

# The Implementation of Integrated Islamic Education (IIE) in Malaysian Islamic Religious Secondary Schools from Education Administrators' Perspectives

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## Abstract

This study is based on the premise that there is a need for an integrated Islamic education (IIE) curriculum that could develop the whole person of Muslim children. It examines the school administrators and educational officers' views on the key aspects related to the effectiveness of the implementation of the IIE curriculum, such as the understanding of the IIE's concept and the teaching and assessment techniques of IIE. The study is using qualitative method; it employed interviews with 12 respondents from the National Religious Secondary School (SMKA) and Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) schools and two educational officers. The findings identified that Islamic education school administrators have positive attitudes towards IIE, have adequate knowledge of the integrated concept of Islamic education and highly encourage their teachers to use various pedagogical methods in teaching IIE. The findings also indicate that the schools have implemented a systematic assessment for students' academic achievement, but only some schools have assessed the behavioural aspects of their students. Despite these positive results, the study reveals a few problems in implementing IIE, such as exam-oriented trends and the inadequacy of professionally certified teachers in some schools, which could hinder its effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Integrated Islamic education, Islamic school, Malaysian Islamic education, integrated education

## Introduction

Islamic education has always been a center of attention among Muslim parents, educationists and politicians in Malaysia. This is due to its pertinent role in shaping the youngster, particularly in Muslim society. In Malaysia, the Islamic Education system has experienced several significant changes since its independence in 1957 up to the present day while attempting to fulfil the needs of the people and the nation. In the 1980s, Islamic Education underwent significant development and improvements. These tremendous changes were marked by the introduction of the integrated curriculum in Malaysian schools, namely the New

Curriculum for Primary School in 1983 and the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools in 1989 then the formulation of the National Philosophy of Education in 1988 in which the school education was geared towards achieving holistic goals (Ministry of Education, 2001).

Islamic Education is a core component in the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (ICSS/KBSM) and a compulsory subject for all Muslim students from Year 1 to Form 5 in the Malaysian schooling system. The Integrated Curriculum of Islamic Education aims to develop the whole potential of students in a holistic, balanced and integrated manner encompassing intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects (Ab. Halim, 2007). The content of the IIE curriculum covers the reading of the Qur'an and Hadith, the Sciences of *Shar'iyah* (Muslim Laws) and Islamic Ethics.

As articulated in the Malaysian National Education Policy, education is an ongoing effort towards developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner to produce intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious (Ministry of Education, 2012a). Thus, both primary and secondary levels emphasize a holistic (intellectual, spiritual, physical and emotional) approach to ensure quality human development for all domains-cognitive and affective. The cognitive domain deals with knowledge recall and intellectual skills like comprehending information, organizing ideas, analysing and synthesising data, applying knowledge and evaluating ideas or actions (Lawton & Gordon, 1996). The affective domain concerns emotions, feelings and attitudes such as enjoyment, conserving, respect and support (Lawton & Gordon, 1996).

The philosophy of Islamic Education in Malaysia is very much in line with the National Philosophy of Education, which emphasizes individual development. Using this philosophy, Islamic Education aims to develop the potential of Muslim children in an overall and balanced manner to produce a Muslim individual who possesses good moral values and can contribute to society at the same time they will responsible for the betterment of all humanity.

### **The Need for an Integrated Islamic Education Curriculum**

During the colonial and early independence era, two education systems ran simultaneously in Malaya: traditional Islamic religious education and “secular” modern education (Che Noraini & Hasan, 2008). Parents, including Muslims tended to send their children into modern schools, which were largely secular because they provided more economic value and offered more prospects (Rosnani, 1996). On the contrary, traditional Islamic religious education which took root in the Malay community since the 1400s, began to decline because it was deemed not adaptable to modern changes (Arbaiyah, 2008). The curriculum of the traditional Malay education system, although based on religious teaching has less content on modern knowledge such as sciences, technology, mathematics and economics (Rosnani, 1996).

As a result, religious students were not equipped with the contemporary knowledge that would enable them to take a significant role in the country's socio-economic development. They were thus being naturally left out from the mainstream of national development and remaining in the narrow religious areas. Their professions were limited to religious pursuits such as religious teachers, *imams* (prayer leaders) and *qadhis* (judges in the Islamic courts). This created a perception among the people that religious education provides less economic value (Rahimah, Rosnani & Yuslaini, 2013). Consequently, those who came from Islamic religious education background tended to stay with their own group and isolate themselves from the rest of society.

On the other hand, the national secular education system failed to infuse moral values, thus leading to social problems. It has also been claimed that the present national education system has failed to develop moral character, contributing to the increase in corruption, white-collar crime and drug addiction (Mohd. Nur, 1989). This situation put Muslim parents and children in a dilemma; the existence of dualism in education would negatively affect the balanced development of their children. Parents hoped their children would grow up with Islamic religious values and at the same time, they wanted them to be equipped with knowledge of modern technology and its advances. However, this educational dualism has failed to fulfil some parents' expectations, especially among Islamic-minded Muslims while producing an integrated personality.

In the era of Muslim resurgence from the 1970s onward, Muslim groups such as the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (ABIM) urged the government to introduce an integrated education system to resolve the above problems by incorporating both education systems (Badlihisam, 2010). With an integrated education system, they believed students would not be left out of the mainstream of national development. These Muslim groups began to set up their own schools to accomplish their objective of integrating Islamic knowledge and humanities. During these periods, several integrated Islamic schools were established ranging from kindergartens to secondary schools especially in the Klang Valley, Selangor.

In response to this development, the government through the Ministry of Education took a key step in 1977 of introducing Muslim religious schools which combine both Islamic religious and modern subjects in the curriculum with full financial support from federal and state governments (Ministry of Education, 2012b). This positive development has contributed to the rapid development of Islamic education in the country.

Lately, the Muslim school has regained encouraging demand from parents. The Islamic schools run by the government have become popular among Muslim parents in the country, with a continuous increase in annual enrolment. Apparently, the schools run by Muslim movements like ABIM (Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement) and IKRAM (previously known as Malaysian Islah Movement (JIM) have also received the same acceptance. The overwhelming responses from the parents to these types of schools is probably due to their excellent achievements in national examinations in the last decade and their success in producing knowledgeable students in both Islamic religious knowledge and worldly knowledge with moral strength. However, some issues regarding the effectiveness of Islamic Education and its implementation in the schools are still outstanding.

This study aims to examine Islamic education administrators' views on the concept of IIE, the teaching and assessment methods in teaching and learning IIE as well as to investigate the problems that were perceived as the barriers for effectiveness of teaching and learning Integrated Islamic Education in selected schools.

## **Methodology of Study**

This study adopted qualitative method and fieldwork. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school administrators of Muslim religious schools in Selangor and the responsible officers of Islamic Education in the Ministry of Education Malaysia and Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS). The selection of samples for the interviews was made using principles of purposive sampling (Patton, 1987). The researcher's choice of respondents

for interviews was based on the purpose of the study rather than by random sampling or the selection of a large number of participants. The idea behind using purposeful sampling was that it would be the best choices for researcher understand the problem and the research objectives.

An interview schedule was developed based on the research objectives for the school principals and the education officers. The instruments were pre-tested to revise the order of questions and to identify ambiguities or points where there had been confusion. Feedback from the pre-test participant was taken to make some changes in the interview schedules. The schedules were also reviewed by two experts before real interview processes were conducted.

In this study, a total of 14 respondents were interviewed. Twelve respondents were from the National Religious Secondary School (SMKA) and the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) schools. Both types of schools use an integrated Islamic Education curriculum for their students. The interviews also involved two education officers from the Division of Islamic Education, Ministry of Education (BPI) and the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS). All the interviews were conducted in person and the interview sessions took place at their respective offices. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. The researcher performed all of the transcriptions and checked for accuracy. This study employed a variety of analytic strategies that involve sorting, organizing and reducing the data as well as assembling the data to interpret them. As for the interviews, the recorded interviews were transcribed and field-notes were compiled for analysis. Transcripts were read and coded by highlighting key words. Emerging themes were determined based on the highlighted terms.

## **Findings**

The findings of this study are presented based on the views of educational administrators on some key aspects of the implementation of IIE including the concept of IIE, teaching and assessment of IIE likewise the problems in implementing IIE in schools.

### **a. Understanding of the Concept of Integrated Islamic Education (IIE)**

In order to analyze what the respondents' understanding about the concept of IIE, each of them was asked to give their opinion on the concept of IIE. One female principal thought that the concept of an IIE was integrating Islamic Education into other academic discipline subjects in school (A/S/F1<sup>1</sup>). While another (male) principal gave a more general answer, stating that IIE is the integration of revealed knowledge and worldly knowledge as well as integrating spiritual and physical aspects together in the curriculum (A/S/M1).

One comprehensive answer was given by a school administrator of JAIS school by giving three major elements in IIE: integration of skills, intellect, spiritual and physical aspects in the curriculum; combining religious subjects in the curriculum; and teaching different discipline subjects according to the Islamic perspective (A/J/M2). As for other responses, one respondent attempted to justify, why IIE ought to be introduced by stressing that:

*“For me, integration means we attempt to abolish a dividing wall between different sections in education, academic section and non-academic section. Education is basically neutral. In fact, both academic education and non-academic education are Islamic...”*  
(H/J/M2)

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<sup>1</sup> A=administrator, S=type of school (SMKA or JAIS school), F=gender (male or female), 1= no of respondent.

Another principal gave two forms of integration within the subjects in Islamic knowledge between different disciplines by asserting:

*“For me, an integrated concept of Islamic Education first of all is integration between Islamic knowledge for example, integrating fiqh into tawhid, history and etc. Secondly, integration between different disciplines for example, the creation of the universe can be integrated into geography, history or science through different approaches and techniques...”* (H/S/M2)

On the integration process in the school curriculum, one senior education officer stated that *‘integration means values across the curriculum and translating all the values into the school’s ethos’*. This includes integration within Islamic Education’s subjects themselves and integration between Islamic Education subjects and other disciplines such as sciences and mathematics (O/MI<sup>2</sup>).

The above findings suggested that almost all participants agreed that the concept of IIE is related to integrating topics within the Islamic Education curriculum and integrating the Islamic Education’s subjects with other academic subjects. In other words, IIE involves integration across the topics within Islamic Education and integration across subjects such as integrating an Islamic Education with Natural Science.

To sum up, the integrated concept of an Islamic Education may consist of the integration of knowledge and values, the integration of an Islamic Education with other branches of knowledge, the integration of various topics in Islamic Education itself and the integration of an Islamic Education learned in the classroom together with experience outside the classroom.

#### **b. Teaching Technique of IIE**

In terms of teaching technique, more than two-third of the respondents stated that their teachers used a variety of teaching techniques to facilitate the learning of Islamic Education. The schools encouraged the teachers to use an appropriate mix of teaching and learning techniques, use a wide range of teaching and learning resources and employ different classroom activities in small groups to make learning interesting, motivating and meaningful. To facilitate these modern approaches, the schools had provided the necessary teaching tools such as overhead projectors, LCD projectors, computers and other modern teaching equipment.

As for the teaching method, the respondents said that their schools are no longer use the 'chalk and talk' approach. A variety of methods had been adopted to increase the student's attention and interest. One of these was the student-centred approach replacing the traditional teacher-centred with active learning among the students themselves. This method advocates developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills of the students. Other teaching methods adopted in schools were group discussion and presentation, workshops, library-research and simulation as well as memorization. One respondent mentioned an example of simulations carried out in her school was while the teacher taught about *hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah). The students were shown the practical aspect of *hajj* as it is in its real situation. For her, by adopting this method the concept would be more understandable (A/S/F2).

In summary, the Islamic Education teachers used different techniques of teaching and learning for Islamic Education, in order to make the teaching more effective. The adoption of

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<sup>2</sup> O= officer, M=gender (male or female) and 1= no. of respondent

the new teaching style using ICT was encouraged in schools is in line with the introduction of the smart teaching and learning approaches.

### **c. Assessment of IIE**

The findings of the interviews found that all schools have a systematic academic assessment through monthly tests, half-year examinations and final examinations. As for JAIS schools, the students must sit for two additional JAIS religious examinations, namely the Religious Secondary Certificate (SMA) and the Higher Religious Certificate (STA) based on the al-Azhar secondary school syllabus. For non-academic assessment, most of the schools have implemented moral assessment for their students. However, they did not have a standard measurement instrument for this. Every schools has its own criteria to measure their students' behaviour (*akhlak*). It seems that it is up to the school whether to assess student behaviour or not. Some schools assessed their students based on their leadership qualities and their involvement in extra-curricular activities. While in another school they used a diagnostic test<sup>3</sup> by a student counsellor to examine the students' behaviour, problems, interests and talents (A/S/F1). To acknowledge those students with excellent conduct, a number of respondents said that they gave them a special reward, namely Principal's Special Reward at the end of the year. By doing this, it is hoped to encourage other students to emulate the recognized students as model.

Some schools did not take their students' behaviour into any consideration as part of the overall student performance. They gave their reason for this by saying that “*it is hard to assess non-academic performance...*” (A/S/M2, D/S/F2). One respondent stated that “*non-academic (performance) is hard to assess but we have the student's record of indiscipline...*” (A/S/M2). At the same time, when a JAIS education officer was asked the question of the implementation of behaviour assessment, he said “*In terms of (behaviour) assessment, we are still trying to determine the acknowledged technique. For me, it is not so critical to issue a certificate or any form of recognition...*” (O/J1). These responses show that the respondents felt that assessing student behaviour was not necessary. Thus, their attitude toward it was not as serious as their attitude towards their academic assessment of the student.

In short, behaviour assessment was not considered as necessary as academic assessment and it was up to the school leadership to implement it. Nevertheless, all the respondents agreed that good conduct is as important as academic achievement while all schools have made attempts to produce a good personality as required by Islam.

### **d. Problems of the implementation of IIE**

When the SMKA respondents were asked about their views on the problems they have encountered in teaching the Islamic Education in their schools, all of them were satisfied with their teachers' abilities and experiences. One female respondent expressed her perspective of Islamic Education teachers in her school as follows:

*“The majority of the teachers are great. They are excellent and skillful. (Some of them) are examiners or the panel for setting exam questions and they are always invited to give talks at other schools. The teachers have positive attitudes and hard-working...”* (A/S/F1)

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<sup>3</sup> This test is an aid for learning and was designed to discover an individual pupil's strengths and weaknesses in a particular subject area (Lawton and Gordon 1996).

In addition, another principal felt that experienced and competent teachers contributed to the success of Islamic Education in his school and state that: *'these factors make us excellent, particularly in Islamic Education...'* (A/S/M2).

In contrast, more than half of JAIS respondents said that they had encountered the problem of incompetent teachers in their schools. This was due to some of them being untrained and non-option teachers assigned to teach subjects which were not their specialization. Thus these teachers could not teach effectively as they did not have the knowledge and skills to teach the particular subjects. This inadvertently affects the quality of teaching in the classroom. As well as one of them mentioned the problem of teacher appointment in which about 40% of them were temporary teachers (A/J/M2). Such a category of teacher is not permanently appointed. As a result, this affects the effectiveness of teaching and learning in schools. This phenomenon was acknowledged by the JAIS education officer:

*"As for temporary teachers they are always trying to look for a better job. This will affect the quality (of teaching) because the new teachers have no experience compared to the trained and permanent teacher. Only about 40% of our teachers are permanent and we always hearing about unsatisfactory feeling among the students (regarding this problem). This problem is critical..."* (O/J1)

Another problem that was pointed out by an assistant principal from a SMKA school was exam-oriented pressure. She said: *'Whenever the examination results are released, every school is keen to compare with other schools as also is the society, thus, this phenomenon indirectly pushes the schools to focus on academic performance...'* (A/S/F2). Similarly, a great emphasis on public examinations results by education authorities and schools has led to focus towards passing examinations only. As a result, parents are very concerned about their children's grades and scores. National examinations are often used as a yardstick for the effectiveness of schools. For this reason, learning is very much directed towards preparing students for examinations while human development is often sacrificed since this is not considered in the overall marks.

From the findings, there are significant differences between the SMKA and JAIS respondents regarding the quality of teachers as well as the facilities in schools such as teaching equipment and reference materials for the teaching and learning of Islamic Education. As mentioned in the findings, all teachers in the SMKA are trained and qualified, whereas quite a big number of the JAIS teachers are untrained and temporary in services. Moreover, SMKA schools which are under the Ministry of Education are sufficiently equipped with modern facilities unlike JAIS schools which are under the State Government of Selangor.

## **Discussions**

School administrators' knowledge and understanding of the educational concept is critical because it underlies his or her actions. It also affects the way how they perceive their roles and behave in managing their schools. In other words, the principals' knowledge may, to some extent, be absorbed and integrated into their practical knowledge on school management. It is important therefore, to determine the level of knowledge of principals on the subject of study namely the IIE. The findings in this study show that the principals have good and clear understanding on the concept of IIE. This suggests that the principals of secondary religious schools have adequate knowledge of the IIE. This finding is supported by a study of Abdul Rahim and Azharul Nizam (2012) which showed that the curriculum implementers in

secondary schools understand the concept of integrated education and they adopt the integration of noble values in their teaching.

The findings from the qualitative data revealed that almost all the principals are promoting a range of teaching approaches to improve student learning. For instance, one principal from JAIS school (H/J/M2) is setting up a media room equipped with modern teaching equipment to facilitate teaching activities. However, he expressed his disappointment about the poor utilisation of this equipment by the teachers. These findings were in line with another study by Rahimah, Wan Ismail and Normila (2013) which indicated that most of the integrated Islamic schools encouraged the utilization of information and technological teaching aids. However, the teachers still have negative attitude in using these modern equipment in their teaching. This makes their teaching uninteresting and dull. Also, the question of the adoption of different teaching methods by using teaching technologies among the teachers still arises. In a study by Ab. Halim (2007), he found that many teachers were unable to use or adopt the various types of teaching method suggested in the teaching manual.

In addition, Islamic Education teachers prefer to use traditional teaching techniques rather than modern technological tools as indicated by Hatifah (2000) and Rahimah, Wan Ismail and Normila (2013). They also found that traditional methods such as textbook and blackboard are still common teaching instrument used by Islamic Education teachers. Again, studies by Khairul Azmi (2011) hinted at similar results, revealing that teachers prefer to use textbooks, reference books and chalkboard or the extensive use of audio and audio-visual materials was still not very popular. The preference of Islamic Education teachers to employ traditional teaching techniques will possibly have an adverse effect on the effectiveness of IIE.

The findings of the study showed that the schools have a systematic academic assessment mainly through written and oral examinations. In addition to that, JAIS schools have additional religious examinations based on the al-Azhar secondary school syllabus. This result is supported by Rahimah, Wan Ismail and Normila (2013) likewise Ibrahim (2006) in his quantitative study which indicates that a significant majority of the teachers in Islamic religious schools employed written and oral tests, while a fewer number of them employed the observation method for student assessment. The findings also indicated that Islamic Education teachers are using a combination of assessment methods and that they prefer to use conventional methods such as written and oral tests. Employing a range of assessment methods and techniques is important for effective teachers to monitor their student's understanding of lessons and work as argued by McBer (2000). Besides, effective teachers encourage pupils to judge the success of their own work and to set themselves targets for improvement.

In terms of non-academic assessment such as students' behavioural aspect, the results of the present study indicated that not all schools assess their students' behavioural development which in agreement with Rahimah, Wan Ismail and Normila (2013). This finding probably reflects the attitude of few school leaderships that behavioural performance is less important than academic performance. Other possible reasons may be the lack of schools' recognition of behavioural excellence in an overall recognition of students' performance, as well as no standard policy related to behavioral assessment in school.

The findings reveal that the problems in the implementation of IIE in schools are inadequately-trained teachers. The majority of JAIS school administrators indicated that they had encountered problems from the lack of professionally trained teachers in their schools. This was because the particular teachers had never received any professional teaching training and



also because of the non-option teachers who are assigned to teach subjects that are not their expertise. They also encountered a large number of temporary teachers which the number being nearly half of the total teacher population.

Another major problem was the pressure of national examinations. This situation is due to the overemphasis of parents as well as the public on student achievement in national examinations. Moreover, student selection to higher education is mainly based on examination results. Thus, frequently it is the case that the focus and style of learning are very much directed to the achievement of examination results rather than the curricular objectives. This finding is supported by Tengku Sarina (2014), who argues that overemphasizing examination results has led to the adoption of certain teaching and learning strategies such as rote learning and spoon feeding rather than acquiring generic skills.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, to make the teaching of IIE effective, teachers as key players in teaching and learning should be trained in the know-how and the technique of the integration process because the inculcation of universal values across the curriculum requires a new pedagogical orientation. Such an approach would require teachers to convey values in their teaching as well as to be connected to broader perspectives wherever and whenever possible. In this regard, teacher-training colleges are vital in offering courses on the theory of knowledge and comparative studies. In addition, the JAIS school authority should send their unqualified teachers for training to enhance their pedagogical skills. Regarding the problem of examination pressure on students, there should be a balanced emphasis at all levels on the students' achievement in both academic and non-academic realms. The school administrators, as well as the Islamic Education teachers, must ensure that preparation for national examinations does not overshadow other elements of a student's development such as critical thinking and creativity.

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