

TAQWA AS A COMMUNITY-BASED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MODEL: DESIGN, PHILOSOPHY AND POTENTIAL IMPACT

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Abstract: *The erosion of fundamental religious literacy among Muslim youth, particularly in Quranic recitation and prayer performance, presents a critical challenge for contemporary Islamic education. While formal instruction provides basic exposure, it often lacks contextual relevance and continuity beyond the classroom. In response to this gap, the TAQWA model; short for Transformasi Asas Quranic & Worship Advancement, was conceptualised as a community-based religious education framework aimed at revitalising fardu 'ain practices among Muslim youth in Malaysia. This conceptual paper explores the philosophical foundation, structural design, and projected impact of the TAQWA module, highlighting its integration of Quranic literacy, prayer refinement, spiritual values, and community mentorship. Grounded in Islamic pedagogical principles and participatory action models, TAQWA offers a holistic approach to religious empowerment that emphasises internal transformation (taqwa), peer engagement, and social responsibility. The paper argues that the model holds significant potential to address youth moral crises, strengthen religious identity, and enhance university–community collaboration in religious education.*

Keywords: *Community engagement, Islamic education, Youth empowerment, Religious literacy, TAQWA module*

Introduction

In the era of rapid social transformation and digital saturation, Muslim youth face growing challenges in maintaining religious consciousness and consistent engagement with core practices of Islam. Foundational acts such as *salah* (prayer) and Quranic recitation; categorised under *fardu 'ain* obligations, are often underperformed or misapplied, not due to rebellion or apathy, but largely because of structural and pedagogical gaps in the way these rituals are taught and reinforced. While formal religious education exists within national curricula and mosque settings, its emphasis on textual instruction and exam-oriented assessment often fails to translate into sustained internalisation and behavioural transformation (Ishak & Shukor, 2020). Moreover, youth from semi-urban or underserved communities frequently lack consistent access to quality religious guidance, resulting in superficial religious knowledge and diminished practice. This gap is compounded by the weakening influence of traditional institutions such as the mosque, the family unit, and community elders, who historically functioned as moral anchors and transmitters of religious discipline. The absence of engaging and contextually relevant learning spaces has opened a void where many youths no longer find personal meaning in daily acts of ibadah, even though they may theoretically recognise its importance. A shift is thus required, from instruction-based to transformation-based pedagogy; from isolated delivery to integrated, community-anchored approaches.

Recent statistics indicate a worrying decline in the moral and spiritual well-being of Malaysian youth. The *Malaysia Youth Index (2019)*, for instance, recorded a relatively low score of 68.6 in the spirituality and religion domain, reflecting weakening engagement with religious identity and practices (Kementerian Belia dan Sukan, 2019). More recent surveys also highlight that a significant portion of Muslim adolescents struggle with consistent performance of daily prayers and accurate recitation of foundational Qur'anic verses (Mohd Sani, Ismail & Ibrahim, 2021). Such findings point to a broader moral crisis, where superficial religious knowledge is not effectively translated into sustained practice. This reality underscores the urgent need for innovative models of religious education that go beyond classroom instruction, bridging the gap between theoretical literacy and lived worship.

In response to this challenge, the TAQWA model (Transformasi Asas Quranic & Worship Advancement) was conceptualised as a structured yet flexible intervention to address the decline in basic worship literacy and moral grounding among Muslim youth in Malaysia. It is a modular framework that blends Quranic fluency (tajwid and tahsin), prayer competence (fiqh and amali), ethical cultivation, and peer-led outreach. Rooted in the Islamic principle of taqwa (God-consciousness), it frames religious education not merely as the transmission of ritual knowledge, but as the cultivation of character, self-discipline, and communal responsibility. This conceptual paper aims to explore the underlying philosophy of the TAQWA model, elaborate its design and pedagogical architecture, and propose its potential applications within Malaysian community and educational contexts. In doing so, it situates TAQWA within broader discourses of Islamic education reform, moral development, and youth empowerment, offering a model that is scalable, adaptable, and spiritually resonant.

Theoretical and Philosophical Foundation

The TAQWA model draws upon an integrated foundation of Islamic pedagogy, moral philosophy, and contemporary community-based learning (CBL) theory. At its core lies the concept of *taqwa*, understood not merely as “fear of God” in the punitive sense, but as a state of vigilant self-awareness and ethical discipline rooted in spiritual consciousness. The Quran repeatedly frames *taqwa* as both the outcome and objective of religious engagement, stating: “*O mankind, worship your Lord... that you may become people of taqwa*” (Qur’an, 2:21). In this light, *taqwa* becomes the compass of the moral self; directing intention, moderating behaviour, and sustaining accountability before the Divine. Any educational model that bears this term, therefore, must not restrict itself to ritual mastery, but should aim for holistic internalisation of values that shape conduct in both private and public spheres. In classical Islamic educational discourse, this moral orientation is captured through the triadic framework of *ta’dib* (discipline), *tarbiyah* (nurturing), and *tazkiyah* (purification). Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1993) emphasised that *ta’dib*, as the essence of Islamic education, involves not just the transfer of knowledge (*‘ilm*) but the proper placement of knowledge within the self, guided by *adab*, wisdom, and ethical restraint. This worldview treats the learner not as a passive recipient of information, but as a moral subject whose soul (*nafs*) must be trained to recognise truth, act with justice, and pursue excellence (*ihsan*). Accordingly, the TAQWA module is designed not simply to teach the rules of *tajwid* or *fiqh*, but to instil habits of reverence, discipline, and reflection through applied learning experiences.

Complementing this is the emphasis on *fardhu ‘ain* knowledge; the obligatory personal duties every Muslim must fulfil, including proper Quranic recitation and prayer performance. In many contexts, this area of religious literacy is treated as a “given,” often overlooked in higher stages of Islamic education. Yet, research shows that the neglect of *fardhu ‘ain* at foundational stages leads to a weak spiritual base, which in turn contributes to identity confusion and behavioural inconsistency in youth (Zainal & Halim, 2021). TAQWA re-centres *fardhu ‘ain* as both the starting point and the axis around which further moral and spiritual development revolves. The model also aligns with the principles of community-based learning (CBL), which stress the importance of context, collaboration, and experiential engagement in knowledge acquisition. Rather than isolating religious instruction within formal institutions, TAQWA anchors its implementation in local *suraus* and community spaces, empowering youth to learn within environments that are spiritually active and socially familiar. CBL in Islamic education allows for the revival of *halaqah* and *musyawarah* traditions; learning circles that are dialogical, participatory, and transformative. Furthermore, by assigning graduates of the TAQWA program to mentor younger participants (as in the TAQWA *Cilik* initiative), the model taps into prophetic traditions of layered mentorship (*murabbi–mutarabbi*) that were central to early Islamic learning communities.

In sum, the TAQWA model synthesises classical Islamic principles with modern pedagogical insights to offer a comprehensive, spiritually rooted, and socially responsive approach to religious education. It positions youth not only as learners of *ibadah*, but as nurtured leaders whose spiritual literacy is both a personal duty and a public trust. Scholarship on mosque-based youth education underscores both its potential and its limitations. Hamzah, Jalil, and Khairuddin (2020) emphasize that mosque-led initiatives can strengthen communal values, yet Ishak and Shukor (2020) observe that many of these programs remain short-lived and fail to instil consistent worship habits among youth. More recent contributions (e.g., Latif & Musa, 2022; Abdullah, 2023) have pointed to the growing role of digital Islamic pedagogy, including hybrid Qur’an classes and mobile applications, as tools to complement traditional instruction.

However, while digital platforms provide accessibility, they often lack the embodied mentorship and community anchoring essential for moral formation. Studies on youth religiosity (Roslan et al., 2020; Zainal & Halim, 2021; Nur & Fauzi, 2024) further highlight a tension: young Muslims express theoretical awareness of religious duties but demonstrate inconsistencies in actual practice. This literature reveals a gap at the intersection of mosque-based learning, digital pedagogy, and youth religiosity—precisely the space where the TAQWA model situates itself. By integrating community-based mentorship with structured fardu ‘ain literacy and digital assessment tools, TAQWA addresses both the accessibility challenge and the need for sustained transformation.

Methodology: Conceptual And Applied Framework Design

Methodologically, this study adopts a *conceptual and applied framework design*. As a conceptual paper, it outlines the philosophical underpinnings and pedagogical rationale of the TAQWA model. Simultaneously, it advances an applied framework by proposing a structured three-phase module (theoretical acquisition, practical training, and community empowerment) that can be directly tested within community settings. The adoption of *Community-Based Learning (CBL)* is deliberate, reflecting both classical Islamic traditions of halaqah (learning circles) and contemporary theories of experiential education. CBL ensures that learning is not isolated within formal institutions but embedded in lived community contexts where accountability, mentorship, and collaboration reinforce spiritual growth.

The TAQWA approach is further justified by its focus on fardu ‘ain obligations as the foundation of Islamic literacy. By prioritizing Qur’anic recitation and prayer proficiency, the model addresses the most critical gaps identified among Muslim youth. Beyond ritual competence, TAQWA emphasises values infusion, reflective practice, and peer-led mentoring, aligning with the maqasid al-shariah objectives of safeguarding religion (hifz al-din) and ensuring moral continuity (hifz al-nasl). Together, these design choices position TAQWA not merely as a theoretical construct but as a replicable framework for sustainable religious empowerment.

Design of the TAQWA Module

The TAQWA module (Transformasi Asas Quranic & Worship Advancement) is designed as an integrated and progressive framework that targets two primary dimensions of fardu ‘ain literacy: (i) Qur’anic fluency and (ii) prayer competence. These two elements are not taught in isolation but are reinforced through values education, reflective practice, and community participation. The module structure follows a three-phase implementation model; Theoretical Acquisition, Practical Training, and Community Empowerment, each aligned with specific learning outcomes and pedagogical strategies. At the core of the TAQWA module are two thematic content tracks

a. Quranic Literacy Track This component focuses on improving participants’ technical and spiritual engagement with the Qur’an. It comprises:

- Tajwid Theory: Structured lessons on pronunciation rules, articulation points (*makhraj*), and common errors in recitation.
- Tahsin al-Qira’ah: Practical drills to refine fluency, rhythm (*madd*), and tone (lagu bacaan), guided by qualified instructors.
- Assessment: Oral recitation tests and digital quizzes (e.g., Quizizz) to gauge theoretical understanding and fluency.

This track seeks not only accuracy in recitation but also *khushu'* (humility and attentiveness), promoting the Qur'an as a personal moral guide rather than merely a liturgical text.

b. Prayer Proficiency Track

Complementing Qur'anic literacy is the systematic training in *fiqh al-salah* (jurisprudence of prayer) and its practical performance. This track includes:

- Fiqh Modules: Covering purification (*taharah*), conditions, pillars, and nullifiers of prayer based on recognised Sunni jurisprudence.
- Practical Workshops: Amali sessions on performing individual and congregational prayer, correcting physical posture, and reciting prescribed supplications with proper pronunciation.
- Simulation Exercises: Real-time role plays, prayer leadership rotation, and peer evaluation to build confidence and mastery.

This dual-track content ensures that participants are spiritually literate not only in theory, but in embodied practice—bridging the gap between knowing and doing.

Three-Phase Implementation Framework

The pedagogical delivery of the TAQWA module is structured as follows:



Figure 1: TAQWA Framework

a) Phase 1: Theoretical Acquisition

Participants undergo intensive workshops focusing on the foundational knowledge of *tajwid* and *fiqh al-salah*, delivered through lectures, discussions, and digital-based quizzes. This phase emphasises conceptual clarity and diagnostic assessment of participants' starting levels.

b) Phase 2: Practical Training and Evaluation

Building upon theoretical grounding, participants engage in hands-on activities, recitation clinics, prayer simulations, and guided amali sessions. They are evaluated through oral and practical tests. Mentors observe and provide real-time feedback using standardised rubrics.

c) Phase 3: Community Empowerment via TAQWA Cilik

The most competent participants are selected to mentor younger children (ages 7–12) in a sub-program known as TAQWA Cilik. Here, trainees become facilitators, applying what they have learned and reinforcing their skills through teaching. This final phase not only consolidates learning but instils a sense of religious responsibility and leadership among youth.

Pedagogical Features

The TAQWA module incorporates the following features to enhance its effectiveness:



Figure 2: TAQWA Pedagogical Features

- Experiential and Reflective Learning: Participants journal their learning journey, reflect on their inner transformation, and set personal ibadah goals.
- Mentorship and Peer Support: Group learning and peer correction foster collaborative accountability and reduce performance anxiety.
- Digital Integration: Platforms like Quizizz and Google Meet are used for formative assessment and post-program follow-up, making the program scalable and adaptable for blended learning environments.
- Values Infusion: Every module is tied back to the concept of taqwa, making explicit the connection between ritual practice and character development.

This modular design, grounded in Islamic epistemology and community-centred pedagogy, positions TAQWA not merely as a training course but as a transformative journey. It empowers youth with not just competence, but *hikmah* (wisdom), *adab* (discipline), and *amanah* (responsibility) to be agents of religious renewal in their respective communities.

Anticipated Impact and Implementation Strategy

The TAQWA model is envisioned not only as a platform for transmitting religious knowledge but as a catalyst for long-term behavioural transformation, community revitalisation, and institutional collaboration. Its design is informed by the premise that religious education, when delivered through spiritually anchored, community-based, and action-oriented models, can restore core Islamic values among youth while empowering them to become active agents of dakwah and moral leadership.

a) Individual-Level Impact

At the individual level, the module is expected to strengthen fardu ‘ain literacy by equipping youth with the knowledge and practical skills required to confidently perform daily acts of worship. More importantly, the experience of learning in a structured, reflective, and supportive environment fosters the internalisation of taqwa, nurturing qualities such as discipline, sincerity, humility, and accountability. Early implementation of the TAQWA pilot has already

shown increased motivation among participants to engage with the Qur'an, attend congregational prayers, and volunteer in local religious events. This aligns with existing research that links structured Islamic programs to improved spiritual resilience and identity clarity among Muslim adolescents (Zainal & Halim, 2021).

Furthermore, the facilitation element embedded in the TAQWA Cilik phase provides a rare opportunity for youth to transition from passive recipients of knowledge to active mentors. This role reversal empowers participants with a sense of purpose, encourages continuous self-improvement, and builds critical soft skills such as leadership, communication, and emotional intelligence—qualities essential for community leadership in the Islamic tradition.

b) Community-Level Impact

On a wider scale, TAQWA has the potential to reinvigorate mosque-based learning as a credible, engaging, and youth-led platform for religious development. Through its collaborative design, the program strengthens the ties between local institutions (such as suraus), families, and tertiary institutions. The program fosters a participatory culture where community members co-own religious education, restoring trust in religious spaces as centres of knowledge, guidance, and collective moral responsibility.

The involvement of university-based facilitators, particularly through initiatives like Universiti Teknologi MARA's Geran Komuniti TEJA, also demonstrates the value of embedding University Social Responsibility (USR) within faith-based engagement. TAQWA offers a replicable model for how higher education institutions can mobilise their academic expertise, students, and networks to support communal spiritual literacy while conducting applied research in Islamic pedagogy, youth development, and social cohesion.

c) Implementation Strategy and Replicability

To ensure sustainability and replicability, several key implementation strategies are proposed:

- **Scalable Module Design:** The TAQWA module is designed with modular flexibility, allowing facilitators to adapt the content according to local context, participant age groups, and available resources. Its combination of offline and online elements enables hybrid implementation, especially in rural or low-access areas.
- **Train-the-Trainer Approach:** Central to TAQWA's growth is its capacity to produce local facilitators through every cycle. With each trained cohort, the program can expand its reach organically, creating a self-sustaining system of peer-led instruction.
- **Institutional Partnerships:** Continued collaboration between universities, mosque committees, and religious agencies is key to institutionalising the model. Integration with formal co-curricular frameworks or Service Learning Islamic Education (SLIE) models within IPTAs could further embed the program in academic delivery.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Future implementations should incorporate systematic tools for tracking participant growth, long-term behavioural changes, and community-level impact. This may include follow-up surveys, focus group discussions, and digital performance tracking over time.

In essence, the TAQWA model anticipates transformation not only in the worship practices of individuals, but in the broader ecology of Islamic education within the community. It proposes a shift from fragmented, ritualistic instruction toward holistic, values-based formation; framing taqwa as the foundation for both personal piety and public responsibility.⁴

Conclusions

The TAQWA model presents a timely and contextually grounded response to the growing concern over spiritual disengagement and ritual illiteracy among Muslim youth. Rooted in classical Islamic educational philosophy and informed by contemporary pedagogical strategies, TAQWA reimagines fardu 'ain education as a transformative process—one that integrates knowledge, practice, values, and community engagement. Rather than viewing acts of worship as isolated rituals, the model positions them as dynamic tools for cultivating taqwa, shaping moral identity, and fostering communal responsibility. This conceptual paper has outlined the theoretical foundation, structural design, and projected impact of the TAQWA module. Through its three-phase implementation—comprising theoretical acquisition, practical application, and peer-led outreach—the model creates a learning journey that is developmental, participatory, and scalable. Its emphasis on mentorship, community integration, and reflective spirituality situates it within a broader call for holistic Islamic education that prepares youth not only to perform rituals correctly, but to embody faith meaningfully.

Going forward, the TAQWA model holds significant potential for replication across diverse socio-religious contexts, particularly through the support of universities, mosques, and local religious agencies. Future initiatives should consider pilot testing the module in different states, refining content based on participant feedback, and developing digital tools to support hybrid delivery. Equally important is the need for empirical research to evaluate the model's long-term effectiveness and to develop a robust impact framework for measuring spiritual, behavioural, and social outcomes. In an era where religious identity is both challenged and contested, TAQWA offers a practical vision of faith-based youth empowerment that is rooted in tradition, responsive to context, and oriented towards the future. As Muslim communities navigate the complexities of modernity, such models are vital in ensuring that the next generation remains spiritually grounded, morally upright, and socially responsible,

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