompleks Darul Hidayah, Permatang Tok Gelam, Penang, Malaysia. Drawing on a critical narrative review of relevant literature and semi-structured interviews with three informants involved in programme management and teaching, the study examines current educational practices and opportunities for integrating digital learning. The findings indicate that the institution delivers education primarily through face-to-face classes covering Islamic creed, Islamic jurisprudence, Prophetic biography, Islamic ethics, and Quranic studies. The study found that digital technology had not been formally integrated into classroom teaching at the time. In response, the article proposes a phased approach that provides basic digital facilities, digitizes existing learning modules, trains educators, and fosters institutional collaboration. The proposed integration aims to complement face-to-face instruction by potentially extending access to educational materials and supporting revision beyond scheduled classes. The study highlights the importance of institutional readiness, appropriate digital resources, and continued educator guidance in strengthening Islamic education for Muslim converts.

Keywords: Muslim Converts, Islamic Education, Digital Learning, Religious Guidance, Digital Technology

Introduction

Education following conversion to Islam requires more than an introduction to religious concepts. It involves gradually acquiring knowledge and practices associated with belief, worship, conduct, and participation in a religious community. In this article, “Muslim converts” refers to individuals who embraced Islam after previously not identifying as Muslims. The Malaysian term “mualaf” overlaps with this description but may carry specific administrative and welfare implications. Abdul et al. (2021) show why the contextual meaning of “mualaf” must be distinguished from the assumption that every convert has the same legal or assistance status. “Muslim converts” is therefore used consistently here as an educational description, without assigning a fixed duration since conversion.

Malaysian scholarship offers useful perspectives on the support required after conversion. Suhid et al. (2021) examined Muslim converts’ perceptions of teachers’ practices, while Abdullah @ Ng Siew Boey et al. (2023) investigated religious understanding and appreciation

in Terengganu. Beyond classroom teaching, Awang and Che Mat (2024) described the informational and integrative roles of guidance centres. Although these studies examine different settings, they suggest evaluating educational provision in terms of both instructional quality and the support available beyond scheduled lessons. This raises a further question about how supplementary learning resources might support continuing education, particularly in institutions where face-to-face instruction remains the primary mode of teaching.

At Kompleks Darul Hidayah, Permatang Tok Gelam, Islamic education for Muslim converts is delivered primarily through face-to-face instruction, while digital technology has not yet been formally integrated into classroom teaching. The question, therefore, is how accessible, carefully reviewed resources might enable learners to revisit lessons without weakening their contact with educators. Integrating appropriate digital resources could give Muslim converts more opportunities to access learning materials, revisit lessons, and reinforce their understanding beyond scheduled classes.

While existing Malaysian studies have examined Muslim convert education, teaching practices, and institutional guidance, opportunities to introduce supplementary digital learning resources within specific educational settings remain an important area for further examination. This study contributes to educational and social science research by examining these opportunities in the context of Kompleks Darul Hidayah and identifying practical priorities for integrating digital resources into its existing educational programme. In doing so, it highlights the importance of institutional readiness and continued educator guidance in supporting the gradual introduction of digital learning.

The article therefore aims to:
(1) discuss the existing educational arrangement reported for Kompleks Darul Hidayah.
(2) assess the educational rationale and limitations of supplementing Muslim convert classes with digital resources.
(3) identify practical and institutional priorities for phased implementation.

Literature Review

This review considers Malaysian research on Muslim convert education, the work of teachers and guidance institutions, and relevant studies of digital learning. Bringing these strands together helps identify which educational priorities existing evidence supports and which still need investigation at Kompleks Darul Hidayah.

Education, Religious Understanding and Continuing Guidance

Muslim convert education involves progressive learning rather than a single event. A literature review by Fakhruddin and Awang (2020), focused on the children of Muslim converts, identified challenges relating to family circumstances and religious knowledge. These findings should not be transferred directly to adult learners at Kompleks Darul Hidayah, but they demonstrate that access to formal teaching is only one part of educational support. In Terengganu, Abdullah @ Ng Siew Boey et al. (2023) reported concerns relating to religious understanding and appreciation among participants in their study and stressed the importance of appropriate teaching methods.

A more recent study of indigenous Muslim converts in Sabah by Md Rasip et al. (2026) identified educational challenges alongside social and administrative concerns. The circumstances described in Sabah may not apply in Penang. However, they strengthen the argument for consulting local learners and educators before determining the form of any supplementary support.

Taken together, these studies suggest that a learning resource's usefulness depends on what it helps a learner do. Notes may make unfamiliar terms easier to revisit, while recordings may support repeated listening. Neither format alone can show whether a learner understands a religious explanation or performs worship correctly. Digital materials should therefore be linked to clear learning aims and opportunities to seek clarification.

Teaching Practices and the Function of Guidance Centres

In a questionnaire study involving 124 Muslim converts from two Malaysian institutions, Suhid et al. (2021) reported generally positive perceptions of teachers' classroom practices. The study highlights teaching methods but provides no direct evidence of instructional quality in Penang. Awang and Che Mat (2024), drawing on interviews with personnel involved in convert management, similarly present Islamic guidance centres as providers of basic religious information and spaces supporting integration. These findings suggest that educators should maintain direct educator–learner relationships when introducing supplementary technologies.

The institutional dimension is equally important. Drawing on library research and content analysis, Sham et al. (2024) discuss infrastructure, teaching modules, and educational personnel as related aspects of Muslim convert education management. Abu Hasan (2025) considers how these elements might be organised within a conceptual management approach in Selangor. These studies raise useful questions for the Penang setting, particularly about facilities, approval of teaching materials, educator preparation, and ongoing support. They do not establish that Kompleks Darul Hidayah faces the same problems.

Digital Resources, Instructional Quality and Access

Ramli et al. (2026), in a Malaysian systematic review of 20 studies, examined instructional models and design approaches used in digital Islamic education. Their synthesis highlights the connections between technology choice, lesson design, and implementation conditions. For the present study, this implies starting with educational aims and the capacity to review and use materials, rather than assuming that a digital format is inherently effective. However, the review does not establish Muslim converts' readiness at Kompleks Darul Hidayah.

Digital learning may extend access to explanations beyond scheduled sessions. Nevertheless, Martin et al.'s (2020) systematic review demonstrates the breadth of issues affecting online teaching, including instructional design, learners, instructors, and organisational support. Tinmaz et al. (2022) similarly show that digital literacy encompasses more than basic access to electronic devices. These reviews are not studies of Malaysian Muslim converts, so their value here is to inform design considerations rather than to predict local outcomes.

The educational value of learning materials depends not only on their format but also on the suitability of the teaching methods employed. Abd Karim et al. (2022), in a study involving

nine Muslim converts, found that participants responded positively to the Iqra' Fast Track Rosnani (IFTaR) method, particularly in facilitating their recognition of Arabic letters and basic Qur'anic reading. Although the study did not examine digital learning, its findings highlight the importance of selecting instructional approaches that respond to learners' educational needs.

Overall, the literature highlights the potential of digital resources to complement existing teaching practices, provided that their development considers learners' educational needs, the suitability of instructional materials, and educators' capacity to support their use. At Kompleks Darul Hidayah, these considerations provide a basis for introducing digital learning resources that support religious understanding and continuity of learning beyond scheduled classes.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based approach supported by semi-structured interviews with three informants at Kompleks Darul Hidayah, Penang, Malaysia. The narrative literature review draws on selected Malaysian studies concerning Muslim convert education, religious guidance and institutional management, along with relevant research on digital learning and instructional design. The selected literature was examined and synthesised to identify educational considerations and opportunities for integrating digital resources into existing teaching practices.

The three informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in Muslim convert education at Kompleks Darul Hidayah. They comprised one programme management officer who also serves as an educator and two educators responsible for teaching Muslim converts. The interviews aimed to gather contextual information about the organisation of educational programmes, current teaching practices, and the use of digital technology in educational delivery.

Information obtained from the interviews was used to describe the existing educational arrangements at Kompleks Darul Hidayah and to provide institutional context for the literature-based discussion. The study subsequently draws on relevant literature to identify practical opportunities to introduce supplementary digital resources, with particular attention to learning materials, teaching facilities, educator preparation, and institutional collaboration.

Findings and Discussion

This section examines existing educational practices at Kompleks Darul Hidayah and opportunities to integrate digital technology into Muslim convert education. Drawing on information obtained from three informants involved in management and teaching and relevant academic literature, the discussion focuses on current teaching practices, the potential use of supplementary digital learning materials, educator preparation, and institutional collaboration. It gives particular attention to practical measures that could strengthen educational delivery while maintaining the importance of face-to-face religious guidance.

Existing Educational Delivery and the Place of Digital Technology

Islamic education for Muslim converts at Kompleks Darul Hidayah is primarily delivered through face-to-face classes covering Islamic creed (aqidah), Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), Prophetic biography (sirah), Islamic ethics (akhlaq), and Quranic studies. Information supplied by the three informants indicates that digital technology was not formally integrated into classroom teaching at the time of the study. This presents an opportunity to explore how digital resources could complement existing educational practices, particularly by providing additional learning materials beyond scheduled classes.

Suhid et al. (2021) support the importance of maintaining face-to-face instruction by emphasising the significance of teachers' instructional practices in Muslim convert education. Similarly, Awang and Che Mat (2024) highlight the role of Islamic guidance centres in providing religious knowledge and facilitating social integration. These studies suggest that digital resources should complement, not replace, direct religious guidance. For Kompleks Darul Hidayah, supplementary materials could enable learners to revisit lessons and reinforce their understanding while educators continue to provide explanations, demonstrations, and corrective feedback.

Research on Quranic education further highlights the importance of appropriate teaching methods and evaluating learning outcomes. Abd Karim et al. (2022), in their study of the Iqra' Fast Track Rosnani (IFTaR) method involving nine Muslim converts, found that participants responded positively to its approach to basic Quranic reading. Similarly, Abdul Hamid et al. (2025), in a study involving 120 adult participants, reported improvements in self-reported understanding of tajwid and related learning indicators following a structured Quranic education programme. Although these studies examined different educational settings and approaches, they underscore the importance of selecting suitable instructional methods and assessing learners' progress. These considerations are particularly relevant to the proposed development of supplementary digital learning materials at Kompleks Darul Hidayah.

Digitising Existing Modules without Replacing Educators

A practical starting point for digital integration at Kompleks Darul Hidayah would be to digitise selected lessons from the existing curriculum. Concise electronic notes and presentation slides could support revision of Islamic creed and jurisprudence, while approved audio recordings could facilitate repeated Quranic recitation practice. Short instructional videos could reinforce religious practices demonstrated during face-to-face classes, whereas digital materials on the Prophetic biography and Islamic ethics could encourage further reflection and discussion. These resources could extend learning opportunities beyond scheduled classes while keeping educators central in providing religious guidance.

Developing digital materials requires careful attention to the accuracy, clarity, and suitability of religious content. Materials should be aligned with the existing curriculum, presented in language appropriate to learners' levels of understanding, and designed to support specific learning objectives. Abd Karim et al. (2022) demonstrate the importance of appropriate instructional approaches in developing basic Quranic reading skills among Muslim converts. Similarly, Ramli et al. (2026) highlight the significance of instructional design and pedagogical considerations in digital Islamic education. Together, these studies provide a rationale for

selecting and developing digital resources that support established teaching practices rather than introducing technology without clear educational purposes.

At Kompleks Darul Hidayah, the initial development of digital resources could therefore focus on a limited number of teacher-approved modules, accompanied by practical training and opportunities for learner feedback. This approach would let educators assess the materials' suitability, identify needed improvements, and gradually expand their use based on institutional capacity and educational needs.

Classroom Facilities, Access and Educator Preparation

The gradual integration of digital technology at Kompleks Darul Hidayah should begin with an assessment of existing classroom facilities and available resources. Depending on institutional needs and financial capacity, basic equipment such as laptops, projectors, audio systems, and internet connectivity could be introduced or upgraded to support teaching activities. Tablets may be considered at a later stage where their educational value and practical necessity can be established. The assessment should also consider how learners might access supplementary materials, including whether offline resources, different language options, or smaller file sizes would be appropriate.

Educator preparation is equally important to the effective use of digital resources. In addition to basic technical skills, educators would benefit from training in selecting reliable religious content, adapting learning materials to different levels of understanding, and integrating digital resources into face-to-face instruction. Tinmaz et al. (2022) identify digital competencies, skills, and digital thinking as important dimensions of digital literacy, while Sham et al. (2024) discuss institutional and management issues affecting Muslim convert education in Malaysia. These considerations suggest that digital integration at Kompleks Darul Hidayah should be supported by appropriate training, manageable teaching resources, and institutional commitment. Beginning with a limited collection of carefully selected materials would provide a practical foundation for gradual development.

Institutional Collaboration and Proposed Implementation

Institutional collaboration could play an important role in supporting the gradual integration of digital resources into Muslim convert education at Kompleks Darul Hidayah. Abu Bakar and Ismail (2018) highlight the importance of cooperation between government agencies and non-governmental organisations in managing Muslim convert affairs in Malaysia, including the provision of religious education. In Penang, potential collaboration with the Penang Islamic Religious Affairs Department (JHEAIPP), the Penang Islamic Religious Council (MAINPP), Universiti Sains Malaysia and relevant community organisations could provide opportunities for developing educational materials, strengthening educator training and evaluating digital learning initiatives. Such collaboration would let the institution draw on relevant expertise and resources while ensuring educational activities remain aligned with its existing responsibilities and objectives.

Table 1 outlines the proposed priorities for the gradual integration of digital resources into the existing educational programme at Kompleks Darul Hidayah. The phased approach emphasises institutional readiness, appropriate resource development, and ongoing evaluation to support informed decisions before further implementation.

Table 1
Proposed Phased Priorities for Digital Support at Kompleks Darul Hidayah

	Priority	Proposed Action	Evidence Needed Before Proceeding
1.	Facilities	Review existing laptops, projectors, audio equipment, and internet connectivity.	Facilities inventory, budget, and maintenance requirements.
2.	Learning Materials	Develop teacher-reviewed digital notes, slides, interactive PDFs, and selected audio or video resources.	Content accuracy, language suitability, and accessibility.
3.	Educator Support	Provide practical training in digital teaching and supplementary learning activities.	Staff training needs, responsibilities, and workload.
4.	Limited Pilot	Introduce selected digital materials alongside existing face-to-face classes.	Learner and educator feedback, accessibility and comprehension.
5.	Revision and Partnerships	Refine digital materials and explore institutional collaboration before wider implementation.	Pilot findings, institutional responsibilities and sustainable resources.

Before introducing supplementary digital resources, Muslim convert learners and educators should be consulted to identify their educational needs, preferences and practical requirements. A small-scale pilot could then be conducted to assess the accessibility and suitability of the materials, their usefulness for independent revision, the implications for educators' workload and learners' understanding of the lessons. Findings from this initial evaluation would inform refinements to the resources and help determine their potential for wider implementation at Kompleks Darul Hidayah.

Limitations and Future Research

This study draws primarily on a narrative review of selected literature, supplemented by contextual information obtained through semi-structured interviews with three informants involved in education at Kompleks Darul Hidayah. Although these interviews provided insights into existing teaching practices and the potential integration of digital resources, the study did not directly examine Muslim convert learners' experiences, educational preferences, or readiness to engage with digital learning. Furthermore, the reviewed studies were conducted across different educational settings and learner populations, which may influence the applicability of their findings to Kompleks Darul Hidayah.

Future research could build on these findings by examining existing teaching facilities and exploring Muslim convert learners' and educators' perspectives on digital learning. Particular attention should be given to the suitability of instructional materials, language preferences, accessibility, and the practical requirements of integrating digital resources into existing classes. A small-scale pilot involving selected digital materials could subsequently evaluate their educational usefulness, ease of use, and implications for teaching practices. Further comparative studies involving other Muslim convert education centres could also provide valuable insights into approaches that may be adapted to different institutional contexts.

Conclusion

This study highlights the potential of digital learning to strengthen Islamic education for Muslim converts at Kompleks Darul Hidayah, Penang, while preserving the importance of face-to-face instruction and direct religious guidance. Drawing on the institution's existing educational practices and relevant academic literature, the study identifies opportunities to develop supplementary digital resources for Islamic creed, jurisprudence, Prophetic biography, Islamic ethics, and Quranic studies. A gradual approach involving the assessment of teaching facilities, development of appropriate learning materials, educator preparation and institutional collaboration offers a practical direction for integrating digital technology into the existing educational programme. Consultation with learners and educators, followed by a small-scale pilot, would help refine these initiatives according to educational needs and institutional capacity. The study contributes to discussions on Muslim convert education by outlining a context-sensitive approach to digital integration that prioritises pedagogical relevance, institutional readiness and the continued role of educators in supporting religious understanding and learning.

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