

**THE HISTORY OF ISLAMIC MAGAZINE PUBLISHING IN  
MALAYSIA BEFORE INDEPENDENCE: A SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO MAGAZINES WITH ISLAMIC  
EDUCATIONAL THEMES**

***SEJARAH PENERBITAN MAJALAH BERGENRE ISLAM DI MALAYSIA  
SEBELUM MERDEKA: SATU TUMPUAN KHAS KEPADA MAJALAH  
BERTEMAKAN PENDIDIKAN ISLAM***

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**Abstract**

The emergence of Islamic magazines in Malaya can be traced back to as early as 1906, marking a significant development in the dissemination of religious knowledge through print culture. Among these publications were magazines with a distinct Islamic educational focus, produced primarily by madrasahs with the aim of enhancing students' understanding of Islam and supporting academic engagement during the pre-independence era. This study seeks to explore the historical trajectory of Islamic magazine publishing in pre-independence Malaya, with particular attention to publications that reflected Islamic educational themes. This is a qualitative study based on historical research, adopting a library-based approach for data collection and applying thematic analysis for data interpretation. The findings reveal that out of a total of 41 Islamic-genre magazines published during the pre-independence period, eight were specifically centred around Islamic educational themes. Each of these eight magazines displayed unique characteristics in terms of objectives, content focus, writing approach, and economic considerations. The growth of magazines in this category was largely driven by the wave of Islamic reformism pioneered by the *Kaum Muda*—a group of individuals with religious educational backgrounds from the Middle East, who, upon returning to Malaya, established madrasahs as a means to implement their reformist ideals. Hence, the decline in the number of such magazines as Malaysia approached independence in 1957 can be attributed to a significant shift in the priorities of madrasahs led by the *Kaum Muda* figures who redirected their efforts towards political engagement and nationalist movements, rather than continuing with educational publishing.

**Keywords:** Kaum Muda; Madrasah; Malay magazines; Malay publications; Muslim media.

**Abstrak**

*Kemunculan majalah bergenre agama Islam di Tanah Melayu dapat dikesan seawal tahun 1906, sekali gus menandakan perkembangan penting dalam penyebaran ilmu agama melalui medium percetakan. Dalam penerbitan bahan-bahan bercetak khususnya majalah, terdapat majalah yang memfokuskan pendidikan Islam secara khusus yang diterbitkan oleh institusi madrasah dengan tujuan mempertingkatkan pemahaman pelajar terhadap agama Islam serta menyokong penglibatan akademik pada era sebelum kemerdekaan. Sehubungan dengan itu, kajian ini bertujuan*

*menelusuri perkembangan sejarah penerbitan majalah Islam di Tanah Melayu sebelum merdeka, dengan penekanan khusus terhadap majalah yang memaparkan tema pendidikan Islam. Kajian ini bersifat kualitatif berasaskan penyelidikan sejarah, menggunakan pendekatan kepustakaan bagi pengumpulan data dan kaedah analisis tematik untuk mentafsir maklumat. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa daripada sejumlah 41 majalah bergenre agama Islam yang diterbitkan dalam tempoh tersebut di mana lapan daripadanya memberi tumpuan khusus kepada tema pendidikan Islam. Setiap satu daripada lapan majalah tersebut menampilkan ciri tersendiri dari segi objektif, fokus kandungan, pendekatan penulisan dan pertimbangan ekonomi. Perkembangan majalah dalam kategori ini banyak dipacu oleh gelombang gerakan Islam yang diketengahkan oleh golongan Kaum Muda iaitu golongan berpendidikan agama dari Timur Tengah. Apabila golongan ini kembali ke Tanah Melayu, mereka telah menubuhkan institusi madrasah sebagai wadah menyebarkan idealisme Islam. Oleh itu, kemerosotan jumlah majalah bertemakan pendidikan Islam menjelang kemerdekaan pada tahun 1957 berkait rapat dengan perubahan ketara dalam keutamaan madrasah yang dipimpin oleh tokoh-tokoh Kaum Muda, apabila berlakunya peralihan tumpuan kepada gerakan politik dan nasionalisme berbanding meneruskan usaha penerbitan berbentuk Pendidikan.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Kaum Muda; Madrasah; Majalah Melayu; Media Islam, Penerbitan Melayu*

## INTRODUCTION

Magazines represent one of the key forms of print media that played a vital role in disseminating information and knowledge to the Malay community in Malaysia during the pre-independence era. As a popular medium of the time, magazines were also utilised by religious scholars (ulama) to convey Islamic knowledge, beginning with the publication of *al-Imam* in 1906 (Sarwan et al. 2020). Following the launch of *al-Imam*, various individuals and organisations began engaging in the publication of magazines with Islamic religious themes as an alternative means of imparting religious knowledge to specific segments of the readership (Mahfood & Musa 2021).

One of the key contributors to the publication of Islamic genre magazines was the madrasah institution. Fundamentally, madrasahs are Islamic educational institutions that emerged in the Malay Peninsula in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These institutions integrated religious sciences (such as *aqidah*, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith* and Arabic language) with modern subjects including mathematics, science and English (Mas'ud et al. 2019). As part of their efforts to enhance students' understanding of Islam and to support academic engagement, many madrasahs took the initiative to publish magazines as supplementary educational resources (Muhamad & Othman 2020).

Islamic education, at its core, refers to the systematic effort to impart religious knowledge, with a strong emphasis on worship (*ibadah*), creed (*aqidah*), and ethics (*akhlaq*) (Jamil 2022). Within this context, Islamic magazines with an educational focus are those that feature learning materials designed to reinforce the educational process, deepen students' understanding of Islam and raise awareness of the significance of religious knowledge—particularly among the students of madrasah (Kasa et al. 2025).

However, previous historical research has often generalised the study of Islamic genre publication. Such generalisations tend to portray Islamic magazines solely as instruments of religious outreach (*da'wah*) or as platforms for Islamic reformist discourse, while overlooking their role as educational vehicles (Kasa et al. 2024; Sarwan et al. 2020; Sharif et al. 2021). In particular, magazines with Islamic educational themes exhibit distinct characteristics and developed in parallel with the establishment of madrasahs as emerging Islamic educational institutions in the early twentieth century.

In light of the above, this study aims to analyse the historical development of Islamic magazine publishing, with particular reference to magazines featuring Islamic educational themes during the pre-independence era in Malaysia. This research is significant as it offers a more nuanced understanding of the educational functions of Islamic magazines, highlighting their differences that can be observed in terms of publication aims, content focus, writing styles, and economic models that distinguish magazines with Islamic educational themes from other Islamic magazines.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is a historical study employing a qualitative research methodology. To collect data, the study adopts a library-based approach, utilising both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources such as *al-Raja* (1925), *Jasa* (1925), *Wihdat al-Madaris* (1935) and *Majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud* (1950) were obtained from the National Archives of Malaysia and the Za’ba Library, Universiti Malaya. For data analysis, the study applies thematic analysis. To implement this, the researcher identified and constructed three key analytical dimensions which are the themes of the magazines, the content focus and the writing style. These dimensions were formulated based on generalisations that reflect shared criteria across magazines within the same category. The construction of these categories was subsequently reviewed and interpreted inductively, in line with the approach recommended by Byrne (2022).

In determining the special criteria of Islamic educational theme magazines, this study adopts the concept proposed by Hamid (2012), Adnan (2022) and Kasa et al. (2024) which assert that a magazine should be classified based on its underlying editorial idealism and economic considerations. The editorial idealism can be discerned through three principal criteria. The first relates to the publication’s objective and the second pertains to its content focus—both of which collectively reflect the magazine’s core thematic orientation. The third criterion concerns the writing approach employed, which offers insights into the intended readership, tone, and discursive style. In addition, economic considerations constitute a fourth criterion. These include aspects such as circulation, distribution and the publishing body or sponsor responsible for financing the publication. Taken together, these criteria not only serve to identify the distinctive features of Islamic educational magazines but also provide a nuanced understanding of their functions within the broader educational landscape of pre-independence Malaysia.

## RESULTS

Fundamentally, a total of eight Islamic magazines with an educational theme were published in the period leading up to Malaysia’s independence (1906–1957). The titles, along with their respective years of publication are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: List of Magazines with An Islamic Educational Theme

Period	Total	Magazine Titles (Year of Publication)
Before World War II (1906–1941)	6	<i>Al-Raja</i> (1925), <i>Jasa</i> (1927), <i>Panduan</i> (1927), <i>Wihdat al-Madaris</i> (1935), <i>Devan Pergaulan</i> (1940) & <i>Seruan Ihya</i> (1941).
After World War II (1945–1957)	2	<i>Majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud</i> (1950) & <i>Risalah</i> (1954)
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	

Sources: Researcher’s analysis.

The data presented in Table 1 reveals a concentration of Islamic educational magazine publications during the pre-World War II period, with six out of the eight titles appearing between 1906 and 1941. This indicates a strong momentum in Islamic educational discourse prior to the war, largely driven by Madrasah al-Mashoor in Penang which was responsible for several publications including *al-Raja* in 1925 and *Devan Pergaulan* in 1940. These were followed by the publication of *Jasa* in 1927 by Madrasah al-Attas in Johor Bahru and *Panduan* in the same year by Madrasah al-Idrisiah in Kuala Kangsar. Meanwhile *Wihdat al-Madaris* published in 1935 by an association of Islamic teacher in Malaya based in Madrasah al-Mashoor. The final magazine to be published before the outbreak of the Second World War was *Seruan Ihya*, issued in 1941 by Madrasah al-Ihya al-Sharif in Gunung Semanggol, Perak. The post-war period (1945–1957) witnessed a marked decline, with only two magazines published. Maahad al-Mahmud in Alor Setar, Kedah, published *Majalah al-Maabad al-*

*Mahmud* in 1950, followed by the publication of *Risalah* in 1954 by Madrasah al-‘Ulum al-Sharī‘ah in Bagan Datuk, Perak. The cover designs of several magazines are illustrated as follows.



Figure 1. Cover Design of Magazines with Islamic Educational Themes (*Al-Raja*, *Jasa* and *Majalah al-Mahad al-Mahmud*).

Sources: Collection of Za'ba Library, Universiti Malaya.

## DISCUSSION

Basically, magazines with Islamic educational themes published during the era of pre-independence Malaysia have their own specific criteria. These criteria are what qualify the magazines listed in Table 1 as those with an Islamic educational theme. They are not categorised as such merely because they were published by an educational association or madrasahs which had emerged as new Islamic educational institutions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rather, their classification is based on clearly defined characteristics inherent in the magazines themselves. The following outlines the specific criteria that distinguish magazines within this category.

## MAGAZINE OBJECTIVE

The first distinguishing criterion of magazines within this category, as compared to other forms of Islamic publications, lies in their objective—namely, to provide Islamic religious knowledge specifically tailored for madrasah students. As Islamic educational institutions, madrasahs utilised magazines as a medium to cultivate reading habits among their students. In addition, these magazines also served as platforms for students to develop writing skills by producing articles that reflected their understanding of the religious subjects studied in the madrasah.

*Al-Raja* was the first magazine to be published under this category. Its primary objective was to serve the dissemination of Islamic religious knowledge to its readers (Adnan 2014). Although *al-Raja* did not explicitly state its target audience, the fact that it was published by Madrasah al-Mashoor clearly indicates that it was intended for madrasah students. This is evidenced by four key points. First, the magazine offered subscription discounts specifically for students who wished to subscribe to *al-Raja* (Peluang yang Baik 1928). Second, it is clearly stated on the front cover that the magazine was written and published by the students of Madrasah al-Mashoor. Third, the principal of Madrasah al-Mashoor at the time, Abbas Bakar Rafiee, actively encouraged the publication of the magazine as a means of promoting a culture of reading and writing among students (Muhamad & Othman 2020). This initiative aimed to nurture students' creativity and intellectual engagement through written expression. Fourth, in one issue of *al-Raja*, a student expressed support for the magazine's republication in 1928 after a period of inactivity (Tuan Pengarang 1928). This serves as clear evidence that madrasah students were indeed among the magazine's readership and were actively engaged with its content. These four forms of evidence collectively demonstrate that *al-Raja* was primarily directed at a readership comprising madrasah students, despite its stated objective being general in nature. Inevitably, the publication assumed the responsibility of serving as a platform through which students

could access religious knowledge, aligning with the educational function inherent to its institutional origins.

Taking *Wihdat al-Madaris* as another example, this magazine explicitly stated its objectives as: (i) encouraging the pursuit of knowledge among students, (ii) strengthening the bonds of solidarity among madrasah teachers, (iii) nurturing students' intellectual growth, (iv) familiarising readers with the madrasah syllabus, and (v) training students in the Arabic language (Tujuan Majalah 1935). This reflects an intentional editorial direction aimed at integrating the magazine into the broader teaching and learning process within the madrasah system, reinforcing both student development and institutional cohesion. Even though it was published by an association of Islamic teachers, it nevertheless supported the mission and educational goals of the Madrasah al-Mashoor as the association were also based in the same madrasah.

Another example of a magazine published after World War II is *Majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud*. The primary aim of this publication was to provide an intellectual platform that could stimulate the growth of knowledge among students. Authored by madrasah students themselves, the magazine was intended to shape student character by emphasising core moral values such as courtesy and proper conduct (*adab*), while also preparing them to play an active role in future societal development and service to Islam (Rencana Pengarang 1950).

## CONTENT FOCUS

Given that the primary objective of magazines within this category was to provide Islamic religious knowledge specifically for madrasah students, their content was naturally directed towards materials that aligned with this aim. The featured content largely focused on Islamic teachings appropriate for student-level comprehension, typically concentrating on core aspects of the religion such as worship (*ibadah*), creed (*aqidah*), and ethics (*akhlaq*).

In addition to these, the magazines also included content designed to support the madrasah teaching and learning process—most notably in the areas of Arabic and English language instruction. This indicates that magazines in this category were not only religious in purpose, but also functioned as holistic educational tools that complemented the formal curriculum delivered within madrasahs.

For instance, *al-Raja* featured content related to acts of worship (*ibadah*), prophetic stories, lessons on *tajwid*, and the Arabic language (Adnan 2014). According to Muhamad (2016), the magazine also addressed a broader range of topics, including religious matters, literature, education, nationalism, school syllabi, examination schedules, and advertisements for student enrolment at the madrasah. On the other hand, *Wihdat al-Madaris* included dedicated sections tailored for students, such as included dedicated sections for students such as “Halaman Ilmu Tauhid” (Page of Theology), quranic exegesis, “al-Hadith” as well as Arabic language instruction through columns like “Sahifah al-Ta’lim” and “Sahifah al-Insya” (Isi Kandungan 1935).

*Majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud* also focused on Islamic educational themes, as evidenced by the presence of sections such as knowledge section and education section. Notably, the magazine uniquely featured Islamic educational articles written in both English and Arabic. In its second issue, for example, articles in these languages discussed topics such as the importance of seeking knowledge, the purpose of education in Islam, and strategies for becoming an excellent student (“Isi Kandungan” 1950).

The content focus of the aforementioned magazines indicates that, although Adnan (2014) suggests that madrasah-published magazines were also intended for the general public or wider readership, the actual content of these publications clearly reveals a targeted emphasis on madrasah students as the primary readership. For example, *Majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud* explicitly stated the following in its editorial (Rencana Pengarang 1950):

*“Sesungguhnya dalam usaha yang pertama, majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud telah menerima sambutan yang baik dari pembaca-pembaca yang bukan sahaja terdiri daripada pelajar malah segenap lapisan orang ramai yang ingin membantu kita dalam usaha kita menuju kemajuan...”*

[Translation: Indeed, in this initial effort, *Majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud* received a positive response from readers, consisting not only of students but also of people from all walks of life who wished to support us in our endeavour towards progress].

This further reinforces the researcher’s view that magazines within this category were indeed published primarily for madrasah students, even though their content was occasionally general in nature and accessible to the wider public. The inclusion of articles related to Arabic or English language instruction clearly indicates that the intended audience was more specifically aligned with madrasah students. It is important to note that Arabic and English were not commonly studied by the broader Malay community at the time. This fact was affirmed in *Majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud*, which stated that “the Malay society in Malaya is still very far removed from the Arabic language” (Rencana Pengarang 1950).

Arabic was typically studied only by those with a religious education background, whether through *pondok* (traditional Islamic schools) or modern madrasahs. A clear distinction exists between the two: *pondok* institutions focused exclusively on religious instruction, excluding modern subjects such as English, whereas madrasahs sought to balance both religious and modern knowledge (Sulong 2015). The presence of English language sections in these magazines strongly suggests that the intended readers were none other than madrasah students who were already studying the language as part of their curriculum.

This indicates that, despite their occasional appeal to a general audience, the primary function and design of these magazines were pedagogical in nature, specifically tailored to support the educational needs of madrasah students. The inclusion of subject-specific content such as Arabic and English languages not commonly studied by the wider Malay population, further affirms that these publications were deeply embedded within the madrasah learning syllabus.

## WRITING APPROACH

Given that magazines within this category were often authored by the students themselves, their writing style was generally simple, instructional, and reflective of the students’ linguistic abilities and educational level. For instance, *al-Raja* and *Majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud* explicitly stated that their content was written by madrasah students from Madrasah al-Mashoor in Penang and Maahad al-Mahmud in Alor Setar, respectively (Bantu-Membantu 1928; Kata Aluan 1950).

Although Adnan (2014) notes that other magazines, such as *Jasa*, were led by an editor-in-chief who was a teacher at Madrasah al-Attas, the involvement of students in the writing and content development process remained significant. In the case of *Panduan*, for example, both students and teachers at Madrasah al-Idrisiah played an active role in its production. This demonstrates that, regardless of the editorial leadership, the student voice remained central to the magazine’s construction and messaging.

Another clear example of student-oriented authorship and tone can be seen in *Majalah al-Maabad al-Mahmud*, particularly in the English-language which states (How to be a Good Student 1950):

“All pupils of al-Maabad al-Mahmud should endeavour to be good students. They should work hard at their lessons and follow the traditions of their schools. A student must make plans for his study. He should draw up a time-table of his daily work outside school hours... He should go to bed early and rise early. Remember the proverb, ‘early to bed and early to rise make a man healthy, wealthy and wise.’ When he studies a lesson, he must concentrate his

mind on it and try to understand it fully. If he does not understand anything, he should ask his teacher and parents.”

This excerpt clearly illustrates the simple writing style typical of student authorship. The language used is straightforward, the sentences are structurally basic, and the vocabulary is limited to everyday terms suitable for school-level readers. The instructional tone—offering practical advice on study habits and personal discipline—aligns with the pedagogical goals of the magazine and reflects the maturity and language proficiency expected of a madrasah student at that time. Moreover, the integration of common proverbs and moral guidance further supports the notion that these magazines were both educational and formative, reinforcing not only academic values but also character development in a manner accessible to peers.

Unlike other magazines, *Jasa* which although authored by teachers at Madrasah al-Attas and not involving students as contributors, it retained a writing approach that was accessible and easy for students to understand. The magazine consistently featured content related to Islamic practices of worship (ibadah) through a regular column titled *Pelajaran Fiqh* (Fiqh Lessons). This section presented basic religious teachings in a clear and structured manner. One example can be seen in an article discussing ablution (wudu') as illustrated in the following excerpt (Wudhu 1930):

*“Wudhu itu ialah suatu jalan yang meluaskan sembahyang. Tiada sah sembahyang dengan ketiadaannya, dan dikehendaki dengan wudhu itu ialah membasuh beberapa anggota tertentu. Fardhu wudhu itu enam (i) niat mengangkat badas kecil di dalam bati tatkala air sembahyang ke muka, (ii) membasuh sekalian muka, lebarnya di antara dua punting telinga, panjangnya daripada tempat tumbuh rambut (dahi) yang biasa binggga akhir dagu, (iii) membasuh dua tangan serta siku, (iv) menyapu setengah daripada kepala, (v) membasuh dua kaki serta dua buku lali dan (vi) membuat bagaimana susunan di atas ini tertib.”*

[Translation: Wudu' is a means that enables one to perform prayer, as prayer is not valid without it. Wudu' involves washing specific parts of the body as prescribed. The obligatory components of wudu' are six: first, the intention (niyyah) in the heart to remove minor impurity at the moment the ablution water touches the face; second, washing the entire face — with the width measured between the two earlobes and the length from the usual hairline (forehead) down to the bottom of the chin; third, washing both hands including the elbows; fourth, wiping a portion of the head; fifth, washing both feet including the ankles; and sixth, performing these acts in the correct sequence (tartib)].

This excerpt indicates that the writing is organised in a list format with simple and sequential sentence structures. The content is delivered in a descriptive manner that is both informative and instructional, without lengthy elaboration or rhetorical language. The choice of vocabulary is basic and direct, aligning with the educational function that underpins the magazine. This approach shows that although the article was written by a teacher, the style of delivery was still adapted to suit the students' level—maintaining a balance between accuracy of religious knowledge and ease of understanding.

## ECONOMIC CONSIDERATION

All eight magazines were typically funded by the madrasah. As madrasahs functioned as privately run Islamic educational institutions, the publication of these magazines served as a means to generate income. Consequently, most of the magazines were sold at a set price. For example, *al-Raja* and *Jasa* were sold at RM0.25 per copy, with an annual subscription priced at RM2.50, inclusive of a RM0.50 discount (Peluang yang Baik 1928; Pemberitahuan 1930). In contrast, *Dewan Pergaulan* was priced more affordably at RM0.15 per copy, *Panduan* at only RM0.20 and *Wibdat al-Madaris* at RM 0.20 with a special 50% discount offered to student buyers (Adnan 2014).

According to *al-Maahad al-Mahmud* magazine, the sale of the magazine—although aimed at enhancing students' religious knowledge—required a higher operating budget. This was clearly

emphasised in the magazine itself, as stated in the following editorial excerpt (Rencana Pengarang 1950):

*“Begitulah juga dalam soal harga majalah kita. Kita bersusah hati-tetapi kita terpaksa juga menjalankan langkah itu kerana memandangkan kepentingan hidup. Majalah kita untuk menghadapi zaman-zaman yang akan ditempuhnya ini...sebabnya adalah oleh soal permulaan-harga gambar-gambar-blok-blok-perutusan yang jauh dan lain-lain lagi.”*

[Translation: It is the same with the matter of our magazine’s price. We are troubled by it — but we are forced to take this step because of the demands of livelihood. Our magazine must face the times ahead... the reason lies in matters such as initial costs — image prices, printing blocks, distant deliveries, and so on].

This shows that despite the magazine’s educational and religious objectives, financial considerations remained an unavoidable reality. The editorial reveals a degree of tension between the ideal of offering accessible religious content and the practical costs of production and distribution. By acknowledging expenses such as image printing, block-making, and long-distance postage, the publication illustrates the broader economic pressures faced by privately funded religious institutions at the time.

In the researcher’s view, this is the reasons why some magazine with the same themes applying advertisements as a supplementary means of financial support. For instance, *Jasa* featured an advertisement for a distance learning programme via post in 1929, offering courses in Arabic and English at a monthly fee of RM1.00. Those who registered using a coupon found in the magazine were eligible for a discounted rate of RM0.75. Approximately 626 students enrolled in the programme by 1930 (Abdul Latiff et al. 2018). Another example is *al-Raja*, which advertised various services including Penang Hotel and Kwong Tuck Tailor (Penang 1928). These advertisements demonstrate that, while maintaining their educational and religious missions, the magazines pragmatically engaged with commercial strategies to sustain their operations and reach a wider readership.

However, the circulation of these magazines was typically very low. According to Adnan (2013; 2014), magazines in this category had a print run of only around 500 to 1,000 copies per issue. This figure lags significantly behind that of Islamic magazines with reformist themes such as *al-Imam* and *al-Qalam*, which recorded circulations between 3,000 and 5,000 copies (Sarwan et al. 2020; Sharif et al. 2022). When compared with magazines of other genres, the gap becomes even more apparent. For instance, *Album Malaya Merdeka* (political genre) had a circulation of 8,000 copies, *Film Raya* (entertainment genre) with 15,000 copies, *Hiboran Kanak-Kanak* (children’s and educational genre) with 30,000 copies and *Kenchana* (general interest) with 4,500 copies (Adnan & Rahamad 2014).

Based on researcher’s views, this significant disparity in circulation may be attributed to several interrelated factors. Firstly, religious school-based magazines were generally limited in reach, often targeting only the internal community of a specific madrasah or its immediate network. Secondly, the lack of commercial infrastructure and marketing resources placed these publications at a disadvantage compared to popular or mass-market magazines. Thirdly, the content often focused on Islamic education which catered to a niche readership and lacked the broad appeal that entertainment or general interest magazines offered. As a result, despite their educational value, religious magazines remained marginal in terms of print circulation and public reach.

## **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE MAGAZINE**

The principal foundation underpinning the emergence of magazines with an Islamic educational theme was the Islamic reform movement led by the *Kaum Muda*. According to Roff (1994), *Kaum Muda* refers to a group inspired by the Islamic reformist movements of the Middle East, having been exposed to such ideas during their studies abroad. Influenced by this intellectual current, they became committed to addressing the socio-cultural stagnation faced by the Malay community under colonial rule. One of the key areas of focus was education. In response to limited access to English-medium

schools and the narrow religious-only curriculum of the traditional Islamic school's system known as pondok, the *Kaum Muda* established madrasahs as an alternative form of Islamic education that integrated both religious and modern subjects (Hamimi & Saat 2020). From this institutional base, the publication of magazines emerged as a natural extension of their reformist agenda. These publications served as tools to disseminate ideas and promote educational reform as Roff (1994) affirms:

“The new print culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with greatly enhanced communications with the Middle East and the rest of Islamic Southeast Asia, fostered production of newspapers, journals and other publications, some directly associated with madrasahs, that served, especially, the agenda of the Islamic reformists, and also found expression in a host of voluntary associations for self-help, educational, and eventually political purposes in the Islamic interest.”

From this excerpt, it is evident that the emergence of print culture played a pivotal role in advancing the reformist mission of the *Kaum Muda*. However, magazines within the category of Islamic educational themes did not advocate for religious purification or the rejection of ritual innovations (*bid'ah*) as promoted by *al-Imam*, which was first published in 1906. Nor did these magazines directly address Malay social issues in the same way as *Pengasuh*, established in 1918 (Kasa et al. 2025). Instead, their primary objective was the intellectual and religious development of madrasah students. This is reflected in both the content and the writing approach, which were pedagogically oriented. As such, these magazines functioned primarily as educational tools within the madrasah environment, despite the fact that madrasahs themselves were institutions largely shaped by *Kaum Muda* ideologies.

The decision to disseminate Islamic knowledge through magazines was a strategic one, given that print media was the most accessible and effective platform for mass communication at the time. This is clearly illustrated in a statement from *al-Johoriah*, a magazine published in 1932, which emphasised the influence of print as follows (Al-Johoriah 1932):

*“Nyatalah surat khabar atau majalah jadi penyeru yang lebih mudah dan segera sampai serta-merta ceruk-meruk dunia kerana mengejut dan memimpin bangsanya kepada sebaik-baik haluan kerana kita dapati kebanyakan pengeluar-pengeluar surat khabar dan majalah itu sangat khidmat akan bangsanya...”*

[Translation: It is clear that newspapers or magazines serve as a more convenient and immediate medium to reach even the remotest corners of the world, as they awaken and guide their nation towards the best possible path, since we find that most newspaper and magazine publishers are deeply devoted to serving their people...].

From this excerpt, it is evident that magazines had become a prevailing medium of the time for disseminating information, including Islamic religious knowledge. In response to this trend, madrasahs published approximately six magazines in this category prior to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1941. Notably, three of these were published by Madrasah al-Mashoor and an association of Islamic teacher based on the same madrasah. This can be attributed to the institution's strong emphasis on Arabic language instruction. In order to achieve proficiency, the madrasah encouraged practical activities such as speaking and writing in Arabic. As a result, many students from other madrasahs across the Malay Peninsula chose to further their studies at Madrasah al-Mashoor specifically to enhance their command of the Arabic language (Muhamad 2016). Furthermore, the availability of printing materials—such as paper and related resources—as well as access to printing facilities, was an important contributing factor. At the time, Penang had already become a hub for print culture, with a high concentration of newspapers and magazines published by the *Jawi Peranakan* and Arab communities (Merican 2021). These infrastructural advantages made it logistically feasible for Madrasah al-Mashoor to undertake magazine production. Consequently, it became the first madrasah to publish a magazine within this specific Islamic educational category.

A similar rationale applied to three remaining magazines. For instance, the *Jasa* published by Madrasah al-Attas in Johor Bahru appears to have been influenced by the strong commitment of the

institution's leadership—particularly Sayyid Hassan al-Attas (1832–1932), an Arab Hadrami figure—to providing Islamic education to the Muslim community in Malaya (Abdul Latiff et al. 2018). In the early twentieth century, much of the region's printing activity—including newspapers, magazines, and books—was concentrated in Singapore. This extended to the editorial landscape as well, with many writers, editors, and publishers based in the city. Essential printing materials and equipment—such as presses, paper, ink, metal type, and lithographic tools—were readily available, and Singapore also boasted a more advanced and specialised printing workforce compared to other parts of the Malay Peninsula. These favourable conditions had a notable spillover effect on nearby Johor Bahru, particularly benefiting institutions such as Madrasah al-Attas. Given its geographical proximity to Singapore, the madrasah was well-positioned to take advantage of the city's robust print infrastructure including to publish the *Jasa* magazine (Mahfood & Musa 2021).

However, following the Second World War, only two magazines within this category were published. This decline can be attributed to a shift in the role of madrasahs—from focusing on fostering nationalist consciousness through education to direct involvement in political activism. In the post-war period, many madrasahs began to participate actively in political movements, particularly after the establishment of Hizbul Muslimin on 14 March 1948 at Madrasah al-Ihya al-Sharif in Gunung Semanggol, which aimed to advocate for Malayan independence (Haris 2025). The party received support from several other madrasahs, including Madrasah al-Insaniah in Teluk Intan, Madrasah al-Huda Wa al-Bushra in Sitiawan, Madrasah al-Ulum al-Syariah in Bagan Datoh, Madrasah Yahyawiyah, and Madrasah Diniyah in Padang Rengas (Saat & Ariffin 2022). In addition, this wave garnered a positive response from women, particularly those who possessed a background in religious education and later joined politics. Among them were Aishah Ghani, Sakinah Junid, and Shamsiah Fakeh, all of whom received their education at Madrasah Diniyah Putri in Padang Panjang, Sumatra. They later played a key role in founding a women's movement called *Angkatan Wanita Sedar* (A.W.A.S.) in 1946 (Ramli et al 2024).

As a result, the educational mission that had previously driven the publication of Islamic educational magazines was gradually supplanted by a political agenda. This shift significantly contributed to the decline in the production of religious magazines with educational themes by madrasahs in the post-war period.

## CONCLUSION

Magazines with Islamic educational themes were characterised by their specific objectives, content focus, and writing approaches, all of which were designed to convey Islamic knowledge to a targeted readership—namely, madrasah students. The existence of magazines within this category demonstrates that, although 41 Islamic-genre magazines were published during the period, eight of them pursued a distinct mission: to serve as pedagogical tools that supported the intellectual and spiritual development of students within Islamic educational institutions. These magazines were not merely instruments of Islamic outreach, but functioned as structured platforms for teaching, reinforcing classroom instruction, and nurturing a generation of educated Muslims grounded in both religious principles and critical thought. Their publication reflects the broader vision of madrasahs in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Malaya, particularly those aligned with the *Kaum Muda*, which sought to modernise Islamic education and extend its reach through the strategic use of print media.

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