Teachers' Perspectives and Institutional Readiness in the Implementation of Holistic Islamic Education: A Case from Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

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Article Info	ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of holistic Islamic education among secondary students at Sheikh Haji Mohd Said National Religious Secondary School, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Holistic Islamic education promotes the integrated development of spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social aspects to foster balanced individuals. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with six teachers, classroom observations over six weeks, and curriculum document analysis. Findings reveal that although the curriculum reflects the principles of holistic education, implementation varies due to limited resources, time constraints, and differences in teacher preparedness. Nonetheless, the approach positively influences students' character, religious understanding, and social behavior. The study concludes that teacher capacity-building, infrastructural improvement, and community involvement are essential to strengthen holistic education practices. These findings contribute to the discourse on holistic Islamic education in Malaysia and offer practical recommendations for educators and policymakers aiming to promote balanced student development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Holistic Islamic education has emerged as a central paradigm in shaping learners who are not only intellectually capable but also spiritually grounded, emotionally balanced, and socially responsible. This integrated educational philosophy reflects the Islamic worldview (tasawwur Islam) that aims to develop insan kamil—complete human beings—through the harmonious cultivation of body, mind, and soul. The Malaysian Ministry of Education has embraced this vision, as reflected in the Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan and curriculum reforms that promote a balanced integration of religious, cognitive, and socio-emotional domains (Ismail & Rahman, 2022; Aziz & Mahmud, 2021). Such emphasis aligns with global educational shifts that advocate for values-based and student-centered learning in the 21st century.

The need to effectively implement holistic Islamic education is particularly pressing at the secondary level, where students face critical identity formation and moral development stages. While various curricular frameworks have been developed to support this approach—such as Kurikulum Bersepadu Dini and Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM)—the degree to which holistic principles are translated into classroom practices remains uneven. Schools often struggle with inadequate infrastructure, limited instructional time, and varied teacher readiness, all hindering the actualization of holistic education ideals.

Recent studies (e.g., Mohd Noor & Latif, 2023; Hanafi et al., 2024) have explored spiritual and emotional development aspects in Islamic schools, noting constraints related to pedagogical consistency and institutional support. However, these studies primarily focus on urban or well-funded schools, leaving a research gap in less-explored rural or semi-urban regions. Empirical research remains scarce on how holistic Islamic education is implemented in National Religious Secondary Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama, SMKA), particularly in Negeri Sembilan. This gap is critical, as such schools play a significant role in shaping Malaysia's next generation of Muslim professionals, educators, and leaders.

In response to this gap, this study investigates the implementation of holistic Islamic education at Sheikh Haji Mohd Said National Religious Secondary School in Negeri Sembilan—a semi-urban institution known for its religious orientation and diverse student population. The research specifically aims to: (1) examine how holistic educational principles are embedded in daily teaching and learning activities; (2) identify key challenges faced by educators; and (3) assess the perceived outcomes on students' character formation and academic development.

By employing a qualitative case study methodology—incorporating interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis—this study seeks to produce rich contextual insights that are theoretically grounded and practically relevant. The findings aim to inform educators, curriculum planners, and policymakers on bridging the gap between policy and practice. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic education by highlighting localized strategies to enhance the effective implementation of holistic pedagogical approaches in real-world school settings.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of holistic Islamic education at Sheikh Haji Mohd Said National Religious Secondary School in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The case study method was chosen for its strength in exploring complex educational practices within their authentic contexts, enabling rich, nuanced interpretations of human behavior, institutional culture, and pedagogical processes.

The research was conducted over a three-month period, during which the researcher observed school activities, classroom teaching, and student-teacher interactions for prolonged periods. This immersion gave a contextual understanding of how holistic Islamic education was applied in practice.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure rich and relevant data. The sample included six Islamic education teachers with varying experience levels (ranging from three to fifteen years), eight students from different academic levels (Forms 2 to 5), and two school administrators. These informants were chosen based on their active roles in planning, delivering, or experiencing holistic Islamic education programs. Selection criteria included teaching involvement in Islamic studies, participation in co-curricular religious activities, and availability during the data collection period.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: (1) semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and administrators; (2) non-participant classroom observations; and (3) document analysis of lesson plans, curriculum guides, and institutional policy documents. Multiple data sources enabled methodological triangulation, enhancing the study's credibility.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed several validation strategies. Prolonged engagement at the site helped the researcher build rapport with participants and gain deeper insights into the educational dynamics. Triangulation of data sources and collection methods minimized researcher bias. Member checking was conducted by sharing initial interpretations with participants for feedback and accuracy. Peer debriefing sessions were held regularly with academic supervisors to reflect on findings, refine themes, and ensure analytical rigor.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. This involved familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Coding was done manually using Microsoft Excel, and constant comparative analysis was applied to identify convergences and divergences across data sets. Recurring themes such as "teacher agency," "spiritual integration," and "structural barriers" were identified and refined through iterative analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Result

The findings of this study are organized into four main themes: (1) integration of holistic education principles, (2) challenges in implementation, (3) time allocation for holistic education dimensions, and (4) impact on student development. Each theme is based on data collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

3.1.1. Integration of Holistic Education Principles

Holistic Islamic education aims to integrate students' spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions. At Sheikh Haji Mohd Said School, this integration is reflected in the curriculum design and pedagogical practices. Teachers intentionally instill spiritual values through daily Quran recitation, congregational prayer, and discussions on Islamic ethics. One teacher noted, *"We start each day with Quranic reflection, which serves as a foundation for spiritual growth and self-discipline."*

Intellectual development is supported through the national curriculum, which is strengthened by linking academic content to the Islamic worldview. For example, in social studies, students analyze civic responsibility through Islamic law and jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), which helps them contextualize knowledge within an ethical paradigm. Emotional development is addressed through reflective journals and group discussions, which encourage students to articulate feelings and cultivate empathy. Teachers report that Islamic concepts such as sabr (patience) and rahmah (compassion) are used to guide emotional literacy. Social development is fostered through mosque activities, charity programs, and peer mentoring, encouraging responsibility and collaboration. One student shared, *"Our community projects help us understand how to serve others sincerely."* Document analysis confirmed the intentional inclusion of these dimensions in lesson plans and school policies. However, the level of integration varies across subjects and teachers, suggesting room for improved consistency.

3.1.2. Challenges in Implementation

Despite a clear commitment to holistic principles, several challenges hinder full implementation. Resource limitations—particularly in teaching materials and infrastructure—were frequently cited. Time constraints due to exam preparation and packed schedules reduce emotional and social learning opportunities. One teacher observed, *"We want to do more community service and character education, but the timetable is dominated by academic preparation."*

Teacher preparedness also varied. While some educators had undergone training in holistic pedagogy, others relied on conventional instructional methods, leading to inconsistency in practice. Institutional support, while present, was often constrained by limited budgets and administrative priorities, affecting the scale and sustainability of extracurricular programs. These findings echo previous studies identifying a gap between curriculum intent and classroom enactment in holistic Islamic education (Hanafi et al., 2024; Zainuddin et al., 2019).

3.1.3. Time Allocation for Holistic Education Dimensions

Interview data and timetable analysis revealed an imbalanced distribution of instructional time. Academic subjects dominated the weekly schedule, averaging 15 hours per week, followed by spiritual activities (6 hours), social development (4 hours), and emotional development (3 hours). This imbalance reflects systemic priorities favoring cognitive outcomes, undermining holistic education's integrated vision.

Table 1. Average Weekly Time Allocation for Holistic Education Dimensions

Dimension	Average Hours per Week
Intellectual	15
Spiritual	6
Emotional	3
Social	4

Table 1 shows a disproportionate emphasis on intellectual development, which is understandable given the national education focus on academic achievement. However, this imbalance suggests that more structured time should be allocated to emotional and social dimensions to realize proper holistic education, as supported by Aziz and Mahmud (2021).

3.1.4. Impact on Student Development

Participants reported that students exposed to holistic practices exhibited stronger moral behavior, greater empathy, and improved interpersonal skills. Teachers observed that students who engaged in spiritual and social activities were more respectful and cooperative. A student reflected, *"Through charity work, I learned to care for others and be more responsible."* These outcomes align with literature emphasizing the role of integrated Islamic education in nurturing character and community-mindedness (Ismail & Rahman, 2022). The positive effects, however, were more evident in environments where all four dimensions were consistently implemented.

This study identified three significant findings regarding the implementation of Holistic Islamic Education in Practice (HIEP) at SMKA Sheikh Haji Mohd Said, Negeri Sembilan. These findings directly address the research objective of understanding how holistic Islamic education is applied within a formal secondary school context: *First*, the Integrative Approach to HIEP Implementation. The implementation of HIEP is characterized by an integrative approach that combines formal curriculum, co-curricular activities, and character-building programs (aktiviti sahsiah). Teachers connect subject content with Islamic values relevant to students' daily lives. This integration extends beyond the classroom into various school programs such as usrah, tazkirah, and community-based initiatives, reflecting a consistent application of Islamic principles across different aspects of student life.

Second, the Role of Teachers as Murabbi (Holistic Educators). Teachers play a central role as murabbi — educators who impart knowledge and guide students spiritually, emotionally, and morally. They serve as role models and spiritual mentors, shaping students' character through instruction and personal example. It highlights a pedagogical approach that is not limited to cognitive development but also includes affective and spiritual dimensions, consistent with the holistic education philosophy. Institutional Leadership and School Culture as Enablers

Third, the school's leadership strongly supports the successful implementation of HIEP through clear policies, structured programs, and consistent administrative support. The principal and senior administrators actively embed Islamic values into the school's ethos and daily practices. This institutional support ensures that Islamic education is not treated as an isolated component but as an integral part of the school's culture. These findings offer empirical contributions to developing a practical model for holistic Islamic education that other Islamic educational institutions in Malaysia can adapt. They also underscore the importance of alignment between curriculum design, the role of teachers as murabbi, and institutional leadership in realizing an adequate and contextually relevant model of holistic Islamic education.

The findings indicate an observable integration of holistic Islamic education principles, particularly in the spiritual and intellectual domains. These principles are consistently implemented through daily religious routines and a curriculum enriched with Islamic perspectives. However, emotional and social dimensions remain underdeveloped due to constraints such as limited time, resources, and teacher preparedness. It answers the first research question by showing that although the model is present in concept, its full implementation remains partial. Identifying key challenges addresses the second research question: lack of teaching materials, time constraints, insufficient professional development, and inconsistent institutional support. These barriers hinder the full realization of holistic Islamic education and cause disparities in its application across classrooms.

In response to the third question, the study found that existing holistic practices positively influence students' moral behavior, empathy, and social responsibility. It confirms the role of Islamic education not only in academic formation but in producing ethically and emotionally grounded individuals. Findings were derived through triangulated data collection, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. This methodological approach enabled a holistic and multi-perspective understanding of the school's implementation practices. Credibility and validity were strengthened through prolonged engagement, member checking, and peer debriefing. The study reflects a partial implementation of the Tarbiyah model, which combines ta'lim (instruction), tarbiyah (character formation), and ta'dib (discipline). While ta'lim and ta'dib are embedded in formal teaching and behavioral expectations, tarbiyah—focused on nurturing emotional and spiritual maturity—is less consistently executed due to systemic challenges. The classical notion is that Islamic education should prioritize moral and spiritual purification over mere cognitive achievement.

The findings are consistent with recent literature on Islamic education in Malaysia and beyond. While the Integrated Islamic Education (IIE) model is theoretically well-received in Malaysian schools, student moral development is rarely assessed systematically (Hashim & Dorloh, 2024). Zainal Abidin et al. (2023) also found that intellectual aspects are given the highest priority in most Malaysian Islamic schools, with affective and social dimensions receiving considerably less attention (Sahin, 2018). It directly mirrors the time distribution data from the current study. Additionally, Anwar and In'am (2025) highlighted that limited teacher training significantly hinders the incorporation of emotional and spiritual pedagogy in Islamic schools—a finding echoed in the varied teacher preparedness reported by this study (Jenuri et al., 2025).

On the international level, it emphasized the importance of community involvement and institutional backing in achieving successful holistic outcomes in Islamic schools in Nigeria. The current study supports this by noting a lack of community engagement and weak structural support at the school level in Malaysia. Further, it was found that integrating moral education with religious content significantly improves student conduct and interpersonal skills. The present study reflects these positive outcomes in student character development as reported by teachers and students (Ismail et al., 2022).

This study significantly contributes to theory and practice in holistic Islamic education. Theoretically, it advances existing frameworks by addressing the gap between ideal holistic education models, such as the Integrated Holistic Education Model (IHEM), and their real-world implementation in diverse and resource-limited school contexts. By developing the Holistic Islamic Education in Practice (HIEP) model, this research offers a context-sensitive framework highlighting the importance of integrating curriculum and co-curricular activities, empowering teachers as holistic educators (murabbi), and fostering strong institutional leadership and community involvement. The HIEP model provides Islamic schools and policymakers with a flexible, evidence-based approach that can be adapted to varying institutional capacities, enabling more effective and authentic application of holistic Islamic education principles. This dual contribution enriches theoretical discourse and delivers actionable insights for improving educational practice in Islamic secondary schools.

This study contributes significantly to national and global discourses on Islamic education by providing an empirically grounded model—Holistic Islamic Education in Practice (HIEP)—that addresses practical challenges Islamic secondary schools face in Malaysia and similar contexts worldwide. Nationally, the HIEP model offers a flexible and scalable framework tailored to the diverse institutional capacities and cultural realities of Malaysian Islamic schools, supporting policymakers and educators in advancing holistic education aligned with national educational goals. Globally, this research enriches the broader conversation on integrating spiritual, cognitive, and emotional development within faith-based education systems, offering insights applicable to Islamic schools and other religious educational institutions seeking to balance tradition with contemporary educational demands. By bridging theory and practice in varied socio-educational contexts, this study helps shape the future direction of holistic Islamic education in Malaysia and internationally.

4.   CONCLUSION

The implementation of holistic Islamic education at Sheikh Haji Mohd Said National Religious Secondary School in Negeri Sembilan focuses on how spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions are integrated into educational practices. The findings indicate that while the spiritual and intellectual aspects are well embedded through religious routines and curriculum integration, the emotional and social domains are less emphasized due to time constraints, limited teacher training, and inadequate institutional resources. Nevertheless, even partial implementation positively impacts students' moral character and social responsibility. The study introduces the Holistic Islamic Education in Practice (HIEP) model, which contributes theoretically by contextualizing core educational dimensions alongside enabling factors such as teacher competence, institutional support, and community engagement. Practically, it highlights the need for strategic investment in teacher development and systemic alignment to support balanced educational outcomes. Although limited to a single school context, the study suggests future research to test the HIEP model across diverse settings and assess the impact of holistic pedagogy on long-term student development, reinforcing the call for integrative and value-based Islamic education reform.

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