Intellectual Discourse

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Intellectual Discourse
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Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	ʿ
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	ʾ
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
◌َ	a		◌َا، ◌َى	an
◌ُ	u		◌ُّو	un
◌ِ	i		◌ِّي	in
◌َا، ◌َ، ◌َى،	ā		◌َوْ	aw
◌ُو	ū		◌َيْ	ay
◌ِي	ī		◌ُّو	uww, ū (in final position)
			◌ِّي	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: http://rotas.iium.edu.my

Note from the Editor

In the last issue, we announced that Intellectual Discourse is changing its publication schedule of regular issues—from January and June—to April and October, starting from this issue, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2025). In this issue, we present 15 articles and two book reviews. They cover a wide range of disciplines, from philosophy to political science, psychology, Qur'an and Sunnah studies, and communications. They are all pertinent issues that are relevant to the Muslim World.

In the first article (Metaphysical and Phenomenological Doubt in the Search for Truth: A Comparative Study of al-Ghazālī and Edmund Husserl), Müfit Selim Saruhan examines al-Ghazālī's method of metaphysical doubt in light of phenomenological approaches, comparing such method with that of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). The author argues that for al-Ghazālī (c. 1058-1111 CE), doubt is not an end in itself, but a 'methodological suspension' toward uncovering truths. This article attempts at rethinking contemporary epistemology through the integration of phenomenological and religious insights.

Almasa Mulalić, Ratnawati Mohd Asraf and Safija Bušatlić examine the practice of inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina – specifically on English teachers' attitude toward teaching children with disabilities in foreign language classrooms – in the second article (Inclusive Education for All: A Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina). Their study finds mixed reactions from the teachers, where some expressed reservations about teaching in inclusive classrooms, while others strongly advocated for inclusivity by willing to adopt effective strategies and methodologies to integrate learners with disabilities. The study also advocates for policy changes through reviewing the mainstream curricula to ensure that their content and level of complexity are suitable for students with disabilities.

The third article (Globalisation and Religion: A Study of Thai Muslims' Experiences on Gender Diversity in Thai Muslim Society

through an Islamic Perspective) by Jiraroj Mamadkul examines the impact of globalisation on gender diversity within the Thai Muslim community. It also applies an Islamic perspective on the issue by exploring how LGBTQI+ Thai Muslims negotiate their identities while adhering to Islamic teachings. His research finds that increased media access that glorifies Western individualist values – as a direct impact of globalisation – has enabled LGBTQI+ Thai Muslims to express their identities openly. Mamadkul suggests that the provision for religious counselling that is both faithful to Islamic teachings and sensitive to the well-being of the LGBTQI+ individuals is essential in navigating the complexities of globalisation and maintaining faith and human dignity.

The thoughts of Mohd. Kamal Hassan, the third rector of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), is the focus of the fourth article (Mohd. Kamal Hassan's Perspectives on Family Relationships: Strategies for Strengthening Malaysian Muslim Families) by Fatimah Karim, Sayyed Mohamed Muhsin and Nur Elyliana Abdul Hadi. The article finds that Kamal Hassan's insights into promoting harmonious family relationships, especially spiritual leadership, economic stability and mutual respect, are relevant in strengthening Muslim families in Malaysia. It also suggests that Kamal Hassan's interpretation of the *Ūlū al-Albāb* personality be the basis for a compelling strategy to address the challenges faced by Malaysian Muslim families.

Afrizal Tjoetra, Aizat Khairi, Nellis Mardhiah and Nodi Marefanda study challengesto good governance in village governments in West Aceh in the fifth article (Community-Centric Governance: Unveiling the Challenges and Strategies in West Aceh Villages). Their article explores the obstacles that hinder the implementation of good governance at the village level with a view of overcoming such obstacles. The authors find that legal enforcement, equality and efficient administration in West Aceh's village administration are strong, but there are shortcomings in community participation and responsiveness. They conclude that enhancing community involvement and responsiveness is crucial for achieving effective and sustainable local governance.

The place of religion in International Relations (IR) is explored in the sixth article (Bringing Back Religion to the Forefront: An Opinion-Oriented Study from IR Scholars in Malaysia's Research Universities) by Siti Zuliha Razali, Nadhrah Abd. Kadir and Razlini Mohd Ramli.

The article finds a strong consensus among IR scholars in Malaysia's research universities on the importance of integrating religion into IR. The IR scholars acknowledged that the discipline has a strong secular bias, while suggesting that Constructivism is probably the most amenable to analysing religion in IR for its emphasis on ideational factors and normative change. This study also highlights the IR scholars' recommendation for multidisciplinary and experiential approaches to prepare students to engage with the complexity of religion in IR.

In the seventh article (Coalition Rule by Pakatan Harapan, 2018-2020: Key Consociational Lessons), Muhammad Azzubair Awwam Mustafa, Kartini Aboo Talib @ Khalid and Nazri Muslim evaluate Pakatan Harapan's (PH) experience in administration (2018-2020) through the lens of Arend Lijphart's consociationalism. Despite the absence of any PH's own reference to consociationalism, the authors suggest that the elements of a broad grand coalition, corrective proportionality, improvised segmental autonomy, and informal bargaining in place of mutual veto were akin to Lijphart's (1977) consociationalism. The study also suggests that inclusion without enforceable rules limits the durability of consociational arrangements in post-BN Malaysia.

The eighth article ("Should I Pay a Living Wage?" A Systematic Review on Employers' Decision from an Organisational Perspective) by Nurul Izzati Asyikin Zulkifly, Ruhaya Hussin and Maisarah Mohd. Taib is a systematic review exploring employers' decision for or against living wage. The study extracts three themes related to organisational justice: distributive, procedural and interactional justices. It also proposes a novel framework for employers' decision on living wages from the perspective of organisational justice, which may serve as a decision-making tool for employers to introduce living wage, and a strategy for advocates of living wage to persuade employers to pay reasonable living wage.

Zunaidah Mohd Marzuki and Nurulhaniy Ahmad Fuad review themes of Islamic spiritual care within the literature related to *Ṭibb Nabawī* in the ninth article (Prophetic Model of Islamic Spiritual Care from Muslim Professional Practitioners' Perspectives: A Systematic Review within the *Ṭibb Nabawī* Genre). They examine the *ḥadīths* used in such literature to derive at a Prophetic framework for Islamic spiritual care. Their study concludes that Islamic spiritual care spans multiple

disciplines, that it includes broader Islamic intellectual tradition, especially *tasawuf,* and that some *Ṭibb Nabawī* aspects are not included in Islamic spiritual care.

The notes on the tenth to 13ᵗʰ articles by our guest editor, Nerawi Sedu, will follow this paragraph. He edited four articles from "Communication and Media Centre International Conference 2024 (COMETIC '24)," held on 16–17 October 2024. On behalf of the editorial team, we record our appreciation to the authors – from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Türkiye – who choose to present their research findings in *Intellectual Discourse*. We are also thankful for the contributions of the reviewers who assist us in improving the quality of the works that appear in this issue.

Tunku Mohar Mokhtar
Editor

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In the tenth article (Designing and Evaluating a Culturally Grounded Digital Parenting Initiative in Malaysia), Shafizan Mohamed, Nazariah Shar'Ie Janon, Mohd Helmi Yusoh, Norsaremah Salleh, Nur Shakira Mohd Nasir, and Wan Norshira Wan Mohd Ghazali explore the importance of developing a digital parenting platform that integrates cultural and religious values within the Malaysian context. The authors argue that *Platform Keibubapaan Digital* (Platform KID) could serve as an effective alternative to traditional parenting approaches if it is designed and tailored to reflect the cultural norms and needs of Malaysian parents. They emphasise that effective digital parenting technologies should prioritise visual appeal, interactive content, strong outreach capabilities, and culturally sensitive materials. The authors express optimism that such a culturally grounded digital initiative, when used appropriately, can empower Malaysian parents with the knowledge, confidence, and ethical foundation needed to raise digitally resilient children.

The 11ᵗʰ article (Perception about Islam, Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Behavioural Intention in Using Artificial Intelligence among University Students) focuses on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) among Muslim university students in Malaysia. Drawing on the assumptions of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) integrated with Islamic principles, Aini Maznina A. Manaf and Tengku Siti Aishah Tengku Mohd Azzman conducted a cross-sectional survey to examine how religion, attitude, social norms, and intention influence students' perceptions of AI. The authors argue that the ethical use of AI, when guided by Islamic principles, can foster holistic student development. They further suggest that adopting AI with positive attitudes and ethical awareness can enhance the educational experience and ultimately raise the standard of higher education in Malaysia.

The 12ᵗʰ article (Parental Perceptions of Islamic YouTube Animation: The Case of 'Abdul Bari' in Pakistan) examines the use of children's animated YouTube series as tools for teaching Islamic values in contemporary Muslim societies. Saima Waheed, Mohd. Khairie Ahmad, and Zafar Iqbal Bhatti apply the Uses and Gratifications Theory, Parental Mediation Theory, and the Mediatisation of Religion framework to explore how digital media can complement traditional methods of Islamic education. Their findings suggest that parents appreciate *Abdul Bari* for promoting Islamic virtues and consider it a safer alternative to secular online content. However, they also express concerns over its commercialised nature and the influence of YouTube's algorithms. The authors conclude that, with proper parental guidance and monitoring, such digital content can effectively nurture children's understanding of Islam.

Establishing an Islamic model of codes of conduct for advertising Professionalism is the focus of the 13ᵗʰ paper (Development of a Model for Advertising Professionalism from the *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* Perspective). Contemporary advertising is often criticised for promoting unhealthy practices such as deception and the sexualisation of content, largely due to the absence of clear ethical guidelines. Drawing insights from religious scholars and industry practitioners, Aida Mokhtar, Faiswal Kasirye, Mohd. Fuad Md. Sawari, Amilah Awang Abd. Rahman, and Ahasanul Haque propose an alternative framework for advertising ethics grounded in the principles of *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah.* The authors argue that the universal and holistic nature of these principles, when

properly integrated into professional codes of conduct, can curb unethical practices and encourage greater accountability within the highly commercialised advertising industry—ultimately benefiting both practitioners and society at large.

Collectively, these four contributions embody the spirit of COMETIC '24—pausing not to retreat, but to confront critical questions head-on. Through diverse lenses—technological, health, ethical, intercultural, and geopolitical—they enrich academic discourse and chart new directions for both scholarship and praxis.

Nerawi Sedu
Guest Editor

Metaphysical and Phenomenological Doubt in the Search for Truth: A Comparative Study of al-Ghazālī and Edmund Husserl

Müfit Selim Saruhan[*]

Abstract: This study examines al-Ghazālī's method of metaphysical doubt in light of phenomenological approaches, particularly that of Edmund Husserl. It argues that al-Ghazālī's intellectual crisis and subsequent journey toward certain knowledge reveal a proto-phenomenological attitude, wherein doubt is not an end in itself but a methodological suspension aimed at uncovering indubitable truths. Through comparative analysis, this paper explores their shared commitment to epistemic certainty, the role of intuition, and the transformation of the self in the search for truth. Furthermore, it highlights the interplay between mystical experience and rational method, proposing a novel framework for rethinking religious epistemology in light of phenomenological reflection. The study uses both primary sources and recent scholarship, situating al-Ghazālī within a broader philosophical context that underscores his relevance to contemporary debates in epistemology, phenomenology, and the philosophy of religion.

Keywords: al-Ghazālī, Husserl, doubt, phenomenology, intuition

Abstrak: Kajian ini meneliti kaedah keraguan metafizik al-Ghazālī bersandarkan kepada pendekatan fenomenologi, khususnya yang dikembangkan oleh Edmund Husserl. Ia berhujah bahawa krisis intelektual al-Ghazālī dan perjalanan beliau menuju pengetahuan tertentu memperlihatkan satu sikap proto-fenomenologi, di mana keraguan bukanlah tujuan akhir, tetapi suatu penangguhan metodologi yang bertujuan untuk mendedahkan kebenaran yang tidak dapat disangkal. Melalui analisis perbandingan, makalah ini meneliti

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komitmen bersama mereka terhadap kepastian epistemik, peranan intuisi, dan transformasi diri dalam pencarian kebenaran. Selain itu, ia menyoroti interaksi antara pengalaman mistik dan kaedah rasional, serta mengemukakan satu kerangka baharu untuk menilai semula epistemologi agama dalam cahaya refleksi fenomenologi. Kajian ini menggunakan kedua-dua sumber primer dan kajian terkini, meletakkan al-Ghazālī dalam konteks falsafah yang lebih luas yang menegaskan relevansinya terhadap perdebatan kontemporari dalam epistemologi, fenomenologi, dan falsafah agama.

Kata kunci: al-Ghazālī, Husserl, keraguan, fenomenologi, intuisi.

Introduction

The search for truth has historically been marked by episodes of radical doubt. From the Pyrrhonists and Academic Skeptics in antiquity to Descartes, Kierkegaard, and the existentialists, doubt has often served as the necessary precondition for the clarification of belief and the eventual acquisition of certainty (Moran, 2000; Zahavi, 2005). In the Greek tradition, Pyrrho of Elis and his followers practiced *epoché*—the suspension of judgment—in order to attain tranquility (*ataraxia*). The Academic Skeptics, such as Arcesilaus and Carneades, refined this by arguing that certainty is impossible, but probable judgments can still guide life. These approaches framed doubt as both a therapeutic and epistemic strategy, a conceptual background that would re-emerge in modern and postmodern contexts (Popkin, 2003).

Philosophical skepticism, especially in its Pyrrhonian form, involved suspending judgment (*epoché*) to attain tranquility (*ataraxia*), a move that shaped both ancient and later philosophical traditions. This tradition deeply influenced not only Western epistemology but also Islamic intellectual discourse, particularly through figures such as al-Ghazālī, who inherited the Hellenistic legacy through the Arabic philosophical tradition (*falsafa*) (Griffel, 2009).

In the history of philosophical inquiry, the problem of doubt has recurrently emerged as a pivotal moment in the pursuit of epistemic certainty and the restructuring of foundational knowledge. Both Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Edmund Husserl, despite their distinct historical and cultural contexts, engaged deeply with this problem by initiating radical forms of doubt that ultimately served as gateways to a renewed understanding of truth. While al-Ghazālī's metaphysical crisis led him to

a spiritual epistemology grounded in inner certainty (*yaqīn*), Husserl's phenomenological reduction aimed to suspend all presuppositions in order to uncover the pure structures of consciousness. Comparing these two approaches reveals surprising conceptual affinities—such as the role of intuition and the act of epistemic suspension—and opens new pathways for understanding the interplay between religious and philosophical quests for certainty.

It is important to distinguish between radical or skeptical doubt (as in Pyrrhonism or Cartesian skepticism) and methodological doubt, which is employed as a deliberate tool for the refinement of knowledge. While the former often questions the very possibility of certainty and tends toward epistemic suspension, the latter seeks to clear away uncertain beliefs to establish a firmer epistemological ground (Husserl, 1999; Descartes, 1996).

In this sense, al-Ghazālī's approach is more aligned with methodological doubt, even though he begins by entertaining deeply skeptical considerations. His autobiographical *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* reflects a structured process of examining different sources of knowledge—sense perception, intellect, and tradition—before arriving at a state of spiritual certainty grounded in intuitive experience (*dhawq*) (al-Ghazālī, 2000).

It is important not to overlook that al-Ghazālī employed doubt not merely as a tool for intellectual crisis but as the starting point of a systematic scientific method. His intellectual journey, as articulated in *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* and *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm* (The Standard Measure of Knowledge), reflects a methodological quest for certainty. He critically examines the sources of knowledge—sense perception, reason, and traditional authority—in pursuit of a reliable criterion (*miʿyār*, sometimes *qanūn*). This criterion must be indubitable, free from error, and capable of protecting the mind from deception. His skeptical examination of the limits of sensory and rational inference thus leads not to nihilism but to a more solid foundation. In *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm*, he outlines a clear commitment to logical analysis, demonstrative reasoning (*burhān*), and intellectual certainty (*yaqīn*), showing that his method is not anti-rational but profoundly methodical. His method, therefore, can be understood as a form of epistemological purification.

Al-Ghazālī's method, though grounded in Islamic spirituality, resonates with the systematic doubt of Descartes and anticipates Husserl's phenomenological epoché. There is evidence in the intellectual history of *falsafa* and *kalām* that classical Islamic thinkers were familiar with skeptical themes inherited from Greek philosophy (Nasr, 1964; Chittick, 2007). Al-Ghazālī's training in logic and philosophy enabled him to creatively adapt these themes, transforming them into a framework for spiritual inquiry. Thus, it is plausible to argue that classical skepticism indirectly inspired his method, not by leading to relativism, but by pushing him toward a more refined and experiential form of certainty (al-Ghazālī, 1328/1967).

Although the name al-Ghazālī evokes both admiration and criticism, careful study shows that his skepticism was not a rejection of reason but a way of grounding it ethically. His *al-Munqidh* includes rational reflections like: "To be certain of a mistake, the knowledge must be so strong that... even miracles cannot shake it" (al-Ghazālī, 1967, p. 15). This passage illustrates his demand for knowledge that is indubitable.

Among the most profound manifestations of this dynamic are the epistemological crises of al-Ghazālī and Husserl. Though separated by centuries and contexts, both thinkers suspended judgment and subjected their systems to rigorous critique (Rustom, 2023; Griffel, 2009). This study explores the intersections between al-Ghazālī's metaphysical doubt and Husserl's phenomenological epoché. Both envision doubt not as annihilation but as a gateway to deeper insight—whether through divine illumination or eidetic intuition.

Phenomenology and the Dynamics of Doubt

Phenomenology, as developed by Edmund Husserl, is not merely a school of thought but a radical reorientation of philosophy toward the things themselves (*zu den Sachen selbst*) (Husserl, 1983, p. 6). Its core claim is that knowledge must begin not from abstract metaphysics nor from empirical generalisation, but from how phenomena give themselves to consciousness. By suspending presuppositions and reducing inquiry to the structures of intentionality, phenomenology seeks to uncover the conditions of possibility for meaning and evidence. In this sense, phenomenology is not the abandonment of the world but its most careful description, one that treats consciousness and world as inseparably correlated. I believe this orientation turns doubt into a

method of purification: by withholding naïve belief in external reality, phenomenology clears a space where the essence of experience can appear with greater clarity (Zahavi, 2005, 14–15).

The connection between philosophical doubt and phenomenology thus lies in their shared gesture of *epoché*—a suspension of judgment not for skepticism's sake but for truth's sake. Just as the Pyrrhonian skeptics practiced *epoché* to achieve tranquility (*ataraxia*), Husserl radicalises this practice by transforming it into a scientific method: doubt is no longer a paralysing impasse but the doorway to eidetic intuition (Moran, 2000,150–152). Al-Ghazālī, too, embodies this dynamic in *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, where he questions sense, intellect, and tradition only to arrive at an indubitable form of inner certainty (*yaqīn*) (al-Ghazālī, 2000). I argue that both Husserl and al-Ghazālī reveal how doubt, when phenomenologically disciplined, becomes not a negation of knowledge but a higher affirmation: it strips away illusion to expose a foundation where truth is both seen and lived.

Methodology

The methodological process involves three main stages: (1) a systematic close reading and philological examination of primary texts by al-Ghazālī and Husserl; (2) the extraction and critical evaluation of epistemological categories embedded in these texts; and (3) a comparative synthesis that aims to trace thematic and methodological parallels without erasing cultural and philosophical particularities.

Primary texts of al- Ghazālī are analysed with attention to historical context, theological nuance, and the author's own autobiographical narrative. On the phenomenological side, central works such as Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, *Ideas I*, and *Logical Investigations* provide the philosophical basis for identifying the structural elements of the epoché and the theory of intentionality.

In order to strengthen the interpretive framework, this study integrates recent scholarly discourse from both Islamic studies and phenomenological philosophy. Relevant contributions are drawn from contemporary research on Islamic epistemology, spiritual psychology, and mysticism, as well as from phenomenological analyses on subjectivity, intentionality, and the nature of consciousness. The study adheres to the methodological expectations of peer-reviewed scholarship

by incorporating multi-lingual sources, interdisciplinary perspectives, and critical engagement with both classical and contemporary positions.

Result and Discussion

Al-Ghazālī's Metaphysical Doubt

Al-Ghazālī's intellectual crisis, as narrated in *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, marks a pivotal moment in classical Islamic thought. His suspicion toward accepted sources of knowledge—namely, the senses, the intellect, and authority (*taqlīd*)—is not merely rhetorical but existential. He recounts an intense period during which he systematically doubted all that he previously took for granted, including the veracity of his senses and the reliability of logical inference (al-Ghazālī, 2000; 1962). This profound state of doubt ultimately paralyzed his ability to affirm even basic truths and served as a turning point toward an entirely new epistemological framework.(Grasen,2014,13-34).

Crucially, however, al-Ghazālī's doubt was not arbitrary or emotional—it followed a structured method, deeply informed by his training in logic (*manṭiq*), philosophy (*falsafa*), and theology (*kalām*). His methodological awareness is especially evident in works like *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm* and *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*, where he engages in a rigorous critique of reasoning and the conditions of valid inference. In these works, al-Ghazālī articulates his criteria for true knowledge, emphasising that certainty (*yaqīn*) must be established through indubitable and logically demonstrable premises. His approach shows clear familiarity with Aristotelian logic and reflects a commitment to *burhānī* (demonstrative) reasoning. Thus, his metaphysical doubt should be seen as a rational suspension of belief aimed at testing and refining the very foundations of knowledge—what Husserl would later conceptualise as *epoché*.(Shihadeh,2011,77).

The crisis described in *al-Munqidh* was not an abandonment of reason but its purification. Al-Ghazālī seeks a knowledge that is immune to doubt, comparing it to the kind of certainty that cannot be shaken even by sensory miracles or metaphysical illusions. This is not a rejection of rationality but an elevation of epistemology toward a level where knowledge is internally self-evident. For al-Ghazālī, the failure of sense perception and rational argumentation was not the end of inquiry but a call to transcend these levels through inner spiritual illumination (*ishrāq*) and intuitive experience (*dhawq*).

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī does not only describe his doubt in autobiographical or mystical terms. He constructs an epistemological framework that is deeply systematic and conceptually coherent. For instance, in *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm*, he develops what might be described as an early theory of epistemic validity, where he distinguishes between degrees of certainty, types of inference, and the reliability of propositions. He does not indiscriminately accept Sufi intuition but places it at the apex of a hierarchy that begins with logical and empirical verification. This layered model of knowledge combines the rigor of philosophical reasoning with the transformative aims of mystical insight.

Therefore, al-Ghazālī's doubt serves three interrelated functions: epistemological, ethical, and spiritual. Epistemologically, it purges false beliefs; ethically, it cultivates humility and sincerity in the pursuit of truth; spiritually, it prepares the soul for divine illumination. His temporary withdrawal from public life and academic prestige mirrors the internal withdrawal from inherited doctrines and uncritical beliefs. It is a lived *epoché*—a radical reorientation of the self toward a new kind of certainty rooted in divine reality.

This reorientation is neither irrational nor anti-scientific; rather, it exemplifies a higher-order rationality that transcends reductive empiricism and purely deductive logic. Al-Ghazālī's methodology anticipates what can be described as a proto-phenomenological attitude—one in which certainty does not emerge solely from formal syllogistic reasoning but is cultivated through a refined, ethically attuned, and spiritually receptive form of subjective awareness. This awareness is not arbitrary or private opinion, but a disciplined and epistemologically valid mode of perception, rooted in the purification of the soul and alignment with the divine order. His concept of the illuminated heart (*qalb munawwar*) as the locus of true knowledge finds a compelling analogue in Husserl's phenomenological subject, where consciousness functions both as the origin and the horizon of all meaning-constitution. In both frameworks, knowledge is inseparable from the transformation of the knower. Thus, al-Ghazālī's metaphysical doubt emerges as a paradigmatic model of how rigorous rational inquiry and spiritual tradition can converge into a holistic, experiential, and ultimately transformative epistemology—one that integrates logic, intuition, and existential depth into a unified pursuit of truth.

One of the most recent works on this subject is Nabil Yasien Mohamed's *Ghazālī's Epistemology: A Critical Study of Doubt and Certainty*." It offers a systematic and balanced analysis of al-Ghazālī's treatment of *shakk* (doubt) and *yaqīn* (certainty) (Mohamed, 2024). The book resists portraying al-Ghazālī merely as a philosopher or solely as a mystic, instead presenting him as a thinker who genuinely integrates both traditions. Mohamed emphasises how al-Ghazālī's method relies on the interplay between philosophical demonstration (*burhān*) and Sufi practice, framing his epistemology as a dialogue between reason and the heart, between rational inference and intuitive unveiling.

This strongly resonates with the aims of my own study. Whereas Mohamed carefully reconstructs the internal logic of al-Ghazālī's epistemology, my work places this logic in comparative dialogue with **Edmund Husserl's phenomenology**. By aligning al-Ghazālī's metaphysical doubt with Husserl's *epoché*, I highlight the structural role of suspension and intuition across traditions. Mohamed's analysis demonstrates how al-Ghazālī disciplines doubt within Islamic thought, while my approach universalises this insight, showing how rational analysis and intuitive verification converge as methodological tools in both Islamic and Western contexts. In this way, Mohamed's work and mine are complementary: his provides the detailed roadmap of al-Ghazālī's epistemology, and mine situates that roadmap within a comparative philosophical framework that underscores the enduring relevance of doubt as a gateway to truth.

Husserl's Phenomenological Epoché

Husserl's concept of *epoché*—central to his phenomenological method—marks a radical departure from the empirical and naturalistic assumptions of traditional philosophy and science. Derived etymologically from ancient Greek skepticism, *epoché* originally denoted the suspension of judgment in the face of uncertainty. However, Husserl transformed this concept into a methodological tool for accessing the pure structures of consciousness by "bracketing" or setting aside all presuppositions about the external world. This bracketing is not a denial of reality, but a way to reorient attention from what is assumed to be objectively "out there" toward how meaning is constituted in subjective experience (Husserl, 1982).

To properly understand Husserl's *epoché*, one must situate it within his broader critique of the "natural attitude"—the unreflective acceptance of the world as it appears in everyday experience. In works such as *Ideas I* and *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl argues that this attitude hides the deeper, transcendental conditions that make experience possible. His method calls for a "phenomenological reduction," a return "to the things themselves" (*zu den Sachen selbst*)—not as they exist empirically, but as they are given in conscious intentionality (Husserl, 1999). This reduction leads to the uncovering of the *transcendental ego*, the pure consciousness that constitutes the world of appearances through acts of meaning-bestowal.

What makes Husserl's approach particularly novel is his radical redefinition of objectivity: rather than viewing it as an independent property of external things, he demonstrates that objectivity is constituted *within* consciousness through intentional acts. In Husserl's phenomenology, every act of consciousness is inherently intentional— that is, it is always directed toward an object, whether real, imagined, abstract, or emotional. This foundational insight, known as the *principle of intentionality*, challenges the traditional Cartesian separation between subject and object by showing that meaning arises not in isolation but through the lived relation between the two. Consciousness, therefore, is never an inert or empty receptacle; it is an active, meaning-giving process, continually engaged in structuring experience. By performing the *epoché*—the suspension of naturalistic or metaphysical assumptions about the existence of objects—Husserl is able to redirect philosophical attention to the manner in which objects are given to consciousness. This involves uncovering the *noetic* (act-related) and *noematic* (content-related) structures that condition appearance, thereby revealing that the essence of objectivity lies not in its detached presence, but in its *givenness* to a conscious subject. In doing so, Husserl transforms epistemology into a reflective, first-person analysis of how truth, meaning, and knowledge are constituted in and through subjective experience. This methodological shift marks a profound departure from both empiricist realism and abstract rationalism, offering instead a rigorous path toward foundational insight grounded in lived consciousness.

This has profound implications not only for epistemology but also for metaphysics, psychology, and ethics. Husserl's turn to the transcendental ego is not a turn away from reality, but a philosophical deepening of how reality is disclosed to a subject. It opens the possibility

of a rigorous science of experience—a *Wissenschaftslehre*—that can analyse phenomena in their first-person givenness with the same precision as mathematics or logic. In this way, phenomenology aims to be both a science and a philosophy of consciousness.

When read in light of al-Ghazālī's own methodological doubt, Husserl's *epoché* resonates in intriguing ways. Just as al-Ghazālī suspends his trust in the senses, reason, and tradition to arrive at inner certainty (*yaqīn*), Husserl suspends his belief in the objective world to uncover the foundational structures of meaning. While al-Ghazālī seeks knowledge through spiritual purification and divine illumination, Husserl seeks it through eidetic intuition—the grasping of essential structures (*Wesen*) in their apodictic clarity. Both thinkers, though operating in different epistemic traditions, employ a form of suspension to reach a deeper, more original source of certainty.

Moreover, the *epoché* is not a purely intellectual exercise in Husserl—it entails a transformation of the subject. The phenomenologist must cultivate a reflective attitude, a heightened self-awareness that parallels the ethical and spiritual preparation in al-Ghazālī's path of purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). In both frameworks, the knower is not merely a passive observer but an ethically and cognitively engaged being. This reorientation of the self lies at the heart of both thinkers' methods and suggests a broader philosophical kinship that transcends cultural and religious boundaries.

Husserl's later writings, particularly in *The Crisis of European Sciences*, also reveal a quasi-spiritual dimension to his philosophy. He critiques the objectivism and fragmentation of modern science, calling instead for a return to the "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*), the pre-theoretical realm of lived experience. In this call, Husserl implicitly echoes the kind of holistic and self-involving knowledge that al-Ghazālī pursued centuries earlier. For both thinkers, the restoration of certainty involves a rehabilitation of the knowing subject, not through external proof alone but through inward transformation and direct access to foundational truth.

Comparative Analysis

Both al-Ghazālī and Husserl employ doubt not as a terminus but as a methodological point of departure, a catalyst that initiates a profound reconstruction of epistemology. Instead of surrendering to skepticism,

they transform doubt into an instrument of intellectual and spiritual purification. This deliberate move subverts the familiar dichotomies often posited between faith and reason, or science and mysticism. In their shared vision, genuine philosophy does not require the exclusion of subjectivity or religious experience; rather, it requires a bracketing of inherited assumptions so that deeper, more foundational modes of knowing may be disclosed.

For al-Ghazālī, this process begins with a suspension of reliance upon theological and philosophical authorities—*mutakallimūn*, *falāsifa*, and even Sufis—in pursuit of a certainty that is both indubitable and transformative. His temporary withholding of assent mirrors Husserl's suspension of the "natural attitude," where the phenomenologist sets aside unexamined belief in the external world to investigate how consciousness constitutes meaning. Both thus employ suspension (*taʿlīq* or *epoché*) not to destroy knowledge but to purify its sources and refine its grounds. Truth, in their accounts, emerges only once the mind is liberated from the veils of custom, habit, and dogma (Hourani, 1958, pp. 183–191).

At the centre of both projects lies intuition as the decisive faculty for accessing genuine knowledge. For al-Ghazālī, *dhawq*—literally, "tasting"—is a spiritual-intuitive apprehension that transcends rational syllogism. Rooted in the purified heart (*qalb*), this form of knowing is not irrational but supra-rational, the fruit of ethical and spiritual cultivation (al-Ghazālī, 2010; Rustom, 2023). Husserl's *Anschauung*, by contrast, is the immediate givenness of essences to consciousness—an eidetic grasp of invariant structures beyond empirical particulars (Husserl, 1982). Despite their distinct content—divine illumination for al-Ghazālī, eidetic reduction for Husserl—both elevate intuitive immediacy above abstract deduction, signaling a paradigmatic shift from formal logic to lived clarity.

This turn destabilises rigid philosophical dichotomies—subject versus object, rationalism versus empiricism, theology versus phenomenology. In both traditions, intuition does not abolish reason but completes it, integrating the epistemic with the existential, knowledge with transformation. What emerges is a transformative epistemology, a model in which knowing is inseparable from the moral and ontological development of the knower.

Their projects are thus inseparably tied to self-transformation. Al-Ghazālī's metaphysical journey requires moral purification through asceticism, ethical discipline, and detachment from prestige. Only by this path does he become worthy of intuitive disclosure through divine illumination. Husserl's transcendental reduction likewise restructures consciousness, opening access to the essential conditions of experience. In both cases, knowledge demands that the knower undergo a conversion of subjectivity in order to perceive a different order of truth.

Accordingly, both thinkers redefine knowledge not merely as justified belief but as existentially grounded certainty. For al-Ghazālī, certainty (*yaqīn*) dwells in the illuminated heart (*qalb munawwar*), made receptive to truth through divine grace and inner refinement. For Husserl, certainty appears as apodictic self-evidence, indubitable once disclosed to reflective consciousness. This shift—from external validation to internal illumination—questions the dominant paradigms of both analytic philosophy and scholastic theology, compelling us to reconsider the subjective conditions of truth.

By emphasising intuition, both thinkers sketch the contours of what may be called a phenomenological theology: a horizon where religious truths are not dogmatically accepted but experientially unveiled. Here truth is not merely revealed or deduced; it is inhabited and lived. Such an epistemology is profoundly holistic, resisting modern fragmentation by centring the subject as the locus where divine and eidetic realities converge (Zahavi, 2005; Rustom, 2023).

Thus emerges the possibility of a phenomenology of faith. Faith, in this sense, is not blind submission but a structured experiential awareness rooted in lived certainty. For al-Ghazālī, faith (*īmān*) matures through self-examination and purification, culminating in *yaqīn*—a certainty invulnerable to doubt because it is existentially embodied. For Husserl, faith may be read as the phenomenologist's radical commitment to uncovering meaning through intentional reflection and intuition. In both cases, faith unites the noetic and the existential, affirming that truth is not merely asserted but dwelt within. As William C. Smith (1991) reminds us, belief without personal engagement is incomplete; al-Ghazālī and Husserl show that certainty requires the whole self's participation.

Ultimately, both thinkers converge on a profound insight: truth is not simply a proposition to be verified but a mode of being to be

realised. Whether through divine illumination or eidetic intuition, the highest knowledge is a form of presence—a unity of knowing, being, and meaning. Their legacies invite us to rethink the very foundations of philosophy and theology, directing us back to the depths of subjectivity where the search for truth truly begins.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both al-Ghazālī and Husserl utilise doubt not as an endpoint, but as a rigorous method for navigating the complexities of knowledge, certainty, and the transformation of the self. Their respective projects emerge from a shared dissatisfaction with uncritical belief—whether in theological dogma or naturalistic assumptions—and both thinkers initiate a radical suspension of these inherited convictions to reach more secure epistemic foundations. Al-Ghazālī's metaphysical doubt, grounded deeply in Islamic spirituality, represents not a negation of reason, but its elevation and refinement through spiritual purification. His method shows that certainty (*yaqīn*) is not merely a cognitive achievement but the fruit of an existential and moral struggle, culminating in a mode of intuitive knowledge (*dhawq*) that transcends rational demonstration.

This spiritual epistemology contrasts with more formalist or discursive accounts of knowledge by emphasising the necessity of internal transformation. Knowledge for al-Ghazālī is neither purely propositional nor detached; it is personal, embodied, and participatory. Certainty, in this sense, is not simply known—it is *lived*. His thought challenges modern assumptions that draw strict boundaries between reason and revelation, or between subjectivity and truth, by demonstrating that mystical experience and intellectual integrity need not be mutually exclusive.

Husserl, while working within a secular and phenomenological tradition, arrives at surprisingly similar insights. His concept of *epoché*—the bracketing of the natural attitude—allows the philosopher to step back from the external world and explore the intentional structures of consciousness. This reduction is not a retreat from truth, but a methodological return to the conditions that make experience and meaning possible. Through *eidetic intuition*, Husserl uncovers the essential forms of phenomena, privileging direct experiential evidence over empirical or abstract theorisation. His transcendental project

suggests that certainty is located not in the objectivity of the world, but in the reflective clarity of the subject.

In both frameworks, **intuition** is not an optional supplement to rational knowledge but the core through which truth is accessed in its most authentic form. Al-Ghazālī's *dhawq* and Husserl's *Anschauung* share a commitment to immediacy, clarity, and interior certainty. These concepts reconfigure epistemology to include the moral, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of knowing. This convergence challenges inherited dichotomies between subject and object, between faith and reason, between metaphysics and experience. It suggests that the truth is not merely about correspondence to external facts, but about coherence with the inward light of purified perception.

Moreover, both thinkers insist on the transformative dimension of knowledge. For al-Ghazālī, knowledge that does not morally or spiritually elevate the soul is incomplete. Similarly, for Husserl, true philosophical reflection alters the structure of the ego, leading to a heightened awareness of how we constitute meaning. In both cases, the knower becomes transformed in the very act of knowing. This shared emphasis places the subject—not as a neutral observer, but as an ethically and existentially involved participant—at the centre of the epistemic enterprise.

From this comparative horizon, a new framework begins to emerge: a phenomenology of faith. This is not faith reduced to dogma, nor reason emptied of spiritual depth, but an integrated model in which belief arises as an existential, intuitive certainty lived out in the purified self. For al-Ghazālī, faith (*īmān*) is an experiential response to divine truth that emerges only after intense intellectual and spiritual struggle. For Husserl, faith may be seen in the philosopher's disciplined commitment to intentional structures that transcend mere empirical observation. In both cases, faith is a mode of *dwelling within* the truth—a lived realisation rather than passive acceptance.

This study thus offers a path for rethinking contemporary epistemology through the integration of phenomenological and religious insights. It challenges us to reconsider the role of subjectivity, intuition, and transformation in our understanding of knowledge. Far from being relics of pre-modern metaphysics, thinkers like al-Ghazālī and Husserl point toward a renewed vision of inquiry in which intellectual clarity

and spiritual depth are mutually reinforcing. By placing the knower—not merely logic or empirical data—at the heart of the epistemological process, they remind us that the search for truth is also a search for the self.

Ultimately, this comparative analysis invites further research into how Islamic thought and phenomenology can enrich one another. It opens the door to interdisciplinary conversations between theology, philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science. In an age marked by both epistemic relativism and spiritual disorientation, the synthesis of al-Ghazālī and Husserl offers a timely and profound response: that knowledge, to be truly transformative, must involve not only thinking but being—and not only believing, but becoming.

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Inclusive Education for All: A Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract: The global movement toward inclusivity reflects a growing recognition of the need to provide equitable access to education for all learners. This paper examines the practice of inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a focus on English teachers' attitudes toward teaching children with disabilities in foreign language classrooms. Data were collected from 20 English teachers using the structured interview, after which their responses were thematically analysed. The findings reveal mixed perspectives; some teachers expressed reservations about teaching in inclusive classrooms, while others strongly advocated for inclusive practices; expressing a willingness to adopt effective strategies and methodologies to integrate learners with disabilities. By capturing and highlighting the teachers' views and practices

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on inclusivity, this paper provides insights into the common challenges they face and the strategies they employ to integrate students with disabilities into classrooms, hence contributing to the ongoing efforts to create more equitable and supportive learning environments for all students, particularly those with disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusive education, inclusivity, inclusive classrooms, inclusive practices, challenges to implementation, teacher's role**.**

Abstrak: Pergerakan global ke arah keterangkuman mencerminkan pengiktirafan yang semakin meningkat tentang keperluan menyediakan akses pendidikan yang adil dan saksama untuk semua pelajar. Artikel ini mengkaji amalan pendidikan inklusif di Bosnia dan Herzegovina, khususnya, sikap guru Bahasa Inggeris tentang pengajaran kanak-kanak kurang upaya di kelas bahasa asing. Data dikumpul daripada 20 guru Bahasa Inggeris menggunakan temu bual separa berstruktur, di mana jawapan mereka dianalisis secara tematik. Penemuan kajian mendedahkan bahawa sesetengah guru mempunyai keraguan terhadap pengajaran dalam bilik darjah inklusif, manakala yang lain menyokong amalan inklusif; menyatakan kesediaan untuk menggunakan strategi dan metodologi yang berkesan untuk mengintegrasikan pelajar kurang upaya. Dengan menyerlahkan pandangan dan amalan guru tentang keterangkuman, artikel ini memberikan gambaran tentang cabaran yang mereka hadapi dan strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk menyepadukan pelajar kurang upaya ke dalam bilik darjah, dan seterusnya menyumbang kepada usaha berterusan untuk mewujudkan persekitaran pembelajaran yang lebih saksama dan yang menyokong semua pelajar, terutamanya mereka yang kurang upaya.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan inklusif, keterangkuman, bilik darjah inklusif, amalan inklusif, cabaran untuk pelaksanaan, peranan guru.

Introduction

Inclusive education has become increasingly implemented as part of global educational reform. It emphasises that all children—regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or learning challenges—should have equitable access to high-quality education in mainstream classrooms (UNESCO, 2005). This approach represents a shift from previous models that segregated students with disabilities into special schools or separate programs, toward one that values diversity, equity, and the acceptance of learners of various abilities studying together in the same classroom. (Hornby, 2014).

The recognition of education as a fundamental human right has been a powerful driver of this change. Legal frameworks, international agreements, and social movements have underscored the moral and practical necessity of building inclusive systems that remove barriers to learning. Research in psychology, neuroscience, and pedagogy has further supported this shift by highlighting how learning is enriched when classrooms embrace diversity and when teaching is responsive to individual needs.

Within the specific context of foreign language education, however, the implementation of inclusive principles presents both challenges and opportunities. Language learning requires active engagement, communication, and cultural understanding, which can be especially demanding for students with disabilities or learning difficulties. At the same time, the interactive and social nature of language classrooms provides unique opportunities for learners of diverse abilities and backgrounds to work together and foster empathy and mutual respect for one another (García, 2009; Tomlinson, 2001). Scholars argue that inclusive practices—such as differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, and supportive learning environments—not only enhance students' academic performance but also strengthen their social and emotional development (Florian, 2014; Pijl, Meijer, & Hegarty, 2008).

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the results of our collaborative study on the perceptions of Bosnian teachers towards inclusive education, with particular attention to language teaching. The study sought to understand the teachers' readiness to implement inclusive methodologies; their views on integrating inclusive principles in the language classroom; and the strategies they employed to support learners with disabilities. At the same time, it investigated the challenges they encountered in creating equitable and supportive learning environments. By presenting these findings, the paper aims to contribute to the ongoing debates on inclusive education and provide insights that may guide teacher preparation and policy development in comparable educational settings.

Inclusive Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a very complex political and educational structure. The country consists of two entities and one district: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, and Brčko

District. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are 10 cantons, while Republika Srpska has a centralised system. In total, there are 13 Ministries of Education across the country, which makes it very difficult to maintain quality and consistency in education. When it comes to inclusive education, there are many indicators that legislation is supportive of its implementation at each of the administrative levels. For instance, primary and secondary schools as well other educational institutions implement inclusive education, supported by international legislative frameworks. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina still generally implements a dual system of education consisting of general education and special education. Special education is offered at specialised centres in different parts of the country, and parents can decide on the school they would like to send their children to. Some parents choose special schools because they believe that their children will receive more specialised instruction. There are also many parents who choose to enrol their children in regular schools in the hope that inclusive education practices will offer more opportunities for them.

Today, inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is emerging as the primary framework within the education system. Nevertheless, despite the efforts made by the teachers and educational institutions in implementing inclusive education and the backing given by the Education authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina for stronger reforms and high-quality learning for inclusive education (Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo, 2025), numerous obstacles persist in realising true inclusivity. Firstly, educators hold divergent views on the conception and definition of inclusive education. While some focus only on students with mild learning disabilities, others include those with severe disabilities. There are also the challenges that teachers face when implementing inclusive strategies in their foreign language classrooms. This is shown in Bišćević et al.'s (2017) study, which found that approximately 48% of his teacher participants cited inadequate knowledge and skills in inclusive education as a primary obstacle—a challenge that is not unique to Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also experienced globally. Consequently, numerous professionals and researchers have argued that teachers should possess effective pedagogical strategies that would engage their students with diverse educational needs. De Jong et al., (2013) for instance, have advocated for enhanced teacher competencies in differentiated instruction as well as a deeper understanding of

autism, adaptive instruction, and social support techniques for engaging students on the autism spectrum (Able et al., 2014). Others, however, have questioned the necessity for teachers to be concurrently proficient in Braille, sign language, and applied behaviour analysis—considering the fact that any given group of learners could have a wide spectrum of disabilities—including visual and hearing impairments, autism spectrum disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Hence, it is evident that the issue of teacher competencies for inclusive classrooms is rather complex. As asserted by Avramidis et.al. (2000) and De Boer et al. (2011), many studies focus on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, but do not adequately capture the multifaceted competencies required to serve diverse student populations.

Hence, there are numerous challenges or obstacles faced by Bosnian teachers and institutions in implementing inclusive education. However, it should be pointed out that perhaps the greatest obstacle to inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to Bišćević et al. (2017), is the shortage of experts in regular schools who are able to work with students with special needs. Unfortunately, however, many schools do not have special education teachers on staff.

Before ending our discussion on the implementation of inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we would like to point out that teachers have urged for the provision of additional incentives for working with students with exceptional educational needs. According to Johnson (1986), for instance, numerous teachers have emphasised on performance-based compensation and smaller class sizes to compensate for the additional time and effort they spend on teaching students with special and diverse needs. This can help to "soften" the possible negative attitudes they could have towards inclusion because of the additional workload and difficulty in catering to the diverse needs of their students. As asserted by Loreman (2007), the most significant theme that teachers have identified revolves around scepticism or outright opposition toward inclusion. Given that positive attitudes serve as the foundational pillar of inclusive education, this finding is concerning. In fact, according to Dizdarević et al., (2017), research indicates that teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina have more negative attitudes towards inclusion than their EU counterparts, despite a general inclination towards supporting it. Addressing this issue, therefore, necessitates comprehensive reforms

across various dimensions, such as the psychological, behavioural, educational, cultural, and political aspects (Armstrong, 2017).

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative case study design to explore the perceptions of Bosnian foreign language teachers on inclusive education. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating complex, socially constructed phenomena such as teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone. As Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasise, qualitative inquiry allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of participants' perspectives and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences. In addition, the case study design enables researchers to explore this issue within its real-life institutional context (Yin, 2018). Case studies are well-suited for understanding phenomena where the boundaries between the subject of study and the surrounding context are not clearly defined, as is the case with inclusive education, which intersects with pedagogy, policy, and personal experience. By focusing on rich descriptions and contextualised insights, we deemed the qualitative case study design as being the most appropriate approach for examining how inclusivity is interpreted and enacted in the Bosnian educational environment.

Using In-Depth, Face-to-Face Interviews

To capture the feelings and experiences of the teachers towards inclusive education, we used in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. This is because semi-structured interviews strike a balance between consistency across participants and flexibility to pursue topics that emerge during the conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This method also allows participants to elaborate on their beliefs and practices while enabling the researcher to probe for clarification or examples, leading to richer and more meaningful data. In addition, face-to-face interviews facilitate rapport and trust between interviewer and participant, which enhances the authenticity and depth of the responses (Opdenakker, 2006). Non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures obtained from the face-to-face interviews also provided us with valuable contextual insights that would be missed in written surveys or online-only formats. By interpreting qualitative data in this manner, we obtained the information we required because when questions are well-formulated, participants can clearly define their ideas

without any constraints (Neergaard, Olesen, et al., 2009). Further, the openness of qualitative research to interpretations and clarifications helps minimise the effects of potential interferences during the research process (Sandelowski, 2000). This approach is particularly appropriate for analysing the beliefs of teachers as it provides insights into "pre- and in-service teachers' self-reflection; beliefs and knowledge about teaching, students, and content; and an awareness of the challenges inherent to classroom teaching" (Kagan,1990, p. 421). Given the potential complexity of discussing the challenges of putting inclusive education into practice, we felt that this method would allow our participants to articulate their perspectives more openly and reflectively.

Participants

The study involved 20 participants; nineteen of whom were female, while one was male. They were drawn from the International University of Sarajevo (IUS) and the University of Sarajevo, with nineteen of them being from Bosnia and Herzegovina and one from Türkiye. The group consisted of practising primary and secondary school teachers.

The participants were varied in terms of age, teaching experience, and familiarity with inclusive education. While some were experienced teachers with substantial professional practice, others were at the beginning of their careers. All of them had been exposed to coursework and training on inclusive education, giving them a baseline understanding of students' diverse needs, inclusive methodologies, and relevant pedagogical approaches. To protect confidentiality and maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to all the participants. These pseudonyms are used consistently throughout the reporting of the findings to ensure clarity and narrative flow while safeguarding the participants' identities. A detailed description of the participants is provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1: General Information about the Participants

Pseudonyms	Degree	Age	Gender	Teaching experience	Teaching Setting	Familiarity with IE	Involvement in IE practices
Amir.	PhD	30	Male	4 years	SS	Yes	Yes
Lejla	MA	25	Female	1 year	PS	Yes	Yes

Pseudonyms	Degree	Age	Gender	Teaching experience	Teaching Setting	Familiarity with IE	Involvement in IE practices
Aida	MA	40	Female	10 years	SS	Yes	Yes
Selma	BA	27	Female	3 years	PS	Yes	Yes
Amela	BA	25	Female	2 years	PS	Yes	Yes
Alma	PhD	45	Female	15 years	SS	Yes	Yes
Jasmina	MA	35	Female	7 years	PS, SS	Yes	Yes
Edina	BA	25	Female	1 year	PS	Yes	Yes
Lamija	BA	26	Female	3 years	PS	Yes	Yes
Sanela	BA	24	Female	1 year	PS, SS	Yes	Yes
Mirela	MA	42	Female	12 years	PS, SS	Yes	Yes
Azra	BA	24	Female	1 year	PS	Yes	Yes
Sabina	MA	35	Female	7 years	SS	Yes	Yes
Nadira	MA	34	Female	12 years	SS	Yes	Yes
Maja	BA	27	Female	4 years	SS	Yes	Yes
Dženita	MA	31	Female	8 years	PS	Yes	Yes
Enisa	MA	40	Female	15 years	SS	Yes	Yes
Belma	MA	38	Female	10 years	SS	Yes	Yes
Hana	BA	29	Female	6 years	SS	Yes	Yes
Selvina	MA	36	Female	9 years	SS	Yes	Yes

(Key: PS: Primary school. SS: Secondary school)

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using the semi-structured interview, which provided an ideal balance between allowing us to guide the discussion while allowing the interviewee to be spontaneous and unconstrained in answering our questions (Given, 2008). The interviews were then transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis to identify the patterns in the responses.

During the interview, the teachers were first asked questions regarding their gender, age, occupation, years of teaching experience and perceived level of familiarity with the concept of inclusive education. Thereafter, they were interviewed to obtain their responses to the following research questions:

1. What does inclusive education mean to the teachers? What are their attitudes and opinions towards inclusivity?
2. How can foreign language teachers incorporate the principles of inclusive education into their teaching practices?
3. What challenges and barriers might foreign language teachers face while implementing inclusive education principles in their classrooms?
4. What professional opportunities and support do foreign language teachers need to effectively integrate inclusive education principles into their teaching?

Results

This section presents the findings of the study, organised around the four guiding research questions. To preserve authenticity, the findings are conveyed through a combination of the teachers' verbatim responses and reported accounts, with pseudonyms used in place of their real names. The presentation of their responses follows the sequence of the research questions.

Participants' views and attitudes on inclusive education

In this section, we present the teachers' perspectives on the first research question: *What does inclusive education mean to you, and what are your attitudes and opinions towards inclusivity?*

From their answers to our first question, we could see that the participants had a good understanding of what inclusive education is, although their perspectives on it may differ slightly.

Amir, for instance, described inclusive education as a practice rooted in the recognition and respect for the unique qualities of every learner, regardless of their physical or mental abilities. As Amir explained:

> Inclusive education, in my view, involves recognising and valuing the unique qualities of all students, regardless of their

physical or mental abilities. This approach ensures that these students feel integrated into society rather than marginalised. Moreover, inclusive education facilitates students with special needs in experiencing autonomy, self-determination, and a sense of being valued….Often, we understand the theory but lack effective practical strategies. Therefore, inclusive education also equips 'ordinary' individuals with the skills to effectively communicate and engage with members of society who have special needs.

Also related to the importance of accomodating students with special needs is the issue of enabling them to achieve at least a certain level of success, as expressed by Amela*: "*Inclusive education for me as an educator is about giving the opportunity for all students to achieve [at least] an average level of success…no matter what background they have, and what kind of learning disability they have."

Building on this, Lejla stressed the principle of *equity*, highlighting its importance:

Inclusive education for me is education that provides equal opportunities for all students no matter their diversities and/or physical, psychological, emotional, or social difficulties. I believe that inclusive education is a crucial topic that should be discussed more frequently in all areas of education.

The same is felt by Selma, who said that inclusive education means equality for her:

This term serves the purpose of allowing everyone to be treated equally regardless of their abilities and personalities. I believe….that it is very important for future students and educators. Therefore educators and institutions should look forward to developing it as much as possible.

While the other teachers emphasised the benefits and importance of inclusivity, Aida expressed a more cautious perspective. She acknowledged the positive intentions behind the concept but voiced concerns about its practical implementation:

In inclusive education, students with different cognitive, developmental and behavioural difficulties are given an opportunity to attend the same classes as those who do not face these challenges. Speaking from a layman's perspective, as someone who has never participated in an

inclusive educational process, I believe that inclusivity is a well-intentioned concept that often faces too many practical barriers for it to be truly beneficial for the students.

The responses by these teachers highlight both their optimism towards inclusive education and their concerns about it. They recognised inclusivity as a valuable and necessary principle for education; one that promotes fairness and social integration. However, while many of them emphasised its empowering role, others raised concerns about the barriers that limit its impact. Nonetheless, the overall tone was supportive, and the teachers recognised its importance for students, teachers, and the school community. The findings of our study with regard to teachers' attitudes towards inclusion differ from Dizdarević et al.'s (2017), who found that the teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina have more negative attitudes towards inclusion than their EU counterparts, despite a general inclination towards supporting it; and those of Linder et al. (2023), who found that the teachers from the 36 studies he analysed generally held neutral or ambivalent views toward the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. The difference in the findings is likely to do with the aspect of inclusion the researchers were referring to and the reasons for their views. The teachers in Linder et al.'s study did not favour the inclusion of all students in the same classroom; instead, their perspectives varied depending on the type of disability they had. The teachers in our study, on the other hand, generally had positive attitudes toward inclusion, but also expressed some degree of caution regarding the actions we should take to ensure that our practices would be indeed inclusive and effective.

Inclusive principles in the foreign language classroom

Having explored the teachers' general understanding of inclusive education, it is important to now consider how they put these principles into practice as this is the real test of inclusion. For foreign language teachers, this task is particularly complex as language learning can be especially challenging for students with disabilities or learning differences (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Lindsay, 2011). For that reason, our second research question asked how foreign language teachers can incorporate the principles of inclusive education into their teaching. Our intention for asking this question was not to solicit a fixed set of methodological prescriptions, but rather to explore teachers' lived practices, perspectives, and philosophies regarding inclusion in their

classrooms. We wanted to capture how the teachers conceptualised inclusion in practice—how they adjust their teaching to meet the diverse needs of their students; how they respond to their students' difficulties in learning; and how they differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all their learners.

During the interview, several participants emphasised the need for teachers to first of all, recognise and accept diversity as the foundation of inclusive teaching. As Amir explained:

> Predominantly, such educators must understand the term 'disability' and the term 'mental challenge' in order to progress further. Such teachers should accept diversity and general difference…attributed to all students. In other words, not all teaching and learning processes are adequate for all learners (disabilities included or not), and as such they (the processes), must be adequately distributed and allotted to the learners. Not all students are meant to reach the same results; they should not all be identical (an impossible undertaking, to say the least) and the learners, as such, ought to be respected based on their inherent skills. Such diversity in skill, understanding, or background allows different learners to acquire different skills and forms of knowledge suited to their ever-so individual needs.

Building on this, the other participants highlighted practical ways of enacting this philosophy. Amela, for instance, said that inclusive practice should begin with small, manageable steps for both teachers and students:

> I believe we should begin with small, incremental steps tailored to the needs of students with special needs and the educational level of their teachers… Initially, beginner teachers should be assigned to no more than three students to avoid becoming overwhelmed. They should regularly prepare accessible classroom materials (printings with larger materials, audio materials that are loud enough, tools grasping the attention of constantly distracted students, etc.) in the target language…

Here, we see that the teachers did not verbalise inclusion as an abstract ideal but as the everyday classroom adjustments that they make to foster the enjoyment of language learning. Our interpretation is that the

teachers see inclusion as a gradual and collaborative process—one that depends on cooperation, consultation with colleagues, and consistent adaptation to meet students' needs.

Jasmina, on the other hand, connected inclusive principles directly to the nature of language teaching itself. According to her:

> successful language learning in general requires ensuring a supportive learning and teaching environment…foreign language classes more often than not encompass students of diverse national, cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds, and hence they are adapted, both in content and in the teaching methods used, to incorporate the principle of accepting diversity and respecting differences in learners.

The teachers' responses highlight how the they integrate inclusive principles in their teaching. The findings suggest that inclusion, as the teachers understood it, rests on valuing diversity as a guiding principle and translating that principle into responsive and adaptable classroom practices. Their responses also affirm that inclusion—as they have practised it—is grounded in both awareness and action.

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education

As well documented in the literature, teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms are often confronted with issues related to diverse student abilities and the demand for specialised strategies to address these varied needs. These challenges are not unique to Bosnia but also experienced by teachers worldwide (Florian & Beaton, 2018; Pantic & Florian, 2015).

A key concern raised by many of our teacher participants is the **lack of resources and institutional support**. Alma, for instance, when asked about some of the challenges she faced, answered, "Not being prepared for this education, not having adequate support from their schools, not having enough resources, not communicating their ideas, not delegating to their administrators, not good technical support…". Amela expanded on this by pointing out the difficulty she faced in adapting teaching materials across multiple classes: "…with multiple classes to teach, it can be physically too demanding to accomplish everything at once."

The teachers also spoke of **attitudinal barriers**. Amela observed that disagreements with colleagues or parents often obstruct the

implementation of inclusive strategies: "The most common barrier faced…is the presence of a colleague or parent who consistently disagrees with the learning process, asserting their opinion as paramount." Such resistance, whether from peers or parents, reflects what scholars describe as "the cultural politics of inclusion," where differing beliefs about disability, learning, and authority create tension (Ainscow, 2020).

Yet another layer of difficulty faced by the teachers has to do with the **linguistic and cultural diversity** in classrooms. As Aida shared, "If we regard inclusivity in the light of cultural diversity, the main challenge is linguistic and cultural barriers among people who come from very different cultural backgrounds, which may lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings and other difficulties in interaction." Aida's response is interesting as it broadens the understanding of inclusion to encompass not only disability but also multicultural sensitivity, a very important aspect of foreign language classrooms (Byram, 2018).

Finally, it is important to note that some of the teachers, despite recognising the seriousness of the situation, experience a certain degree of **fear of inclusion**, causing them to distance themselves from the activities that would support it. Others, because to their limited exposure to inclusion, feel unprepared for these responsibilities or believe they lack the ability to work with these children. Hence, it is crucial that every educator—whether they are school teachers or university instructors—receive professional, state-aided, and comprehensive support in their training related to inclusion.

These findings highlight the fact that while foreign language teachers value the ideals of inclusion, they face significant obstacles in translating them into practice. Addressing these barriers requires a concerted effort by Ministries, institutions, and schools to provide targeted teacher training, sufficient resource allocation, stronger collaboration between schools and parents, and institutional recognition of the cultural and linguistic complexities inherent in language classrooms.

Professional support for foreign language teachers

When asked about the support they needed to effectively integrate inclusive practices into their teaching, the teachers started by saying that creating effective classes and lessons for children with diverse needs requires hard work. To help them carry out their teaching responsibilities

properly, they emphasised the importance of sustained professional development and institutional backing. This is precisely the view of Armstrong (2011), who highlighted several components for effective teaching in inclusive classrooms, which includes providing professional development, access to resources, support networks, pedagogical guidance, policy and administrative support, and technological support.

Sania, a teacher with ten years of teaching experience, shared an inspiring example of a visually impaired student who thrived in her class:

> I had a student in my foreign language class who was almost completely blind. He started the classes at A2 level and managed to reach the required B2 level in the prescribed four-month period, without repeating any of the levels. He had a laptop that transformed all visual materials into audio form, and this enabled him to follow and carry out all the tasks presented to him. The other students were very supportive, and this helped him to fit in easily.

Sania's story highlights how having access to the appropriate resources, combined with peer support and a nurturing inclusive classroom, can enable remarkable student progress.

The other teachers emphasised that professional development must go beyond general awareness to provide specific, actionable strategies. For example, Emina proposed that "symposiums, seminars, or workshops should be tailored more precisely to the specific needs of student groups… Each of us should conduct focused research within our respective student groups before sharing our findings with colleagues." She further argued that the Ministry of Education should play a stronger role by initiating volunteer programmes to identify committed teachers and by fostering innovation through initiatives such as competitions for university students to share new perspectives on inclusion.

Amra took a more pragmatic stance, suggesting that teachers should be formally required to pursue training: "Teachers should be obligated to finish some courses regarding teaching students in inclusive environments. Talking with other teachers may help them broaden their horizons."

Selma echoed this view, underscoring the importance of continual professional renewal: "Constant, fresh and up-to-date re-evaluation

of their own skills [is needed]...and *this can be achieved through certified programs, symposia, and conferences, as well as professional seminars"*.

From the interviews, we observed that the teachers had a shared perspective, in that inclusive education is not a static goal but an evolving practice. As shared by our participants, teachers require institutional support from their schools and regular opportunities for professional growth . These elements are essential not only for equipping educators with the knowledge and skills to teach effectively, but also for cultivating the confidence and tenacity needed to create genuinely inclusive classrooms.

Discussion

The results of our study show a considerable alignment with the current research and literature on inclusive education. A notable finding is that most of the teacher-participants regarded inclusive education as a significant advancement in the educational system; one that involves using the appropriate methods and approaches to enhance both teaching and learning—as also maintained by Ainscow(2020) and Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011). The teachers also emphasised that the concept and practice of inclusion must extend beyond simply placing students with special needs in mainstream classrooms, but that to create supportive learning environments and conditions that would enable not only special-needs students, but also their peers to strive. Their views are supported by current research such as Zins et.al.'s (2004), which shows that positive teacher–student relationships and emotionally supportive classrooms enhance engagement and belonging for all learners; and also by Florian (2015), who argues that inclusive pedagogy rests on the belief that *all* learners are capable of growth.

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews of the participants was the importance of equipping teachers with the necessary training, resources, and institutional support to sustain inclusive practices. Without adequate support, they said, teachers would often feel overwhelmed by having to meet the diverse educational needs of their students. This finding aligns with those of Forlin et. al (2014) and Slee (2018), who state that ongoing professional development and institutional support are critical to building teachers' confidence and capacity for inclusion.

Finally, the participants called for measures such as making courses and training on inclusive education mandatory at all levels of teacher education. They also called for the enactment of laws and regulations to guide inclusive practices. Their views echo UNESCO's (2017, 2020) calls for inclusive education to be reinforced through comprehensive policies and institutional frameworks. From the results of the study and current research findings, it is quite apparent that inclusive education requires a collaborative effort—to create environments where all learners are given the opportunity to succeed.

Conclusion

Inclusion is about developing a community where each member is not only appreciated, but also feels a sense of belonging. To ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to education, teachers must be provided with the appropriate support, resources, and ongoing professional development opportunities. These initiatives are crucial in enhancing their confidence and effectiveness in teaching in inclusive classrooms. Policymakers also play a crucial role. They must critically review mainstream curricula to ensure that its content and level of complexity are suitable for students with disabilities. In this regard, providing teachers with guidebooks or workshops on how to differentiate instruction will help them to cater to the needs of both students with disabilities as well as their peers. It is crucial to identify what needs to be improved, what is effective, and what is not—and to take the appropriate action—so that no student is left behind. Ultimately, our collective efforts will help create a more supportive environment to enable every learner to succeed.

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Globalisation and Religion: A Study of Thai Muslims' Experiences on Gender Diversity in Thai Muslim Society through an Islamic Perspective

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Abstract: This research examines the impact of globalisation on gender diversity within the Thai Muslim community and the Islamic perspective on this issue. Using documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with LGBTQI+ Thai Muslims, the study explores how individuals negotiate their identities while adhering to Islamic teachings. Interviews with religious leaders and scholars provide further insights into pathways for understanding and accepting gender diversity in the Thai Muslim context. Findings reveal that globalisation, particularly through increased media access and exposure to Western values emphasising individual rights, has enabled LGBTQI+ Muslims to express their identities more openly. However, tensions remain as traditional Islamic principles are deeply embedded in Thai Muslim society. The author proposes fostering understanding through two key approaches: first, employing sensitive communication and guidance that allow LGBTQI+ individuals to live in line with Islamic teachings; second, creating supportive family environments that encourage personal growth while maintaining Islamic values.

Keywords: globalisation, gender diversity, Islam, Thai Muslims

Abstrak: Kajian ini meneliti kesan globalisasi terhadap kepelbagaian gender dalam komuniti Muslim di Thailand serta perspektif Islam mengenai isu tersebut. Melalui analisis dokumen dan temu bual mendalam bersama Muslim Thailand yang berciri LGBTQI+, kajian ini mengkaji bagaimana individu bergelut dengan identiti mereka sambil tetap berpegang pada ajaran Islam.

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Temu bual dengan pemimpin agama dan sarjana turut memberikan pandangan lanjut tentang usaha memahami serta menerima kepelbagaian gender dalam konteks Muslim Thailand. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa globalisasi, khususnya melalui akses media yang lebih luas dan pendedahan kepada nilai Barat yang menekankan hak individu, telah membuka ruang kepada Muslim LGBTQI+ untuk mengekspresikan identiti mereka dengan lebih terbuka. Namun begitu, ketegangan masih wujud kerana prinsip Islam tradisional masih berakar kukuh dalam masyarakat Muslim Thailand. Pengarang mencadangkan dua pendekatan utama: pertama, menggunakan komunikasi sensitif dan bimbingan yang membolehkan individu LGBTQI+ hidup selaras dengan ajaran Islam; kedua, mewujudkan persekitaran keluarga yang menyokong perkembangan peribadi sambil mengekalkan nilai Islam.

Kata kunci: globalisasi, kepelbagaian gender, Islam, Muslim Thailand

Introduction

In the wave of globalisation, the world has undergone tremendous transformations in various dimensions—economically, politically, and socially. Globalisation is often defined in different ways. Roland Robertson describes it as "the compression of the world (shrinking the world) and the intensification of a shared consciousness globally" (as cited in Steger, 2002). This definition suggests that globalisation is an ongoing, ever-evolving process, influencing human perceptions and bringing about significant changes in multiple aspects of life, including economy, politics, identity, and social norms. Globalisation also plays a role in shaping new standards, values, religious beliefs, and cultural practices. It represents an accelerated change due to advancements in science and technology, enabling rapid communication and interaction among people across continents and countries. Consequently, cultural exchanges, as well as ideological and religious beliefs, are inevitably affected.

While globalisation has positive impacts, such as improving the quality of life in many Muslim countries and modernising various sectors like education and infrastructure, it also has negative consequences. One of these is the dominance of Western ideologies, particularly from the United States, which promote values that sometimes conflict with Islamic beliefs. Anjum (2017) argues that globalisation affects not only American Muslims but also Muslims worldwide, turning them into

consumers and targets of American culture, policies, and the global war on terror. This influence has introduced new lifestyles that prioritise individual rights and freedoms, emphasising personal autonomy over collective social values. The Western interpretation of human rights often criticises Islamic social practices and punishments aimed at protecting society from crimes.

This study, however, focuses on a specific aspect of human rights: gender diversity and same-sex relationships within the context of the Thai Muslim community. These new identities challenge long-standing customs, traditions, and beliefs among Thai Muslims, a community that is known for its adherence to unique faith-based practices and values. This study aims to explore how globalisation influences Thai Muslim perspectives on gender diversity and same-sex relationships, how Thai Muslim individuals reconcile these identities with their faith, and what Islamic principles can offer as solutions for LGBTQI+ Muslims seeking to live according to their faith while holding on their LGBTQI+ feelings.

Gender Diversity

Gender diversity recognises that people experience gender beyond just 'male' and 'female' categories. It acknowledges that gender identity is shaped by personal experience and self-perception, not just biology, and represents a complex, deeply personal aspect of who we are (Assawaboonyalert et al., 2022). The term LGBTQI+ is used to include a range of sexual orientations and gender identities, not just same-sex attraction. For example: Lesbian (women attracted to women), Gay (men attracted to men), Bisexual (attracted to more than one gender), Transgender (gender identity different from assigned sex at birth), Queer/Questioning (identifying outside traditional labels or exploring identity), Intersex (born with biological sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female), and "+" for other identities, non-binary or asexual, (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, n.d.).

The Thai Context of LGBTQI+ Issues

Thailand is often described as one of the most visible hubs for LGBTQI+ culture in Asia. Legal debates around the Civil Partnership Bill and the Marriage Equality Bill, alongside the popularity of 'boys' love' (Y-series) dramas, have contributed to wider acceptance of sexual and gender

diversity in mainstream society. The term *kathoey* (commonly used for transgender women or gender-nonconforming males) is embedded in Thai cultural life, and subcultures such as *tom-dee* (masculine-presenting women and their feminine partners) highlight the local ways gender diversity is expressed.

However, this apparent openness is more complex in practice. While LGBTQI+ individuals in Thailand are highly visible in public life—through media, entertainment, and activism—they continue to encounter structural barriers. Until the recent passage of the Marriage Equality Bill, same-sex couples were not granted the same legal recognition as heterosexual couples. Many workplaces still lack clear protections against discrimination, and social stigma remains common in conservative religious settings and rural areas. For Thai Muslims, this national context presents a particular challenge. On the one hand, they are part of a society where LGBTQI+ identities are increasingly normalised, yet on the other hand, they belong to communities that uphold stricter interpretations of Islamic principles and values. As a result, Thai Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals often find themselves negotiating between the wider cultural acceptance present in Thai society and the expectations of their religious communities.

Islamic teachings maintain a strict stance on same-sex relations, with the Qur'ān presenting the story of Prophet Lūṭ's people as a moral warning:

> Do you commit the worst sin such as none preceding you has committed in the 'Ālamīn (mankind and jinn)? Verily, you practise your lusts on men instead of women. Nay, but you are a people transgressing beyond bounds (Qur'ān 7:80–81).

Yet the Qur'ān also reminds believers that the Prophet Muhammad was sent as a mercy to all: 'And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the 'Ālamīn (mankind, jinn and all that exists)' (Qur'ān 21:107).

This tension between divine prohibition and divine mercy frames contemporary debates on gender diversity within Islam. In the Thai Muslim context, globalisation has increased LGBTQI+ visibility and introduced new cultural norms, compelling individuals to reconcile personal identity with religious principles. This study asks how Muslims can critically engage with Islamic teachings to foster understanding

without alienating individuals from their faith. While some uphold strict adherence to traditional interpretations, others argue for a more inclusive reading of Islamic sources to address present realities (Anjum, 2017).

Literature Review

Globalisation and Gender Diversity

Globalisation has shaped economic growth, trade, and international interactions while also diffusing Western values—democracy, liberal markets, consumer culture, and gender diversity. Robertson defines it as "the compression of the world and the intensification of global consciousness" (as cited in Drakulovska & Dragović, 2018). Building on this, Charoenwongsak (2016) proposes glocalisation, integrating global and local dimensions whereby universal values such as individual rights spread worldwide. Ritzer further widens the scope to transcontinental ties, emergent global social life, and the pull of capitalist globalisation and Americanisation (as cited in Drakulovska & Dragović, 2018). Religion and globalisation intersect in two ways: (1) religious responses that reinterpret practices globally, and (2) globalisation's impact on belief, from adaptation to resistance. Within this nexus, the LGBTQI+ movement has influenced international relations, politics, and policy (Picq & Thiel, 2015). While some states recognise LGBTQI+ rights and gender diversity, others resist. In 2014, same-sex relations were criminalised in 78 countries, with five imposing the death penalty (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2014).

Culturally, globalisation reshapes values unevenly. Many in the West see diffusion as natural progress, while numerous non-Western communities view it as a threat to cultural-religious identity (Phuanghat, 2016). This divide echoes Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995), framing tension between American-led Western culture and Islamic identity, and Huntington's claim that post-Cold War conflict pivots to civilisational differences (Huntington, 1996).

Historically, roots of contemporary gender-diversity discourse trace to the Renaissance turn to rationality and science, the rise of secular states, and liberalism's pursuit of freedom from external constraints. The European sexual revolution then provided a platform for LGBTQI+ legal recognition, anti-discrimination laws, and social acceptance,

especially in Europe and America (Yaqeen Institute, 2022). Today, opposition to gender diversity is often cast as a human-rights violation, intensifying friction between religious commitments and liberal norms. Critics note that religious views on gender/sexuality are sometimes labelled 'hate speech.' Al-Qawīm (2015) highlights this inconsistency by citing Nick Clegg's defence of Charlie Hebdo under free expression and questioning why liberalism that supports LGBTQI+ rights appears intolerant of religious dissent—underscoring enduring tensions between liberal ideals and religious worldviews.

Muslims and Gender Diversity in the Western World

Rahman (2015) examines the experiences of Muslims in the West, particularly in the U.S. and Europe, where navigating LGBTQI+ identity politics often produces tensions between religious belief and social expectations. Opposition to LGBTQI+ identities is seen by some as resistance to modernity, while others link it to Islamophobia. Rahman identifies four key research themes: negative reactions from families and communities, perceptions of homosexuality as a Western import, reinterpretations of religious texts to accommodate same-sex relations, and the invisibility of LGBTQI+ Muslims due to fear of discrimination.

Some scholars seek to reframe the Islamic discourse on this issue. Ḥabib (2008) argues that *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* (80–84) addresses the rejection of Prophet *Lūṭ* and the attempted assault on his guests, rather than condemning all same-sex relations, critiquing *fiqh* for over-generalisation. Yet others note this reading misinterprets the Qurʾān's moral lessons for future generations. LGBTQI+ Muslims in the West often face pressure, mockery, and exclusion, prompting some to reinterpret scripture through themes of dignity, equality, and justice (Siraj, 2016). Muḥsin Hendricks, a South African gay *imām*, similarly contends that Islam does not inherently forbid same-sex relations, but views them as part of Allāh's plan (Siraj, 2016). Such positions, however, clash with ʿaqīdah (Islamic belief), which holds both Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* as divine; rejecting *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* (authentic ḥadīth) is considered apostasy by many ʿulamāʾ (Islam Q&A, n.d.).

In the U.S., where Muslims comprise about 1% of the population, most reject Western gender values; 71% define family strictly as heterosexual, with first-generation immigrants less accepting than later

generations, particularly African American Muslims (Rayside, 2011). Younger Muslims show more openness: in 2009, 58% of Muslim students supported same-sex marriage, influenced by civil rights and equality discourses, though traditional norms endure under pressures such as Islamophobia, family values, and conservative leadership. In Canada, Golriz (2020) found varied acceptance among Muslim organisations, suggesting that opposition arises from social and cultural values as much as ʿaqīdah. Alvi & Zaidi (2019) likewise show that South Asian LGBTQI+ Muslims conceal their identities due to family shame and socio-economic pressure, noting a gap in research on those deeply committed to faith. In Britain, Iqbal (2020) highlights how LGBT+ Muslims grapple with rigid gender norms and familial pressures, often concealing identity but sometimes reconciling faith and sexuality by reinterpreting the Qurʾān to align with lived experience.

Islamic Perspectives on Same-Sex Relations

Islamic teachings do not accept same-sex relationships. The earliest example being the people of Prophet *Lūṭ* who were punished for engaging in same-sex acts: "So when Our Commandment came, We turned (the towns of Sodom in Palestine) upside down and rained on them stones of baked clay …" (Qurʾān 11:82–83). An authentic ḥadīth also records that Allah cursed women who imitate men and the men who imitate women (Al-Tirmidhi, Vol. 5, Book 41, 2784), reinforcing the prohibition of such behaviour.

Two Arabic terms are central here: *khunthā* (intersex), describing those with both male and female characteristics, and *mukhannath*, men with effeminate traits (Napakorn, 2022). Islamic jurisprudence provides rulings for *khunthā* depending on their inclination towards one gender but does not recognise alternative or third genders. For *mukhannath*, rulings treat them as men, though natural effeminacy was distinguished from deliberate imitation.

Historical sources confirm the presence of *mukhannathūn* during the Prophet's time. Ibn Ḥajar, in *Al-Iṣābah*, records that individuals such as Hīt, Hidm, and Mātiʿ freely associated with women (Napakorn, 2022). Mātiʿ, a slave of Fakīthah, was permitted to enter the Prophet's wives' households as he was believed to be uninterested in women. Later, however, when evidence suggested otherwise, restrictions were imposed (Napakorn, 2022).

Al-ʿIrāqī, in *Ṭarḥ al-Tathrīb*, clarifies that natural effeminacy carries no blame, while deliberate imitation is sinful, echoing the *ḥadīth* on cross-gender behaviour (Napakorn, 2022). Thus, effeminacy itself was not considered a violation, but misuse of it prompted corrective action.

This distinction underscores the need for balanced understanding. Individuals naturally tested with such traits should recognise their boundaries, while the society should avoid disdain or discrimination that may drive them towards impermissible behaviour. Hence, it is crucial to differentiate between same-sex inclinations, which serve as a test of faith and are not sinful in themselves, and same-sex acts, which are explicitly prohibited in Islam—just as resisting desires for *zinā*, alcohol, or drugs distinguishes faithfulness from sin.

Gender Diversity in Thai Muslim Society

In the past, research on gender diversity within Thai Muslim society has been limited, reflecting the broader reluctance of the community to engage with this sensitive issue. It continues to be perceived as a source of shame, often metaphorically 'swept under the rug' rather than confronted through meaningful solutions. This avoidance extends across institutions within the Muslim community, including schools, mosques, and, importantly, the family unit, which plays a central role in shaping the values of Muslim children.

More recently, scholarship has begun to address gender diversity among Thai Muslims, particularly in relation to same-sex attraction and LGBTQI+ identities. Notably, studies reveal that same-sex behaviour frequently occurs within religious educational settings, especially Pondok schools (religious schools) and integrated Islamic schools that combine religious and secular curricula.

Kosem (2017) documents how effeminate or queer-presenting students in all-male religious schools were often subjected to sexual exploitation by peers or senior students. This pattern reflects the dangerous misconception that same-sex acts (*liwāṭ*) are less sinful than heterosexual extramarital relations (*zinā*). Kosem also highlights the problematic practice of Muslim families sending effeminate sons to male-only religious schools in the hope of 'correcting' their behaviour, an intervention that may instead expose them to harm. The study calls for urgent clarification of these misconceptions and the establishment

of protective mechanisms in Islamic schools to safeguard vulnerable students from abuse or from engaging in behaviours contrary to Islamic teachings under external pressures.

Kosem (2017) also examined historical accounts of *liwāṭ*, noting the widespread sexual exploitation of boys in certain Muslim societies. Kligerman (2007) controversially argued that homosexual conduct could be permissible in Islam if carried out in secrecy, citing examples from the Arab World. Such claims are highly problematic, as they risk legitimising *liwāṭ* and creating the false impression that same-sex acts are acceptable within Islam. From an Islamic perspective, divine injunctions cannot be overridden by human practice, and morality cannot be redefined by shifting social norms—a principle that remains central to Islamic ethical teaching.

Other studies have examined expressions of gender diversity among Thai Muslims in university settings. Samdaengsan et al. (2018) found that transgender identities often emerge from early childhood socialisation, particularly when boys grow up primarily among female peers. This prolonged exposure to female social environments fosters feminine behaviours that become embedded in self-identity. Most participants in the study reported recognising their transgender identity between the ages of eight and ten. Importantly, many of these students sought to gain acceptance from peers and families by participating actively in university and community life, creating spaces for self-expression within their social context.

Research has also explored same-sex attraction among Muslim women, particularly those identifying as masculine-presenting, commonly referred to as *toms* in Thailand. Meenpran (2019) concludes that such identities often arise from environmental influences, family upbringing, and negative experiences with men. Many participants expressed hostility towards men and assumed protective roles over women they loved. One participant reflected:

> The shift in my feelings did not emerge purely from within but was shaped by my   environment—my community and family. Growing up as the only daughter in a family of brothers, I was raised similarly to them. This experience influenced me significantly. My parents raised me as a boy, reinforcing my masculine traits. I never found interest in

> playing with dolls or engaging in activities typical of girls,
> as I viewed them as trivial and foolish. My upbringing had a
> clear impact on my identity (Meenpran, 2019).

Further perspectives emerge in the work of Sa-u (2019), who investigated the experience of a former gay Muslim in Thailand who eventually left Islam. Using symbolic interactionism and interview data, the study demonstrates how Western models of gay identity and neoliberal values shaped his departure from religion. Despite leaving Islam, he continued to perform certain rituals to maintain family and community ties. The study concludes that Muslim society must provide constructive spaces for understanding gender diversity to reduce conflict and foster social cohesion.

These studies collectively underscore the need for broader, intersectional research. Future scholarship should examine how ethnicity, regional identity, community dynamics, religious leadership, educational systems, and state policy interact in shaping experiences of gender diversity among Thai Muslims. At present, much of the research is limited to the individual and family levels, overlooking institutional and structural factors that significantly influence the discourse on gender diversity within Thai Muslim communities.

Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative methods to examine Islamic perspectives on gender diversity, with a particular focus on how Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals in Thailand negotiate their identities in relation to religious teachings. A documentary research approach was first undertaken, drawing on secondary sources such as books, academic articles, research papers, magazines, and websites. These materials were systematically analysed to identify aspects of the discourse often neglected in wider society, where those who diverge from heteronormative expectations are too easily labelled as 'heretical.'

Alongside this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals. The participants, aged between 23 and 55 years, represented varied educational backgrounds: one held a master's degree, five held bachelor's degrees, and one had primary-level education. They resided in different regions of Thailand—Bangkok (three), Pathum Thani (one), Ayutthaya (one),

Songkhla (one), and Pattani (one)—and were employed in diverse sectors, including teaching, corporate work, healthcare, online sales consultancy, entrepreneurship, social work, and freelance occupations. The group included individuals from both urban and rural settings, highlighting contrasts in religious environments: rural areas were more strongly shaped by religious conservatism, while urban areas generally offered more openness to evolving social norms. Ethical clearance for the interviews was granted by the RSU Ethical Review Board (COA. No. RSUERB2023-152), ensuring compliance with established research ethics.

The study follows a lesson-learned approach, analysing and synthesising participants' experiences to develop best practices for engaging with Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals in ways that are both respectful and consistent with Islamic values. Interviews were conducted one-to-one, using open-ended questions to encourage depth of reflection. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymising participants with alphabetical codes (A-I), acknowledging their vulnerability as a research group. Recruitment followed a snowball sampling method, whereby existing participants referred others who met the criteria of being Muslim, identifying as LGBTQI+, and striving to reconcile their identities with Islamic principles. Trusted intermediaries facilitated contact, after which the research objectives were explained and consent obtained. If a potential participant declined, the researcher sought alternative referrals until the sample was complete.

To incorporate perspectives from Islamic authority figures, one Islamic scholar and one religious leader were interviewed. The scholar was selected based on demonstrated expertise in Islamic jurisprudence related to gender diversity, while the religious leader was chosen for his governance role within Muslim communities, such as serving on provincial Islamic committees or mosque councils.

A key limitation of the study lies in its participant composition. Although the focus is on gender diversity broadly, the individuals accessed identified specifically as lesbian, gay, or queer and transgender. Other identities within the LGBTQI+ spectrum—such as bisexual, intersex, or non-binary—were not directly represented, largely due to difficulties in access and willingness to participate. This limitation highlights the need for future research to engage with a wider range

of identities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender diversity in Thai Muslim contexts.

To ensure accuracy, the study applied triangulation by cross-checking information across multiple sources and involving more than one researcher in the interview process. Data were analysed thematically, allowing key themes to emerge across both documentary and interview sources. This enabled the development of conclusions and recommendations that contribute to more informed, inclusive, and faith-consistent approaches to gender diversity within Thai Muslim society.

Findings

The Impact of Media and Globalisation on LGBTQI+ Identities in the Thai Muslim Community

This study explores the role of media and globalisation in shaping LGBTQI+ identities within the Thai Muslim community. While interviewees largely agreed that mass media and social media do not create LGBTQI+ identities, they acknowledged their significant role in spreading related concepts. Biological factors such as hormones and upbringing were cited as more influential in shaping identity.

Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024) noted that media increases visibility but does not directly influence sexual orientation, emphasising that Islamic principles still guide self-expression. Similarly, Participant G (personal communication, January 28, 2024) viewed social media as a space for expression rather than a determinant of attraction. Conversely, some interviewees believed that media fosters behavioural imitation. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) highlighted how repeated comments on platforms like TikTok and Facebook shifted their attraction from men to women. Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024) pointed to Instagram, BL (Boys' Love) series, and online content as influences on gender behaviour. Findings suggest that media shapes LGBTQI+ self-expression and societal acceptance but does not inherently determine sexual identity. Many Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals continue to navigate these influences within an Islamic framework, balancing identity with religious principles.

Factors Influencing Gender-Diverse Identities

Gender-diverse identities in the Thai Muslim community arise from multiple influences, including biological, psychological, and social factors. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023), from a rural province, argued that gender identity is shaped more by social structures than genetics, noting the strong influence of religious expectations in their community. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023), also from a rural area, questioned the role of hormones in shaping attraction, expressing discomfort with his feelings. By contrast, Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024), based in Bangkok, described early same-sex attraction as linked to parental roles but emphasised that their urban context provided more opportunities for self-expression and relative acceptance.

School environments further reinforced these differences. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) from an urban all-girls school associated identity development with close female friendships, while Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024), raised in a rural province and attending an all-boys religious school, described attraction to men as a product of peer influences in a tightly monitored religious setting. Participant E (personal communication, January 20, 2024), also from a rural area, highlighted subconscious emotions as central in shaping identity, yet expressed greater caution in disclosure due to the close-knit nature of their community.

These accounts demonstrate that while biological and psychological factors play a role, the environment—whether rural or urban—significantly conditions how gender-diverse identities are understood, expressed, or concealed.

Self-Realisation of Gender-Diverse Identities

The process of recognising gender-diverse identities varied widely. Participant E (personal communication, January 20, 2024) recalled first experiencing attraction at the age of 13 in a boys' religious school. Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024) identified a gradual shift in preference towards men during a school sports event.

For others, gender nonconformity in behaviour signalled early awareness. Participant G (personal communication, January 28,

2024) remembered playing with dolls and adopting feminine traits as a child. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) became aware of her identity after forming an emotional bond with a female classmate in an all-girls school. These accounts reveal that self-realisation of gender-diverse identities is shaped by age, upbringing, and environment, with some participants recognising their feelings early in life while others became conscious of them later.

Experiences of Being a Muslim with Gender-Diverse Identities

Interviewees described diverse experiences in reconciling their identities with Islamic teachings. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) interpreted his inclinations as a divine test, turning to practices such as prayer and fasting to maintain discipline. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023) considered nonconforming attractions religiously impermissible and sought to control them.

Others described emotional struggles. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) expressed guilt and sadness: "It hurts to love the same sex. Sometimes I just want to cry." Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024) actively moderated his outward expression to align with religious principles. Participant G (personal communication, January 28, 2024) reflected on their upbringing in a daʿwah-oriented (*Jamaah Tabligh*) family, which reinforced the conviction that gender diversity contradicts Islamic values. These narratives underline the tension experienced by Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals, who must balance personal identity with religious expectations. Many relied on faith practices as a source of moral guidance, even while facing inner conflict.

Approaches to Managing Gender-Diverse Identities

Participants described a range of strategies for managing their identities within the framework of Islam. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) highlighted prayer, fasting, and acts of worship as tools for self-discipline. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023) stressed remembering the afterlife as a way to resist worldly desires. Participant G (personal communication, January 28, 2024) argued that performing good deeds protects against harmful behaviour.

Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024) emphasised the importance of surrounding oneself with pious Muslims, though rejecting marriage as a solution. These findings suggest that devotion, moral self-regulation, and supportive peer networks are central to how Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals manage diverse identities within Islamic boundaries.

Desired Perspectives and Treatment from Family and Society

Interviewees expressed different experiences regarding family and societal acceptance. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) called for greater understanding, arguing that LGBTQI+ individuals should not be judged without clear evidence of sinful actions. Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024) found acceptance in the medical and healthcare sectors.

Others faced discrimination. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) sought societal acceptance without pressure or insults. Participant E (personal communication, January 20, 2024) described a non-confrontational family approach where relatives acknowledged but did not discuss their identity.

Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024) shared experiences of being bullied despite efforts to conform. Findings suggest that while some Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals receive family support, societal acceptance remains a challenge.

Prevention and Resolution Approaches for Gender Diversity in the Thai Muslim Community

Interviewees proposed religious education, family involvement, and personal commitment as key solutions. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) recommended strengthening faith through Islamic teachings. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023) emphasised parental guidance in shaping gender identity.

Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024) advocated religious devotion as a coping mechanism. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) highlighted the importance of acceptance within the family. Overall, strategies focused on religious

adherence, open communication, and structured guidance within families and communities.

Can Islamic Principles Transform One's Identity?

Interviewees viewed Islamic teachings as essential for self-discipline and transformation. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) credited Islamic repentance (*tawbah*) and worship with helping regulate emotions. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023) noted that focusing on the afterlife reduced attachment to worldly desires.

Some acknowledged ongoing struggles. Participants C and D (personal communications, January 7 & 14, 2024) noted that negative thoughts persist in moments of vulnerability. Findings suggest that while religious adherence aids self-discipline, complete transformation remains challenging for many individuals.

Perspectives of Islamic Scholar and Religious Leader

Professor H (personal communication, January 29, 2024) emphasised globalisation's role in spreading LGBTQI+ discourse via mass media. He argued that Islam rejects gender diversity, citing religious texts and historical divine punishment. However, he advocated compassionate engagement rather than discrimination. He proposed parental guidance, religious education, and community outreach as preventive measures, reinforcing faith-based morality and ethical behaviour.

Interviewee I (personal communication, February 4, 2024) acknowledged that LGBTQI+ individuals have always existed and emphasised self-control as key to social integration. He identified social media and improper parenting as major contributors to gender diversity in Muslim communities. He proposed a 'Tripartite Model'—involving families, mosques, and schools—to provide structured Islamic guidance. Proper oversight was deemed essential to prevent issues such as sexual misconduct in male-only religious schools.

Findings highlight the ongoing negotiation between LGBTQI+ identity and Islamic principles in Thai Muslim society. While religious teachings provide a framework for self-discipline and moral regulation, societal pressures and media influences continue to shape gender identity discourse. Solutions must balance faith-based guidance with compassionate community support.

Discussion

The Influence of Globalisation on the Changing Perceptions of Gender Diversity Among Thai Muslims

Globalisation has brought about significant transformations across multiple dimensions worldwide, including in Thai Muslim society, particularly regarding gender diversity. The spread of Western values and ideologies that emphasise individual rights and personal freedom has led to greater acceptance and expression of the notion of gender diversity, extending beyond the traditional binary of male and female to include gay, lesbian, and transgender identities.

The easy accessibility of information through the internet and social media has allowed Thai Muslims to unconsciously absorb global discussions surrounding gender and sexual diversity. The ability to communicate instantly across different countries and continents has facilitated deep and rapid cultural and ideological exchanges, influencing how gender diversity is perceived. The expansion of globalisation into local communities, a phenomenon known as 'glocalisation,' has had a profound impact on traditional beliefs and practices, including those in Muslim communities worldwide. Thai Muslims have inevitably been exposed to LGBTQI+ discourse through globalisation, leading to a clash between Western liberal values and Islamic teachings.

While this study focuses on gender diversity as a case study, the broader conflict between Western and Islamic values extends to various social issues, including dress codes and modesty, the prioritisation of family versus individual autonomy, women's rights, the right to self-determination, abortion, and sterilisation. As a result, globalisation has influenced how Thai Muslims think about gender diversity. Exposure to LGBTQI+ representation in international media and societies where these identities are widely accepted and supported has encouraged some members of the Thai Muslim community to be more open about their sexual identities. This Western discourse on rights and freedoms inherently contradicts traditional Islamic beliefs, yet globalisation continues to shape societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality, driving inevitable social change.

Islamic teachings oppose gender diversity based on the belief that Allah has created all things in the most appropriate form, including

the natural order of human beings. This extends beyond gender and sexuality to environmental and ethical concerns, such as deforestation and unsustainable development leading to climate change, pollution, including PM2.5 air pollution, and deviations from natural laws that result in negative consequences for humanity rather than God. Similarly, the case of gender and sexual diversity is seen as a deviation from the natural laws established by God, which leads to negative consequences like higher risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as syphilis and hepatitis (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Several studies referenced previously highlight the influence of globalisation, primarily driven by Western values, particularly American and European liberal democracy. These ideologies prioritise individual freedoms, placing personal rights above religious doctrines. As a result, Muslims worldwide, including Thai Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals, face challenges in navigating their identities. Similar to Muslims in Western societies, Thai Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals express their gender identity differently depending on their social environment. In public spaces or within LGBTQI+ circles, they can express themselves more freely. However, within Muslim communities or religious settings, they face restrictions due to religious and familial expectations.

Moreover, the findings suggest that environment plays a critical role in how gender diversity is experienced and negotiated. Participants living in rural, Muslim-majority provinces such as Songkhla and Pattani described stricter religious expectations, stronger family monitoring, and greater pressure to conform to traditional norms. In these settings, deviations from gender norms are more visible, often leading to stigma or attempts at correction by families and schools.

By contrast, participants residing in urban centres such as Bangkok and Pathum Thani reported greater exposure to diverse social networks, broader access to online communities, and comparatively higher levels of acceptance. Although they still encountered prejudice, the urban environment provided more opportunities for self-expression and less constant scrutiny. This distinction highlights how globalisation is not experienced uniformly. Its influence is filtered through local contexts, with rural environments maintaining stronger religious conservatism and urban areas reflecting more pluralist values.

In sum, globalisation, driven by Western liberal ideologies, prioritises individual freedoms over religious teachings. This has led some Thai Muslims to adopt LGBTQI+ discourse alongside Islamic principles, resulting in internal conflicts and pressures in shaping their identities. The inherent contradiction between Western and Islamic perspectives creates tensions in self-perception, making it challenging for individuals to reconcile their faith with their sexual identity. Despite these challenges and ideological clashes, globalisation continues to play a key role in spreading discussions about gender and sexual rights, leading to social transformations that Thai Muslims cannot entirely avoid.

Islamic Perspectives on Gender Diversity

Islamic teachings on gender diversity are firmly rooted in religious doctrine, rejecting homosexuality and gender diversity, considering them sins that remain prohibited until the end of time. Similar to adultery, alcohol consumption, gambling, and drug use, these acts are deemed prohibited (*haram*). Al-Qurʾān and ḥadīth explicitly mention punishments for homosexual behaviour, referencing Prophet Lūṭ's people, who were punished for engaging in same-sex relations. Additionally, Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) condemned those who imitate the opposite gender, prohibiting women from behaving like men and vice versa. As a result, Islam strictly forbids homosexuality and transgender behaviour.

Historically, Islamic jurisprudence distinguishes between *khuntha* (intersex individuals) and *mukhannath* (effeminate men). *Khuntha* are born with both male and female characteristics, and Islamic law provides specific guidelines for their treatment. *Mukhannath*, referring to effeminate men, are not sinful if their traits are natural. However, deliberately altering one's gender expression is impermissible and subject to religious consequences.

Islam emphasises self-discipline and moral restraint. Muslims who experience same-sex attraction but refrain from acting upon it are not considered sinful, just as those who resist adultery, alcohol, or corruption are regarded as good Muslims. Islamic teachings differentiate between sexual attraction and behaviour—a person who has same-sex desires but does not engage in prohibited acts, such as *liwāṭ* (sodomy) or gender nonconformity, and instead follows Islamic principles, is still considered

a righteous Muslim. If an individual naturally exhibits effeminate traits but remains within Islamic boundaries, their efforts are acknowledged.

In Muslim societies, gender diversity is viewed as a test from Allāh, challenging both individuals and the community. Some successfully maintain their religious identity, while others fully embrace an LGBTQI+ identity, highlighting the ongoing tension between Islamic teachings and modern influences. The rise of digital platforms has amplified discussions on gender and sexual identity, making LGBTQI+ visibility more prominent. Globalisation and social media have introduced new challenges for religious authorities and families striving to uphold traditional Islamic values.

Recommendations for Thai Muslims Regarding Gender Diversity

The general Muslim population should approach Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals with compassion rather than judgment. They should not be condemned or cast out but instead supported in living within the framework of Islam to prevent them from seeking acceptance outside the Muslim community, which might distance them from their faith. It is essential to recognise that many Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals do not choose their sexual orientation but experience these feelings involuntarily. Despite these attractions, they can still be devout Muslims as long as they do not engage in prohibited acts, such as *liwāṭ* (sodomy) or gender transition surgery. However, even if they have sinned, Islam always provides a path to repentance (*tawbah*), allowing them to return to a righteous path.

For Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals, their non-conforming identity should be viewed as a test from Allāh, similar to how others face various life challenges. They must distinguish between same-sex attraction and acting upon desires, recognising the "red line" established by Islamic teachings. Islam upholds the unchanging principle that same-sex behaviours remain sinful and beyond reinterpretation. The ultimate goal is to please and live within Allāh's framework, as expressed in the Qurʾān (89: 27-30):

> It will be said to the pious — believers of Islamic Monotheism: O (you) the one in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back to your Lord, — well-pleased (yourself) and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter you, then, among My honoured slaves, And enter you My Paradise.

To address gender diversity, religious education is key. Parents and religious leaders should play an active role in fostering *īmān* and guiding children's moral development. Scholars should organise Islamic educational programmes to provide accurate knowledge on gender diversity while ensuring that discussions are rational and well-grounded, rather than focusing solely on legal rulings and punishments.

Psychological and social support are also necessary. Counselling services should help individuals navigate their feelings while adhering to Islamic teachings. Safe spaces should be created where Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals can receive guidance from scholars and professionals. Additionally, Muslim communities should be educated on gender diversity to foster respect and appropriate engagement, avoiding discrimination and exclusion. Educational institutions must implement preventive measures to protect gender-nonconforming students, ensuring they are not bullied or harmed. Schools should develop fair intervention strategies for handling such cases.

A structured approach should include research-based best practices. Studies should explore the lived experiences of Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals, examining education, employment, family life, and religious observance. This can inform policies and guidelines that enable them to live in accordance with Islamic principles while leading fulfilling lives. Additionally, Thai Muslim communities should engage in dialogue with Muslim-majority countries that have addressed these issues constructively, adopting best practices aligned with Islamic values within the Thai social context.

Addressing gender diversity in Thai Muslim society requires collaboration between parents, scholars, community leaders, and educational institutions. The goal should be to foster understanding and inclusivity while upholding Islamic principles. By approaching the issue with knowledge, wisdom, and compassion, the Muslim community can support individuals struggling with gender diversity, helping them live in accordance with their faith while maintaining dignity and social integration.

Conclusion

Globalisation has significantly influenced the transformation of Thai Muslim society, particularly regarding gender diversity. The rapid

dissemination of information and exposure to global ideas, including LGBTQI+ rights, have led to increased visibility and advocacy among LGBTQI+ Muslims in Thailand. However, this shift has also caused internal conflicts within the Muslim community, where traditional religious values often clash with modern human rights perspectives. This tension became particularly evident during the 2023 Thai general election when the progressive Move Forward Party promoted the Marriage Equality Bill. Many Thai Muslims viewed this as contradictory to Islamic principles, raising concerns about the future influence of liberal ideas on Muslim youth. Islamic perspectives on gender diversity are traditionally rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, which consider same-sex relationships sinful. However, some contemporary Muslim scholars and religious leaders in Thailand have begun adopting a more compassionate approach, emphasising understanding and religious guidance over condemnation. This shift reflects an effort to balance adherence to Islamic teachings with the realities of societal change brought about by globalisation and liberal thought.

To address gender diversity in Thai Muslim society effectively, a comprehensive approach that fosters mutual understanding and inclusivity is essential. The research highlights the importance of providing religious counselling that is both faithful to Islamic teachings and sensitive to the well-being of LGBTQI+ individuals. Education on gender diversity within an Islamic context should be promoted at institutional, community, and family levels. Furthermore, dialogue between supporters and opponents of LGBTQI+ rights within the Muslim community is crucial for reducing conflicts and fostering coexistence. By combining religious principles with adaptive social strategies, Thai Muslims can navigate the complexities of globalisation while maintaining their faith and respecting human dignity.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study has shed light on gender diversity within Thai Muslim society, it faced limitations in scope. The participants represented primarily lesbian, gay, transgender and queer identities, leaving other dimensions of LGBTQI+—such as intersex, non-binary, or asexual Muslims—largely unexplored. Future research should aim to include these groups, whose experiences may reveal different forms of negotiation between identity, religion, and society. Moreover, while this

study highlighted differences between urban and rural environments, a deeper exploration of regional variations, ethnic identity, economic background, and generational change would provide a fuller picture of how Thai Muslims experience gender diversity. Longitudinal studies following individuals over time could also help to clarify how identity and faith evolve in response to globalisation and shifting social conditions.

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Mohd. Kamal Hassan's Perspectives on Family Relationships: Strategies for Strengthening Malaysian Muslim Families

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Abstract: Modern Muslim families in Malaysia face significant challenges, including marital discord, parental neglect, and the erosion of traditional Islamic values, all exacerbated by modernisation and globalisation. This study examines the ethical framework introduced by Mohd. Kamal Hassan, focusing on the concepts of 'Islamicisation of the self' and *al-Wasaṭiyyah* and explores their relevance to contemporary family issues in Malaysia. Through content analysis, field research, and surveys conducted with IIUM staff, the research investigates the application of Kamal Hassan's ideas to address family challenges. The findings reveal that Kamal Hassan's insights into promoting harmonious family relationships, particularly in areas such as spiritual leadership, economic stability, and mutual respect, are widely recognised as relevant. This study proposes that the concept of the *Ūlū al-Albāb personality* – encompassing education, self-Islamisation, and the principle of *al-Wasaṭiyyah* – offers a compelling strategy to address the challenges faced by Malaysian Muslim families. Additionally, the study highlights the importance

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of educational initiatives, such as workshops, in enhancing awareness and integrating these ethical principles into everyday family life.

Keywords: Kamal Hassan, Family Relationships, Ūlū al-Albāb, IOHK, Malaysian Muslim Family, Islamicisation of the self, al-Wasaṭiyyah

Abstrak: Keluarga Muslim moden di Malaysia kini berdepan pelbagai cabaran yang semakin kompleks, termasuk konflik rumah tangga, pengabaian tanggungjawab keibubapaan, serta penghakisan nilai-nilai Islam tradisional yang kian ketara akibat arus pemodenan dan globalisasi. Kajian ini meneliti kerangka etika yang diketengahkan oleh Mohd. Kamal Hassan dengan memberi fokus kepada konsep *Islamisasi diri* dan *al-Wasaṭiyyah*, serta menilai kesesuaiannya dalam menangani isu-isu kekeluargaan semasa di Malaysia. Melalui pendekatan analisis kandungan, penyelidikan lapangan dan soal selidik yang dijalankan dalam kalangan warga UIAM, kajian ini meneliti bagaimana prinsip-prinsip yang digagaskan oleh beliau diaplikasikan dalam konteks kekeluargaan. Hasil kajian mendapati pandangan Kamal Hassan berkaitan pemantapan hubungan kekeluargaan—terutamanya dalam aspek kepimpinan spiritual, kestabilan ekonomi dan sikap saling menghormati—diiktiraf sebagai amat relevan oleh para responden. Kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa konsep personaliti *Ūlū al-Albāb*, yang merangkumi pendidikan, pengislaman diri, dan prinsip *al-Wasaṭiyyah* sebagai satu strategi yang berkesan untuk menangani cabaran yang dihadapi oleh keluarga Muslim di Malaysia. Kajian ini turut menekankan kepentingan inisiatif pendidikan seperti bengkel dalam meningkatkan kesedaran serta penghayatan nilai-nilai etika Islam dalam kehidupan berkeluarga.

Kata kunci: Kamal Hassan, Hubungan Kekeluargaan, Ūlū al-Albāb, IOHK, Keluarga Muslim Malaysia, Islamisasi diri, al-Wasaṭiyyah

Introduction

The family is the fundamental unit of Islamic society, built on essential values such as love, responsibility, and mutual respect. However, modern Muslim families in Malaysia face various challenges, including marital disharmony, parental neglect, and the erosion of traditional Islamic values as a result of modernisation and globalisation. Modernisation refers to the transformation from traditional or pre-modern societies into modern ones. It involves changes in technology, the economy, politics, and culture, aiming to improve living standards and advance societal progress. Globalisation is the process of increasing interconnectedness

between countries through the exchange of goods, services, information, people, and culture. It influences culture and lifestyle by introducing new ideas, values, and habits, while sometimes challenging local traditions and identities. In this article, the terms *modern Muslim families* and *modern era* refer to families and contexts that have undergone these processes. The rise in domestic violence among spouses indicates serious concerns regarding marital stability. According to statistics from the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM), reported cases of domestic violence increased from 6,540 cases in 2022 and 5,507 cases in 2023 to 7,116 cases in 2024 (Hisham, 2025). Additionally, there is a growing concern over parental neglect and the increase of single-parent families, which adversely affect children's upbringing and development. The struggle to uphold traditional Islamic values amidst modernisation and globalisation is further eroding these values, leading to ethical and moral dilemmas within families (Ibrhim et al., 2025).

Professor Emeritus Mohd. Kamal Hassan (1942–2023), a distinguished scholar in Islamic thought, coined the term 'Islamicisation of human knowledge (IOHK),' and the 'Islamicisation of the self' within the larger context of the Tawḥīdic paradigm. His teachings emphasise high moral standards, starting with self-reform before societal reform (Muhsin, 2015). While his focus was primarily on education and academic settings, this study explores how his ethical insights can also serve as a guide for family relationships.

In his early work, *Islamic Identity Crisis* (1981), Kamal Hassan identified secularisation and globalisation as factors destabilising Muslim identity and family structures. Though not focused on family directly, his critiques of un-Islamic cultural practices and calls for cultural reform remain relevant. His 2011 book, *Voice of Islamic Moderation from the Malay World*, introduces *al-Wasaṭiyyah* as a principle of balance in life, including family roles, namely rights and responsibilities, communication, and parenting.

In his 2013 work on *al-Wasaṭiyyah*, Kamal Hassan explains that the concept is essential for countering ideological deviations, the political misuse of Islam, and social fragmentation. By emphasising knowledge, spiritual refinement, and ethical conduct, *al-Wasaṭiyyah* promotes constructive dialogue and peaceful coexistence. As he elaborates, it is not a form of passive centrism, but an active embodiment of excellence, balance, and justice in both leadership and societal reform.

Current literature also recognises the lack of religious knowledge, rising materialism, and inadequate social support as causes of marital breakdown (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Hedonistic tendencies further exacerbate family issues and contribute to marital discord by promoting self-centredness and a disregard for long-term commitments and values. Islamic law considers the removal of harm to be an obligation, achieved by preventing harm before it occurs and eliminating it if it arises (Muhsin et al., 2019). In this light, the current research explores the challenges faced by Malaysian families through the lens of Kamal Hassan's perspectives. This study uses content analysis, field research, and surveys to analyse Kamal Hassan's principles and their impact on Malaysian Muslim family life. Findings are derived from his writings and survey responses from IIUM staff to propose strategies that strengthen family harmony grounded in Islamic ethics.

Kamal Hassan's Contributions: Islamicisation of the Self and *Al-Wasaṭiyyah* in Muslim Families

Kamal Hassan: A Brief Biographical Sketch

Tan Sri Dr. Mohd. Kamal Hassan, the third Rector of IIUM and the Honorary Adviser for CENTRIS, was born in Kelantan in 1942. He earned a first-class degree in Islamic Studies from the University of Malaya and later completed his Master of Philosophy and PhD at Columbia University. His work focuses on Islamic thought in Southeast Asia, particularly on ethics, education, and society. At IIUM, he was instrumental in integrating revealed knowledge with human sciences and promoting Islamic values in academia (Muhsin, 2015).

His major contributions include the Islamisation of human knowledge (IOHK), the Islamisation of the self, and the proper understanding and application of *al-Wasaṭiyyah*. These concepts offer guidance in addressing challenges such as family instability and moral decline in Malaysia's Muslim society.

Islamicisation of the Self within the Family Context

The *Islamicisation of the self* is a concept deeply rooted in the foundational teachings of Islam, tracing back to Prophet Ādam *('alayhi al-salām)*, and centres on the continuous alignment of one's values, intentions, and conduct with Islamic principles. In the modern era, Kamal Hassan revitalised and contextualised this concept, drawing upon the Qur'ān

and *Sunnah* as well as the works of classical and contemporary scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Ghazālī, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, and HAMKA, to highlight its significance in addressing the spiritual and ethical crises of contemporary society. He argues that this ongoing process of transformation is essential for fostering a deeper commitment to Islamic teachings in daily actions and decisions. This is particularly important because the human soul is vulnerable to the temptations of Satan, who relentlessly seeks to deceive people toward behaviours that contradict Islamic norms and values. For Islamicisation of the self to be truly effective, it must be accompanied by *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the self), as Islam calls for the cleansing of society of *Jāhiliyyah* attitudes and un-Islamic elements (CENTRIS IIUM, 2022). This purification process, which starts with inspecting the conditions of the spiritual heart, nurtures the development of Islamic virtues within individuals, ultimately contributing to the emergence of righteous individuals, societies, and civilisations (Muhsin, 2015). In a familial setting, this process becomes a powerful tool for fostering spiritual and moral growth within the household. Each family member is encouraged to cultivate personal discipline, ethical behaviour, and a sense of responsibility toward one another. Parents play a pivotal role in embodying these values, creating a nurturing environment that reinforces Islamic norms and ethics in their children. By nurturing a strong connection to Islamic principles, families can safeguard themselves against the challenges of moral decay, materialism, and spiritual neglect that are increasingly common in modern society (Hassan, 2011).

Al-Wasaṭiyyah and Family Dynamics

Al-Wasaṭiyyah is another central tenet of Kamal Hassan's work. He argues that *al-Wasaṭiyyah* should not be merely interpreted as moderation (an inaccurate and truncated notion of the important Qur'anic concept) as many ordinary Muslims wrongly understand it. Rather, it must encompass three key attributes or pillars: justice (*al-'adl*), excellence or goodness (*al-khayriyyah*), and rightful balance (*al-tawāzun*) to attain a successful life (Hassan, 2014). A comprehensive understanding of *al-Wasaṭiyyah* in Islam, grounded in the Quran and the *Sunnah*, can function as a guiding principle for Muslims, particularly in family relationships, to maintain a holistic and balanced lifestyle, make informed decisions, and fulfil their responsibilities. Kamal Hassan's view on *al-Wasaṭiyyah* in family life is rooted in the idea that Islam encourages individuals to

choose the best realistic path. Excellence should be the rational choice for a righteous Muslim, and the best choice is not always a moderate one. This perspective rejects the Western-imposed interpretation of *al-Wasaṭiyyah* as mere moderation. Families are therefore encouraged to engage in open dialogue and mutual consultation (*shūrā*) when making decisions, rather than relying on authoritarian methods or allowing conflicts to escalate without resolution (Hassan, 2014; Islam, 2019).

Kamal Hassan's elucidation of the Qur'anic concept of *al-Wasaṭiyyah* emphasises its relevance not only to the financial and material aspects of family life but also to the emotional and relational dynamics within families. This is particularly relevant in addressing contemporary challenges, such as marital disputes and tensions between parents and children. Instead of adopting rigid or extreme positions, *al-Wasaṭiyyah* calls for excellence in conduct like empathy, patience, and understanding. (Hassan, 1981; Hassan, 2011).

Kamal Hassan's Insights and Principles in Family Relationships

Kamal Hassan's works, though not exclusively focused on family matters, offer profound insights into how Islamic principles shape familial relationships. His scholarship on Islamic thought, ethics, and societal wellbeing provides a valuable framework for understanding the family's role in nurturing moral values, promoting stability, and upholding the Islamic way of life. The following sections synthesise his perspectives, drawing from his works to highlight their relevance to contemporary family dynamics.

Centrality of Family in Islamic Society

Kamal Hassan underscores the family as the cornerstone of Islamic society, emphasising its role in nurturing essential moral and ethical values. He views the family as a fundamental unit for transmitting Islamic teachings across generations, which contributes to both individual wellbeing and societal stability. A strong family structure cultivates spiritual and emotional growth, enhancing the overall health of the *ummah* (Hassan, 2011).

Marriage as a Divine Institution

Kamal Hassan views marriage (*nikāḥ)* as more than just a legal contract. In his view, it is a sacred institution meant to foster tranquillity (*sakīnah*),

love (*mawaddah*), and mercy (*raḥmah*) between spouses. Drawing on Qur'anic principles, he highlights the spiritual and ethical dimensions of marriage, emphasising its role in achieving personal fulfilment and social stability amidst modern challenges such as materialism and individualism (Hassan, 1981).

Parental Responsibility and Ethical Child-Rearing

Kamal Hassan asserts that parents are the primary educators responsible for their children's moral and spiritual development. He stresses that parenting is more than just providing material needs; it also requires instilling Islamic values and acting as role models. Parents are entrusted with shaping the character and faith of the next generation, emphasising the significance of moral guidance within the family structure (Hassan, 2011).

Balanced Rights and Responsibilities within the Family

Kamal Hassan highlights the necessity of balancing rights and responsibilities among family members, as outlined in Islamic teachings. He explains that while individuals possess specific rights, they also have corresponding duties to ensure familial harmony. This balance is rooted in principles of justice ('*adl*) and compassion (*raḥmah*) which are vital for preventing conflicts and promoting mutual respect among family members (Hassan, 1981).

The Role of Religion in Sustaining Family Bonds

Kamal Hassan emphasises the importance of religious practices in strengthening familial relationships. Activities like prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) enhance spiritual bonds within the family. These practices foster collective spiritual consciousness, helping families navigate the challenges posed by secular influences and materialistic values (Hassan, 2018).

Challenges of Modernism and Western Influences

Kamal Hassan criticises the adverse effects of Western secularism and individualism on traditional Islamic family structures. He contends that these influences can weaken familial bonds and undermine core Islamic values. To counteract these effects, he advocates for a renewed commitment to Islamic principles, cultivating resilience against the spiritual and moral challenges of modernism (Hassan, 1995).

Spiritual Leadership within the Family

Kamal Hassan stresses the role of spiritual leadership in the family, particularly the father's role as both a moral guide and an ethical role model. He advocates for a leadership style grounded in spirituality and ethical behaviour, complemented by the mother's nurturing influence on children's moral development. This partnership ensures a strong spiritual foundation for the family (Hassan, 2011).

Resolving Family Conflicts through Shūrā (Consultation)

Kamal Hassan promotes *shūrā* (consultation) as an effective way to resolve family conflicts. He emphasises the importance of open dialogue and mutual understanding in addressing disputes, highlighting the need for patience, principled tolerance and fairness. This consultative approach aligns with *al-Wasaṭiyyah* and Islamic principles of justice and fosters long-term familial harmony (Hassan, 2000).

Women's Role and Status in Family Life

Kamal Hassan acknowledges and values highly the vital role of women in family life, emphasising their equitable status within Islamic teachings. He supports women's empowerment through education, recognising their important contributions to the family's moral and spiritual wellbeing. He espouses the complementary roles for men and women, promoting collaboration and mutual respect to ensure family stability (Hassan, 2007).

Economic Stability and Provision for the Family

Kamal Hassan identifies economic stability as crucial for family wellbeing. He recognises the traditional role of the father as the guardian and primary provider (*qawwām*) and stresses the necessity for financial management based on Islamic principles like moderation, justice, and responsibility. Hassan warns against excessive materialism, advocating for a balanced approach that prioritises spiritual values alongside material needs (Hassan, 2011; Hassan, 1981).

Contemporary Issues in Malaysian Muslim Families and Solutions through Islamicisation of the Self and *Al-Wasaṭiyyah*

Contemporary Malaysian Muslim families face various challenges, such as the erosion of traditional values, materialism, and

intergenerational conflicts, besides external pressures from secular ideologies. These issues weaken the moral and spiritual bonds within families, disrupting their role as a foundational unit in society. Kamal Hassan's concepts of Islamicisation of the self and *al-Wasaṭiyyah* **(**representing excellence, justice, and right balance) along with his insights on familial relationships, offer valuable strategies to address these challenges.

Contemporary Issues in Malaysian Muslim Families

Erosion of Traditional Values

The rapid development of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era has significantly impacted Muslim families in Malaysia, especially in undermining traditional Islamic values such as respect, responsibility, and spirituality that should be fostered among family members. A study by Ibrhim et al. (2025) reveals that when married couples fail to internalise Islamic values, it often leads to prolonged conflicts due to the lack of religious principles as a foundation for resolving issues, frequently resulting in divorce.

This shortfall hampers the fulfilment of religious obligations, including financial provision, conflict management, and mutual respect between spouses. Furthermore, diminishing religious consciousness contributes to gender role conflicts that threaten familial harmony (Muhammad Husni & Iffah Fathiah, 2023). For instance, Shafie and Mohd Zin (2020) found that while women in modern society are increasingly entering the workforce and contributing to household income, traditional perceptions of women's roles in the home remain strong. This imbalance creates tension, particularly when husbands do not accept or support their wives' roles outside the home, or on the other hand, the husbands expect sharing of financial responsibilities from their wives, without the reciprocal sharing of domestic roles. The role of the mother as the primary nourisher, nurturer, and first madrasah for her children is vital. The weakening of this role poses a risk factor that may contribute to moral decline and developmental issues in children. Moreover, the erosion of religious values negatively impacts the moral development of children, leading to behavioural issues among youth, such as disrespect toward parents, teachers, and elders, which poses a serious challenge to family institutions (Abdul Rashid et al., 2023).

Materialism and Consumerism

Materialism and consumerism have become prevalent in modern societies, where luxury is often considered a symbol of success. This focus on material wealth can lead to dissatisfaction when such expectations are unmet (Abdul Rahman & Hassan, 2015), causing families to prioritise material success over emotional, spiritual, and ethical development. A study by Azura Tamat and Vellymalay (2019) supports this notion, revealing that contemporary society increasingly values material possessions, wealth, and worldly pleasures over the love shared between parents and children.

As parents work longer hours to earn more money, they often neglect to spend quality time with their children. This lack of involvement in their children's growth can adversely affect their emotional wellbeing. Moreover, materialistic parents tend to exert a lot of pressure on their children to achieve academic excellence while overlooking the importance of acquiring Islamic knowledge, which is essential for every Muslim. Furthermore, research by Che' Sharif et al. (2015) indicates that strong materialistic values in Malaysia have led to the neglect of the elderly.

Intergenerational Conflicts

One of the major challenges facing contemporary families is the generational divide, which can lead to younger generations feeling disconnected from the values of their elders. Conflicts often arise from differing expectations and roles within the family (Hughes et al., 2019), especially when three generations live together. According to the 5th Malaysian Population and Family Study, 70% of elderly Malaysians reside with their families (Abdullah, 2025). Parents may have specific expectations for their children regarding career paths, academic success, or personal choices, while children often have their own aspirations. Without effective communication among these generations, disagreements will persist, creating an emotional minefield (Rahman, 2025).

Family Disunity

The family is the fundamental foundation for the development of society and the establishment of a strong, stable nation (Abd. Razak & Nik Hussain, 2007). However, the increasing breakdown of family

institutions has become a pressing concern (The News, 2023). Although family disunity does not always mean divorce, alarming statistics indicate that a divorce (*ṭalāq*) is pronounced every minute, whether in court or outside of it (The News, 2023). This highlights the fragility of family structures in Malaysia, particularly among Muslim families.

One primary cause of familial breakdown is the lack of shared values and ineffective communication among family members. This issue is further exacerbated by the pressures of high living expenses, the influence of modern lifestyle trends, insufficient religious knowledge and appreciation, and the rapid development of media and communication technologies, all of which threaten family harmony (A.Yusof, 2022). This can give rise to internal conflicts and prolonged dissatisfaction if not addressed appropriately.

Furthermore, a study by Wan Ismail et al. (2023) identifies the collapse of family institutions, such as parental divorce, poor communication between parents and children, excessive pressure, lack of religious education, involvement in adulterous activities, and drug abuse, as significant contributors to the prevalence of illicit sexual behaviour among adolescents. Most concerning is the exploitation of adolescents by family members for prostitution, which underscores the severity of the issue.

Secular and Western Influences

Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud stated that the influence of secularism is very strong in today's Muslim society, affecting various aspects of life (Arifin & Suhaimi, 2019). The increasing prevalence of secular and Western values, which prioritise individualism and moral relativism, poses a major threat to the traditional Islamic family structure. The concept of individualism encourages individuals to prioritise self-interest and personal freedom, thus reducing their commitment to partners or family members. The absence of cooperation and tolerance in these relationships ultimately leads to conflicts and tensions that are difficult to resolve (Ibrhim et al., 2025).

Social Media Influences

Social media has become the primary platform for showcasing lifestyles and facilitating comparisons among couples. In the context of husband-and-wife relationships, this trend can trigger feelings of jealousy, a loss

of trust, and conflict, ultimately contributing to the breakdown of the family unit (Ibrhim et al., 2025). Increasingly, individuals are airing personal grievances about family members on social media, whether it be children criticising their parents or married couples publicly attacking each other.

A study by Najmuddin et al. (2023) indicates that the misuse of social media has a negative impact on the harmony of marital relationships, with many divorce cases linked to infidelity occurring on these platforms. Yuhaniz Mohd Yusop, Senior Assistant Director of the Family, Social, and Community Division of JAKIM, notes that some individuals post about their partner's infidelity as a way to express their feelings. Some even share evidence of their partner's wrongdoing, believing it to be a last-ditch effort to salvage the marriage. However, this approach contradicts Islamic guidelines for resolving domestic conflicts (Arifin, 2023).

Marital Conflicts

Conflict is an inevitable part of human life, including within the institution of marriage. Domestic conflict typically arises from differences in opinion, desires, or plans between spouses, which can threaten the harmony of their relationship (Hamzah, 2006). Although conflict between spouses is normal, it does not necessarily have detrimental effects if both spouses possess adequate knowledge and skills for managing conflict (Abdullah, 2017). However, Mohamad @ Asanar et al. (2021) note that prolonged and poorly managed marital conflict can lead to various negative psychological effects, such as depression, anxiety, stress, eating disorders, and trauma for those involved. Key contributors to domestic conflict include financial crises, communication breakdown, and family interference. In addition, the rise in cases of domestic violence, failure to provide maintenance, infidelity, and unauthorised polygamy suggests that marital conflict is a serious issue (Muhammad et al., 2023).

Narcissism in Family Relationships

Narcissism in family dynamics creates a painful and stressful environment, characterised by a toxic power imbalance. Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is defined as a condition in which an individual feels superior to others, constantly seeks admiration

and respect, lacks empathy, and views themselves as the most important person, as explained by Dr. Farah Deena Abd Samad, a psychiatrist at Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz (HCTM) (Tanzizi, 2024). Consequently, those living with someone who has NPD may experience emotional and psychological effects, including feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-confidence, confusion, depression, trauma, and mental and physical exhaustion (Tanzizi, 2024). Additionally, former Permatang Pauh MP Nurul Izzah Anwar has pointed out the complexities of parenting in a world increasingly defined by narcissism, where challenges arise from modern self-centeredness and materialism (Selvam, 2023). Kasim (2022) further notes that narcissistic behaviour among teenagers has become a pervasive issue in contemporary society, as many waste their time in the age of social media addiction, spending excessive hours on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to consume trivial information.

Absent Parents

An "absent parent" refers to a mother or father who is physically unavailable in a child's life for various reasons, such as work migration, divorce, or neglect, resulting in the child lacking love, support, and guidance. The incomplete presence of parents significantly impacts children, affecting their emotional, social, and psychological development. A study by Battistella & Asis (2013) shows that individuals raised by temporarily absent parents often experience feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and anxiety. They may face challenges in their relationships with both parents and siblings and often struggle to establish clear future aspirations. Research by Santos et al. (2024) found that children who grow up without an active parental role frequently experience loneliness and seek emotional support from friends or others. Their study also indicated that parental absence hinders identity development, emotional regulation, and the ability to form intimate relationships. For example, children without a father figure may struggle with their identity, as the father's role is crucial in shaping a child's competence, emotional intelligence, confidence, and self-esteem (Kamila & Mukhlis, 2013).

Survey Analysis

This section presents the findings from a survey involving 67 IIUM staff members. The goal was to assess family-related challenges and the

application of Kamal Hassan's concepts—Islamicisation of the self and *al-Wasaṭiyyah* —within family life.

Demographic Profile

The respondents included academic, administrative, and support staff. The majority were between 30 and 49 years old, with over 43% having more than 15 years of service at IIUM.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age (n=67)		
20-29 years	3	4.5
30-39 years	21	31.3
40-49 years	23	34.3
50-59 years	17	25.4
60 and above	3	4.5
Gender (n=67)		
Male	33	49.25
Female	34	50.75
Position (n=67)		
Academic staff	41	61.19
Administrative Staff	10	14.92
Technical or Support Staff	16	59.25
Period of Service (n=67)		
Less than five years	14	20.90
5-10 years	15	22.39
11-15 years	9	13.43
More than 15 years	29	43.28

Awareness and Understanding of Key Principles

Participants were asked about their familiarity with Kamal Hassan's two main concepts. Around 55.22% had a moderate understanding of Islamicisation of the self, while 50.75% reported the same for *al-*

Wasaṭiyyah. A small minority had little or no familiarity, yet the majority acknowledged both concepts' importance in family life.

Chart 1: Level of Understanding of Islamicisation of the Self involves Purification of the Self.

- Very Familiar: 41.79%
- Somewhat Familiar: 55.22%
- Not Familiar: 2.99%

Chart 2: Level of Understanding of *al-Wasaṭīyyah* (excellence, justice, and right balance).

- Very Familiar: 50.75%
- Somewhat Familiar: 47.76%
- Not Familiar: 1.49%
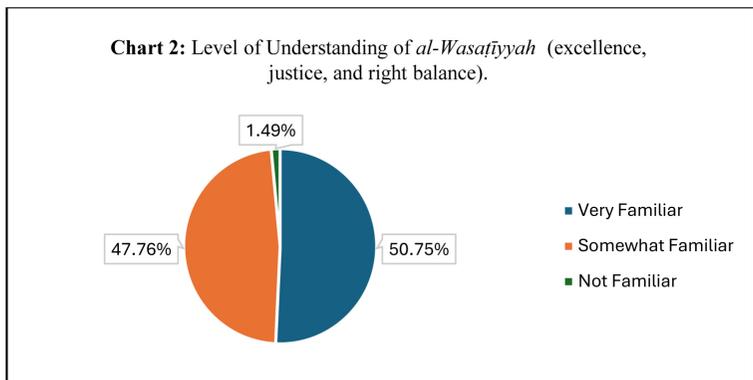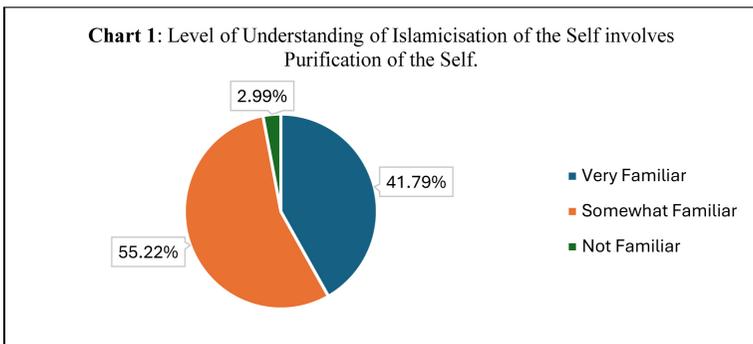
Despite the variation in depth of understanding, most respondents recognised these principles as beneficial in addressing family challenges and promoting ethical conduct within the household.

Chart 3: The importance of implementing these principles for fostering harmonious family life and addressing family challenges

- Very Important: 77.61%
- Important: 20.90%
- Somewhat Important: 1.49%
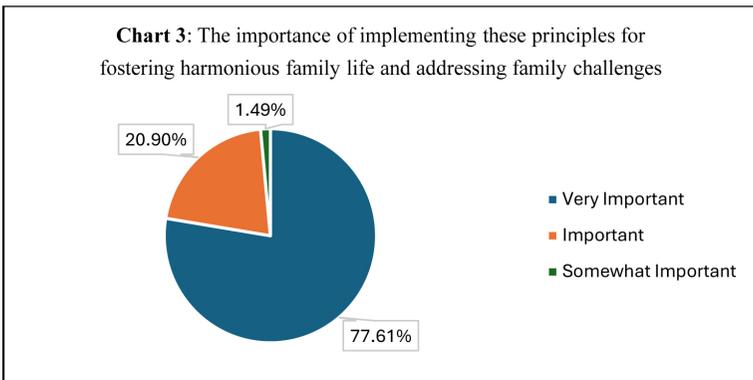
Challenges Faced by Malaysian Muslim Families

Respondents identified various challenges threatening the harmony of Muslim families. The most frequently cited issues were the influence of modern technology (82.09%), financial stress (79.10%), and erosion of Islamic values (71.64%).

Table 2: Challenges Faced by Malaysian Muslim Families

Challenges	Frequency	Percent
Absent parents	30	44.78
Economic stress and financial instability	53	79.10
Erosion of traditional/Islamic values	48	71.64
Influence of modern technology and social media	55	82.09
Intergenerational conflicts between family members	26	38.81
Issues with parenting and child discipline	42	62.69
Lack of collective religious activities	34	50.75
Marital conflicts	29	43.28
Narcissistic tendencies in family relationships	27	40.30
Secular and Western influences	39	58.21

Social media was highlighted as a primary disruptor of spousal and parent-child communication, followed closely by financial burdens and weakening religious commitment. These findings align with national trends and previous studies (MAIS, 2024; Hadi, 2024).

A large proportion (67.16%) strongly agreed that these challenges hinder the practice of Islamic values in daily family life.

Chart 4: Agreement Level – "Challenges Hinder Islamic Values in Family Life"

1.49%
31.34%
67.16%

■ Strongly Agree
■ Agree
■ Disagree
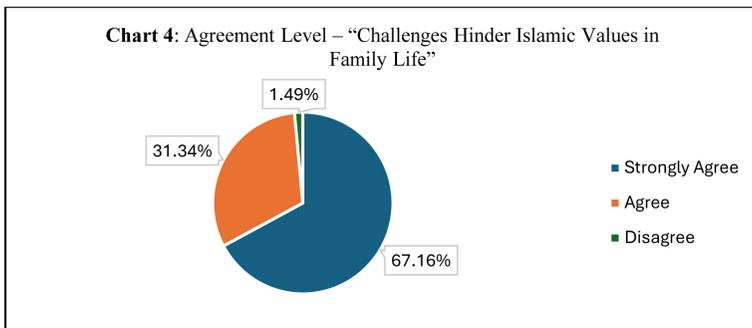
Relevance of Kamal Hassan's Principles and Insights

The survey assessed how respondents viewed the relevance of Kamal Hassan's principles in addressing contemporary family issues.

Spiritual leadership was rated as very important by 80.60%, followed by economic stability (82.09%) and shared religious activities (83.58%) as key to family unity.

Table 3: Importance of Practicing Spiritual Leadership in the Family

Importance	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very Important	54	80.60
Moderately Important	13	19.40

Table 4: Importance of Economic Stability Grounded in Islamic Principles

Importance	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very Important	55	82.09
Moderately Important	11	16.42
Slightly Important	1	1.49

Table 5: Significance of Religious Activities in Strengthening Family Relationships

Significance	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Highly significant	56	83.58
Moderately significant	11	16.42

Additionally, 86.57% of respondents saw Islamicisation of the self as highly relevant in tackling moral decline and materialism. Similarly, 80.60% deemed *al-Wasaṭiyyah* very applicable for maintaining balance and resolving conflicts.

Table 6: Relevance of Islamicisation of the Self

Relevance	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Highly relevant	58	86.57
Moderately relevant	8	11.94
Somewhat relevant	1	1.49

Table 7: Applicability of Al-Wasaṭiyyah in Family Conflict Resolution

Applicability	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very applicable	54	80.60
Moderately applicable	12	17.91

　　　　When asked which of Kamal Hassan's insights were most effective in strengthening family ties, the top responses included mutual respect and communication (82.09%), spiritual leadership (82.09%), economic moderation (70.15%), and religious bonding practices (70.15%).

Table 8: Most Effective Insights from Kamal Hassan on Strengthening Family Ties

Insights	Frequency	Percent
Addressing the influence of western secularism	32	47.76
Economic stability grounded in moderation	47	70.15
Emphasising the sacred nature of marriage	36	53.73
Encouragement of mutual respect and effective communication	55	82.09
Promoting justice and compassion in family interactions	38	56.72
Religious practices as a family bonding tool	47	70.15
Shūrā (consultation) for decision-making	42	62.69
Spiritual leadership in the family	55	82.09
The role of parents as primary educators	47	70.15
Understanding complementary roles between spouses	44	65.67

Practical Application and Personal Experience

A significant number (80.60%) reported integrating Kamal Hassan's principles into their family practices. Most practiced *al-Wasaṭiyyah* in family roles (65.67%), Islamicisation of the self (58.21%), and used *shūrā* (consultation) for conflict resolution (56.72%).

Chart 5: Personal Experiences Applying Kamal Hassan's Principles into Family Practices

14.93%

4.48%

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

80.60%
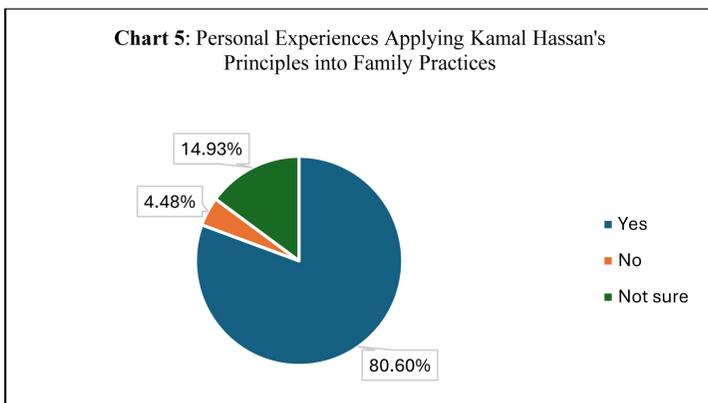
Table 9: The Principles of Kamal Hassan Applied by the Respondents

Principles	Frequency	Percent
Balancing financial and spiritual responsibilities	35	52.24
Embedding the Islamicisation of the self in personal conduct	39	58.21
Participating in family religious practices	36	53.73
Practicing *al-Wasaṭiyyah* in family roles and responsibilities	44	65.67
Using *shūrā* (consultation) to resolve family conflicts	38	56.72
Not sure	10	14.93

Respondents also viewed IIUM's initiatives, including family workshops and seminars, as effective in spreading awareness. About 94% agreed that such programs helped families apply these principles.

Chart 6: Respondents' Views on IIUM's Role in Promoting Family Values

5.97%

32.84%

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
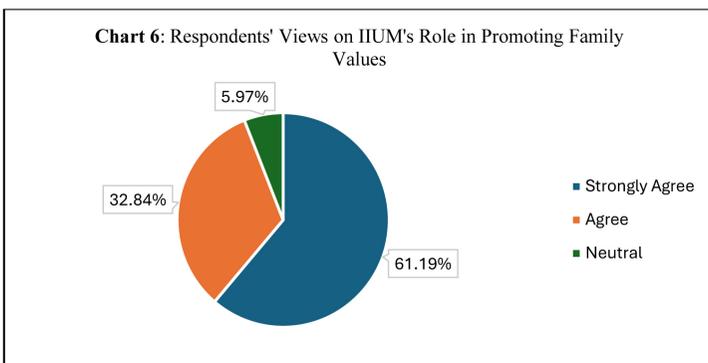
61.19%

The most beneficial resources identified were educational modules on Islamic family values (62.69%) and family-oriented religious workshops (61.19%).

Table 10: Most Beneficial Resources or Programs for Assisting Families to Adopt the Principles Promoted by Kamal Hassan

Resources/Program	Frequency	Percent
Campaigns for moderation in technology usage	23	34.33
Counselling sessions focusing on intergenerational harmony	24	35.82
Educational modules on Islamic family values	42	62.69
Family economics in Islam	21	31.34
Family-oriented religious workshops	41	61.19
Women's empowerment programs	18	26.87

In conclusion, the survey results indicate that 67 respondents from diverse backgrounds at IIUM face significant family-related challenges, primarily due to the influence of modern technology and economic instability. Although the respondents' understanding of the principles of Islamicisation of the self and *al-Wasaṭiyyah* was modest, they all acknowledged the importance of practicing these principles to strengthen family relationships. There was consensus on their relevance, with respondents expressing strong support for applying these principles in their daily lives. They emphasised effective communication and spiritual leadership as key means to enhance family harmony. Initiatives such as educational modules and religious workshops were identified as valuable resources for promoting these values within the community.

Strategies to Address Challenges Faced by Malaysian Muslim Families

A comprehensive analysis of survey data collected from the IIUM community indicates the need to develop a framework to guide the Muslim community in Malaysia, particularly in strengthening the resilience of family relationships.

Nurturing Holistic Personality Development through the Ūlū al-Albāb Framework

Kamal Hassan described *Ulū al-Albāb*, 'people of sound reason' as "intellectuals and scholars par excellence who combine the understanding of the Book of Nature with the Book of Revelation and integrate human reason with Divine revelation" (Hassan, 2010). He introduced the "*Ūlū al-Albāb*" model of holistic personal development. In light of Qur'anic teachings, this framework emphasises the importance of studying both divine revelation and the natural world to derive valuable scientific and technological knowledge, enabling individuals to contribute actively to civilisation (Hasan & Moten, 2023). The *Ūlū al-Albāb* model encompasses several interconnected processes, including the Islamicisation of human knowledge, the Islamicisation of the self, *al-Wasaṭiyyah*, relevantisation, and *tazkiyat al-nafs*.

The Islamicisation of human knowledge establishes a foundation for both personal and communal understanding of Islamic principles, directly influencing the Islamicisation of the self. Practicing *al-Wasaṭiyyah* complements both the Islamicisation of knowledge and the Islamicisation of the self by promoting a just, ethical, and balanced approach that encourages individuals to seek knowledge while upholding moral standards. Relevantisation ensures that the acquired knowledge is practical and applicable, facilitating its implementation into daily life, thus supporting Islamicisation of the self and fostering a culture of *tazkiyat al-nafs*. Ultimately, the journey of *tazkiyat al-nafs* is enriched by engaging with relevant knowledge and adopting a balanced lifestyle, ensuring that personal growth aligns with Islamic teachings. By integrating these concepts, individuals can develop a comprehensive understanding of Islam that is deeply rooted in tradition while remaining responsive to contemporary needs. The Quran links faith and good deeds, likening faith to a tree's root and good deeds to its fruits (14:24–25), showing that true spirituality requires ethical action (Hassan, 2020).

In the context of family dynamics, this model can strengthen relationships among family members through a deep appreciation of spiritual values and their connection with 'worldly' knowledge. By merging insights from divine revelation and the natural world, families can create a harmonious environment that fosters holistic personality

growth. Adapting scientific and technological knowledge within the family context is crucial for addressing modern challenges such as materialism and generational conflicts. By applying the principles of this model, families can become more resilient and proactive in facing various pressures, creating an atmosphere that nurtures collective learning and development. Three models can guide Muslim families in nurturing the holistic personality of *Ūlū al-Albāb*: the first model, "Education as the Foundation in Muslim Families"; the second model, "Islamisation of the Self as a Springboard for Role Models"; and the third model, " *Al-Wasaṭiyyah*-Based Parenting."
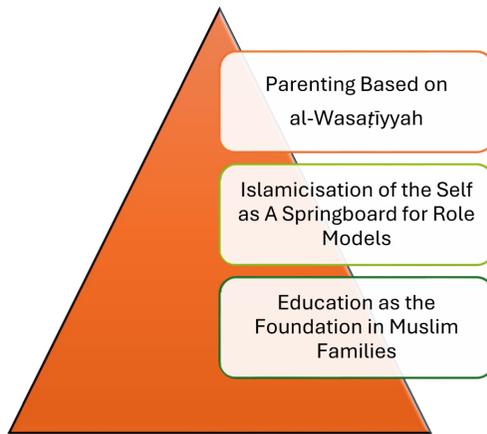
The First Model: Education as the Foundation in Muslim Families

Education is the cornerstone for developing well-rounded individuals in intellectual, moral, spiritual, and emotional aspects. This journey begins with religious education, where children learn the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic principles, instilling a deep spiritual connection and a clear understanding of their purpose in life. This religious foundation cultivates *taqwā* (awareness of God), guiding individuals to live in accordance with Islamic teachings, norms and values and contributing to personal and societal wellbeing.

This holistic approach enables individuals to develop critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving skills that help them remain firmly anchored in their faith. At the same time, moral and ethical education plays a key role in character development within the Muslim family. Values such as honesty, kindness, respect, and social

responsibility are instilled to shape children's character and foster a sense of responsibility toward society. Emotional and psychological development is equally important, with parents and educators striving to enhance children's emotional intelligence, resilience, and self-awareness, enabling them to manage their emotions and relationships effectively. Parents are considered the first educators, playing a vital role in guiding their children not only through formal education in schools and higher education institutions but also by creating a conducive environment at home that encourages curiosity, moral reflection, and a love for knowledge.

The Second Model: Islamicisation of the Self as A Springboard for Role Models

This model focuses on personal development based on Islamic values, with the goal of creating positive role models within the family. According to Kamal Hassan, the family is the primary unit of society, where Islamic values are nurtured and transmitted. He contends that "a healthy family unit is essential for the well-being of the ummah" (Hassan, 2011). Therefore, the Islamicisation of the self becomes foundational for building harmonious familial relationships. Kamal Hassan's concept of Islamicisation of the self encourages family members to align their actions with Islamic principles, prioritising spiritual wellbeing over material wealth and ensuring that ethical behaviour and spiritual growth take precedence. Shariah is both a comprehensive framework of moral and ethical principles and a divinely ordained system of religious law (Hassan, 2019).

Additionally, this model promotes the transmission of Islamic values through spiritual leadership and ethical practices in the education of children. Kamal Hassan emphasises that parents act as "guardians" of Islamic values, with their role extending beyond merely providing material needs to include moral and spiritual guidance (Hassan, 2011). This approach fosters mutual respect across generations and helps bridge any gaps. As role models, parents, must exemplify the importance of maintaining a clear Islamic moral compass when faced with challenges. Whether it involves balancing work and family life, demonstrating honesty in difficult times, or showing kindness to others, the examples set by parents and older family members leave a lasting impact on children's personal and social development.

The Third Model: *Al-Wasaṭiyyah*-Based Parenting

Parenting based on the concept of *al-Wasaṭiyyah*, as introduced by Kamal Hassan, revolves around three core principles: justice, excellence, and right balance. This approach fosters a harmonious environment where love and discipline coexist, ensuring that children develop the right moral and ethical values. To practice *al-Wasaṭiyyah*-based parenting, parents should encourage their children to respect others, do good, and act ethically, without resorting to harsh punishment or excessive leniency. They must strive to be firm yet fair, with an emphasis on guidance and correction instead of anger or indulgence. Additionally, parents should recognise that each child is unique with distinct personalities and needs.

Al-Wasaṭiyyah parenting emphasises understanding these differences and treating each child with respect, offering guidance appropriate to their temperament. Parents need to adopt the most suitable approach based on each child's individual needs. For example, a typical child and a child with special needs, such as autism, require different caregiving strategies. Parents should not apply the same parenting style to both. Moreover, they should avoid extremes—being too strict or too lenient—as either can harm a child's development. The goal is to create a balanced environment where the child feels safe, loved, and understood, while setting clear boundaries and expectations that allow for exploration, mistakes, and learning. Similarly, parents should promote open communication, encouraging their children to express their thoughts and feelings while listening attentively.

Conclusion and Major Findings

This study has focused on the ethical principles articulated by Kamal Hassan, specifically the concepts of Islamicisation of the self, *al-Wasaṭiyyah* and personality of *Ūlū al-Albāb* which are highly relevant in today's family dynamics. This study reveals several key findings:

1. The three main challenges faced by IIUM members who participated in the survey regarding family issues are the impact of social media and technology, economic instability, and the erosion of Islamic values. These challenges reflect the broader realities confronting Muslim families in Malaysia, who are increasingly exposed to the tide of modernisation and social change that test the resilience of the Islamic family institution.

2. Islamicisation of the self and *al-Wasaṭiyyah* are identified as among the most effective principles from Kamal Hassan for regulating Islamic family relationships.

3. Kamal Hassan's insights stress that the family institution should be grounded in spirituality, justice, and moderation.

4. The knowledge and understanding of survey participants regarding the concepts of Islamicisation of the self and *al-Wasaṭiyyah* are at a moderate level; however, both concepts are recognised as essential foundations for family life. Kamal Hassan's principles are deemed effective in addressing family challenges, particularly in the areas of spiritual leadership, economic stability, and mutual respect.

5. The overwhelming support for Kamal Hassan's principles within family dynamics reflects a strong awareness among respondents of the need to integrate Islamic values as a foundation for addressing contemporary family challenges.

6. Most respondents have successfully implemented Kamal Hassan's principles in their daily family life, with the strongest emphasis on the practice of *al-Wasaṭiyyah* in family roles and responsibilities, followed by Islamicisation of the self and the practice of shura in resolving conflicts.

7. The model of Ulu Al-Albab personality, which incorporates education, Islamicisation of the self, and *al-Wasaṭiyyah* to cultivate a holistic personality, was developed as a strategy to foster harmonious family dynamics rooted in Islamic ethics based on Kamal Hassan's insights.

8. Respect and effective communication among family members are vital for conflict resolution, especially within Malay Muslim families. Communication characterised by good manners and politeness, along with the reinforcement of Islamic family values such as love, empathy, and tolerance, is heavily emphasised.

9. Findings indicate that initiatives like workshops and family programs conducted by IIUM staff are effective in enhancing awareness and practice of these values, as supported by nearly 94% of respondents. This reflects the community's commitment to inculcating Islamic values in family dynamics in a practical manner.

10. There is a need for empowerment in developing and integrating family ethics modules, based on Islamic teachings and Kamal

Hassan's principles, into relevant courses across IIUM faculties. Likewise, organising large-scale campaigns and forums to promote strong and ethical Muslim families, in collaboration with JAKIM, state religious departments, and NGOs, is very much needed.

Acknowledgement

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Community-Centric Governance: Unveiling the Challenges and Strategies in West Aceh Villages

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Abstract: Village governments in West Aceh face persistent challenges in implementing the good governance principles mandated under Indonesia's Village Law (No. 6 of 2014). This study aims to identify these challenges and develop strategies to strengthen community-centric governance in villages. It addresses the research questions of what obstacles hinder the implementation of good governance at the village level and how these obstacles can be overcome. The study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, collecting data from three sub-districts in West Aceh representing varying levels of development, to examine how good governance principles are applied in village administration. Key findings indicate strengths in legal enforcement, equality, and an efficient, consensus-oriented administration, but also highlight shortcomings in community participation and responsiveness. To address these gaps, the study proposes continuous training for village officials, recruiting

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qualified youth, and fostering broader community engagement. In conclusion, enhancing community involvement and responsiveness is crucial for achieving effective and sustainable local governance.

Keywords: Village Governance, Good Governance, Community Participation, Challenges, Strategies.

Abstrak: Pentadbiran kampung di Aceh Barat menghadapi cabaran berterusan dalam melaksanakan prinsip tadbir urus yang baik yang diamanatkan di bawah Undang-undang Desa Indonesia (No. 6 Tahun 2014). Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti cabaran-cabaran ini dan membangunkan strategi untuk mengukuhkan tadbir urus berpaksikan komuniti di kampung. Ia menjawab persoalan kajian apakah halangan yang menghalang pelaksanaan tadbir urus yang baik di peringkat kampung dan bagaimana halangan ini boleh diatasi. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, mengumpul data daripada tiga mukim di Aceh Barat yang mewakili pelbagai peringkat pembangunan, untuk mengkaji bagaimana prinsip tadbir urus yang baik diterapkan dalam pentadbiran kampung. Penemuan utama menunjukkan kekuatan dalam penguatkuasaan undang-undang, kesaksamaan, dan pentadbiran yang cekap, berorientasikan konsensus, tetapi juga menyerlahkan kelemahan dalam penyertaan dan responsif masyarakat. Untuk menangani jurang ini, kajian ini mencadangkan latihan berterusan untuk pegawai kampung, merekrut belia yang berkelayakan, dan memupuk penglibatan masyarakat yang lebih luas. Kesimpulannya, meningkatkan penglibatan dan respon masyarakat adalah penting untuk mencapai tadbir urus tempatan yang berkesan dan mampan.

Kata Kunci: Tadbir Urus Kampung, Tadbir Urus Baik, Penyertaan Komuniti, Cabaran, Strategi.

Introduction

This study explores the challenges and strategies associated with strengthening village governance to achieve good governance at the local level. Despite facing various hurdles, it underscores the importance of implementing the principles of good management across all government lines (Jati, 2022). A joint study by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) of Teuku Umar University and the Regional Planning and Development Agency (BAPPEDA) of West Aceh Regency revealed suboptimal management of village funds in the region. This deficiency

is attributed to the underperformance of the Village Owned Enterprise (BUMG), resulting in a failure to fully realise the mandates outlined in Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages.

West Aceh Regency, like many other rural regions in Indonesia, has faced complex governance challenges due to historical, political, and socio-economic factors. The region was significantly affected by the Aceh conflict (1976–2005) and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, both of which disrupted governance structures and local development initiatives (Zikriati & Arani, 2024). The conflict weakened administrative capacities at the village level, creating institutional gaps that still affect governance today. Although the 2005 Helsinki Peace Agreement brought political stability, many villages continue to struggle with bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of skilled personnel, and inadequate financial management, all of which hinder effective governance (Wijatmoko, Armawi, & Fathani, 2023). Additionally, inconsistent application of village autonomy laws has led to disparities in governance effectiveness among the different villages in the region.

Furthermore, socio-economic disparities and limited community participation have slowed the progress of local governance reform (Shaleh & Islam, 2024). Many rural communities in West Aceh face high poverty rates, limited infrastructure, and low levels of civic engagement, making it difficult for village administrations to fully implement good governance principles. Despite the aim of Law No. 6 of 2014 to promote decentralised governance, the lack of technical expertise, financial literacy, and policy consistency among village officials has resulted in mismanagement of village funds (Qotadah, Wakhid, & Susanto, 2022). Additionally, there are concerns regarding political interference and a lack of transparency in financial planning and project implementation, further complicating the efforts to strengthen governance at the village level. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that includes capacity-building for village officials, promoting transparency in financial management, and fostering community involvement in decision-making processes.

Villagers, both in groups and as individuals, require services for various needs, such as health, education, work, marriage, inheritance, birth, and licensing. The effective implementation of village government must adhere to the principles outlined in Law No. 6 of 2014 Section

24, including legal certainty, orderly governance, prioritising public interest, openness, proportionality, professionalism, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, local wisdom, diversity, and participatory governance (Syarif, 2023). Despite the persistent demand for quality government services, administrative processes often remain convoluted due to the sluggish performance of bureaucratic apparatus, resulting in inefficiencies. The village government holds a crucial responsibility in providing services to the community, and the quality of these services depends on factors such as effectiveness, efficiency, and community perceptions. However, a significant challenge at the village level is related to the consistent application of good governance principles, as highlighted by research conducted by Ilham Arie Saputra (2013).

Figure 1: Map of Aceh Province
Source: BAPPEDA Aceh

To address this challenge, the article advocates for the consistent application of good governance principles, emphasising their applicability from the central to the village level. It stresses the importance of principles such as community participation, upholding the rule of law, transparency, stakeholder engagement, consensus-oriented decision-making, equality, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, and

strategic vision for achieving clean and responsible village governance (Sjamsoeddin et al., 2023). The inconsistent application of these principles poses a significant challenge to the government. To overcome this, the government must establish work rules or governance systems, aligning them with regional autonomy principles. Regional autonomy, defined as the rights, authorities, and obligations of the region, allows for self-regulation in government affairs following laws and regulations. The success of the government's working rules is intertwined with factors of good and correct governance, ultimately contributing to prosperous and thriving societies. The output of such governance is a robust and sound governance system.

Literature Review

In this study, the author employs a new institutional theory, focusing on informal institutions and their significant interactions with external communities (Munir et al., 2020). The new institutional approach posits that interactions with the external environment, including society, are shaped by the interests of individual or political actors, thereby influencing the course of institutions. An illustrative example is the interaction between institutional actors and the behaviour of interest groups external to the institution, where the conduct of these groups can impact the actions of actors within the institution through networking, communication, and structural implementation.

While institutional theory forms the basis of this article, the researcher also integrates aspects of good governance theory to examine the actors involved in village governance. Good governance, characterised by participation, orientation, accountability, responsiveness, effectiveness, fairness, inclusive consensus, and adherence to the rule of law, ensures minimised corruption, consideration of minority views, and the inclusion of vulnerable voices in decision-making (Sujana et al., 2020). This governance approach is responsive to both present and future community needs.

The concept of "good" in good governance, as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2004, holds dual meanings (Wulansari et al., 2019). First, it encapsulates values that uphold people's will and contribute to achieving national independence, sustainable development, and social justice. Second, it incorporates the functional aspects of effective and efficient governance in fulfilling

these objectives. According to UNDP, good governance entails the implementation of a stable, responsible, efficient, and effective state government, fostering constructive interaction between the country's domains, private sector, and society. The principles of good governance provide the mechanisms and guidelines to balance stakeholders' interests. The characteristics of good governance realisation, as outlined by UNDP, are summarised in Figure 2 based on various study results.

Figure 2: Characteristics of Good Governance
Source: Vyas & Aktan, 2017

The enactment of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 6 of 2014 on Village Government is perceived as the practical implementation of government affairs and the representation of local community interests within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia's governmental framework (Fingerprints, 2015). Within this context, the village government assumes a pivotal role in fostering community governance to achieve village independence through active engagement in development initiatives. In the realm of social processes, the primary responsibility of the village government is to cultivate democratic living conditions, provide effective social services, and instil a sense of peace and justice (Sidik, 2015). Moreover, it is emphasised that effective governance at the village level necessitates leadership orientation towards public services, wherein the adoption of good governance practices is positioned as a strategic imperative.

According to Dwipayana, Ari, and Sutoro (2003), the realisation of village independence through good governance at the village level involves the comprehensive mapping of four main elements. These elements include the state, represented by the village government; the political community, represented by the village representative body; civil society, encompassing various institutions and social organisations; and the economic community, comprising the financial district, as well as production and distribution sectors facilitated by actors and economic organisations within the village (Zhang et al., 2020). The interplay of these governance elements is illustrated in Tables 1 and 2 in the following section, providing a comprehensive overview of their interconnected dynamics.

Recent studies continue to emphasise the importance of institutional capacity-building and participatory governance in enhancing village-level governance. The effectiveness of governance reforms depends on the institutional environment, leadership, and administrative capacity of local governments (Syukri, 2024). The decentralisation process in Indonesia, while providing greater autonomy to village governments, has also exposed weaknesses in policy implementation, coordination, and financial management (Talitha, Firman, & Hudalah, 2020). A major challenge is ensuring that governance structures remain inclusive, transparent, and accountable, particularly in managing village funds and involving local communities in decision-making processes. Research suggests that digital governance innovations, such as e-governance platforms and online financial reporting, have the potential to improve transparency and accountability in village administration (Sofyani, Pratolo, & Saleh, 2022). However, technological literacy and infrastructure disparities remain significant barriers to widespread adoption in rural areas.

Another critical aspect of good governance at the village level is social accountability and community engagement, which play a vital role in ensuring that governance practices are aligned with the needs of local populations. Studies indicate that village governance is most effective when it integrates community-driven development (CDD) approaches that encourage bottom-up planning and decision-making (Lahfana & Machdum, 2025). However, even though regulatory frameworks support participatory governance, challenges such as elite domination, lack of institutionalised participation mechanisms, and limited civic awareness

continue to hinder meaningful community involvement (Wawo et al., 2025). To address these gaps, scholars propose enhancing the training programmes for village leaders, strengthening the legal frameworks for participatory budgeting, and promoting gender-inclusive governance models to ensure diverse representation in decision-making processes.

Methods

This study adopts qualitative methods involving a descriptive approach. As articulated by Bogdan and Taylor and cited by Moleong (2000:3), qualitative research is geared towards generating descriptive data, presented in written or spoken words and derived from observations of people and behaviours. In parallel, descriptive research serves the purpose of portraying or delineating existing phenomena, encompassing both natural and human-engineered elements. Primary data serves as the foundation for this research, consisting of information obtained directly from the source. The collection of primary data involves methods such as observation, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGD) with pertinent sources (Busetto et al., 2020). Complementing the primary data, secondary data is also utilised to refine the research process. These secondary sources encompass a variety of records, books, and magazines, including financial statements, government reports, articles, and theoretical books. The research employs the observation method, as outlined by Sugiyono (2016: 228), which emphasises that observations allow researchers to discern details that are overlooked or deemed ordinary by others in the environment. The interview method is employed to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas through question-and-answer sessions to contribute meaning to the specific topic under investigation (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Additionally, the documentation method is utilised to capture records of past events through writings, drawings, or monumental works.

The selection of sources is critical to obtaining comprehensive information. The criteria for source selection include individuals who possess a deep understanding of the challenges and strategies in strengthening village governance for good governance at the local level (Bhangu et al., 2023). Furthermore, they should be actively involved in the activities being investigated, have adequate time for interviews, refrain from biasing information, and exhibit a level of unfamiliarity with research to add an element of novelty (Morgan, 2022). To determine

the sources, the study employs the purposive sampling technique, deliberately selecting individuals who are considered representative of the population based on specific criteria or considerations.

Table 1: Identities of Sources

No.	Sources	Total
1.	Head of Bappeda West Aceh	1 person
2.	Head of DPMG Office of West Aceh	1 person
3.	Secretary of DPMG Office of West Aceh	1 person
4.	Head of Field within the scope of DPMG West Aceh	4 persons
5.	P3MD: Village Companion Coordinator Team in West Aceh	6 persons
6.	TP2D West Aceh	1 person
	Total Sources	14 persons

Sources: Author's Fieldwork

Qualitative research employing the human instrument plays a pivotal role in delineating the research focus, selecting information sources, conducting data collection, evaluating data quality, interpreting data, and drawing conclusions based on findings (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The nature of qualitative research is characterised by ambiguity, where research objectives, data sources, and anticipated outcomes lack clear definitions. Humans are the primary research instruments due to the inherent lack of definitive forms in research problems, procedures, hypotheses, and expected results. The unpredictable and unclear nature of these elements necessitates the central role of human involvement throughout the research process (Suandi et al., 2022).

All the obtained data undergo qualitative analysis, eschewing statistical test models in favour of a descriptive presentation model. The data analysis comprises three components: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion derivation (Otani, 2017). In the data reduction process, the study focuses on specific aspects to simplify the abstraction of data from the field. This iterative process occurs throughout the study, involving the grouping of data based on the specific problem under investigation. The presentation of data encompasses the comparison and connection of primary data gathered from the field with secondary data obtained from literature sources. The subsequent interpretation of this combined data aims to extract meaningful concepts and insights. Conclusions are drawn based on the interpretation of

both primary data acquired through interviews and observations and secondary data derived from books, the internet, and journals (Mayring, 2022). An essential step in this process involves the reinterpretation of conclusions to prevent misinterpretation and ensure the maturation of the obtained results. This iterative approach plays a crucial role in refining and enhancing the robustness of the research findings.

Table 2: Map of Village Governance Elements and their Relational Issues

Governance Elements	Actor	Arena	Relational Issues
Country	The village chief and village device	Regulation, control of society, policy management, finance, services	Accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and control
Political society	Village representative body	Representation, articulation, aggregation, formulation, legislation, socialisation, control	Capacity, accountability, and responsiveness
Civil society	Institutional, social organisations, citizens	Empowerment, cooperation, mutual assistance, networking	Participation (voice, access, and control)
Economic society	Actors and economic organisations	Production and distribution	Policy access, social accountability

Source: Dwiapayana, Ari, & Sutor (2003)

Discussion

Good Governance in Village Administration

The State Administration Institute has determined that good governance entails the establishment of a robust and responsible administration within the state government, characterised by effectiveness and efficiency. This is achieved by fostering a "synergy" of constructive interactions among the state, the private sector, and society (Said, 2021). The emphasis lies on the cohesive collaboration between these entities to ensure the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the state's administrative functions. Additionally, both the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank contribute nuanced perspectives on good governance.

According to their definitions, good governance involves the implementation of social development management and responsibility aligned with democratic principles and efficient market practices. This includes strategies to avoid the misallocation of scarce investment funds, prevent political and administrative corruption, exercise budget discipline, and establish political and legal frameworks conducive to the growth of entrepreneurial activities (Pavlyshyn et al., 2021). In essence, these definitions underscore the multifaceted nature of good governance, encompassing responsible administration, democratic principles, market efficiency, anti-corruption measures, fiscal discipline, and the facilitation of a conducive environment for entrepreneurial development. The collaborative and constructive interaction between the state, private sector, and society emerges as a common thread in promoting effective and efficient governance.

Community Participation in Development Planning

Village development necessitates meticulous planning based on the current conditions, encompassing natural resources, human capital, financial resources, infrastructure, technology, and the aspirations of local communities (Margareta & Salahudin, 2022). A comprehensive approach is essential to address the unique characteristics of each village and align development initiatives with local wisdom. Crucially, community participation emerges as a cornerstone in the decision-making process, influencing policies throughout the developmental stages. This involvement spans planning, decision-making, implementation, evaluation, and the utilisation of development outcomes. The significance of community participation is paramount, as it ensures that plans and programmes are tailored to local contexts.

However, the study reveals a notable gap in community inclusion across villages in West Aceh Regency. The absence of community involvement in determining activities and programmes has resulted in a pervasive lack of trust in the programmes initiated by stakeholders. Community participation is identified as a critical factor influencing the success of development programmes and fostering village community development (Damayanti & Syarifuddin, 2020). The deficiency in community engagement extends beyond decision-making,

encompassing limited involvement in problem identification and recognition of existing community potential. Addressing these gaps becomes imperative to enhance the efficacy of development initiatives and strengthen the bond between stakeholders and the communities they serve.

Emphasising Good Governance: The Crucial Role of Transparency

In the current era of reform and technological advancement, including Industrial Revolution 4.0, the principles of good governance have become imperative at all levels of governance from national to village levels. Transparency, particularly concerning matters impacting society, is now an essential requirement (Anjinappa, 2015). Establishing trust is the primary objective of governance, and transparency plays a pivotal role in achieving this goal. Each entity involved in implementing the principles of good governance must exhibit responsiveness to the needs and concerns of various societal elements. Efforts to enhance responsiveness should be consistently applied, especially in public sectors that may tend to be closed and power oriented. Regular surveys are essential to gauge general satisfaction with public sector services and to ensure that responsiveness is continually improved.

To realise government accountability to the public, a key strategy is the consistent application of transparency, particularly in executing programmes and activities. Transparency in governance holds significant meaning, allowing the public to be informed about government policies, both proposed and implemented (Castellano, 2018). Openness in administration enables the public to provide feedback and assess the approaches taken by the government. Regarding village budget management (ADG) in West Aceh Regency, transparency is mandated by Permendagri Number 113 of 2014, requiring the display of notice boards or billboards detailing ongoing activities and budget allocations (Kadjudju et al., 2017). However, achieving easy online access to cash inflow and outflow records in every village within the region remains a considerable challenge. Furthermore, village heads (*keuchik*) are obligated by Law Number 6 of 2014 on villages to submit various reports periodically, including:

1. Submission of a report on the implementation of the Village Government at the end of the budget year to the Regent of West Aceh.

2. Submission of a report on the performance of the Village Government at the end of the term to the Regent of West Aceh.

3. Submission of a written statement of governance to Tuha Peut at the end of the fiscal year.

4. Accountability Report on the Realisation of Village APB Implementation to the Regent of West Aceh at the end of the fiscal year.

5. Realisation Report on Village Fund Use.

Despite these regulations, challenges persist in achieving comprehensive transparency in the management of village funds, emphasising the need for ongoing efforts to fulfil these requirements effectively.

Fostering Government Responsiveness for Effective Governance

In the pursuit of good governance, they are dedicated to embodying the principle of government responsiveness, ensuring a government that is not only sensitive but also swift in addressing the concerns and aspirations of the public (Abu El-Haj, 2018). The essence of good governance lies in the government's adeptness in understanding the genuine needs of its people and proactively analysing community requirements. Consequently, the government is expected to formulate inclusive policies and strategies that prioritise the overall welfare of society without any form of discrimination. Considering the limited availability of village funds for development, prudent measures must be applied. Firstly, the determination of development programme priorities should be based on measurable criteria. Secondly, a bottom-up approach is essential, obliging the active involvement of the community and stakeholders in deciding programme priorities. Thirdly, each proposed programme must demonstrate productivity. Lastly, the submission of programmes should align with the local wisdom of each village.

While the principle of responsiveness is being applied to some extent, challenges persist. The main obstacle lies in the ineffective implementation of certain programmes, hindering the realisation of village-level independence (Abrahams & Newton-Reid, 2008). Furthermore, the expression of responsiveness through a five-year strategic plan (*renstra*) encounters complications, as some villagers propose programmes that deviate from the outlined plan, creating

difficulties in accommodation due to misalignment with ratified documents. Another hurdle identified in West Aceh Regency is the prevalence of temporary acting (Pjs) village heads (*keuchik*) in 224 out of 322 villages. This situation presents various challenges, including limitations on the rights of Pjs *keuchik*, which differ from definitive *keuchik*, and the inability of Pjs *keuchik* to create programmes beyond the provisions of the ratified five-year strategic plan (*renstra*) (Maifizar, 2022). Addressing these obstacles becomes paramount for effective governance and the successful implementation of responsive strategies for community development.

Inclusive Governance through Consensus Building

In the pursuit of effective and inclusive governance, the principle of consensus orientation stands as a cornerstone. This principle advocates that decisions must undergo a meticulous process of deliberation and consensus. Such a decision-making approach, forged through agreement, binds the various stakeholders, ensuring the efficacy of decision implementation. The deeper the involvement of constituents in the decision-making process, the more faithfully the aspirations and needs of the community are represented (Annahar, Widianingsih, & Muhtar, 023). Participation fosters rigorous supervision and control over general policies, elevating the levels of prudence and accountability in their implementation. Hence, the consistent application of the consensus principle is strongly recommended across all levels of government management to facilitate the realisation of noble ideals, particularly in the context of achieving an independent village.

However, the application of the consensus principle in each village within West Aceh Regency reveals an uneven landscape. A notable challenge emerges during crucial events like *musrembang* (community development planning meeting) at the village level, where community attendance can be inconsistent (Tahulending et al., 2018). This unpredictability has a tangible impact on the types of programmes that can be implemented effectively in the future. Ensuring a consistent application of the consensus principle encounters challenges, primarily stemming from its uneven implementation. Concerns arise over the lack of uniformity in community-driven decisions across the regency. This inconsistency poses a notable obstacle to achieving cohesive and community-supported initiatives. Proactive efforts are needed to

encourage and facilitate community attendance during key events to foster a more inclusive decision-making environment. This strategic emphasis on community engagement is crucial for ensuring that the diverse voices within the community are heard and considered.

In addition, strengthening the communication channels between the government and the community is identified as a critical factor. Transparent and informative communication plays a pivotal role in keeping the community well-informed, motivated, and actively involved in the consensus-building process. Effective communication is key to building trust and ensuring that the community feels connected and engaged in decision-making processes. Moreover, investing in training and capacity-building initiatives emerges as a crucial step. Empowering community members with the necessary knowledge and skills is imperative for meaningful participation in the consensus-building process (Tambaip et al., 2023). An informed and engaged community is fundamental for the success of participatory decision-making. Despite the existing challenges to consistently apply the consensus principle, there are significant opportunities for improvement. Prioritising enhanced community engagement, communication enhancement, and capacity-building initiatives can pave the way for more effective and inclusive governance in West Aceh Regency. This, in turn, can contribute significantly to the overarching goal of building independent and prosperous villages.

Equality in West Aceh Regency

The principle of equality is foundational, emphasising the government's responsibility of ensuring the inclusive involvement of all parties in the political process without any form of exclusion. In the context of West Aceh Regency, the village governments adhere to this principle, demonstrating a commitment to non-discrimination among constituents. Across various domains, including politics, health, and other areas, the village governments have strived to apply the principle of equality in service delivery. In the political sphere, there is a concerted effort to ensure that all community members, without exception, have a voice in processes like *musrembang*. This commitment to inclusivity aligns with the broader goal of fostering a political environment in which every individual feels represented and valued.

Furthermore, the principle of equality extends to public services, with the village governments in West Aceh Regency emphasising fair treatment and equal access for all. This commitment underscores the importance of ensuring that public services are not only accessible to everyone but also administered without discrimination. The active involvement of the community in *musrembang* exemplifies the village governments' dedication to equal participation, creating opportunities for collective decision-making. This approach aligns with the broader principles of good governance, where equality plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of inclusivity and shared responsibility. The village governments in West Aceh Regency uphold the principle of equality across various domains, fostering an environment where all individuals are treated fairly and have an equal opportunity to participate in political processes and access public services (Trisna et al., 2022). This commitment to equality aligns with the overarching principles of good governance, contributing to the development of inclusive and responsive local governments.

Promoting Effective and Efficient Governance in West Aceh Regency

Effectiveness and efficiency form the backbone of governmental processes, ensuring that institutions yield results aligned with the citizens' needs. The West Aceh Regency Government is committed to maximising existing resources, striving for effectiveness and efficiency in producing regulations and policies, as well as managing the state's finances. To enhance accessibility, each village in West Aceh Regency establishes a Public Service Office, reinforcing the government's dedication to serving the community. The Department of Population and Civil Registration in West Aceh Regency, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, actively encourages village officials to optimise Service Operational Standards (SOP) for public services. This initiative aims to streamline administrative processes and enhance the overall efficiency of the services provided to the community (Samsidar et al., 2022). Moreover, public services in every village in West Aceh Regency, including processes related to vital documents on population and marriage, are administered with accessibility in mind, often at no cost to the residents. In the realm of health, the village governments of West Aceh Regency organise monthly *posyandu* (community health program with emphasis for mother and child) sessions for toddlers, underscoring their commitment to the well-being of the community.

These initiatives collectively reflect the dedication of the West Aceh Regency Government to fostering effective, efficient, and citizen-centric governance.

Fostering Accountability in Village Governance

Accountability serves as the cornerstone, compelling government officials to assume responsibility for their actions and policies. Whether in government, the private sector, or community organisations, decision-makers are accountable to the community and relevant institutions. The manifestation of accountability varies, contingent on the nature of the organisation involved. In the context of the village governments in West Aceh Regency, accountability takes tangible forms as *keuchik* (village chiefs) deliver comprehensive reports (Phurma & Najamudin, 2022). At the close of each budget year and the conclusion of their term, *keuchik* dutifully presents a detailed performance report on the village government to the Regent. Additionally, a written statement of governance is submitted to Tuha Peut at the end of every fiscal year. Furthermore, the transparency of financial matters is emphasised through the dissemination of village budget financial statements to the community during the *musrengbang* event. While the village device is entrusted with specific responsibilities aligned with their roles, there remains room for improvement. In some instances within West Aceh, certain members of the village device fall short in performing their duties and responsibilities. Addressing these gaps in accountability is pivotal to fortifying the principles of transparent and responsible governance within West Aceh Regency.

Challenges in Implementing Good Governance at the Village Level

The implementation of good governance principles at the village level faces a set of distinct challenges, each demanding thoughtful solutions to ensure effective governance. Despite the village governments' intention to encourage community involvement in governance, not all residents actively engage in the process (PAKEH, 2018). The multifaceted roles of villagers, encompassing farming, craftsmanship, and employment, often hinder their full participation in village governance activities. The educational backgrounds of village officials play a crucial role in determining their competencies. However, not all officials possess a bachelor's degree qualification or higher. The strategic placement of officials based on their expertise remains a critical consideration,

emphasising the importance of enhancing the competencies of the village apparatus. Many villages still rely on traditional manual administrative processes, neglecting the benefits of information technology.

The persistence of methods like bookkeeping and writing on boards results in inadequate documentation. The urgent need to transition to information technology is essential for more efficient and streamlined administrative processes. The allocation of substantial budgets for community empowerment programmes often leads to conflicting interests during decision-making (Ikhsan et al., 2020). This struggle may result in unaddressed community desires, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and transparent approach to decision-making processes. The scarcity of facilities and infrastructure at the village level poses a significant challenge to effective public service delivery. The absence of essential infrastructure hampers the villages' ability to meet the diverse needs of their community members adequately. Addressing these obstacles requires a multifaceted strategy that encompasses competency development, the integration of information technology, and a participatory approach to decision-making. By overcoming these hurdles, village governance can evolve towards a more inclusive, transparent, and efficient model.

Strategic Measures for Improved Village Governance

Implementing effective strategies is crucial to achieving the goal of good governance at the village level. Two key strategies are highlighted for enhancing the implementation of good governance principles (Ilhamsyah et al., 2020). Firstly, providing training and education to village officials is essential, particularly in areas related to public services and responsiveness to community concerns. Equipping village devices with the necessary knowledge and skills would give them a better understanding of the needs of the community and enable them to respond effectively to any complaints or issues raised by residents. Training programmes should focus on enhancing the capacity of village officials to deliver quality public services and constructively engage with the community.

Secondly, improving discipline and performance among village employees is integral to the successful implementation of good governance. A disciplined workforce ensures that tasks and responsibilities are carried out efficiently, contributing to the overall

effectiveness of the village government. Cultivating a culture of professionalism and commitment among village devices is key to building a governance framework that is responsive, accountable, and aligned with the principles of good governance (Sari & Maifizar, 2023). These strategies, centred around education and discipline, can play a pivotal role in fostering good governance practices at the village level. Continuous efforts to enhance the capabilities of village officials and instil a culture of discipline are essential components of a successful governance framework that benefits the community at large.

Conclusion

This study underscores the need for further improvements in applying good governance principles in village governance in West Aceh Regency. Key areas requiring attention include participation and responsiveness, which are vital components of effective governance at the local level. While the village governments demonstrate strength in certain aspects, identifying and addressing the gaps is essential for comprehensive and inclusive governance. The uneven community participation in the governance process across villages poses a challenge to the effectiveness of decision-making and programme implementation. To overcome this issue, the village governments have implemented strategies such as providing continuous education and training. By enhancing the capabilities of village officials, the government aims to create a more responsive and proactive administration that caters to the needs and aspirations of the community. Another strategy involves recruiting young individuals with specific criteria to assist the village officials with their tasks. This approach recognises the value of fresh perspectives and youthful energy in contributing to the development agenda. Additionally, the government is actively working to stimulate and encourage the active involvement of village communities. By organising activities that directly involve residents, the village governments seek to build a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for the villages' progress. The future direction for village governance in West Aceh Regency should continue along the path of strengthening participatory practices and responsiveness. Efforts to bridge the gaps in community involvement should be sustained through ongoing education, engagement activities, and targeted recruitment of individuals who can bring new ideas and energy to the governance process.

Furthermore, embracing technology and modernising administrative practices could enhance the efficiency of village governance. Adopting information technology for record-keeping, communication, and public service delivery can streamline processes and improve transparency. A forward-looking vision should also emphasise sustainability and resilience. Integrating environmental and social sustainability into governance practices will contribute to the community's long-term well-being. This includes promoting eco-friendly initiatives, disaster preparedness, and inclusive development that considers the needs of all community members. The village governance in West Aceh Regency should prioritise continuous improvement, innovation, and inclusivity. By addressing current challenges and proactively planning for the future, the village governments can better serve their respective constituents and contribute to the overall development and prosperity of the region.

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Bringing Religion Back to the Forefront: An Opinion-Oriented Study from IR Scholars in Malaysia's Research Universities

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Abstract: In the wake of major global events such as 9/11, it is becoming increasingly necessary to consider Religion as a tool to analyse these conflicts. Unfortunately, the field of International Relations (IR) has sidelined Religion in favor of other mainstream, secular theories, particularly in the West. This research aims to highlight the non-Western perspective of Religion in IR and discusses how to effectively implement it in the discipline. The study was conducted by analysing data collected during interviews with 13 IR scholars from three Malaysian research universities (RU). The findings revealed a strong consensus on the importance of integrating Religion into IR. Scholars largely dismiss the field's secular bias, and suggest a constructivist approach when analysing Religion in IR due to its emphasis on ideational factors and normative change. Lastly, the scholars recommended multidisciplinary and experiential approaches to prepare students to engage with the complexity of Religion in IR.

Keywords: Religion, International Relations (IR), Non-Western Perspectives, Constructivism, IR Pedagogy

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Abstrak: Perkembangan konflik global selepas peristiwa 11 September menunjukkan keperluan untuk meletakkan agama sebagai alat analisis dalam kajian Hubungan Antarabangsa (IR). Namun, disiplin IR arus perdana, khususnya di Barat, masih cenderung meminggirkan agama dan mengutamakan teori-teori sekular. Kajian ini bertujuan mengetengahkan perspektif bukan Barat mengenai peranan agama dalam IR serta membincangkan kaedah pengintegrasiannya secara efektif ke dalam disiplin tersebut. Penyelidikan ini dilaksanakan melalui temu bual bersama 13 sarjana IR dari tiga universiti penyelidikan (RU) di Malaysia. Hasil kajian menunjukkan kesepakatan kuat bahawa agama perlu diberikan perhatian yang lebih luas dalam IR. Para sarjana menolak bias sekular dalam disiplin ini dan mencadangkan pendekatan konstruktivis bagi analisis agama kerana penekanannya terhadap faktor idea dan perubahan norma. Tambahan itu, pendekatan multidisiplin dan pembelajaran berasaskan pengalaman turut disarankan bagi meningkatkan pemahaman pelajar terhadap kerumitan hubungan antara agama dan IR.

Kata kunci: Agama, Hubungan Antarabangsa (IR), Perspektif bukan Barat, Konstruktivisme, Pedagogi IR

Introduction

For years, the academic discipline of IR has relied on its objective mainstream paradigms, like Realism, when addressing real-world issues. Using secular means to analyse the world's events has long been regarded as the primary method for conducting academic research. However, global events since World War II (some argue even before that) have demonstrated a strong connection between Religion and a country's political, economic, and spiritual climate.

The 20th century was marked by industrialisation and materialism with capitalism serving as the driving force behind the world's economic and political systems. However, as societies reached material prosperity into the 21st century, deeper concerns emerged, such as purpose and mental health, that capitalism and endless productivity could not address. As a result, many began to turn back to Religion and spirituality to fill the void that capitalism could not.

The 20th century witnessed two world wars driven by both political and economic reasons, yet with the start of the 21st century, Religion emerged as a critical global issue. Key events such as the Iranian Revolution in the 1970s, the Mujahideen's war with the Russians in the

1980s, and the rise of Christian resistance against corrupt governments in Latin America in the 1990s paint a picture of Religion's growing role in global conflicts. This role seemed to grow in the new millennium with the September 11 attacks, the Taliban defeating the U.S. in 2022, the long-standing Israel-Palestine conflict which began in 1948 and then escalated in 2023 with Israel's genocide in Gaza (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2024), and the increase in religious extremism across regions further highlight this trend. All this goes to show that IR scholars can no longer ignore Religion as a vital factor when studying global issues, even with its subjective and immeasurable nature.

This study was carried out to investigate the necessity for Religion to be used as a tool in IR and ways in which to bring it into the discipline. This research was conducted qualitatively by interviewing 13 Political Science and International Relations scholars from different universities across Malaysia to seek their views on Religion and its role in IR.

Debating the Role of Religion in International Relations

The dynamic relationship between Religion and IR has now become a vital area of study, one that opposes secular assumptions historically rooted in the field. IR scholars such as Haynes (2021), Williams (2022), Adams (2021), Sandal and James (2010), and Fox (2018) have contributed works to the discipline on how Religion, the once neglected IR child, is finally being acknowledged as a major player in shaping international politics. Through this academic view, these scholars, among many others, believe that Constructivism is the theory that best explains the complex relationship between Religion and IR today.

The Secular Foundations and Oversight of Religion in IR

Historically, IR was set on a secular foundation. According to Haynes (2021), Religion was excluded from conventional IR until the late 20th century. This exclusion was primarily due to the field's secularist nature in which scholars worked under the assumption that modernity and progress would inevitably lead to a decline in religious influence. In 1648, the Treaty of Westphalia enacted the belief that Religion should be kept out of political governance. Along the same lines, Realism, advocated by prominent figures such as Kenneth Waltz (2010), places an unequal emphasis on material power while overlooking ideological

forces, including Religion. Even during the Cold War, which lasted from 1947 to 1991, the discourse was framed in terms of capitalism versus communism, rather than secularism versus Religion (Haynes, 2021).

May et al. (2014) bolster Haynes' view by stating that the dominance of secularism in IR prevented a deeper analysis of how Religion has always had an ongoing historical influence on the field. Even with the deep Judeo-Christian roots of many modern political institutions, Religion was still confined to the private sphere. Additionally, May et al. (2014) state that the post-secular theory provides more critique of the secularist nature of IR. According to this theory, the black and white secular-religious binary is inadequate to understand global dynamics. In contrast, Religion has reemerged as a political force that is not in contention with modernity but as an actor within it. Academics such as Casanova (1994) and Habermas (2001) emphasise that the resurgence of Religion in the public sphere challenges the presumed neutrality of secularism and underscores the need to revise IR theories.

The beginnings of interest in religious influence on IR stirred with the occurrence of two major events before 9/11. These two events were the 1979 Iranian Revolution and Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis (Haynes, 2021). With these events, scholars began to rethink the role of Religion in international politics. During the Iranian Revolution, the secular Shah was overthrown, transforming the country into a theocratic Islamic state. This situation challenged the broad assumption that modernisation leads to secularisation. Similarly, Huntington's disputed 1993 thesis labelled the post-Cold War international conflict as one between the West and Islam, thus framing Religion as the primary cause of global conflict. Although it was heavily criticised, it became more relevant after the 9/11 attacks.

Post-9/11: The Securitisation of Religion and Its Theoretical Consequences

The September 11 terrorist attacks were a crucial turning point for the study of Religion in IR. After this calamity, the goal shifted to the securitisation of Islam as the West began to view Islamic extremism as a major threat (Haynes, 2021). The subsequent "War on Terror" led to more military interventions in Muslim-majority nations and increased surveillance of Muslim populations worldwide. This incident not only

altered the perception of Religion in international security but also accentuated the drawbacks of existing IR theories (Haynes, 2021).

The real test came along when conventional IR frameworks like Realism, liberalism, and even Marxism, had trouble integrating Religion into their studies. Realism primarily focused on power and security issues, while largely ignoring the influence of religious ideologies on foreign policy. Liberalism, on the other hand, prioritised cooperation between international institutions while overlooking religious actors as secondary forces that influence diplomacy and global governance. Contrarily, scholars found Constructivism to be the most effective theoretical framework for studying Religion in IR as it highlights the importance of identity, norms, and beliefs in moulding state behaviour. Thus, Constructivism is believed to be the optimal method for understanding how Religion is actively involved in IR (Adams, 2021; Williams, 2022).

Constructivism: The Ideal Framework for Understanding Religion in IR

Many scholars defer to Constructivism when analysing Religion within the context of IR due to its capability in incorporating religious factors into global affairs. According to Haynes (2021), Sandal and James (2010), and Fox (2018), Constructivism provides a distinct explanation of how Religion shapes state behaviour, identity, and global norms. Constructivism focuses on the power of ideas and beliefs, recognising that Religion is not merely a passive cultural backdrop in international politics, but also an active force with the potential to reform diplomatic processes, global governance, and national policies.

A prominent example that demonstrates this is the impact of religious ideologies on human rights discourse. Catholicism, for instance, places high importance on human dignity and the sanctity of life. This belief played a crucial role in shaping the post-World War II human rights regime (Haynes, 2021). Moreover, Sandal and James (2010) demonstrate how religious groups such as American Evangelical Christians and Middle Eastern Islamic NGOs influence policy decisions and impact international diplomacy.

Furthermore, Constructivism offers an enlightening perspective on the role that Religion plays in soft power. Religious institutions

typically wield considerable influence through their humanitarian aid, moral authority, and diplomatic efforts. Pope Francis's backing for climate action and refugee rights is a clear example of how religious organisations can influence global norms and policies. The increasing importance of religious diplomacy, exemplified by actors such as the Vatican and Islamic organisations, demonstrates the growing role of religious organisations in global governance (Fox, 2018).

The Need for a Broader Conceptualisation of Religion in IR

Where Haynes (2021) presses on the need for moving beyond security concerns in IR, Sandal and James (2010) call for a broader definition of Religion in IR that does not follow the reductionist perspective that sees Religion as only a source of conflict. Their work showcases how, contrary to the violent image often associated with Religion, it can actually serve as a means towards peace, conflict resolution, and the forging of new international norms (Sandal & James, 2010). They share similar views with Haynes, who has previously called for further research that goes beyond studying Islamist terrorism and instead prioritises non-state religious actors who influence international affairs through diplomacy, humanitarian efforts, and soft power (Haynes, 2021).

Furthermore, other scholars also support the notion that religious influence can transcend state borders through transnational movements, diaspora communities, and religious NGOs. Juergensmeyer (1994), and Mavelli and Petito (2012) explain how globalisation allows religious actors to dispute the state-centric model of IR. Whether it is through humanitarian aid, education, or grassroots activism, these actors reinvent political engagement in such a way that traditional IR theories can only hope to emulate.

This notion of religious peacebuilding coincides with Fox's (2018) study of the role of Religion in advancing and deterring cooperation in global governance. In his research, Fox found that religious groups can impact state behaviour by advocating for moral authority and global norms. This situation was evident in the Catholic Church's support for climate change and refugee rights. On the same note, the growth of religious nationalism in countries like India, Turkey, and the United States displays how Religion can also act as a tool for populist agendas. Heads of state, such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Donald Trump, have used their religious identities as a bargaining chip to consolidate

domestic power and redefine national interests on the world stage (Fox, 2018).

These viewpoints align with the idea that Religion and politics can work together hand-in-hand. As Philpott (2002) and Berger (1999) claim, Religion remains a crucial resource for identity formation and moral legitimacy, particularly in regions where secular establishments struggle to maintain their authority.

This movement towards understanding the multidimensional role of Religion in international politics indicates an increasing awareness that religious actors, whether state or non-state, have a significant impact on world affairs in ways that secular theories can no longer overlook.

Expanding Religion's Role in IR Theory

Based on the aforementioned scholarly works, it is apparent that Religion is no longer just a background noise in the field of IR. After 9/11, the role of Religion in shaping global politics has been put in the spotlight, from its involvement in security concerns to soft power and diplomacy. IR scholars like Haynes (2021), Sandal and James (2010), Fox (2018), and Williams (2021) call for a broader and more distinct method to studying Religion in IR, one that transcends the narrow scope of terrorism and security and involves the full potential of religious actors and ideologies that impact international affairs. Additionally, other scholars also advocate for a more nuanced, multidisciplinary approach that acknowledges the co-constitutive nature of Religion in politics, especially within the post-secular context (Hurd, 2008; Wilson, 2012; May et al., 2014).

Out of all the IR theories, Constructivism offers the best theoretical framework for comprehending how Religion affects IR. By accepting the power of religious beliefs and identities, Constructivism allows academics to navigate on how Religion determines state behaviour, global norms, and the dynamic structure of IR. As we head toward the future, IR as a discipline must recognise Religion as a major factor in global politics, as it has the power to shape diplomacy, global governance, and the future of IR.

With that in mind, this literary review discusses prominent Western perspectives on Religion and IR. In order to broaden the

scope of understanding Religion and its role in the field of IR, other perspectives from outside the Western hemisphere should also be taken into account. This research is conducted with the intention of adding the voices of non-Western, specifically Malaysian, IR scholars to the discourse.

Methodology

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach in order to study the role of Religion in IR. This initiative was conducted by directly interacting with academic experts in the field. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 scholars specialising in International Relations and Political Science from the top three research universities (RUs) in Malaysia: Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and Universiti Malaya (UM). These schools were selected based upon their academic reputation and research influence in the social sciences.

The interviewees were picked based on their academic standing, IR specialisation, and hefty teaching experience in their field. 75% of the respondents have 10-15 years of teaching and research experience at their respective universities. The interviews were done on an individual basis with the following questions:

1. Do you think Religion should be included within international relations?
2. Do you think it is possible to include Religion as a variable in the mainstream IR?
3. If so, how?
4. What approaches do you use to teach your courses?

These open-ended questions opened the door to deep, scholarly discussions with academic experts, who shared their insights on the incorporation of Religion into IR theory and pedagogy.

This qualitative study provided a rich, interpretive understanding of the respondents' perspectives, highlighting their personal experiences and theoretical leanings. The data was analysed thematically to determine recurring patterns, contrasts, and unique viewpoints across all the responses.

Religion and IR: Should Religion Be Included in IR, Is it Possible, and How?

Research University I (RUI)

Scholar 1 (S1)

When asked whether Religion should be included in IR, S1 criticised how Religion is simplified and viewed in a binary manner as either good or bad for democracy and governance, particularly within the field of IR. He further contends that the concept of Religion should not be defined in strict terms; rather, Religion should be viewed as complex and multifaceted, since even within religious communities, there are different perceptions of the same Religion. Studying Religion in this way would pave the way for a deeper understanding of how Religion affects politics and governance (Scholar 1, personal communication, 7 October 2021).

Scholar 2 (S2)

S2 agrees that Religion is becoming more relevant and should be included in IR. He refers to how in the past, Religion has influenced historical conflicts (i.e., religious wars). He explains that the current IR discourse has become more secular, especially after the World Wars. However, with growing global problems like terrorism and climate change (which are already viewed within religious contexts), Religion is starting to be pulled back into the limelight in international politics. With these increasing issues, S2 argues that Religion can no longer be ignored in IR, especially when discussing non-state actors like terrorist groups who have the potential to destabilise nations, as occurred during the events of 9/11 (Scholar 2, personal communication, 12 October 2021).

S2 suggests that one way Religion can be included in mainstream IR is to analyse it on two different levels. The first would be the individual, such as how the religious beliefs of a single leader could influence foreign policy. The second level would be domestic, such as how Religion influences domestic conflicts or state behaviour. He further calls for the need to study conflicts through a religious lens, like those involving fundamentalism or separatism. He predicts that the role of Religion in IR will increase because of international events, with countries like Afghanistan being used as prime examples.

Scholar 3 (S3)

S3 supports the inclusion of Religion in IR. He considers Islamic organisations, such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as crucial global actors. Before events like 9/11, Religion was mostly sidelined in the field of IR, and the secular views of Western academics failed to consider Religion's political role in non-Western societies. For instance, Islam has often been perceived in contention with Western civilisation, especially in discussions about political Islam and fundamentalism.

S3 also points out how Religion is already sometimes used in IR teachings when studying topics such as transnational terrorism and Islamism. However, he reflects that IR currently lacks a comprehensive framework to analyse the role of Religion in international conflicts (Scholar 3, personal communication, 4 April 2023).

Scholar 4 (S4)

When discussing Religion in Social Sciences and IR, S4 maintains that the entire discipline of social sciences, with IR in particular, is heavily secularised, especially in the West. Historically, after the Renaissance and the French Revolution, Religion and governance have been separated. Even so, he argues that after the 1990s, the resurgence of religious movements displays the considerable role of Religion in reacting to global issues like capitalism, marginalisation, and poverty (Scholar 4, personal communication, 11 October 2021).

S4 proposes that Religion in and of itself is too large a concept to be used as a primary variable in IR. However, religious movements, on the other hand, specifically those that respond to globalisation, may serve as a more effective variable in understanding global dynamics. He uses the Pentecostal movement in the Philippines as an example, as it emerged as an alternative to Catholicism in response to political instability and poverty. The Tzu Chi Buddhist movement also occurred in response to neoliberal challenges. Although S4 believes that Religion itself might not be a useful main variable in IR, he thinks that it can be a handy tool for understanding global events, particularly when referring to crisis response and social systems.

S4 attributes the challenges of studying Religion in the social sciences, IR specifically, largely to the Western secularisation of

academic discourse. He states that when studying Religion, difficulties arise when scholars delve into the theological aspects, notably when analysing political and social responses within religious belief systems. The stigma surrounding Islam and its connection to terrorism, especially after 9/11, convolutes the study of Religion in IR. S4 emphasises the importance of historicising these concepts to help understand their social and political dimensions.

Scholar 5 (S5)

In his interview, S5 explains how secularism shaped the IR discipline as it rose alongside Western hegemony. After World War II, secularism set aside faith in what it viewed as the success of modern civilisation. This change impacted all academic disciplines, especially IR and Political Science, as Western universities began adapting a secular approach (Scholar 5, personal communication, 4 December 2021).

Historically, many early Judeo-Christian scholars were religious authorities who wrote largely about Christianity, with their ideas still being referenced in modern times. Nevertheless, since IR developed during a secular era, it naturally adopted its *zeitgeist*. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s–specifically after the Iranian Revolution–that Religion made a comeback in IR, which shocked the West, especially the United States and the United Kingdom. S5 recommends reading Jonathan Fox's works on Religion and IR for further study.

Research University 2 (RU2)

Scholar 6 (S6)

S6's interview delves into Religion and IR through an Islamic lens and Middle Eastern politics. S6 explains that in certain regions, such as in the Middle East, Religion cannot be easily left out of political systems. In other regions, Religion may not be as relevant to politics as it is in the U.S. or Europe, where secularism is more prevalent. Hence, in regions like the Middle East, using Religion as a tool when analysing IR would be more suitable. He uses the 1979 Iranian Revolution and Iranian foreign policy as examples of how Religion can determine political decisions and IR (Scholar 6, personal communication, 29 March 2021).

When addressing the challenges in using Religion in IR, S6 proposes that while mainstream IR theories like Realism or Liberalism are not

very suitable to describe Religion, Constructivism may be a better alternative. The absence of specific academic methods for incorporating Religion into IR theories still proves to be a challenge for the discipline as a whole.

S6 also touches on the issue of Religion in the Arab Spring, stating that it was not the main cause, but rather provoked by socio-political problems such as economic hardship and political repression. On the other hand, Religion seemed to be a consequence of the Arab Spring, as religious groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt gained political traction and formed new governments afterwards.

Scholar 7 (S7)

S7 asserts that Religion has a large hand in IR, especially in conflicts and understanding international law. She explains that in conflicts like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, Religion acted as both a cultural element and the driving force in the conflict, with religious superiors fueling the fire for hatred and persecution. These two issues display the deep interactions between Religion, ethnicity, and war conduct, particularly when religious figures are complicit in igniting violence or dividing communities (Scholar 7, personal communication, 2 July 2021).

S7 also points out how Western IR theory neglects Religion due to its secular and materialist paradigms, like Realism and liberalism. This forms a void in the IR discipline, especially when studying non-Western conflicts like in Asia or in the Middle East, where cultural and religious determinants cannot be ignored. She proposes that Religion may be an effective variable in IR, but there are still obstacles in actually integrating it into mainstream theory, given the complexity and variety of religious beliefs around the world.

Moreover, S7 explains how religious and cultural factors can be studied in IR from an Asian standpoint but this is still underdeveloped. She suggests that non-Western historical records, such as the Malaccan Maritime Laws, could help provide previously untapped resources for studying IR outside of the prominent Western discourse. All in all, S7's interview highlights the importance of Religion in shaping IR and proposes that more inclusive perspectives could improve the study of global politics.

Scholar 8 (S8)

S8 strongly supports including Religion in IR and explains that Western academics tend to minimise the importance of Religion. He believes that not only do religious teachings affect personal behaviour, but they also impact state behaviour and international relations. Religious teachings consist of concepts like diplomacy, tolerance, and compromise, which can all be implemented in IR regardless of religious background (Scholar 8, personal communication, 17 April 2021).

He explains in depth an Islamic concept called *shura* which means consultation and acts as a useful tool in international diplomacy. Using this model, countries are inspired to participate in discussions, focusing on shared values and compromise. He compares this to the Western concept of democracy. However, he highlights the main difference: where democracy allows the majority to make decisions, Islam places limits, particularly when those decisions go against Islamic principles.

Scholar 9 (S9)

In her interview, S9 discusses how both Religion and culture have important roles in IR, especially when analysing conflicts in the Middle East. She describes how, after the Cold War and the onset of globalisation, the concept of a "world without borders" emerged, making it more challenging to exclude Religion from international politics. For instance, religious factors are part of the reason why Turkey struggles to join the EU. S9 claims that, especially after crises like 9/11, Religion must be reincorporated into IR because modern conflicts not only involve political and economic factors, but religious ones as well (Scholar 9, personal communication, 28 March 2021).

In spite of this, mainstream IR scholars oppose the inclusion of Religion as they see it as a postmodern approach. S9 criticises this mindset as certain Religions like Islam offer an extensive foundation for understanding life as a whole. She says that Islam is usually misunderstood and should not be grouped with other Religions, especially in the Middle East, where Religion and culture are deeply interconnected.

In order to incorporate Religion into IR, S9 proposes the usage of empirical studies, case studies, and comparative research. For example, studying the levels of democracy in both Islamic and non-Islamic

countries could help discern between religious and cultural determinants. She suggests studying countries like Israel, Turkey, and Iran to assess whether their political systems are influenced more by Religion or culture. Furthermore, she claims that Islam should be studied first as the starting point for incorporating Religion into IR. Then other Religions should be studied subsequently within the same time period to ensure that comparisons are done objectively.

Scholar 10 (S10)

When studying social phenomena, S10 uses multiple theories from IR and political anthropology, like Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, Marxism, and Feminism. He recognises that Religion can be a useful tool in research, but only when it is relevant to the case study. For instance, when studying Chinese converts in Indonesia, Islam should not be used as a starting assumption, but rather it should be incorporated as a natural part of the analysis and studied in context (Scholar 10, personal communication, 26 March 2021).

Research University III (RU III)

Scholar 11 (S11)

S11 takes a deep dive into the precarious position that Religion holds in IR. He describes the historical conflict between Religion and IR ever since the Treaty of Westphalia, which established secularism in Europe. This treaty marked the beginning of the modern state system, which emerged as a result of the Reformation and the Catholic-Protestant wars in Europe. These historical events put a negative light on the inclusion of Religion in IR and instead shone a more positive light on secularism (Scholar 11, personal communication, 17 March 2022).

Although Religion had a rather infamous history in the field of IR, S11 presses that its political impact can no longer be ignored. After events like the Iranian Revolution and 9/11, the role of Religion in modern geopolitics is now more crucial than ever. Thus, a paradox is established: although Religion is deeply involved in influencing global events, it has historically been ignored within mainstream IR.

S11 introduces the concept of transcendentalism, which describes how Religion transcends physical limits and extends into the supernatural. These kinds of subjective concepts are challenging to

understand using Western secular knowledge. IR generally employs empirical data and rational thinking, which makes it challenging for Religion to be incorporated into conventional IR frameworks. However, political campaigns like Political Islam, fundamentalism, and events like the clash of civilisations object to this.

S11 also highlights the reemergence of religious movements in global politics, like the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and Hinduism in India, which shows that Religion can no longer be excluded from politics. He notes that there are already existing IR frameworks that help to understand Religion, but they are often neglected in favor of issues like terrorism or soft power. This digs a large gap in the pathway to incorporating Religion into mainstream IR.

Scholar 12 (S12)

S12 supports the inclusion of Religion into IR, but when it comes to countries like Malaysia, the matter becomes more complicated. Analysing Religion through an IR lens in Malaysia would be challenging, considering the country's vibrant religious diversity and the many interpretations of its major Religion, Islam. S12 states the need to acknowledge universal perspectives while simultaneously considering local practices (Scholar 12, personal communication, 26 April 2021).

Another challenge S12 introduces when discussing Religion and IR is the obstacles in defining the concept of Religion itself. S12 claims that having a solid definition for Religion is imperative before using it in research. However, its personal and abstract nature complicates its usage as an applicable variable in IR.

S12 also notes how religious views can be influenced by human rights issues, such as discrimination. When discussing contentious issues like LGBT rights, she says it is important to try to find an equilibrium between religious values and human rights principles.

Scholar 13 (S13)

S13 believes that even though it is not always recognised, Religion does have a heavy role in IR. He notes that, before the Enlightenment period, Religion was often incorporated into political theory and international studies, but was later replaced by more secular and objective study methods. He claims that even during the separation of Religion from

academic disciplines, it still has a firm hold in IR theories like classical Realism. Religious ideas like "original sin" and "just war" are still deeply rooted in such theories, often without acknowledgment (Scholar 13, personal communication, 22 April 2021).

S13 mentions other IR theories, such as social Constructivism and neoclassical Realism, which acknowledge the significant hefty impact of Religion in shaping political behaviour. This suggests that religious teachings should be considered when examining foreign policy. For example, when analysing how Islam influences Malaysia's stance on Israel or how Protestant values are incorporated in U.S. political decisions.

Table 1 displays a summary of the scholars' input during the interviews regarding the inclusion of Religion in IR.

Table 1: Summary of Scholars' Views on Religion In International Relations

University	Support for Religion in IR	Key Points	Challenges	Suggested Approaches
RU1	Generally supportive	Religion has been oversimplified; should be treated as complex and multifaceted. Historically sidelined but resurfacing after 9/11 and the Iranian Revolution. Religious movements (e.g. , Pentecostalism, Tzu Chi) reveal its political role.	Heavy secular bias in IR; Religion too broad a variable; lack of a clear framework for studying it.	Study Religion at multiple levels (individual leaders, domestic politics); focus on movements rather than Religion as a whole; historicise its role; integrate works of scholars like Jonathan Fox.
RU2	Strongly supportive	Religion central in Middle East politics; crucial in conflicts (Bosnia, Rwanda); influences state and personal behaviour. Islamic principles (e.g., syura) provide alternative models for diplomacy. Culture and Religion are intertwined in regions like the Middle East.	Western IR theories neglect Religion; difficulty generalising due to diversity; risk of over-assuming Religion's role in some contexts.	Use Constructivism; apply Asian/ non-Western perspectives; employ empirical/ comparative studies; contextualise Religion in case studies; integrate cultural-historical records.

University	Support for Religion in IR	Key Points	Challenges	Suggested Approaches
RU3	Supportive but cautious	Religion historically embedded in IR (e.g., "just war," "original sin") but sidelined since Westphalia. Still highly influential in modern geopolitics (Islamic fundamentalism, Hindu nationalism). Local diversity (e.g., Malaysia) complicates analysis.	Secular dominance in IR; transcendental aspects of Religion resist empirical study; challenges in defining Religion; tensions with human rights values.	Recognise Religion's historical roots in IR theories; adopt Constructivist/ neoclassical approaches; balance universal norms with local practices; study Religion alongside human rights discourse.

Teaching Approaches

Research University I (RU I)

Scholar 1 (S1)

When discussing teaching approaches, S1 says he likes using critical discussions in his classes. Living in Malaysia, where many have Religion as a focus in their day-to-day lives, having these kinds of conversations helps to challenge students' worldviews on Religion. This method encourages students to study Religion with a critical lens, enabling them to understand its intricacies and various interpretations rather than simply accepting certain views without question (Scholar 1, personal communication, 7 October 2021).

Scholar 2 (S2)

S2 does not view Religion as a proper "tool". However, he does acknowledge its relevance to many important concepts in IR, such as political Islam, religious ideologies in foreign policy, and the conflict between universal human rights and religious rights (Scholar 2, personal communication, 12 October 2021).

Scholar 3 (S3)

S3 believes that when teaching IR, Religion can be a helpful tool, especially when studying regions like Southeast Asia, where Religion

is a strong determinant of political affairs. He says that secular theories tend to flounder in capturing how Religion shapes power dynamics. For example, he mentions the potential application of Confucianism in understanding China's global expansion (Scholar 3, personal communication, 4 April 2023).

S3 also mentions that IR does not have a distinct framework to study the role of Religion, Islam in particular, in transnational terrorism. Although some IR courses hint at religious aspects when teaching terrorism, there is still not a committed theoretical method that can be used to teach the phenomenon. Hence, S3 suggests that IR needs to glean from other fields like political science and cultural studies in order to better comprehend Islamism as an ideology.

He points out that in the past, there were no prominent resources that connected Religion and IR in depth, but nowadays there are academics like Jeff Haines who have studied the topic thoroughly albeit from a Western perspective. He says that the problem with the Western viewpoint is that scholars hail from societies where Religion is not deeply rooted in everyday life. He proposes that academics from religious societies should be at the forefront in studying the role of Religion in IR instead of only depending Western scholar perspectives.

Scholar 4 (S4)

S4 supports the inclusion of religious movements as a variable in IR studies but admits that the topic is complicated to study. He suggests that a multidisciplinary approach, combining social sciences and historical context, would be helpful in understanding the role of Religion in international affairs and teaching it to students (Scholar 4, personal communication, 11 October 2021).

Scholar 5 (S5)

Based on S5's interview, his teaching methods involve discussing the historical context into how the IR field developed. He also encourages his students to critically engage with the influence of secularism on the field of IR and whether alternative mentalities would be more suitable to the field. He suggests reading works by Jonathan Fox who has written broadly about Religion and IR. Lastly, he uses using past events like the Iranian Revolution and its effect on IR to show how Religion affects

IR in modern times (Scholar 5, personal communication, 4 December 2021).

Research University II (RU II)

Scholar 6 (S6)

When teaching his classes, S6 mainly uses Realism because he says it is easier for his students to understand as a foundation for studying global events, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict (Scholar 6, personal communication, 29 March 2021).

Scholar 7 (S7)

S7 jokes that her coworkers found her course to be boring, so she took it upon herself to make it a little more interesting by incorporating her IR background and religious views on genocide. She used cases like Bosnia and the Hutu conflict, and noticed that her students were more engaged with the material compared to those of previous lecturers who had not taught in this manner. Although she specialises in biosecurity, she surprised her students by talking about eugenics, using Hitler's genocide of Jews and the current persecution of Uighurs in China as examples. She notes that eugenics is determined by both ethnicity and Religion, as was seen in armed conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda. She claims that using these sorts of examples helps make her course more exciting for students to attend (Scholar 7, personal communication, 2 July 2021).

Scholar 8 (S8)

S8 says he discusses Religion in his classes only when relevant to the lesson at hand. He teaches courses on Islam and Western thought, as well as Islamic Government and Administration, which centred on elements such as *shura* (consultation), justice, and equality. He admits that although his teaching method is not strictly limited to Religion and IR, he does refer to religious views when they match the course content. He believes it is essential for all students, regardless of their religious backgrounds, to understand how Islam and other Religions perceive different concepts. His goal is to guide his students to an understanding of life itself, which he views as the primary takeaway from his classes (Scholar 8, personal communication, 17 April 2021).

Scholar 9 (S9)

S9 prefers hands-on, real-world lessons over conventional classroom learning. She often takes her students on field trips to various countries, allowing them to interact with local students and conduct their own research on real-world international problems (Scholar 9, personal communication, 28 March 2021).

Scholar 10 (S10)

S10 favors empirical research and using an open-minded, interdisciplinary approach when teaching. He emphasises the importance of avoiding bias and not letting personal or predetermined values influence research, instead encouraging critical thinking and objective analysis. He enjoys using various theoretical frameworks, such as Liberalism, Constructivism, Marxism, and Feminism, so that his students can study religious and social issues from different viewpoints rather than relying on a single framework (Scholar 10, personal communication, 26 March 2021).

Research University III (RU III)

Scholar 11 (S11)

S11 calls for IR scholars to adopt a new approach to Religion within the discipline. Instead of depending on Western frameworks, he believes that scholars must establish dialogue starting at the local level when studying the role of Religion in daily politics and IR. The goal should be to understand the influence of religious actors such as the Taliban and to stray away from seeing Religion solely as a background topic. S11 advocates for IR scholars to move past theoretical debates and participate in practical discussions that incorporate Religion into the ever-changing dynamics of global politics (Scholar 11, personal communication, 17 March 2022).

Scholar 12 (S12)

S12 shares that in her IR courses, students often raise the topic of Religion especially when discussing human rights and social movements. Although she believes that incorporating religious perspectives into IR is helpful for critical thinking, she is wary about students pushing their religious views on others in order to respect diversity (Scholar 12, personal communication, 26 April 2021).

S12 admits that while including Religion in IR classes might challenge the mainstream approach, it can still improve students' comprehension. She proposes that it could be an interesting activity, albeit with some difficulties, especially when considering whether Religion can be studied objectively in the field.

Scholar 13 (S13)

S13 employs caution when discussing Religion in his classes due to the diverse and multi-religious environment in Malaysia. He worries about accidentally misrepresenting religious teachings and making students uncomfortable with his own personal views. Nevertheless, he intends to organise discussions about the importance of Religion in political research. He believes it could be a useful way to inspire students to think more critically about the role of Religion in international affairs (Scholar 13, personal communication, 22 April 2021).

Table 2 presents a summary of the various teaching approaches used by the scholars from the three RUs.

Table 2: Summary of Teaching Approaches

University	Teaching Approaches
RU1	Emphasises discussions to challenge students' worldviews; uses historical and contemporary cases (e.g., Iranian Revolution, political Islam, Confucianism) to show Religion's impact; incorporates scholarship (e.g., Jonathan Fox); encourages interdisciplinary study of Religion and IR.
RU2	Takes diverse and applied approaches: Realism as a foundation, interdisciplinary use of multiple IR theories, and inclusion of Religion in topics like genocide, biosecurity, and Islamic governance; methods include case studies, empirical research, and even field trips to connect theory with practice.
RU3	Promotes cautious, dialogue-based engagement with Religion in IR; highlights local actors (e.g., Taliban) and student-led discussions on Religion, human rights, and social movements; stresses sensitivity in a multi-religious environment while encouraging critical reflection and respectful debate.

Findings

These interviews with the 13 scholars divulged a rich and nuanced interpretation of the role of Religion in IR. The data collected produced several key themes:

Strong Support for Including Religion in IR

Almost all the scholars interviewed approved of the inclusion of Religion in the IR discipline. Experts like S2 and S3 pointed out that both historical and contemporary world events, like religious wars and the upsurge of transnational terrorism, prove that Religion still holds political relevance. They claimed that Religion is no longer a peripheral factor but a central element in understanding both state and non-state actions in contemporary geopolitics. Similarly, S7 referred to Religion's part in past conflicts like Bosnia and Rwanda, highlighting its effect on identity and violence.

Challenges of Integrating Religion into Western IR Theories

Most of the interviewees criticised the secular tendencies of mainstream IR theories. S5 and S11 both mentioned that IR grew within a secular Western environment and therefore neglected any mentions of Religion. S12 brought up the point that Religion, in itself, is challenging to define, let alone apply regularly across different geopolitical contexts. The interviewees' concerns echoed those raised by Sandal and James (2010) and Williams (2022), who disputed that mainstream liberal and realist frameworks often refer to Religion as a reactionary or subordinate force, thereby ignoring its deeper philosophical and political roles.

Constructivism as the Preferred Framework

Most of the interviewees, like S6 and S13, claimed that Constructivism is the ideal theory for understanding Religion in IR. Their views mirrored those championed by Haynes (2021), who praised constructivist thinking for its malleability in discussing identity, belief, and normative change. Constructivism places significance on ideational power, which aligns with the real-world phenomenon that Religion determines global narratives, behaviours, and alliances beyond material interests.

Regional Relevance and the Importance of Non-Western Perspectives

Numerous scholars pressed the need for a regionalised lens when studying Religion in IR. S6 highlighted how Religion is much more politically rooted in regions like the Middle East than in the secular West. S9 and S7 called for incorporating local religious histories, such as Islamic and Asian traditions, into the IR discourse to balance out the Western dominance of the discipline. This mirrors Fox's (2018) and Mavelli and Petito's (2012) arguments that religious policy and influence are practiced globally and not only within authoritarian or theocratic states.

Diverse Teaching Approaches to Religion in IR

Lastly, the respondents disclosed a wide range of teaching methods that they employed in their classrooms, which could also be utilised for incorporating Religion into IR education. Some of the scholars like S1 and S4, often resort to critical discussion and multidisciplinary methods to challenge their students' assumptions and get them thinking outside the box. Others, like S7 and S9, prefer to use real-world case studies, historical conflict analysis, and experiential learning methods, such as fieldwork. All of these teaching approaches demonstrate that Religion can be incorporated into IR discourse, not just theoretically, but also practically. Sandal and James' (2010) research similarly called for a more distinct incorporation of Religion into IR and political science education.

Conclusion

This research was conducted to explore the viability of Religion as a variable in IR, and ways in which to incorporate it into the field. The findings show that Religion is not a side note in global affairs, rather, it acts as a driving force that can no longer be ignored in mainstream IR discourse. Prominent IR scholars, such as Haynes, Sandal and James, Fox, Adams, Williams, among others, have already laid the academic foundation by introducing the idea that secular IR theories, like Realism and Liberalism, are antiquated in their disdain for Religion. They concluded that Constructivism is the ideal theory best suited to studying how religious beliefs, identities, and norms influence international behaviour and institutions.

Through subjective interviews with 13 scholars from three of Malaysia's top research universities, the findings from this project reported hefty approval for the incorporation of Religion into IR theory and pedagogy. Although the scholars recognised the historical and cultural reasons behind the exclusion of Religion in IR, they still affirmed that global events, especially after 9/11, have made it relevant once again. Their discussions confirmed that religious ideologies determine everything from conflict and diplomacy to policy-making and transnational governance.

This research also highlighted that the secular Western model of IR is not universally viable. As discussed by the scholars in their interviews, in many non-Western societies, Religion is deeply embedded in political and everyday life. This study hopes to amplify more non-Western voices, like those from Malaysia, to help diversify the IR discourse and represent more people from outside the Western lens in order to challenge the prominence of traditional Western-centric narratives. By focusing on regional experiences, alternative worldviews, and religious pluralism, this study offers an invaluable corrective to help balance out the field.

All in all, this paper aims to contribute to the growing call for a more inclusive and representative IR discipline. This view regards Religion not as an aberration or problem, but as a powerful tool that can be used to understand international relations better. Future studies and IR pedagogy must adopt interdisciplinary methods, regional perspectives, and theoretical innovation in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic and vital role of Religion in global politics.

Acknowledgement

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Coalition Rule by Pakatan Harapan, 2018-2020: Key Consociational Lessons

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Abstract: This article reassesses Pakatan Harapan's (PH) 2018–2020 experience through Lijphart's consociational framework. A qualitative approach is applied, triangulating semi-structured elite interviews with documentary sources and news reports. Findings show that PH built a broad grand coalition across ethnic and regional lines, applied corrective proportionality by granting Malay-based parties disproportionate cabinet weight to secure ethnic legitimacy, relied on improvised rather than institutionalised segmental autonomy and treated mutual veto as informal bargaining rather than a binding safeguard. These design choices produced short-term legitimacy but weak internal cohesion, leaving the coalition vulnerable to defections, culminating in the 'Sheraton Move.' The study provides an empirically grounded account of Malaysia's post-BN hegemonic coalition governance and demonstrates how inclusion without enforceable rules limits the durability of consociational arrangements.

Keywords: Coalition politics, consociational democracy, Pakatan Harapan (PH), Malaysia, power-sharing

Abstrak: Artikel ini menilai semula pengalaman Pakatan Harapan (PH) pada tahun 2018–2020 melalui kerangka konsosiasional Lijphart. Pendekatan

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kualitatif digunakan dengan menggabungkan data temu bual separa berstruktur bersama elit politik dengan pelbagai sumber dokumen dan laporan berita. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa PH membentuk satu gabungan besar merentasi garis etnik dan wilayah, melaksanakan pembetulan perkadaran dengan memberi parti berasaskan Melayu perwakilan kabinet yang lebih besar bagi menjamin keabsahan etnik, bergantung pada autonomi segmen yang bersifat sementara dan tidak diinstitusikan serta menjadikan kuasa veto bersama sebagai rundingan tidak formal dan bukannya perlindungan yang mengikat. Keadaan-keadaan ini bukan sahaja menghasilkan keabsahan jangka pendek tetapi kesepaduan dalaman yang lemah lalu menjadikan gabungan tersebut terdedah kepada peralihan sokongan dan akhirnya membawa kepada 'Langkah Sheraton.' Kajian ini memberikan penjelasan empirikal terhadap tadbir urus gabungan pasca hegemoni BN di Malaysia dan hasilnya menunjukkan bahawa keterlibatan tanpa peraturan yang boleh dikuatkuasakan menyebabkan ketahanan susunan konsosiasional itu terhad.

Kata kunci: Politik gabungan, demokrasi konsosiasional, Pakatan Harapan (PH), Malaysia, perkongsian kuasa.

Introduction

Coalition politics in divided societies depends not only on the calculation of votes but also on credible power-sharing among significant social groups. Consociational theory identifies four stabilising pillars; grand coalition, proportionality, segmental autonomy, and mutual veto (Lijphart, 1969; 1977). Malaysia provides a useful case. For decades, Barisan Nasional (BN) combined formal inclusion with UMNO dominance, which scholars describe as hegemonic consociationalism (Case, 2013). The 2018 general election disrupted that pattern when Pakatan Harapan (PH) defeated BN and promised a more balanced model of coalition governance. Yet within 22 months, the PH government collapsed in the 'Sheraton Move,' raising questions about the limits of coalition stability in a fragmented and polarised system.

This study evaluates PH's governing design and performance through the lens of Lijphart's four pillars. The central argument is that PH achieved inclusion through a broad grand coalition and an ethnic-balancing version of proportionality, but failed to institutionalise segmental autonomy and mutual veto. This imbalance created a gap between inclusion and institutionalisation. While PH's coalition appeared inclusive across ethnic and regional lines, the absence of

binding rules and guarantees meant that elites relied on personal trust and symbolic gestures. This weakness helps to explain both the democratic breakthrough of 2018 and the fragility that led to PH's early collapse.

The analysis uses a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with PH's elite politicians. These accounts were cross-checked against coalition agreements, seats distribution, cabinet lists, and online news articles. The study contributes empirically by documenting how PH assembled and sustained an elite pact across communities, analytically by refining the idea of corrective proportionality as a survival strategy, and theoretically by distinguishing between disagreement and mutual veto. Together, the findings show how PH reproduced some elements of consociationalism but lacked the institutional safeguards required for durable coalition governance.

Coalition Politics and Consociationalism

Coalition politics refers to arrangements where several political parties cooperate to form a government, usually in parliamentary systems where no single party can win a majority (Lijphart, 1969). Such cooperation is often driven by electoral realities, shared ideology, or the need for political survival. For societies divided along ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines, Lijphart (1969, 1977) proposed consociational democracy as a more suitable model. This framework rests on four key principles; grand coalition, proportionality, segmental autonomy, and mutual veto. These mechanisms are designed to ensure broad representation and protect minority interests. Evidence from countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, and Lebanon shows that consociationalism can reduce conflict in divided societies (McGarry & O'Leary, 1993). Norris (2008) further argues that coalition-building in plural societies is not only strategic, but also necessary for stability. However, consociationalism has its critics. Horowitz (1985) notes that it can entrench ethnic divisions. Roeder and Rothchild (2005) suggest that power-sharing may worsen grievances by creating zero-sum politics. Mair (1997) adds that coalitions in fragmented systems often lead to instability, as seen in Italy and Israel.

Malaysia has long attracted interest in debates on consociationalism. For decades, the BN, a coalition dominated by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) with its multi-ethnic partners, was viewed as a consociational arrangement that preserved ethnic balance

while ensuring stability (Case, 1996). Yet many scholars describe it as a hybrid system, combining ethnic bargaining with authoritarian control (Case, 2013). UMNO's dominance meant that power-sharing favoured the Malay majority. Policies such as the New Economic Policy entrenched Malay privilege, limiting genuine pluralism and promoting patronage (Weiss, 2006).

The GE14 marked a turning point. PH, an opposition coalition of PKR, DAP, AMANAH, and PPBM defeated BN for the first time since independence. This was addressed as a democratic breakthrough and a chance to move beyond dominant-party rule (Weiss & Suffian, 2023). Mahathir Mohamad's return as prime minister symbolised reformist hopes but also showed the persistence of personalised leadership (Abaidah & Yusoff, 2021). Scholars note that PH's victory came through unprecedented opposition coordination under restrictive conditions (Ong, 2021). Yet the coalition was fragile. Leadership rivalries, ideological divisions, and unresolved succession plans between Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim weakened its foundations. Within 22 months, the government collapsed in the 'Sheraton Move' of February 2020, which many describe as a democratic reversal and proof of fragile coalition politics (Nadzri, 2022; Ufen, 2021; Tayeb, 2021).

The collapse reflected unresolved leadership conflicts and the inability to reconcile ideological and ethnic cleavages within the coalition (Tayeb, 2021). Weiss and Suffian (2023) note that PH's short rule demonstrated both the promise of ending UMNO's dominance and the limits of sustaining multi-ethnic cooperation in Malaysia's fragmented system. The aftermath saw the rise of Perikatan Nasional (PN), led by Bersatu, UMNO and PAS, which consolidated Malay-Muslim identity politics and deepened polarisation (Weiss & Tayeb, 2024). These developments highlight how PH's experience exposed the structural weakness of consociational practices in Malaysia, where fragile alliances struggle to balance ethnic representation, party competition, and leadership ambitions.

Malaysia's experience since 2018 shows both continuity and change in coalition politics. On the one hand, party competition still follows ethnic and religious lines, confirming long-standing features of Malaysian politics. On the other hand, fragmentation has created uncertainty, with regional actors now shaping national outcomes. The fall

of PH and later developments show how difficult it is to institutionalise stable power-sharing in a society marked by deep cleavages and shifting alliances.

While recent scholarship has examined PH's collapse, PN's rise, and GE15's consequences (Nadzri, 2022; Tayeb & Weiss, 2024), less attention has been given to PH's time in power through the framework of consociational democracy. This study addresses that gap. It evaluates PH's performance between 2018 and 2020 against Lijphart's four pillars: grand coalition, proportionality, segmental autonomy, and mutual veto. The aim is to understand whether PH reproduced, reformed, or rejected consociational practices, and what lessons its fall holds for coalition governance in Malaysia. In doing so, this study contributes empirically by analysing Malaysia's fragile transition from dominant-party rule, and theoretically by testing the relevance of consociationalism in a plural, polarised, and fragmented political setting.

Grand Coalition of PH, 2018-2020

When Arend Lijphart first introduced the concept of consociational democracy in the late 1960s and 1970s, he placed the idea of the grand coalition at its core (Lijphart, 1969; 1977). In societies marked by deep ethnic, religious, or linguistic divisions, the stability of democracy cannot be secured by the rule of the majority alone. Instead, all major groups must be represented in the governing coalition so that none feel excluded or dominated. A grand coalition is therefore more than just a collection of political parties coming together for electoral convenience. It is a conscious effort to bring into the same government elites who represent competing communities, ensuring that decisions reflect a broad consensus rather than the will of one segment. In this sense, the grand coalition is not about numbers alone; it is about legitimacy. Only when all the key groups are at the table can stability be maintained.

GE14 provides a fascinating case study to explore this principle. The victory of Pakatan Harapan (PH), a coalition made up of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), the Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Amanah Negara (AMANAH), and Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), was historic. For the first time since independence, BN was defeated. This moment of political change was hailed by many observers as a democratic breakthrough, yet it also raised questions about whether

PH could sustain a governing arrangement that truly lived up to the demands of a grand coalition in such a divided society.

The road to PH's victory was not straightforward. Only three years earlier, the opposition had suffered a major crisis when Pakatan Rakyat (PR), the coalition formed in 2008, collapsed. The fallout between the Islamist PAS and the secular DAP in 2015 fractured the opposition's unity and left many wondering if a viable alternative to BN could ever emerge. The collapse was particularly damaging because it reinforced the impression that deep ideological and ethnic differences made lasting opposition cooperation impossible.

Out of this crisis, however, a new actor emerged. On 16 September 2015, a group of progressive leaders expelled from PAS formed Parti AMANAH Negara (AMANAH). AMANAH kept an Islamic voice alive within the opposition bloc, filling the void left by PAS. Without AMANAH, the opposition would have appeared lopsided, lacking credible Malay-Muslim representation. The presence of AMANAH, even if numerically small, was symbolically important. It allowed PH to claim that it was still a coalition that reflected the country's pluralism; PKR with its multi-ethnic base, DAP with its strong Chinese-majority support, and AMANAH providing an Islamic anchor. This was the first step towards re-creating a consociational balance after the collapse of PR.

The second major development was the entry of PPBM in 2016. Founded by Mahathir Mohamad and Muhyiddin Yassin, both formerly from UMNO, PPBM was designed to capture support in the Malay heartland. Its inclusion was a turning point. Earlier opposition efforts in 2008 and 2013 had come close to victory, but they failed primarily because of insufficient Malay support. Respondent B, reflecting on this, said: "We (PH) had already attained a peak level of support prior to the GE14, yet we still failed to secure a significant number of Malay votes. Therefore, the involvement of Mahathir and Muhyiddin will strengthen support for PH" (Interview, May 30, 2024). From his prison cell, Anwar Ibrahim also acknowledged this reality. According to Respondent C, Anwar told allies that Mahathir's presence might provide the "six inches needed to reach the fruit" that had remained out of reach in the past (Interview, May 31, 2024). These comments capture the consociational logic in which a credible coalition needs Malay elites to complete the picture of inclusion.

Mahathir's decision to re-enter active politics was not just a personal comeback. It represented a reconfiguration of elite cooperation. The reconciliation between Mahathir and Anwar can be considered the most dramatic illustration of elite accommodation in Malaysian history. Once bitter rivals, their public handshake during a court appearance on 5 September 2016 (Harian Metro, September 5, 2016) symbolised a willingness to put aside personal hatred for the sake of a prospective coalition unity. PH institutionalised this accommodation in January 2018 when it announced Mahathir as its prime ministerial candidate, Wan Azizah as deputy, and Anwar as the designated successor pending a royal pardon (Harian Metro, January 7, 2018). This arrangement ensured that leadership was shared across Malay and multi-ethnic constituencies, reflecting Lijphart's insistence that grand coalitions must be broad and inclusive.

Mahathir's efforts to reach out to the DAP also showed how seriously PH took the idea of inclusiveness. According to Respondent D, Mahathir's attendance at the DAP's national convention in December 2016, where he praised the party as more "Malaysian" than MCA (Interview, June 11, 2024), signalled a break from decades of UMNO's demonisation of the DAP. It reassured Chinese voters and symbolised a bridging of ethnic divides. Likewise, his participation in Bersih rallies (MStar, September 1, 2015; Berita Harian, November 19, 2016) demonstrated that he was willing to align himself with civil society demands for reform, another symbolic gesture of inclusiveness.

PH also understood that a genuine grand coalition could not ignore East Malaysia. Sabah and Sarawak have long played a pivotal role in federal legitimacy, often acting as kingmakers. In Sabah, PH worked with Shafie Apdal's WARISAN to avoid splitting the opposition vote (New Straits Times, April 2, 2018). In Sarawak, PKR and DAP negotiated seat allocations to prevent clashes. Although WARISAN was not formal members of PH, these arrangements acknowledged the need for Sabah's representation. Moreover, because PH was not officially registered in time for the election, all candidates in Peninsular Malaysia contested under the PKR logo (Harian Metro, April 5, 2018). This symbolic move projected unity across the coalition, reinforcing its image as a grand coalition standing for national inclusiveness.

Yet, for all its achievements in constructing a broad coalition, PH's arrangements were fragile after they secured the power after GE14. Elite bargaining held the coalition together, but it was not backed by strong institutions. Respondent F, a former UMNO MP who defected to PPBM recalled how Hamzah Zainuddin coordinated the movement of MPs: "Most of us didn't know each other well… Hamzah acted as the bridge" (Interview, June 14, 2024). PPBM's parliamentary strength grew from 13 to 28 MPs through these defections, but this expansion was based on personal ties and informal deals, not on institutional loyalty.

The contrast with BN is striking. BN had long practised a form of grand coalition, but it was hegemonic. UMNO dominated while other parties played junior roles. Inclusion was formal but unequal (Case, 2013). PH, by contrast, attempted to share leadership more evenly among Malay, Chinese, Indian, and East Malaysian elites. It embodied the principle of grand coalition in a more genuine sense. However, because its inclusiveness rested on elite pacts rather than institutionalised safeguards, it was fragile. The absence of anti-defection laws, for instance, meant that MPs could switch allegiances with ease, undermining coalition stability.

PH's collapse in February 2020 underscored this fragility. Despite successfully creating a grand coalition on paper and in practice, it lacked the institutional depth to sustain itself. Leadership rivalries resurfaced, trust broke down, and defections toppled the government. In consociational terms, PH demonstrated both the potential and the limits of the grand coalition principle in Malaysia. It showed that diverse elites could indeed come together to form a government, ending decades of one-party dominance. But it also revealed that without strong rules and mechanisms to bind elites together, such inclusion remains vulnerable to collapse.

Ultimately, PH's story highlights a broader lesson about coalition politics in divided societies. A grand coalition is necessary for legitimacy, but it is not sufficient for stability. Inclusion must be matched by institutionalisation. Malaysia's experience shows how easily elite bargaining can unravel when it relies too heavily on personalities and symbolic gestures. For PH, the achievement of building a coalition that united some segments of the society was remarkable. Yet its downfall

illustrates the challenge of sustaining such unity in a fragmented and polarised system.

Proportionality in PH, 2018-2020

In Lijphart's (1969, 1977) framework, proportionality is about fairness in making sure that political power and state resources are shared in a way that no community feels ignored or left out. In societies divided along ethnic or religious lines, this principle acts as a safeguard against domination by a single group. Proportionality is not limited to how votes are counted or seats are distributed in parliament, it also extends to the allocation of cabinet positions, senior posts in the public service, and access to government resources. McGarry and O'Leary (1993) argue that proportionality strengthens divided societies because it ties representation to real inclusion, while Norris (2008) reminds us that in polarised contexts, proportionality works less like a mathematical formula and more like a political balancing act that guarantees minorities a meaningful role in power. Of course, the principle is not without its critics. Horowitz (1985) warns that proportionality can freeze ethnic divisions by embedding them in political structures, and Roeder and Rothchild (2005) caution that it may create a zero-sum mindset where communities see every gain by others as a loss to themselves.

Malaysia offers a useful example of these dynamics. Under BN, proportionality was formally present but in practice tilted heavily towards UMNO, which dominated decision-making and reduced its coalition partners to junior roles. Case (2013) describes this arrangement as "hegemonic consociationalism," where the appearance of inclusion masked a system that privileged Malay dominance. When PH took shape before the 2018 general election (GE14), it had to craft a new approach to proportionality without UMNO at the centre. This required a formula that was more balanced, but also more delicate, and ultimately more vulnerable to strain.

The first real test came in the run-up to GE14, when PH leaders had to negotiate how parliamentary seats would be distributed among the coalition's parties. The allocation had to reflect not just the size and strength of each party, but also the ethnic and ideological segments they represented. The outcome of that bargaining process in Peninsular Malaysia is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of GE14 Parliamentary Seats by PH Component Parties
(Peninsular Malaysia)

Party	Allocated Seats	Strategic Basis
PKR	51	Multiethnic reach, strongest opposition party
PPBM	54	Malay-majority constituencies, challenge UMNO
DAP	35	Urban/semi-urban Chinese-majority areas
AMANAH	26	Former PAS strongholds, Islamic reformist profile

(Source: Undi.info; Interview data, March 2023–June 2024)

The seat-sharing formula was less about strict calculation and more about political strategy. PKR's allocation recognised its wide multi-ethnic appeal, while DAP was largely confined to its traditional strongholds in urban, Chinese-majority constituencies. AMANAH, though small in size, was brought in to symbolically carry an Islamic voice after the PAS split, ensuring that the coalition could still claim a religious dimension. PPBM, despite being the newest member, received the largest share of seats. This was a deliberate move to place the party in direct competition with UMNO in Malay-majority areas. As Respondent E explained, "Bersatu (PPBM) is a Malay party and must contend with UMNO" (Interview, June 5, 2024). In this way, proportionality within PH was never just about numerical fairness but about ensuring that every significant ethnic segment had a seat at the table. In that sense, PH was already approximating Lijphart's principle of proportional inclusion, even before a single vote was cast. When the election results finally came in, however, they painted a very different picture of proportionality.

Table 2: GE14 Results – Parliamentary Seats Won by PH Parties

Party	Seats Won	Percentage of Total PH Seats
PKR	48	39%
DAP	42	35%
PPBM	13	11%
AMANAH	11	9%
WARISAN	8	6%
Total	122	100%

(Source: SPR GE14 results from Undi.info, May 2018)

Table 2 shows that PKR and DAP carried most of PH's success in the 2018 election, while PPBM and AMANAH won far fewer seats. If proportionality were applied strictly based on election results, PKR and DAP should have held the greatest influence in government. But proportionality in consociational theory is not simply a numerical calculation. Even though they performed poorly at the polls, PPBM and AMANAH were given a larger share of cabinet posts because they were Malay-based parties and vital for PH's ethnic legitimacy. This approach can be described as corrective proportionality by adjusting representation to reassure the Malay community and to counter the perception that PH was dominated by the Chinese-majority DAP and multiethnic PKR. Weiss and Suffian (2023) note that the tension between electoral proportionality and ethnic proportionality lay at the heart of PH's fragility. The cabinet distribution after GE14 put this corrective proportionality into practice.

Table 3: Cabinet Distribution under PH (2018)

Party	Cabinet Ministers	Percentage of Cabinet Posts	Comparison to Seats Won
PKR	7	28%	Under-represented
DAP	6	24%	Under-represented
PPBM	6	24%	Over-represented
AMANAH	5	20%	Over-represented
WARISAN	3	12%	Proportional (Sabah role)

(Source: Utusan Borneo, July 2, 2018)

According to Table 3, PKR and DAP, despite winning nearly three-quarters of PH's parliamentary seats, were under-represented in the cabinet. By contrast, PPBM, with only 13 seats, received 6 ministries and the prime ministership, while AMANAH, with 11 seats, received 5 ministries. WARISAN, though not formally a PH member, was given 3 portfolios to acknowledge its contribution in reinforcing PH's majority and as the representative from Sabah. These decisions reflected not a failure of proportionality but a reinterpretation of it. The allocation was designed to calm Malay anxieties, counter UMNO's narrative of Chinese dominance, and preserve coalition balance. This is in line with the situation that happened before GE14 where PH needs a Malay party to form a credible opposition against BN.

This interpretation of proportionality was ethnic rather than numerical. PKR and DAP accepted reduced representation to prevent destabilising perceptions, while PPBM was elevated to symbolise Malay leadership. The deliberate over-representation of PPBM thus reinforced the consociational aim of reassuring all these segments of inclusion, even at the expense of strict numerical fairness.

Compared to BN's practice of hegemonic proportionality, PH's approach was nearer to Lijphart's conception of proportionality. Under BN, UMNO dominated, with other partners still receiving portfolios with little power. PH attempted a more balanced formula where smaller parties were over-represented to maintain coalition cohesion and ethnic legitimacy. This was closer to Lijphart's vision of proportionality, where the goal is stability through inclusiveness. However, such compromise generated tensions. PKR and DAP leaders felt their contributions were undervalued despite winning the most seats, while PPBM's inflated role sowed resentment within the coalition.

The effects of PH's approach to proportionality were mixed. On the positive side, it helped the coalition gain legitimacy across ethnic and regional lines, which was key to securing its historic victory in 2018. At the same time, however, it created strains within the coalition. Ufen (2021) and Nadzri (2022) argue that part of PH's downfall came from these disproportional arrangements. The Sheraton Move in February 2020 was not only the result of leadership rivalries but also of discontent over how power was shared. By giving PPBM more influence than its electoral results justified, PH built a fragile balance that quickly collapsed once defections began.

In short, proportionality in PH was both a strength and a weakness. The distribution of seats, the election results, and the cabinet appointments all show that proportionality was treated less as a strict formula and more as a negotiated compromise to keep all major communities on board. This marked a shift from BN's dominance, as PH tried to share power more fairly, where the latter still prioritising ethnic legitimacy over strict electoral proportionality. While this approach made the coalition more inclusive, it also weakened its internal cohesion. PH's experience suggests that proportionality can bring short-term legitimacy, but without safeguards such as anti-defection laws or stronger coalition discipline, it may end up undermining the stability it is supposed to protect.

Segmental Autonomy in PH, 2018-2020

In consociational theory, segmental autonomy means that different social groups whether ethnic, religious, or linguistic, should have the freedom to manage issues that are central to their identity (Lijphart, 1977). The idea is that each group in a coalition retains the right to speak for itself and make decisions in certain areas, rather than being absorbed into a single majority. McGarry and O'Leary (1993) argue that this reduces tensions, since minorities are assured that their interests will not simply be overridden. But critics such as Horowitz (1985) warn that it can also harden divisions, encouraging communities to focus only on their own agendas instead of finding common ground.

BN once reflected a clear, if imperfect, version of this principle. Each party within BN represented a distinct ethnic base; UMNO for Malays, MCA for Chinese, and MIC for Indians; while parties from Sabah and Sarawak stood for their regional communities. This model institutionalised ethnicity as the foundation of politics. It allowed groups to feel represented but also entrenched UMNO's dominance. By contrast, PH, formed in 2015 after the collapse of Pakatan Rakyat, presented itself as a coalition aiming to move beyond communal politics. Yet when PH came to power in 2018, it found it difficult to balance the consociational principle of autonomy with its reformist rhetoric.

PH's ethnic alignment was less straightforward than BN's. AMANAH and PPBM, together with Malay leaders in PKR, represented Malay interests. DAP, despite calling itself multi-ethnic, was still widely seen as a Chinese-majority party because of its membership and candidate profile. Indian representation was thin, with no major party championing their interests. Instead, figures from HINDRAF were brought in through Senate appointments (DAP Malaysia, July 17, 2018). Unlike BN, which locked ethnic roles into place, PH improvised its formula, constantly negotiating how much space each group could claim.

Some interviews we conducted suggest this tension. Respondent B stressed that PH did not want to favour one group over another: "We adhere to the principles that exist in Islam. We cannot prioritize one race over others" (Interview, May 30, 2024). Respondent C added that ethnicity was becoming a weaker marker of identity: "We merely cling to the notion of race; nevertheless, I believe it is weak when we examine

the concept of ethnicity, as external developments significantly influence the evolution of the Malays" (Interview, May 31, 2024). These views suggest that PH leaders wanted to frame their politics around issues, not ethnicity. In practice, however, ethnic balancing continued to shape their decisions.

PH's leadership depended on a Malay-led anchor in PPBM. Even though PPBM had only 13 seats, it was elevated to give the coalition a clear Malay face, echoing UMNO's role in BN. This was partly to counter opposition claims that PH was "dominated by non-Muslims." Out of PH's 122 seats, 65 were held by non-Muslims and 57 by Muslims, fuelling the perception of under-representation. To manage this, PH overcompensated by giving PPBM more weight in government.

The opposition capitalised on these concerns by painting PH as anti-Malay. Contentious issues such as PH's initial willingness to ratify ICERD, its support for the Rome Statute, the management of Tabung Haji under a non-Malay Finance Minister, and its perceived sympathy for LGBT rights (Sinar Harian, May 9, 2019) became political weapons. Respondent E noted that appointments like Lim Guan Eng as Finance Minister, Richard Malanjun as Chief Justice, and Tommy Thomas as Attorney General "may be legal, but politically, they caused unease" (Interview, June 5, 2024). For many Malays, autonomy was not only about having a say in policy but also about symbolic control over key institutions. By failing to address this, PH gave its opponents space to attack.

The by-election losses in Semenyih and Tanjung Piai in 2019 suggested PH's weakening position. PPBM, the party that was meant to represent the Malays, performed better in mixed seats—consistent with PH's strength—than in Malay heartlands. In consociational terms, the Malay segment did not feel secure within PH despite PPBM's elevated role.

Mahathir's leadership also revealed the limits of autonomy. Respondent A observed that unlike his earlier tenure, when UMNO dominance gave him near-total control, Mahathir in PH had to accommodate the demands of partners like PKR and DAP (Interview, March 30, 2023). Respondent E recalled an incident where DAP pressured Mahathir to delist the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and threatened to withdraw support if ignored (Interview, June

5, 2024). This suggested how segmental autonomy operated in practice where DAP could use its weight to push for concessions, while PPBM had to work harder to prove its Malay credentials.

Mahathir's decision to attend the 2019 Malay Dignity Congress illustrated this balancing act. While many cabinet members opposed his participation, he insisted on going. Respondent A explained: "They [PH] are not at ease with this congress, but Mahathir is from Bersatu, a Malay party. He is concerned about the Malays, and that's why he attended" (Interview, March 30, 2023). The congress itself produced little, but Mahathir's presence sent a signal that PPBM would defend Malay interests. This was a symbolic use of segmental autonomy.

Tensions over leadership succession added another layer of strain. PKR and DAP pushed for Anwar Ibrahim's transition to the premiership, while PPBM resisted, fearing that the change would weaken its standing among Malays. Respondent E noted that pressure from DAP and PKR created instability in the PH Presidential Council (Interview, July 4, 2024). In this case, autonomy was not only about ethnicity but also about leadership ambitions, with each party using the principle to defend its position.

The management of UMNO defectors further destabilised PH. PPBM's strategy, coordinated by Hamzah Zainuddin, aimed to strengthen its Malay base by absorbing UMNO MPs. This blurred the lines between PPBM and UMNO, making PH's autonomy arrangements more fragile. What was meant to be an effort to secure Malay representation ended up in mistrust within the coalition.

In the end, PH's attempt to practise improvised segmental autonomy was fragile. While it claimed to transcend communal politics, it still relied heavily on PPBM as a Malay anchor. Autonomy was exercised symbolically through cabinet appointments, ethnic congresses, and defections rather than through firm institutional rules. Mahathir was expected to act both as a national leader and as a defender of Malay interests, a paradox that proved unsustainable.

From a theoretical point of view, PH shows both why autonomy matters and why it is difficult to sustain. Autonomy is necessary to assure groups that their concerns will not be ignored. But when it is improvised rather than institutionalised, it can create more mistrust

than stability. Horowitz's (1985) critique rings true here: instead of encouraging integration, PH's autonomy practices reinforced old divisions. The 'Sheraton Move' of 2020, which ended PH's rule, was the logical outcome of a coalition that could not institutionalise autonomy in a lasting way.

Mutual Veto in PH, 2018-2020

In consociational theory, mutual veto is one of the four key principles that help divided societies remain stable. Lijphart (1969, 1977) describes it not as a bargaining tool but as a guarantee that no group should be forced to accept a decision that threatens its vital interests. McGarry and O'Leary (1993) call it a protective device, while Norris (2008) stresses that its strength lies in inclusiveness in which without it, minority groups might walk away from cooperation altogether. Critics, however, note the risks. Horowitz (1985) warns that vetoes can entrench divisions, while Roeder and Rothchild (2005) show that vetoes can be used opportunistically, creating stalemate rather than compromise. Even so, in plural societies, the veto remains essential because it reassures groups that their core interests will not be sacrificed.

Malaysia's earlier experience under BN only partially reflected this principle. Each ethnic party had some space to negotiate, but UMNO's dominance meant that veto power was not equally shared. When PH was formed, it promised something different with a coalition built on more equal participation and collective decision-making. At the centre of this was the Presidential Council, set up as the main decision-making forum. After PPBM joined in 2017, Mahathir Mohamad became Chairman, Anwar Ibrahim the General Leader, Wan Azizah the President, and Muhyiddin Yassin, Mohamad Sabu, and Lim Guan Eng the deputy presidents, with other party leaders holding vice-presidencies (Malaysiakini, July 14, 2017). On paper, each party was given equal representation, and the arrangement appeared consistent with Lijphart's idea of mutual veto.

In reality, however, the Council did not work as intended. Ministers frequently made announcements without prior agreement. For example, Human Resources Minister M. Kulasegaran proposed bringing in African workers, which Mahathir later rejected (Sinar Harian, June 30, 2019). Similarly, Entrepreneur Development Minister Redzuan Yusof declared the Lynas plant would stay open, contradicting PH's earlier

promise to shut it down (Malaysiakini, November 24, 2019). These episodes showed that there was no binding process to clear decisions through the Council, and no penalties if parties ignored it. Instead of formal vetoes, parties relied on public statements or symbolic dissent after the fact, which weakened unity and credibility.

The ICERD controversy was the clearest example. PH initially supported ratifying the convention, in line with its reformist image. But when Malay-Muslim parties mobilised mass opposition, claiming it threatened Malay privileges and Islam's status, PH quickly backed down. This reversal was not negotiated in the Council; it was a reactive decision to street pressure. Respondent G admitted that "PH made promises without understanding the legal implications of existing contracts" (Interview, July 4, 2024), underlining the lack of careful deliberation. The same happened with plans to downsize the civil service and with the Lynas pledge where promises were made, only to be abandoned when resistance grew. Without formal veto procedures, decisions were taken and reversed haphazardly, undermining coalition discipline.

The leadership succession issue exposed these weaknesses even further. Before GE14, PH had agreed Mahathir would serve only temporarily before handing over to Anwar. But once in power, this agreement was contested. Zuraida Kamaruddin publicly supported Mahathir serving a full term (Malaysiakini, August 3, 2019), while Mahathir himself dismissed the manifesto as "not a sacred text" (Malaysiakini, July 16, 2018). For PKR, Anwar's succession was a core interest, yet without binding veto rights, it could be postponed or ignored repeatedly. Lijphart's theory suggests veto powers exist precisely to prevent such outcomes. PH's inability to enforce them meant that the issue became a running battle that destabilised the coalition.

What PH practised, then, was closer to bargaining than true veto. Parties resisted policies, but their resistance was expressed through brinkmanship or symbolic acts rather than institutional guarantees. As highlighted above, there was unease among Malays at the appointments of Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng, Chief Justice Richard Malanjun, and Attorney General Tommy Thomas. In a genuine consociational model, PPBM could have exercised a veto to block such appointments. Instead, it resorted to symbolism, such as Mahathir's attendance at the

Malay Dignity Congress, to reassure its Malay base. This difference matters. In countries like Belgium or Northern Ireland, veto rights are formalised in law and require cross-community approval. In PH, vetoes were informal, exercised outside institutions, and often through public confrontation.

The lack of a functioning veto weakened PH's stability. Without clear rules, parties pursued unilateral strategies. DAP pushed for reforms such as ICERD and UEC recognition, which alarmed the Malays. PPBM expanded by recruiting UMNO defectors, which PKR and DAP saw as undermining trust. Each party believed its interests were existential, but none had institutional veto power to secure them. The result was fragmentation. Respondents E and G linked these failures partly to inexperienced new ministers who were not used to coalition governance, but the deeper cause was structural where PH lacked the assurance that vital interests would always be protected.

The 'Sheraton Move' in February 2020 marked the collapse of this fragile arrangement. PKR's vital interest on Anwar's succession was never guaranteed. PPBM's interest in securing Malay leadership was not adequately safeguarded inside PH, pushing its leaders to seek protection outside of the coalition. With no institutionalised veto to enforce trust, defections spread and the government fell. PH had the appearance of a system with mutual veto but not its substance.

From a theoretical standpoint, PH illustrates how fragile coalition governance becomes when veto rights are informal rather than formalised. Lijphart argued that veto powers keep minorities engaged; without them, they may withdraw. Horowitz's critique is also relevant: PH's ad hoc vetoes encouraged brinkmanship and public grandstanding instead of compromise. Comparative experience suggests that vetoes work best when tied to formal rules and clear procedures (McGarry & O'Leary, 2006). In PH, however, veto power remained aspirational, reducing the Council to a symbolic committee.

In conclusion, PH's mutual veto was more theoretical than real. The Presidential Council gave the appearance of collective leadership but lacked enforcement mechanisms. Instead of binding guarantees, vetoes were expressed through protests, symbolic gestures, or last-minute manoeuvres. This blurred the line between simple disagreement and true veto, leaving core interests unprotected. Without institutionalised

safeguards, inclusiveness became fragile, and coalition governance unstable. PH's experience shows that genuine power-sharing requires more than broad representation; it requires enforceable guarantees that no segment's vital interests can be ignored. The failure to embed such guarantees goes a long way in explaining PH's instability and eventual collapse.

Conclusion

PH met the spirit of consociational inclusion but struggled to build the institutions needed to make inclusion durable. On the principle of grand coalition, PH managed to bring together historic rivals, incorporate an Islamic reformist partner in AMANAH, add a Malay anchor in PPBM, and coordinate with actors in East Malaysia. These moves reflected consociational breadth. On proportionality, PH practised what can be called corrective proportionality by elevating Malay-based parties in cabinet to reduce perceptions of non-Malay dominance. These choices gave PH the legitimacy to win power and secure initial acceptance across communities.

The same design also created weaknesses. Segmental autonomy was improvised rather than firmly structured, expressed through symbolic acts such as high-profile appointments, attendance at ethnic congresses, or the recruitment of defectors, rather than through clearly assigned domains of authority. Mutual veto remained informal. The Presidential Council lacked binding procedures to protect the vital interests of member parties in areas such as ICERD, Lynas, civil service reform, or leadership succession. Without enforceable guarantees, parties turned to public brinkmanship, mistrust grew, and elite defection became a rational choice leading to the 'Sheraton Move' and the fall of the PH government.

Three lessons can be drawn. First, broad inclusion needs to be paired with written and enforceable coalition rules that define what issues require veto power, how decisions are made, and what sanctions apply when agreements are breached. Second, proportionality formulas must be transparent and reviewed periodically, balancing electoral strength with ethnic legitimacy to prevent discontent. Third, autonomy should be institutionalised through clear portfolios or domains that are protected from routine interference, supported by anti-defection laws and stronger coalition discipline. This study has focused on the design of PH's

coalition, but further research could explore how voters, civil society, and regional parties understood and responded to these arrangements. Malaysia's experience since 2018 shows that while numbers can win elections, only strong and credible institutions can sustain coalition governance in a divided society.

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"Should I Pay a Living Wage?" A Systematic Review on Employers' Decision from an Organisational Justice Perspective

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Abstract: This study is a systematic review that explores employers' decision for or against living wage (LW). Published articles up to year 2022 were extracted and screened, and a total of 24 articles were reviewed. Thematic analysis was used to extract themes for three components of organisational justice. Themes like employer morale and ethics, employee contribution as well as current and future impacts explain distributive justice. The right strategy, implementation costs, perceived benefits and external interventions describe procedural justice. Finally, employers direct, indirect or no communication to employees explain interactional justice. Theoretically, a novel framework that describes how employers decide on living wages from the perspective of organisational justice is proposed. It simultaneously serves as a decision-making tool for employers to introduce LW and a strategy for living wage advocates to persuade employers paying living wage.

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Abstrak: Kajian ini meneliti keputusan majikan untuk menerima atau menolak gaji sara hidup wajar dengan menggunakan metodologi sorotan literatur bersistematik. Kajian ini mengekstrak dan menyaring artikel yang diterbitkan sehingga tahun 2022. Sebanyak 24 artikel telah dipilih dan diteliti. Kaedah analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengenal pasti tema-tema yang berkaitan dengan tiga komponen keadilan organisasi. Keadilan pengagihan dihuraikan melalui tema-tema seperti moral dan etika majikan, sumbangan pekerja, serta kesan masa sekarang dan masa hadapan. Keadilan prosedur pula dihuraikan melalui tema-tema seperti strategi yang tepat, kos dan manfaat gaji kehidupan wajar, serta intervensi luaran. Manakala keadilan interaksi dijelaskan melalui tema komunikasi majikan kepada pekerja secara langsung, tidak langsung, dan tiada komunikasi. Dari sudut teori, kajian ini mencadangkan satu kerangka baharu yang menerangkan bagaimana majikan membuat keputusan berkaitan gaji kehidupan wajar berdasarkan perspektif keadilan organisasi. Dalam masa yang sama, kerangka ini berfungsi sebagai alat dalam membantu majikan membuat keputusan, memperkenalkan gaji kehidupan wajar, dan sebagai strategi bagi pendokong gaji kehidupan wajar untuk meyakinkan majikan membayarnya kepada pekerja.

Kata kunci: Psikologi industri dan organisasi, gaji kehidupan wajar, keadilan organisasi, membuat keputusan, majikan.

Introduction

Ensuring fair pay remains a complex challenge for organisations, as employees' perceptions of perceived fairness of pay are closely linked to their work motivation and satisfaction (Armstrong, 2006; Woods & West, 2016). Employers, on the other hand, often base pay distribution on the basis of employee contribution and performance (Armstrong, 2006; Skilling & Tregidga, 2018). This tension reflects the broader discourse on organisational justice, where fairness is not only a subjective experience that shapes employees' attitudes and behaviours, but also a normative principle that guides managers' decisions on pay practises.

Living wage (LW) is proposed as a wage scheme that guarantees employees and their families a basic standard of living, enables social participation, personal and family development and reduces financial

burdens (Werner & Lim, 2017; Chong & Khong, 2018). It ensures individuals' minimum standard of living and social sustainability by addressing essential needs while promoting growth and social quality (Werner & Lim, 2016). The LW usually exceeds the statutory minimum wage. In the United Kingdom (UK), the rates are £10.85 in London and £9.50 outside London, compared to a minimum wage of £8.91 (Living Wage Foundation, 2021). In Malaysia, the Bank Negara has recommended LW of between RM2,700 and RM6,500, depending on household size (Chong & Khong, 2018), with the latest estimate being RM3,047 compared to the minimum wage of RM1,500 (Choy & Tay, 2023). Given the higher rate, LW has sparked heated debates and public controversies, reflecting divergent reactions among economic actors (Ford & Gillan, 2017; Hodgetts et al., 2022).

The debates on LW are based on the principles of justice (Hill, 2019; Werner & Lim, 2016). Proponents view LW as a matter of distributive justice, ensuring employees' right to a decent standard of living while promoting productivity, equitable distribution of wealth, economic growth and employee well-being, thereby benefiting society as a whole (Werner & Lim, 2016; Carr et al., 2019). However, critics argue that wages should reflect skills, income and market value, which makes LW unfair (Skilling & Tregidga, 2019). The decision to adopt LW is therefore based on competing perspectives of equity and fairness.

Previous research has explored the rationale for LW from economic, ethical and religious perspectives (Werner, 2021; Werner & Lim, 2016), as well as strategic decision-making perspective (Heery et al., 2017; Zeng & Honig, 2017), but the link to organisational justice remains limited (Hill, 2019). As pay distribution is central to organisational practise, applying an organisational justice lens provides valuable insights for employers and stakeholders in LW decisions. This study fills this gap by proposing a comprehensive framework that draws on distributive, procedural and interactional justice to answer "How do employers and business stakeholders decide for or against LW?

This study has two key contributions. First, it identifies the motives of economic actors who support or oppose LW, addressing theoretical gaps in prior research that largely emphasised trends (Searle & McWha-

Hermann, 2020). Second, it provides evidence-based insights for fair and equitable LW implementation, providing reliable evidence for decision and policy makers (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). This paper introduces organisational justice and its connection to wage distribution and LW, as well as outlining the document extraction methods and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analysis (PRISMA), before presenting and discussing the findings.

Organisational Justice

Organisational justice, centred on workplace equity, shapes perceptions of fairness (Greenberg, 2009; Nabatchi et al., 2007), and strongly influences organisational decision-making, attitudes and behaviours (Woods & West, 2016; Hadi et al., 2020). It positively correlates with affective commitment, trust, and employees' behaviours in the organisation (Khaola & Rambe, 2021; Choong et al., 2018), while perceptions of injustice often result in anger and resentment among employees (Nabatchi et al., 2007).

Research on organisational justice in pay distribution has long centred on employees, but recent studies highlight the role of employers and business stakeholders as key agents of organisational justice (Eib et al., 2020). Nevertheless, employers are pivotal in shaping pay policies, (Burri et al., 2020), as most decisions are made top down (Heery et al., 2017).

This study adopts Greenberg's model of organisational justice, which includes distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Nabatchi et al., 2007) to examine wage distribution and LW.

Distributive Justice

Distributive justice, central to pay decisions (Armstrong, 2006; Burri et al., 2020), concerns the perceived fairness of resources in social exchange. In remuneration, fairness is measured by the proportionality of pay to work performance (Greenberg, 2009). Employers argue in favour of LW, claiming that it is commensurate with employees' contributions to the organisation (Werner & Lim, 2017). Conversely, opponents argue that LW is disproportionately high for low-wage employees and question the perceived fairness relative to personal and market value (Skilling & Tregidga, 2019). These differing valuations of LW shapes employers' decision-making.

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice, understood as the perceived fairness of decision-making processes (Greenberg, 2009), emphasises satisfaction derived from procedures themselves (Nabatchi et al., 2007). Employers across both high- and low-wage sectors often uphold this principle in determining fair pay (Hill, 2019). Among LW employers, compensation is assessed against factors such as skills, qualifications, experience, effort, time, enthusiasm and contribution to company profits (Hill, 2019). In contrast, non-LW employers contend that LW undermines performance-based system, particularly those linked to commissions and bonuses (Werner & Lim, 2017). Consequently, decisions on such matters necessitate careful deliberation with management to ensure just and defensible implement (Carson, 2022).

Interactional Justice

Interactional justice concerns fairness in the communication of procedures and outcomes (Greenberg, 2009). It comprises informational justice, where fairness is perceived when outcomes are fully explained, and interpersonal justice, where authorities demonstrate courtesy and respect (Nabatchi et al., 2007; Greenberg, 2009). Interactional justice, such as treating co-workers with dignity, aligns with the ethical foundation of LW, which emphasises adequate compensation for a decent standard of living (Werner & Lim, 2016). Interactional justice also shapes responses to decision outcomes and predicts various dimensions of pay satisfaction, as it encourages employee voice and transparent communication about pay performance and performance system (Wickramasinghe, 2023). However, compared to distributive and procedural justice (Hill, 2019), evidence of interactional justice in relation to LW remains limited.

Methods

This study employs a systematic review to generate high quality evidence and enhance understanding of employers' decision-making regarding the adoption or rejection of LW. This approach is particularly valuable for guiding employers and business stakeholders in pay-related decisions, given that wages constitute a substantial share of business costs, reaching up to 70 per cent (Bobieca et al., 2021; Paycor, 2022). Such decisions affect product pricing, businesses sustainability

and organisational performance. The systematic review further ensures comprehensive insights drawn from a robust body of research, aligning with the objectives of this study.

This study adopted PRISMA as the primary reporting framework. To address PRISMA's limitations in guiding qualitative and mixed-method designs, the guidelines for qualitative systematic reviews by Butler et al. (2016) were applied (Shaffrill et al., 2020). The search strategy was designed to comprehensively identify relevant studies across multiple databases (Butler et al., 2016), guided by specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) studies using primary data from employers' and business stakeholders' experiences and decisions on LW, supported by secondary data; (2) research employing qualitative methods as the primary approach, with quantitative and mixed methods also considered; (3) peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters from reputable databases (e.g., Springer Link, Routledge, Taylor & Francis); (4) publications in English; and (5) studies published up to 2022. Exclusion criteria were: (1) studies focusing exclusively on employees; (2) non-peer-reviewed sources; (3) non-English publications; (4) inaccessible documents; and (5) studies irrelevant to the research questions.

The search terms were developed using the Population, Context and Outcome (PCO) framework (Butler et al., 2016), with synonyms identified through the EBSCO Thesaurus and prior literature review (Shafrill et al., 2020) to guide the search process. Table 1 presents the keywords derived from the PCO framework.

Table 1: Keywords for the Literature Search

PCO framework	Keywords
Population	Employer OR stakeholder OR manager OR owner OR council OR government authority OR shareholder OR trade union OR politician
Context	Living wage
Outcome	Decision OR support OR pay OR reject OR against

This study utilised a comprehensive search across open access and university databases, including DOAJ, EBSCO, Emerald, MDPI, Scopus, Science Direct, Springer Link, Taylor and Francis, Web of Science and Google Scholar. Consistent with Shaffrill and colleagues (2020), advanced search techniques such as Boolean operators, phrase searches, truncation, wildcards and field codes were applied. An example of the search string for the advanced search in the databases: AB "living wage" AND AB (("employer*" OR "stakeholder*" OR "manager*" OR "owner*" OR "council*" OR "politician*" OR "shareholder" OR "trade union" OR "government* authorit*")) AND AB (("support" OR "pay" OR "against" OR "reject")). Manual strategies included hand searching three journals with LW special issues, such as Labour & Industry, Employee Relations and Transfer: European Review of Labour Research (Dobbins & Prowse, 2022), as well as backward searching reference lists and using Connected Papers database to confirm saturation (Connected Papers, n.d.). Following Levy and Ellis (2006, cited in Shaffrill et al., 2020), the search was concluded when no new results emerged. Conducted between July and September 2022, the process yielded 346 articles after the automatic removal of 6,677 records and 54 duplicates, with an additional 45 records identified manually.

A total of 346 electronically retrieved and 45 manually identified articles were screened for eligibility based on title, keywords, abstract and methodology. The 45 manually retrieved articles were further assessed for quality using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Checklist, a widely applied tool for evaluating qualitative research that enables rapid appraisal of validity, methodological appropriateness, and ethical considerations (Butler et al., 2016; CASP, 2018). Articles were scored as "Yes" (2 points), "Can't tell" (1 point) or "No" (0 point) (Njau et al., 2019), with only those achieving medium to high scores (16-20) included in the data extraction and analysis. Quality assessment was conducted independently by all three authors, with the first author reviewing all articles and assigning them to the second and third authors for secondary review. Articles were scrutinised to ensure compliance with the inclusion criteria and relevance to the research questions. This process yielded 24 articles, summarised in PRISMA diagram (Figure 1).

The data were analysed using thematic analysis to capture and interpret recurring patterns in experiences, thoughts and behaviours

(Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Deductive categories were applied to organise the data into three themes, aligned with the principles of organisational justice, while inductive categories allowed subthemes to emerge within each principle. This combined approach reflects the recognition that exclusive reliance on a single analytic strategy is neither practical nor sufficient (Byrne, 2022).

Figure 1: Summary of the Search Process

IDENTIFICATION

Records identified from databases (n =7123)

Records identified from manual searching (n = 45)

Records marked as ineligible by automation tools (n = 6723). Duplicate (n = 68)

SCREENING

Records screened after duplicate removed:
Database (n =346)
Manual (n =31)

Record removed:
Abstract: (n = 329)
Cannot retrieved: (n = 3)

Records sought for retrieval:
Database (n = 37)
Manual (n = 8)

Records assessed for quality appraisal (n = 45)

Record excluded (n = 31)
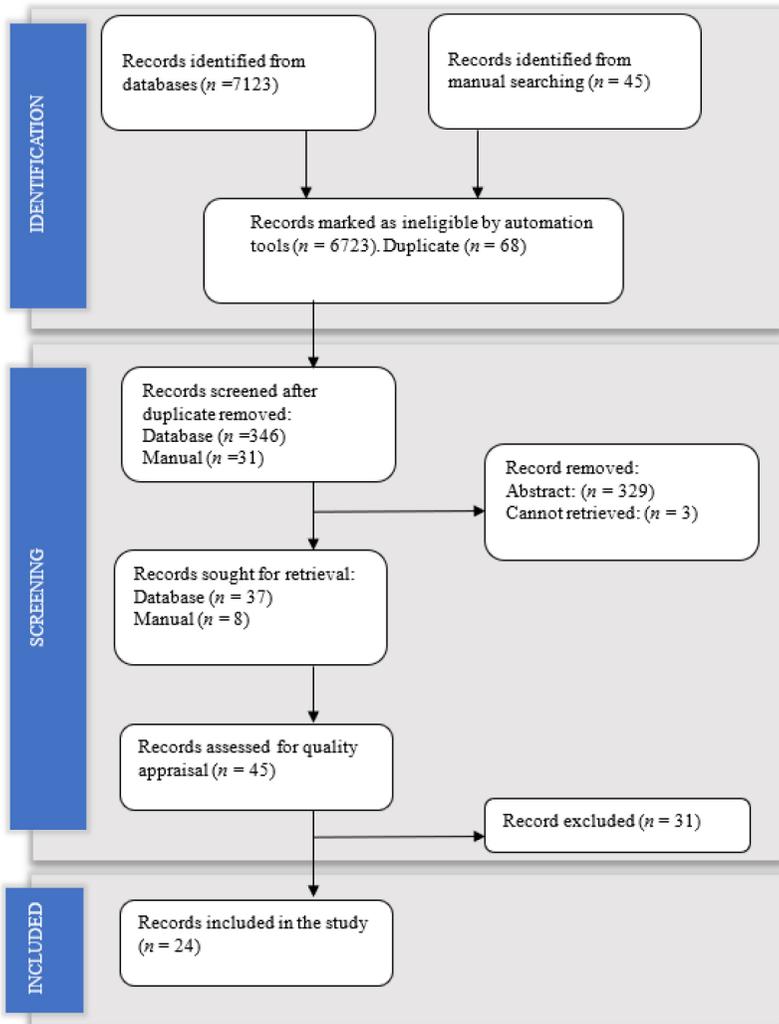
INCLUDED

Records included in the study (n = 24)

Figure 1: Summary of the Search Process

Findings and Discussion

The 24 articles reviewed in this study were published between 2000 and 2020, and conducted across diverse contexts, including Canada (Jaarsveld et al., 2019; Ptaschnick & Zuberi, 2015; Zeng & Honig, 2017), New Zealand (Hodgetts et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2022), the United States of America (USA) (Bartle & Halaas, 2008; Clain, 2012; Grant & Trautner, 2004; Reynold & Vortkamp, 2005; Schumaker & Kelly, 2013), the UK (Carson, 2021; Dabinett et al., 2016; Heery et al., 2017; Heery et al., 2018; Johnson, 2017; Prowse et al., 2017; Prowse & Dobbins, 2022; Prowse & Fells, 2016; Walmsley et al., 2018; Werner, 2021; Werner & Lim, 2017), Sweden (Egels- Zandén, 2015; Tarnovskaya et al., 2022) and several Asian regions (Ford & Gillan, 2017; Tarnovskaya et al., 2022). Most applied study designs such as case studies or mixed methods and used interviews, closed- and open-ended surveys, observation, and document analysis as methods of data collection.

Distributive Justice

Distributive justice, defined as fairness in resource allocation (Greenberg, 2009), is often assessed through outcomes relative to inputs, including wages, education, training, experience and effort (Baldwin, 2006). In this study, it refers to employers' perceptions of the fairness of LW in relation to the benefits it provides. Three themes were identified as shaping employers' judgments and their decisions to support or reject LW: employers' moral and ethics, employees' contribution and current and future impacts.

Theme 1: Employers' moral and ethics

Theme 1 explores employers' moral and ethics and identifies fundamental values that influence their attitudes to LW, which uncovers ethical and moral judgements based on the principle of distributive justice, particularly the principle of needs-based sufficiency and consideration of common goods. It comprises three sub-themes: employers' general perceptions, adequacy of livelihood and concern for employees.

Sub-theme 1: Employers' general perceptions

Sub-theme 1 explores employers' general perceptions of LW and their reasoning regarding its fairness. The literature highlights that many

employers view paying LW as morally justified and aligned with responsible organisational practises (Hodgetts et al., 2022; Prowse & Dobbins, 2017; Werner, 2021; Werner & Lim, 2017). Supporting LW is regarded as a means for organisations to ensure fair wages (Hodgetts et al., 2022) and demonstrate sound business practises (Parker et al., 2022). Employers' satisfaction in providing LW further underscores its strong moral rationale (Werner, 2021).

Proponent of LW regard it as a fair wage and a fundamental human right, eliminating ambiguity in wage determination (Werner, 2021). This perspective aligns with the LW philosophy, which upholds employees' right to fair wage and employers' duty to provide it (Werner & Lim, 2016). Conversely, opponents argue that LW disadvantages employees and trade unions (Ford & Gillan, 2017) and constitutes an artificial intervention unlikely to enhance productivity (Parker et al., 2022).

The principle of common good lies at the core of debates on LW. Proponents link between poverty to low wages and highlight the health consequences of inadequate income (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2015). Opponents argue that addressing such issues requires broader economic, social and political analysis contending that LW alone cannot substantially reduce poverty, enhance productivity or improve overall quality of life and work (Parker et al., 2022). Thus, while proponents emphasise the communal benefits of LW, opponents stress its limitations and uncertainties.

Sub-theme 2: Adequacy of livelihood

Sub-theme 2 addresses livelihood adequacy, illustrating that employers who support LW seek to ensure employees a decent and sustainable quality of life (Egels-Zenden, 2015; Hodgetts et al., 2022; Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2015; Parker et al., 2022; Werner, 2021). This perspective links wages and benefits to societal well-being, emphasising the need for sufficient income to support families with essentials such as nutritious food and education (Werner & Lim, 2017). In contrast, opponents challenge the calculation of LW, criticising unrealistic assumptions and its inadequacy in difficult circumstances (Ford & Gillan, 2017) as reflected in concerns about family responsibilities and care burdens highlighted by Hodgetts and colleagues (2022, p.8), "*but if I've got*

three kids… a sick mother-in-law at home or something, that's not nearly enough to actually live with dignity."

The debates reflect the sufficiency principle of distributive justice, which advocates wages adequate for a dignified life (Burri et al., 2021) and align with LW sustainability principle that wages should ensure self-sufficiency (Stabile, 2008, in Werner & Lim, 2016). However, this sub-theme highlights the ambiguity in defining needs (Fischer, 2008), raising doubts about the purpose of LW.

Sub-theme 3: Concern for employees

Sub-theme 3 highlights employers' concern for fairness and employee well-being. Paying LW is viewed as an expression of care, enabling employees to afford a decent lifestyle and support their families, thereby enhancing their well-being. This was highlighted by Zeng and Honig (2017, p. 480); "*I care about our employees' well-being. I think the living wage provides the employees with the opportunity to be able to afford their lifestyle with their family.*" This moral commitment extends to the macro level, as employers emphasise that LW benefits not only employees, but also businesses and society (Prowse & Dobbins, 2017). For employers, LW thus represents both an act of care and a demonstration of doing what is right.

Theme 2: Employees' contribution

The second theme deals with the question of whether LW is proportionate to employees' contribution to the business. Proponents contend that LW reflects employees' contribution and skills (Hodgetts et al., 2022; Werner, 2021), long working hours as well as routine and complex tasks, (Werner, 2021; Parker et al., 2022), challenging environments (Parker et al., 2022), fulfilment of employer expectations (Walmsley et al., 2018), employees' hard work (Werner, 2021) and high quality services (Walmsley et al., 2018; Werner & Lim, 2017). Employers also value LW as a fair reward that reinforces their strategic positioning as providers of quality services, exemplified by statements emphasising staff retention and exceptional care as stated in Wener (2021, p. 5), "*We have made it known that we are a LW employer so that I think that message [is]. that [it's] quality staff that we keep, very, very good staff that will look after your kids.*"

In contrast, opponents of LW question its applicability to certain employees, labelling them as "undeserving" due to low morale, absenteeism, illiteracy or low qualifications (Hodgetts et al., 2022). They also highlight perceived inequities for middle-level earners and discrepancies with higher skills and productivity (Carson, 2022; Parker et al., 2022; Werner & Lim, 2017). This challenges the sufficiency principle and invokes the desert principle, which claims that contributions, efforts and labour demands justify economic benefits (Burri et al., 2021). Conversely, proponents emphasise that LW is not productivity-based but ensures life sustainability (Hodgetts et al., 2022). This contrast illustrates competing applications of distributive justice principles (sufficiency and desert) in assessing LW fairness.

Theme 3: Current and future impacts

This theme explores employers' perceptions of the fairness of LW in relation to its current and future organisational impacts. It is analysed through five sub-themes: investment in employees, investment in business, pay disparity, market shift and mindset. This theme highlights the complexities and dilemmas employers face when assessing the fairness of LW.

Sub-theme 1: Investment in employees

This sub-theme uncovers employers' motivations for supporting or opposing LW in relation to employee outcomes. Proponents emphasise benefits such as improved retention of skilled employees (Hodgetts et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2022; Werner & Lim, 2017; Zeng & Honig, 2017), reduced absenteeism and turnover (Zeng & Honig, 2017), increased motivation (Walmsley et al., 2018) and improved productivity (Egels-Zenden, 2015; Werner & Lim, 2017). This perspective is encapsulated in the view that a happy workforce is more committed and productive (Werner, 2021). For these employers, paying LW is considered an investment expected to yield positive returns (Carson, 2022; Werner, 2021; Werner & Lim, 2017), linking directly to the next sub-theme, which is investment in business.

Sub-theme 2: Investment in business

Employers also consider the spillover effects of LW from employees to the business. For examples, improved retention reduces retraining needs (Zeng & Honig, 2017), while satisfied and empowered employees

minimise errors, enhance output, lower production costs and generate savings (Egels-Zenden, 2015). These outcomes align Carr et al.'s (2019) assertion that LW supports productivity gains and promotes decent work.

Conversely, opponents raise concerns about the uncertain economic impact of the LW, particularly its potential to reduce business competitiveness and cause plant closures or job losses (Parker et al., 2022; Tarnovskaya et al., 2022). One employer who adopted LW but later abolished it reported adverse outcomes, including high turnover and employee dissatisfaction following the removal of performance bonuses, which created the perception of unfair pay (Werner & Lim, 2017). Increased wages without added benefits undermined company savings, leading to the discontinuation of LW. The employer, however, introduced alternative fair remuneration methods, reflecting a pragmatic stance in which LW is adopted when beneficial, but withdrawn if it threatens business viability.

Sub-theme 3: Pay disparity

This sub-theme highlights the complexity of assessing fairness between LW proponents and opponents. Employers argue that implementing LW increases operating costs and necessitates wage adjustments for higher earners, potentially affecting motivation (Johnson, 2017). Balancing costs with productivity is therefore critical. Narrowing the pay gap between supervisors and subordinates may be perceived as unfair (Egels-Zenden, 2015), particularly by those earning slightly above LW, leading to demotivation (Carson, 2022). In addition, higher wages for low-skilled employees may discourage upskilling (Egels-Zenden, 2015) and contribute to wage compression (Parker et al., 2022), challenging the merit principle. When wages fail to reflect skills and responsibilities, the fairness of LW is called into question.

On the other hand, employers committed to pay equity (Hodgetts et al., 2022) and operating within flat pay systems (Werner, 2021) view the introduction of LW as minimally disruptive, as it aligns with established flat pay structures. Flat structure reflects a team-based consultative culture, therefore, LW does not alter perceptions of fairness (Parker et al., 2022, p. 15). However, organisations already paying above market rates to middle- and senior-level employees may refrain from further increases, as current salaries are deemed fair (Zeng & Honig, 2017).

Sub-theme 4: Market shift

Beyond affordability, there is a growing trend of employers adopting LW (Hodgetts et al., 2022), with adoption by some companies encouraging others to follow (Ptaschnick & Zuberi, 2015). However, employers facing rising living and wage costs may not perceive an immediate need to implement LW (Parker et al., 2022). This sub-theme reflects employers' views of fair wage distribution as shaped by the market demand (Deutsch, 1975) and prevailing market standards for wage setting (Skilling & Tregidga, 2019).

Sub-Theme 5: Mindset

Advocates emphasise the need for employers to shift their attitudes toward LW, arguing that objections based on wage inequality are unfounded since all employees deserve fair pay for a decent life. Employees are urged to avoid wage comparisons (Hodgetts et al., 2022), while LW is seen as reshaping societal expectations of fairness, grounded in individual' life needs. Employers are further encouraged to regard LW as a long-term investment rather than simply a cost (Carson, 2022).

Procedural justice

Procedural justice refers to individuals' perceptions of the fairness in decision-making processes (Greenberg & Tyler, 1987). Given the complexity of wage distribution, decision-making procedures are particularly significant. In this study, procedural fairness is defined as the process by which employers determine their stance on LW. Four themes emerged: the right strategy, implementation costs, perceived benefits and external interventions.

Theme 1: The right strategy

This theme looks at the strategic considerations employers undertake before introducing LW, including its alignment with the organisational goals and values, process before decision-making, balance in decision-making and creative ways to overcome challenges.

Sub-theme 1: Alignment with organisational goals and values

Resource allocation should align with organisational goals and values (Armstrong, 2006), making it essential that decisions on the LW reflect

these principles. Advocates of LW emphasise such alignment with core business objectives (Ptashnick & Zubeir, 2015; Werner, 2021; Werner & Lim, 2017), a view supported by surveys showing that over 80 per cent of LW employers highlight its importance (Heery et al., 2017). For many organisations, LW is integrated into business strategy to secure employee financial security and improve customer service (Werner & Lim, 2017). For example, one company explicitly linked LW to ensuring employees' financial security and delivering "*the best level of customer service*" (Werner & Lim, 2017, p. 857).

Employers acknowledge that diverse values shape their decisions and that organisational philosophies and priorities differ. As noted by an employer: "*The difficulty for me is that I work for a company that values training and development, and career development is something we have always done. But I realise that there are many organisations that do not necessarily have the same philosophy … and don't focus on fair pay ...*" (Walmsley et al., 2018, p. 262).

Sub-theme 2: Process before decision-making

This sub-theme explores the multi-layered process employers undertake before committing to LW. Steps include board and stakeholder discussions (Carson, 2022; Prowse et al., 2017), cost impact analyses (Egels-Zenden, 2015; Prowse & Fells, 2016), pilot testing (Egels-Zenden, 2015; Tarnovskaya et al., 2022), developing performance indices, forming collaboratives (Tarnovskaya et al., 2022), and establishing fairness commissions (Dabinett et al., 2016; Johnson, 2017). For example, one organisation assessed LW feasibility through multiple cost calculations, using Fair Wear Foundation's methods, employee estimates and partner assessments, demonstrating its commitment to ensuring fairness for both employers and employees (Egels-Zenden, 2015). Seeking employee consent further reinforces perceptions of fairness in wage adjustments (Hodgetts, 2022; Werner & Lim, 2017).

Against the backdrop of a government emphasising fairness and striving to be the fairest city in the country (Dabinett et al., 2016), a proactive step was taken to form a commission to advise on fairness before considering the introduction of LW. As a result, 23 local authorities in the UK, including Cardiff, formed the Fairness Commission. This commission produced a report that looked at key issues such as jobs and wages, and ultimately proposed the introduction of LW. Executive

committees of leaders from the private, academic and public sectors were also formed to lobby for its implementation citywide (Dabinett et al., 2016). Through frequent meetings and discussions, these initiatives encouraged organisations to reconsider their stance, leading some to adopt LW.

Sub-Theme 3: Balance in decision-making

Employers carefully evaluate the advantages and drawbacks before adopting LW (Hodgetts et al., 2022). Affordability concerns (Werner & Lim, 2017) serve as a crucial reality check, requiring a balance between meeting wage demands and safeguarding organisational sustainability (Walmsley et al., 2018).

Sub-Theme 4: Creative ways to overcome challenges

LW employers adopt inventive strategies to address associated challenges. These include foregoing expensive consultants, limiting new hires, reducing subcontracting (Prowse & Fells, 2016), adjusting prices, adopting cost-effective technologies (Werner & Lim, 2017), integrating expenses into financial plans (Reynolds & Vortkamp, 2005) and seeking subsidies from contractors (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2015). Some offset costs through productivity gains (Werner & Lim, 2017), while others manage expectations, viewing increased costs as anticipated (Walmsley et al., 2018).

Theme 2: Implementation costs

This theme illustrates one of the key approaches to supporting or rejecting LW. It looks at employers' analyses and assessments of the costs of introducing LW and highlights their assessment of companies' ability to pay as part of the decision-making process.

Firstly, employers begin by assessing the direct costs of implementing LW, which include a large proportion of low-paid employees, limited resources (Prowse & Fells, 2016) and rising LW rates (Werner & Lim, 2017). Passing these costs to customers poses risk of reduced demand (Parker et al., 2022), reinforcing concerns about LW's expense and discouraging adoption. However, some organisations find the transition manageable when wages already exceed LW (Grant & Trautner, 2004; Werner, 2021), only a small workforce is affected (Johnson, 2017; Reynolds & Vortkamp, 2005; Werner & Lim, 2017; Zeng & Honig,

2015), increases are marginal (Egel-Zenden, 2015; Werner, 2021), or costs are balanced by resulting benefits (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2015; Werner, 2021).

Secondly, the pay gap is a significant concern in evaluating the fairness of LW, especially across employee groups. While some advocate reducing wage disparities (Hodgetts et al., 2022; Jaarsveld et al., 2022), others favour maintaining the status quo (Hodgetts et al., 2022; Walmsley, 2018), arguing that narrowing gaps may demoralise long-serving employees (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2015; Werner & Lim, 2017). This resistance aligns with distributive justice and merit principles, which emphasise compensation that reflects duties and responsibilities, particularly in supervisory roles.

Finally, hidden costs such as administrative adjustments, further add to the financial impact of implementing LW. Organisations often face extensive salary revisions affecting most employees (Reynolds & Vortkamp, 2005; Werner & Lim, 2017), while regulatory paperwork creates additional burdens (Grant & Trautner, 2004). These unanticipated expenses, shaped by complex organisational factors (Parker et al., 2022), alongside wage differentials underscore the practical challenges of adopting LW.

The sub-themes reveal the practical challenges of implementing LW. While employers may accept LW as a basic requirement, they often refrain from adoption when costs are prohibitive (Parker et al., 2022). This reflects the moral-profit dilemma, where employers acknowledge the importance of fair wages, but are reluctant to risk profitability (Walmsley et al., 2018).

Theme 3: Perceived benefits

In contrast to the previous theme, this theme highlights employers' considerations of the benefits of adopting LW, particularly reputational, organisational and business advantages.

Reputation emerges as a key factor in decision-making. While opponents perceive little reputational value in LW (Hodgetts et al., 2022), proponents argue that it fosters trust, strengthens customer retention and attraction, creates new business opportunities (e.g. Werner, 2021; Werner & Lim, 2017) and helps secure projects from local authorities (Jaarsveld et al., 2022; Johnson, 2017; Werner, 2021).

A systematic review by Gomez-Trujillo et al. (2020) further supports a positive association between reputation and financial performance, noting additional benefits such as talent attraction, crisis resilience and improved relations with government and society. The findings emphasise the significance of reputational advantage in sustaining organisational viability.

Employers also recognise organisational benefits of LW, including improved employee attitudes and behaviours such as job satisfaction, morale, motivation, engagement and productivity (Tarnovskaya et al., 2022; Walmsley, 2018; Werner & Lim, 2017). In addition, personnel-related advantages include retaining skilled employees, reducing turnover, securing good talent, as well as reducing training needs and frequency (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2015; Werner, 2021). As one employer observed, "*without paying a decent wage 'good people' would leave the business*" (Werner, 2021, p. 5).

Finally, employers evaluate the balance between the costs and benefits of implementing LW. Many conclude that the benefits outweigh the costs, contributing to improved funding and overall organisational success (Jaarsveld et al., 2022). This strategic assessment emphasises LW's positive impact for both employers and employees.

Theme 4: External interventions

The final procedural justice theme identified in this study is external intervention, which highlights how external factors, including labour unions, politicians, campaigners, other business owners and local authorities influence employers' decisions to support or oppose LW.

Politicians and political parties are among the strongest advocates (Clain, 2012). In the UK, Bradford City Council adopted LW following a narrow Labour majority (Prowse & Fells, 216), while Sheffield implemented LW and lobbied other political leaders to pursue its goal of becoming the fairest city in the country (Dabinett et al., 2016). Municipal adoption also served as a model for other organisations (Heery et al., 2017; Jaarsveld et al., 2022). In the US, LW legislation is more likely to be passed in regions with Democratic voter majorities and strong public sector unions (Clain, 2012). Local governments have also linked contracting to LW compliance, requiring companies to pay LW to secure contracts (Johnson, 2017), or obligating appointed contractors

to extend LW to their employees (Grant & Trautner, 2004; Reynolds, 2005). However, evidence show that some contractors fail to honour these commitments, treating LW primarily as a business strategy rather than a moral obligation (Luce, 2014).

Labour unions are among the most prominent advocates for the LW, as they regularly negotiate wage arrangements with employers on behalf of their members (Prowse & Fells, 2016). The role of the union is to negotiate wages with employers for their members. Advocacy groups, including not-for-profit organisations and accreditation bodies such as Citizens UK and Living Wage Aotearoa, play a central role in LW campaigns in the UK and New Zealand, promoting initiatives and encouraging employer accreditation (Prowse & Fells, 2016). These efforts have prompted many employers to consider adoption. Nonetheless, some employers are influenced less by government, unions or pressure groups, and more by media coverage and the perceived business benefits (Carson, 2022).

Market pressure also influences employers' decisions, as strategies to attract and retain top talent increasingly align with labour market demands for LW (Hodgetts et al., 2022). As one employer noted, "*in terms of recruitment, which I do a lot of, I think the market was starting to expect a living wage from employers. I think particularly the kind of brand that we like to aim for, much talent we were recruiting were already demanding that*" (p. 9). Such pressures may therefore drive employers to adopt LW.

Interactional Justice

Interactional justice refers to the fairness perceived by individuals based on how outcomes and procedures are communicated, whether information is thoroughly explained (interpersonal justice) and/or in a way that conveys respect and dignity (informational justice) (Greenberg, 2009). In this study, it refers to how employers communicate the process and outcomes of supporting or rejecting LW to employees, either directly, indirectly or not at all, to ensure fairness. In cases of involuntary regulation, interactional justice reflects how authorities communicate LW regulations to employers, shaping their perceptions of fairness and decision-making.

Theme 1: Direct communication

Employers who favour direct employee involvement in decision-making communicate their commitment to paying the LW by consulting employees and obtaining their consent prior to implementation (Werner & Lim, 2017). Some host a series of national events to celebrate LW adoption (Prowse & Dobbins, 2017), while others adopt employee-led approaches, such as monthly negotiations that allow more managerial flexibility in recognition and rewards (Parker et al., 2022). These practises reflect informational and interpersonal justice, as employers engage in open communication, seek employee input and respect their views.

Theme 2: Indirect communication

Employers may also communicate their decisions indirectly through negotiations with trade unions and associations (Heery et al., 2017) or, in the case of political institutions, through political manifestos (Prowse & Fells, 2016). Accreditation or displaying a 'badge' as LW employers further serves as implicit communication of pay practises (Carson, 2022; Werner, 2021). However, this study found limited evidence of how employers directly communicating such decisions to employees.

Theme 3: No communication

In some cases, employers do not communicate their decisions, leaving employees to speculate about wage allocations. For example, employees may question why some colleagues receive LW bonus while others are excluded (Egel-Zenden, 2015). This reflects the top-down nature of pay decisions, where management determines outcomes without employee involvement. Such lack of communication can undermine perceptions of fairness, despite when employers intend to ensure fair pay. Figure 2 summarises the findings.

Conclusion

The decision to support or reject the LW is fundamentally a question of sustainability for individuals, society and businesses LW promotes a dignified life, alleviates financial burdens, and enables families to thrive and participate in social activities, thereby strengthening society and reducing poverty. It also benefits the economy by enhancing business reputation, improving workforce quality and increasing purchasing power. However, associated costs may jeopardise business viability.
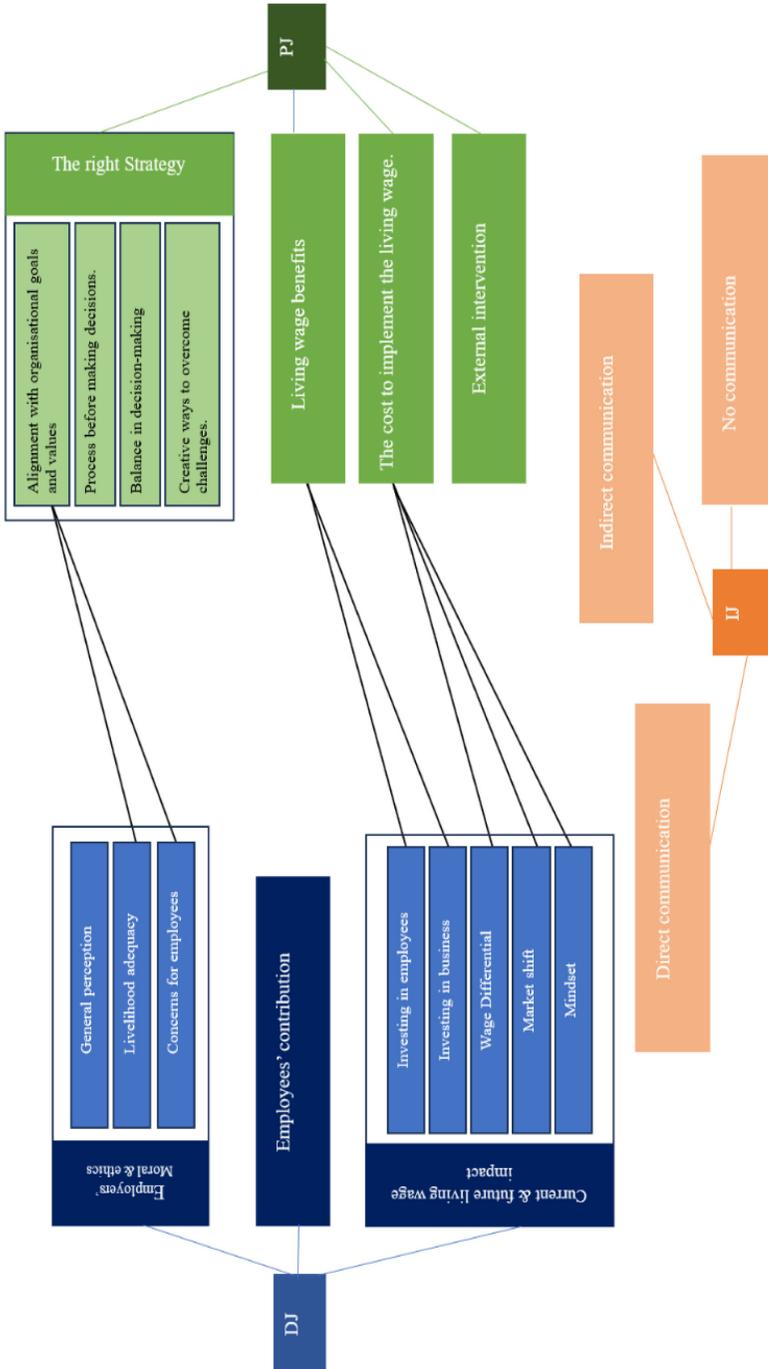
Figure 2: Employers' motivation to support or reject LW.

The decision to support or reject LW is a complex process guided by principles of justice and fairness. A fair outcome requires consideration of both moral values and strategic factors from the perspective of organisational justice. Employers may support LW to assist employees and their families, yet financial constraints can limit implementation. Strategically, LW may be adopted to enhance the organisational reputation, drive growth and differentiate from competitors. This process illustrates the interaction between different types of justice dimensions, i.e., distributive justice in determining fair outcomes, procedural justice in weighing costs and benefits and interactional justice in communicating intentions and decisions.

Nevertheless, this study is not without its limitations. It focuses exclusively on peer-reviewed journals and excludes other sources such as dissertations and grey literature. Nonetheless, this study offers valuable insights into the decision-making processes that shape employers' support for or rejection of LW and their pursuit of fair decision.

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Prophetic Model of Islamic Spiritual Care from Muslim Professional Practitioners' Perspectives: A Systematic Review within the Ṭibb Nabawī Genre

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Abstract: This study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) to identify themes of Islamic spiritual care (ISC) within the literature of Muslim practitioners and their equivalent in *Ṭibb Nabawī (TN)* genre, by examining the *ḥadīths* used to derive a Prophetic framework for Islamic spiritual care. Reviewing 18 selected sources, this study adheres to PRISMA guidelines and employs the PICo framework to explore the Prophetic model from professional practitioners' perspectives. Findings indicate the use of approximately 75 *ḥadīths* across 16 sub-themes, with 14 of them aligning with *Ṭibb Nabawī* genre, highlighting the significance of *ḥadīth* in Islamic spiritual care. The study recommends further research to develop a comprehensive Prophetic framework by incorporating the element of physical medication, in addition to integrating all relevant *ḥadīths* and elements of *tasawuf*, offering a holistic approach to Islamic spiritual care. This research is a pioneering SLR in integrating ISC with TN.

Keywords: Islamic spiritual care, Muslims chaplain, *ḥadīth*, SLR, *Ṭibb Nabawī*

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Abstrak: Kajian ini menggunakan tinjauan literatur sistematik untuk merumuskan kerangka Nabawi bagi penjagaan spiritual Islam dengan mengenal pasti tema-tema dalam literatur pengamal profesional Muslim berjajaran dengan tema dalam genre *Ṭibb Nabawī* melalui penelitian *ḥadīth* yang digunakan. Dengan mengkaji 18 sumber terpilih, kajian ini mematuhi garis panduan PRISMA dan PICo. Dapatan menunjukkan penggunaan sekitar 75 *ḥadīth* merentasi 16 sub-tema; 14 daripadanya adalah sejajar dengan genre *Ṭibb Nabawī*, membuktikan kepentingan *ḥadīth* dalam bidang penjagaan kesihatan spiritual Islam. Kajian ini mencadangkan penyelidikan lanjut untuk membangunkan kerangka yang komprehensif dengan menggabungkan elemen perubatan fizikal, selain daripada mengintegrasikan semua *ḥadīth* yang relevan dan elemen *tasawuf*, bagi menawarkan pendekatan holistik kepada penjagaan spiritual Islam. Kajian ini adalah perintis dalam mengintegrasikan bidang penjagaan spiritual Islam dengan perubatan Nabawi.

Kata kunci: penjagaan spiritual Islam, professional, *ḥadīth*, tinjauan literatur sistematik, *Ṭibb Nabawī*

Introduction

Spiritual care—often referred to as pastoral care or chaplaincy—denotes religious services provided by trained professionals within institutional settings such as prisons, schools, hospitals, and the armed forces. It primarily addresses matters of spirituality, a core concern of religions, though each faith approaches it from its own worldview. Islamic spiritual care extends this concept by offering an Islamic framework that integrates psychology, theology, Islamic law, counselling, and philosophy. Although the institutional practice has Christian origins, Long and Ansari (2018) argue that it is nonetheless authentically Islamic.

In healthcare settings, a more concise definition for Islamic spiritual care, drawn from multiple studies (Shariff, 2021; Shafi et al., 2021; Baig Isgandarova, 2023) could possibly be "the professional provision of spiritual and religious support to Muslim patients and their families in clinical settings." Grounded in Islamic theology, ethics and psychology, it integrates with medical care by facilitating worship, offering pastoral and moral guidance, and supporting patients' meaning-making, dignity and hope—especially during illness and end-of-life—to promote holistic wellbeing.

On the other hand, Prophetic medicine (*Ṭibb Nabawī,* TN) is a distinct genre of *ḥadīth* literature focusing on health and medical issues

(Perho, 1995). This review explores the *ḥadīth* roots of Islamic spiritual care through the lens of TN to identify its potential contributions to contemporary healthcare - both physical and psychological. Given that research on Islamic spiritual care lags behind fields such as Islamic banking, finance, and education (Mohd. Marzuki et al., 2024), a systematic literature review linking it with the *ḥadīth* tradition, particularly the TN genre, represents a novel undertaking.

This study undertakes a systematic literature review to assess how *ḥadīth* is used in spiritual care literature, focusing on the *Ṭibb Nabawī* genre. It analyses existing studies to identify themes, perspectives, and insights on incorporating *ḥadīth* into spiritual care within this tradition, thereby clarifying the relationship between expert Islamic spiritual care literature and *Ṭibb Nabawī* specifically, as well as between Islamic teachings, Prophetic traditions, and contemporary healthcare more broadly. Given word-count limits, the discussion is necessarily focused and concise.

Methodology

The review protocol

This systematic review adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to achieve its objective and ensure a comprehensive and transparent review process**.** Based on this review protocol, the authors initiated the systematic literature review (SLR) by formulating appropriate research questions. They then detailed the systematic searching strategy, which consists of three main sub-processes: identification, screening (including inclusion and exclusion criteria), and eligibility. Finally, the authors described the data abstraction process and how the abstracted data were analysed and validated.

Formulation of research questions

In order to give direction and focus on the review topic, the main research question for this study was formulated based on the PICo framework. It is well-known grounded on three primary concepts: Population or Problem, Interest, and Context, consequently directed to the main question: *How do Muslim professional practitioners represent Ṭibb al-Nabawī in the Islamic Spiritual Care literature, and what model can*

be drawn from the combined literature on Ṭibb al-Nabawī and Islamic Spiritual Care?

Table 1: PICo Framework

P: Population or Problem	I: Interest	C: Context
Ḥadīth (Prophetic Model)	*Islamic Spiritual Care from Muslim Professional Practitioners' Perspectives*	*Ṭibb Nabawī* Genre

Based on PICo, research questions and objectives were developed as follows:

Table 2: Research Questions and Objectives

	Research Question	Research Objective
1	What themes of Islamic Spiritual Care (ISC) are incorporated from *ḥadīth* in the *Muslim Professional Practitioners'* literature? Are there equivalent themes in the *Ṭibb Nabawī* genre?	To identify the themes of Islamic Spiritual Care (ISC) that are incorporated in the *Muslim Professional Practitioners'* literature; and equivalent themes in the *Ṭibb Nabawī* genre.
2	Which *ḥadīths* are utilised by *Muslim Professional Practitioners* related to these themes in their literature?	To describe the *ḥadīths* that are utilised in relation to these identified themes by *Muslim Professional Practitioners* in their literature.
3	How can the Prophetic framework for Islamic Spiritual Care be derived from the themes and *ḥadīths*?	To derive a Prophetic framework for Islamic Spiritual Care from the themes and *ḥadīths*.

The selection of works within the *Ṭibb Nabawī* genre in this study is guided by their status as primary sources and by Perho's (1995) analysis. *al-Dāʾ wa-al-Dawāʾ,* though different from the others, was chosen for its focus on spiritual maladies and its authorship by Ibn Qayyim—also the author of *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*—aligning it with the themes of spiritual care and chaplaincy. Nevertheless, given the breadth and historical development of the *Ṭibb Nabawī* corpus and its diverse authorship, the presence or absence of direct correspondences with Islamic Spiritual Care (ISC) themes remains inconclusive; this study thus offers only a preliminary exploration of the genre's congruence with ISC.

Table 3: List of books

No	List of Books
1.	*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*: "Kitāb al-Marḍā" and "Kitāb al-Ṭibb"
2.	*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: "Bāb al-Ṭibb wa al-Maraḍ wa al-Ruqā" in "Kitāb al-Salām"
3.	*Sunan al-Nasā'i*: No relevant chapters
4.	*Sunan Abū* Dāūd: "Kitāb al-Ṭibb"
5.	*Sunan al-Tirmidhī*: "Kitāb al-Ṭibb"
6.	*Sunan Ibn Mājah*: "Kitāb al-Ṭibb"
7.	*Al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah
8.	*Al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* by al-Dhahabi.
9.	*Al-Dā'wa al-Dawā'* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah.

Systematic searching strategies

The systematic searching strategy comprises three main processes: identification, screening, and eligibility.

Identification

Relevant studies were gathered using a search-string method with "Islamic Spiritual Care" as the main keyword, varied with related terms (see tables) to broaden retrieval. Searches were conducted in Dimensions AI, Scopus, and Google Scholar, limited to English, Malay/Indonesian, and Arabic publications from 2011 onward to capture recent research. The first identified ISC article appeared in 2011 (Marzuki et al., 2024). Across the three databases, 326 titles were found; *Mantle of Mercy: Islamic Chaplaincy in North America*—frequently cited in secondary sources—was manually added due to the authors' extensive expertise, bringing the total to 327.

Table 4: Keywords and synonyms

Keywords	Synonyms (and equivalent)
Islamic	Muslim, Muslims
Spiritual Care	Chaplaincy, Health Care, Pastoral Care, Spiritual healthcare
Ṭibb Nabawī	Prophetic Medicine/medication.

Table 5: The search string

Database	Search string
Dimensions AI	Islamic spiritual care
Scopus	Islamic Spiritual Care AND Prophetic Medicine, Islamic Chaplaincy AND Prophetic Medicine, Islamic Spiritual Care, Islamic Chaplaincy Islamic Pastoral Care
Google Scholar	Islamic spiritual care AND *ḥadīth*, spirituality.

Screening

All 327 articles were screened using predefined criteria via database filters and manual checks based on Table 1 keywords. Of these, 239 were excluded and 30 duplicates removed, leaving 58 for further assessment. Only scholarly monographs, books, and journal articles were included; newspapers and bulletins were excluded.

Table 6: The Inclusion and Exclusion Screening Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2010-2024	<2010
Document type	Article journal chapters in book, book series, book monograph	conference proceeding, newspapers and bulletins, unpublished
Language	English, Malay/Indonesia, Arabic	English, Malay/Indonesia, Arabic
Regions	Not specified	Not specified

Eligibility

In the eligibility phase, all 58 sources were manually reviewed for compliance with selection criteria. Only works by Muslim practitioners citing *ḥadīth* with proper references were included, verified through author background, methodology, and citations. Eighteen met the criteria; 40 were excluded for lacking Muslim authorship or proper *ḥadīth* references.

Table 7: The Inclusion and Exclusion Eligibility Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Authors	Muslim professional practitioners	Non-Muslim, Non-professional practitioners
Content	With/indicating *ḥadīth* and reference	No *ḥadīth*, No reference

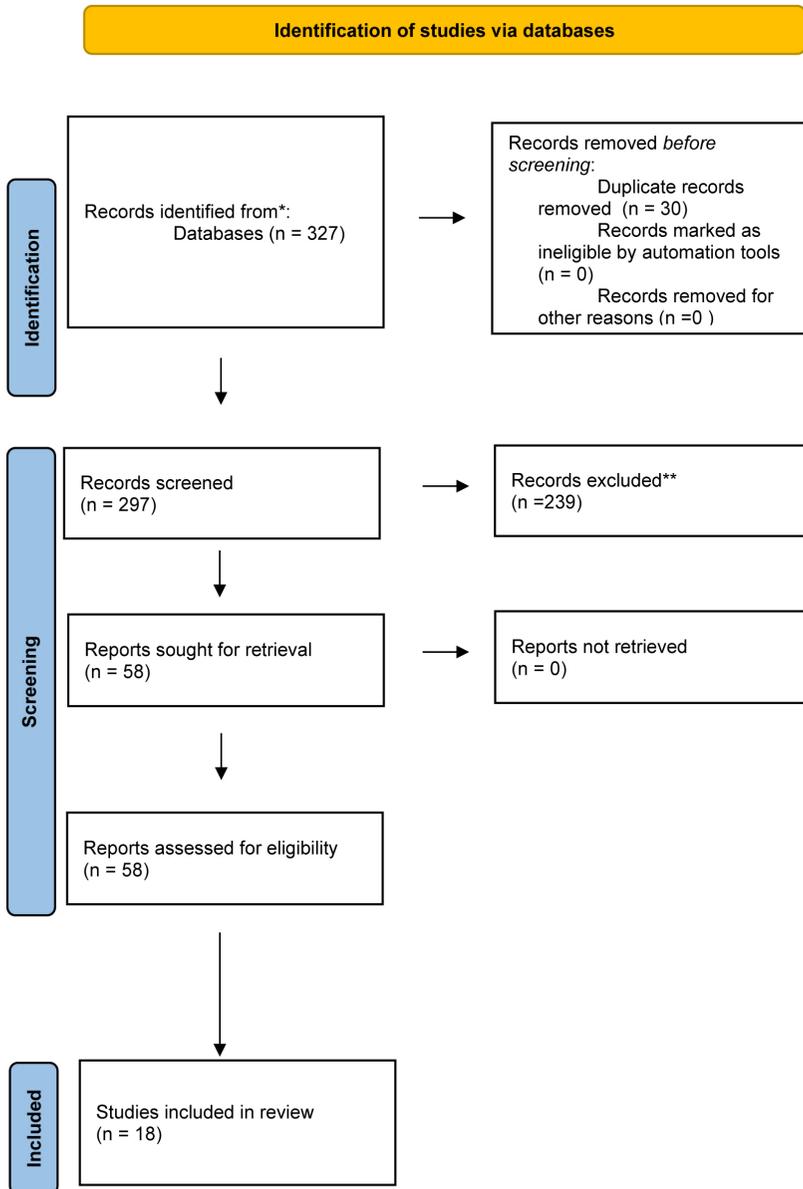Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Adapted with modification from <u>PRISMA 2020 flow diagram —
PRISMA statement (2020)</u> Source: Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71.
doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

Data abstraction and analysis

Data abstraction followed the research questions, extracting relevant information from reviewed studies and organising it into tables. A thematic analysis identified key themes and subthemes using Hvidt et al.'s (2020) classification of spiritual care. Although not focused on Islamic or Muslim perspectives, its three themes—Spiritual Care as Part of Healthcare, Delivering Spiritual Care, and The Role of Spirituality—were adopted and all themes validated by two experts.
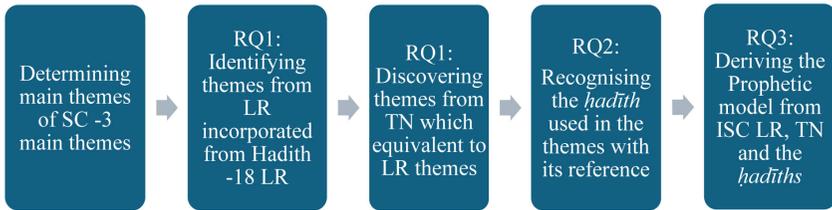
| Determining main themes of SC -3 main themes | → | RQ1: Identifying themes from LR incorporated from Hadith -18 LR | → | RQ1: Discovering themes from TN which equivalent to LR themes | → | RQ2: Recognising the *ḥadīth* used in the themes with its reference | → | RQ3: Deriving the Prophetic model from ISC LR, TN and the *ḥadīths* |

Figure 2: Flow Data Abstraction and Analysis Process

RESULT

Background of the selected literature

This review examines 18 selected literature according to the criteria – comprising articles, monographs, and book chapters – 17 in English and one in Indonesian, all appropriately referenced within the themes.

The themes and the sub-themes

The thematic analysis of the main themes follows the classification by Hvidt N.C. et al. (2020). However, the sub-themes were developed independently based on the data from the selected literature. This analysis produced two sub-themes for the first main theme, six for the second, and 14 for the third.

Table 8: Equivalency of Themes

Main Themes	Sub-Themes (from LR)	TN Theme
Spiritual care as an integral but underdeveloped part of healthcare	Visiting the sick (TN)	Yes
	Women as leaders and chaplains (No TN)	Yes

Delivering spiritual care	Emotional Intelligence	Yes
	The Importance of good company	No
	Being merciful and compassionate	Yes
	Having proper knowledge as healers/carers/chaplains	Yes
	Fiqh of the sick/ill	Yes
	Istiqāmah	No
The role of spirituality	The illnesses of the heart	Yes
	For every sickness there is a cure	Yes
	The Prophet's life as the main source for Islamic Spiritual Care	Yes
	Repentance as a form of healing	Yes
	Spiritual Care as Shepherding	No
	The philosophy of sickness and health	Yes
	The reward of being patient with sickness	Yes
	All humans are equals in worldly status	No
	Collectivism	No
	The Centrality of the Heart	Yes
	The Status of Man/*Insā*n	No
	Kashf-Inkishāf (Mystical Unveiling and Manifestation)	No
	*Muraqaba*h as a form of Healing	Yes
	Purifying Intentions	No

Spiritual Care as An Integral Part of Healthcare

Hvidt et al. (2020) found that healthcare professionals—doctors, nurses, psychologists, and chaplains—often engage in existential discussions with patients, particularly in palliative care. The WHO (2020) identifies four pain dimensions—physical, psychological, psychosocial, and existential—highlighting spiritual care's role in addressing non-physical pain. Relevant *ḥadīth* subthemes here include visiting the sick and women as leaders or chaplains.

A) Visiting the sick

The Prophetic *ḥadīth* encouraging visiting the sick forms a key foundation of Islamic spiritual care and underpins the principle of

khidmah (hospitality) (Baig, 2022). This is reflected in Laird et al. (2021), who cite *ḥadīths* from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim,* no. 2569 and *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 969; Isgandarova (2012) from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* no. 3046; and Candir (2022) from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 6551.

In the *Ṭibb Nabawī* genre, this theme appears in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in chapter(s) "Bāb wujūb 'iyādat al-Marīḍ," "Bāb 'iyādat al-Mughmā 'alayh," "Bāb 'iyādat al-Nisāʾi al-Rijāla," *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* in "Bāb mā jāʾa fī 'iyādat al-Marīḍ," and Ibn Qayyim's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*, in chapter "Hadyuhu… fī 'ilāj al-Marḍā bi tatyīb nufūsihim wa taqwiyati qulūbihim." It also appears indirectly in chapters emphasising empathy, such as "Bāb al-Marīḍ yashtahī al-Shayʾ'" in *Sunan Ibn Mājah* and "Bāb mā jāʾa lā tukrihū marḍākum 'alā al-Ṭaʿām wa al-Sharāb" in *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*.

B) Women as leaders and chaplains

The second subtheme is uniquely addressed by Isgandarova (2022) in "Female Voices in Islamic Spiritual Care: Tensions and Achievements." It centres on *ḥadīths* narrated by ʿĀʾishah (PBUH) and Umm Salamah (PBUH), depicting women companions as imams leading prayer. These *ḥadīths* are recorded in *Musnad* ʿAbd *al-Razzāq*, no. 5086, *al-Dāruquṭnī*, no. 404, *al-Bayḥaqī*, no. 131, and *Ibn Abī Shaybah*, no. 89. Another cited proof is the *ḥadīth* of Umm Waraqah, who had a male *muʾadhdhin* while leading prayer herself, recorded in *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, nos. 591–592.

In TN, female roles as healers appear in *al-Bukhārī* in the chapter "Hal yudāwī al-Rajul al-Marʾah wa al-Marʾah al-Rajul" and in al-Dhahabī's TN; "Fī ibāḥat mudāwat al-Nisāʾ li al-Rajul ghayr dhāt al-Maḥārim wa al-Rijāl li al-Nisāʾ."

Delivering Spiritual Care

According to Hvidt et al. (2020), the theme of "Delivering Spiritual Care" encompasses the values and qualities required of chaplains and healthcare workers when attending patients. *Ḥadīth*-based subthemes identified in the literature include emotional intelligence, good company, mercy and compassion, sound knowledge as healers or carers, *fiqh* of the sick, and *istiqāmah*.

A) *Emotional Intelligence*

The "Emotional Intelligence" theme covers aspects including regulating emotions, communication skills and empathy. The *ḥadīths* that are under this theme are the Prophet's directives to ease difficulties, cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 69 by Isgandarova (2022) and Bajwa (2022), and his response to his son's death, cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1241 by Keshavarsi and Keshavarsi (2021) and Sultan (2022). Keshavarsi and Keshavarsi (2021) further cited *ḥadīths* on the Qur'an's revelation with sorrow, cited from *Ibn Mājah*, no. 1337, the value of patience at calamity's onset cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1283, cautions against excessive love that leads to blindness cited from *Sunan Abū* Dāūd, no. 5130, on a balanced love and hate cited from *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 1997, on love towards the Prophet cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no.76, the *ḥadīth* of *jawāmi' al-kalim* cited from *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no 215.

Additionally, Yusuf and Elhaddad (2021) highlight *ḥadīths* on the heart as moral compass from Muslim, no. 2553, disciplining the *nafs* from *al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2459, and the 'happy' and 'wretched' from *al-Bukhārī*, no. 3028. Finally, Pethic (2022) highlights the *ḥadīth* on planting even at the world's end from *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 12902, demonstrating the spirit of hope.

These perspectives, however, do not appear directly in the *Ṭibb Nabawī* genre or *Sunan* books but can be inferred indirectly from chapters that at first seem unrelated to emotional intelligence. In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, relevant themes include patience with sickness which appear in chapters titled "Bāb mā jā'a fī kaffārat al-Marīḍ," "Bāb faḍl man yusra'u min al-Rīh," "Bāb faḍli man dhahaba basaruhu," and etiquette of visiting the sick under chapters "Bāb 'iyādat al-Nisā'i al-Rijāla," "Bāb 'iyādat al-Ṣibyān," "Bāb 'iyādat al-Aʿrāb," "Bāb 'iyādat al-Mushrik," "Bāb waḍ' al-Yad 'ala al-Marīḍ," "Bāb mā yuqāl li al-Mariḍ wa mā yūjib," "Bāb du'ā al-'Āʾid li al-Marīḍ." Similar themes appear in al-Dhahabī's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* on emotional control and the Prophet as bringer of cure, and in Ibn Qayyim's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* on understanding *Qaḍāʾ* and *Qadar* and following the Prophet's sunnah. Ibn Qayyim's *al-Dāʾ wa al-Dawāʾ* further highlights supplication and God as the sole source of true happiness.

B) The Importance of good company

This theme is noted to have appeared only once through the *ḥadīth* on the importance of having a good *khalīl* (close friend) cited from *Sunan Abū* Dāwūd, no. 4833, in a book chapter by Khan et al. (2021). This theme, however, is not found in neither of the *Sunan* books regarding medicine and illnesses nor the *Ṭibb Nabawī* books.

C) Being merciful and compassionate

This theme is also one of the dominant themes in Islamic spiritual care. Isgandarova (2012) highlights the *ḥadīth* of the likeness of the Muslims to a body, cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim,* no 2586 and the *ḥadīth musalsal bi al-Raḥmah* cited from *Sunan Abū* Dāūd, no. 4941, while Baig (2023) utilises the *ḥadīth* recorded by Ibn Ḥibbān, which says, "the servant does not reach the reality of faith until he loves for the people what he loves for himself of goodness." In a book chapter titled "The Islamic Theology Behind Spiritual Care and Hospital Chaplaincy" by Baig (2022), the *ḥadīth* where the Prophet mentioned that the most beloved to God are those most caring to God's creation, taken from *al-Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ* by al-Ṭabarānī, no. 6026 was used, alongside a few other *ḥadīth*s, which are the *ḥadīth* of *nughair,* cited from *al-Bukhārī,* no. 6129, the *ḥadīth* where the Prophet stood up during the presence of a Jewish corpse cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* no. 1250, and the *ḥadīth* on the tragedy of the Ṭā'if episode, cited from Mubarakfuri's *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*. Another *ḥadīth* is "none of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself" cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* by Rassool (2015) while Khan et al. (2021) used the *ḥadīth* "whoever relieves a Muslim of a burden from the burdens of the world, Allah will relieve him of a burden from the burdens on the Day of Judgement..." which he cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim.* Additionally, Keshavarzi and Keshavarzi (2021) employed a few *ḥadīth*s under this theme, where all of them depicted the Prophet's state of deep empathy. They are the *ḥadīth*s where the Prophet was described to have been continuously in a state of internal grief and concern, cited from *Sunan'al-Tirmidhī*, no. 215, another is the Prophet's continuous prayers for the relief of the believers cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* no. 683, and the *ḥadīth* of when the Prophet himself shed tears upon hearing the pain inflicted on the believers, cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 63. Finally, in the book *Mantle of Mercy*, two chapters by different authors highlighted *ḥadīth*s under this theme, one

of them is the *ḥadīth Qudsi* where Allah SWT forbids injustice upon Himself cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2577, noted by Quraishi and Vajid (2022), while Shuayb (2022) noted the Prophet's way in dealing with the *mukhannath* as an example of his compassion, which he cited from *Sunan Abū* Dāūd, no. 4928.

In the TN genre, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* presents two themes in line with the current one, both from Kitāb al-Marḍā, which are the encouragement to visit the sick, and the etiquette of visiting the sick. The former encompasses chapters such as "Bāb wujūbi ʿiyādat al-Mariḍ" while the latter, chapters such as "Bāb ʿiyādat al-Nisāʾi al-Rijāla," "Bāb ʿiyādat al-Ṣibyān," "Bāb ʿiyādat al-Aʿrāb," "Bāb ʿiyadat al-Mushrik," "Bāb waḍʾ al-Yad ʿalā al-Marīḍ," "Bāb mā yuqāl li al-Marīḍ wa mā yujīb," and "Bāb duʾa al-Āʾid li al-Marīḍ." In *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, from Kitāb al-Ṭibb, this falls under the theme of appreciating the sick, in chapter titled "Bāb al-Marīḍ yashtahī al-Shayʾ" and in *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* in the chapter titled "Bāb mā jāʾa lā tukrihū marḍākum ʿalā al-Ṭaʿām wa al-Sharāb."

D) Having proper knowledge as healers/carers/chaplains

This theme emphasises the importance of knowledge, further highlighting it as one of the key concepts of the Islamic worldview. Isgandarova (2014) in her paper titled "The Evolution of Islamic Spiritual Care and Counselling in Ontario" utilised the well-known *ḥadīth* of palm-tree fertilising whereupon the Prophet famously uttered the words "You know better than I on matters pertaining to this world" cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Another prominent *ḥadīth* on wisdom where the Prophet describes it as the "lost commodity of the believers" which was cited from *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, was also quoted by Khan et al. (2021) and Pethic (2022). Awaad et al. (2021) on the other hand, made use of the *ḥadīth* on the benefit of seeking knowledge taken from *Sunan al-Tirmidhī,* no. 2646, while the *ḥadīth* on the encouragement to speak to people according to their cognitive capacities, taken from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 199 was quoted thrice; once by Keshavarsi and Nsour (2021), another one by Ali (2022) and also Ayyubi (2022), both in the same book titled *Mantle of Mercy*. Finally, Keshavarsi and Ali (2021) quoted the *ḥadīth* wherein the Prophet mentioned that "There are vessels from the inhabitants of the earth that are for Allah, and the vessel of your Lord is the hearts of His righteous slaves. The most beloved of

them to Him are the softest and most tender (hearted)," which they cited from *Mu'jam al-Ṭabrānī*.

This theme can be seen as present in TN literature albeit indirectly especially in the canonical *ḥadīth* books, like many others. In the books of Sunan, it can be on par with the theme on the rulings of seeking for doctors found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in Kitāb al-Ṭibb, from the chapter titled "Hal yudāwī al-Rajul al-Mar'ah wa al-Mar'ah al-Rajul" while in *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, also in Kitāb al-Ṭibb, under the chapter titled "Bāb man taṭabbaba wa lam yu'lam minhu ṭibbun." In *Ṭibb Nabawī* books proper, this subtheme is found to be directly present. In al-Dhahabi's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*, this falls under the theme of Being Ethical Doctors and The Importance of Learning Medicine which can be found in chapters titled "Fī naṣa'ih li al-Ṭabīb," "Faṣlun fī al-Ḥathth 'alā ta'līm al-Ṭibb," and "Ijtināb man la yaḥsun al-Ṭibb," while in Ibn Qayyim's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*, it can be found in the chapter titled "Faṣlun fī hadyihī ṣallallāhu 'alaihi wa sallam fī al-Irshādi ilā mu'ālajati aḥdhaqi al-Ṭabībiyyīn."

E) Fiqh of the sick/ill

This theme primarily addresses Islamic legal matters concerning worship (*fiqh al-ʿibādah*). It includes the *ḥadīth* on how the sick perform *ṣalāt*, cited from *Sunan Abū* Dāūd, no. 952 (Ibin Hasani, 2018); the *ḥadīth* forbidding wishing for death, cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* no. 575, touching on euthanasia (Rassool, 2015); and the legal maxim "lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār" from the *ḥadīth* recorded by al-Baihaqī, no. 11384 (Rassool, 2015). Also under this theme is the *ḥadīth* declaring the earth a place of prostration, cited from *al-Nasā'ī*, no. 736 (Ali, 2022), which serves as a principle for worship rulings.

In the TN genre, this theme is found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, in Kitāb al-Marḍā, under the chapter titled "idha 'āda mariḍan fa ḥaḍarat al-ṣalāt fa ṣallā bihim jamā'atan," "Bāb tamannī al-Marīḍ al-Mawt," and "Bāb wuḍū' al-ʿĀʾid li al-Marīḍ." In *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, it can be included under the chapter titled "Bāb mā jā'a fī man qatala nafsahu bi summin au ghayrihi," "Bāb mā jā'a fī karahiyyati al-Tadāwī bi al-Muskir," and "Bāb mā jā'a fi karahiyyati al-Tadāwī bi al-Kayyi," under the theme of the rulings of medication, from *Kitāb al-Ṭibb*. In Ibn Qayyim's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*, this can be considered albeit indirectly, under the general theme that pervades the whole book which is of following the sunnah of the Prophet in times of sickness.

F) Istiqamah

This theme only emerged once among the selected literature of Islamic spiritual care, in a book chapter by Keshavarsi and Nsour (2021)*.* The authors, when discussing the patients' effort in healing themselves, highlighted the need to be consistent "on what is achievable with minimal effort," thus utilised the *ḥadīth* that "...the most beloved actions to Allah are those that are most consistent, even if they are few" cited from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. There is no mention of this theme in the TN books.

The Role of Spirituality

This theme, according to Hvit et al. (2020), highlights the spirituality role which serves as the foundational strength that helps navigate and endure severe crises as spirituality emphasises the connection between an individual self (body, mind and spirit/soul) and that individual's dynamic dimensions of life.

A) The illnesses of the heart

The exploration of the illnesses of the heart by Keshavarzi and Ali (2021)*,* reveals the significance of avoiding spiritual "destroyers," and they affirmed that the integrated Islamic therapist is ever aware of the prophetic warnings regarding the three spiritual "destroyers:" avarice that is obeyed, material longing that is complied with, and self-admiration as they referred to *ḥadīth* in *al-Bazzār*, no. 729, and also by al-Mundhirī, no. 3943 in which he grades the *ḥādīth* as *ḥasan* (acceptable). They also highlighted the *ḥadīth* from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, that "he who has an atom's weight of arrogance in his heart will not enter the Jannah."

The similar theme that can be found in TN genre is through Ibn Qayyim al-Jauzi's *Al-Dāʾ wa al-Dawāʾ*, specifically in chapter(s): "al-Āfāt al-Māniʾah min athar al-Duʾā," "Aʾẓam al-Khalq ghururan man ightarra bi al-Dunyā wa ājilihā," "Kullu sharrin wa dāʾin fi al-Dunyā sababuhū al-Dhunūb," "al-Waḥshah fi al-ʿĀṣī bainahū wa bainaLlāh," "Ẓulmah fī al-Qalb," "al-Maʾāṣī tūlid amthāluhā," "al-Maʾāsi tuḍ'ifu al-Qalb ʿan irādatihī," "al-Maʾāsī tudhhibu min al-Qalb istiqbāḥuhā."

B) For every sickness there is a cure

This theme can be found through the discussions by Isgandarova (2011, 2012, 2014, 2023) and Isgandarova and Baig (2023) based on the *ḥadīth*

by al-Bukhārī who mentioned that "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment."

The similar theme addressing "For Every Sickness There is a Cure" can be found in the four Sunans i.e., *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Sunan Abū* Dāūd, Sunan Ibn Mājah, and *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* as all contain sections in their respective Kitāb al-Ṭibb with different chapter title i.e "Bāb mā anzala Llāhu dā'an illā anzala lahū shifā'an" in both *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, "Bāb fī al-Rajuli yatadāwā" in *Sunan Abū* Dāūd, and "Bāb mā jā'a fi al-Dawā›i wa al-Ḥaththi 'alaihi" in *Sunan al-Tirmidhī.* Meanwhile, for both Ibn Qayyim's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* and *al-Dā' wa al-Dawā,' this* theme is mainly addressed in introduction of the books, plus in scattered chapters in *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī.*

C) The Prophet's life as the main source for Islamic Spiritual Care

Keshavarzi and Nsour (2021) highlighted the *ḥadīth* "I was exclusively sent to perfect good character" cited from al-Bukhārī's *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, in supporting the Prophet's life as the main source for Islamic spiritual care.

The Prophet's life as the main source for Islamic spiritual care as a theme can be found in the entire genre of *Ṭibb Nabawī*. Ibn al-Qayyim's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* emphasises the Prophet's guidance in medication, as reflected in the chapter titles themselves "Faṣl fī hadyihī ṣallallāhu 'alaihi wasallam…." Similarly, al-Dhahabi's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* highlights this theme which mainly as acts of worship.

D) Repentance as a form of healing

Repentance as a form of healing is highlighted by Uyun et al. (2019) where they mentioned that the Prophet sought forgiveness from Allah at least one hundred times daily narrated by Muslim, no. 6523, and by sharing the psychological benefits of repentance through the *ḥadīth* "Whoever persists in asking for forgiveness, Allah will grant him relief from every worry, and a way out from every hardship, and will grant him provision from (sources) he could never imagine" citing from *Sunan Ibn Mājah*. Additionally, prayer, described as worship by al-Tirmidhī no. 3247, is a core aspect of Islamic spiritual care, as discussed by Candir (2022) and Latif (2022).

Repentance as a form of healing reflectively can be seen in TN genre in al-Dhahabi's *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* in the theme Remembering Allah; which chapter(s) are scattered, and mainly in the medication that invoke the usage of *ruqyah* like reading *al-Fātihah* to those who were bitten by snakes, and the psychological illnesses like fear-inducing nightmares and obsessions. Meanwhile Ibn Qayyim's *Al-Dā' wa al-Dawā'* theme: God is the only way to attain true and real happiness consisting of Chapter(s): "al-Du'ā min anfa' al-Adwiyah," "li al-Du'ā ma'a al-Nubalā thalāthu maqāmāt," "al-Ilḥāḥ fi al-Du'ā," "al-Āfāt al-Māni›ah min athar al-Du›ā," "Shurūṭ qabūli al-Du›ā," and "al-Ad›iyah allatī hiya miẓinnat al-Ijābah."

E) Spiritual Care as Shepherding

Long and Ansari (2018) as well as Bajwa (2022), have emphasised on Spiritual Care as Shepherding as according to them the metaphor of a shepherd *(rā'ī)* is used by the Prophet to illustrate everyone's duty in his *ḥadīth* "All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock," emphasising that community leaders, husbands, and wives all have responsibilities for those in their care. They also asserted that Al-Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, reinforced this metaphor by likening the Prophet's exhaustive dedication to his community to a shepherd's hard work tending to sheep and goats. However, there is no theme from the TN genre on this.

F) The philosophy of sickness and health

Isgandarova (2011) mentioned that "... the theology of health starts with considering health to be one of the greatest blessings to have been given to human beings" citing al-Bukhārī, while Baig and Isgandarova (2023) highlighted the *ḥadīth* "God has not created a disease without also creating its cure" also citing from *al-Bukhārī*.

The attention to this subtheme can be seen as present in al-Dhahabi's work, where he highlights the condition of good health as the ultimate gift from Allah, under a chapter titled "Min ajzāʾ juzʾ al-ʿIlm wa-aḥwāl badan al-Insān."

G) The reward of being patient with sickness

Rassool (2015) highlighted issue of the reward of being patient with sickness, through the *ḥadīth* "No calamity befalls a Muslim, but that

Allah expiates some of his sins because of it, even though it was the prick he receives from a thorn," where he cited from *al-Bukhārī*. He also mentioned the *ḥadīth* "Patience is light" by Muslim and "No one has been given anything more excellent and more comprehensive than patience" by al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Shuayb (2022) also highlighted the reward of being patient with sickness, referring to the *ḥadīth* "No servant experiences a plague and remains in his town, being patient ... except his reward will be like that of the martyr" which he cited from *al-Bukhārī*.

There are two sources of TN genre which allocated specific theme regarding this; firstly *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* Kitāb al-Marḍā, "Bāb mā jā'a fī kaffārat al-Marīḍ," "Bāb faḍl man yaṣra'u min al-Rīḥ," "Bāb faḍl man dhahaba basaruhu," and secondly *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* by Ibn Qayyim in chapters: "Faṣl fī hadyihī s.a.w fī 'ilāj al-Ṣar'," "Faṣl fī hadyihi s.a.w fī 'ilāj al-Ḥarr," "Faṣl fī hadyihī s.a.w fi 'ilāji karbin," and a special chapter on*:* harf ص on *ṣabr.*

H) All humans are equals in worldly status

Baig in his two different writings "The Islamic Theology Behind Spiritual Care and Hospital Chaplaincy" (2022), and "Islamic Spiritual Care and Negative Religious Coping: Islamic Practical Theology and Psychology of Religion at Crossroads" (2023) emphasised on the worldly equality of all humans by citing the *ḥadīth* saying that "You are all from Adam and Adam is from dust. There is no superiority of white over black, nor of Arab over non-Arab except for God-consciousness" from *Musnad Aḥmad.* Additionally, he (2023) also mentioned another *ḥadīth* that the Prophet stated in a narration, "The servant does not reach the reality of faith until he loves for the people what he loves for himself of goodness" by Ibn Ḥibbān, showing the importance of empathy and selflessness which are significant in spiritual care. However, there is no theme from the TN genre on this either.

I) Collectivism

Rassool (2015) mentioned two *ḥadīth*s related to collectivism: The Prophet said: "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself" citing from IslamToday, and the *ḥadīth* "Can you tell us which kind of wealth is the best, so that we may strive to acquire it?' He said: "The best (wealth) is a remembering tongue (one

which always remembers Allah), a thankful heart, and a believing wife who will help you with your faith" by al-Tirmidhī. Meanwhile, Baig (2022) highlighted *khidmah* (service) as an integral culture, indicating from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* but without mentioning the *ḥadīth*'s wording that the word womb, *raḥm* in Arabic, is derived directly from God's name *al-Raḥmān*, the most compassionate. However, there is no theme from the TN genre on this too.

J) The Centrality of the Heart

Baig (2022) in "The Islamic Theology Behind Spiritual Care and Hospital Chaplaincy" highlighted that the purity of heart is central to one's overall well-being, as he cited the *ḥadīth* from *al-Bukhārī* and *Muslim*: "Surely in the breasts of humanity is a lump of flesh, if sound then the whole body is sound, and if corrupt then the whole body is corrupt. Is it not the heart?," and the *ḥadīth* from *al-Baiḥaqī* "Verily, everything has a polish, and the polish of the heart is the remembrance of Allah Almighty."

This theme appears indirectly in Ibn Qayyim's *al-Dāʾ wa-al-Dawāʾ*, where he stresses avoiding sin as it corrupts the heart. Relevant chapters from the book are mentioned under the subtheme The Illnesses of the Heart.

K) The Status of Man

In "Islamic Spiritual Care and Negative Religious Coping: Islamic Practical Theology and Psychology of Religion at Crossroads," Baig (2023) stressed on the status of man as fashioned and honoured by God, mentioning a *ḥadīth* from *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-*Bukhārī* that the human being is not alone created by God but is shaped "in the image of God."

In *al-Tibb al-Nabawi*, al-Dhahabi has specified a chapter: The Creation of Man and Anatomy of the Human Body, which comes under this theme.

L) Kashf-Inkishāf (Mystical Unveiling and Manifestation)

Khan, et al. (2021) put emphasis on the therapist's characteristics and the state of their own heart, citing the *ḥadīth* from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* and al-Bukhārī's *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*: the Prophet Muhammad said, "A believer is the mirror of a fellow believer." However, there is no theme from the TN genre on this too.

M) Muraqabah as a form of Healing

This theme is explored in different book chapters in the two books: *Applying Islamic principles to clinical mental health care: Introducing traditional Islamically integrated psychotherapy* (2021), and *Mantle of Mercy: Islamic Chaplaincy in North America (2022).* Keshavarzi and Nsour (2021) highlighted the importance of drawing near to God through supererogatory works through the *ḥadīth*, "My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks" by al-Bukhārī.

Meanwhile, Keshavarzi et al. (2021) highlighted the spirituality of *dhikr* and its importance. They mentioned that the Prophet's response to Ubay b. Kaab's commitment to *ṣalawāt*: "If you do so, then all your worries and concerns will be relieved, and all your sins will be forgiven" recorded by al-Tirmidhī, as supportive argument to the calming effect of *dhikr* due to fact that *dhikr* may bring down *barakah* or divine blessings upon the heart of the believer. They also highlighted the Prophet's emphasis on the transformative power of *dhikr* by stating, "The example of the one who does dhikr of Allah compared to the one who does not, is like the example of the dead person and the living" recorded in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.* Again, through a *ḥadīth* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* also, they highlighted the importance of *dhikr* through deep and devotional prayer, particularly the *Sayyid al-Istighfār*, as a crucial aspect of repentance and spiritual cleansing.

Candir et al. (2022) emphasised that "prayer is worship" and that remembrance circles are akin to "meadows of paradise" both recorded by al-Tirmidhī. Sultan (2022), in the same book, discusses the Prophet's guidance on charitable giving, referencing the *ḥadīth* where the Prophet advised Sa'ad b. Abi Waqqas that donating one-third of his wealth was still too much, quoting *al-Bukhārī*, no. 5039.

As for TN genre, in *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī,* Ibn Qayyim emphasises themes of strong faith in Allah and adherence to His laws. Similarly, in *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī,* al-Dhahabi has the theme on remembering Allah. In *al-Dā'wa al-Dawā',* Ibn Qayyim al-Jauzi has themes of *murāqabah* and *maḥabbatullāh* as the highest forms of love, asserting that true

happiness can only be attained through God, with significant focus on the *du'ā* in all chapters.

N) *Purifying Intentions*

Keshavarzi et al. (2021) in their chapter **"**Spiritually (Rūḥānī) Focused Psychotherapy" emphasised that intention—the reason or purpose behind a volitional mental process or behaviour—is crucial in determining whether an action will strengthen or weaken the spirit, as they supported this principle by the prophetic statement recorded by al-Bukhārī, "Indeed, actions (aʿmāl) are only by intentions and each person will only attain that which he intended." However, there is no specific theme in the TN genre.

Discussion

The study identified subthemes from various *ḥadīths* in Muslim professional literature, categorising them under three main themes, with some aligning more closely with *Ṭibb Nabawī* (TN). In TN, spiritual care is approached within a model comprising three elements: caretaker and patient etiquettes (adab), holistic healing, and human ontology.
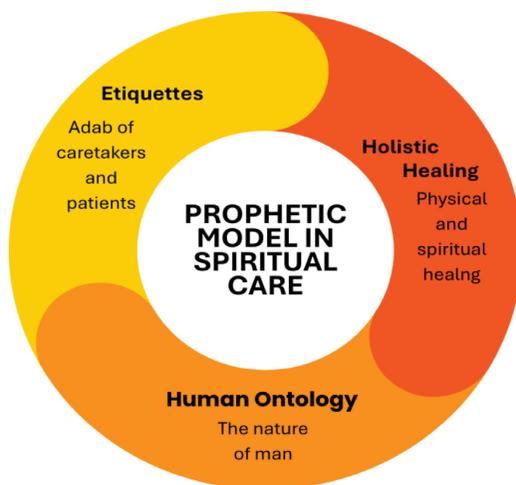

Figure 3: Prophetic model in spiritual care.

ISC stresses caretakers' roles, whereas TN focuses on patient conduct during illness, marking a distinct approach to spiritual care. TN also integrates physical healing through prescribed foods, drinks, and medicines—an aspect less stressed in ISC. Although ISC covers broader

Islamic traditions, some TN elements remain overlooked. 75 *ḥadīths* met the inclusion criteria, mainly from nine canonical collections, with few from other sources. Additionally, a *ḥadīth's* multidimensional nature permits varied interpretations, causing overlap across subthemes.

The findings reveal that Islamic spiritual care encompasses diverse knowledge, integrating the Islamic intellectual tradition—particularly tasawwuf—with TN. This suggests a framework for a Prophetic model of spiritual care, grounded in *ḥadīth*-based guidance. For instance, the subtheme "*Fiqh* of the sick" necessitates caretakers to understand Islamic law across various issues, including euthanasia, as addressed in TN literature.

This framework calls on physicians, caretakers, and chaplains to master ʿaqīdah, *fiqh*, and *tasawuf*, which is the practice of *sharīʿah* through the station of *iḥsān*. TN itself embodies this definition of *tasawuf*, as it unites spiritual and practical care. While practitioners often stress the psychological aspects, the model also integrates physical medication and nutrition—one of the "*shahwatān*" (sexual and appetite) in Islamic guidance—as essential to a Prophetic approach to spiritual care. Al-Ghazzālī (1990) situates dietary practice spiritually, reflecting Sufi attention to nutrition (Salamah-Qudsi, 2019), making its inclusion vital to holistic healthcare.

Conclusion and Further Research

The systematic review found that Muslim professionals' use of various *ḥadīths* highlights the significance of the *ḥadīth* perspective in Islamic spiritual care. While the *ḥadīths* relate to different subthemes of Islamic spiritual care, not all align with the *Ṭibb Nabawī* (TN) genre, as ISC emphasises non-patient aspects while TN focuses on patient care. The study identifies three key points: (1) Islamic spiritual care spans multiple disciplines, (2) it includes the broader Islamic intellectual tradition, especially *tasawuf*, with TN being part of this, and (3) some TN aspects are not included in Islamic spiritual care. The study recommends future research to create a comprehensive Prophetic framework, integrating relevant *ḥadīth*s and *tasawuf*, beyond just the TN genre.

Acknowledgement

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Designing and Evaluating a Culturally Grounded Digital Parenting Initiative in Malaysia

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Abstract: The widespread adoption of digital technologies in Malaysia, with internet penetration reaching 97.4% in 2023, has profoundly redefined childhood experiences. While digital parenting principles are globally

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recognised, their application in Malaysia is shaped by socio-cultural diversity, religious beliefs, and economic inequalities, and existing parenting resources often lack sustained, culturally competent guidance. This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining a nationwide market validation survey of Malaysian parents (n = 240) with focus group discussions involving participants from diverse backgrounds, to examine challenges, preferences, and expectations in digital parenting. Findings reveal that parents struggle with screen time regulation, online risk management, and awareness of harmful content, issues further compounded by disparities in digital literacy. Parents expressed strong demand for short-form, visually engaging, and interactive content, alongside features such as expert-led Q&A, age-specific content filtering, and peer-sharing narratives, while also emphasising the importance of moral and faith-based guidance embedded in Islamic and cultural values. Evaluation of the Platform Keibubapaan Digital (Platform KID) prototype highlighted the need for greater interactivity, community engagement, and personalisation. By synthesising global best practices with local cultural contexts, the study informs the development of Platform KID as a model for empowering Malaysian parents with the skills, confidence, and ethical frameworks to raise digitally resilient children, with implications that extend beyond Malaysia to other Muslim-majority and multicultural societies.

Keywords: Cultural, Digital parenting, Digital literacy, Malaysia, Parental mediation

Abstrak: Capaian internet di Malaysia yang mencapai 97.4% pada tahun 2023 telah membawa implikasi besar terhadap pengalaman kanak-kanak dan mewujudkan cabaran baharu kepada ibu bapa. Walaupun prinsip keibubapaan digital telah dibincangkan secara meluas di peringkat global, pelaksanaannya di Malaysia dipengaruhi oleh kepelbagaian sosio-budaya, kepercayaan agama, serta ketidaksamarataan ekonomi. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran yang merangkumi tinjauan pengesahan pasaran (n = 240) dan perbincangan kumpulan fokus bagi meneliti cabaran, keutamaan, dan jangkaan ibu bapa berkaitan keibubapaan digital. Dapatan menunjukkan isu utama yang dihadapi ialah pengawalan masa skrin, pengurusan risiko dalam talian, dan kesedaran terhadap kandungan berbahaya, yang diperburuk oleh jurang literasi digital. Ibu bapa menekankan keperluan kandungan yang ringkas, menarik, dan interaktif, dengan ciri-ciri seperti soal jawab bersama pakar, penapisan kandungan mengikut umur, serta perkongsian pengalaman sesama ibu bapa. Keperluan kepada panduan berasaskan nilai moral, Islam, dan budaya juga diangkat sebagai elemen penting. Penilaian prototaip Platform Keibubapaan Digital (Platform KID) menegaskan keperluan interaktiviti, penglibatan komuniti, dan personalisasi. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada pembangunan

model intervensi digital yang menggabungkan amalan terbaik global dengan keunikan konteks Malaysia, serta berpotensi diaplikasikan dalam masyarakat Muslim dan majmuk lain.

Kata kunci: Budaya, Keibubapaan digital, Literasi digital, Malaysia, Mediasi

Introduction

The overall use of digital technologies in daily life has significantly altered the essence of parenting in the 21st century. Children in Malaysia, where internet penetration was 97.4 percent in 2023 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission [MCMC], 2023), are getting exposed to digital devices at younger and younger ages, sometimes even before they enter formal education. Although digital media offers children with unparalleled opportunities to learn, create, and connect with others, it also poses threats of cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, online grooming, and overuse of screens (UNICEF Malaysia, 2020). These trends have made digital parenting, which refers to the methods, techniques, and habits that parents use to monitor and safeguard their children in the digital world, a hot topic of popular and academic concern.

Global studies on digital parenting have explored a variety of parenting styles, including restrictive mediation, co-use, and active mediation (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Clark, 2013). Nevertheless, a lot of this research is based on Western experiences, and there is a lack of empirical evidence that can be applied to the situation of parents in Southeast Asia. Malaysia has a unique combination of socio-economic status, cultural norms, and religious values that influence digital parenting, which is not the same as models created in Euro-American contexts (Mohamed, Wok, Wan Ghazali, & Mohd Nasir, 2022). In this case, parents must deal not only with the issues of technological literacy and safety but also with the moral and spiritual aspects of online life of their children.

Although these issues are urgent, there are not many large-scale, research-based interventions that are developed to address the needs of Malaysian parents. Current resources are disjointed, frequently provided in the form of ad hoc awareness campaigns, and seldom combine evidence-based methods with culturally competent information (Osman

& Muda, 2022). Besides, research indicates that parents need assistance in both technical skills, like learning how to use privacy settings and identify harmful content, and moral education, especially when it comes to aligning online activities with family and religious values (Mohd Yusof & Hashim, 2018). This two-fold demand highlights the necessity of interventions that extend beyond generic digital safety messages to offer customised, context-sensitive advice.

Platform KID background

Platform Keibubapaan Digital (Platform KID) is a Malaysian digital initiative designed to provide parents with culturally relevant, research-driven resources to navigate the complexities of raising children in the digital age. The platform is designed as an educational platform and a community center, aiming to solve the twofold problem of leveraging the power of technology in the development of children and minimising the risk of its use, including too much screen time, exposure to dangerous content, and safety risks online.

Platform KID is based on empirical evidence collected in the form of nationwide surveys and focus group discussions with Malaysian parents, which was developed as a research project sponsored by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MOSTI). These studies have indicated that there is a high demand of parenting resources that are not only practical and interactive but also woven in local moral and cultural values especially Islamic values. The platform thus incorporates professional advice, age-appropriate content suggestions, and peer-sharing capabilities to make its content relevant and applicable in various parenting situations.

The distinctive feature of Platform KID is the combination of short videos, infographics, interactive quizzes, and live Q&A sessions with professionals with the help of a bilingual interface to address the needs of the multicultural population of Malaysia. The platform allows parents to learn together by providing both expert-curated and community-generated content, which creates a supportive learning experience in which parents can exchange experiences, seek professional guidance, and learn to become effective digital parents.

The platform is available online at https://platformkid.my/, which guarantees nationwide coverage and gives parents access to resources on

demand. Being in its developmental stage, Platform KID is constantly improved based on the feedback of the users, and its functionality is planned to be expanded, its interactivity improved, and partnerships with educators, child development specialists, and religious leaders formed in order to make it sustainable and effective.

This study provides the main findings of the market validation process of the Platform KID project, which illustrates how empirical evidence may be used to inform the development of a user-centred, culturally responsive digital parenting platform. Placing these findings in the wider context of digital parenting and media literacy, the study adds both to the academic knowledge and to the practical implications of the Malaysian context. The discussion does not only cover local parenting issues but also provides implications on how to design similar interventions in other Muslim-majority and culturally diverse societies.

Literature Review

The explosion of digital technologies in the last 20 years has radically changed the character of childhood and, accordingly, the role of parents. As children are now exposed to digital devices at an early age, parenting is becoming a complex experience in a digital ecosystem, which provides more opportunities than ever before to learn and develop, but also poses an unprecedented number of risks (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Digital parenting refers to the strategies, practices, and skills that parents use to direct, support, and protect their children in their use of digital media (Clark, 2013). Such approaches can involve restrictive mediation (imposing limits on device use), active mediation (discussing online content), co-use (having shared digital experiences), and, to a growing extent, enabling mediation (empowering children to be able to critically navigate digital spaces) (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2016).

Digital parenting is not only important in individual households but it has also become a major social concern. The online activities of children overlap with more general issues in society related to cyber safety, data privacy, digital well-being, and media literacy. Digital parenting research has therefore shifted out of the niche and into a major field of interdisciplinary inquiry that relies on education, communication studies, psychology, and public policy.

Digital Parenting in the Malaysian Context

Although the main principles of digital parenting, including the establishment of boundaries, open communication, and a responsible example of using technology, are universal, their implementation is bound to be influenced by the local socio-cultural and economic factors. The digital environment is especially dynamic in Malaysia. The early and frequent exposure of children to digital technologies has been enabled by high internet penetration rates that currently stand at 97.4 percent as of 2023 (MCMC, 2023), and the prevalence of affordable mobile devices. However, the same pace of technological adoption has not been accompanied by a similar increase in the digital literacy and mediation of parents. According to Osman and Muda (2022), a significant number of parents are unable to keep up with the changing risks and opportunities that the digital world offers, which results in the lack of effective digital parenting measures.

The Malaysian parents have to negotiate a unique digital environment that is informed by a multifaceted interaction of cultural, religious, geographical, and socio-economic influences. To begin with, the cultural diversity in the country, which includes the Malay, Chinese, Indian, and the indigenous communities, generates different parenting norms and values. These variations affect the way in which parents understand acceptable digital behaviour with some communities focusing more on academic use of technology and others focusing on creative or entertainment-based use.

Second, the values of religion are very important especially to Muslim families who form the majority in Malaysia. Digital parenting among these families is not only about safety and productivity but also about moral and spiritual aspects. Parents usually assess media content in terms of Islamic ethics, making sure that it does not contradict the values of modesty, respect, and avoidance of harmful or inappropriate content (Mohamed, Wan Ghazali, & Mohd Nasir, 2024). Such moral framing can influence the choice of allowable apps, games, and online interactions in a manner that is not sufficiently covered by global models.

Third, the urban-rural divide is a major factor that affects the digital parenting experience. Although most urban families have access to high-speed internet and exposure to more digital literacy programs, most rural households experience unreliable connectivity and less educational

intervention (Mohd Yusof & Hashim, 2018). The opportunities that children have to be digitally educated, the risks they are exposed to, and the ability of parents to respond to them are all influenced by these disparities.

Lastly, socio-economic factors are decisive. The income of the family determines what kind of devices children can use, how much parental control is possible, and whether it is possible to invest in paid educational services or parental control applications. Higher-income families can afford more sophisticated monitoring tools, whereas lower-income families can be more dependent on shared devices and informal supervision methods.

Collectively, these contextual issues imply that digital parenting in Malaysia cannot be addressed by merely copying global models. Rather, it demands culturally sensitive and context-specific approaches that consider the realities of the local communities. This kind of approach acknowledges that effective digital parenting in Malaysia does not only entail training parents in technical skills, but also in the cultural, moral, and economic aspects that define how families will interact with digital technologies.

Challenges Driving the Need for Digital Parenting Support

Research in Malaysia continues to indicate a series of urgent issues, which parents encounter in the digital age. Among the most important ones is the existence of knowledge gaps. Most parents do not have the knowledge and expertise to set up privacy settings, identify dangerous online materials, or control the digital footprint of their children (UNICEF Malaysia, 2020). In the absence of such competencies, parents can end up exposing their children to privacy violations, unsuitable content, and unsafe online relationships. The rate of technological change tends to exacerbate these gaps, as it may be hard even to tech-savvy parents to keep abreast of new risks and safety precautions.

The second challenge that keeps occurring is the challenge of balancing risks and opportunities. On the one hand, parents recognise the educational and creative opportunities of digital tools, including interactive learning platforms and creative design applications; on the other hand, they are extremely worried about excessive use, gaming or social media addiction, cyberbullying, and access to violent or

sexualised content (Rahim et al., 2015). This duality tends to put parents in a continuous negotiation position, where they have to balance the positive aspects of digital interaction with the potential harms, without a clear indication of how to find the optimal balance.

The digital environment adds another dimension of complexity in the form of moral and value-based considerations to Muslim households. In addition to technical precautions, parents must face moral dilemmas associated with modesty, proper language, and norms of interaction, which are based on the Islamic ethics (Mohamed et al., 2024). Such issues need interventions that do not stop at filtering and monitoring, but also involve faith-based guidance and resources to assist parents in instilling values in online environments.

Adding to these problems are the parental differences in digital literacy. The degree of parents' familiarity with the technology, which usually depends on age, education level, and exposure to technology at work, influences the parenting strategies applied to mediate the online behaviour of their children (Ktoridou et al., 2012). More digitally literate parents tend to use enabling mediation strategies, which develop resilience and critical thinking in children, and less literate ones might resort to restrictive measures or, on the other hand, lack of control (Warren and Ward, 2020).

The combination of these challenges shows the insufficiency of occasional awareness campaigns or generic, globally focused recommendations to Malaysian families. Unless they are provided with specific, culturally sensitive interventions, parents may fall back on either being overprotective and restricting children to unhealthy use of technology or being permissive and exposing children to online dangers. This highlights the necessity of well-organized, context-based support structures like Platform KID, which can provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and culturally appropriate guidance they need to parent their children in the digital world in Malaysia.

The Imperative for Digital Parenting Education and Support

The best practices in digital parenting that are emerging globally are more education-based interventions that equip parents with skills and confidence to support their children in their digital interactions, instead of only resorting to restrictive measures (Livingstone et al., 2015). This

strategy acknowledges that digital resilience cannot be controlled in the long term; it needs engagement, communication, and role modelling. Digital parenting education is based on three interconnected aspects.

1. Technical competence that entails providing parents with the ability to handle devices, configure privacy settings, use parental control tools, and navigate the features of platforms their children use. In the absence of this basic skill, parents might not be able to effectively keep track of the usage or react to online dangers in time.

2. Critical literacy means to assess the digital information critically, identify bias, identify harmful content, and learn about the persuasive strategies used in media and online communication. This literacy is needed in the era of fake news, algorithm-based feeds, and invisible advertising to ensure that parents can teach their children to be discerning and not to be manipulated.

3. The value integration makes sure that digital parenting is not conducted in a moral vacuum. Incorporating cultural, ethical, and religious values into digital advice assists parents to make online behaviours consistent with the wider family values and societal norms. This is particularly important in multicultural and religiously diverse societies such as Malaysia where digital parenting is bound to overlap with moral and spiritual education.

Such holistic and sustained support initiatives are lacking in the Malaysian context. Although schools might conduct simple cyber safety programmes and ad-hoc awareness campaigns, they tend to be one-off activities, generic in content and child-centred. Parents seldom have an exclusive, research-based platform that provides ongoing, culturally appropriate advice that is responsive to their needs and situations. This lack of continual, locally based resources is a serious gap in national digital literacy initiatives. Addressing this gap is the core mission of the Platform Keibubapaan Digital (Platform KID) project. Integrating technical training, critical literacy skills, and ethical education into a single, convenient platform, Platform KID will empower Malaysian parents with the skills and confidence they need to raise children who are resilient to the digital world, ethically sound, and ready to navigate the digital world, which is becoming more and more complex.

Research Questions

The literature highlights that while digital parenting resources are increasingly available, there remains a significant gap in resources that are culturally contextualised for Malaysian parents, integrate moral and faith-based guidance, and offer practical, age-appropriate digital tools. Previous studies emphasise the need for content that is not only educational but also accessible in formats parents can easily integrate into their daily routines. Furthermore, limited empirical work has examined the intersection between digital parenting practices, cultural values, and platform design in Malaysia.

In response to these gaps, this study adopts the integrated conceptual framework outlined earlier—combining Parental Mediation Theory, the Digital Literacy Framework, and Cultural Adaptation Principles—to address the following research questions:

1. RQ1: What challenges do Malaysian parents face in managing their children's digital engagement?
2. RQ2: What are parents' preferred content formats and platform features for digital parenting support?
3. RQ3: How do cultural and religious values shape parents' expectations for digital parenting resources?
4. RQ4: How do parents evaluate and provide feedback on the current Platform KID prototype?

Conceptual Framework

The design and implementation of the Platform Keibubapaan Digital (Platform KID) project is informed by an integrated conceptual framework that synthesises Parental Mediation Theory, Digital Literacy Frameworks, and Cultural Adaptation Principles. This synthesis addresses the identified gaps in the literature review, especially the lack of culturally informed digital parenting support in Malaysia.

The Parental Mediation Theory, which has long been a part of media and communication research, can be used to understand the way parents control the interaction of children with digital technologies. This theory has three primary approaches, which are restrictive mediation, active mediation, and co-use, which have varying levels of

parental involvement (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Newer research adds the concept of enabling mediation, which goes beyond control to empower children to have the skills and confidence to explore the online world on their own (Clark, 2013). The enabling mediation is especially applicable in the Malaysian context, as it corresponds to the two-fold goal of promoting digital competencies in children and strengthening moral and religious values.

Although mediation theory describes the process of parental guidance of children, it does not exhaust the competencies needed to effectively guide children. In this case, Digital Literacy Framework addresses a gaping hole. Digital literacy is a wide range of capabilities, including operational skills (e.g., using devices, setting privacy options) as well as information evaluation (e.g., judging credibility, identifying misinformation) and content production. Digital literacy in the case of parents also entails the ability to demonstrate safe online behaviour, risk management, and promote responsible digital engagement (Ala-Mutka et al., 2008). Since the level of digital skills among Malaysian parents is uneven, with the level of digital skills often depending on socio-economic and educational backgrounds, any digital parenting program should be available to both digitally skilled and digitally inexperienced users (Mohd Yusof & Hashim, 2018).

Nevertheless, parental mediation and digital literacy models are usually based on the Western experience and do not necessarily describe the Malaysian family reality. Here Cultural Adaptation Principles come in handy. Based on the study by Resnicow et al. (1999), cultural adaptation guarantees that the interventions are consistent with the beliefs, values, and practices of the target community. In the case of Malaysia, it means incorporating Islamic morals, including adab (proper conduct), moderation, and respect, into the contextualisation of online safety and digital citizenship and applying locally relevant languages, examples, and stories. Cultural adaptation also acknowledges the existence of a multi-ethnic society in Malaysia where various parenting practices exist, which affect the rules and communication patterns in the homes.

Combining the three approaches, the Platform KID conceptual framework views parents not as the gatekeepers of technology but rather as the facilitators of the overall digital growth of their children. The

framework recognises that strategic mediation, robust digital literacy skills, and culturally relevant guidance are needed to achieve effective digital parenting in Malaysia. The research design of the current study is based on this integrated approach, which guarantees that data collection will capture both technical and value-based aspects of digital parenting.

At the operational level, this conceptual framework informed the design of the market validation survey and focus group protocols, so that they focused on the mediation strategies, digital skills, and cultural expectations of parents. The second part describes how these insights were obtained through the methodology, which was then applied to the design of the features and content strategy of Platform KID.
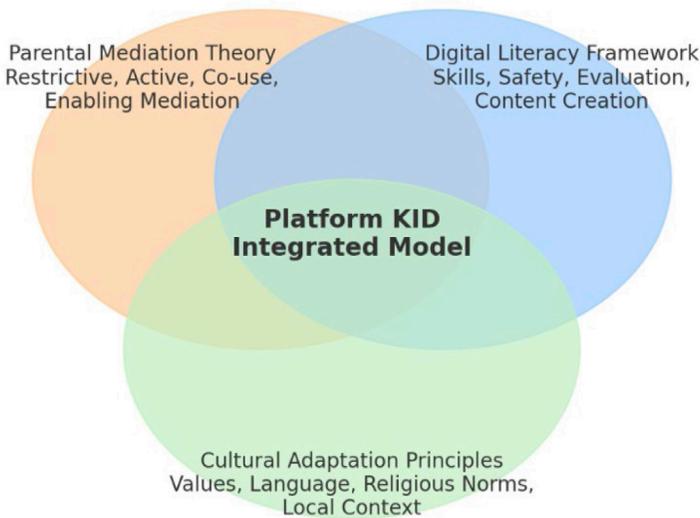
Parental Mediation Theory
Restrictive, Active, Co-use,
Enabling Mediation

Digital Literacy Framework
Skills, Safety, Evaluation,
Content Creation

**Platform KID
Integrated Model**

Cultural Adaptation Principles
Values, Language, Religious Norms,
Local Context

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Methodology

This study employed a **mixed methods design** to capture both the breadth and depth of Malaysian parents' digital parenting practices, challenges, and needs. The quantitative component consisted of a nationwide online survey to identify general trends, while the qualitative component involved Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to provide deeper contextual insights. This dual approach ensured that findings were statistically robust while also capturing the cultural, behavioural, and emotional nuances underpinning digital parenting in Malaysia.

Quantitative Data Collection

A structured online survey was developed in Malay and English to maximise accessibility and participation. The instrument covered five domains:

1. Demographic Profile – respondent background, family composition, and socio-economic status.
2. Parenting Challenges in the Digital Age – difficulties in managing children's technology use, online safety, and screen time.
3. Digital Literacy and Practices – self-assessed skills and use of digital tools for parenting.
4. Platform Expectations and Preferences – preferred features, content formats, and engagement mechanisms.
5. Adoption and Willingness to Pay – readiness to use and invest in a digital parenting platform.

The survey comprised Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions, allowing both structured responses and qualitative elaborations. Distribution took place over four weeks via Facebook parenting groups, WhatsApp communities, parenting blogs, and personal networks, ensuring reach across diverse parental demographics.

The research focused on the Malaysian parents and guardians who had at least one child below the age of 18. The purposive and network sampling enabled the collection of 240 valid responses, which provided a margin of error of +/- 6.33 percent at a 95 percent confidence level in estimating the parent population of 10 million in Malaysia. This sample size is in line with suggestions on social research in exploratory and market validation settings, where sample sizes of 200-400 are deemed adequate to identify key trends in medium-sized populations (Mukti, 2025).

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative component comprised two semi-structured FGDs conducted virtually via Google Meet, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. Discussions followed a guided protocol covering:

• Challenges in managing children's digital use.
• Expectations for a dedicated parenting platform.

- Openness to Adoption and potential barriers.
- Cultural and Social Influences on parenting approaches.
- Prototype Feedback on Platform KID's initial interface and features.

Each session included five participants, ensuring diverse representation in terms of gender, ethnicity, location, socio-economic status, and parenting stage (pre-school, primary, and secondary/teenage children).

Participants were purposively selected to mirror Malaysia's demographic diversity, with an emphasis on including urban and rural parents, multiple ethnic groups, and varied digital literacy levels. In total, the FGDs involved 7 mothers and 3 fathers, ranging from low-income (<RM3,000) to high-income (>RM10,000) households, and educational backgrounds from secondary school to postgraduate degrees.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse quantitative data to determine the frequency pattern, percentage distribution, and mean scores of digital parenting challenges, benefits, and preferences. The qualitative data collected through open-ended questions in the survey and FGDs were transcribed, coded and analysed thematically. The conceptual framework of the study, which included parental mediation strategies, digital literacy competencies, and cultural adaptation needs, was used to code categories to guarantee consistency between theory and analysis.

Results

This section presents findings from the market validation survey (n = 240) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with ten parents from diverse socio-economic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds. The survey results provide statistical evidence of key trends, while the FGDs offer richer, contextualised perspectives that deepen our understanding of those trends. Both datasets are synthesised for each thematic finding.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 240 respondents who participated in the nationwide survey. Most participants were Malay (80%), followed by Bumiputera (11.7%), Chinese (3.3%), Indian

(2.9%), and others (2.1%). This distribution reflects the sample, not the national population.

Table 1. Ethnic Composition of Respondents (n = 240)

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Malay	192	80.0
Bumiputera	28	11.7
Chinese	8	3.3
Indian	7	2.9
Others	5	2.1

This unbalance can be explained by the distribution mode and target audience matching. Malay respondents were overrepresented since the platform is culturally and linguistically oriented to the Malay-majority parenting community, in particular, Malay Muslim parents. Recruitment was based on social media groups in Malay language, WhatsApp networks, and parenting forums where non-Malays are less likely to participate. Such a situation is typical of culturally targeted research because access and participation are frequently linked to language, cultural networks, and topicality (Althubaiti, 2022).

RQ1: What challenges do Malaysian parents face in managing their children's digital engagement?

Survey results (Table 2) show that most parents face substantial challenges in managing their children's digital engagement. The most common difficulty reported was setting and enforcing screen time limits (78.2%), followed by managing online risks such as cyberbullying and inappropriate content (70%), and lack of awareness of harmful online content (61.6%).

Table 2: Challenges of Digital Parenting

Challenge	% of parents reporting
Difficulty setting and enforcing screen time limits	78.2%
Managing online risks (cyberbullying, inappropriate content)	70.0%
Lack of awareness of harmful online content	61.6%

FGD participants confirmed these concerns, noting that they often resort to inconsistent manual restrictions such as physically removing devices or monitoring over the shoulder. A recurring theme was the

tension between wanting to protect children and feeling under-equipped to do so: "Sometimes I just trust that the cartoons they watch are safe, but I'm not always sure what's in them." The FGDs also revealed that parents' own screen use habits were a barrier to modelling healthy behaviour, echoing the survey's broader findings about role modelling difficulties.

RQ2: What are parents' preferred content formats and platform features for digital parenting support?

Survey respondents overwhelmingly preferred short-form, visually engaging content over lengthy written resources. Videos or tutorials (81%) topped the list, followed by infographics (74%) and interactive quizzes (71.9%).

Table 3: Parents' preferred content formats and platform features

Content Format	% of Parents Preferring
Short-form videos/tutorials	81.0%
Infographics	74.0%
Interactive quizzes	71.9%

FGD discussions reinforced this finding. Parents explained that concise, focused content is easier to fit into their daily routines and more memorable. Several participants expressed that they are unlikely to engage with lengthy articles unless the content is urgent or highly relevant: "I don't have time to read long articles; give me a short video and I'll remember it better." The FGDs also suggested that interactive elements—like quizzes—can increase engagement by making learning about digital parenting feel more practical and less like a lecture.

RQ3: How do cultural and religious values shape parents' expectations for digital parenting resources?

A striking 83.2% of survey respondents wanted moral and faith-based guidance integrated into digital parenting resources, indicating a strong preference for content rooted in Islamic values and Eastern cultural principles.

Table 4: Parents' cultural and religious expectations

Preference	% of Parents Preferring
Moral/faith-based guidance in resources	83.2%

FGD participants elaborated on this, explaining that while technical advice on online safety is essential, it should be framed within moral boundaries and cultural expectations. Parents saw this as critical to ensuring children not only behave safely online but also develop good character: "I want my children to be safe online, but also to know what is right and wrong according to our faith." Participants further stressed that cultural and religious framing makes advice more relatable and trustworthy, increasing the likelihood of adoption.

RQ4: How do parents evaluate and provide feedback on the current Platform KID prototype?

Survey respondents highlighted age-specific content filtering (82.4%), expert-led Q&A sessions (81.4%), and peer-sharing stories (75.4%) as the most desired features for a digital parenting platform.

Table 5: Parents' desired features for a digital parenting platform.

Feature	% of Parents Preferring
Age-specific content filtering	82.4%
Expert-led Q&A sessions	81.4%
Peer-sharing stories	75.4%

FGDs revealed why these features matter. Parents wanted tailored advice that considers a child's developmental stage, particularly as digital risks and opportunities vary with age. They valued expert-led Q&A for authoritative guidance, but also saw peer-sharing as an equally important source of relatable, real-world strategies: "Sometimes another parent's story teaches you more than an article." Participants also noted that combining expert advice with peer experiences could help balance professional credibility with practical applicability.

Feedback on the current Platform KID prototype was consistent across FGDs: it was seen as too static and lacking interactive elements. While the content was viewed as relevant, the presentation did not encourage regular engagement.

Feedback from focus group participants highlighted the need for the Platform KID prototype to evolve from a static, information-based design to a more interactive and participatory platform. Participants recommended embedding short-form multimedia content such as videos and infographics to enhance engagement, while also incorporating

discussion forums and live expert sessions to foster ongoing learning and community interaction. They further proposed gamification features—such as badges, progress tracking, and interactive challenges—to encourage continuous user participation. Collectively, these suggestions underscore that effective digital parenting platforms should not only deliver reliable content but also cultivate a sense of community and sustained user engagement through interactivity and personalised user experience.

One participant summarised the sentiment: "It looks okay, but it feels like a brochure. It needs to feel alive—videos, chats, reminders—something that makes you want to come back." Survey data supported these views indirectly, as parents' strong preference for dynamic and interactive formats pointed to the need for a more engaging platform design.

In summary, the findings reveal that Malaysian parents share common challenges in digital parenting, particularly in managing screen time and online safety, and demonstrate strong preferences for practical, faith-informed, and interactive resources. The results confirm that effective digital parenting support must integrate cultural and moral values, provide accessible multimedia content, and prioritise interactivity and community engagement. These insights directly inform the enhancement of Platform KID, ensuring it aligns with parents' needs and expectations in the Malaysian context.

Discussion

This research was aimed at filling a definite gap in the availability of culturally relevant and practically applicable digital parenting resources in Malaysia. Although there are international digital parenting campaigns, they are usually targeted at western populations, and little consideration is given to the moral, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds that influence parenting practices in Muslim-majority nations. The results of this study highlight the fact that successful digital parenting support in Malaysia cannot be culturally neutral; instead, it should incorporate local values, be mindful of language preferences, and adapt to the lived realities of Malaysian families.

The statistics showed that Malaysian parents continue to struggle with controlling the use of technology by their children, especially

in terms of establishing screen time boundaries, controlling online risks, and keeping up with the knowledge of harmful content. These concerns reflect those found internationally, though they are heightened in settings where parental digital literacy is not uniform, and where parental mediation is frequently reactive as opposed to proactive. The focus group discussions reaffirmed that parents want to protect their children, but they usually lack the tools, strategies and confidence to do so effectively. The most common were the dependencies on ad-hoc measures, including the removal of devices, which only offer temporary solutions and do not instil long-term digital resilience in children. This is an indication of a serious gap in the development of enabling mediation skills, skills that can enable children to explore online environments safely and autonomously.

The popularity of short-form videos, infographics, and interactive quizzes has significant consequences in terms of platform development. Parents tend to consume content that is short, visually engaging, and can be consumed in tight schedules. This observation emphasises the necessity of Platform KID to follow the design philosophy of brevity, clarity, and interactivity. Notably, interactive learning tools, including quizzes, polls, or gamified challenges, can make the process of digital literacy education practical and interesting, which enhances the possibility of long-term platform usage.

The most important lesson that can be learned during this study is that there is a staggering need to morally and faith-based frame the content of digital parenting. It is not just a preference but a statement of how Malaysian parents see the point of parenting itself, to shape not only the safety of their children but also their moral character. The implication of this to Platform KID is that Islamic values and culturally familiar moral narratives must not be an optional overlay but a foundational organising principle of content creation. This integration will increase trust in the platform, user loyalty, and make Platform KID a unique alternative to generic, globally produced parenting resources.

The preferences for certain platform functions, such as age-specific content filtering, Q&A with experts, and sharing stories with peers, indicate a more general change in parental preferences toward digital parenting tools. They are demanding platforms that go beyond the fixed information repositories to dynamic interactive communities

where professional expertise and peer knowledge co-exist. In the case of Platform KID, this translates into the incorporation of two-way communication mechanisms, the creation of communities of practice among parents, and the provision of expert advice in an accessible and relatable manner. Such a hybrid form of professional and peer support may become a hallmark of digital parenting interventions in Malaysia.

The need to implement a more participatory design is supported by the feedback on the current prototype, which was characterised as too static. To become more than a one-time visit resource, Platform KID needs to develop long-term engagement by providing such features as live sessions, active discussion forums, personalised recommendations, and gamification. Such improvements not only match the preferences expressed by parents, but also with the known studies that interactivity is the most important factor in maintaining user engagement in digital platforms.

Collectively, the results are highly relevant to the future of digital parenting in Malaysia. On the one hand, they emphasise the necessity of interventions that should be not only technically proficient but also culturally based. Second, they refer to a paradigm of digital parenting support that combines the authority of expert knowledge with the authenticity of peer experience. Third, they emphasise that the success of platforms will be determined by the capacity of delivering timely, concise, and interactive content, which aligns with the consumption patterns of modern parents. Lastly, they propose that digital parenting in Malaysia needs to shift to proactive skill-building rather than reactive monitoring, so that both parents and children have the skills to cope with an increasingly complex digital world.

In meeting these needs, Platform KID can establish a precedent of culturally contextualised, technologically engaging, and pedagogically sound digital parenting programmes not just in Malaysia, but the Muslim world at large.

Conclusion

This paper reaffirms that efficient digital parenting support is not a luxury anymore, but a necessary element of child upbringing in the digital age when children are exposed to digital media at a very young age and online threats are constantly changing. The results indicate that

Malaysian parents are keen to obtain practical, interactive and culturally based guidance, but these are limited in the local environment. Platform KID is in a good position to bridge this gap by providing short-form, visually appealing, and interactive content; integrating age-specific content filtering, expert-led Q&A, and peer-sharing capabilities; and contextualising all materials in moral and faith-based principles. The second step will involve the improvement of the platform based on user-centred design, the expansion of outreach to various parent communities, and the establishment of collaborations with teachers, child development experts, and religious authorities. By so doing, Platform KID can become a parenting ally that families can trust and a national example of how to empower parents to raise digitally resilient children.

Acknowledgement

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Perception about Islam, Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Behavioural Intention in Using Artificial Intelligence among University Students

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence has increasingly received attention and wide acceptance among university students throughout the world. For Muslims, their behavioural intention in using artificial intelligence ethically is expected to be guided by Islamic teachings. Yet, little is known about the use of artificial intelligence among Muslim students of higher educational institutions. The present study explores how Muslim university students' perception about Islam, attitude, and subjective norms influence their behavioural intention towards using artificial intelligence in the context of Malaysia. This work extends the understanding of the influence of Islam on Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to better explicate one's behavioural intention in using artificial intelligence. A total of 406 university students in Klang Valley, Malaysia participated in a cross-sectional survey conducted over a three-month period. Perception about Islam, attitude towards using artificial intelligence, and subjective norms were used as the independent variables, while behavioural intention to use artificial intelligence served as the dependent variable. Findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between each independent variable and behavioural intention to use artificial intelligence. Attitude towards AI emerged as the

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strongest predictor of intention to use AI, while perception on Islam becomes the weakest predictor. This study enhances theoretical insights into technology adoption from the perspectives of TRA and Islamic principles, while also providing practical guidance for developing ethically grounded AI practices within Muslim-majority educational contexts.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, attitude, Islam, subjective norms, theory of reasoned action

Abstrak: Kecerdasan buatan semakin mendapat perhatian dan penerimaan meluas dalam kalangan pelajar universiti di seluruh dunia. Bagi umat Islam, niat tingkah laku mereka dalam menggunakan kecerdasan buatan secara beretika diharapkan berpandukan ajaran Islam. Namun, sedikit yang diketahui tentang penggunaan kecerdasan buatan dalam kalangan pelajar Islam institusi pengajian tinggi. Kajian ini meneroka bagaimana persepsi pelajar universiti Islam tentang Islam, sikap, dan norma subjektif mempengaruhi niat tingkah laku mereka terhadap penggunaan kecerdasan buatan dalam konteks Malaysia. Kajian ini meluaskan pemahaman tentang pengaruh Islam terhadap Teori Tindakan Beralasan (TRA) untuk menerangkan dengan lebih baik niat tingkah laku seseorang dalam menggunakan kecerdasan buatan. Seramai 406 pelajar universiti di Lembah Klang, Malaysia menyertai tinjauan keratan rentas yang dijalankan dalam tempoh tiga bulan. Persepsi tentang Islam, sikap terhadap penggunaan kecerdasan buatan, dan norma subjektif digunakan sebagai pembolehubah bebas, manakala niat tingkah laku untuk menggunakan kecerdasan buatan berfungsi sebagai pembolehubah bersandar. Dapatan menunjukkan hubungan yang positif dan signifikan antara setiap pembolehubah tidak bersandar dan niat tingkah laku untuk menggunakan kecerdasan buatan. Sikap terhadap AI muncul sebagai peramal terkuat niat untuk menggunakan AI, manakala persepsi terhadap Islam menjadi peramal yang paling lemah. Kajian ini meningkatkan pandangan teori ke dalam penggunaan teknologi daripada perspektif TRA dan prinsip Islam, di samping menyediakan panduan praktikal untuk membangunkan amalan AI berasaskan etika dalam konteks pendidikan majoriti Muslim.

Kata kunci: Kecerdasan buatan, sikap, Islam, norma subjektif, teori tindakan beralasan

Introduction

In tandem with the rapid technological changes, artificial intelligence (AI) is growing swiftly and gaining increasing attention (Kavanagh, 2019, Shen et al., 2025) among citizens in the twenty first century. AI has become an essential tool for enriching various aspects of real-world applications, such as medical diagnosis, face recognition, robotics, internet applications, data mining, and industrial applications (Górriz et.al., 2020). The rapid advancement of AI technologies has transformed various sectors, including education, healthcare, and business (Kaushik, 2023; Agarwal, Swami, & Malhotra, 2024; Neha et.al., 2020). In the context of higher education, AI adoption has risen quickly in the last five years (Chu et al., 2022), with applications in assessment and evaluation, prediction, AI assistance, Intelligent Tutoring System (ITS), and student learning management (Crompton & Burke, 2023).

According to UNESCO, the AI technology has drawn the attention of educators and has been embraced by numerous countries worldwide (Gianini, 2023). Its capacity to assist students in producing essays, summaries, letters, artworks, and more has contributed to its widespread use in academic settings. While offers significant benefits - such as accuracy, efficiency, and personalisation— it also introduces ethical risks and challenges if not used properly (Murphy, 2019; Nasho & Awuye, 2025). Consequently, a sound ethical framework is crucial to ensure that AI is used responsibly and meaningfully within educational institutions.

From an Islamic perspective, ethics and moral conduct and values are rooted in divine guidance derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Qur'an declares, *"Verily in this (Qur'an) is a Message for people who would (truly) worship Allah"* (Quran, 21:106), affirming its role as a moral compass for human conduct ('Alwānī, 1995). The Sunnah complements the Qur'an by offering practical demonstrations of ethical principles (Abdul Rahman, 2023). Hence, the Islamic worldview provides an integral foundation for examining the moral and ethical use of emerging technologies such as AI (Eldeib et al., 2025). Integrating these sources into modern discussions on AI allows for an academically grounded interpretation of how Islamic ethics guide technology adoption—an area still underexplored in empirical AI studies.

While numerous models have been used to study AI adoption and behavioural intention—such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)—these frameworks are largely derived from Western epistemologies and lack religious or spiritual dimensions. There remains a critical gap in understanding how Islamic principles influence behavioural intentions towards AI usage, particularly among Muslim university students. Addressing this gap is vital, as the ethical use of AI in Muslim-majority educational contexts must align with the moral teachings of Islam and the broader objectives of the *maqasid al-shariah* (objectives of Islamic law).

Therefore, this study explores the ethical use of AI for academic activities among Muslim university students in accordance with Islamic teachings. Specifically, it examines how perceptions of Islamic values attitude towards AI interact to shape behavioural intentions to use AI responsibly. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the attitude of university students towards AI?
2. What is the relationship between university students' attitude towards AI and their behavioural intention to use AI?
3. What is the relationship between subjective norms towards AI and behavioural intention to use AI among university students?
4. What is the relationship between university students' perception about Islamic teachings and their behavioural intention to use AI?
5. What is the best predictor of university students' intention to use AI?

Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

The term "artificial intelligence" was first coined by McCarthy in 1956 (Crompton & Burke, 2023). Since then, its meaning has evolved alongside the rapid expansion of research in diverse fields, including education. Fetzer (1990) defines AI as the study and creation of artifacts—machines or systems—that exhibit intelligence as a result of being purposely designed by humans, distinguishing them from natural intelligence. In his critique of the traditional computational paradigm, AI is described as a computer program that manipulates symbolic representations according to rules to solve reasoning tasks. Despite extensive debate, the definitions and interpretations of intelligence remain contested,

with many approaches focusing narrowly on cognitive functions while overlooking social, philosophical, and contextual dimensions. Given that this study focuses on the influence of AI within higher education, it adopts the more contemporary definition by Popenici and Kerr (2017, p. 2), who describe AI as "computing systems that are able to engage in human-like processes such as learning, adapting, synthesising, self-correction and use of data for complex processing tasks." This definition aligns well with the pedagogical and administrative functions of universities in Malaysia that increasingly rely on intelligent systems to enhance learning, teaching, and institutional management.

AI is becoming a critical driver of transformation in **higher education**, reshaping how universities approach teaching, learning, and assessment (Wang & Steele, 2025). Beyond improving efficiency or automating administrative work, AI encourages a fundamental rethinking of education towards personalised, adaptive, and data-driven learning experiences. Within the Malaysian higher education context, this transformation aligns with the Ministry of Higher Education's aspiration to integrate the 4th Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) and AI technologies under the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025. AI applications such as predictive analytics for student performance, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated assessment tools are increasingly adopted across Malaysian universities to improve learning outcomes and institutional decision-making.

Globally, the intersection of AI and higher education has drawn significant scholarly attention. A systematic review study conducted by Crompton and Burke (2023) found a total of 138 studies conducted in 31 countries across six continents, with Asia contributing 41% of the total research. However, most of these studies originated from Taiwan and China, indicating a regional imbalance. In contrast, research on AI in Malaysian higher education remains comparatively limited, despite the nation's growing investment in digital transformation initiatives such as the Malaysia Artificial Intelligence Roadmap (2021–2025) published in 2023. Malaysia's unique multicultural and predominantly Muslim context offers a distinct lens through which AI adoption can be examined. Perceptions of AI among students in Malaysian higher education institutions may be shaped not only by technological readiness but also by ethical and spiritual considerations grounded in Islamic values. Understanding these perceptions is therefore essential

to designing AI-driven educational strategies that are both culturally relevant and pedagogically effective in the Malaysian higher education landscape.

The present study was conducted in Malaysia. Although Malaysia is also an Asian country, its culture is different from Taiwan and China as its population is dominated by Muslims. In this regard, perception about AI, viewed from an Islamic lens, among students of higher educational institutions is a contributing factor in determining their behavioural intention towards AI.

Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Behavioural Intention towards AI

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) posits that an individual's intention to engage in a particular behaviour is shaped by both their personal attitude toward the behaviour and the perceived social norms associated with it (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975). In other words, when individuals hold favourable evaluations of a behaviour and believe that significant others endorse it, they are more likely to form the intention to perform that behaviour. Foundationally, attitude refers to an individual's overall evaluation of a target behaviour (e.g. using AI for learning), which can be positive or negative. Besides, subjective norms capture perceived social pressures from important others (e.g. peers, instructors, institutions) regarding whether one should perform the behaviour, and these norms shape intentions alongside attitudes and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen 1991). Behavioural intention, in turn, is the proximal antecedent of actual behaviour; higher education contexts have increasingly treated AI use in learning as the target behaviour for which intention predicts adoption or use.

Recent empirical works in higher education have examined subjective norms and attitudes as predictors of the intention to engage in AI. Asio and Gadia (2024) identified the predictors of students' attitudes towards AI and discussed the implications for higher education institutions, highlighting how attitudes relate to adoption considerations in university settings. Ma, Akram, and Chen (2024) conducted a cross-cultural examination of students' behavioural intentions and attitudes towards AI in higher education, underscoring how cultural context can shape the strength and direction of the effects of attitudes and norms on intention. In a study focusing on the determinants of students' attitudes

and intentions towards AI in education, Wang, Zhang, and Gong (2024) provided evidence on how attitudinal evaluations and intentions to engage with AI in education are shaped by educational experiences and perceived value of AI-enhanced learning. Zulkifli and Alias (2025) examined students' intention to use digital tools, illustrating the integration of TRA constructs (attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) in predicting the intention to engage with AI-enabled or AI-related educational tools. Collectively, these studies have produced consistent findings: attitudes and perceived social expectations (subjective norms) strongly influence students' behavioural intentions to adopt AI in higher education, with cross-cultural and contextual factors moderating the strength of these associations (Asio & Gadio, 2024; Ma, Akram, & Chen, 2024; Wang, Zhang, & Gong; Zulkifli & Alias, 2025).

Apart from these contemporary works, several other recent contributions have illustrated how attitudes towards AI and the social environment around the use of AI in universities translate into intention and eventual use. For example, Musawa, al-Malik, and Khan (2024) reported on attitudes, readiness, and intention towards AI adoption in education in the context of a major conference, signalling that institutional and peer context shape the evaluation and willingness to adopt AI in academic settings. Malik et al. (2023) explored students' perspectives on AI in academic essays, offering qualitative and quantitative insights into how students perceive AI as part of their scholarly work, which bears on attitudes and perceived norms surrounding AI usage in higher education. Implications for practice include directing attention to shaping favourable attitudes towards AI through demonstrable benefits (e.g., enhanced learning outcomes and efficiency) and addressing social norms through peer and instructor messaging, curricula that normalise AI use, and institutional policies that articulate acceptable uses and ethical considerations (Asio & Gadia, 2024; Ma et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Based on this discussion, the present study hypothesised that:

H_1: University students have a positive attitude towards artificial intelligence.

H_2: University students with a positive attitude towards artificial intelligence will have a stronger behavioural intention to adopt AI technologies.

H$_3$: Subjective norms significantly influence university students' behavioural intentions to use artificial intelligence, with higher perceived social pressure leading to greater intentions to adopt AI.

Learning with AI in Islamic perspectives

Previous studies have examined the adoption of technology in various contexts (Kaushik, 2023; Agarwal, Swami, & Malhotra, 2024; Neha et al., 2020). However, few have integrated religious perspectives, particularly in Muslim-majority settings. This study highlights the importance of understanding how Islamic teachings can inform ethical considerations in technology use, thereby filling a significant gap in existing research. In Muslim-majority settings, the perceptions of AI may be informed by Islamic values and ethical considerations. The integration of AI in education among Muslims not only enhances efficiency but also reinforces moral and spiritual values while promoting inclusivity, spiritual values, and justice in educational access (Mahmudulhassan et. al., 2024).

Previous studies indicate that Muslim students often evaluate AI technologies through the lens of Islamic ethics, assessing their potential impact on moral values. This perspective can lead to a cautious approach towards AI applications seen to be in conflict with Islamic teachings. Importantly, the role of lecturers and educational institutions in providing guidance on the ethical implications of AI is also significant. Research by Syukur et al. (2024) revealed that students of Darul Maarif University in Petidam, Thailand, were very careful about the impact of technology on Islamic values. Although AI has not been formally integrated in the university courses, AI has sparked concerns about its effect on the role of traditional Islamic religious teachers and cultural values in the institution.

What the current body of work suggests, in lieu of direct Islam-specific empirical studies, is that religio-ethical considerations may shape attitudes and subjective norms towards AI adoption in ways that TPB/TRA can accommodate. For example, a cross-cultural work on AI attitudes and behaviour (Ma et al., 2024) highlights how broader cultural and value systems influence students' intentions, which in Muslim-majority or Islamist-influenced contexts may reflect Islamic

ethical considerations as part of cultural norms. Similarly, studies examining student attitudes towards AI in higher education emphasise the importance of ethical and responsible AI use and alignment with educational values, which are relevant to Islamic ethical discourse (Asio & Gadia, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). These lines of work imply that Islamic teachings could operate as a moderator or contextual factor shaping attitudes and subjective norms, thereby affecting behavioural intentions to adopt AI. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H$_4$: There is a significant positive relationship between university students' perception about Islamic teachings and their behavioural intentions to use AI.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which was developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1970). TRA posits that an individual's behavioural intention, determined by attitude towards the behaviours and subjective norms, is the strongest predictor of actual behaviour (Fishben & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1985). While attitude reflects the person's overall positive or negative evaluation of performing a behaviour, subjective norms represent the perceived social pressure from important referents to engage in, or refrain from, the behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TRA assumes individuals as rational decision-makers who evaluate the expected outcomes of their behaviour and the opinions of significant others before forming an intention (Ajzen, 1985). When Muslims view AI as aligning with Islamic principles—such as justice, fairness, and the responsible use of knowledge—they tend to develop more positive attitudes and a stronger intention to adopt it.

In the present study, TRA provides the theoretical foundation for understanding university students' intention to use artificial intelligence (AI) in learning. The model explains how students' internal evaluations (attitudes) and external pressures (subjective norms) shape their intention to adopt AI tools. To contextualise TRA within an Islamic educational environment, the variable perception about Islamic teachings is included as an additional belief-based construct influencing intention. In Islamic contexts, technology adoption decisions are not value-neutral; they are often filtered through perceptions of religious alignment, ethical appropriateness, and the pursuit of beneficial knowledge (*'ilm nafi'*).

Therefore, students' perception about Islam is expected to play a significant role in shaping how they evaluate and intend to use AI.

While the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) have been widely used to study technology adoption, these models primarily emphasise utilitarian beliefs such as perceived usefulness and ease of use. However, they often overlook the influence of moral, cultural, and religious values on behavioural intention. The TRA is more suitable for this study because it incorporates the influence of beliefs and normative pressures that extend beyond performance-based evaluations. This makes it well-suited for examining technology adoption in a faith-oriented academic environment.

Empirical evidence supports this theoretical orientation. Mohr and Kühl (2021) applied TRA and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to the adoption of AI in agriculture. They found that subjective norms significantly influenced behavioural intention, confirming TRA's predictive power in technology adoption. Similarly, Sohn and Kwon (2020) further demonstrated that attitude and subjective norms predicted consumers' intention to adopt AI-based products. TRA is often used in fields like health psychology, marketing, and public policy to understand how attitudes and social influences affect decision-making and behaviour. In the educational settings, Naseri and Abdullah (2023) emphasised that TRA constructs are essential to understanding students' intention to adopt emerging technologies like AI, particularly in culturally sensitive contexts. Choung et al. (2022) further highlighted that users' ethical comfort and trust in AI systems significantly shape their attitudes, which subsequently predict behavioural intention.

Drawing on these insights, this study extends TRA by incorporating perception about Islamic teachings as a belief-based independent variable. It is posited that when students perceive AI as consistent with Islamic principles—such as promoting justice, fairness, and responsible use of knowledge—they are more likely to form favourable attitudes and stronger intentions to use it. Conversely, if AI is viewed as conflicting with Islamic ethics, students' adoption intention may weaken. Accordingly, the **conceptual framework** (see Figure 1) was developed for this study as follows:
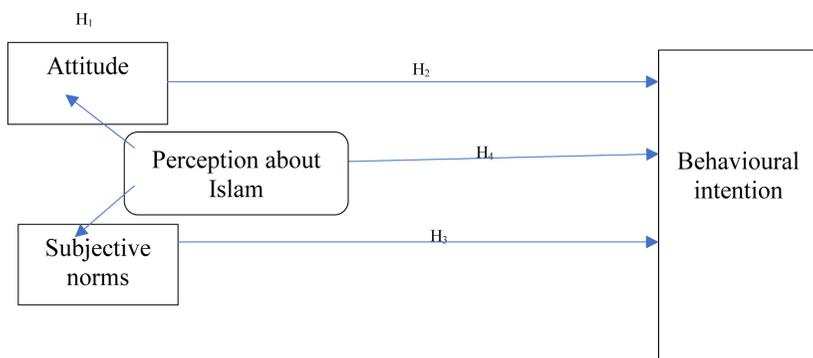
Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

The framework aligns with the TRA causal logic, where beliefs and social pressures shape behavioural intentions. In this adapted model, attitude, subjective norms, and perception about Islamic teachings serve as independent variables that directly influence behavioural intention to use AI. This structure establishes a coherent link between the theoretical foundation and the study's hypotheses. Based on the adapted Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) framework, four hypotheses were developed to examine how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceptions about Islamic teachings influence students' behavioural intention to use AI in learning.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey was conducted among Muslim university students in an international Islamic university located in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Data collection ran from October to December 2023. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across ten different departments in a faculty. The researchers divided the proportion of respondents based on the two main divisions in the faculty: Human Sciences (60%) and Islamic Revealed Knowledge (40%), and from the total number of actively registered undergraduate students in 2023. Further, students were randomly selected to ensure adequate representation between both divisions, based on the Human Sciences Departments (i.e., Communication, English Language and Literature, Sociology and Anthropology, History and Civilisation, Psychology. Political Science) and Islamic Revealed Knowledge Departments (i.e., Arabic Language and Literature, Qur'an and Sunnah Studies, Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, and Usul al-din and Comparative Religion). A Google Form was constructed to collect

data, and a survey questionnaire was distributed online. Respondents were required to fill in a consent form before responding to the survey. Initially, 410 responses were received but after eliminating duplicate responses, the study obtained a total final sample size of 406. Based on the total number of students actively registered (i.e., 3624), Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table determined that the minimum sample size based on the total population is 364, and this criterion was met in this study.

Measures

The survey instrument included validated scales measuring perception about Islam, attitude towards AI, subjective norms, and behavioural intention to use AI.

Subjective norms in using AI

Subjective norms in using AI was adapted from the scale by Chai, Wang, and Xu (2020). Subjective norms refer to the social influence in adopting a behaviour, defined as "how one perceives socially important others such as parents, friends, and teachers may expect one to act" (Chai, Wang, & Xu, 2020, p. 3). They found the internal consistency of the scale reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .808). In this study, subjective norms are contextualised as the social influence by others in one's intention to use AI technology to complete academic tasks. This construct contains four items measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. An example of the items reads, "Most people I know think I should learn about AI technology." Higher scores indicate stronger social influence by others, such as course mates and lecturers, to use AI technology to complete academic tasks.

Attitude in using AI technology

Attitude in using AI technology was also adapted from the scale introduced by Chai, Wang, and Xu (2020). In this study, attitude towards the behaviour of using AI includes an individual's expectations and feelings about the possible consequences of adopting AI technology to complete academic tasks. It contains three items and is also measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. An example of the items is "Using AI technology is pleasant." Chai, Wang, and Xu (2020) also found the internal consistency of the scale reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .844). Higher scores indicate a

more positive attitude towards using AI technology when completing academic tasks.

Behavioural intention in using AI in academic tasks

Behavioural intention in using AI to complete academic tasks was also taken from the study by Chai, Wang, and Xu (2020). It is contextualised in this study as future intention to use AI technology. It contains four items and is also measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. An example of the item reads, "I will pay attention to emerging AI applications." Chai, Wang, and Xu (2020) found the internal consistency of the scale very reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .913). Higher scores indicate a stronger intention to use AI technology in completing academic tasks.

Perception about Islam

Perception about Islam is measured using the Ethical Conduct-Do Dimension subscale from the psychological measure of Islamic religiousness (PMIR) scale, and it consists of five items (Raiya, 2008). The participants were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The higher the score, the higher the level of "do." This subscale demonstrated very high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .95).

A reliability test was performed to check the consistency and accuracy of the measurement scales. The results in Table 1 indicate that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients are satisfactory (between .95 and .98), indicating that the questions for a particular construct measure a similar concept and they are internally consistent (Cronbach, 1951).

Table 1: Reliability Analysis for Selected Variables

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Perception about Islam	5	.923
Attitude towards AI	3	.890
Behavioural intention	4	.862
Subjective norms	4	.800

Statistical Analyses

Hypothesis 1 was tested using a one sample *t*-test, and hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 were analysed using Pearson correlations to examine the influence of university students' attitudes, perception about Islam, and subjective norms on their behavioural intention to use AI. Finally, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the best predictor of university students' intention to use AI in completing academic tasks.

Findings and analysis

Descriptive analyses were used to describe the background of the respondents. The total number of 406 respondents participated in this study. The analyses show that the majority of respondents were female (75%). They were relatively young, with the majority (76.5%) in the 20–21 years old age group, followed by 22–23 years old (17%) and 18–19 years old (0.16%) age groups. The survey respondents also performed well in their studies. About 70% of them obtained a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 3.0 and above, while 28% were considered moderate in their academic performance with a CGPA between 2.51 and 3.0. Only a small percentage (2%) of the respondents obtained a low CGPA (2.5 and below). The respondents consisted of students from both the six Human Sciences and four Islamic Revealed Knowledge (41%) departments in the faculty. Since this study was conducted in an Islamic university, all respondents were Muslim undergraduate students. The respondents' profiles are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Profile of respondents

Socio-demographic profile of respondents		Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	25.0
	Female	75.0
Age	18–19 years old	0.16
	20–21 years old	76.5
	22–23 years old	17.0
CGPA	Low (0–2.5)	2.7
	Moderate (2.51–3.00)	27.6
	High (3.01 above)	69.7
Department	Human Sciences	59%
	Islamic Revealed Knowledge	41%

Attitudes of university students towards AI

A one-sample t-test was conducted to test H_1. The test assessed whether students' mean was significantly higher than the neutral midpoint of the scale (3.00). Based on the analysis, the attitude of university students towards AI was higher ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.72$) than the test score of 3, $t(365) = 22.7$, $p < .001$. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test results for the three items measuring students' attitude towards AI technology. All three items recorded mean scores above 3.80, indicating that students generally perceived using AI technology as enjoyable, fun, and pleasant.

Moreover, the t-test results were highly significant ($p < .05$) for all items, confirming that students' ratings were significantly higher than the neutral midpoint of the scale. Therefore, H_1 is supported. University students showed a positive attitude towards artificial intelligence.

Table 3: One Sample t-test on University Students' Attitude towards AI

Items	M	SD	df	t	p
Using AI technology is pleasant.	3.8224	.76473	365	20.574	.001
I find using AI technology enjoyable.	3.8770	.78595	365	21.349	.001
I have fun using AI technology.	3.8661	.82833	365	20.004	.001

Relationships between university students' attitude, perception about Islam, subjective norms, and behavioural intention to use AI

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the influence of university students' attitudes, perception about Islam, and subjective norms on their behavioural intention to use AI. The descriptive statistics and correlations among variables are presented in Table 4. Students reported a moderately positive attitude towards AI ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.72$), moderate subjective norms ($M = 0.72$, $SD = 0.58$), and a moderate intention to use AI ($M = 0.71$, $SD = 0.71$).

As hypothesised in H_2, students' attitude towards AI was positively and significantly correlated with their intention to use AI, $r(366) = .58$, $p < .01$, indicating that students with more favourable attitudes

reported stronger intentions to adopt AI technologies. Supporting H_3, subjective norms were also positively related to students' intention to use AI, $r(366) = .51$, $p < .01$, suggesting that higher perceived social pressure was associated with greater behavioural intention to adopt AI. Finally, in line with H_4, perception about Islamic teachings showed a significant positive correlation with intention to use AI, $r(366) = .26$, $p < .01$, indicating that students who perceived AI adoption as compatible with Islamic principles reported stronger intentions to use AI.

These findings collectively support the proposed hypotheses, highlighting the roles of attitude, social influence, and religious perception in predicting students' behavioural intentions towards AI adoption.

Table 4: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Attitude	366	3.85	.72	-			
Subjective norm	366	.72	.59	.46**	-		
Perception about Islam	366	4.56	.58	.23**	.21**	-	
Behavioural Intention	366	.71	.71	.58**	.51**	.26**	-

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

To determine the strongest predictor of university students' behavioural intention to use artificial intelligence, the study performed a multiple regression using perception about Islam, attitude towards AI, and subjective norms as predictors. The overall model was significant, $F(3, 362) = 90.50$, $p < .001$, and all predictor variables accounted for approximately 42.9% of the variance in behavioural intention to use AI ($R^2 = .43$).

As shown in Table 5, attitude towards AI emerged as the strongest predictor of intention to use AI (ß $= .42$, $p < .001$), indicating that students with more positive attitudes reported greater intention to adopt AI technologies. Subjective norms were the second strongest predictor (ß $= .30$, $p < .001$), suggesting that perceived social pressure or support significantly influenced students' intentions to use AI. Perception about Islamic teachings also significantly, though weaker, predicted

behavioural intention (ß = .10, p < .001), indicating that alignment with religious principles contributed to students' willingness to adopt AI.

Table 5: Multiple Regression for Students' Behavioural Intention to Use AI

Variable	ß	SE	SE ß	P
Attitude	.42	.26***	.42	.001
Subjective norms	.36	.04***	.30	.001
Perception about Islam	.13	.05	.10	.001
R^2	.429			
F	90.5			

Overall, the analysis revealed that perception about Islam, attitude towards AI, and subjective norms had significant positive relationships with behavioural intention to use AI. Specifically, students who perceived Islamic teachings as supportive of ethical AI usage demonstrated increased intentions to adopt AI technologies. The findings indicate that when students believe that their religious beliefs align with the ethical use of AI, they are more likely to have a positive attitude towards its adoption. Additionally, subjective norms, or the perceived social pressure to engage with AI, also played a crucial role in shaping their intentions.

Discussion

The present study examined university students' attitudes towards AI and the factors influencing their behavioural intention to adopt AI technologies. The results provide empirical support for all the proposed hypotheses and offer both theoretical and practical insights. The findings confirm that the first hypothesis, which states that university students hold a positive attitude towards AI, is supported. Results of one-sample *t*-test revealed that students generally perceived AI as enjoyable, fun, and pleasant, indicating a readiness to engage with emerging technologies in learning contexts. This result aligns with the findings of Wang et al. (2024), who reported that positive attitudes are central in predicting technology acceptance. However, this study extends prior work by demonstrating that Malaysian students' favourable attitudes toward AI are not only influenced by perceived usefulness and enjoyment but also by growing exposure to AI in academic settings. This indicates that as AI becomes more visible in higher education, students are

increasingly open to its pedagogical integration, thereby reinforcing the generalisability of attitude as a key determinant of AI adoption.

Furthermore, the role of subjective norms highlights the influence of peer and societal expectations on students' decisions to engage with AI. This suggests that fostering a supportive community that encourages ethical AI use could further enhance students' intentions to adopt these technologies. This finding is consistent with Li et al. (2022), who found that both attitude and subjective norms significantly shape behavioural intentions. However, cross-cultural comparison provides additional insight: in collectivist cultures such as Malaysia, social influence tends to play a stronger role than in individualist contexts (Alhugbani, 2025; Schoefer et al., 2025). In such settings, individuals often look to peers, lecturers, and institutional authorities for cues about acceptable behaviour. The present study's findings suggest that while subjective norms are important, their effect is slightly weaker than attitude—indicating that students are guided both by personal evaluations of AI's usefulness and by social endorsement. This balance reflects Malaysia's transitional cultural orientation, which blends collectivist values with increasing individual agency in technology use.

The results of this study underscore the importance of integrating religious perspectives into the discourse on technology adoption, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts. The positive correlation between students' perception about Islam and their behavioural intentions suggests that religion can serve as a moral framework for guiding ethical AI use. Educational institutions could leverage this by incorporating Islamic ethical principles—such as justice, responsibility, and the pursuit of beneficial knowledge—into AI-related curricula and initiatives. By doing so, educational institutions could enhance students' understanding and acceptance of AI technologies while ensuring that their use aligns with their values.

Nevertheless, the study finds that compared to attitude and subjective norms, perception about Islam perception of Islam was found to be a weaker predictor of behavioural intention. This may be because students view AI as a neutral technological tool rather than a religious or moral issue. Moreover, as Syukur et al. (2024) noted, Islamic universities often engage with AI implicitly through research and workshops rather than through formal curricular integration. The absence of explicit

institutional policies or frameworks linking AI with Islamic principles may weaken the perceived connection between faith and technology adoption. Addressing this gap through structured discourse and policy could strengthen students' ethical and purposeful engagement with AI in the future.

Implications of the study

This study's findings provide meaningful contributions to the literature on technology adoption through the lens of TRA by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). TRA posits that an individual's behavioural intention is primarily influenced by their attitude towards the behaviour and subjective norms. In line with TRA, this study demonstrates that university students' positive attitudes towards AI and their perceived social pressure significantly predict their intention to adopt AI technologies. The strong predictive power of attitude highlights the centrality of individual evaluation in shaping technology adoption behaviour.

Moreover, this study extends TRA by incorporating students' perception about Islamic teachings as a contextual factor, thus adding a cultural-religious dimension to the model. The significant, though weaker, effect of religious perception suggests that moral and ethical considerations can enhance the explanatory power of TRA in culturally and religiously sensitive contexts. This highlights the potential of extending classical behavioural models to integrate socio-religious variables in understanding technology adoption in non-Western settings.

The results of this study also offer practical insights for educators, policy makers, and AI developers in higher education. Since attitude has been identified as the strongest predictor of adoption, higher education institutions should focus on training programmes, demonstrations, and workshops that highlight AI's practical benefits and enjoyable applications in learning. Workshops, seminars, and collaborative projects that explore the intersection of technology and ethics —such as discussions on the responsible use of AI-generated content and the ethical boundaries of plagiarism—can effectively shape students' positive yet principled engagement with AI. Studies suggest that educational programmes that incorporate discussions of AI with ethical considerations from an Islamic perspective can positively influence students' attitudes (Sain et al., 2024).

In addition, since subjective norms significantly shape behavioural intention, universities can encourage faculty and peer champions to integrate AI into teaching and research, thereby creating a supportive culture for AI adoption. Since perceptions about Islamic teachings influence adoption. Communicating AI use in ways consistent with Islamic ethical principles—such as ensuring fairness and transparency in AI-assisted grading or protecting student data privacy in AI learning platforms—will reassure students that technological innovation is compatible with their moral and religious values. Incorporating AI literacy and ethics modules into the curriculum will prepare students to engage with AI responsibly while fostering technical competence and mental awareness.

Limitations and recommendations for future studies

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, thus restricts the ability to infer causality among the variables. Future research could employ longitudinal designs, make cross-cultural comparisons, and examine additional psychological or contextual factors, such as perceived risk, trust in AI, or ethical concerns, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI adoption in higher education. Second, the study was conducted within a specific context—university students in Malaysia—which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other cultural or educational settings. Replicating the study in different countries or among diverse student populations could provide comparative insights and strengthen the external validity of the results.

Additionally, this study opens avenues for further exploration into the role of religious beliefs in technology adoption across different cultural contexts. Future research could expand on this study by examining other religious perspectives or by exploring longitudinal changes in attitudes and intentions as AI technologies evolve. In addition, future research may consider integrating other theoretical models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) or Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) to compare their predictive power with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Researchers could also explore additional variables, such as perceived usefulness, trust in AI, or ethical concerns, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI adoption behaviour. Qualitative approaches, such as interviews

or focus groups, may further enrich the findings by capturing deeper insights into students' motivations and concerns regarding AI usage in education.

Conclusion

University students' behavioural intention to use AI is shaped by a combination of personal attitude, social influences, and cultural-religious factors, with attitude being the most influential predictor. This study highlights that fostering positive perceptions, supportive environments, and ethical alignment are key to accelerating AI integration in higher education, ultimately preparing students for active participation in the AI-driven future.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the need for higher education institutions to cultivate positive attitudes towards AI through awareness programs, hands-on training, and ethical discourse. Universities should also foster supportive peer and institutional environments that normalise AI usage in academic settings.

Notably, this study contributes to the understanding of how Islamic perceptions influence university students' behavioural intentions to use AI. Importantly, aligning AI education and practice with Islamic ethical principles—such as fairness, accountability, and the responsible use of knowledge—can strengthen students' confidence and willingness to engage with AI technologies responsibly. By integrating TRA with religious perspectives, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the contributing factors that drive technology adoption in Muslim communities. The positive relationships identified in this research suggest that aligning AI use with ethical considerations rooted in Islamic teachings can promote a more responsible and accepted integration of AI technologies among students.

Future educational policies and curriculum designs can therefore benefit from embedding both technological competence and moral consciousness, ensuring that AI integration in higher education contributes to holistic student development. In this way, the study not only enriches the theoretical understanding of technology adoption through the lens of TRA and Islamic perspectives but also offers actionable guidance for creating ethically grounded AI practices in Muslim-majority learning environments.

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Parental Perceptions of Islamic YouTube Animation: The Case of 'Abdul Bari' in Pakistan.

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Abstract: This study examines how Pakistani parents perceive Islamic YouTube animated series *Abdul Bari* and its influence on their children's religious learning. This study integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory, Parental Mediation Theory, and Mediatisation of Religion. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were gathered from 25 Muslim parents of children aged 5–12 through in-depth interviews. The findings show that parents value *Abdul Bari* for promoting Islamic virtues while viewing it as a safer option compared to secular online content. At the same time, they express unease over YouTube's commercialised and algorithmic nature. The study contributes to media and communication research by revealing how religious parenting practices intersect with digital media cultures, demonstrating that faith-based education is being redefined within online spaces. It offers new insights into how families negotiate religious identity and technological influence in the context of contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: Islam, Muslim, social media, edutainment, socialisation

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Abstrak: Kajian ini meneliti bagaimana ibu bapa Pakistan melihat siri animasi Islam YouTube *Abdul Bari* dan pengaruhnya terhadap pembelajaran agama anak-anak mereka. Kajian ini menggabungkan Teori Kegunaan dan Kepuasan (Uses and Gratifications Theory), Teori Mediasi Ibu Bapa (Parental Mediation Theory), dan Pendigitalan Agama (Mediatisation of Religion). Dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi kualitatif, data dikumpulkan daripada 25 orang ibu bapa Muslim yang mempunyai anak berumur antara 5 hingga 12 tahun melalui temu bual mendalam. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa ibu bapa menghargai *Abdul Bari* kerana memupuk nilai-nilai Islam serta menganggapnya sebagai pilihan yang lebih selamat berbanding kandungan sekular dalam talian. Pada masa yang sama, mereka menyatakan kebimbangan terhadap sifat komersial dan algoritma YouTube. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada bidang penyelidikan media dan komunikasi dengan mendedahkan bagaimana amalan keibubapaan berteraskan agama berinteraksi dengan budaya media digital, menunjukkan bahawa pendidikan berasaskan keagamaan sedang didefinisikan semula dalam ruang dalam talian. Ia juga memberikan pandangan baharu tentang bagaimana keluarga merundingkan identiti keagamaan dan pengaruh teknologi dalam konteks masyarakat Muslim kontemporari.

Kata kunci: Islam, Muslim, media sosial, didik-hibur, sosialisasi

Introduction

Social media plays a multifaceted role in modern society, serving as a powerful platform for communication, information sharing, education, marketing, entertainment, and social mobilisation (Andok, 2024). It enables instant connection between individuals, communities, and organisations across the globe. Fostering relationships and building networks through messaging, video calls, and interactive content (Katili, 2024; Bajwa et al., 2022). These developments reflect how digital connectivity has redefined the very nature of social interaction shifting communication from physical spaces to virtual communities where ideas, values, and identities are constantly negotiated. In educational contexts, social media supports learning by providing access to diverse resources, expert knowledge, and peer-to-peer interaction (Arif et al., 2025; Akhyar et al., 2025). However, this growing integration of social platforms into daily life also blurs the boundaries between learning and leisure. The way users, particularly young audiences, engage with digital content reveals that education today is not confined to classrooms but increasingly shaped by online experiences, including entertainment media and animated narratives.

In Pakistan's rapidly expanding digital landscape, YouTube has emerged as a primary platform for children's entertainment and informal education (Vogelman-Natan, 2025; Shamim, 2024). Its vast library of accessible and algorithm-driven content attracts young audiences and parents alike, positioning it as a key medium for value-based storytelling. Among the numerous channels, *Abdul Bari* stands out as a popular Islamic animated series that blends humour, relatable narratives, and vibrant visuals with Qur'anic and prophetic teachings (Annisah, 2025; Naila & Rohimi, 2024). Through this combination, the series makes moral and religious concepts both engaging and relevant to contemporary children, reflecting how digital media increasingly functions as a space for faith-based learning within Pakistani households.

The research focus is the views of the parents concerning the Islamic values and moral imperatives discussed in the Abdul, animated series. It examines parental modes of control over the children in connecting with the programme, and points to mediation practices through which viewing experiences and religious training in the family are moulded.

This research is an addition in studies of communication and media because it clarifies the intersection of religious learning, conversational practices in families, and digital technology in everyday media activities. The article broadens the existing discussion on the media audiences, mediation of parents, and mediatisation of religion in non-western, Muslim-dominated contexts by investigating the choice, meaning, and inclusion of faith-based messages in the everyday lives of children. Furthermore, the research shows how the interactive and algorithmic environment of YouTube transforms the role of parents, which develops new ways of teaching morality and spirituality that integrate entertainment and schooling. In this connection, the results provide new insights into how the digital space would put family communication, religious authority and cultural identity back together.

Research Questions

Guided by these aims, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Pakistani parents perceive the religious and moral content presented in the *Abdul Bari* animated series?

RQ2: In what ways does YouTube's platform structure influence parents' trust, accessibility, and control over their children's viewing experiences?

RQ3: What parental mediation strategies do parents employ when their children watch *Abdul Bari* on YouTube?

RQ4: How do parents evaluate the programme's impact on their children's Islamic knowledge, moral behaviour, and interest in faith-based learning?

RQ5: What concerns or challenges do parents have regarding the use of YouTube for delivering Islamic animation to children?

Literature Review

Religious media refer to the radio, film, print, television, and online media, which is used to spread faith-based information, teach moral virtues, and practice spirituality (De Sousa et al., 2021). As technology continuously evolves, religious performance has left the institutional forms of religiosity and moved to individualised electronic platforms like YouTube, podcasts, social media networks; such platforms do not only inform but also determine moral perspectives and cultural identities (Zhang, 2025). This shift explains why it is imperative to develop an understanding of how families perceive and trust online content about religion in ordinary life situations.

Islamic animation, to be more specific, has become one of the most common methods of conveying religious and moral values to people through the use of interesting plots and pictorial images (Huda & Anwar, 2024). These are various productions that condense Quranic and prophetic teachings to children by transforming abstract morals into stories that children can relate to (Al Mushaiqri & Sulistio, 2024; Yudaningsih, 2025). However, most of the current studies devote more attention to the content quality and teaching methods instead of paying attention to the audience perceptions.

YouTube is one of the leading informal learning sources of Pakistani children, and the *Abdul Bari* series became one of the culturally

appropriate options of Islamic video games instead of the secular entertainment. This kind of series is more used by parents to reinforce moral and religious values at home (Lu et al., 2022; Konca et al., 2024; Shen et al., 2025). The given work builds on the existing research by examining the way Pakistani parents perceive, interpret and control the involvement of their children in utilising *Abdul Bari*, which provides insight in the contribution of digital Islamic media involvement in moral growth and parental supplication.

The necessity to explore Islamic animation and its impact on children learning and moral growth is therefore important in understanding parental attitude. In the case of *Abdul Bari*, the opinion of parents is influenced by their religious beliefs, the level of education, their faith in manufacturers, and the hopes in the spiritual development of their children. Such views, in its turn, guide the mediation techniques like discussion, co-viewing, and content restrictions (Alareifi, 2024; Kanu et al., 2024).

The combination of such mediation actions and the messages relayed by animation has an influential effect on children in the internalising and interpretation of Islamic teachings. Although the popularity of the *Abdul Bari* and other similar productions are rising, the Pakistani academic literature on the topic of these productions in terms of socialising children to be like Allah and moral transformation is still lacking. Religious media for children occupies a unique space in Pakistan. While it offers an alternative to secular or Westernised entertainment and reinforces Islamic values. YouTube's algorithm-driven system also exposes children to unrelated or inconsistent religious content (Eide, 2020).

While previous research has largely examined how religious media influence adult audiences, limited attention has been paid to their impact on children, particularly from parents' perspectives. Studies such as De Sousa et al. (2021), Zhang (2025), and Feriana et al. (2025) highlight how faith-based media strengthen adults' spiritual identity, moral reflection, and community bonds. However, these works overlook how young viewers engage with religious content and how parents' guide that process. This study fills that gap by exploring Pakistani parents' perceptions of the Islamic YouTube series *Abdul Bari* and its role in shaping children's moral and spiritual learning, offering insights into its

authenticity, educational value, and cultural relevance in contemporary Muslim households.

Table 1: Summary of Research Gaps

Research Dimension	Existing Insights	Identified Gap
Islamic Animation as Edutainment	*Nussa* and similar series show educational and moral efficacy	No empirical studies on *Abdul Bari* as a Pakistani phenomenon
YouTube as Delivery Medium	Known advantages and risks of algorithm-based platforms	Lack of research on Pakistani parents' trust and navigation of YouTube content
Parental Mediation in Religious Context	Mixed parental attitudes toward cartoons in Pakistan	Insufficient understanding of mediation specifically for Islamic animation
Semiotic and Cultural Representation	Semiotic analyses of *Burka Avenger* highlight value-laden storytelling	No content analysis done on *Abdul Bari*
Digital Community Reception	Ethnographic themes in Indonesian Islamic animation	Need for similar analysis of Pakistani audiences around *Abdul Bari*
Animators' Cultural Framing in Pakistan	Scholars emphasise localised heritage in animation content	*Abdul Bari* unaddressed in this cultural identity discourse

This study integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G), Parental Mediation Theory (PMT), and Mediatisation of Religion (MOR) to examine how Pakistani parents engage with the Islamic animated series *Abdul Bari* and guide their children's media consumption.

U&G assumes that audiences are active participants in the communication process, selecting media content based on personal goals such as information-seeking, entertainment, social interaction, or personal identity formation. In the context of *Abdul Bari*, U&G helps explain why parents in Pakistan choose or encourage their children to watch this Islamic animated series (Aksoy & Allahverdi, 2025). Parents often use the programme as an informational and educational tool to teach Islamic morals in an engaging, age-appropriate format. It also addresses the entertainment requirements of children that show humour, songs and characters that they can relate to; it facilitates socialisation

through the strengthening of shared religious value in families (Bhatti et al., 2025; Waheed et al., 2022).

PMT is a theory which looks at the regulation policies that parents employ to govern and influence video-consumption of children. The premise on which this theory was developed is attributed to the fact that parental involvement has the potential to change the way children decode and are impacted by the media messages (Mekonen et al., 2024). It mentions three primary forms of mediation style: active people can mediate by talking and explaining about the Islamic messages that they see in the episodes; restrictive style, parents can prohibit the watching time or skip some episodes, that they regard as less educational and important; and co-viewing style, the parents can watch the television shows with their kids and provide a chance of shared interpretation and conversation. In *Abdul Bari*, the parental mediation is important to make sure that the moral and religious messages presented in content are comprehended, put into their contexts, and be aligned with the values family members share.

MOR represents the attribute in which the religious beliefs, practices and messages get modified in accordance with the modern media forms. The premise behind this idea is that the media do not merely carry religious material but reworks it in forms that suit the logic of the mediums (Kołodziejska et al., 2023). *Abdul Bari* is an example of mediatisation based on the study context that involves adapting the teachings of the Islamic faith into motion pictures that have an appeal on children today. Being available on YouTube, the programme can reach an audience that far outweighs the traditional religious education, due to the algorithms of this platform that increase the visibility (Stepniak, 2023). By using digital storytelling, the series mixes the ideals of Islam with pop culture, making it more palatable and digestible to the youth viewers by making moral and spiritual lessons more tolerable (Trihastutie, 2024).

The amalgamation of U&G Theory, PMT, and MOR provides a unified lens for examining how digital media, family communication, and faith-based learning intersect. U&G Theory explains parents' active selection of *Abdul Bari* to meet children's moral, educational, and entertainment needs. PMT highlights the communicative strategies discussion, co-viewing, and restriction used to guide children's

understanding. MOR situates these family practices within the broader transformation of faith through digital media, where religion adapts to media logic and visual storytelling. Together, these frameworks reveal how parents and children co-construct religious meaning in mediated settings, merging moral education with entertainment, digital faith communication, and religious socialisation.
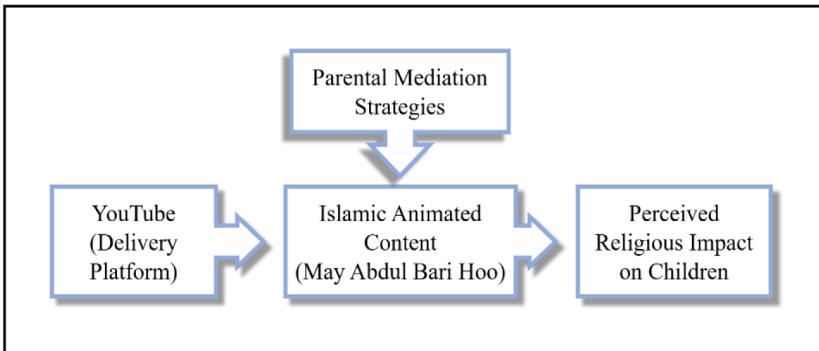

Figure 1: Research Framework

Research Methodology

Research Design: This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of Pakistani parents regarding the *"Abdul Bari"* animated series on YouTube. This research seeks to uncover the meanings parents attach to the series and its perceived role in shaping their children's religious and moral understanding. The emphasis is on obtaining rich, descriptive accounts rather than quantifying responses, which aligns with the interpretivist paradigm that underpins this study (Rogo, 2024).

Population and Sampling: The target population comprised Muslim parents residing in Pakistan who had children between the ages of 5 and 12 years and who allowed or encourage their children to watch the *"Abdul Bari"* series on YouTube (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024). A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify participants who met these specific inclusion criteria. The study aimed to interview between 20 and 25 parents, with the final sample size determined by the point of thematic saturation, where no new significant insights emerged from additional interviews (Naeem et al., 2023).

Table 2: Demographic Profiles of Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Education Level	Number of Children	Age of Child Watching	Viewing Frequency of "Abdul Bari"
P1	Female	32	Bachelor's	2	7	Daily
P2	Male	38	Master's	3	9	3–4 times a week
P3	Female	29	Intermediate	1	6	Weekly
P4	Female	35	Bachelor's	2	10	Daily
P5	Male	40	Master's	2	8	2–3 times a week
P6	Female	30	Bachelor's	3	5	Weekly
P7	Female	28	Bachelor's	1	6	Daily
P8	Male	37	Bachelor's	2	11	Weekly
P9	Female	33	Master's	2	7	2–3 times a week
P10	Female	31	Intermediate	1	5	Daily
P11	Male	39	Bachelor's	3	10	Weekly
P12	Female	34	Master's	2	8	3–4 times a week
P13	Male	36	Intermediate	2	7	Weekly
P14	Female	27	Bachelor's	1	5	Daily
P15	Female	29	Bachelor's	2	6	2–3 times a week
P16	Male	41	Master's	3	9	Weekly
P17	Female	33	Bachelor's	1	7	Daily
P18	Female	35	Intermediate	2	8	Weekly
P19	Male	38	Bachelor's	2	10	2–3 times a week
P20	Female	30	Master's	1	6	Daily
P21	Female	32	Bachelor's	2	5	Daily
P22	Male	37	Intermediate	3	11	Weekly
P23	Female	34	Master's	1	9	3–4 times a week
P24	Female	28	Bachelor's	2	6	2–3 times a week
P25	Male	39	Master's	2	8	Weekly

Data Collection Method: Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which offered flexibility in exploring participant experiences while ensuring coverage of core themes. An interview guide was developed to include open-ended questions related to participants.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms such as Zoom or WhatsApp, depending on participant convenience and geographic location (Grodal et al., 2021). Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent.

Data Analysis: Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. This involved familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review and refinement of themes, and final theme definition. The thematic approach allowed the researcher to capture both explicit and implicit meanings within the parents' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

Ethical Considerations: The study adhered to strict ethical protocols. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews, and they were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any stage. Participants' identities were kept confidential by using pseudonyms in transcripts and publications (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Data will be stored securely and accessible only to the researcher.

Ensuring Trustworthiness: To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants for verification. Peer debriefing was used to discuss emerging themes with fellow researchers. Triangulation was achieved by comparing parents' accounts with selected episode observations from the series (Adler, 2022). An audit trail was maintained to document research decisions throughout the process.

Table 3: Coding Process Linking Codes, Themes and Theories

Initial Code	Category	Emerging Theme	Relevant Theory
Moral reinforcement	Faith-based learning	Perceptions of Religious and Moral Content	U&G
Educational motivation	Information and education	Perceptions of Religious and Moral Content	U&G
Platform convenience and concern	Accessibility vs. risk	Role of YouTube in Accessibility and Trust	MOR
Active guidance	Co-viewing and discussion	Parental Mediation Strategies	PMT

Initial Code	Category	Emerging Theme	Relevant Theory
Restrictive control	Time and content limitation	Parental Mediation Strategies	PMT
Behavioural change	Moral and social development	Perceived Impact on Children's Behaviour	U&G
Algorithmic risk	Monitoring and concern	Concerns and Challenges	MOR + PMT

Findings and Analysis

This segment presents the findings of interviews conducted with 25 Muslim parents in Pakistan whose children (aged 5–12) watch the "*Abdul Bari*" animated series on YouTube. Through thematic analysis, five major themes emerged. Each theme is supported with direct participant quotes and sample dialogues from the series in both Urdu (Roman) and English translation.

Perceptions of Religious and Moral Content

Parents consistently viewed *Abdul Bari* as a meaningful religious and moral guide for their children, blending Islamic teachings with relatable storytelling. They considered the series not merely entertainment but an extension of their own efforts to install values. Episodes convey principles such as truthfulness, kindness, respect, gratitude, and responsibility through brief, memorable dialogues that children often repeat in daily life.

> For instance, P4 recalled her son correcting a friend by saying, "…Allah loves those who speak the truth," while P17 noted her child reminding a cousin, "Return what is not yours," directly quoting *Abdul Bari*. Parents appreciated how the show emphasised empathy and helping others. P9 described her daughter assisting her grandmother after watching *Abdul Bari* help an elderly man carry heavy bags, and P15 observed her son echoing the series' message of brotherhood by helping a classmate.

> Respect for elders was also strongly reinforced. P20 mentioned her daughter greeting grandparents more warmly, and P6 highlighted her son's habit of saying, "Peace should be greeted first," mirroring *Abdul Bari*. The series connects

religious practices to everyday manners: P14's daughter reminded her to say *Bismillah* before meals, while P1's son began arranging his shoes neatly, citing, "Cleanliness is part of faith."

Environmental awareness and care for animals were additional themes. P19 noted her child preventing harm to a cat, reflecting *Abdul Bari*'s lesson, "Be kind to animals, and Allah will be kind to you," and P12 recalled her daughter avoiding river pollution after an episode. Humour and songs enhanced retention of lessons; P2's child enjoyed a cleaning song, while P24 remembered a humorous warning about lying, which also reinforced the moral. Other examples included refusing to waste food, comforting peers in sorrow, and sharing with neighbours, all inspired by *Abdul Bari*'s guidance. As P7 concluded, "It doesn't feel like preaching; it feels like a friend teaching them in a fun way and they remember every word."

Role of YouTube in Accessibility and Trust

Parents highlighted YouTube as the primary medium that makes *Abdul Bari* easily accessible, affordable, and consistently available for their children. For many, the platform's free nature and on-demand viewing make it a preferred choice over television or DVDs.

P3 explained, "On cable, we had to watch at a fixed time, but on YouTube, we can watch whenever we want." Similarly, P8 appreciated the lack of geographical restrictions: "I work in Dubai, my kids are in Lahore, and we watch the same episodes on YouTube."

Several parents noted the convenience of replays and playlists for repeated learning. P1 said, "If a child likes an episode, you can replay it again and again with just one click." P14 added that her daughter memorised moral songs because "She listens to the same song using the rewind feature."

Trust in the content was another key theme. Many parents felt safe letting children watch *Abdul Bari* on YouTube because it aligns with Islamic values. P12 remarked, "Not everything on YouTube is safe, but *Abdul Bari* gives peace of mind." P21 echoed this, saying, "Even if I leave my phone with them, I know nothing inappropriate will appear."

YouTube's algorithm also plays a role in building viewing habits. P19 said, "Search once, and YouTube automatically suggests more." This recommendation feature helps parents who may not have time to manually select content every day. Offline availability through YouTube downloads was mentioned by P5: "If the internet is slow, download it first and show it later." P16 added that this feature is particularly useful during travel: "When there's no internet on the train or in the village, kids watch downloaded episodes." As P7 summarised, "Having *Abdul Bari* on YouTube is like having a library inside your home."

Parental Mediation Strategies

Parents described various ways they guide and monitor their children's viewing of *Abdul Bari* on YouTube, aiming to maximise its moral lessons while controlling exposure. Strategies ranged from active co-viewing to discussion and reinforcement, to restrictive control over screen time and access.

Many parents said they prefer watching the episodes together so they can immediately explain lessons. P4 noted and P17 shared, "Whenever prayer is mentioned, I say: see, *Abdul Bari* also prays on time."

Some parents use post-viewing discussions to link the show's message with real-life situations. P9 explained, "If there's an episode on sharing, the next day I ask after school: what did you share today?" P15 added, "When *Abdul Bari* helps his mother, I tell my child to help me in the kitchen."

Others apply restrictive mediation to balance moral education with screen limits. P2 said, "Only one or two episodes daily, otherwise other videos start showing up." P19 uses YouTube Kids to filter unwanted content: "I keep a lock on the YouTube Kids app."

A few parents incorporate reward-based mediation, allowing the series as a motivational tool. P20 shared, "If homework is done on time, then they get to watch *Abdul Bari*." P24 said, "If they behave well, I play their favourite moral story."

Co-viewing also becomes a way to correct misunderstandings. P6 explained, "Sometimes children misunderstand, so I pause the video and explain what it really meant." In some

cases, parents even extend the lesson into activities. P12 described, "After the Eid episode, we distributed food to the poor together." As P21 summarised, "Just playing the video isn't enough; explaining alongside is essential."

Perceived Impact on Children's Behaviour

Most parents reported noticeable positive behavioural changes in their children after watching *Abdul Bari*. They described improvements in manners, prayer habits, truthfulness, and willingness to help others. Many linked these changes directly to repeated exposure to the show's moral dialogues.

> P1 shared, "Speaking the truth is our identity." My daughter always mentioned I am speaking truth like *Abdul Bari*. P14 observed that her son started reminding family members about prayer: "It's prayer time, let's pray," like *Abdul Bari*.

> Some parents saw changes in sharing and empathy. P9 said, "Now he shares his lunch at school because in one episode *Abdul Bari* shared his lunch." P12 noticed her daughter showing kindness: "After the Eid episode, she put her old clothes in a box saying these are for the poor."

> Parents also linked behavioural improvement to the show's repeated emphasis on obedience and respect. P4 explained, "When *Abdul Bari* obeys his mother, my son listens to me the same way. P15 added, "Now he greets elders with 'Peace be upon you, just like in the series." Some parents highlighted reduced exposure to undesirable media habits. P2 said, "Earlier he was obsessed with games and random cartoons, now he mostly watches this moral series."

> However, a few parents noted that changes require consistent reinforcement. P19 cautioned, "Just watching isn't enough, you have to remind them again." P6 agreed, "Until I give him daily examples from the episode, the behaviour doesn't stay consistent." As P21 put it, "Now we have a little *Abdul Bari* in the house."

Concerns and Challenges

While most parents appreciated *Abdul Bari* for its moral and religious content, some expressed concerns regarding children's viewing habits,

comprehension, and reliance on digital platforms. A common worry was increased screen time.

> P3 noted that her son sometimes insisted, "I will only watch *Abdul Bari*," while P16 added that even after one episode, children often requested more, requiring parents to enforce limits. P11 observed that children occasionally interrupted homework to watch, mimicking *Abdul Bari*'s encouragement to "learn a little more."

> Younger children sometimes interpreted lessons too literally. P6 shared that after the episode "Lying is bad," her son corrected his sister over minor matters. P20 mentioned that the lesson "Anger comes from the devil" led her child to label parental discipline as devil-like. Similarly, P14's daughter compared her parent's patience to *Abdul Bari*'s, reflecting a direct but sometimes rigid application of lessons.

> Some parents expressed concerns about YouTube itself. The platform's recommendations occasionally introduced unrelated or inappropriate content. P5 said the next suggested video might be a cartoon they did not want their child to watch, and P19 highlighted the difficulty of controlling YouTube, preferring to supervise viewing closely. P8 recounted occasions when she left the room only to find her child viewing unrelated videos.

> Language and comprehension were other challenges. While the series is in Urdu, some Islamic terms and moral concepts were difficult for younger children to understand. P10 noted her son asking the meaning of "*Amanat*" (trust), and P21's daughter inquired about *zakat* after hearing an episode.

Discussions

Perceive the religious and moral content of the "Abdul Bari" animated series

The findings show that Pakistani parents overwhelmingly perceive *Abdul Bari* as a highly positive and authentic source of religious and moral education for their children (Akhyar et al., 2025). Parents consistently emphasised that the series extends their own efforts of moral upbringing by embedding Islamic teachings within relatable stories, humour, and memorable dialogues (Katili, 2024). This perception is best explained

through U&G, which highlights the ways audiences actively use media to meet specific needs in this case, information and education, socialisation, and moral development.

Parents mostly valued *Abdul Bari* for its educational gratification, appreciating how it conveys Islamic values honesty, respect, kindness, and gratitude through simple, relatable stories that translate abstract morals into practical lessons (Alareifi, 2024). Seen as an extension of informal religious education rather than entertainment, the series enables parents to act as active audiences within the U&G framework, intentionally selecting content that reinforces both moral learning and family values. Its depiction of everyday moral choices positions it as a tool of mediated moral socialisation, bridging digital media and traditional faith-based instruction. This raises deeper questions: How does consistent exposure to such content shape children's internalisation of Islamic values? Why do parents place such trust in mediated forms of moral guidance, and to what extent might *Abdul Bari* complement or gradually replace direct parental teaching?

Second, parents experienced socialisation gratification as the programme reinforced shared religious values within the family. Children were seen emulating *Abdul Bari*'s modelled behaviours saying *Bismillah* before meals, showing kindness to animals, and respecting elders while encouraging others to do the same. Parents thus viewed the series as a tool for moral socialisation that strengthened family bonds and collective religious identity. As Aksoy and Allahverdi (2025) note, religious media promotes "value internalisation through modelled repetition," enabling children to translate moral lessons into everyday practice. Within the U&G framework, this fulfils relational needs by allowing families to reaffirm shared beliefs and integrate Islamic values into daily life, transforming media viewing into lived faith.

Lastly, religious narratives and moral development was also an important source of satisfaction. Parents pointed to the ways in which children emulated the actions and echoed the speech of *Abdul Bari* in real life situations. This congruent experience as a result of the regular exposure to good examples of morality allowed children to assimilate Islamic morals by themselves, in a fun and active way. In that regard, the series serves a greater purpose than being a form of entertainment;

it turns into a means of moral education based on religious plots (Bhatti et al., 2025).

Parents' trust and control over the program's accessibility and viewing experience

The results suggest that the platform architecture of YouTube is indeed the key determinant of how the parents view and trust *Abdul Bari* in providing both religious and moral teaching to their children (Andok, 2024). The most suitable framework to interpret this dynamic is the MOR, which focuses on the adaptation of religious content to the digital format, its manipulation by technologically driven logics and locations in the beyond-religious spaces.

First, parents highlighted how the adaptation of Islamic messages into YouTube's audiovisual format made religious learning more engaging and accessible for children. The programme's integration of storytelling, humour, songs, and visual appeal exemplifies how traditional moral teachings are re-packaged into a digital-friendly form (Katili, 2024). This transformation reflects the mediatisation process, where Islamic narratives are not merely transmitted but reshaped to fit the logics of online media consumption.

Second, YouTube's algorithmic infrastructure strongly influenced visibility and continuity of religious exposure. Parents noted that once children accessed the official channel, the recommendation system ensured repeated exposure to related episodes, reducing the need for constant parental oversight (Yudaningsih, 2025). Alternatively, the commonly feared consequences of algorithm-based media did not apply to the parents in this example, with the algorithm seen as aide on the circulation of safe morally upright content. The playlist and auto-suggestion features of the platform, therefore, regulated the consumption and continuation of religious messages in children's daily activities.

Third, YouTube's on-demand accessibility extended Islamic education beyond traditional settings, allowing parents to integrate faith-based learning seamlessly into daily routines through replay able and downloadable episodes. This flexibility transformed religious instruction into an adaptable, family-centred practice. As De Sousa et al. (2021) note, digital religious media democratises access by removing spatial and temporal barriers, enabling audiences to engage

with content "at their own pace and context." From a U&G perspective, this accessibility fulfils instrumental and convenience gratifications, as parents choose platforms that suit their educational and temporal needs. It also reconfigures traditional authority, empowering parents rather than religious institutions to mediate their children's exposure to Islamic teachings. Thus, YouTube functions as a modern agent of religious socialisation, extending moral learning across diverse households and contexts.

Parental mediation strategies

Parents apply a mix of mediation strategies when their children watch *Abdul Bari* on YouTube, a practice that can be understood through PMT. This framework highlights three key approaches active mediation, restrictive mediation, and co-viewing all of which were evident in parental practices. Active mediation appeared most dominant. Many parents paused episodes or elaborated on key dialogues to ensure that children absorbed the intended Islamic teachings. For example, when episodes emphasised truthfulness or prayer, parents reinforced these values by reminding children of their religious obligations (Lu et al., 2022). Some extended the lesson beyond the screen by asking follow-up questions such as whether children helped at home or behaved honestly at school. This illustrates the explanatory function of active mediation, where parents not only interpret media content but also integrate its moral lessons into everyday life.

Restrictive mediation was also widely employed. Parents set limits on the number of episodes watched or restricted viewing to specific days. Some of them used technical resources, including YouTube Kids to block distracted or inappropriate content. Notably, the fact that *Abdul Bari* was a trusted site was not a barrier condition, but rather the risk of the platform in general and overexposure to the content (Konca et al., 2024). This signifies the cocooning aspect of barring-mediation as a trait that functions to reconcile moral teaching with bracketing the monitor.

The act of co-viewing was used as a sort of supplement to the learning experience in religion. The act of watching together led the parents to detangle misunderstandings that existed between them and their families, institute talks about Islamic practices and consolidate nuclear relationships.

Impact on children's faith-based learning

The U&G Theory allow one to consider parents perception of *Abdul Bari* in terms of the programme utility to meet the needs of their children. The three most important advantages were named by parents: they fostered the moral development, increased the levels of Islamic awareness, and made a child interested in religious education (Bhatti et al., 2025). These are about the uses of the programme, as well as about the gratifications that parents and children would get out of it.

The most popular evident gratification was a moral development parents noted that children could learn such values as honesty, kindness, and respect through the show stories. Some reported that their children began to act more truthfully in challenging situations, citing *Abdul* Bari as a role model. Similarly, improvements in manners, obedience, and respect for elders were considered outcomes of repeated exposure to the program's ethical lessons.

The second benefit emphasised was the strengthening of Islamic knowledge and daily practices. Parents noticed that children were not only learning religious concepts but also applying them in routine life. Examples included reminding others about prayer, using Islamic greetings more often, and expressing enthusiasm for visiting the mosque. Parents valued how the programme translated religious principles into simple practices that children could easily remember and apply (Pamuji et al., 2024).

The third significant satisfaction was the motivational boost on faith-based learning. Parents valued the fact that the Islamic faith was popularised through the series because they taught lessons through tales, melodies and the widespread culture. One of the mothers observed that the Islamic teachings became approachable and relatable because of the use of regular things like Eid, visit to mosques and greetings. Such conversations include the saying of *Salamu Alaikum*! The mentioned quotes were also examples of how the programme linked faith and lived experiences (Al″Mushaiqri & Sulistio, 2024).

Parents concern on the use of animation for Islamic learning content

Parents claimed that they valued *Abdul Bari* as a source of Islamic education but objected to delivering it via YouTube (Naseef et al., 2024).

Mediatisation of Religion and Parental Mediation Theory frameworks are only the best ways of explaining these concerns.

Considering the perspective of mediatisation, the perceptions of YouTube by parents indicated the complicated negotiation between religious and media agendas. They were happy that the platform made Islamic education easy and easy to watch, but they were equally aware of how the YouTube format, engineered by algorithms, commercials, and popular culture, is altering the role of children and religion to be introduced to one another. Instead of being exposed to Islamic values in a traditional setting of mosques or being taught by the parent, children of nowadays learn through a media environment filled with commercial interests and attention-seeking logic.

This change implies that digital platforms not only provide religious contents but actually transform the religious content meaning and communication procedures. The worries by parents that their interests are distracted by some of the recommendations or secular advertisements can be seen as a clue to the fact that spiritual education is being repackaged in the logical structure of media consumption. Therefore, their duality about YouTube shows a more general cultural change - when the transmission of teachings in religions is mediated more by technology, and religious power is subjected to the influence of algorithmic power.

People were concerned by the recommendation system generated by algorithms that may cause children, who watch religious videos, to get into music, dancing, or even cartoons that are not aligned with the Islamic doctrine (Jeffery, 2025). They also were concerned the advertisements and commercialisation of the platform would make sacred messages irrelevant as they are placed between secular noise.

Screen dependency was another popular problem. Children had to undergo a series of screenings most of the time, and they would repeat *Abdul Bari* as a way of receiving even longer screenings. This was causing more fear among the parents that this was deepening an on-demand media consumption habit that was completely opposite to instilling discipline and a balanced approach towards the media. In addition, other subscribers had the opinion that the instructive tone of certain episodes was not as enticing, which questions the sustainability

of religious learning on a platform that is closer to entertainment than to introspection.

The ways that parents had applied in reacting to these risks was compliant with PTM. The restrictive mediation that was mostly applied were, imposing time limits, controlling devices, and in some cases, downloading of episodes such that they could be viewed offline instead of using YouTube. Some of them went to an extent to suggest that an ad free application should be developed to offer people a safer access. Proactive mediation could also be observed when parents clarified difficult terminology (e.g., *amanat* or *zakat*) and when they put the lessons into context when children misunderstood them, e.g. their saying ugly words about their siblings. The co-watching was applied as the supplement to the practice that enabled the family talk about the essentials of prayer, honesty, and kindness and proper description of interpretation (Eirich et al., 2022).

The results of this research prove and expand the preexisting assumptions of mediated religion and digital parenting because they show how Pakistani parents combine faith-based media with family communication and moral education. In line with the findings of research on the effectiveness of animation-based digital learning media in facilitating understanding of Islamic education by children, this paper content asserts the appreciation of *Abdul Bari* by parents as an engaging tool in ensuring children understand Islamic values. Likewise, the results are consistent with Astuti et al. (2022), who stress that digital caregiving allows Muslim families to nurture spiritual principles using the technology means. The findings support the U&G Theory, which suggests that parents are obviously making deliberate decisions on the types of Islamic content not to be entertained by, but to satisfy community learning and spiritual expectations.

PMT is also supported in the study by the observation that parents use active guidance, restriction, and co-viewing to make sure that the experiences of children on the Internet were moral. In comparison to the Western situations, where Clark (2012) and Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) discover that digital parenting is commonly defined in terms of managing screen time, risk regulation, and negotiation of technology usage, Pakistani parents also conceptualise digital mediation as an issue of moral duty that is connected to preserving faith. Spectacularly per

the MOR school of thinking, YouTube is a revolutionary but at the same time a religiously enabling tool, that at the same time reconceptualises the teachings of Islam in the digital realm. Contrary to the ideas of secularisation promoted by certain Western research, this paper demonstrates that digital media can enhance religious socialisation and provide spiritual education in Muslim preponderant settings, which provides a culturally unique example of religiousness in digital raising.

Conclusion

Results demonstrate the remarkable parent values of the programme as an authoritative Islamic knowledge and morality system of children, and in the context of the active negotiation of the use of the digital space. According to U&G terms, parents saw the series to serve several purposes including provision of an accessible religious education, augmentation of the moral progress, and enthusing children in their faith-centred education. The stories of the characters which people could recognise, humour, and catchy dialogues not only brought amusement but also helped to reinforce the general endeavours of families in contributing to moral upbringing as children could transfer the values of Islam to practice.

Meanwhile simultaneously, the platform structure of YouTube contributed a lot to the formation of parental trust and control. The mediatisation process led to repackaging of Islamic teachings into captivating audio-visual materials and the protrusion of religious teaching to family lifestyles on an everyday basis. However, the parental anxieties about the dangers of secular exposure via algorithms, advertising, and the consumption of screens also coincide with the parental anxieties about the rubrics of commercialisation in the digital logic. Altogether, *Abdul Bari* reveals the way digital religious media can act as the instrument of the Islamic socialisation as well as the location of the negotiation between the religious, family and technological dimensions. It is successful not only because of what it reproduces in its content but because of how the parents negotiate its role in the larger digital landscape that comprises children learning environments. This paper drives the religious media studies forward by integrating U&G theory, MOR, and PMT by demonstrating that parental involvement into *Abdul Bari* positively contributes to the moral education and family-level socialisation and exposure to platform risks. It points to the role

of the accessibility, suggestion and commercial purpose of YouTube in informal religious education and to a hybrid mediation relating regulation and collaborative learning.

This study provides valuable insights into parents' perceptions of *Abdul Bari* on YouTube but has several limitations. As it focused solely on parents, children's perspectives were excluded. Future research should include children through interviews or focus groups to understand how they perceive and apply religious and moral lessons. Secondly, the sample was limited to Pakistani Muslim parents, restricting generalisability. Comparative studies across diverse Muslim societies could reveal cultural influences on parental mediation and trust in digital religious media. Additionally, the study relied on qualitative data, providing rich insights but not measuring behavioural or attitudinal changes in children. Mixed-method approaches, such as surveys or experiments, could offer more systematic evidence of media impact. Future studies should also address technological and policy concerns, including the risks of algorithm-driven recommendations and commercialisation.

Academic Contributions: This study enriches communication research by combining U&G, PMT, and MOR to explain the intersection of media, family, and faith. It extends U&G Theory by showing that parents' media choices are driven by collective moral and religious aims rather than personal enjoyment. PMT is expanded through evidence that Pakistani parents use mediation not just for control but as a form of religious instruction. The findings also refine MOR perspective by showing that YouTube supports, rather than weakens, faith transmission demonstrating how digital media can sustain religious learning in family life.

Practical Implications: Practically, the study provides guidance for parents, educators, and media producers. Parents can use co-viewing and guided discussion to strengthen children's moral understanding while managing screen time. Educators may adopt Islamic animated programs like *Abdul Bari* to make value-based education more engaging. For content creators, the findings encourage the production of faith-oriented, culturally sensitive digital media that combine learning with entertainment.

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Development of a Model for Advertising Professionalism from the *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* Perspective

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Abstract: The study proposes a new Islamic model for advertising agencies that embraces a normative perspective framed by *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*. The phenomenological research design was adopted through semi-structured interviews carried out on 25 advertising industry practitioners and academicians well-versed in *Maqasid Al-Shariah*. The findings reveal that

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advertising agencies applied various *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* principles in their codes of conduct, but they did not adhere to the same set of standards whilst academics recommended that *Maqasid Al-Shari'iah* elements be embedded in a standardised code of conduct and implemented in an ecosystem that ensures professionalism and sustainability. The study is significant as it examined both advertising agency and academic perspectives giving birth to the Model of the Implementation of the Advertising Codes of Conduct using *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* that visualises how best to implement *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*.

Keywords: *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*, Professionalism, Advertising Agency, Islamic model, Code of conduct.

Abstrak: Kajian ini mencadangkan satu model Islamik baharu bagi agensi pengiklanan yang berteraskan perspektif normatif *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*. Reka bentuk kajian fenomenologi yang diguna melibatkan temu bual separa berstruktur dengan 25 pengamal industri pengiklanan dan ahli akademik bidang pengiklanan berpengetahuan luas tentang *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pengamal industri telah menggunakan pelbagai prinsip *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* dalam kod etika mereka, namun tanpa mengikut set piawaian yang seragam. Sementara itu, para ahli akademik mencadangkan agar elemen *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* diterapkan dalam satu kod etika seragam dan dilaksanakan dalam ekosistem yang menjamin profesionalisme serta kelestarian. Kajian ini signifikan kerana ia meneliti perspektif kedua-dua pihak, iaitu pengamal industri pengiklanan dan ahli akademik, sekali gus melahirkan cadangan suatu Model Pelaksanaan Kod Etika Pengiklanan berasaskan *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* yang menekankan amalan terbaik seragam untuk melaksanakan *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* bagi industri pengiklanan.

Kata kunci: *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah,* Profesionalisme, Agensi pengiklanan, Model Islami, Kod tatalaku

Introduction

Comparable to other professions, like lawyers, doctors, journalists and public relations practitioners, advertising practitioners encounter many ethical issues at the workplace and must adhere to the codes of conduct to ensure professionalism. Working ethically is an important component of professionalism, besides possessing theoretical knowledge (Christian et al., 2020). The embrace of the Islamic worldview entails that every decision made at advertising agencies should have the primary aim of pleasing Allah SWT preceding other advertising objectives such as

making profits or creating awareness of brands. The Islamic worldview has three components such as belief in Allah SWT, belief in prophethood and belief in eschatology (Ushama, 23 November, 2021). The practice of embedding Islam into advertising is possible as evident by a study on Islamic marketing principles and conventional social media (Hasan, 2020). It is also necessary as several advertisements are targeted to the Muslim audience that is growing in number. There are almost two billion Muslims globally making the Muslims a huge market with Indonesia having the largest number of Muslims with about 240 million Muslims (World Population Review, 2025)

Ideally, advertising agency practitioners should practise professionalism by adhering to *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* to produce advertisements that are Islamic. *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* includes: the preservation of the self, the preservation of reasoning, the preservation of religion, the preservation of property, and the preservation of lineage (Kamali, 2008). The study is set in the context of Malaysia which is predominantly Muslim comprising 70.5 percent of the 30.9 million population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2025). Its official religion is Islam as mentioned in the constitution (Government of Malaysia, 2010).

Statement Of the Problem

On social media, the presence of unethical advertisements that are deceptive and not acceptable to Islam is rampant. This calls for the importance of ensuring that the advertising practitioner produces advertisements that are Islamic for the Muslim and non-Muslim audience as Islamic values are universal. It was found that not many businesses comply with Islamic marketing practices making it important to come up with guidelines (Abdullah & Ahmad, 2010). Hence, the study focused on determining the perceptions of advertising agencies and academics in relation to their use of *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* in the production of advertisements. Unethical advertisements could influence audiences' perception of reality and behaviour as espoused by several theories such as social learning theory (Bandura, 2001) and cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2002). The reinforcement of Islamic values through advertisements is important as the Muslim advertising practitioner's purpose of life is to revere Allah SWT (Mokhtar & Samsudin, 2015). The purpose of the study is to understand how the advertising agency

regulates the conduct of advertising practitioners as they influence the production of the advertisements significantly when encoding messages for the receiver.

Significance of the Study

There is the dearth of previous studies on a comparable subject making the study important to conduct to fill the research gap. Any offensive advertisements could cause hatred to the brand (Noor et al., 2022). Most studies that are very old have examined the advertising production process from the ethical perspective but have not focused on the role of advertising practitioners (Hirschman, 1989; Hyman, 2009; Hyman et al., 1994; Polonsky & Hyman, 2007; Rice, 1999) which makes this study significant. The study is also significant because it will develop a model that would provide a framework for an ecosystem to ensure professionalism when producing Islamic advertisements by providing recommendations that will be beneficial to advertising agencies in Malaysia and other Muslim nations.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions for this study:

1. How do advertising agencies regulate the conduct of advertising practitioners?
2. How should *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* principles be imbued in the advertising practitioners' agency code of conduct?

Literature Review

There are several studies in the past that focus on the topic of advertising practitioners and Islam but there appears to be the dearth of studies on the advertising agency and advertising practitioners from the *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* perspective. Most of the studies on the advertising agency, practitioner and ethics are not recent articles justifying the research gap of the contemporary situation.

Advertising Professionalism in Advertising Production

Advertisements are criticised for their unethical messages and inappropriateness to Muslims making the role of the advertising practitioner in the production process important to scrutinise. The

advertising industry has also been stigmatised for long as it is regarded as being complicit in "exploitative capitalist mechanisms and cultural degradation" (Cohen & Dromi, 2018, p. 175). The for-profit objective of the advertisements per se without the consideration of ethics is a concern. Thus, advertising ethics should be applied by advertising practitioners of agencies to ensure that advertising they produce is ethical.

This boils down to the notion of professionalism in the advertising industry. The question of whether advertising is a profession has been raised before. Advertising is not deemed as a profession but ought to have practitioners conduct themselves with professionalism (Keane, 1974). The professionalism stature is a societal granted privilege hence practitioners have the responsibility to perceive beyond one's own self-interest and address societal needs (Christians et al., 2020). There appears to be limited consensus on what makes a profession. If we were to regard advertising practitioners as professionals, there are two aspects that should be considered by them: they need to have theoretical knowledge of advertising and embrace ethical practices (Christians et al., 2020). The truth of the matter is, whether advertising practitioners are professionals or not, they must adhere to ethical practices, but professionalism makes it more formal and universal.

There are previous studies by Muslim and Western scholars emphasising the importance of the role of the agency (and practitioner) in producing responsible advertisements within tight deadlines and high expectations (Drumwright, 2019). Despite this, advertising practitioners play an important role in influencing advertising content hence their conduct needs to be examined and regulated. Western scholars have underscored the negative implications of producing irresponsible and unethical advertisements due to their harmful effects (Polonsky et al., 2003). Advertisements are deemed as irresponsible if regarded as such by at least one stakeholder (the advertising agency, advertiser, media or competitor) in the production process (Polonsky & Hyman, 2007). The advertising practitioner and advertising agency are mentioned by Drumwright (2019) as important stakeholders in ensuring that advertising ethics is practised. In Malaysia, advertising is perceived to be Western causing Western behaviour to be adopted by the people (Kadir & Al-Aidaros, 2015) and this is unethical.

Advertising ethics can be examined on three levels: 1. The micro level or individual level that includes individual advertising practitioners; 2. the meso level or groups of organisations that affect advertising business (agencies, clients, media, industry associations, or regulators); and, 3. the macro level in relation to advertising's impact on society (Drumwright, 2019). All three levels are interrelated with one another and do not function in silo (Drumwright & Kamal, 2016). The study focuses on the first two levels in this regard, in terms of the individual advertising practitioners at the micro level and the meso level in the form of advertising agencies without excluding the third level which is macro in orientation.

The interdependence of the advertising practitioner and the advertising agency is obvious. The advertising practitioner's moral sensitivities are influenced by the organisational culture of the advertising agency making the meso level important alongside other meso-level players like clients and media which make up an ecosystem where all parties must adhere to high ethical standards (Drumwright, 2007; Drumwright & Murphy, 2004).

There are issues of ethical concern when advertising practitioners interviewed in 29 agencies were found to have "… 'moral myopia', a distortion of moral vision that prevents moral issues from coming into focus, and "moral muteness" meaning that they rarely talk about ethical issues" (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004, p. 7). Although, another study found that practitioners were concerned about morality as reflected by the findings of a study by Cohen and Dromi (2018) who mention that the practitioners regard themselves as caring people and are concerned about others. Nevertheless, this brings to the fore, the importance of having advertising professionalism through the embrace of advertising ethical practices by adopting *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*.

Advertising Professionalism and Ethical Conduct

Professionalism in the media (and advertising) industry refers to the ability of a person to adopt ethical practices and have theoretical knowledge of the subject matter (Christians et al., 2020). There has been great concern of advertising practitioners and their moral character raised by several Western and Muslim scholars (Cunningham, 2005; Hunt & Chonko, 1987; Mokhtar & Samsudin, 2015; Richardson-Greenfield & La Ferle, 2021; Schauster, 2015; Schauster & Neill, 2017). The apparent

dearth of more recent studies on the subject matter leads to the research gap, making this study significant. Of focus in these older studies on ethical advertising is the advertising practitioners' fair treatment of clients and their response to the financial implications in relation to their clients. One study surveyed 330 advertising agency executives and found that "treating clients fairly" was one of the frequently mentioned complex ethical problems, creating honest advertisements and working for advertisers whose products were unhealthy or not useful were some of the other issues mentioned thus affecting their performance and their relationships with co-workers (Hunt & Chonko, 1987). Another study found that advertising professionals depicted considerably lower ethical reasoning than journalists and suggested that they can reason at a higher stage of moral development but when placed in a professional setting, they stopped using their moral judgement and focused on the financial implications for them and their clients (Cunningham, 2005).

Some advertising practitioners interviewed in another study experienced moral myopia and worked external to the 'principled' level of ethical concern from the cognitive moral development framework (Richardson-Greenfield & La Ferle, 2021). There were several issues raised by respondents because of the tension in agency–client relations causing deceptive advertising to be rationalised. This came about with the imposition of pressure placed on agencies by their clients to deliver effective advertising that attains results, the issue of deception was identified as a concern by informants but not treated seriously, and the need for training in identifying ethical issues and tools in making ethical decisions was apparent. Practitioners also needed help to move along the continuum of moral development and engage in intentional ethical reasoning and decision making.

The need for the training of advertising practitioners was also raised in another study. A study framed by identity theories and moral justifications reported the interviews of 29 advertising and public relations executives, that found greater opportunities for advertising practitioners to behave unethically, the absence of ethics training provided and that some perceived it was their personal responsibility to be ethical whereas others perceived the responsibility to lie with others like the publisher or consumer (Schauster & Neill, 2017). Another study that used the lens of Giddens's structuration theory suggested that leaders with virtuous character affected advertising agencies with their morality as

virtuous leaders promoted organisational values and encouraged ethical awareness (Schauster, 2015). It is obvious that the role of the advertising practitioner is important in producing ethical advertisements as found in previous studies. How would one attain professionalism in advertising agencies? Due to the controversy surrounding advertising practitioners regarding moral myopia, "…an Islamic ethical code of conduct should be formed to guide Muslim Islamic advertising practitioners as they play a part in producing advertisements that would influence messages" (Mokhtar, 2019a, p. 6).

A set of code of conduct together with training on the codes would be greatly beneficial to advertising practitioners to educate them on how to be ethical. Prominent advertising scholars have gone ahead to define a code of conduct or ethics as, a set of concepts and principles that provide us with a guideline in identifying the behaviour that helps or harms creatures and that most people confuse ethics with behaving in accordance with social conventions, religious beliefs, and the law (Paul & Elder, 2020). This denotation highlights what to expect in any code of conduct guidelines or ethics but of course in Islam, the code of conduct needs to adhere Islamic principles. The conduct of advertising practitioners has always been under scrutiny by industry professionals and the public for whom the advertisements are intended (Bedoui & Mansour, 2015; Mokhtar, 2019a). Subsequently, there is the need to demystify the concept of *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*.

The Muslim Advertising Practitioner and Maqasid Al-Shari'ah

Several scholars have examined the role of advertising practitioners in terms of Islamic ethics. Islamic advertising goes by the principle 'enjoin good and forbid evil' and recognises that the Muslim advertising practitioner should be guided by this in life (Mokhtar & Samsudin, 2015). Islamic ethics is based on the Qur'an and Sunnah unlike Western ethics (Mokhtar, 2019b). Mokhtar (2019a) puts forth a framework generated from Al-Ghazali's Al-Ihya' linked to the Muslim advertising practitioners that that embrace the predominant concepts of vicegerency, *Tawhid, Ihsan, Islam, Iman* and *wasatiyyah* in addressing moral myopia.

Another way to address the ethical aspect of advertising is to adhere to *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*. It is imperative to ensure that the advertising production process involves stages that conform to the *Shari'ah*. A

study found that some advertisements were not totally Islamic although the product was *halal*, the advertising practices of health and beauty products were not 100 percent *Shari'ah*-compliant as they did not fulfil the five characteristics making up the *halal* advertisement encompassing aspects of credibility, non-deceptive, simplicity, dignity and humanity (Aziz et al., 2019). Again, the advertising practitioner is at the centre of the production process.

Maqasid is an Arabic word constructed in the plural form to mean 'purposes' or 'objectives' and is rooted in the Arabic word, *qasada,* which means 'intended.' Prominent Muslim scholars, Ibn' Ashur (2001), Muhammad al-Zuḥaylī (2006), Ibn Bayyah (2007), and Yusuf al-Qaraḍāwī (2008) collectively define *Maqasid* as the ultimate sense of meaning and wisdom that concerns with the rulings of the lawmaker or lawgiver, often referred to as '*Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*' which are categorised into five aspects: protections of life, property, lineage, intellect, and religion that are intended to guide and protect the welfare of humanity.

There is the absence of studies on the code of conduct for advertising practitioners and *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* and very few studies on advertising or the advertising practitioner and the *Maqasid* (Abdullah & Azam, 2020; Mohamad et al., 2019). Advertising practitioners must adhere to *Shari'ah* teachings when formulating Islamic advertisements that are not offensive to Islam (Mokhtar, 2019a). A study reviewed literature and produced the Strategic Islamic Marketing framework that focused on *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* and marketing by applying the five elements of *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* to marketing in terms of the protection of religion (that requires businesses to carry out their business strategies with good intentions by providing products that serve their beliefs and religion), protection of life (businesses need to provide *halal* goods and services that would positively affect our health), protection of intellect (providing beneficial message to educate consumers), and protection of posterity or lineage in which the sources of the products must be *halal* to protect the physical and spiritual health, and protection of wealth, when conducting businesses need to adhere to the *Shari'ah* (Mohamad et al., 2019).

Another study focused on the role of the entrepreneur using advertising that can be integrated with the five principles of *Maqasid*

Al-Shari'ah thus coining the term - *Halalpreneurship*. This term relates to the entrepreneur who possesses the characteristics of *taqwa* and trustworthiness, prioritises *halal* products and services, worships Allah SWT, carries out philanthropic responsibilities, and has knowledge of both business and *Shari'ah* (Abdullah & Azam, 2020). However, to achieve the genuine and intended meaning of advertising, practitioners must accept the importance of applying *Shari'ah* principles before designing their advertisements.

The few studies on Islamic advertising and ethics hardly discussed the principles of *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* in relation to Islamic advertising. The solution to the issues raised is the production of a set of codes of conduct that are Islamic by adhering to the *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* for the Muslim audience that need to be issued alongside training on incorporating *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* elements in the advertising production process. Codes of conduct incorporating *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* are important in addition to the current advertising guidelines issued by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), the Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) and the Ministry of Health Malaysia that appear to be disregarded by the advertisers of Facebook advertisements (Aziz et al., 2019) and other advertisers leading to the production of unethical advertisements. The importance of using *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* to preserve the five important elements is also emphasised by Karim et al. (2016) when the current guidelines are not specific in prescribing the depiction of women in Islamic advertisements.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is defined by *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*. Many scholars associate *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* with the objectives of the *Shari'ah*. al- al-Qaraḍāwī (2008) contends that *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* is the "objectives intended by textual commands, prohibitions and permissibility, and the detailed rulings of the *Shari'ah* to the Muslim *Ummah*." In addition, al-Qaraḍāwī's definition relates *Maqasid* to the ultimate rulings of the *Shari'ah* to the *Ummah*. 'Ibn Ashur (2001) also defines *Maqasid* as the objectives of the *Shari'ah* that imbue wisdom and more profound meaning that Allah has prescribed unto humanity in the form of *Shari'ah* ordinances. Furthermore, Abdallah Ibn Bayyah's (2010) definition of

Maqasid concerns the general intentions of the *Shari'ah*, objectives, wisdom, inferences, and true meanings and interpretations as dictated by the lawgiver. For emphasis, Ibn Bayyah's views on *Maqasid* concerns textual sources that can ultimately identify the *Maqasid.* Finally, Muhammad al-Zuḥaylī (2003) defines the *Maqasid* as the aims, meanings, and objectives established by the *Shari'ah* to realise and achieve them through the different Islamic laws laid down in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Scholars agree that the Qur'an and the Hadith are the ultimate sources of the *Maqasid,* some scholars disagree whether what is inferred in the Quran and the Sunnah can uprightly identify with *Maqasid* to a certain extent (Malik, 2015). The *ulama'* have classified the *masalih-cum-Maqasid* into three categories in descending order of importance: essential *masalih* or *darruriyat* followed by complementary benefits (*hajiyyat*) and then embellishments or *tahsiniyyat* (Auda, 2008a; Kamali, 2008). The essential interests under *masalih* or *darruriyat* are adopted in the study: faith, life, lineage, intellect, and property and these were used to form the questions for the interviews with advertising practitioners and academicians (see Figure 1). There is an order of priority apparent in *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*:

> An order of priority is also suggested among the definitive *maqasid* in favour of those which preserve faith and life over the other three, and protection of the family comes next followed by intellect and property. A similar order of priority also applies between the essential *Maqasid* which take priority over those which are deemed complementary and then those which fall under desirability (Kamali, 2008, p. 136).

Purposes of Islam (levels of necessity)					
Necessities (*Daruriyat*)		Needs (*Hajiyat*)		Luxuries (*Tahsiniyat*)	
Preserving of faith	Soul	Wealth	Mind	Offspring/ Lineage	Honour

Figure 1: Hierarchy of the purposes of the Islamic law (dimension of levels of necessity) (Auda, 2008a, p. 3)

Research Methodology

A phenomenological research design was adopted for this study, focusing on exploring how advertising agencies regulate the conduct of advertising practitioners and how academicians propose that *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* is to be applied to advertising production. Phenomenology denotes an individual's lived experiences and how they make sense of whatever happens through their articulation of these experiences (Clark et al., 2021; Mathotaarachchi & Thilakarathna, 2021). It is essential to understand whether advertising practitioners conform to the industry's code of conduct, and if they applied *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* in the production process.

The interview method was used for the study, where 19 academicians of a public university in Malaysia (14 males and five females) and six advertising agency practitioners (four males and two females) in Malaysia were carried out using a semi-structured interview guide as the data collection instrument using purposive and snowballing sampling techniques. Purposive sampling refers to selecting knowledgeable samples in the subject matter that can answer the interview questions, and the snowballing technique, encompasses the use of samples that are generally recommended by interviewed respondents (Clark et al., 2021).

The academicians were chosen from a higher learning institution in Malaysia for their knowledge and expertise in *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* practices. The respondents were asked what *Shari'ah* is about and whether its principles can be applied to the general population, including non-Muslims, to which they had to provide their expert opinions based on empirical evidence regarding the phenomenon being studied. The advertising practitioners were interviewed about their agency's code of conduct and whether they were aware of any other advertising codes of conduct in addition to their use *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*.

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim for fear of misrepresenting the interviewees and were later checked for accuracy by the lead researcher. In addition, the researchers used a standard interview guide for all academicians, that differed from the questions for the advertising practitioners. All semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer to add probing questions to attain more explanations and details in their response to questions.

For the analyses, transcribed interviews were analysed using NVivo, a prominent software used by qualitative researchers in data analysis. An inductive coding route proposed by Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) was adopted where codes were created based on the available data and read several times to arrive at the accurate meaning of the sentences during the coding. Then, a hierarchical code frame was generated to organise the codes into an organisational data structure to facilitate proper analysis. A technique for establishing credible findings was the audit trail where the research process was examined by a co-researcher who was an expert on qualitative research methods (Tisdell et al., 2025).

Table 1: Themes and Codes of Application of *Maqasid Al-Shariah* in Advertising Production

Themes	Codes
Use current codes of conduct	Use own agency codes
	Staff discipline coupled with codes of conduct
	Practice self-regulation
	Select employees carefully
Reference to other codes	Refer to 4As, ASA and Content Code
Use ideals when selecting clients	Ad agency chooses clients wisely
	Most clients choose ad agency
	Depends on Networking

Findings

There were two research questions for the study. The first research question was - How should advertising practitioners apply *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* principles in the production of their advertisements? The second research question was - How could *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* principles be imbued in the advertising practitioners' agency code of conduct?

Table 2: Themes and Codes of how *Maqasid Al-Shariah* can be Imbued in Codes of Conduct

Themes	**Codes**
Create Codes of Conduct with *Maqasid Al-Shariah* Elements	*Maqasid Al-Shariah* is Universal and for non-Muslims too
	Ads should be *Shariah*-Compliant

Themes	Codes
	Use Various Ways to Apply Five Essentials
	Application of code of ethics should be in line with Quran and Sunnah
	Dimensions of *Maqasid Al-Shariah* can be related to advertising
	Include More than Five Essentials
Develop an ecosystem	Educate the Industry and Others on *Maqasid*
	Unify Shariah Law and Civil Law
	Form Bodies to Monitor Implementation of *Maqasid Al-Shariah*

Theme 1 – Use Current Codes of Conduct

The findings revealed that it would be feasible to embed *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* ideals in the current codes of conduct. The codes used at present are the agency's own codes of conduct and employee disciplining.

Code 1: Use Own Agency Codes

Some advertising agencies have the employee handbook that includes the codes of conduct for advertising practitioners. These can be used to incorporate *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* ideals to be more relevant to Muslim advertising practitioners and conform to Islam.

> It is part of our employee handbook covering Respecting people, DE&I, harassment & bullying, IT security etc. We are not able to provide you with a copy because this is our internal document (Informant 1).

> We do not have a complete code of conduct for my company. We only have an employee handbook. So, every employee, upon joining, is handed that employee handbook that has those rules and regulations that they must follow while executing their duties. So, we have an informal one (Informant 4).

> Yes, we do (have our own codes). It's called Omnicom Code of Business Conduct (Informant 6).

Some of the codes are formal and others are informal ones of which the latter are codes of conduct that are not comprehensive and complete as indicated by Informant 4. The internal codes of conduct are preferred

over the Malaysian Advertising Code of Practice (MACP) and the Content Code for the industry because they protect consumers and employees simultaneously.

> Our internal code of conduct covers more than Content Code and ASA. Content Code and ASA focus on protecting the consumers; our internal code seeks to protect the consumers and our employees (Informant 1).

> Yes, we have a stringent compliance code of conduct that allows us to operate because we have about 800 employees worldwide controlled by HR (Informant 5).

How different are the Advertising Standard Authority (ASA) codes, Content Code and others compared to the internal codes of conduct of an agency?

> Yes, we have the 4As (Association of Accredited Advertising Agents Malaysia), but each group relies on their internal codes, although numerous bodies help regulate the conduct on top of the internal code of conduct…They are different because ours are internally focused, and the ASAs are externally focused on what can be done on TV, radio, and publications in terms of content, but the internal ones are on how one behaves (Informant 5).

> It serves different purposes (Informant 6).

Code 2: Staff Discipline coupled with the Codes of Conduct

Bad conduct is unacceptable for advertising agencies and there are several disciplining techniques which have been used by the agencies and one of them is in terms of laying off staff members when required. This proves the seriousness of advertising agencies when it comes to their expectations of good behaviour from staff. A good code of conduct coupled with disciplining techniques would be ideal for creating a more efficient and productive ad agency said some informants.

> The employees are not allowed to share our client's information with other people, our competitors, but aside from that, we are very professional and have no problem with our employees for now. Nevertheless, we will issue a warning letter if it happens, but if it persists, we will fire the employee (Informant 2).

> Yes, first of all, my Heads of Department (HODs) will initiate a meeting with the employee and counsel them; if it happens multiple times, they will be fired (Informant 4).

> However, in case of any unethical behaviour, we first issue warning letters, see where it goes, and assess the situation according to its merits and circumstances. I oversee the finance, and there are no unethical behaviours I have encountered with my employees (Informant 3).

Code 3: Practice Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is also practised by advertising agencies according to some informants. The third informant said it is the agencies' responsibility to self-regulate but with some check and balance from other entities like 4As and the 2As (Malaysian Advertisers Association). Another informant said that it must monitor its own performance that is supplemented by being involved in ad competitions.

> It is imperative to self-regulate. Therefore, it is not only the role of the 4As, but also the 2As or clients have to have a big say in how they are run (Informant 3).

> From my experience, there is no organisation in our industries that monitors us. We have our ways of monitoring ourselves (Informant 4).

Informant 3 mentioned that values were adopted by the agency, and it would rather do this than follow codes.

Code 4: Select Employees Carefully

This code was mentioned by Informant 5 when the person said that the backgrounds of prospective employees were scrutinised to make sure that they would conduct themselves well at the workplace.

Theme 2: Reference To Other Codes

There is one code under this theme that refers to the 4As, ASA, Content Code and agency knowledge regarding codes worldwide. Some agencies had indicated that they referred to other codes as they did not have their own codes of conduct.

Code 1: Refer to 4As, ASA and Content Code

Some informants mentioned that their ad agencies refer to the codes by other entities in certain situations like if they did something different or pitch.

> Yes, I have been in touch with the A4s for a long time. There is a code of conduct from the Ministry of Communication, and now there is a Content Code from Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). We do not have to refer to any unless we do anything extraordinary. We kind of know whatever goes on in this industry (Informant 4).

> Firstly, there are advertising rules that MCMC drafts, and that is what we follow. For our internal, we follow the rules based on the advertisements. There are informal rules that we follow to satisfy ourselves and the clients. For example, we do not entertain bribing clients in favour of giving us business. Every relationship we have with our clients is strictly professional…ASA does not have many restrictions, first you have to participate in their activities to get to a boomerang point, you have to put your employees in some seminars, classes, and conferences to learn more knowledge as per their recommendations…The 4As have specific rules for us to follow, such as during pitching. For example, we cannot pitch a client without charging them (Informant 2).

> We follow both the Content Code and ASA's code (Informant 1).

Theme 3 - Use Ideals When Selecting Clients

This theme has a few codes: ad agency chooses clients wisely, most clients choose the ad agency and depends on networking which emphasises that there are more aspects to look at that go beyond the codes of conduct.

Code 1: Ad Agency Chooses Clients Wisely

The advertising agency would choose their clients or advertisers wisely before they agree to commit in terms of the nature of their business, their record of payments, their brand credibility and if their values are the same as the agency's. Informant 4 claimed that the record of payment and clients' industry are important to scrutinise. Informant 5 mentioned

that the brand must be a proper fit of what the agency looks for, for it to have credibility and Informant 6 stated that the client must share similar values and ethics as the agency and there is the fear of plagiarism in their ad works that can be accused by the client, mentioned Informant 3.

> Apart from the financial factor, we also look at the nature of their business. We will not work with companies or products that use derogatory messages. For example. we declined to work with a cosmetic company that sells intrusive products that is injected into the consumer's face with the claims that the product will make one look as beautiful as the Koreans. We believe people are beautiful as they are now (Informant 1).

Code 2: Most Clients Choose Ad Agency

According to Informant 2, most of the time, the clients would choose the agency and likewise the agency would find out if the client is able to pay them.

Code 3: Depends on Networking

An advertising agency mentioned that it selects clients through networking with others and tries to focus on building good relationships with others (Informant 3).

For the second research question - How could *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* principles be imbued in the advertising practitioners' agency code of conduct? There are several themes, codes and subcodes generated from academicians.

Theme 1: Create Codes of Conduct with *Maqasid Al-Shariah* Elements

There are six codes generated under this theme.

Code 1: Maqasid Al-Shari'ah is Universal and for non-Muslims too

It is important to understand that *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* is for both Muslims and non-Muslims making the objectives relevant for everyone worldwide. Fourteen interviewees mentioned the applicability of the *Maqasid* for everyone with some of them agreeing to the following:

> …the *Maqasid* should be focused on the entire Ummah and not just Muslims alone (Informant 10).

Code 2: Advertisements should be Shari'ah-Compliant

As *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* was raised by the interviewers, the notion of *Shari'ah*-compliant advertisements was also brought up by several interviewees. The *Maqasid* are objectives of the *Shari'ah*, hence each objective cannot be in isolation but are related to one another. This was mentioned by informants 11, 13 and 21.

Code 3: Use Various Ways to Apply Five Essentials

There are several subcodes that were generated under this code.

Subcode 1: Use all 5 components of Maqasid Al-Shari'ah

When asked about the ingredients of an ideal code of conduct. Several interviewees mentioned that all ingredients of *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* need to be included in the advertising codes of conduct some of which said:

> So, we need to look at all the five elements while formulating the codes because the implementation of the rules might affect our daily lives. So, all five elements are important for our well-being (Informant 20).

> All five objectives should be included in the code of ethics for advertising (Informant 23).

> The higher objectives of *Shari'ah* are important to be observed in our communities. *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* are values that need to be practised in any community therefore, if they become universal values, they need to be preserved for the survival of our communities (Informant 24).

Subcode 2: Use All and According to Priority

Some mentioned the importance of giving priority to religion in the *Maqasid* over others with eight interviewees mentioning this. Some of them were:

> Yes, we have to include all of the five essentials above in producing advertisement according to its priority (Informant 11).

> Preserving human life will be next after religion, family, intellect, and property in that order would be very important (Informant 24).

Subcode 3: Usage depends on Product

The application of the *Maqasid* depends on what you are advertising.

> …it would depend on the kind of product that you're
> advertising. if you are advertising some medical product or
> some drugs, the first thing that comes to mind is the health of
> the other people (Informant 21).

Code 4: Application of code of ethics should be in line with Quran and Sunnah

The codes of ethics need to be adhering to the primary sources of Islam that is the Quran and Sunnah with the *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* as a way of supplementing them.

> When you want to make (the) code, you can use *Maqasid
> Al-Shari'ah* tools to analyse the appropriateness of the scale
> of the code of ethics for advertisement. It should not be the
> main source to use but rather the Quran and Sunnah, however
> *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* can be used to supplement and look at
> the codes of ethics for conflicting point of views. (Informant
> 15)

Code 5: Dimensions of Maqasid Al-Shari'ah can be related to advertising

There are several dimensions of *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* that can be related to advertising according to several subcodes:

Subcode 1: Protection of Lineage

Advertising can protect one's lineage by providing products that are halal that would not adversely affect people, mentioned Informant 16.

Subcode 2: Protection of Wealth

Advertising is directly related to wealth, and it should be protected through the application of the *Maqasid* in terms of the protection of wealth, said Informant 24.

Subcode 3: Protection of Life

Advertising should protect life in terms of preserving our health. People need to sell the best products that are halal as what is consumed will affect our health, mentioned Informant 11 and 12 and it can protect

life by posting advertisements on health-related matters that include medicinal treatments and so forth, said Informant 18.

Subcode 4: Protection of 'Aqli/Intellect

Other than the above, our intellect or *aql* can also be protected in terms of creativity that is *Shari'ah*-compliant, said Informant 12 and religious messages, mentioned Informant 23. Informant 16 said that pornographic or sexually illicit messages might ruin one's intellect, messages that are good and beneficial would educate people and are encouraged.

Subcode 5: Protection of Religion

Protecting religion could be done in a way by giving just, true messages said Informant 11 who then said:

> This is one of the ways to protect the religion because it is a kind of upholding and adhering to the commandment of Allah SWT.

Informant 22 mentioned that protecting religion must be done through da'wah similar to advertisements.

Subcode 6: Protection of Property

Protecting property can be done by increasing it through *halal* means and ads could facilitate the acquisition of property, said Informant 23.

Code 6: Include More than Five Essentials

There could be more than the five elements of the *Shari'ah* and we could include diversity and inclusion for one said informant 6.

> Al-Ghazali in his definition of *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* differentiated it from the objective of people and what is beneficial to them. But *Maqasid* is what is meant by the objective of the law Giver (Allah). So, the five elements of *Shari'ah* that we know might not be the only ones because the elements are many and they keep changing from time to time depending on our situation and the societies in which we live in because their aim is to guide us on what we do the right and not to what was prohibited by Allah (Informant 20).

Theme 2: Develop an Ecosystem

Code 1: Educate the Industry and Others on Maqasid

Make ad agencies aware of the benefits of the codes. Informant 11 mentioned that we must understand the *Maqasid* to create the ecosystem supporting it. Advertisers and the audience need to be accurately informed of *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* so that there is no ill-perception of Islam, said Informant 16. Educate the public that all essentials are accepted in all religions since secondary school level, said Informant 23 and Informant 24. When it comes to the industry, train them on the *Maqasid*, said Informant 21 in a way that shows the beauty of Islam in a gentle manner, said Informant 24.

Informant 9 mentioned that the benefits need to be told to the industry and instilled in the ads. Others have mentioned:

> We need to have a general code of ethics for those who are in the industry. We need to talk to the professionals and involve them (Informant 24).

> …ensure training of the stakeholders (producers, the public, owners) (Informant 15).

Code 2: Unify Shari'ah Law and Civil Law

Some respondents mentioned that *Shari'ah law and civil law must be unified* (Informant 13) as the jurisdiction of ads is usually under civil law not *Shari'ah* law, *Maqasid* needs to be integrated with Islamic Jurisprudence and that morality must be linked to law as Islam is the source of values (Informant 21).

Code 3: Form Bodies to Monitor Implementation of Maqasid Al-Shari'ah

A Halal certification body should be formed (Informant 25), government departments should regulate (Informant 7) or that the *Shari'ah board, Shari'ah risk officer or Shari'ah Advisor* should regulate. Islamic advertisements should themselves have halal certification that is focused on end to end (Informant 25).

There should be a *Shari'ah* board to help regulate the implementation of codes said Informant 7 and Informant 13. Currently, the professional bodies are the 4As, ASA and others (Informant 3 and Informant 6).

Informants 13 and 16 mention the need for a *Shari'ah* advisor or *Shari'ah* risk officer (Informant 10).

Discussion

The findings uncover that advertising agencies use their own codes and the codes of professional bodies such as ASA's MACP and CMCF's Content Code to manage the ethical perspective of their employees. It is clear from this that more needs to be done in terms of including *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* in the codes to ensure that Islam is adhered to by practitioners as MACP and the Content Code are more focused on guiding advertising content rather than the conduct of practitioners. The encoding of advertising messages in carried out by practitioners whose morality should be of a high standard.

There are guidelines for Islamic advertising recommended that prescribe the depiction of the dignified woman, truthful advertising, fulfilment of promises and the disclosure of defects amongst them (Shafiq, 2018). These principles can be categorised under *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* hence, depicting women in a dignified manner would protect the lineage of the populace for example. In Islam, communication (including advertising) has the mission of *da'wah* by conveying Islamic teachings with wisdom for the objective of building harmonious relationships with Allah and between humans (Tanjung & Abdullah, 2025). There are three components of Islamic communication: firstly, the communicator (or advertising practitioner) that is a moral and spiritual agent providing secondly, truthful messages and thirdly, to affect the audience in a good manner (Arifin, 2017) who must be well-versed in the halal and haram aspects of products (al-Qaraḍāwī, 2013) with Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the best example.

In view of this, there needs to be codes of conduct that would be more focused on the behavioural aspect of the advertising practitioner. The absence of such codes is concerning as advertising practitioners face a lot of unethical issues and could influence the advertising messages to be unethical themselves as raised by previous researchers (Cunningham, 2005; Hunt & Chonko, 1987; Mokhtar & Samsudin, 2015; Richardson-Greenfield & La Ferle, 2021; Schauster, 2015; Schauster & Neill, 2017). A professional code of conduct is a set of codes that would be guiding the advertising practitioners as they carry out their work in the agency,

and this research study is upholding that *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* needs to be embedded in it.

The closest professional advertising codes of conduct is spelled out by the American Marketing Association (AMA) statement of ethics that mentions, "Marketing ethics are the norms and values that guide how we make decisions in this work. Ethical marketing means more than just staying within legal lines—it's about building trust, fostering transparency, and acting with integrity" (American Marketing Association (AMA), 2025); it does not specify *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* elements but refers to Western ideals.

The findings also emphasise the importance of using the *Maqasid* as part of an ecosystem for Muslims and non-Muslims. There are non-Muslims working in advertising agencies as well hence, whether the codes would be applicable to them was raised to the academic interviewees and they said that Islam is a universal religion as indicated by the Quranic verse, "We have only sent you (O Muhammad) as a mercy to all the worlds" (Surah Al-Anbiyaa', 21:107).
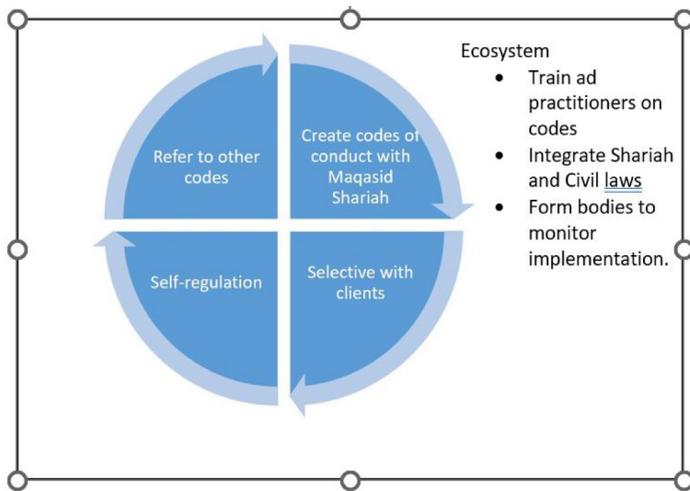
Figure 2: Model of the Implementation of Advertising Codes of Conduct with *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*

The Model of the Implementation of Advertising Codes of Conduct with *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* is formed that recommends referring to other codes by ASA, 4As and CMCF in addition to the proposed code of conduct, by creating codes of conduct with *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*, by

being selective with clients and practise self-regulation that promotes the notion of regulating the industry by the industry against the backdrop of an ecosystem that includes training advertising practitioners on the use of the codes of conduct, integrate *Shari'ah* and Civil laws and form bodies to monitor implementation (see Figure 2). In a study, it was found that advertising practitioners in the US were not trained on deceptive advertising and they need to be trained to identify potential ethical issues which is critical (Richardson-Greenfield & La Ferle, 2021).

Limitations of the Study

This was a qualitative study that cannot be generalised to the population unlike a quantitative study that has this advantage. Its progress was impeded by COVID-19 that shifted interviews online through video calls and emails. In future, face to face interviews ought to be conducted and more interviews with advertising practitioners would have benefited greatly as there were only six interviews with them conducted but a larger number of academic interviews was carried out creating an imbalance in the sample.

Conclusion

There were several themes and codes that generated from the interviews with advertising practitioners and academicians. They reveal that advertising agencies are using their own code of conduct and the MACP, 4As guidelines and Content Code that are meant for advertising content on regulating the conduct of practitioners. This depicts that *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* elements need to be integrated in the code of conduct for Islamic values to be inculcated in practitioners and for advertisements to be morally produced. The Model of the Implementation of Advertising Codes of Conduct with *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* was produced from the study which underscores the components that require practitioners to refer to other codes, self-regulate, create codes of conduct with *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah* elements and be selective with clients against an ecosystem that trains advertising practitioners on codes, integrate *Shari'ah* and civil laws and form bodies to monitor implementation.

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Book Review

Gozde Hussian (2024). *Islamic Doctrines and Political Liberalism: Muslim's Sincere Support.* **Palgrave MacMillan. pp. 253, ISBN 978-3-031-72266-0**

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As someone interested in the ongoing debates on Islam and the liberal tradition, it was not the main title, *Islamic Doctrines and Political Liberalism*, but rather the subtitle—*Muslim's Sincere Support*—that first caught my attention. The phrase conveys a sense of authenticity, suggesting that while considerable efforts have been made to identify common ground between liberal values and Islam, the dialogue continues to grapple with the challenge of establishing a genuinely mutual foundation of support. True to this promise, Gozde Hussain's work situates Islamic intellectual resources in conversation with liberal political theory through careful and sustained engagement, demonstrating both sensitivity to context and fidelity to tradition. The book's central concern is particularly significant: Hussain explores whether mainstream Sunni Islam can find meaningful common ground with the core tenets of Rawlsian political liberalism. Crucially, this engagement does not rely on radical reinterpretations of Islam or on excessively abstract philosophical exercises. Instead, it is rooted in accepted interpretations within mainstream Sunni traditions-spanning theology, jurisprudence, and political thought. Hussain's answer is nuanced. While she acknowledges that most Sunni approaches stop short of fully endorsing political liberalism, she contends that reconciliation remains possible within interpretations that remain faithful to divine sources and jurisprudential reasoning. At the same time, she stresses that reconciliation cannot be one-sided. For genuine dialogue to emerge,

the Islamic intellectual tradition must engage political liberalism, but political liberalism itself must also re-examine and recalibrate certain assumptions. Thus, Hussain frames the encounter between the two traditions as a reciprocal process-one that requires movement on both sides.

Before outlining the central arguments that lead to the above conclusion, Hussain, in the second and third chapters, following the introduction, turns to the theoretical frameworks of her work. She engages both with Comparative Political Theory (CPT) and core assumptions of Rawlsian political liberalism. Yet her engagement is not merely descriptive; it is primarily critical, as she seeks to reconstitute the key assumptions of both CPT and Rawls ideas. On CPT, after surveying the major approaches, she argues that prevailing methodologies and rationales for doing CPT are largely grounded in the assumption that contemporary political theory is dominated by "the presence of Western cognitive hegemony within knowledge production." From this perspective, CPT has often been justified as an effort to deconstruct the Western paradigm and to build alternative arguments from non-Western traditions. While acknowledging the validity of this justification, Hussain raises an important caution. She warns that "our fear of reinforcing Western hegemony and our respect for the autonomy of non-Western culture may inadvertently lead to the exclusion of valuable insights from the Western canon." In this way, Hussain's intervention, therefore, is an attempt to recalibrate the field, offering an approach to CPT that resists both Western dominance and the uncritical privileging of non-Western traditions. In rethinking Rawlsian political liberalism, Hussain examines Rawls's idea that, for a comprehensive doctrine such as Islam to qualify for a liberal society, it must accept that it is rational for others to reject its core beliefs. Rawls calls this the "burden of judgment" (BoJ). Hussain finds this expectation unrealistic. Followers of a religious or philosophical tradition cannot be asked to treat their deepest convictions as open to rejection, since they regard them as absolute truths. Instead, she proposes a more practical standard: a doctrine should count as compatible with political liberalism if it supports the shared conception of justice because it recognizes the benefits of that framework, and that support comes from its own moral principles. In this way, believers do not have to compromise or water down their core convictions, yet they can still endorse and participate in a liberal political order.

After establishing the initial theoretical framework, Hussain examines three types of projects and discourses developed by modern Islamic thinkers to assess whether these approaches support the Rawlsian account of overlapping consensus, the central concept of political liberalism. She first discusses figures such as Mawlana Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who categorically rejected any reconciliation between Islam and the secular political order, even regarding acceptance of such an order as tantamount to apostasy. Drawing on Rawls's framework, she characterizes these positions as *"incompletable doctrines."*

Second, Hussain turns to a body of arguments that could provide Muslims with a framework for endorsing the liberal political order. She identifies three main bases advanced in this regard but notes that the first two do not constitute a genuine pathway to a possible overlapping consensus. These arguments suggest that the secular or liberal order is not an ideal condition but can be tolerated by Muslims so long as it ensures freedom to practice their religion, or if resisting it would create greater instability. Hussain contends that while such discourses acknowledge the secular order, their foundations remain fragile. Support for political liberalism, she argues, stems less from principled theological commitment than from a sense of Muslim vulnerability, and is ultimately regarded as a compromise when measured against the ideal of living under an Islamic state. She considers a third possibility, articulated by thinkers such as Tariq Ramadan, Abdullah bin Bayyah, and Rachid al-Ghannouchi, who argue that Islamic values are broadly compatible with secular and liberal values. From this perspective, it becomes a religious responsibility for Muslims to contribute to and engage with these political models on the basis of their theological commitments. Interestingly, Hussain observes that while this third variant recognizes the justice of the secular order and encourages Muslim participation within it, it still upholds the Islamic order as superior. Nevertheless, she emphasizes that this third approach holds the potential to develop into an Islamic form of overlapping consensus in the long run, provided the conditions are favourable.

Finally, in the chapter preceding the conclusion, Hussain turns to Islamic intellectual projects that explicitly endorse the secular and liberal order as genuinely Islamic. Here she surveys the discourses of Abdullah an-Na'im, Nurcholish Madjid, Ali Abd al-Raziq, and Nasr Abu Zayd.

Among them, she notes that 'Muslim citizens in liberal states who seek an Islamic rationale to support their political order may find al-Raziq's arguments particularly compelling and within the bounds of acceptable interpretations of divine sources'. This is a striking observation, given that much of the modern Islamic political debates has vilified al-Raziq's thesis for departing from mainstream views on Islam and politics. Hussain, however, situates him differently: for those seeking a solid and textually grounded justification for political liberalism from an Islamic standpoint, al-Raziq's project has strong appeal. The main reason, she argues, is that he "sits firmly within the dictates of Islam's sacred texts" and speaks in the scholarly language of the *ulama*, drawing upon authoritative sources and the writings of reputable Muslim scholars and jurists.

Overall, Hussain's work offers a fresh perspective on the debate between Islamic values and political liberalism. Unlike earlier studies that constructed an Islamic case for liberalism by departing from mainstream interpretations through epistemic ruptures, she deliberately seeks answers within established Islamic traditions. In doing so, she provides a careful and critical cross-examination of the development of modern Islamic socio-political thought in relation to contemporary liberal theory. A possible point of contention lies in the way Hussain frames Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī as someone who outright rejected the compatibility of Islam and secularism, equating the latter with apostasy. While al-Qaradāwī did acknowledge the incompatibility of Islam and secularism in Muslim-majority contexts, he later emphasized that Muslims living as minorities should navigate their challenges by embracing the ethics of citizenship in the West-an approach he presented as consistent with Islam's core principles (Al-Qaradāwī, 2014). This positioning brings him closer to scholars such as Abdullah Bin Bayyah and Tariq Ramadan, rather than to the rejectionist camp. Beyond this observation, the book succeeds in offering a balanced and productive framework not only for dialogue between Islam and political liberalism but also for advancing the practice of comparative political theory.

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Asad, Muhammad & Asad, Pola-Hamida (2024). *The Unpublished Letters of Muhammad Asad.* **Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Renaissance Front & Islamic Book Trust. pp. 252, ISBN: 978-967-26388-4-1.**

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This book stands out as a unique compilation of personal letters exchanged between renowned scholar Muhammad Asad and his wife Pola-Hamida with their friends. Originally published in three separate volumes in the Pakistani journal *Islamic Sciences*, it is now available in book form. Muhammad Asad remains an enigma to many in both the East and the West. Two of his most celebrated works are *Road to Mecca*—which chronicles his personal journey into Islam and his extensive travels across the Arabian Peninsula, blending introspective reflections on faith and identity with his spiritual transformation and conversion—and *The Message of the Qur'ān*, his English translation and commentary of the Qur'ān, celebrated for its clarity, literary quality and its thoughtful interpretation of the Qur'ānic message, making it accessible to modern inquisitive minds.

Yet, this book ventures beyond the literary and intellectual dimensions of Muhammad Asad. It unveils a more intimate portrait of the man himself—a raw and unfiltered depiction of his joy and frustration, his exasperations and pain, his moments of despair and glimmers of hope. It is divided into three sections. The first features twenty-six letters addressed to friends, which offer valuable insight into Asad's intellectual and personal evolution. As noted by Muhammad Arshad, the compiler of these letters, Asad had written little in English prior to his arrival in the Indian subcontinent in 1932; most of his earlier works were in German (Asad, Muhammad & Asad, Pola-Hamida 2024: p. 4). These letters, however, reveal crucial aspects of Asad's intellectual journey. Although Asad likely learnt conversational Arabic during his second trip to Arabia (1924-1926), he also lived with the Bedouins in the desert to gain "an instinctive feel of the language" (Asad, 2011, p. xix). According to Asad, only the Bedouins of the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in Central and Eastern

Arabia, have preserved the pure, unadulterated Arabic that remained close to the idiom of the Prophet's time, retaining all its intrinsic characteristics (Asad, 2011, p. xix). This profound immersion in the language would later shape Asad's magnum opus, *The Message of the Qur'ān,* which he described as the 'first attempt' at a truly idiomatic explanatory rendition of the Qur'ānic message into a European language (Asad, 2011, p. xix).

It is true that Asad makes no mention of his teachers, not even in his letters to his friends. Yet, before embarking on his monumental translation of the Qur'ān, he had undertaken a serious study of *Sahih al-Bukhāri* in Madinah. In the preface to the first edition of '*Sahih al-Bukhāri: The Early Years of Islam*' published in 1938, he noted that this volume would be followed by thirty-five more installments of the *Sahih* (Asad, Muhammad 2013: p. viii). Tragically, none of these have survived—though completed—because they were destroyed during the chaos and inter-religious holocaust that engulfed the Indian subcontinent after the Partition (Asad, 2013, p. ix). Reflecting on this loss in '*Sahih al-Bukhāri: The Early Years of Islam*', he wrote: 'With my own eyes, I saw a few scattered leaves of those manuscripts floating down the river Ravi in the midst of torn Arabic books—the remnants of my library—and all manner of debris; and with those poor, floating pieces of paper, vanished beyond recall more than ten years of intensive labour' (Asad, 2013, p. ix).

It is important to highlight his study and translation of *Sahih al-Bukhāri* when addressing the criticism of his detractors—including JAKIM (the Department of Islamic Affairs of Malaysia), who have accused him of lacking a proper understanding of the *sunnah* in his translation of the Qur'ān (Malaysiakini 2025, Free Malaysia Today 2025). In the Preface to the second edition (1981), Asad reflects on this period with renewed insight and gratitude: "[It] gradually dawned upon me that my work on the *Sahih al-Bukhāri* was not totally lost. On the contrary, I realised with growing conviction that the ten years spent on analysing, translating, and clarifying the Sahih were a God-willed preparation for a work which for a very long time had represented an enticing dream to me: a new rendering into English of the message of the Holy Qur'ān and a commentary based on the principle that the doors of *ijtihad* have never been and never could be closed to man's searching intellect."

Similar sentiments were expressed in the closing remarks of his Preface of 'The Message of the Qur'ān' where the author stated: "[I] make no claim to having reproduced anything of this indescribable rhythm and rhetoric of the Qur'ān. No one who has truly experienced its majestic beauty could ever be presumptuous enough to make such a claim or even to embark upon such an attempt. And I am truly aware that my rendering does not and could not really "do justice" to the Qur'ān and the layers upon layers of its meaning": for,

If all the sea were ink for my Sustainer's words, the sea would indeed be exhausted ere my Sustainer's words were exhausted. (Qur'ān, 18:109) (Asad, 2011, p. xxiii).

It is, therefore, perplexing that JAKIM and KDN (The Ministry of Home Affairs) deemed the Malay translation of *The Message,* a decade-long effort by the Islamic Renaissance Front, as heretical, simply because its interpretation diverged from JAKIM's institutional understanding even for the word "Islam." For JAKIM, 'Islam' is understood as the *bureaucratical Islam* practiced and regulated in the modern Malaysian context, confined to the followers of Prophet Muhammad (Malaysiakini 2025, Free Malaysia Today 2025). In contrast, Asad conceptualises Islam in its original, Qur'ānic sense as "self-surrender to God," and a Muslim as "one who surrenders himself to God." As he elucidates: "[It] is obvious that the Qur'ān cannot be correctly understood if we read it merely in the light of later ideological developments, losing sight of its original purport and the meaning which it had—and was intended to have—for the people who first heard it from the lips of the Prophet himself. For instance, when his contemporaries heard the words *Islam* and *muslim,* they understood them as denoting man's "self-surre*nder to God" and "one who surrenders himself to God,"* without limiting these terms to any specific community or denomination" (Asad, 2011, p. xxi). Hence, a Judicial Review filed by the IRF against KDN and the Government of Malaysia is currently being heard in the High Court, which has granted leave for the case to proceed (Malaysiakini 2025, Free Malaysia Today 2025).

The second part of the book contains twenty-two unpublished letters written by Asad and his wife Pola-Hamida Asad. These letters shed a new light into his intellectual engagements and reveal lesser-

known details about his private and family life. The third primarily consists of correspondence between Muhammad Asad, Pola-Hamida Asad and their most trusted friend, Muhammad Husain Babri—whom Asad described as the best, and certainly most faithful, of all friends, a relationship that endured for more than fifty years through the many vicissitudes of his life. (Asad, Muhammad 2012: p. 81). Although much of the correspondence reflects Asad's frustrations in defending his dignity following his marriage to Pola-Hamida—and the ensuing controversy when the Pakistani Foreign Services refused to authorise his marriage on the grounds that he already had a wife, Munirah, residing in Pakistan—Asad maintained that he had long been estranged from Munirah, with little in common except for their son, Talal, who, along with his mother, was living in London instead (Asad & Asad, Pola-Hamida, 2024, pp 28-61). The painful and unfounded allegations that he has renounced Islam also surface in these letters.

What strikes me most in this book is Asad's fascination with the medieval scholar Ibn Hazm, whom he refers to as "my Imam al-A'zam" (the greatest Imam). This admiration is mentioned only once—in a letter to his friend Ghulam Rasul Mehr (Asad, Muhammad & Asad, Pola-Hamida 2024: p. 24)—where Asad refers to *al-Muhalla*, a voluminous book on Islamic law and jurisprudence by Ibn Hazm. This association sparked a train of thought for me. Having previously read his *Message of the Qur'ān,* where he frequently cited Zamakhshāri and Ar-Rāzi, I found his fascination with Ibn Hazm az-Zåhiri somewhat "contradictory." However, it prompted me to revisit Asad's works with renewed attention and to recognise the subtle but consistent influence of Ibn Hazm's rational and textually grounded approach that he references several times in *The Message of the Qur'ān*.

While I cannot elaborate in detail here, I would like to quote the scholar Josef Linnhoff who made a remarkable observation on this issue (Linnhoff, 2021, pp 425-443). He noted that Asad shares several core principles of the Zāhiri school, particularly regarding its conception of the *shari'a* as having a delimited and carefully circumscribed scope. This perspective, he argues, provides the theoretical foundation for Asad's vision of an Islamic State—one in which the s*hari'a* lays down only the fundamental legal and moral framework, but leaves the elaboration of its details to human reason and interpretation.

It is noteworthy that Asad, despite not having read the works of the eminent thinker Ibn Hazm during his early years in India, later recognised that many of his conclusions closely aligned with Ibn Hazm's fundamental ideas (Asad, 2006, p. 2). To Asad, Ibn Hazm ranks highly among a select group of profound thinkers who endeavours to liberate the eternal Law from anything that extends beyond the self-evident ordinances of the Qur'ān and the *sunnah* of the Prophet.

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Book
In-text citations:
Al-Faruqi & al-Faruqi (1986)

Reference:
Al-Faruqi, I. R., & al-Faruqi, L. L. (1986). *The cultural atlas of Islam*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Chapter in a Book
In-text:
Alias (2009)

Reference:
Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

Journal Article
In-text:
Chapra (2002)

Reference:
Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies, 10*, 214-232.

The Qur'ān
In-text:
(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36
(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:
The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

Ḥadīth
In-text:
(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)
(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:
(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

The Bible
In-text:
Matthew 12:31-32

Reference:
The new Oxford annonated Bible. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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