

Intellectual Discourse

Volume 34

Number 2

2026



International Islamic University Malaysia
<https://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/id>

Intellectual Discourse

Volume 34

Number 2

2026

Editor-in-Chief

Danial Mohd Yusof (Malaysia)

Editor

Tunku Mohar Mokhtar (Malaysia)

Associate Editors

Anke Iman Bouzenita (Oman)

Khairil Izamin Ahmad (Malaysia)

Book Review Editor

Mohd. Helmi Bin Mohd Sobri
(Malaysia)

Editorial Board

Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu (Nigeria)

Badri Najib Zubir (Malaysia)

Daniel J. Christie (USA)

Habibul H. Khondker (UAE)

Hafiz Zakariya (Malaysia)

Hazizan Md. Noon (Malaysia)

Hussain Mutalib (Singapore)

Ibrahim M. Zein (Qatar)

James D. Frankel (China)

Kenneth Christie (Canada)

Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (Malaysia)

Rahmah Bt Ahmad H. Osman
(Malaysia)

Serdar Demirel (Turkey)

Shukran Abdul Rahman (Malaysia)

Syed Farid Alatas (Singapore)

Thameem Ushama (Malaysia)

International Advisory Board

Anis Malik Thoha (Indonesia)

Chandra Muzaffar (Malaysia)

Fahimul Quadir (Canada)

Farish A. Noor (Malaysia)

Habib Zafarullah (Australia)

John O. Voll (USA)

Muhammad al-Ghazali (Pakistan)

Muhammad K. Khalifa (Qatar)

Redzuan Othman (Malaysia)

Founding Editor

Zafar Afaq Ansari (USA)

Intellectual Discourse is a highly respected, academic refereed journal of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It is published twice a year – in April and October – by the IIUM Press, IIUM, and contains reflections, articles, research notes and review articles representing the disciplines, methods and viewpoints of the Muslim world.

Intellectual Discourse is abstracted in SCOPUS, WoS Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), ProQuest, International Political Science Abstracts, Peace Research Abstracts Journal, Muslim World Book Review, Bibliography of Asian Studies, Index Islamicus, Religious and Theological Abstracts, ATLA Religion Database, MyCite, ISC and EBSCO.

ISSN 0128-4878 (Print); ISSN 2289-5639 (Online)

<https://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/id>

Email: intdiscourse@iium.edu.my; intdiscourse@yahoo.com

Published by:

IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia

P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Phone (+603) 6196-5014, Fax: (+603) 6196-6298

Website: <http://iiumpress.iium.edu.my/bookshop>

Intellectual Discourse
Vol. 34, No. 2, 2026

Contents

<i>Note from the Editor</i>	215
 <i>Research Articles</i>	
Politics, Wisdom, and Happiness: A Statistical and Comparative Analysis of Greek and Islamic Philosophy <i>Luay Hatem Yaqoob</i>	221
Islamic Influence on Traditional Water Transport and Boat Building in Terengganu from the 13 th to 20 th Century <i>Nur Alia Shamsul Bahri</i> <i>Norazilawati Abd Wahab</i> <i>Arbai 'yah Mohd Noor</i> <i>Mohd Firdaus Abdullah</i> <i>Zuliskandar Ramli</i> <i>Ruzaini Sulaiman</i>	239
Ubuntu and Madani in Dialogue: Ethical Encounters, Lived Experience, and the Moral Realities of Malaysia–Africa Relations <i>Muhammad Danial Azman</i> <i>Kevin Fernandez</i>	265
Mapping Outcome-Based Education Principles to Qur'anic Guidance for Islamic Higher Education <i>Muhammad Irwan Ariffin</i> <i>Afiza Mohamad Ali</i> <i>Nurul Nuha Abdul Molok</i> <i>Khadijah Khalilah Abdul Rashid</i> <i>Hamwira Yaacob</i>	293

Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities in Mainstream Classrooms: The Challenge of Teacher Preparedness <i>Ratnawati Mohd Asraf</i> <i>Harvindar Kaur</i>	319
Language Learning Beliefs in Motion: The Role of Experience and Engagement <i>Alper Fener</i> <i>Ervin Kovačević</i>	339
Fostering National Harmony through Inter-Religious Education: An Analysis of <i>Pendidikan Moral KSSM</i> and <i>Pendidikan Islam KSSM</i> Syllabi <i>Nur Nisa Solehah binti Muhamad Haswazil</i> <i>Fatmir Shehu</i> <i>Ainul Azmin binti Md. Zamin</i>	367
The Spiritual Quest in Contemporary Muslim Speculative Writing: A Reading of <i>Bird Summons</i> (2023) by Leila Aboulela <i>Wan Nur Madiha binti Ramlan</i> <i>Raihan binti Rosman</i>	393
Water Symbolism in <i>Syair Perahu</i> by Hamzah Fansuri: A Reflection of Maritime Life and Islamic Values in the History of Malay Society <i>Mohd Firdaus Abdullah</i> <i>Mardiana Nordin</i> <i>Arba'iyah Mohd Noor</i> <i>Norazilawati Abd Wahab</i> <i>Yusry Sulaiman</i>	415
Eco-political Discourse in Mahmoud Darwish's Poetry of Resistance <i>Hamoud Yahya Ahmed Mohsen</i> <i>Fahad Ibrahim Al-Bakr</i> <i>Ruzy Suliza Hashim</i> <i>Abdulrahman Alosman</i>	439

Mindfulness-Informed Parenting Interventions for Parents
and Caregivers of Children with Atypical Development:
A Scoping Review

Siti Inarah Hasim

Jamilah Hanum Abdul Khaiyom

Mardiana Mohamad

Zunaidah Mohd Marzuki

Jamiah Manap

Nellie Ismail

Nor Hayati Kasim

457

Book Reviews

Patrick Haenni & Jerome Drevon. (2025). *Transformed
by the people: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's road to power
in Syria* (315 pp.) Hurst & Company. ISBN: 9781805264101
Reviewer: Mohamed Fouz Mohamed Zacky

489

Al-Kassimi, Khaled. (2022). *International law, Necropolitics,
and Arab lives: The legalization of creative chaos in Arabia*
(1st ed., 318 pp.). Routledge. ISBN 978-1-032-30714-5.
Reviewer: Nath Aldalala'a

494

Roundtable Report

Understanding Islamophobia: Structural Dynamics,
Internal Challenges, and Strategic Responses
Michelle R. Kimball

499

Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
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	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ	a		اَ، اِ، اِي	an
اُ	u		اُو	un
اِ	i		اِي	in
اَ، اِ، اِي، اِيْ	ā		اَو	aw
اُو	ū		اِيْ	ay
اِيْ	ī		اُوْ	uww, ū (in final position)
			اِيْْ	iyy, ī (in final position)

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

Note from the Editor

In this first regular issue of 2026 (April), *Intellectual Discourse* Vol. 34, No. 2 presents 11 research articles, two book reviews, and a seminar report. These articles span various disciplines, including philosophy, religion, international relations, education, Muslim literature, and psychology. The book reviews and seminar report focus on geopolitical issues in West Asia and the Muslim World. Scholars from the Muslim World, both individually and through interdisciplinary collaborations, contribute their research to enrich this edition.

In the first article (Politics, Wisdom and Happiness: A Statistical and Comparative Analysis of Greek and Islamic Philosophy), Luay Hatem Yaqoob compares the conceptualisation of political wisdom, happiness, and the ideal state between the Greek and Islamic philosophies. Based on descriptive statistical analysis, he finds that Muslim scholars did not merely copy Greek models but significantly expanded upon them by integrating prophetic authority and spiritual dimensions into governance. The article also illustrates how the fusion of reason and revelation produced a sophisticated discourse on achieving the good life within a just society.

The second article (Islamic Influence on Traditional Water Transport and Boat Building in Terengganu from the 13th to 20th Century) by Nur Alia Shamsul Bahri and her colleagues examines the influence of Islam on traditional boat building in Terengganu. Drawing primarily upon archival data, the article demonstrates that the gradual introduction of Islamic influence and local government support resulted in significant changes in boat-making activity. Islamic elements within the Malay community were fully incorporated. The article also shows how animistic and Hindu-Buddhist rituals prevalent in the 13th through 16th centuries gave way to the primacy of Islamic values, which became apparent by the early 20th century.

Muhammad Danial Azman and Kevin Fernandez examine the evolution of Malaysia–Africa relations by contrasting high-level diplomatic narratives with the daily lived experiences of African migrants in the third article (Ubuntu and Madani in Dialogue: Ethical Encounters, Lived Experience, and Moral Realities in Malaysia-Africa Relations). The authors introduce the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework. This framework bridges African communitarian philosophy with Malaysia’s Islamic governance ethos, offering a unique perspective on evaluating institutional fairness and social belonging. While official rhetoric champions South–South cooperation and mutual respect, interviews with Nigerian and Sudanese residents reveal a more complex reality characterised by administrative inconsistency and racialised public perceptions. The article argues that for Malaysia to be a credible moral leader in the Global South, it must align its domestic treatment of the African diaspora with its international advocacy for justice. The study concludes with policy recommendations aimed at humanising bureaucratic systems and fostering deeper intercultural understanding.

The fourth article (Mapping Outcome-Based Education Principles to Qur’anic Guidance for Islamic Higher Education) by Muhammad Irwan Ariffin and his colleagues investigates the integration of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles with Qur’anic guidance to improve quality assurance in Islamic higher education. Using a thematic *tafsīr* approach, the authors map six core educational pillars, like clarity of focus and backward design, to specific scriptural concepts and classical interpretations. The study reveals a strong theological alignment between modern outcomes-driven frameworks and Islamic values such as purposeful action and accountability. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, the article proposes the OBE-Islamic Assurance Cycle, introducing practical administrative tools like proficiency rubrics and assessment blueprints. The article also offers a roadmap for institutions to maintain educational rigour while ensuring their curricula remain spiritually coherent and evidence-informed.

In the fifth article (Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities in Mainstream Classrooms: The Challenge of Teacher Preparedness), Ratnawati Mohd Asraf and Harvindar Kaur examine the global transition from specialised to inclusive education, specifically focusing on the necessity of teacher preparedness for supporting students with learning disabilities in mainstream settings. While inclusion is celebrated for

its ethical and social benefits, such as fostering peer acceptance and improving student discipline, the authors highlight a persistent gap between policy goals and classroom realities. Many educators feel underprepared and lack the specialised pedagogical skills required to accommodate neurodevelopmental conditions like dyslexia, ADHD, and autism effectively. This challenge is particularly evident in Malaysia and other Muslim-majority countries, where legislative frameworks have expanded access without sufficient professional training for staff. The article argues that for inclusion to succeed, institutions must prioritise targeted professional development, administrative support, and positive attitude shifts among teachers.

In the sixth article (Language Learning Beliefs in Motion: The Role of Experience and Engagement), Alper Fener and Ervin Kovačević explore how personal history and current involvement shape people's assumptions about acquiring a foreign language. They categorise perspectives into traditional and progressive beliefs and use an international survey to assess the impact of study length and intensity on these mental frameworks. The findings reveal that extensive experience tends to soften reliance on conventional rule-based methods but doesn't completely abandon them. Conversely, highly active learners show a strong preference for flexible, autonomous, and communication-centred approaches. The authors propose a three-dimensional model to map a learner's mindset based on their belief orientation, total study years, and recent engagement levels.

The seventh article (Fostering National Harmony through Inter-Religious Education: An Analysis of *Pendidikan Moral* KSSM and *Pendidikan Islam* KSSM Syllabi), by Nur Nisa Solehah binti Muhammad Haswazil and her colleagues, examines how inter-religious education is integrated into Malaysia's secondary school curriculum to promote national harmony. The authors perform a comparative analysis of the *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education) and *Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Education) syllabi, finding that the former includes diverse religious content while the latter remains largely exclusive and historical. To address these gaps, the study proposes the implementation of Hikmah Pedagogy, a framework designed to foster critical thinking and respectful dialogue among students of different faiths. The authors advocate for a balanced curriculum that encourages genuine appreciation for Malaysia's multi-religious identity rather than mere coexistence. This

approach aims to equip the youth with the social intelligence necessary to navigate a diverse society with tolerance and mutual respect.

Wan Nur Madiha binti Ramlan and Raihan binti Rosman examine Leila Aboulela's novel *Bird Summons* through the lens of Islamicisation of Knowledge, a framework that integrates religious principles with academic study in the eighth article (The Spiritual Quest in Contemporary Muslim Speculative Writing: A Reading of *Bird Summon* (2023) by Leila Aboulela). By examining the journeys of three female protagonists, the authors illustrate how speculative fiction and magical realism convey the internal spiritual struggles and soul purification of these characters. Their research emphasises the importance of Islamic motifs like pilgrimage and the unseen as a crucial counter-narrative to Western literary perspectives that often marginalise Muslim identities. Furthermore, the article offers a historical overview of Muslim speculative writing, tracing its development from classical fables to contemporary tools of social resistance. The authors argue that these fantastical elements are deeply rooted in Islamic metaphysics, dramatising the pursuit of faith amidst modern challenges and migration. This scholarly analysis positions Aboulela's work as a significant contribution to a burgeoning genre redefining faith-based literature.

In the ninth article (Water Symbolism in *Syair Perahu* by Hamzah Fansuri: A Reflection of Maritime Life and Islamic Values in the History of Malay Society), Mohd Firdaus Abdullah and his research team examine *Syair Perahu*, a seminal work of Malay literature by the Sufi scholar Hamzah Fansuri, which uses maritime imagery as a profound spiritual metaphor. The authors argue that water symbolism serves a dual purpose: representing both physical sustenance and the existential challenges faced on the journey to the afterlife. By placing the poem within a social-historical context, the authors demonstrate how the seafaring realities of 16th to 19th-century Malay coastal life influenced Islamic metaphysical teachings. This analysis reveals that terms like the boat, waves, and anchors are not just poetic devices but are deeply connected to the economic and ecological experiences of maritime communities. The article illustrates a unique cultural synthesis, showing how traditional Malay cosmology and Sufi philosophy merged to create a distinct religious identity. This interdisciplinary approach offers a fresh perspective on the harmonious relationship between humanity, nature, and divine guidance.

In the tenth article (Eco-political Discourse in Mahmoud Darwish's Poetry of Resistance), Hamoud Yahya Ahmed Mohsen and his colleagues explore the eco-political discourse within the resistance poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, specifically examining how he integrates nature and politics to oppose colonialism. The authors contend that Darwish employs ecological imagery like trees, stones, and celestial bodies not just as a backdrop but as active participants in the Palestinian struggle for freedom. By blending ecocriticism with postcolonial theory, the study reveals a deep organic connection between the people and their physical surroundings. This relationship is explored through naturalistic interconnectedness and centrality, demonstrating how the environment serves as a living archive of identity and a tool for resistance. The article presents Darwish's work as a transformative literary body where environmental awareness and political liberation are intrinsically linked.

The eleventh (and last) research article by Siti Inarah Hasim and her colleagues (Mindfulness-Informed Parenting Interventions for Parents and Caregivers of Children with Atypical Development: A Scoping Review) examines the landscape of mindfulness-informed interventions designed for the parents and caregivers of children with atypical development, such as autism and ADHD. By analysing 49 empirical studies, the researchers found that these programmes consistently help reduce parental stress and improve emotional regulation, though effects on children are less certain. While the evidence base is growing, it remains concentrated in Western regions and relies on diverse methodological approaches that vary in scientific rigour. A significant finding of the review is that spirituality and religiosity are almost absent from the literature, despite their cultural relevance to many families. Consequently, the authors suggest that future research should focus on cultural adaptations and more robust study designs to better serve diverse global populations. This overview highlights the promise of mindfulness for caregiver well-being while identifying critical gaps in how these interventions are tailored and evaluated.

This latest issue of *Intellectual Discourse* presents a diverse collection of research exploring the intersection of Islamic values, contemporary society, and academic theory. The featured articles span a wide range of disciplines, from philosophical governance and maritime history to inclusive education and speculative literature.

Studies also examine practical applications of religious principles in higher education, international diplomacy, and inter-religious harmony in Malaysia. Other contributions delve into psychological well-being through mindfulness and the political symbolism of nature in resistance poetry. Collectively, these works demonstrate how spiritual dimensions and cultural frameworks enrich modern intellectual inquiry and tackle global challenges. This volume underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in fostering a deeper understanding of the Muslim World and its global connections.

Tunku Mohar Mokhtar
Editor

Politics, Wisdom, and Happiness: A Statistical and Comparative Analysis of Greek and Islamic Philosophy

Luay Hatem Yaqoob*

Abstract: This study presents a comparative analysis of political wisdom, conceptions of happiness, and models of the ideal polity in major Greek and Islamic philosophical texts. Using hermeneutic close reading and thematic coding with NVivo, the study examines selected works of Plato, Aristotle, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd. The analysis identifies three thematic domains: political wisdom, happiness, and the structure of the ideal polity. Descriptive comparisons show that Islamic philosophers devote greater textual emphasis to these themes, particularly in al-Farabi's systematic theory of the virtuous city and Ibn Rushd's reconciliation of Aristotelian philosophy with Islamic intellectual traditions. While preserving key Hellenistic concepts, medieval Islamic thinkers also introduced distinctive elements, especially the integration of prophetic authority and spiritual dimensions into political philosophy. The study argues that Greco-Islamic philosophical dialogue produced more elaborate reflections on governance, ethics, and the good life, highlighting the continuing relevance of cross-civilisational philosophical exchange.

Keywords: Islamic philosophy, political philosophy, wisdom, happiness, Greek philosophy.

Abstrak: Kajian ini membentangkan analisis perbandingan mengenai kebijaksanaan politik, konsep kebahagiaan, dan model negara ideal dalam teks falsafah Yunani dan Islam yang utama. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan pembacaan hermeneutik serta pengkodan tematik melalui perisian NVivo. Teks yang dianalisis merangkumi karya terpilih Plato, Aristotle, al-Farabi, Ibn

* Assistant Professor, Faculty of Divinity, Social Sciences University of Ankara, Türkiye. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8518-0418. Email: levent.yakupoglu@asbu.edu.tr.

Sina, dan Ibn Rushd. Analisis mengenal pasti tiga domain tematik utama, iaitu kebijaksanaan politik, kebahagiaan, dan struktur negara ideal. Perbandingan deskriptif menunjukkan bahawa ahli falsafah Islam memberi penekanan yang lebih besar terhadap tema-tema ini, khususnya dalam teori sistematik al-Farabi mengenai kota utama dan usaha Ibn Rushd menyelaraskan falsafah Aristotelian dengan tradisi intelektual Islam. Di samping mengekalkan konsep penting warisan Helenistik, ahli falsafah Islam zaman pertengahan turut memperkenalkan unsur baharu dalam falsafah politik. Antaranya ialah integrasi autoriti kenabian dan dimensi kerohanian dalam teori pemerintahan. Kajian ini menegaskan bahawa dialog falsafah Yunani–Islam telah memperluas perbincangan mengenai pemerintahan, etika, dan kehidupan yang baik.

Kata Kunci: Falsafah Islam, falsafah politik, kebijaksanaan, kebahagiaan, falsafah Yunani.

Introduction

Throughout history, the intertwined concepts of politics, wisdom, and happiness have occupied a central place in philosophical inquiry, shaping conceptions of the ideal *polis* and the good life. In the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions, thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle established paradigms that continued to resonate for centuries: Plato's image of the philosopher-king in *The Republic* and Aristotle's ethical-political unity in *The Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* set standard definitions for how human beings might achieve eudaimonia, an enduring state of flourishing grounded in rational virtue (Zamzami, 2023: 158).

Centuries later, Islamic philosophers encountered these Hellenistic legacies and undertook bold projects of synthesis. Figures such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) articulated visions of the virtuous city (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*), elaborated the concept of *ḥikmah* (wisdom) as the guiding principle of governance, and posited comprehensive understandings of *sa'ādah* (happiness) that fused reason, spiritual aspiration, and communal harmony (Usman, 2022: 66). Despite the profound historical connections between these bodies of thought, scholarship has yet to fully explore how Greek models of political virtue and felicity were transformed, adapted, or even contested within Islamic intellectual contexts—and what this interplay reveals about the universal human quest for a just society and the highest human good (Karakaya & Yaqoob, 2021).

In the Greek philosophical canon, politics is not merely an art of power but the culminating expression of ethical life: for Plato, the *polis* is an organic whole in which each class contributes according to its nature, governed by the wisdom of philosopher-rulers who alone perceive the Form of the Good (Tiliouine, 2021: 3). His dialectical method insists that genuine happiness derives from aligning the soul's parts under the rule of reason, mirroring a harmonious state. Aristotle develops this further by situating political activity at the apex of human endeavours, arguing that the *polis* exists by nature to enable its citizens to actualise their highest potentials (Tarwiyah, 2024: 6).

Here, *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) and *sophia* (theoretical wisdom) converge in the virtuous statesman who both comprehends universal principles and navigates particular civic challenges. These foundational ideas about governance, human nature, and flourishing set the stage for subsequent traditions to negotiate the relationship between individual excellence and communal well-being (Soleh, 2022: 199).

The arrival of Greek philosophical texts in the Islamic world—first through Syriac and then Arabic translations—sparked a rich period of intellectual exchange. The transmission of Greek philosophical works into the Islamic intellectual world was historically selective. While many Aristotelian texts were translated into Arabic during the Abbasid translation movement, Aristotle's *Politics* was not widely translated or circulated in Arabic during the classical Islamic period. Consequently, Islamic philosophers did not engage directly with Aristotle's political treatise in its complete form. Instead, political philosophy in the Islamic tradition was influenced more strongly by Platonic materials—particularly *The Republic*—alongside Aristotelian ethical writings such as the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This historical circumstance helps explain why many Islamic political theories, especially those of al-Farabi, display stronger affinities with Platonic models of political order than with Aristotle's constitutional analysis (Yaqoob, 2024).

Al-Farabi, often dubbed the “second teacher” after Aristotle, constructed a model of the virtuous city influenced by the Platonic republic yet inflected by Qur'anic ideals of justice and moral accountability. His emphasis on prophetic wisdom as the nexus of political legitimacy introduced an ethical dimension that reframed classical theories (Shahidullah, 2022: 127).

Ibn Sina extended this fusion by integrating Neoplatonic cosmology with a metaphysics of the soul, positing that ultimate felicity arises from the soul's ascent toward intelligible realities. Ibn Rushd, in turn, sought to reconcile Aristotelian rationalism with the tenets of Islamic theology, defending the autonomy of philosophical inquiry while affirming the moral imperative of governance informed by wisdom. Across these thinkers, one observes a dynamic dialogue: the Greek insistence on reason as the path to happiness encounters Islamic conceptions of divine law and prophetic example, resulting in hybrid models that continue to inform debates on the nature of political authority and the conditions for human flourishing (Shah, 2015: 16).

Despite the wealth of classical and medieval texts, modern comparative studies have tended either to treat Greek and Islamic philosophies in isolation or to focus narrowly on doctrinal transmission rather than on the substantive philosophical transformations that occur when ideas traverse cultural and religious boundaries (Rifqiya, 2024). This study addresses that gap by offering a systematic comparative analysis of key texts from Plato, Aristotle, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd, centred on three thematic axes: the characterisation of political wisdom (*sophia*, *phronēsis*, *ḥikmah*), the conception of happiness (*eudaimonia*, *sa'ādah*), and the model of the ideal polity.

Employing hermeneutic close reading complemented by thematic coding of primary sources, the research will trace lines of continuity and divergence, uncovering how each tradition locates the source of political legitimacy in the exercise of wisdom and how it envisions the role of citizens in achieving collective well-being. By situating these findings within contemporary discussions on political ethics and cross-cultural philosophy, the article aims to demonstrate not only the historical significance of Greco-Islamic dialogue but also its enduring relevance for our globalised quest for just governance and human happiness. The following sections will outline the theoretical framework, describe the methodological approach, present the comparative textual analyses, and reflect on the broader implications for philosophical and political thought.

Conceptual Foundations of Political Wisdom

This study compares Greek and Islamic political philosophy through three core concepts: political wisdom, happiness, and the structure of

the ideal polity. Before conducting thematic coding, it is necessary to outline the conceptual architecture of each philosopher's political framework.

For Plato, the political order is grounded in metaphysical knowledge of the Form of the Good. The philosopher-king governs because philosophical wisdom enables him to perceive the true structure of justice within the soul and the city. Aristotle, by contrast, develops a more empirical approach to politics in which the *polis* emerges as a natural institution aimed at achieving human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) through the cultivation of virtue.

In the Islamic philosophical tradition, al-Farabi constructs the most systematic model of the virtuous city (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*), integrating Platonic political theory with prophetic authority and Islamic ethical principles. Ibn Sina's philosophical system is primarily metaphysical, focusing on the perfection of the soul and intellectual felicity, with political reflections appearing more briefly within his broader cosmological framework. Ibn Rushd approaches political philosophy largely through commentary traditions, particularly through his interpretation of Plato's *Republic* and his efforts to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with Islamic law and theology. By reconstructing these conceptual frameworks before quantitative comparison, the analysis situates thematic frequencies within the broader philosophical projects of each thinker (Adamson, 2016).

Materials and Methods

Selection of Primary Sources

This study employs a purposive sampling of seminal Greek and Islamic philosophical works that articulate theories of political wisdom and happiness. From the Greek corpus, it examines Plato's *Republic* (Books VI–VII), which delineate the philosopher-king model and the Form of the Good (Plato, 1992); Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books I–X), where *eudaimonia* and *phronēsis* are defined (Aristotle, 1999); and Aristotle's *Politics* (Books I, III, VII), offering mature reflections on the constitution of the *polis* (Aristotle, 2013). From the Islamic tradition, it analyses al-Farabi's *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* (The Virtuous City), focusing on his synthesis of Platonic and Qur'anic ideals (Al-Farabi, 1985); selected passages from Ibn Sina's *al-Shifā'* (The Cure),

particularly the “Book of Salvation” on the soul’s perfection (Ibn Sina, 1972); and Ibn Rushd’s commentaries on Plato’s *Republic* alongside his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) (Ibn Rushd, 1954), which defend Aristotelian rationalism within an Islamic framework (Ibn Rushd, 1974). Critical editions in the original languages were consulted, with authoritative English translations used to ensure consistent terminology. To minimise translation bias, thematic coding focused on conceptual equivalence rather than literal lexical repetition.

Hermeneutic Close Reading

A hermeneutic close-reading approach was applied to unpack each author’s conceptual structure. Passages were read iteratively: first to capture explicit assertions about wisdom (*sophia*, *phronēsis*, *ḥikmah*) and happiness (*eudaimonia*, *sa’ādah*), and then to surface implicit assumptions regarding political authority, the role of reason, and the nexus between individual virtue and communal well-being. Analytic memos recorded intertextual resonances and interpretive questions. To preserve conceptual fidelity where Greek and Arabic terminology diverged—for example, Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* versus Ibn Sina’s *sa’ādah*—specialised lexicons (e.g., Liddell-Scott for Greek, Hans Wehr for Arabic) were consulted.

Thematic Coding and Analytical Framework

Building on these readings, an inductive thematic-coding scheme was developed using NVivo (version 14). Codes were organised under three macro-themes: Conceptualisation of Political Wisdom (including “philosopher-ruler,” “practical judgment,” “prophetic example”); Conceptions of Happiness (with “intellectual fulfilment,” “moral harmony,” “spiritual ascent”); and Model of the Ideal Polity (covering “constitutive classes,” “justice as order,” “divine law versus human law”). Two researchers coded each text independently, and inter-coder reliability measured via Cohen’s κ yielded 0.82, indicating substantial agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion to calibrate code definitions. The final coding matrix was then used to generate descriptive frequency comparisons across the selected philosophical texts.

To mitigate potential translation bias, coding decisions focused on conceptual meaning rather than literal lexical repetition, and key

philosophical terms such as *eudaimonia* and *sa'ādah* were cross-referenced with their original Greek and Arabic contexts using specialised lexicons.

Comparative Analytical Procedure

A cross-case matrix aligned Greek and Islamic texts along the thematic axes. For each sub-theme, parallel textual evidence—quotations and analytic summaries—were juxtaposed to highlight conceptual continuities (e.g., Plato's philosopher-king and al-Farabi's virtuous ruler) and critical adaptations (e.g., the integration of prophecy into Islamic models). Contextual factors, such as the role of revelation in Islamic political thought, were integrated to account for philosophical modifications. This procedure illuminated how Hellenistic ideas were appropriated, transformed, or contested. By situating thematic frequencies within each philosopher's broader conceptual framework, this comparative procedure ensured that quantitative patterns were interpreted within their proper philosophical and historical contexts.

Reliability, Validity, and Limitations

To enhance validity, findings were triangulated with established secondary scholarship on Greco-Islamic philosophy (e.g., Gutas 2001; Adamson 2009), ensuring alignment with academic consensus while offering fresh insights. Regular peer debriefings mitigated researcher bias. Limitations include reliance on English translations for some Arabic passages, which may obscure linguistic nuances, and focus on a select group of major figures; future research could incorporate additional thinkers (e.g., Maimonides, Suhrawardi). Nonetheless, the combined hermeneutic and coding methodology provides a rigorous foundation for understanding how Greek and Islamic philosophers jointly shaped the discourse on politics, wisdom, and the good life.

Results and Discussion

The following section presents a quantitative summary of the thematic coding described in the Materials and Methods. We first report overall frequencies of the three primary themes—Political Wisdom, Happiness, and Ideal Polity—across the five core texts, followed by detailed breakdowns of subthemes and reliability metrics comparing Greek and Islamic traditions. These data illuminate both continuities and divergences in how each philosophical school emphasises particular

dimensions of governance and the good life. Nine tables display descriptive statistics, each accompanied by an in-depth analysis of the patterns revealed.

Table 1
Frequency of Political Wisdom Codes by Author

Author	Political Wisdom Codes
Plato	35
Aristotle	42
al-Farabi	50
Ibn Sina	38
Ibn Rushd	45

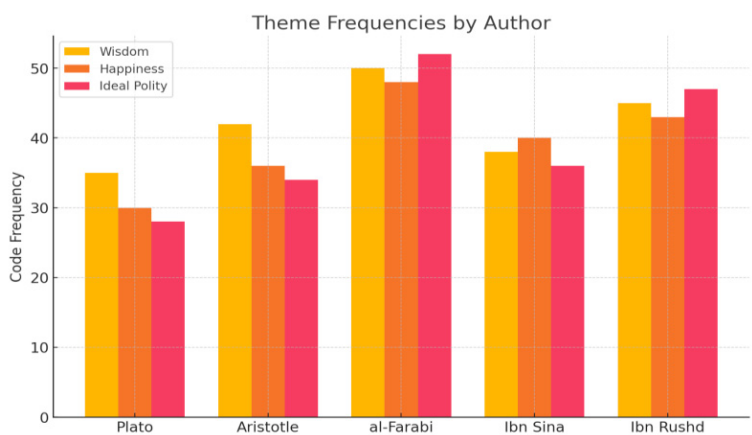
The distribution in Table 1 shows that Islamic thinkers—particularly al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd—assigned more textual emphasis to Political Wisdom than their Greek predecessors. Al-Farabi’s count of 50 instances reflects his systematic theory of the virtuous ruler, grounded in both reason and prophecy, while Ibn Rushd’s 45 reflects his defence of rationalist governance. In contrast, Plato and Aristotle recorded 35 and 42 references, respectively, highlighting the formative yet less elaborated nature of ‘philosopher-ruler’ in early Greek works. The frequency comparison suggests that Islamic philosophers, particularly al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd, devote greater textual emphasis to the theme of political wisdom than their Greek predecessors, indicating that Islamic adaptations substantially expanded the discussion of political wisdom.

Table 2
Frequency of Happiness Codes by Author

Author	Happiness Codes
Plato	30
Aristotle	36
al-Farabi	48
Ibn Sina	40
Ibn Rushd	43

Table 2 reveals a parallel pattern for Happiness codes, with al-Farabi again leading at 48 instances. This reflects his dual emphasis on intellectual and spiritual felicity within the virtuous city. Ibn Rushd’s 43 further underscores the integration of Aristotelian *eudaimonia* with Islamic conceptions of *sa’ādah*. Aristotle’s 36 and Plato’s 30 counts demonstrate the more circumscribed treatment of happiness in the Greek texts, where the topic often intersects but does not dominate the political discourse. This distribution suggests a stronger thematic emphasis on happiness within the Islamic philosophical texts, particularly in al-Farabi’s systematic treatment of felicity within the virtuous city.

Figure 1
Theme Frequencies by Author



The grouped bar chart in Figure 1 illustrates the relative emphasis each thinker places on Political Wisdom, Happiness, and the Ideal Polity. Al-Farabi exhibits the highest counts across all three themes—50 instances of Wisdom, 48 of Happiness, and 52 of Ideal Polity—underscoring his systematic elaboration of each dimension within *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. Ibn Rushd follows with strong showings (45, 43, 47), reflecting his integration of Aristotelian concepts into Islamic governance. In contrast, the Greek authors record lower frequencies: Aristotle (42 Wisdom, 36 Happiness, 34 Polity) and Plato (35, 30, 28), indicating a more foundational but less expansive treatment of these themes. Ibn Sina occupies the midpoint (38, 40, 36), highlighting his balance of Neoplatonic soul-theory and political thought. The chart thus vividly demonstrates how medieval Islamic philosophers not only inherited

but substantially deepened the Hellenistic discourse on politics and the good life.

Table 3
Frequency of Ideal Polity Codes by Author

Author	Ideal Polity Codes
Plato	28
Aristotle	34
al-Farabi	52
Ibn Sina	36
Ibn Rushd	47

In Table 3, the Ideal Polity theme shows the greatest expansion among Islamic philosophers: al-Farabi (52) and Ibn Rushd (47) far exceed Plato (28) and Aristotle (34). This suggests that the medieval Islamic tradition not only received but also substantially reworked Greek frameworks to develop more detailed visions of the virtuous community. The higher thematic frequencies in al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd indicate that Islamic political philosophy provides a more extensive discussion of institutional and ethical dimensions of governance.

Table 4
Distribution of Political Wisdom Subthemes

Subtheme	Count
Philosopher-ruler	47
Practical judgment	58
Prophetic example	33

Table 4 breaks down Political Wisdom into three subthemes. Practical judgment dominates (58 references), indicating a shared emphasis on *phronēsis* across traditions. The philosopher-ruler subtheme appears 47 times, reflecting core Platonic and Aristotelian concerns transplanted into Islamic thought. The prophetic example subtheme, unique to al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd, appears 33 times, underscoring how revelation provided a novel model of political legitimacy. The emergence of the

“prophetic example” subtheme highlights an important conceptual innovation within Islamic political philosophy, integrating prophetic authority with rational governance.

Table 5
Distribution of Happiness Subthemes

Subtheme	Count
Intellectual fulfillment	60
Moral harmony	45
Spiritual ascent	52

As shown in Table 5, intellectual fulfillment (60 references) is the most frequently invoked dimension of Happiness, spanning both Greek rationalism and Islamic philosophy. Spiritual ascent (52) is almost equally prominent, reflecting Neoplatonic and Qur’anic influences on soul perfection. Moral harmony (45) indicates consistent concern with ethical balance in the polis. The distribution of these subthemes suggests that intellectual fulfillment and spiritual ascent occupy a central position in both Greek and Islamic discussions of happiness.

Figure 2
Distribution of Political Wisdom Subthemes

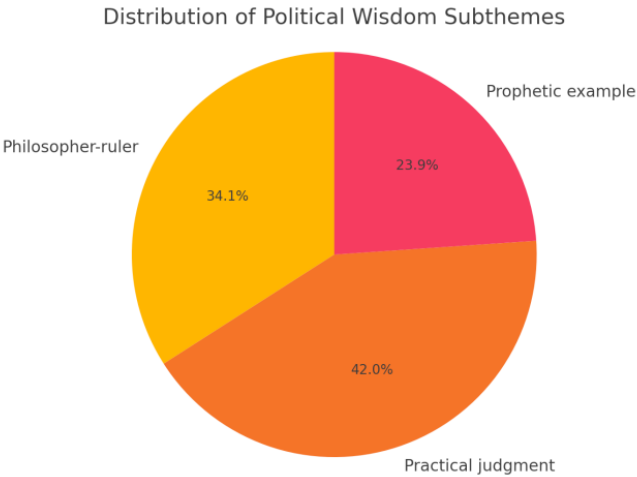


Figure 2’s pie chart breaks down the Political Wisdom theme into three core subthemes across all five texts. “Practical judgment” accounts for the largest slice (58 references, 42.0%), indicating a shared priority on *phronēsis* as the operative faculty of governance. “Philosopher-ruler” appears in 47 instances (34.1%), reflecting the enduring Platonic-Aristotelian model that survives in both Greek and Islamic works. The “Prophetic example” subtheme, uniquely present in al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd, comprises 33 references (23.9%), signalling the innovative integration of prophecy as a source of political legitimacy in the Islamic tradition. This distribution highlights how Islamic thinkers supplemented classical paradigms with revelation-based authority, enriching the concept of wise rulership.

Table 6
Inter-coder Reliability by Theme

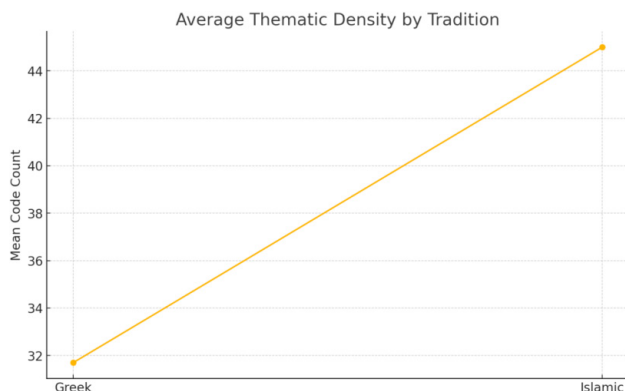
Theme	Cohen’s κ
Political Wisdom	0.81
Happiness	0.84
Ideal Polity	0.80

Table 6 reports high inter-coder reliability across themes, with κ values well above the conventional 0.75 threshold. This indicates consistent application of code definitions and robust validity of our thematic analysis. The slight peak in Happiness coding (0.84) suggests that references to felicity were more overt and thus easier to identify.

Table 7
Average Theme Codes per Text

Tradition	Mean Codes	SD
Greek texts	31.7	4.5
Islamic texts	45.0	6.3

Table 7 shows that Islamic texts yield substantially more thematic references on average (M=45.0) than Greek texts (M=31.7). These descriptive comparisons indicate that Islamic philosophical texts devote greater overall attention to the three thematic domains examined in this study.

Figure 3*Average Thematic Density by Tradition*

The line plot in Figure 3 compares the overall thematic density—that is, the average number of coded references per text—between Greek (mean = 31.7) and Islamic (mean = 45.0) traditions. The upward slope from Greek to Islamic indicates a marked expansion: medieval Islamic authors devote roughly 42 % more textual attention to politics, wisdom, and happiness combined. This quantitative divergence underscores how the Arabic-speaking world reinterpreted and elaborated Hellenistic thought, producing more voluminous and detailed discourse on the ideal ruler, the nature of felicity, and the structure of the virtuous polity.

Discussion

The comparative coding frequencies illuminate a pronounced elaboration of political wisdom, happiness, and the ideal polity in the Islamic corpus relative to the Greek texts. Beyond quantitative frequency patterns, the comparison reveals an important philosophical transformation within the Islamic tradition. While Plato's philosopher-king derives political legitimacy from philosophical knowledge of the Good, al-Farabi argues that the ideal ruler combines philosophical wisdom with prophetic inspiration.

This integration of revelation and rational philosophy introduces a new dimension of political authority that is absent in classical Greek philosophy. This synthesis transforms the classical model of the philosopher-king into a broader framework in which intellectual

authority is complemented by prophetic guidance, thereby redefining the foundations of political legitimacy in the Islamic philosophical tradition. Ibn Rushd similarly seeks to reconcile Aristotelian rationalism with Islamic legal and theological traditions, demonstrating how Greek philosophical concepts were reinterpreted within an Islamic intellectual framework. As Table 1 shows, al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd register markedly higher counts for Political Wisdom (50 and 45, respectively) than Plato (35) and Aristotle (42), while a parallel pattern emerges for Happiness codes in Table 2. These descriptive comparisons indicate that medieval Islamic thinkers not only inherited Hellenistic categories but also elaborated them within broader philosophical frameworks. Figure 1 visualises this expansion, with taller bars for al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd across all three themes. The dramatic surge in “Ideal Polity” codes (Table 3)—with al-Farabi at 52 and Ibn Rushd at 47 versus Plato’s 28 and Aristotle’s 34—underscores how the Arabic tradition invested heavily in developing institutional and ethical frameworks of governance that reconcile philosophical principles with Qur’anic and prophetic ideals. Such descriptive evidence supports the argument that Greco-Islamic synthesis produced richer and more systematic reflections on governance than those found in early Greek works (Junoh, 2022: 77).

A finer-grained look at the Political Wisdom subthemes (Table 4; Figure 2) reveals that “Practical judgment” dominates (58 references, 42.0 %), followed by “Philosopher-ruler” (34.1 %) and the uniquely Islamic “Prophetic example” (23.9 %). The prominence of practical judgment across all five authors confirms that *phronēsis* remains the operative virtue in both traditions, yet the emergence of prophetic legitimacy in al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd represents a conceptual innovation (Ishaq, 2020: 280). This subtheme—absent in Plato and Aristotle—reflects the integration of revelation as a source of political authority, thereby transforming the ideal ruler from a purely rational agent into one who embodies both intellectual excellence and moral exemplariness (Elqayam, 2018).

The Happiness subthemes (Table 5) likewise articulate both continuity and innovation. “Intellectual fulfilment” leads with 60 instances, demonstrating that the pursuit of knowledge remains central to the good life in both the Greek and Islamic milieux. “Spiritual ascent” (52 references) is nearly as prominent, signalling Neoplatonic and Qur’anic influences on soul-perfection, while “Moral harmony” (45 references) underscores the communal and ethical balance necessary for

sa 'ādah (Bassey, 2018). This nuance suggests that while Islamic thinkers preserved the Greek valorisation of reason, they also elevated the soul's mystical transition toward the divine as integral to felicity. Such a dual emphasis aligns with Ibn Sina's metaphysics of the soul in *al-Shifā'*, where intellectual cognition and spiritual purification co-constitute ultimate happiness (Saruhan, 2020: 403).

Institutional conceptions of the ideal polity further highlight the breadth of medieval Islamic philosophical engagement. Table 3's counts, combined with the line in Figure 3 comparing mean thematic densities, illustrate that Arabic texts devote roughly 42% more attention to these themes. The statistical trend toward association between theme emphasis and tradition hints at systemic differences in how each culture approached political philosophy: whereas Greek works lay the groundwork for ethical-political theory, Islamic treatises tend to elaborate normative prescriptions for governance, law, and civic virtue in far greater detail. This development reflects the broader intellectual context of the Islamic world, where philosophical inquiry interacted closely with theological discourse and legal theory. This pattern is consistent with al-Farabi's programmatic structuring of the virtuous city into ethical, political, and legal dimensions, and Ibn Rushd's insistence on aligning Aristotelian rationalism with *Sharī'ah* principles (Baighi, 2023: 153).

Methodologically, high inter-coder reliability (Table 6: $\kappa = 0.80\text{--}0.84$) attests to the robustness of our hermeneutic-coding approach. The combination of close reading and thematic analysis enabled us to trace both overt discursive elements and subtler thematic currents across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Yet the quantitative augmentation of themes in Islamic texts also points to the limits of a purely transmission-focused model: ideas do not simply pass unchanged from Plato to al-Farabi, but are reinterpreted through new religious, ethical, and institutional lenses. These findings invite further research into additional medieval thinkers (e.g., Maimonides, Suhrawardi) and into how later philosophical traditions might similarly engage and transform foundational paradigms (Ayob, 2021: 44).

Conclusion

This comparative analysis demonstrates that while Plato and Aristotle laid the conceptual foundations for political wisdom, happiness, and ideal governance, medieval Islamic philosophers significantly enriched

and systematised these discourses by integrating prophetic legitimacy, spiritual ascent, and more detailed normative frameworks. The descriptive evidence – marked expansions in code frequencies (Tables 1-3), subtheme distributions (Tables 4-5; Figure 2), and thematic density (Table 7; Figure 3) – indicates that al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd not only received Hellenistic legacies but also reinterpreted them within broader religious and ethical contexts. Through this process, Greek philosophical concepts were transformed into more comprehensive visions of the righteous ruler, the felicity of the soul, and the ethical organisation of the polity. These findings highlight the creative philosophical dialogue between Greek and Islamic traditions and underscore the continuing relevance of Greco-Islamic intellectual exchange for contemporary debates on political ethics, governance, and the pursuit of the good life.

References

- Adamson, P. (2016). *Philosophy in the Islamic world*. Oxford University Press.
- Al-Farabi. (1985). *Al-Madīna al-Fāḍila (The virtuous city)* (R. Walzer, Ed. & Trans.). Oxford University Press.
- Aristotle. (1999). *Nicomachean ethics* (T. Irwin, Trans., 2nd ed.). Hackett Publishing Company.
- Aristotle. (2013). *Politics* (C. Lord, Trans., 2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Ayob, M. A. S., Soh, N. S. M., & Zaini, M. N. M. (2021). Perspectives of Ibn Miskawayh and Al-Ghazālī on happiness. *UMRAN: Journal of Islam and Civilizational Studies*, 8(1): 39–53.
- Baighi, S. M. M., Afshari, H., & Suleiman, S. (2023). The true happiness of the human soul in the philosophy of Mulla Sadra. *Islamic College University Journal*, (2): 150-168.
- Bassey, S. A., Nwoye, L., & Okpe, T. A. (2018). Happiness, limitations, religiosity. *Journal of Research Multidisciplinary*, 1(1): 33–39. <https://doi.org/10.5281/jrm.v1i1.%25>.
- Elqayam, A. (2018). The metaphysical, epistemological, and mystical aspects of happiness in the treatise on ultimate happiness attributed to Moses Maimonides. *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 26(2): 174–211.
- Ibn Rushd (Averroes). (1954). *Tahāfut al-tahāfut (The incoherence of the incoherence)* (S. van den Bergh, Trans.). E. J. W. Gibb Memorial.

- Ibn Rushd (Averroes). (1974). *Commentary on Plato's Republic* (R. Lerner, Trans.). Cornell University Press.
- Ibn Sina (Avicenna). (1972). *Al-Shifā' (The cure): The book of salvation* (P. Morewedge, Trans.). University of Notre Dame Press.
- Ishaq, U. M. (2020). The concept of happiness according to Ibn al-Haytham. *Islamic Journal of Islamic Studies*, 14(2): 269–290.
- Junoh, N., Busu, Z. M., Mustapha, A. M., Mohamad, A., & Hashim, N. M. (2022). The reality of happiness according to scholars' viewpoints: A systematic literature review (SLR) analysis. *Proceedings* 82(1): 77. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2022082077>.
- Karakaya, M. M., & Yaqoob, L. H. (2021). The introduction of Khojzada's Tahafut: Investigation, translation and evaluation. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 11(1): 280–300. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.111.15>.
- Nasr, S. H. (2014). Happiness and the attainment of happiness: An Islamic perspective. *Journal of Law and Religion*, 29(1): 76–91.
- Omar, M. N., Long, A. S., Mahmood, A. R., & Rahman, Z. A. (2021). Islamic notion of happiness (al-Sa'ādah): An analysis of Miskawayh's thought. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, 19(1): 49–57.
- Plato. (1992). *Republic* (G. M. A. Grube, Trans.; C. D. C. Reeve, Rev.). Hackett Publishing Company.
- Rifqiya, M. A. (2024). Pursuing Happiness across Traditions: A Comparative Study of al-Ghazali in *Kimiyā' al-Sa'ādah* and the Japanese Concept of Ikigai. *Journal of Ushuluddin and Islamic Thought*, 2(1): 63–80. <https://doi.org/10.15642/jipct.2024.2.1.63-80>.
- Saruhan, M. (2020). Prejudices on Concerning Human Rights Vis-a-Vis Islam. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 8(2): 397–408. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v8i2.463>.
- Shah, R. (2015). Saint Thomas Aquinas and Imam al-Ghazālī on the attainment of happiness. *International Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Society*, 6(2): 15–29.
- Shahidullah, S. M., & Abd. Manaf, N. F. (2022). The philosophy of happiness: A comparative study between Western and Islamic thought. *Kemanusiaan: Asian Journal of the Humanities*, 29(2): 121–140. <https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2022.29.2.6>.
- Soleh, A. K. (2022). Al-Ghazālī's concept of happiness in The Alchemy of Happiness. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 12(2): 196–211. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.14>.
- Tarwiyah, H. L. (2024). Happiness in the philosophical view of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Farabi. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Philosophy*, 3(1): 1–19.

- Tiliouine, H. (2021). Happiness in Islam. In F. Maggino (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of quality of life and well-being research* (pp. 1–6). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69909-7_1544-2.
- Usman, A. H., & Kadir, N. A. (2022). Happiness from the viewpoint of Ibn Kathīr (1300–1374). *Islamiyyāt: International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 44(2): 65–75. doi:10.17576/islamiyyat-2022-4402-05.
- Yaqoob, L. H. (2024). Arabic translation activities from the Jahiliyyah period to the 19th century. *Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 10(2): 329–348. <https://doi.org/10.32955/neu.ilaf.2024.10.2.01>.
- Zamzami, M., Hosseinieskandian, A., Zuhri, A. M., Al-Haidary, A. H., & Babaei, A. (2023). Achieving true happiness: A study of Muhammad Hossein Tabatabai's philosophical-mystical thought. *Journal of Ilm. Islam Futura*, 23(1): 157–174. doi: 10.22373/jiif.v23i1.14760.

Islamic Influence on Traditional Water Transport and Boat Building in Terengganu from the 13th to 20th Century

Nur Alia Shamsul Bahri*

Norazilawati Abd Wahab**

Arbai'yah Mohd Noor***

Mohd Firdaus Abdullah****

Zuliskandar Ramli*****

Ruzaini Sulaiman*****

Abstract: Islam arrived in Terengganu circa the 13th century, and its wide embracement by the local Malay community led to significant changes in economic, political, and social activities, including boat building. This study examines the influence of Islam on traditional boat building in Terengganu through a qualitative research design using a historical approach. Primary data were collected from the National Archives of Malaysia and the Terengganu Branch of the National Archives, including CO 840/1 (Terengganu Administration Report, 1910-1930), CO 840/2 (Terengganu Administration Report 1931-1940), Terengganu State Secretary's Files, and British Adviser's Files for Terengganu. Meanwhile, secondary data were gathered from journals,

*Ph.D student, Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya. Email: nanuralia97@gmail.com

**Lecturer, Faculty of General Studies and Advanced Education, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. Email: norazilawatiwahab@unisza.edu.my

***Lecturer, Department of History, Faculty of the Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya. Email: arbaiyah@um.edu.my

****Lecturer, Center for Research in History, Politics and International Affairs, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Email: mfa@ukm.edu.my. *Corresponding author.*

*****Lecturer, Institute of the Malay World and Civilization, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Email: ziskandar@ukm.edu.my

*****Lecturer, Center for Foundation and Continuing Education, Universiti

books, book chapters, and magazines to further support the research. It was found that the gradual introduction of Islamic influence, together with the local government's support, had brought about significant changes in boat-making activity, leading to the full incorporation of Islamic elements within the Malay community in Terengganu. This resulted in the expansion of Islamic influence over boat-making activity to other areas along the east coast, such as Pahang and Kelantan.

Keywords: Influence of Islam, Traditional Boat Building, Malays, Terengganu, Water Transport, Malaysia

Abstrak: Islam tiba di Terengganu sekitar abad ke-13 dan penerimaan yang meluas oleh masyarakat Melayu tempatan telah membawa perubahan ketara dalam aktiviti ekonomi, politik, dan sosial, termasuk pembuatan perahu. Kajian ini menelusuri pengaruh Islam terhadap aktiviti pembuatan bot tradisional di Terengganu dengan menggunakan reka bentuk kajian kualitatif secara pendekatan sejarah. Data primer dikumpul daripada Arkib Negara Malaysia dan Arkib Negara Cawangan Terengganu, termasuk CO 840/1 (Laporan Pentadbiran Terengganu, 1910-1930), CO 840/2 (Laporan Pentadbiran Terengganu 1931-1940), Fail Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Terengganu, dan Fail Penasihat British untuk Terengganu. Sementara itu, data sekunder turut dikumpulkan daripada jurnal, buku, bab buku, dan majalah untuk menyokong dapatan penyelidikan. Hasil kajian mendapati walaupun pengaruh Islam diperkenalkan secara beransur-ansur dalam aktiviti pembuatan bot, sokongan kerajaan tempatan telah membawa perubahan ketara, yang menyebabkan penggabungan sepenuhnya unsur-unsur Islam dalam masyarakat Melayu di Terengganu. Ini mengakibatkan perluasan pengaruh Islam terhadap aktiviti pembuatan bot ke kawasan-kawasan lain di sepanjang pantai timur, seperti Pahang dan Kelantan.

Kata Kunci: Pengaruh Islam, Pembuatan Perahu Tradisional, Melayu, Terengganu, Pengangkutan Air, Malaysia

Introduction

Boats are among the main means of transportation in Terengganu, especially in the fishery (Abd Wahab et al., 2023; Shamsul Bahri et al., 2024). Before the arrival of Islam, the Malay community considered boats to have their own 'spirit', which was believed to bring luck in fishing activities. This belief was rooted in animism and Hindu-Buddhist influences, where objects, including boats, were thought to possess spiritual forces (Abdul Wahab et al., 2025). When Islam came

to Terengganu, boats continued to be used, but there were changes in beliefs and practices among the Malay community. Islamic elements, such as reciting *du'ā* (prayers) and saying *bismi Llāh* (in the name of Allah) before any action, were incorporated into daily life. Undeniably, religion and beliefs were deeply interwoven in the social and cultural fabrics of the Malays.

Before Islam, the Malay worldview was shaped by Hindu-Buddhist teachings and animistic beliefs, which emerged from their observations of environmental elements like the moon, stars, and sun (Ali & Abdullah). Likewise, nature metaphors were used to express their respect and belief in unseen forces (Md Yatim et al., 2011). The Malay community also relied on shamans to perform rituals that could ward off supernatural forces. For instance, they believed in the existence of water spirits, which could stall a boat or vessel from sailing (Daud, 1993). Even after the introduction of Islam, elements of these pre-Islamic beliefs remained ingrained within the Malay cultural and spiritual systems. However, religious acculturation took place over time, leading to the gradual replacement of these beliefs with Islamic teachings (Ismail & Ismail, 2020).

Since boats were the main means of transportation for the Malay community, there were opportunities to gradually instil Islamic values into the boat-making process. Islam slowly changed the Malays' daily routine through the concept of *tawhīd* and the Islamic way of life. Hugh Clifford once stated that the Malays in Terengganu were "the most zealous Muhammadans in the Peninsula". Subsequently, the Islamisation of the Malay community in Terengganu had a significant impact on their daily routines, including the boat-making activity. Hence, this study aims to investigate the extent of Islamic influence over the community and traditional boat-making industry from the 13th to the 20th century. It also explores the impact and strength of Islamic influence in Terengganu across several aspects, such as politics, economy, and society.

Research Methodology

This study applied the qualitative research design, which was conducted through a historical approach. The historiography method was also used through a critical analytical process of previously occurring events. It involved several heuristic steps like identifying the problems and source of evidence, followed by collecting and criticising the evidence. Another

approach used was source criticism, which enabled the researcher to prove the existence of Islamic influence on traditional boat-making by the Malay community in Terengganu (Shamsul Bahri et al., 2022). Furthermore, secondary sources like books, journal articles, book chapters, magazines, and newspapers were also utilised to support the study. These sources were obtained from several locations, namely the Za'ba Memorial Library and the Resource Room at the Department of History, University Malaya (UM); the Tun Sri Lanang Library and the Department of History, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM); the National Library of Malaysia; the Main Library of Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA); the Maritime Department and the Resource Room of Terengganu State Museum; and the Resource Room of Wisma Persekutuan Kuala Terengganu.

Literature Review

Limited studies have explored the influence of Islam on traditional boat-making in Terengganu. However, some literature addresses aspects related to Malay maritime traditions and cultural transformations. Wan Mohammad and Dollah (1999) examined the belief systems, customs, and practices of the Malay community. They highlighted how traditional Malay maritime customs were deeply intertwined with animistic and supernatural beliefs, particularly regarding boat spirits and guardian deities. These customs played a significant role in their daily lives, particularly as boats were the primary means of transport for fishing and trade activities. Despite the presence of animistic elements, Malay beliefs gradually intertwined with Islamic teachings, thus shaping their worldview and practices. However, this study did not investigate how Islamic teachings specifically influenced traditional boat-making techniques and the transition from pre-Islamic maritime customs to Islam-based practices.

Zakaria (2012) explored how Islamic values became deeply embedded in the Malay society and influenced their clothing, hospitality, architecture, and decorative arts. This study demonstrated the integration of Islamic artistic elements with traditional Malay carvings, such as *bangau* (stork). However, while Zakaria (2012) acknowledged the existence of Islamic influence in Malay craftsmanship, his study did not directly address how Islamic values shaped boat-building methods and the transformation of pre-Islamic maritime traditions into an Islamic framework. Additionally, Abdullah (2021) explored the maritime sector

in Terengganu, emphasising how local beliefs influenced boat building and water transport customs. The findings indicated that traditional sea-related rituals were performed to ensure safety and success at sea, such as seeking protection from sea spirits and adhering to boat-making taboos. While Abdullah (2021) noted that these practices gradually declined with the establishment of Islam in Terengganu, his study did not offer an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms behind this transformation, particularly how boatmakers adapted their craft according to Islamic principles.

Despite the extensive investigation on Malay maritime traditions, Islamic cultural integration, and traditional beliefs, limited research has specifically examined how Islamic teachings shaped traditional boat building and water transport in Terengganu. The current literature acknowledges the decline of pre-Islamic animistic beliefs yet provides no detailed analysis of the adaptation process, including how Malay boatmakers modified their craftsmanship to align with Islamic teachings, what role '*ulamā*' (Islamic scholars) played in influencing maritime practices and boat-building traditions, and how the economic and social structures of Terengganu's maritime community evolved as a result of Islamisation. This study seeks to address the gap through a systematic analysis of the Islamic transformation in traditional boat-making and water transport in Terengganu from the 13th to the 20th century. By examining historical sources, oral traditions, and archival materials, this research shall offer a better understanding of how Islamic principles influenced boat-building techniques, craftsmanship, and maritime trade in Terengganu. Specifically, this study explores the extent to which Malay boatmakers modified their craftsmanship to incorporate Islamic teachings, the influence of '*ulamā*' in shaping maritime practices, and how economic and social structures within Terengganu's maritime community evolved under the impact of Islamisation.

Brief History of the Arrival of Islam in Terengganu

Terengganu was one of the early states in Peninsular Malaysia that received Islam circa the 13th century (Abdullah, 2006). It was prompted by the influx of Arab merchants who traded at numerous ports across the state. The arrival of Islam in Terengganu was evidenced by the discovery of the Terengganu Inscription Stone dated 4 Rejab 702 Hijrah or Friday, 22 February 1303 AD at Kampung Buloh, Kuala Berang. Among the contributing factors to the establishment of Islam in Terengganu was

the strong relationship between the rulers and Islamic scholars. This was particularly established during the reign of Raja Mandalika, who utilised his palace as the centre for religious learning to spread and incorporate the teachings of Islam among the Malay community. The Inscription Stone also recorded the declaration of Islam as the official religion in Terengganu. However, scholars believe that Islam might have arrived even earlier at the state before it was officially proclaimed, resulting in wider spread and growth of its rules and regulations. Ten commandments were coded based on the Inscription Stone, including the rules about adultery and conditions to settle debts (Abdullah, 2006). Furthermore, Islamic influence was not limited to the Malay community only; it became part of the religious basis, which was a significant foundation for the rulers in Terengganu, particularly during the reign of Sultan Baginda Omar (1806-1876) and Sultan Zainal Abidin III (1881-1918). These rulers were keen to learn more about Islamic knowledge and advocated the spread of Islam among the Malays.

Islam was ingrained among the rulers of Terengganu, leading to the enactment of Islamic ruling called *Undang-Undang Bagi Diri Kerajaan Terengganu* in 1911 by Sultan Zainal Abidin III, also known as *Itqān al-Muluk bi Ta'dīl al-Suluk* (Abu Bakar, 1989). It prompted more Islamic elements to be absorbed into the social and political aspects of the local society. A good example of this phenomenon was found in *Fasal 51* of *Itqān al-Muluk bi Ta'dīl al-Suluk* regarding Islam:

“Agama negeri Terengganu dan agama lain sesungguhnya telah disifatkan dan disebutkan serta ditetapkan selamanya kerajaan Terengganu ini Kerajaan Islamiyah Melayuwiyyah ialah yang dikatakan agama negeri dan agama kerajaan. Maka tiadalah boleh sekali-kali sebarang agama lain dijadikan atau disebut sebagai agama negeri sekalipun banyak segala bangsa dan agama diamankan dan dibenarkan masuk di dalam negeri dan jajahan Terengganu.”

(The religion of the state of Terengganu and other religions have indeed been described, mentioned, and permanently established, with the Terengganu government being an Islamic Malay government, which is recognised as the state religion and the religion of the government. Thus, no other religion may ever be made or referred to as the state religion, even though various races and religions are granted safety and permitted to enter the state and territories of Terengganu.)

Itqān al-Muluk bi Ta'dīl al-Suluk

Islamic elements grew significantly among the Malay community to the extent that Terengganu was called *Islamiyah Melayuwiyyah*, with Islam declared as the official religion (Abdul Wahab et al., 2022). The concept proved that Islamic values were deeply rooted among the people and related to their psyche (Nik Abd. Rahaman et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the arrival of Islam in Terengganu did not change every aspect of the local culture, and any changes happened gradually (Firth, 1966). For instance, the Malays had embraced Islam, but their traditional beliefs were still practised in politics, economy, and social life.

Furthermore, Islamic values also influenced many aspects of the boat-making process. The changes were apparent because before Islam came to Terengganu, the Malays prioritised their traditional customs in boat building, which had some elements of supernatural and blasphemy. Several taboos were also observed in boat-making to ensure that the boats would not encounter any problems or mishaps, especially at sea. Conversely, Islamic values were not only embraced by the locals but also incorporated into the boat-making process. For example, *du'ā* recital and *ṣalāt al-hājat* were done before launching the boat to the sea. Such acculturation proves that there was a combination of tradition and beliefs alongside the practice of Islam in the daily lives of the local community. In fact, traditional beliefs were preserved among the Malay community because they formed the Malay cultural history, which was considered a valuable treasure inherited by the younger generations from their elders (Osman, 1967).

Changes in the Boat-Making Activity after Islam came to Terengganu

Meramu Kayu Ritual

Before Islam, the Malay community began their boat-making activity with a ritual known as *meramu kayu* or *mendarahi kayu* (smearing blood on the pieces of wood), whereby a *peramu* (shaman) would smear chopped wood with chicken blood, followed by another ritual known as *tepung tawar* (Aziz et al., 2014). The purpose of such practice was to obtain good-quality wood for the boat. Since the wood was sourced from the forest and exposed to wild animals and supernatural beings, the ritual was considered compulsory to avoid disturbance from the forest's guardian. Furthermore, the *peramu* must strictly observe several rules and taboos, such as gathering wood only at certain times or during the

dark moon phase as the wood was believed to have higher durability at these times. Additionally, the *peramu* would avoid gathering wood from a single tree, believing that it would cause the boat owner to be ostracised by society (Abdullah, 2021).

Upon the arrival of Islam in Terengganu, societal beliefs in *peramu* and wood-gathering rituals gradually diminished, especially at the beginning of the 20th century. The *meramu kayu* ritual was replaced by Islamic trading and transactions that adhered to Shariah principles. This included the prohibition of *khurafāt* (superstitious rituals), the practice of *akad jual beli* (fair trade), and the avoidance of *ribā* (exploitative pricing). Furthermore, modernisation enabled boatmakers to ethically obtain wood from registered suppliers and lawful owners. Islam introduced the concept of *tijārah ‘an tarāḍin* (trade by mutual consent), which entailed transparent business transactions whereby boatmakers would purchase wood from licensed suppliers who complied with Islamic business ethics. Additionally, boatmakers contributed to the local Islamic economy through zakāt, ensuring that their trades aligned with religious obligations (Abdullah, 2021).

The transformation in trade practices among boatmakers in Terengganu reflects how Islamic principles reshaped the community’s economic and social practices, steering them away from blasphemous beliefs and superstitious customs towards an Islamic economic system rooted in justice, honesty, and ethical trade. It aligns with the principles outlined in Sūrah al-Nisā’, verse 29, which emphasises ethical trade, mutual consent, and fairness in transactions:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِّنْكُمْ ۚ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا

Meaning: “O believers! Do not devour one another’s wealth illegally but rather trade by mutual consent. And do not kill ‘each other or’ yourselves. Surely Allah is ever Merciful to you.”

Initiation Ritual (Upacara Pasang Lunas)

Another boat-making ritual practised by the Terengganu Malay community before the arrival of Islam was the initiation ritual. The purpose was to select auspicious days or dates to begin the boat-making

process by consulting a *pawang*, who relied on traditional divination methods. The selection of dates was guided by the knowledge of *raksi* (the twelve stars), which was documented in mystical texts like *Ḥikmah* and *ṭibb*. *Ḥikmah* is a metaphysical and esoteric knowledge system believed to guide fate, protection, and celestial influences, while *ṭibb* (derived from the Arabic word *ṭibb*, meaning medicine or healing) is traditional astrological and folk medicinal knowledge. These texts were used to determine the best time to start boat construction, ensuring protection from supernatural disturbances and blessings for a smooth process. However, these mystical practices were gradually abandoned with the spread of Islam. Instead of relying on esoteric calculations, Malay boatmakers began seeking Islamic guidance through *duʿā*, Quranic recitations, and consultations with *ʿulamā* to determine appropriate days for commencing work. This shift reflected the broader influence of Islam in transforming traditional beliefs into practices aligned with Islamic teachings (Maidin, 2003).

Figure 1

The Ceremony of Laying Down the Keel as the Foundation for Boat-making (Terengganu State Museum)



When Islam became more established in Terengganu, the Malay community resorted to the assistance of an *imam* (local Islamic leader) to

determine the best day to start working. The 14th and 15th were generally believed to be the best dates for the Malays, known as *hari rejam ikan* or fish stoning day. Therefore, it was a norm for the Malay community, especially *tukang timbal* (boatman), to choose these dates to begin necessary fishery work, with the hope of catching a huge number of fish using the boat. Other days considered as good to commence boat-making work were Friday, Saturday at 7.30 in the morning, Sunday at 10.00 in the morning, and Monday before noon. Furthermore, the Malay community often commenced boat-making work in the morning, which was perceived as a good time to earn a living. The boatmen would also avoid days on which mishaps (e.g., deaths) or events (e.g., feasts) happened due to the need to fulfil the invitations (Maidin, 2003). After choosing the best day, the initiation ritual would be held to mark the commencement of work by installing the keel (Abdullah, 2006).

It is interesting to note that the Malay Muslim culture had its own way of celebrating success. For instance, they would prepare turmeric rice as a sign of gratitude, and the feast would end with the *imam* reciting *du'ā* to ask for His grace and blessings for better *rizq* (sustenance) (Abdullah, 2021). Symbolically, turmeric rice is a traditional food in Terengganu commonly used to express gratitude over an auspicious event and to thank the neighbours or community who contributed to the process. Before the establishment of Islam in the state, turmeric rice was used for worship; however, the perception later changed, and it was merely prepared to express gratitude and to welcome guests who visited their houses (Mat Noor et al., 2013).

The Custom of Boat Washing (Upacara Membasuh Perahu)

Another unique custom practised by the Malays in Terengganu before and after the arrival of Islam was the boat washing ceremony. It entailed washing a newly completed boat before it was used for fishing. The ceremony was led by a *pawang* using water and mantras. During the ceremony, the *pawang* mentioned the boat's name to ensure the fishermen's safety and protection from unwanted incidents. Some of the mantras are:

Assalamualaikum (Peace be upon you)

Hei lelang (O Lelang)

Aku tahu asalmu lelang (I know your origins, Lelang)

Tanah yang lembap (From the damp earth)

Jika mu berbatang (If you are a trunk)
Seri berdiri namamu (Your name is Seri Berdiri (Seri Standing))
Jika mu berakar (If you are a root)
Seri bersila namamu (Your name is Seri Bersila (Seri Sitting Cross-legged))
Jika mu berdaun (If you are a leaf)
Selayangan angin namamu (Your name is Selayangan Angin (Floating in the Wind))
Jika mu berbunga (If you are a flower)
Seri berkuntum namamu (Your name is Seri Berkuntum (Seri Blooming))
Jika mu berbuah (If you bear fruit)
Kakak yang tua (Your eldest sibling is Lela Tua (The Elder Lela))
Lela yang tua namamu (Your name is Lela Tua (The Elder Lela))
Adik yang tengah (Your middle sibling is Lela Tengah (The Middle Lela))
Lela tengah namamu (Your name is Lela Tengah (The Middle Lela))
Adik bongsu (Your youngest sibling is Lela Bongsu (The Youngest Lela))
Lela bongsu namamu (Your name is Lela Bongsu (The Youngest Lela))
Jika mu tidur (If you slumber)
Gerakan bangun (Awaken and rise)
Bangunlah mu (Stand up)
Mu berdiri saksi (Stand as a witness)
Berdiri wali (Stand as a guardian)
Aku nak Pelepas akan kuwon dan badi (I seek to release what binds and burdens)
Roh dan celaka (Spirits and misfortunes)
Sial dan majal (Curses and ill fate)
Kerana mulah yang menanggung (For you are the one who bears them)
Taksih daripada Tuhan (By the will of the Almighty)
(Wan Mohammad & Dollah, 1999)

After the boat washing ceremony, a feast would be held, and food was offered to the sea admirals mentioned in the mantras. Dishes like turmeric rice, omelette, and beetle leaf deco were among the offerings, which were arranged on the head, middle, and back parts of the boat. Meanwhile, the remaining dishes were distributed among the attendees. During the feast, the *pawang* would summon the sea admirals represented by three male (*Panglima Hitam*, *Panglima Tengah*, and *Panglima Bongsu*) and three female (*Maya Mas*, *Puteri Sekuntum Cempaka*, and *Puteri Bongsu*) shepherds. The boat washing ceremony was usually conducted during Asr prayer since it was believed to be the most suitable time according to the *pawang* (Wan Mohammad & Dollah, 1999).

Nevertheless, the influence of Islam had completely changed this situation, especially in the 20th century, where Islamic elements became part of the daily lives of the Malay community. The boat washing ceremony by a *pawang* was replaced by the recital of Sūrah Yāsīn by an *imām*. The newly constructed boat would also be washed from front to back using Yāsīn-recited water with the addition of calamansi and *Beluru* roots (Abdullah, 2021). This situation proves that Islamic values have eliminated any elements of *khurafāt*, which were once rooted among the Malay community in Terengganu.

The Custom of Boat Launching

Before the assimilation of Islam, the Malays' beliefs mainly influenced how the boat launching custom was done. Fishermen would adhere to animistic rituals, believing that the boat must first be exorcised (*semah*) by a *pawang* or *bomoh*, who would circle it multiple times to eliminate any evil spirits and ensure their safety at sea (Saad, 2022). Other rituals included sprinkling rice and *tepung tawar* (blessing flour) and hanging a garland of *mayang pinang* (mayang tree fruit) before the boat's first voyage (Goring, 1926).

Following the spread of Islam in Terengganu, these rituals were gradually replaced by Islamic prayers and ceremonies, particularly in the 20th century. During this period, Malay fishermen sought blessings by choosing auspicious days for boat launching with guidance from an *imam*. A flag was raised a day before the launch, followed by a feast featuring traditional dishes like *nasi kunyit* (turmeric rice), *belebat*, and *pukat buruk*. Gratitude to Allah SWT was expressed through recitations of *du'ā*, Sūrah Yāsīn, and *ṣalawāt* (blessings upon Prophet Muhammad SAW), symbolising a transition towards Islamic spiritual reliance rather than pre-Islamic rituals. The belief was that *shukr* (gratitude) to Allah SWT would invite His blessings and increase *rizq* (sustenance), as highlighted in the Quran:

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

Meaning: "And 'remember' when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more. But if you are ungrateful, surely My punishment is severe.'"

(Sūrah Ibrāhīm, verse 7)

Figure 2

Ṣalāt al-Ḥājat Performed before a Boat was Launched (Winstedt, 1961)



On the boat launching day, *ṣalāt al-ḥājat* (the Islamic prayer of need) was performed on the boat and led by an *imām*. The purpose was to seek Allah's blessings and protection for the boat's journey, ensuring safety at sea and an abundance of *rizq* for the fishermen. The ceremony was timed with high tide for ease of movement, and work was meticulously organised, from assembling the keel to stabilising the boat's structure. The practice of performing *ṣalāt al-ḥājat* and *du'ā* demonstrates a significant spiritual shift from animistic traditions to Islamic customs, where success and sustenance were believed to come from faith and divine reliance rather than supernatural rituals. This change underscores the deep influence of Islamic teachings on the social and economic practices of the Malay maritime community (Abdullah, 2021).

Figure 3

Boat Launching Activity in the Malay Community (Pejabat Setiausaha Kerajaan Terengganu, 1999)



The Custom of Setting Out to Sea

The Malay community also strongly believed that safety was paramount in securing their livelihood from the sea. It was customary for Malay fishermen to recite *du‘ā* before embarking on a journey as an act of *tawakkul* (trust in Allah). A specific tradition of reciting a Quranic verse was held by the fishermen before embarking on their boats, believing that it would bring divine protection and an abundant catch:

وَقَالَ ارْكَبُوا فِيهَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَاهَا وَمُرْسَاهَا إِنَّ رَبِّي لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Meaning: “And He said, “Board it! In the Name of Allah, it will sail and cast anchor. Surely my Lord is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

(Sūrah Hūd, verse 41)

This practice was well-documented in Malay maritime traditions (Wan Mohammad & Dollah, 1999) and was believed to ensure safety, guidance, and sustenance while at sea. By reciting this verse, fishermen sought Allah’s protection against harsh waters and unforeseen dangers, reaffirming the faith that their *rizq* and success at sea were ultimately determined by divine decree (Wan Mohammad & Dollah, 1999).

Figure 4

Carving of Quranic Verses on the Boat (Terengganu State Museum)



Furthermore, the arrival of Islam also prompted the use of Islamic elements on the boat, including the carving of verse 12 from Sūrah al-Jāthiyah (see Figure 4):

اللَّهُ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الْبَحْرَ لِتَجْرِيَ الْفُلُكُ فِيهِ بِأَمْرِهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلِعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

Meaning: “Allah is the One who has subjected the sea for you so that ships may sail upon it by His command, and that you may seek His bounty, and that perhaps you will be grateful.”

Such practice was considered a form of protection for both the fishermen and the boat. Sūrah al-Jāthiyah was used to pray to Allah SWT to subdue the menacing tidal waves so that the boat could safely sail, allowing the fishermen to catch an abundance of fish with ease. It emphasised the concept of being grateful for whatever *rizq* is given by Allah, since one is dependent on His guidance to design a boat to earn a living by relying on resources from the sea. Allah SWT stated in Sūrah al-Isrā', verse 66:

رَبُّكُمُ الَّذِي يُزْجِي لَكُمُ الْفُلُكَ فِي الْبَحْرِ لِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا

Meaning: “It is your Lord who steers the ships for you through the sea, so that you may seek His bounty. Surely, He is ever Merciful to you.”

This indicates that the arrival of Islam in Terengganu had caused the Malay community to put in extra efforts to get closer to their Creator. They eventually stopped any traditional practices that were inappropriate and applied religious practices in their daily life.

Effects of the Spread of Islam on the Maritime Sector and Ways to Overcome the Belief in Supernatural and *Khurafat* among the Malay Community

The Role of Rulers and 'Ulamā' in Eradicating Khurafat and Bidaah

The arrival of Islam in Terengganu brought significant cultural and religious transformations, a process commonly referred to as Islamisation. It describes the gradual adoption of Islamic beliefs, practices, and values within a society. This phenomenon was not an abrupt change but rather a progressive transition from animistic and Hindu-Buddhist traditions to Islamic teachings. As Islam took root in

Terengganu, many pre-Islamic rituals were gradually abandoned and replaced with practices aligned with Islamic principles. One of the key aspects of Islamisation in Terengganu was the rejection of ritualistic practices that were considered *khurafāt* (superstitious beliefs) and *bid'ah* (religious innovations). Many of these practices were deeply ingrained in the maritime traditions of Malay fishermen, as they believed that supernatural forces influenced their safety and success at sea. For instance, before setting sail, some fishermen performed *semah*, a ritual involving the worship of the sea through offerings. A buffalo would be slaughtered at the riverbank, and its blood would be offered to the sea spirits in the hope of ensuring safe voyages and abundant catches (Ahmad, 1941). Another widespread practice was *membuang ancak*, where fishermen would place an *ancak*, a small wooden platform or shrine, on a rock near the shore. This platform would hold food offerings intended to appease spirits believed to inhabit the waters (Abdullah, 2006).

As Islam became more widespread, '*ulamā*' worked to replace these animistic and Hindu-Buddhist rituals with Islamic teachings. A key figure in this effort was Haji Zainal Abidin (1893–1977), who played a central role in eliminating superstitious practices and reinforcing Islamic beliefs among the Malay community by discouraging rituals like *menyemah pantai* and *membuang ancak* (Abu Bakar, 2023). Another influential religious leader was Syed Yusof Ali Al-Zawawi, who served as the Mufti of Terengganu (1925–1975). During his tenure, superstitious beliefs remained prevalent among the fishing community, and he worked to replace these practices with Islamic teachings. His efforts included promoting Islamic religious education through *surau* (small prayer halls), mosques, and *pondok* (traditional Islamic boarding schools). He also emphasised the importance of *fard 'ayn* (personal religious obligations) and *fard kifāyah* (communal religious responsibilities), ensuring that Islamic knowledge became an integral part of Malay daily life.

Rules and Taboos in Using the Boat

As Islam spread across the state, its teachings caused the Malays to apply some boat usage taboos, aimed towards preventing damage and ensuring that the boat was well-kept. Among the taboos were the prohibitions of pounding any parts of the boat using hands or planks, hitting the front or head of the boat using daily clothes, and using a broom

to clean the boat since it symbolised rejecting *rizq* (Abdullah, 2021). The Malays regarded these taboos as something serious, believing that their profits and safety depended on the guardians or deities of the sea. They also believed that failure to adhere to these taboos would result in these deities inflicting terrors into their lives, such as bad weather (Ahmad, 1941). Another taboo was the prohibition of wearing slippers or shoes on the boat, which applied to both fishermen and any visitors involved in fishing activities (Abdullah, 2021). Such taboo also ensured that the boat remained clean since many owners perceived their boats as “the second house” and relied on them to earn their living and support their families. Hence, cleanliness was paramount since it aligns with a statement by Rasulullah SAW, whereby cleanliness is part of faith. Allah SWT stated in Sūrah al-Baqarah, verse 222:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

Meaning: “Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.”

While boarding the boat, Malay fishermen would refrain from using vulgar and inappropriate words since it would bring misfortune to them. They were advised to be careful with their utterances while earning *halāl rizq* for their families. Another taboo was to refrain from urinating or defecating at the front part of the boat to keep cleanliness at the highest level. Furthermore, fishermen were reminded not to whistle since the Malays believed that it would cause shark attacks on the whistler (Goring, 1926). In truth, whistling was prohibited to avoid unnecessary noise while catching fish. Such prohibition also aligned with the Islamic rule whereby whistling is deemed *makrūh* since it is a negative *akhlāq* and could be traced back to the Jahiliya’s tradition. Moreover, it was advised that two individuals at odds with each other should not go to sea together, as it could cause mishaps for them. This rule indicated that Islamic values had infiltrated the community, as they believed that the concept of living and earning in harmony must be inculcated among them. Allah SWT stated in Sūrah al-Hujurat, verse 10:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوِيكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

Meaning: “The believers are but one brotherhood, so make peace between your brothers. And be mindful of Allah so you may be shown mercy.”

The Change in Motif and Decoration on the Boat Sides

The religious values brought about by the establishment of Islam in Terengganu also led to changes in motifs and decorations on the boat sides. One of the contributing factors was the Malays' observation of their surroundings before expressing them in their work. Before the arrival of Islam, boat decorations were mainly based on Hinduism, where boatmakers usually carved geometrical motifs on the boats. The Hindu-Buddha influence later saw the use of other motifs like objects and nature. During this era, fishermen used motifs like *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets), animals, and *makara* (elements of wild animals) to decorate their boats. For example, there were traces of motifs based on *wayang kulit* tales and characters, including Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Panji tales, which symbolised the wood carver's creativity. The *wayang kulit* tales also had deep, significant meanings and useful lessons for the community and were considered religious texts before the arrival of Islam. These characters were believed to have magical strength and were invincible at sea (Coatalen, 1982). The Malay community was also creative and innovative in producing items. This was evidenced by the decorative carving on the sides of the boats, encompassing various motifs like egret, *okok*, and *caping*. Each decoration had its respective backstory based on the wood carver's personality (Abdul Wahab et al., 2013).

Figure 5

Decorations based on the Panji Tales (Terengganu State Museum).



Previously, animals were part of the boat decoration themes, mainly represented in the form of snakes or dragons. In India, snakes are highly revered, while dragons are closely connected to water and associated with fertility (Mohd Nasir, 2018). A unique aspect found on boats in northern Terengganu, especially at the borders of Kelantan like Besut and Penarik, was the image of *bangau okok* in the form of a symmetrical screen and carved triangular (Coatalen, 1982).

Figure 6

Decorative Theme of Dragon-Hawk Used a Section of Bangau Okok (National Archive, Malaysia).



Later, the arrival of Islam led to the evolution of decorative motifs in Terengganu boat-making. It significantly influenced the local Malay community and their culture, as evidenced by their adoption of Islamic practices, such as praising Allah SWT and the prophets and reciting Quranic verses. Their boat decorations also gradually changed to floral and nature-based motifs, signifying humans' close relationship with nature. This included the use of *awan larat asli* (original arabesques) and *awan larat jawi* (jawi arabesques) for boat decoration purposes, which contained fewer, further, and larger flower patterns and carried the motifs of leaves, flowers, branches, and fruits (Nik Abd Rahman et

al., 2011). Many wood carvers emphasised leaf carving to portray the intricate art of carving. For instance, the *makara* (wild animal) motif was carved in the shape of leaves and vines, signifying the relationship between Islamic influence and wood carving art. An upward-climbing vine portrayed a close relationship between nature and Allah SWT as the Creator. Such representation indicated that the wood carver prioritised the relationship between humans and Allah SWT, which resonated well with verse 112 of Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān “*ḥablun min ALLāh and ḥablun min al-nās*” (good relationship with Allah and other humans).

Moreover, boat decorations were treated as “motivational spirit”, especially for the fishermen who went to sea to earn a living. The egret was put on the right, believing that it would bring luck to the boat (Mohd Nasir, 2018). From another perspective, the Malays have always prioritised the right side in doing something. For instance, the right hand is used for eating and drinking. Such practice aligns with the sunnah of Prophet Muhammad, who instructed Muslims to prioritise their right when doing most activities.

Figure 7

Bangau Kolek with Makara Theme (Terengganu State Museum)



Conclusion

The Malay community in Terengganu had a close relationship with other people, their natural surroundings, and Allah SWT as the Creator. Such a strong connection served as an inspiration for their boat-making activity, leading to the evolution of their craftsmanship under Islamic influence over time. This study has uncovered new insights into how Islamic teachings gradually replaced animistic and Hindu-Buddhist maritime traditions, transforming the traditional boat-building process, economic structures, and spiritual practices of the Malay community in Terengganu. The key findings indicate that Malay boatmakers actively modified their craftsmanship to align with Islamic teachings. This transition was evident in the shift from superstitious rituals, such as *meramu kayu*, to Shariah-compliant trade practices, the replacement of traditional boat-launching ceremonies with *du‘ā* and *ṣalāt al-ḥājat*, and the incorporation of Quranic inscriptions into boat carvings for spiritual protection. Unlike previous studies that only acknowledged the decline of animistic beliefs, this research demonstrates the specific mechanisms through which Islamisation shaped the maritime industry.

Furthermore, this study highlights the pivotal role of ‘*ulamā*’ in reshaping Terengganu’s maritime traditions. Through their educational outreach, religious sermons, and legal interventions, scholars such as Haji Zainal Abidin and Syed Yusof Ali Al-Zawawi played a crucial role in eradicating *khurafāt* practices, introducing ethical trade principles, and promoting Islamic values in boat-making communities. Their influence led to the institutionalisation of Islamic teachings within the local maritime economy, ensuring that boatmakers conducted their trade in compliance with Shariah law. Additionally, this research provides original contributions by examining how Islamisation influenced the economic and social structures of Terengganu’s maritime community. Unlike existing literature that focuses solely on religious changes, this study reveals that Islamic values reshaped labour organisation, trade ethics, and ownership systems in the boat-building industry. For instance, the transition from unregulated wood procurement to structured trade with registered suppliers ensured economic transparency and compliance with Islamic business ethics, fostering economic stability within Terengganu’s fishing communities.

In conclusion, this study bridges a crucial research gap through a systematic analysis of how Islamic teachings influenced the evolution of traditional boat building and water transport in Terengganu from the 13th to the 20th century. The influence of Islam on traditional boat building in Terengganu began in the 13th century with the arrival of Arab traders. Early practices blended Islamic elements with animistic and Hindu-Buddhist rituals. By the 16th century, syncretic customs, such as initiation rituals, remained prevalent, although gradually infused with Islamic values. The 18th and 19th centuries portrayed stronger religious enforcement through the role of '*ulamā*' and rulers, leading to legal reforms like *Itqān al-Muluk bi Ta'dīl al-Suluk* in Terengganu. By the early 20th century, pre-Islamic rituals were replaced with Islamic practices like *du'ā* and *ṣalāt al-hājat*. Decorative motifs also shifted towards Islamic art forms, and Quranic verses were incorporated into boat design. This situation prompted a complete transformation of maritime traditions with Islamic teachings. These findings offer a broader understanding of Islamic maritime heritage and demonstrate the long-term impact of Islamisation on the technological, economic, and spiritual dimensions of Malay boat-making traditions. The insights provide a foundation for future research regarding Islamic influence in maritime cultures across the Malay Archipelago and highlight the need for further exploration of Islamic maritime traditions beyond Malaysia.

Acknowledgement

This research was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE) through the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) titled "Pembinaan Model Lestari Warisan Teknologi Perahu bagi Meningkatkan Taraf Tukang Timbal sebagai Satu Kearifan Tempatan" (FRGS/1/2021/SSI0/UNISZA/03/5).

References

- Abdullah, A. R. (2006). *Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Asia Tenggara Tradisional*. Shah Alam: Karisma Publications.
- Abdullah, M. Y. (2021). *Pengangkutan Air Negeri Terengganu*. Terengganu: Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.
- Abdullah, S. (2006). Amalan Perbomohan dalam Masyarakat Melayu Satu Tinjauan dari Perspektif Islam. *Jurnal Pembangunan Sosial*, 9, 1-11.

- Abu Bakar, M. (2012), Politik dan Pemerintahan: Tiga Abad Kesultanan Terengganu. In Abdul Rahman Embong, *Terengganu Merentasi Tiga Abad: Kesultanan, Politik, Ekonomi, Agama dan Budaya*, Kuala Terengganu: Yayasan Diraja Sultan Mizan
- Abu Bakar, M. (2023), *Ulama Terengganu Suatu Sorotan*. Terengganu: Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Terengganu.
- Abu Bakar, S. (1989). *Perkembangan Keilmuan dan Kesedaran Keislaman di Terengganu*, PESAKA V, Lembaga Muzium Negeri Terengganu. Kuala Lumpur: United Selangor Press Sdn. Bhd.
- Abdul Wahab, M. R. et al., (2013). Penggunaan Unsur Alam dalam Hiasan Perahu Tradisional di Pantai Timur. *Seminar Etnosains Akademi Sains Islam Malaysia (ASASI) ke-2, Pusat Dialog Peradaban Universiti Malaya*.
- Abd Wahab, N. et al. (2022). Itqan Al-Muluk bi Ta'dil As-Suluk: The Implication of Terengganu Institution 1911 Promulgation. *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, 17(2), 25-38.
- Abd Wahab, N. et al. (2023). Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah on the Socio-Economy of Terengganu, 1920-1942. *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah*, 13(2), 41-56.
- Abd Wahab, N. et al. (2023). Tukang Timbal: Kebijaksanaan Akal dan Teknologi Tradisional dalam Pembuatan Perahu di Terengganu, 1900-1941. *Sejarah: Journal of the Department of History*, 32(1), 46-70.
- Abd Wahab, N. et al. (2025). Water Transports Art and Symbolism in the Malay World: Types of Bangau Decorations on Traditional Boats from the East Coast of Malaysia. *Alam Cipta*, 18(2), 133-158.
- Ahmad, I. (1941). Malay Fisherman's Supersitions. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)*, 19(1), 131-136.
- Ali, I. & Abdullah, M. F. (2024). The homo sapiens seafarer diaspora in the Southeast Asian archipelago: Traversing transoceanic waters from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic era. *Journal of International Studies*, 20(2), 95-117
- Aziz, N. F. et al. (2014). Pengaruh Adat Resam, Kepercayaan dan Kebudayaan terhadap Pembinaan Rumah Melayu Tradisional. *International Journal of the Malay World and Civilisation (IMAN)*, 2(2), 105-111.
- Coatalen, P. J. (1982). *The Decorated Boats of Kelantan*. Pulau Pinang: Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Daud, H. (1993). *Sejarah Melayu: Satu Kajian Daripada Aspek Pensejarahan Budaya*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Firth, R. (1966). *Malay Fishermen: Their Peasant Economy*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Goring, D. H. (1926), Some Malay Boats and Their Uses. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)*, 4(2), 192-199.
- Gunaish, C. F. et al. (2024). Da'wah through Documentary Films Produced by Malayan Film Unit (MFU) and Filem Negara Malaysia (FNM), 1957-1970. *Intellectual Discourse*, 32(1), 159-187.
- Ismail, S. & Ismail, M. S. I. (2020). Unsur-unsur Mistik dan Pemujaan dalam kalangan Masyarakat Melayu di Pulau Besar Negeri Melaka. *Jurnal Melayu*, 19(2), 254-269.
- Itqan Al-Muluk bi Ta'dil al-Suluk.
- Maidin, P. (2003). Tukang Timbal Membina Perahu: Tradisi dan Inovasi. *SARI: Jurnal Alam dan Tamadun Melayu*, 21, 39-56.
- Mat Noor, S. et al. (2013). Pulut Kuning in Malay Society: The Beliefs and Practices Then and Now. *Asian Social Science*, 9(7), 29-40.
- Md Yatim, O. et al. (2011). Tradisi Intelektual Melayu-Islam: Daripada Metafora kepada Saini Kismet. *Jurnal Melayu*, 6, 1-23.
- Mohd Nasir, M. N. (2018). Koleksi Bangau Perahu di Jabatan Muzium Malaysia: Tema dan Makna. *Asian Journal of Environment, History and Heritage (AJEHH)*, 2(1), 289-304.
- Nik Abd. Rahman, N. H. S. et al. (2011). *Kesenian Melayu Islam: Jiwa dalam Pengkaryaan*, World Congress for Islamic History and Civilization. Jabatan Sejarah Islam dan Tamadun Akademi Pengajian Islam Universiti Malaya.
- Osman, M. T. (1967). *Indigenous, Hindu and Islamic Elements in Malay Folk Beliefs*. United States: Indiana University.
- Pejabat Setiausaha Kerajaan Terengganu. (1999). *Pembangunan Terengganu Dahulu dan Sekarang*. Terengganu: Pejabat Setiausaha Kerajaan Terengganu.
- Saad, N. (2002), Turun Ke laut. *Jurnal Warisan Indera Kayangan*, 14, 1-10.
- Shamsul Bahri, N. A. et al. (2022). Tukang Timbal: Sumbangan dan Tradisi Pembuatan Perahu di Terengganu, 1950-1980. *Asian Journal of Environment, History and Heritage (AJEHH)*, 6(2), 51-71.
- Shamsul Bahri, N. A. et al. (2024). The Boatbuilding Practices Among Boatbuilders (*Tukang Timbal*) in Terengganu, Malaysia: A Case Study in Water Transportation, Maritime Heritage and Craftsmanship in Asean. *Alam Cipta: International Journal on Sustainable Tropical Design Research & Practice*, 17(2), 75-87.
- Wan Mohammad, W. R. & Dollah, H. (1999). *Pantang Larang Orang Melayu Tradisional*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn. Bhd.

Winstedt, R. (1961). *The Malay a Cultural History*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd

Zakaria, I. (2012). Islam dan Falsafahnya dalam Kebudayaan Melayu. *Jurnal Hadhari: An International Journal*, 91-108.

Ubuntu and Madani in Dialogue: Ethical Encounters, Lived Experience, and the Moral Realities of Malaysia–Africa Relations

Muhammad Danial Azman*
Kevin Fernandez**

Abstract: Malaysia’s relations with Africa have conventionally been framed through the discourse of South–South cooperation, Bandung-era solidarities, and postcolonial affinity. However, the lived experiences of Africans in Malaysia—particularly among Nigerian and Sudanese communities—reveal a more complex and ethically charged reality. Drawing on documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews conducted between February 2023 and November 2025, this article examines how African migrants interpret Malaysia’s diplomatic identity through everyday encounters with immigration authorities, law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and Malaysian society at large. While many participants reported experiences shaped by racialised perceptions, administrative inconsistency, and episodic prejudice, others highlighted forms of safety, hospitality, and religious solidarity. Situating these narratives within the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF), this article argues that meaningful Malaysia–Africa relations must extend beyond rhetorical solidarity to encompass institutional fairness and ethically grounded relational practices. The findings illuminate both the tensions and the ethical potential embedded in Malaysia’s aspiration to position itself as a moral actor within the Global South.

*Deputy Executive Director for Academic & Student Affairs, International Institute of Public Policy & Management (INPUMA), Universiti Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: danial@um.edu.my. *Corresponding author.*

**Deputy Executive Director, Asia-Europe Institute (AEI), Universiti Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: kevin@um.edu.my

Keywords: Malaysia–Africa relations; Ubuntu; Madani; African diaspora; South–South cooperation; ethical governance

Abstrak: Hubungan Malaysia–Afrika secara konvensional dibingkai melalui wacana kerjasama Selatan–Selatan, solidariti era Bandung, dan pertalian pascakolonial. Namun begitu, pengalaman hidup warga Afrika di Malaysia—khususnya dalam kalangan komuniti Nigeria dan Sudan—menunjukkan realiti yang lebih kompleks serta sarat pertimbangan etika. Berdasarkan analisis dokumen dan temu bual separa berstruktur yang dijalankan antara Februari 2023 dan November 2025, makalah ini meneliti bagaimana migran Afrika mentafsir identiti diplomatik Malaysia melalui pertemuan seharian mereka dengan pihak imigresen, agensi penguatkuasaan undang-undang, institusi pendidikan dan masyarakat Malaysia secara umum. Walaupun ramai peserta melaporkan pengalaman yang dibentuk oleh persepsi berunsur perkauman, ketidakselarasan pentadbiran dan prejudis yang bersifat episodik, sebahagian yang lain menekankan pengalaman keselamatan, keramahan dan solidariti keagamaan. Dengan menempatkan naratif ini dalam Rangka Kerja Perkongsian Ubuntu–Madani (UMPF), makalah ini berhujah bahawa hubungan Malaysia–Afrika yang bermakna perlu melangkaui solidariti retorik kepada keadilan institusi dan amalan hubungan kemanusiaan yang beretika. Dapatan kajian ini menyerlahkan kedua-dua ketegangan dan potensi etika dalam aspirasi Malaysia sebagai aktor moral di Selatan Global.

Kata kunci: hubungan Malaysia–Afrika; Ubuntu; Madani; diaspora Afrika; kerjasama Selatan–Selatan; tadbir urus beretika

Introduction

Malaysia–Africa relations have evolved across three distinct phases: post-Bandung solidarity, post-Cold War economic engagement, and contemporary strategic diplomacy under renewed Global South leadership narratives. These relations encompass trade, education, Islamic diplomacy, and emerging technological cooperation, positioning Malaysia as a bridge between Asia and Africa. However, this macro-level engagement contrasts with the micro-level realities experienced by African communities within Malaysia (Hamidin, 2003a, 2003b, 2009; Jeshurun, 2008; Saravanamuttu, 2010; Karuppannan & Yacob, 2020; Stenecke, 30 May 2016). Emerging from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and post-colonial diplomacy, Malaysia positioned itself as a development-oriented partner committed to equality, mutual

respect, and political autonomy among developing states (Abidin et al., 2014; Mahathir, 1985; Persaud, 2018; *Tricontinental Institute for Social Research*, 8 April 2025). These orientations informed Malaysia's engagement with Africa through technical cooperation, trade, education, and cultural exchange (Padayachee & Valodia, 1998; Devadason & Govindaraju, 2017; Mohamed Elfaki et al., 2012; Stenecke, 30 May 2016).

In the post-Cold War period, Malaysia–Africa relations expanded into economic, political, and religious domains (Pratihari, 2023; Shuriye, 2020; Eissa et al., 2019; Haron et al., 2022, 2002). Recent developments—such as Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's official visits to Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Africa—have further reaffirmed Malaysia's strategic and normative interest in Africa (Faiz Abdullah, 25 November 2025; *SABC News*, 27 October 2025; *Bernama*, 31 July 2025; Koya, 18 November 2025). Malaysia's vocal advocacy for Palestine and opposition to forced displacement have also reinforced its self-image as a justice-oriented Global South and Muslim-majority actor (*Reuters*, 6 February 2025; *The Guardian*, 31 January 2025; Waikar et al., 2021; Delfolie, 2012).

Yet state-level diplomacy provides only a partial account of Malaysia–Africa relations (Azman, 2021; Daniels, 2014; Gardiner, 1989). For Africans living in Malaysia, these relations are experienced not through official communiqués but through everyday encounters with immigration systems, policing, educational institutions, workplaces, and neighbourhoods. Existing scholarship documents the racialisation of African migrants, patterns of hypervisibility, administrative precarity, and securitised imaginaries (Taylor, 2010; Daniels, 2014; Ambikaipaker, 2021; Suleiman & Mikail, 2020). Media reporting has further contributed to public perceptions that associate Africans with crime, deviance, or regulatory violations (*Malay Mail*, 19 July 2019; *The Star*, 3 September 2009; 10 October 2019; *The Straits Times*, 27 June 2021; *Study International*, 11 August 2022).

While these studies illuminate structural and sociocultural challenges, less attention has been paid to how African individuals ethically interpret their experiences in relation to Malaysia's moral self-presentation. This gap is particularly striking given Malaysia's contemporary Madani governance discourse, grounded in Islamic ethics

and the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* tradition (Neo, 2015; Michael & Salleh, 2023; Musa, 2023), and African moral traditions such as Ubuntu, which emphasise relational personhood, dignity, and mutual recognition (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019; Metz, 2019; Ogude, 2019).

This article conceptualises the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF) as both an analytical and normative lens. Analytically, the framework provides a structured approach to interpreting how African migrants evaluate their lived experiences as moral encounters shaped by institutional and sociocultural dynamics. Normatively, it reflects ethical expectations grounded in Ubuntu’s relational humanism and Madani’s governance principles. By integrating these dimensions, the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF) bridges empirical analysis with ethical critique, enabling a deeper understanding of how Malaysia’s diplomatic identity is interpreted through everyday lived realities.

Literature Review

The study of Malaysia–Africa relations remains an evolving and relatively under-systematised field of inquiry (Azman, 2021). Existing scholarship is fragmented across diplomatic history, migration studies, and postcolonial analysis, with limited integration across these domains. Much of the documented literature is relatively recent and often situated within colonial and postcolonial encounters involving African and Malaysian leaders and societies (Hamidin, 2003a; Haron, 2002). As a result, comprehensive accounts that capture the full spectrum of Malaysia–Africa interactions—particularly those that bridge long historical trajectories with contemporary lived experiences—remain limited (see also Haron et al., 2022; Jeshurun, 2008; Lee, 2015). Continuous and systematic scholarly inquiry is therefore necessary to deepen understanding of how historical linkages, diplomatic engagements, and everyday encounters intersect across time.

Notwithstanding these limitations, three broad attributes shape the contours of Malaysia–Africa relations across historical and contemporary contexts. First, before the expansion of European colonial modernity, the Malay World occupied a strategic position within transregional trade networks linking the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea (Hamidin, 2003b). Precolonial Malay polities and sultanates in the Malay Archipelago were embedded within wider

Afro–Asian exchange systems connecting African kingdoms, the Middle East, India, and Chinese empires through both maritime and overland routes. The spread of Islam across the Malay World further suggests the presence of intellectual and commercial linkages involving Muslim traders, scholars, and Sufi networks from the Middle East and North Africa (Azman, 2021). Although historical documentation remains limited, recorded Afro–Asian exchanges indicate that early forms of interaction likely predated modern diplomatic relations. The subsequent emergence of colonial economies intensified these linkages, as commodities such as palm oil from West Africa, cotton from Japan, and spices from the Malay Archipelago circulated within global trade systems in which colonial Malaya occupied a strategic nodal position (Devadason & Govindaraju, 2017). These trajectories suggest that contemporary Malaysia–Africa relations are embedded within longer histories of transregional exchange.

Second, modern Malaysia–Africa relations were shaped by political solidarities emerging from decolonisation and Cold War geopolitics. Interactions among African and Malaysian leaders—documented through diplomatic memoirs, biographies, and informal exchanges—reflect broader Afro–Asian solidarities associated with the Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (Hamidin, 2009; Karuppannan & Yacob, 2020; Saravanamuttu, 2010; Agustian et al., 2024; Hong et al., 2020; Persaud, 2018). A particularly significant moment occurred during Indonesia’s Confrontation against the formation of Malaysia in 1963, when Malaysia sought diplomatic recognition from newly independent African states through the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). This period marked an early phase of Malaysia’s formal engagement with Africa. These ties expanded more systematically during the premiership of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, particularly in the late 1980s and 1990s, when Malaysia intensified diplomatic, economic, and technical cooperation with Sub-Saharan African countries (Padayachee & Valodia, 1998; Devadason & Govindaraju, 2017; Mohamed Elfaki et al., 2012; Stenecke, 30 May 2016). More recent developments point to expansion into new domains such as digital cooperation and artificial intelligence partnerships (Bernama, 31 July 2025; Dike, 2025; Dorigné-Thomson & Lin, 2025; TV BRICS, 1 August 2025), alongside renewed diplomatic engagement under Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim (*Reuters*, 6 February 2025; *The*

Guardian, 31 January 2025; *The Star*, 18 November 2025; SABC News, 27 October 2025).

Third, beyond elite diplomacy, Malaysia's people-to-people interactions have increasingly shaped relations with Africa since the late 1980s and early 1990s (Hamidin, 2009). What began as a limited diplomatic and trade engagement has expanded into higher education, professional mobility, intercultural relationships, and everyday social life (Interview with an officer from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Putrajaya, 12 July 2023). African nationals—particularly from Nigeria and Sudan—have become among the most visible communities within Malaysia's migrant population. Estimates before the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that up to 300,000 African nationals resided in Malaysia, with Nigerians and Sudanese forming the largest groups (Interview with an officer from the Department of Immigration of Malaysia, Putrajaya, 18 February 2024). At the same time, issues related to visa overstays, undocumented status, and involvement in certain criminal activities—often disproportionately emphasised in media reporting—have contributed to the formation of negative public stereotypes, particularly towards Nigerians (Interview with an officer from the Embassy of Nigeria in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 14 June 2024). These dynamics highlight the coexistence of opportunity and stigma, underscoring the complexity of Malaysia–Africa relations as everyday moral judgements rather than purely diplomatic constructs.

Nevertheless, such narratives obscure the experiences of a substantial number of African residents who live, work, and establish families in Malaysia as law-abiding members of society (Interview with a Malaysian historian, Gombak, 5 October 2023). For many, Malaysia represents an opportunity, safety, and a long-term place of settlement. The coexistence of opportunity and stigma underscores the complexity of Malaysia–Africa relations as everyday moral judgements rather than purely diplomatic constructs (Interview with an officer from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Putrajaya, 18 August 2023). It is therefore analytically important to examine the experiences of key communities—particularly Nigerians and Sudanese—not only because of their demographic significance, but also because their lived encounters reveal deeper insights into the experiential ethics, institutional, and sociocultural dimensions of Malaysia–Africa relations. Thus, the following literature

subsection emphasises more recent, complex yet delicate encounters for Nigerian and Sudanese communities in Malaysia.

Malaysia–Africa Relations, South–South Cooperation and Diplomatic Narratives

Since 1957, Malaysia's engagement with Africa has largely been articulated through the framework of South–South cooperation, Bandung-era solidarity, and postcolonial partnership (Hamidin, 2003a, 2003b, 2009; Jeshurun, 2008; Saravanamuttu, 2010; Agustian et al., 2024; Hong et al., 2020). Rooted in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Malaysia positioned itself as a development-oriented partner emphasising equality, sovereignty, and mutual respect (Mahathir, 1985; Persaud, 2018; Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, 8 April 2025). These principles informed diplomatic, economic, and educational engagement with African states (Padayachee & Valodia, 1998; Devadason & Govindaraju, 2017; Mohamed Elfaki et al., 2012; Stenecke, 30 May 2016).

Contemporary developments indicate a broadening of these relations into emerging sectors such as digital governance, artificial intelligence, and Global South cooperation (Bernama, 31 July 2025; Dike, 2025; Dorné-Thomson & Lin, 2025; TV BRICS, 1 August 2025). However, while diplomatic narratives emphasise solidarity and partnership, they provide only a partial account of Malaysia–Africa relations. Migrants often evaluate these narratives through everyday institutional and social encounters. As one Nigerian professional observed, “We hear Malaysia talk about justice and partnership, but what matters to us is how those ideas appear in daily life” (Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 9 September 2025). This highlights the analytical need to move beyond state-centric perspectives towards lived experiences.

Racialisation, Migration and the Lived Realities of African Communities

Within this broader context, a substantial body of scholarship documents the racialised experiences of African migrants in Malaysia, characterised by hypervisibility, institutional scrutiny, and administrative precarity (Daniels, 2014; Suleiman & Mikail, 2020; Ambikaipaker, 2021). Media representations further reinforce these dynamics by associating Africans with criminality or deviance, shaping public perceptions before direct

social interaction (Malay Mail, 2019; The Star, 2019; The Straits Times, 2021; Study International, 2022).

Empirical accounts illustrate how these structural dynamics are experienced in everyday life. A Sudanese postgraduate student noted, “People move away slowly on the train... the silence has a message,” while a Nigerian respondent observed, “People decide who we are before meeting us.” These experiences demonstrate how racialisation operates simultaneously at institutional, sociocultural, and symbolic levels, influencing perceptions of belonging and exclusion.

Research focusing on Nigerian and Sudanese communities further highlights challenges related to immigration procedures, higher education governance, labour-market access, and social integration (Kadouf, 2017; Umar et al., 2014; Mohd Umar, 2014; Suleiman & Mikail, 2020). These structural constraints are often experienced as administrative inconsistency and unpredictability, transforming bureaucratic processes into sources of ethical anxiety. As one respondent remarked, “Every renewal requires something different. I have never submitted the same documents twice” (Interview, Petaling Jaya, 9 June 2025). At the same time, African diasporic communities demonstrate agency by mobilising religious networks, student organisations, and cultural associations to construct alternative forms of belonging (Nganje, 2014; Haron, 2002; Mohamed Elfaki et al., 2012). However, these lived experiences remain marginal within formal foreign policy discourse, revealing a persistent disjuncture between elite narratives and everyday realities (Wan Mohd Nor & Wan Mohd Nor, 2024).

Ubuntu and African Moral Philosophy

Beyond structural explanations, African moral philosophy—particularly Ubuntu—provides an important lens for understanding how migrants interpret their experiences. Ubuntu emphasises relational personhood, shared humanity, and communal responsibility, offering a moral grammar through which dignity and belonging are evaluated (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019; Metz, 2019; Mutongoreni et al., 2025; Ogude, 2019; Qobo & Nyathi, 2016; Walwema, 2025; Madondo & Dhobha, 2025). Complementary traditions further highlight the ethical significance of ancestry, taboo, and communal restraint (Ajayi, 2022; Mekoa, 2020; Kuada, 2020; Vervliet, 2020; Lee, 2015).

Interview evidence suggests that these experiential ethics remain salient among African migrants in Malaysia. As one Sudanese academic explained, “Back home, we acknowledge each other’s humanity first. When that is missing here, it feels like something deeper is wrong” (Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 12 September 2025). Such reflections indicate that migrants interpret their encounters not merely as administrative or social interactions, but as moral experiences.

Madani Governance, Islamic Ethics and Moral Expectations

In parallel, Madani governance represents Malaysia’s contemporary ethical discourse grounded in Islamic political thought and the *maqāsid al-sharī‘ah* tradition, emphasising justice (‘*adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), benevolence (*ihsān*), accountability (*amānah*), and social solidarity (*ukhuwwah*) (Neo, 2015; Michael & Salleh, 2023; Musa, 2023). Scholars situate Madani within Malaysia’s constitutional framework and socio-political development (Muslim, 2012; Hamid, 2018; Mangiarotti, 2023), as well as its projection of Islamic soft power (Delfolie, 2012; Waikar et al., 2021; Nisa, 2023; Noordin & Syed Jaafar Alhabshi, 2023; Shukri, 2025).

These ethical narratives shape migrants’ expectations of fairness and justice. As one Nigerian respondent noted, “Malaysia speaks for justice globally, so we assumed justice would also apply to us” (Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 9 September 2025). This illustrates how national moral discourse informs migrants’ evaluations of institutional conduct and everyday interactions.

Literature Gap and Contribution

Despite extensive scholarship on Malaysia–Africa relations, migration, and ethical governance, three key gaps remain. First, existing literature remains predominantly state-centric, privileging diplomatic narratives over lived experience. Second, while racialisation and migration challenges are well documented, the ethical interpretation of these experiences remains under-theorised. Third, Ubuntu and Madani have not been systematically integrated as a unified analytical framework for understanding Malaysia–Africa relations.

Taken together, the literature reveals three key limitations. First, existing scholarship remains predominantly state-centric, privileging diplomatic narratives over migrants’ lived experiences. Second, while

racialisation and migration challenges are well documented, the experiential ethics of these experiences remain under-theorised. Third, there is limited engagement between African moral philosophy and Malaysia’s governance discourse. By integrating Ubuntu and Madani within a unified analytical framework, this study reconceptualises Malaysia–Africa relations as lived moral realities, bridging the gap between diplomatic rhetoric and everyday experience.

By incorporating lived experiences into the analysis and advancing the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework, this study bridges these gaps and reconceptualises Malaysia–Africa relations as lived moral realities shaped by both institutional structures and everyday encounters.

Table 1
Comparison of Ubuntu and Madani Ethical Framework

Dimension	Ubuntu (African Communitarian Philosophy)	Madani (Malaysia Islamic-Governance Ethos)	Convergence/Divergence
<i>Philosophical roots</i>	<i>Grounded in sub-Saharan African moral worldviews, it emphasises personhood as relational (“I am because we are”).</i>	<i>Grounded in Islamic civilisational ethics, particularly maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah, ‘adl, iḥsān, rahmah and good governance principles.</i>	<i>Both are communitarian and relational but emerge from distinct civilisational traditions (African–humanist vs. Islamic–ethical)</i>
<i>Core ethical principle</i>	<i>Human dignity realised through interconnectedness, mutual care and collective well-being.</i>	<i>Human dignity is upheld through justice, compassion, moral governance and societal balance.</i>	<i>Similar in moral purpose; differ in metaphysical grounding (humanist–anthropological vs theocentric–Islamic).</i>
<i>View of the individual</i>	<i>The individual exists through the community; personhood is socially earned.</i>	<i>The individual is morally responsible before God and society; personal virtue contributes to communal harmony.</i>	<i>Both reject atomistic individualism, but Ubuntu emphasises communal recognition, while Madani emphasises personal accountability to God and society.</i>
<i>View of the community</i>	<i>Community is the primary site of moral reasoning, identity and responsibility.</i>	<i>Community functions as a moral ecosystem shaped by justice, cooperation (ta‘āwun), and social solidarity (ukhuwwah).</i>	<i>Strong convergence: both prioritise communal flourishing over individual gain.</i>

Dimension	Ubuntu (African Communitarian Philosophy)	Madani (Malaysia Islamic-Governance Ethos)	Convergence/Divergence
<i>Moral drivers</i>	<i>Empathy, shared humanity, reciprocity, reconciliation.</i>	<i>Justice, compassion, benevolence (ihsān), trustworthiness (amānah)</i>	<i>Overlaps in compassion and reciprocity; Madani has more institutional/legal articulation.</i>
<i>Conflict resolution</i>	<i>Emphasises restorative justice, reconciliation, and rebuilding social bonds.</i>	<i>Encourages conflict mitigation through shūrā (consultation), fairness, and community-centred solutions.</i>	<i>Parallel approaches: dialogical, restorative, anti-retributive.</i>
<i>Governance Implications</i>	<i>Emphasises restorative justice, reconciliation, and rebuilding social bonds.</i>	<i>Promotes accountable, transparent, ethical governance aligned with Islamic values and public interest (maṣlaḥah).</i>	<i>Both favour ethical governance; Madani emphasises state institutions more explicitly.</i>
<i>Economic and Development Ethos</i>	<i>Development rooted in communal welfare, shared resources and mutual upliftment.</i>	<i>Development guided by justice, sustainability, balanced growth and social equity.</i>	<i>Convergent concern for social equity; Ubuntu is less institutionalised, Madani policy-driven.</i>
<i>Approach to Diversity</i>	<i>Celebrates the plurality and interconnectedness of all humans.</i>	<i>Recognises diversity within an Islamic ethical framework that emphasises justice and mutual respect.</i>	<i>Complementary but shaped by differing cultural origins.</i>
<i>Global Solidarity</i>	<i>Advocates an ethic of collective humanity and anti-oppression beyond borders.</i>	<i>Frames Malaysia's role in the world through Islamic values, South–South solidarity and humanitarian justice.</i>	<i>Strong synergy: both support global justice, anti-colonialism, and moral responsibility to others.</i>

Source. Compiled by the Authors from various Afro-Asian literature and Malaysian government documents.

Locating Ubuntu–Madani Partnership in Malaysia’s Africa Policy

This study advances the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF) to analyse how African migrants in Malaysia ethically interpret their lived experiences. The framework brings into dialogue Ubuntu, a relational African moral philosophy, and Madani, Malaysia’s contemporary discourse on governance grounded in Islamic ethics. While these traditions emerge from distinct intellectual genealogies,

their convergence provides a powerful ethical lens for understanding everyday encounters at the intersection of diplomacy, institutions, and social life.

Ubuntu is fundamentally anthropocentric and relational, emphasising shared humanity, mutual recognition, and communal responsibility (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019; Metz, 2019; Ogude, 2019). Moral worth, within Ubuntu, is realised through social relations rather than solely through individual autonomy (Qobo & Nyathi, 2016; Walwema, 2025; Madondo & Dhobha, 2025). Complementary African ethical traditions further stress the role of ancestry, taboo and moral restraint in sustaining social cohesion (Ajayi, 2022; Mekoa, 2020; Kuada, 2020; Vervliet, 2020; Babola & Shittu, 2020). For African migrants, these ethical orientations shape expectations of dignity, recognition, and humane treatment.

Figure 1

The Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF)



Source. Created by the Authors from comparative literature and fieldwork observations of Africans in Malaysia.

Madani, by contrast, is theocentric and institutionally articulated. Rooted in the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* tradition, it prioritises justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), benevolence (*ihsān*), accountability (*amānah*) and social solidarity (*ukhuwwah*) as guiding principles of governance (Neo, 2015; Michael & Salleh, 2023; Musa, 2023). Scholars situate Madani within Malaysia's broader Islamic political thought and constitutional order (Muslim, 2012; Hamid, 2018; Mangiarotti, 2023), as well as its projection of Islamic soft power and moral leadership internationally (Delfolie, 2012; Waikar et al., 2021; Nisa, 2023; Noordin & Syed Jaafar Alhabshi, 2023; Shukri, 2025).

When placed in dialogue, Ubuntu and Madani illuminate both interpersonal and institutional dimensions of moral life. Ubuntu foregrounds relational warmth and recognition in everyday encounters, while Madani frames expectations of fairness, consistency, and justice within public institutions. This duality enhances the analytical reach of the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF).

Figure 1 presents the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF), illustrating how Malaysia's foreign policy narratives are mediated through ethical governance principles and translated into the everyday experiences of African communities in Malaysia. These lived encounters—shaped by institutional practices and social interactions—ultimately inform perceptions of trust, dignity, inclusion, and legitimacy in Malaysia–Africa relations. Many Africans, including those from Muslim-majority contexts, arrive in Malaysia with moral expectations grounded in Islamic and humanistic values, further reinforced by Malaysia's vocal advocacy for global justice, particularly regarding Palestine. When institutional conduct or societal behaviour falls short of these ideals, migrants interpret the resulting disjunctures not simply as administrative lapses, but as ethical contradictions (see also Mangiarotti, 2023; Mekoa, 2020; Metz, 2019). Despite their distinct intellectual origins, this article argues that Ubuntu and Madani converge as ethical convictions underpinning Malaysia–Africa relations, sharing core commitments to human dignity, compassion, communal responsibility and justice (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Four Dimensions of Ubuntu-Madani Peaceful Framework in Malaysia-Africa Relations



Source. Created by the Authors from comparative literature and fieldwork observations of Africans in Malaysia.

Their divergences are nonetheless instructive. Ubuntu is anthropocentric and relational, whereas Madani is theocentric and grounded in divine accountability. In dialogue, they illuminate both interpersonal and institutional dimensions of moral life, thereby strengthening the framework's analytical capacity. The Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF) consists of four interlocking dimensions: ethical foundations (Ubuntu and Madani), which shape migrants' moral expectations; institutional structures, including immigration, policing and universities, which influence experiences of security and trust; sociocultural realities, encompassing media narratives and everyday interactions that affect belonging or marginalisation; and foreign-policy narratives, through which Malaysia's global commitments frame migrants' evaluations of lived experience. Together, these dimensions provide the analytical foundation for examining the experiences of Sudanese and Nigerian residents in Malaysia.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative interpretivist methodology to examine how African migrants construct moral meaning from their lived encounters in Malaysia. Interpretivist approaches are particularly suited to ethical inquiry, as they privilege subjectivity, relational experience and normative evaluations (Azman, 2016, 2021; Owojori et al., 2020). Our proposed Ubuntu-Madani Peaceful Framework guided the formulation of interview questions, the organisation of thematic categories, and the analytical interpretation of data. The selection of Nigerian and Sudanese participants reflects both empirical and analytical considerations (Interview with an officer from the Department of Immigration of Malaysia, Putrajaya, 18 February 2024). Beyond their status as among the largest African communities in Malaysia, these groups represent diverse migration trajectories, including students, professionals, and entrepreneurs, as well as differing linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. This diversity enhances the study's ability to capture a broad spectrum of lived experiences and ethical interpretations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between February 2023 and November 2025 with 130 Nigerian and Sudanese migrants residing in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Penang, and Johor. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling via diaspora networks, university contacts, and community leaders. Interviews explored experiences across the four dimensions of the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF), including encounters with immigration procedures, policing practices, educational administration, public attitudes, and perceptions of Malaysia's diplomatic role.

Data collection proceeded iteratively alongside analysis, allowing emerging themes to inform subsequent interviews. Thematic saturation was observed after approximately 130 interviews, at which point no substantially new themes emerged. The remaining interviews confirmed the pattern's stability and deepened interpretive insights, thereby ensuring analytical robustness. Interviews were conducted in English and typically lasted 45–90 minutes. Field notes were taken to capture affective cues, contextual observations, and reflexive impressions. To contextualise interview data, the study also drew on documentary and media analysis, including government statements, public speeches, and

Malaysian news coverage related to Africa and African communities (Malay Mail, 19 July 2019; *The Star*, 3 September 2009; 10 October 2019; *The Straits Times*, 27 June 2021; *Study International*, 11 August 2022).

Data analysis proceeded through thematic analysis, beginning with open coding to identify recurring ideas, emotions, and ethical concerns, followed by axial coding to map themes onto the four dimensions of the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF). Interpretive synthesis was then employed to analyse how participants evaluated encounters as moral events rather than purely administrative or cultural interactions (Knight et al., 2023).

Ethical protocols were strictly observed, including informed consent, anonymisation, confidentiality, and secure data storage. As a Malaysian academic researching African communities, the researcher adopted a reflexive stance attentive to positionality, institutional proximity, and potential bias, with a commitment to accurately representing participants' moral perspectives.

While the qualitative sample is not statistically representative, its thematic richness offers analytical depth. Triangulating interview data with documentary and media sources enhances interpretive robustness and provides a nuanced understanding of how African migrants construct moral meaning within Malaysia's evolving socio-political and diplomatic landscape.

Findings

The findings reveal a dynamic interplay among institutional, sociocultural and diplomatic narratives, interpreted through the ethical expectations of Ubuntu and Madani. These selected interview excerpts illustrate how migrants make moral sense of their encounters in Malaysia. These findings demonstrate both ethical contradictions and ethical possibilities within Malaysia–Africa relations.

Navigating Institutional Structures: Immigration, Policing and Bureaucratic Precarity

Participants reported occasional uncertainty and procedural inconsistency within the immigration system, contributing to a sense

of insecurity even among long-term residents. Such encounters were interpreted not merely as administrative challenges but as shaping broader perceptions of fairness and institutional trust. As one Nigerian postgraduate student interviewed in Petaling Jaya on 9 June 2025 observed, “Every renewal requires something different. I have never submitted the same documents twice.”

This interview excerpt echoes Daniels’ (2014) observations on bureaucratic unpredictability and aligns with Suleiman and Mikail’s (2020) discussion of immigration precarity among Africans in Malaysia. Comparable concerns also surfaced in accounts of encounters with law enforcement. As a Sudanese professional interviewed in Kuala Lumpur on 12 June 2025 noted, “They were not rude, but I could feel suspicion before I even spoke. You feel like you must constantly prove innocence.”

Participants interpreted such encounters as moral events, assessed against Ubuntu’s expectation of mutual dignity and Madani’s ethic of justice (*‘adl*), viewing repeated scrutiny as a departure from both ethical traditions. Administrative inconsistency was also evident within educational institutions, as reflected in one account: “My application was suddenly flagged as incomplete, and no one knew why. It felt arbitrary.” Taken together, these experiences underscore the institutional dimension of the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework (UMPF), highlighting the moral significance migrants attach to administrative clarity, fairness, and procedural transparency.

Encountering Malaysian Society: Public Perceptions, Media Narratives and Everyday Interactions

Racialised imaginaries of Africans—shaped in part by sensationalist media reporting (*Malay Mail*, 2019; *The Star*, 2019)—were found to exert a significant influence on everyday social interactions. As one Sudanese undergraduate interviewed in Kuala Lumpur on 5 July 2025 observed, “People quietly shift away on the MRT. No words, but the silence says everything.” A Nigerian respondent interviewed in Kuala Lumpur on 6 July 2025 similarly noted, “Before people meet us, the media has already shaped who they think we are.”

Nevertheless, participants’ accounts reveal a social landscape that is neither uniform nor wholly negative. Several respondents described

experiences of everyday hospitality, such as neighbours who offered greetings and personal engagement, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Another Sudanese interviewed in Kepong on 8 July 2025 articulated a more ambivalent assessment, suggesting that social distance often stemmed from unfamiliarity rather than hostility: “Malaysia is not hostile, but unfamiliar with Africans. People are cautious out of ignorance, not hate.”

Taken together, these excerpts illustrate the coexistence of warmth and discomfort in everyday encounters, indicating that sociocultural attitudes towards Africans in Malaysia remain contingent and potentially malleable rather than fixed or uniformly exclusionary.

Lives of Possibility: Positive Experiences and Everyday Hospitality

Amid these challenges, migrants also recounted meaningful forms of inclusion and everyday affirmation. A 27-year-old Sudanese postgraduate interviewed on 27 August 2025 highlighted the sense of personal safety afforded by life in Malaysia, noting, “Here, I walk at night without fear. That peace is priceless.” A 31-year-old Nigerian professional interviewed in Gombak on 13 August 2025 similarly emphasised experiences of religious solidarity, observing, “During Ramaḍān, colleagues invited me to *ifṭār* every day. They treated me as family.”

Other respondents offered broader positive reflections on their living experiences. One Nigerian interviewed on 5 September 2025 remarked, “Malaysia is still the best place I have lived. People are friendly once they know you. The difficulties are real, but the kindness is real too.” Likewise, a Sudanese participant interviewed on 8 September 2025 reflected that social distance often stemmed from unfamiliarity rather than hostility, stating, “Many Malaysians do not know the differences between African nationalities. When they do, their attitudes change. It is ignorance, not racism, in most cases.”

Taken together, these affirming narratives underscore the ethical potential within Malaysian society, aligning closely with Ubuntu’s relational ethos and Madani’s emphasis on compassion (*rahmah*) and social solidarity (*ukhuwwah*).

Reading Malaysia Through Ubuntu and Madani: Moral Interpretations of Belonging and Exclusion

What distinguishes this study is not only what migrants experienced, but how they ethically interpreted these experiences. As one Nigerian professional interviewed on 9 September 2025 observed, “Malaysia speaks for justice globally. So, I assumed justice would also apply to us.” Migrants frequently evaluated institutional practices against Malaysia’s moral self-image, and when discrepancies emerged, these were often perceived as ethical contradictions rather than mere bureaucratic shortcomings.

Ubuntu rendered relational warmth—and its absence—particularly salient in these interpretations. As a Sudanese academic interviewed in Kuala Lumpur on 12 September 2025 reflected, “We acknowledge each other’s humanity back home. When that is missing here, it feels like something deeper is wrong.” Viewed through the Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework, such testimonies constitute a moral critique, suggesting that Malaysia’s diplomatic ideals acquire meaning and legitimacy only when consistently enacted through social relations and institutional practice.

Malaysia’s Africa Policy Implications

The findings suggest that strengthening Malaysia–Africa relations requires attention not only to diplomatic and economic engagement, but also to the ethical quality of everyday governance. First, greater administrative consistency and transparency within immigration and educational institutions would reduce perceptions of arbitrariness and enhance institutional trust.

Second, public communication strategies and media engagement should move beyond securitised narratives to promote more balanced representations of African communities. Third, intercultural initiatives—particularly within universities and local communities—can foster familiarity, reduce ignorance and activate the ethical potential already present in Malaysian society.

Aligning institutional practices with Madani principles and nurturing Ubuntu-informed relationality would reinforce Malaysia’s credibility as an ethical actor within the Global South.

Table 2

Policy Considerations under the Ubuntu-Madani Partnership Framework

<i>Policy Area</i>	<i>Key Issue</i>	<i>Recommended Actions</i>
<i>Ethical governance</i>	<i>The gap between values and institutional behaviour.</i>	<i>Ubuntu-Madani training, an intercultural programme, and integrating ethics into foreign policy.</i>
<i>Immigration and visa system</i>	<i>Distrust, profiling, and administrative opacity.</i>	<i>Africa desk, standard procedures, feedback channels and anti-profiling guidelines.</i>
<i>Media and public narrative</i>	<i>Stigmatising portrayals of Africans.</i>	<i>Media fellowship, Africa-focused research, diaspora-government task force.</i>
<i>Diaspora engagement</i>	<i>Under-utilised networks and expertise.</i>	<i>Advisory councils, business incubators, cultural and academic festivals.</i>
<i>Higher education</i>	<i>Student welfare concerns, limited Africa-focused content.</i>	<i>African Studies curricula, pastoral support, scholarships, and anti-racism protocols.</i>
<i>Diplomacy beyond trade</i>	<i>Overemphasis on economic cooperation.</i>	<i>Include insights from the diaspora, ethical cooperation frameworks, and value-based diplomacy.</i>

Key areas for improvement include humanising immigration procedures through transparent processes and dedicated units, transforming media narratives to counter suspicion, and leveraging diaspora communities as strategic partners. Additionally, strengthening higher education by developing joint African Studies programs and addressing discrimination can boost Malaysia’s standing as an educational hub. Beyond trade, the framework advocates for a shift in diplomacy towards ethical, people-centred partnerships that incorporate diaspora insights and align with Ubuntu and Madani values, fostering a genuine, morally grounded South–South cooperation.

Conclusion

This study reframes Malaysia–Africa relations through the lived experiences of African migrants in Malaysia, revealing a complex interplay of hospitality, suspicion, opportunity, and constraint. This study contributes to broader debates in international relations by

demonstrating how foreign policy legitimacy is increasingly mediated through everyday ethical experiences rather than solely through state-level diplomacy. Selected interview excerpts and recurring themes across 130 interviews show that institutional inconsistencies and imagined racialised perceptions coexist alongside meaningful gestures of warmth, safety, and inclusion.

The Ubuntu–Madani Partnership Framework offers a distinctive ethical lens that foregrounds human dignity, relational accountability, and moral coherence. Migrants interpret their encounters not only through procedural expectations but through ethical imaginaries shaped by Ubuntu and informed by Madani. This dual ethical structure reveals that Malaysia’s diplomatic rhetoric of justice and solidarity must be matched by domestic practices that affirm the dignity of African communities.

Malaysia possesses the institutional capacity and moral resources to move toward greater ethical consistency. The presence of compassion, safety, and acceptance in migrant narratives suggests that positive transformation is both possible and already underway. Aligning Malaysia’s proclaimed values with everyday realities will strengthen its credibility as a moral actor in the Global South and cultivate deeper, more humane ties with African partners.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the future of Malaysia–Africa relations will be determined not only by state-level diplomacy and Malaysia’s diplomatic missions in Africa, but also by everyday moral encounters that shape the lives of Africans in Malaysia.

Acknowledgement and Declaration

This research is indebted to the Africans in Malaysia who generously shared their experiences, allowing us to glimpse the moral and cultural textures of Africa–Malaysia relations. Ethical approval from the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) ensured that all contributions were protected and handled with integrity. We are grateful to our interlocutors for enriching our understanding of dignity and solidarity, and to the anonymous peer reviewers whose insights strengthened the final manuscript. We remain humbled by the privilege of learning from others.

References

- Abidin, I. S. Z., Jantan, M. D., Satar, N. M., & Haseeb, M. (2014). Trade linkages between Malaysia and the OIC member countries: Empirical evidence based on gravity model. *American Journal of Applied Sciences*, 11(11), 1910–1917.
- Abrahamsen, R. (2017). Africa and international relations: Assembling Africa, studying the world. *African Affairs*, 116(462), 125–139.
- Agustian, I., et al. (2024). Identity and foreign policy: Comparative studies of Indonesian and Malaysian foreign policies in relation to Israel. *Revista UNISCI*, 65, 53–77.
- Ajayi, S. D. (2022). Rejuvenation of taboo as a mechanism for curbing immorality in African society. *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture*, 3(2), 73–91. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-7644/2022/v3n2a5>
- Ambikaipaker, M. (2021). Antiblackness in Malaysia, the Bandung spirit and African–Asian decolonial critique in *The Color Curtain*. In Z. Ibrahim, D. Richards, & V. T. King (Eds.), *Discourses, agency and identity in Malaysia: Critical perspectives* (pp. 231–248). Springer.
- Azman, M. D. (2016). Conducting political research in a highly sensitive post-conflict environment: Reflections from the internally displaced camps in Kenya. *Malaysian Journal of International Relations*, 4(1), 13–36.
- Azman, M. D. (2021). Connecting South–South communities: The narratives of South African–Malaysia relations. *Kajian Malaysia*, 39(1), 193–196.
- Babalola, S., & Shittu, W. (2020). Foreign aid and economic growth in West Africa: Examining the roles of institutions. *International Economic Journal*, 34(2), 241–260.
- Bernama. (2025, July 31). UAE, Malaysia, Rwanda seek to boost AI adoption in Global South. *Bernama* [Malaysia].
- Daniels, T. P. (2014). African international students in Klang Valley: Colonial legacies, postcolonial racialization, and sub-citizenship. *Citizenship Studies*, 18(8), 855–870.
- Delfolie, D. (2012). Malaysian extraversion towards the Muslim world: Ideological positioning for a “mirror effect”. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 31(4), 3–29.
- Devadason, E. S., & Govindaraju, V. G. R. C. (2017). Bridging Asia with Africa: The case of Malaysia. In P. A. Raposo, D. Arse & S. Cornelissen. (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of Africa–Asia relations* (pp. 208–224). Routledge.
- Dike, A. F. (2025). Artificial intelligence, ethics and erosion of human integrity. *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture*, 6(2), 115–133.

- Dorigné-Thomson, C., & Lin, J. (2025). Catalysing ASEAN–Africa relations and South–South cooperation. *ISEAS Perspective*, 2025(8). ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Eissa, G. S., Abdelsalam, E. A., & Omar, M. F. B. (2019). South–South cooperation: A case study of contemporary Sudanese–Malaysian relations. *Intellectual Discourse*, 27(2), 365–388.
- Ewuoso, C., & Hall, S. (2019). Core aspects of Ubuntu: A systematic review. *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law*, 12(2), 93–103.
- Faiz Abdullah, M. (2025, November 25). Malaysia and Africa’s arc of opportunities. *Free Malaysia Today*.
- Gardiner, P. B. (1989). Racial dilemmas in Malaysia: A message for South African development. *Development Southern Africa*, 6(2), 214–226.
- Hamid, A. F. A. (2018). Shifting trends of Islamism and Islamist practices in Malaysia, 1957–2017. *Southeast Asian Studies*, 7(1), 73–93.
- Hamidin, A. H. (2003a). In pursuit of equality: Malaysia–Africa relations in the 1990s. *JATI: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 8(1), 67–84.
- Hamidin, A. H. (2003b). *Malaysia–Africa relations: Searching for common goals*. Kuala Lumpur: Rhythms Publishing & Co. Sdn Bhd.
- Hamidin, A. H. (2009). Malaysia–Africa relations: Emerging trends. *SARJANA*, 24(2), 1–20.
- Haron, M. (2002). The Cape Malays: An imagined community in South Africa – A bibliographical essay. *Africa Research & Documentation*, 88, 35–58.
- Haron, M., Abdul Hamid, A. F., Azman, M. D., Zainol, S., & Mohd Shafik, H. H. (2022). Remembering Hamidin Abdul Hamid: His contribution to Africa–Malaysia relations and the development of African studies in Malaysia. *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies & International Affairs*, 2(2), 206–226.
- Hong, M., Sun, S., Beg, A., & Zhou, X. (2020). Malaysia’s exports to China: Does diplomatic relationship matter? *Economic Papers*, 39(1), 72–88.
- Jeshurun, C. (2008). *Malaysia: Fifty Years of Diplomacy, 1957–2007*. Talisman Publishing.
- Kadouf, H. A. (2017). Quest for education and the problems facing Sudanese students in the diaspora: The Malaysian scenario. *International Journal of Sudan Research*, 7(2), 137–157.
- Karuppannan, I. & Yacob, S. (2020). Malaysia-Indonesia Konfrontasi: The struggle for influence in the Middle East. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 93(318), 67–90.
- Knight, R. L., Mackintosh, K. A., Hudson, J., Shelley, J., Saynor, Z. L., & McNarry, M. A. “Battling the unknown: Using composite vignettes to

- portray lived experiences of COVID-19 and long-COVID.” *PLoS One*, 18, No. 4, (2023): Article e0284710. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0284710>
- Koya, Z. (2025, November 18). PM on official visits to Ethiopia, South Africa and Kenya. *The Star* [Malaysia].
- Kuada, J. (2020). Culture and economic development in Africa: Opportunities and challenges. *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture*, 1(1), 83–99.
- Lee, H.-A. (2015). Affirmative action in Malaysia and South Africa: Contrasting structures, continuing pursuits. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 50(5), 449–464.
- Madondo, E., & Dhobha, H. (2025). Integrating Ubuntu philosophy into communication practices: Enhancing connection and understanding in the Sub-Saharan context. *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture*, 6(4), 219–236.
- Mahathir, M. (1985). North-South dialogue: Mahathir Mohamad. (Interviewed by Altaf Gauhar, August 1985). *Third World Quarterly*, 8(1), 1–15.
- Malay Mail. (2019, July 19). Malaysia an increasingly favourite destination for African students, says the ambassador. *Malay Mail* [Malaysia].
- Mangiarotti, E. (2023). Malaysia 2023: A reform agenda overshadowed by identity politics. *Asia Maior*, 34, 187–202.
- Mekoa, I. (2020). Ancestors as guardians of morality in African traditional religious thought. *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture*, 1(1), 31–47.
- Metz, T. (2019, September 8). The African ethic of Ubuntu. *1000-Word Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology*.
- Michael, F. L., & Salleh, S. F. (2023). National sustainability planning in Malaysia. In R. Brinkman. (Ed.), *Palgrave handbook of global sustainability* (pp. 1331–1350). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mohamed Elfaki, N. A., Jawan, J. A., Ahmed, Z. B., & Ku Seman, K.-H. (2012). Sudan–Malaysia political and cultural relations. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, 6(13), 250–257.
- Mohd Umar, A. (2014). Education migration among Africans: A case study of Nigerian postgraduate students in International Islamic University Malaysia. *IOSR Journal of Humanities*, 19(5), 99–105.
- Musa, M. F. (2023). *The evolution of Madani: How is 2.0 different from 1.0?* Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.

- Muslim, N. (2012). The implications of the provisions in the Federal Constitution for Islam and the Malays for ethnic relations in Malaysia. *Kemanusiaan*, 19(2), 19–40.
- Mutongoreni, N. A., Gwiza, A., & Jarbandhan, V. D. B. (2025). Interfaith dialogue, AI, and conflict resolution in Africa: Exploring the potential of religious leadership. *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture*, 6(1), 161–185.
- Neo, J. L. (2015). Competing imperatives: Conflicts and convergences in state and Islam in pluralist Malaysia. *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, 4(1), 1–24.
- Nganje, F. (2014). Paradiplomacy and the democratisation of foreign policy in South Africa. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 21(1), 89–107.
- Nisa, E. F. (2023). Transnational halal networks: INHART and the Islamic cultural economy in Malaysia and beyond. *Global Networks*, 23(4), 867–885.
- Noordin, N. H., & Syed Jaafar Alhabshi, S. M. (2023). Stakeholder engagement for value-based banking: The case of Malaysian Islamic banks. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 23(3), e2856.
- Ogude, J. (Ed.). (2019). *Ubuntu and the reconstitution of community*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ong, A. (2000). Graduated sovereignty in South-East Asia. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 17(4), 55–75.
- Owojori, A. J., Azman, M. D. & Balakrishnan, R. K. S. (2020). Vested interests and politicization of terrorism in Nigeria: A critical terrorism studies perspective. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 28(4), 2823–2841.
- Padayachee, V. & Valodia, I. (1998). Malaysian investment in South Africa: Some initial observations. *Third World Quarterly*, 33(38), 2435–2437.
- Peiffer, C., & Englebert, P. (2012). Extraversion, vulnerability to donors and political liberalization in Africa. *African Affairs*, 111(444), 355–378.
- Persaud, R. B. (2018). The racial dynamic in international relations: Some thoughts on the Pan-African antecedents of Bandung. In Q. N. Pham & R. Shilliam (Eds.), *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial orders and decolonial visions* (pp. 133–140). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pratihari, B. K. (2023). Africa–Malaysia relations in the post-Cold War period. *Scientific Research Journal*, 10, 703–710.
- Qobo, M., & Nyathi, N. (2016). Ubuntu, public policy ethics and tensions in South Africa's foreign policy. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 23(4), 421–436.

- Reuters*. (2025, February 6). Malaysia says forced displacement of Palestinians would be ethnic cleansing. *Reuters*.
- SABC News*. (2025, October 27). Universiti Malaya confers an Honorary Doctorate in international relations on Ramaphosa. *SABC News* [South Africa].
- Saravanamuttu, J. (2010). *Malaysia's Foreign Policy, the First Fifty Years: Alignment, Neutralism, Islamism*. ISEAS-Yusof-Ishak.
- Shukri, S. (2025). Islamic soft power: Malaysia well-positioned to consolidate its global leadership on halal branding and governance. *ISEAS Perspective*, 2025(89). ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Shuriye, A. O. (2020). Trade and investment between Malaysia and Africa. *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, 11(2), 29–42.
- Stenecke, T. (2016, May 30). Malaysia–Africa's silent partner. *The Diplomat*.
- Study International*. (2022, August 11). Living and studying in Malaysia: A Nigerian student perspective. *Study International*.
- Suleiman, Y., & Mikail, I. K. (2020). Investigating the plights of Nigerians in diaspora: A case study of Nigerians studying in Malaysian universities. *Indonesian Research Journal in Education*, 4(1), 223–245.
- Taylor, I. (2010). *The international relations of Sub-Saharan Africa*. London: Continuum.
- The Guardian*. (2025, January 31). South Africa and Malaysia to launch campaign to protect international justice. *The Guardian*.
- The Star*. (2009, September 3). Globalisation brings more Africans to Malaysia. *The Star* [Malaysia].
- The Star*. (2019, October 10). Nearly half facing the gallows are foreigners, Nigerians the majority. *The Star* [Malaysia].
- The Star*. (2025, November 23). Malaysia to set up Centre for African Studies to enhance ties, says PM. *The Star* [Malaysia].
- The Straits Times*. (2021, June 27). Six Nigerians among eight people nabbed as Malaysia-based cross-border love scam syndicate is busted. *The Straits Times* [Singapore].
- Tricontinental Institute for Social Research*. (2025, April 8). *The Bandung spirit* (Dossier no. 87). Tricontinental Institute.
- TV BRICS. (2025, August 1). UAE, Malaysia and Rwanda forge AI alliance to empower Global South. *TV BRICS*.
- Umar, A., Noon, N. A. M., & Abdullahi, M. (2014). Challenges confronting African students in Malaysia: A case of postgraduate Nigerian students at International Islamic University Malaysia. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 6(9), 161–168.

- Vervliet, C. (2020). A personalist approach to the dialogue of civilisations: African Ubuntu, social Catholic personalism and Muslim Shakānyya compared. *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture*, 1(1): <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-1fd5b1957e>
- Waikar, P., Mohamed Nawab, M. O., & Ali, R. (2021). Dancing with the *ummah*: Islam in Malaysia's foreign policy under Najib Razak. *The Pacific Review*, 34(2), 230–258.
- Walwema, J. (2025). Ubuntu: An African ethics. In D. G. Ross (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of ethics in technical and professional communication*. Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003434375-22/Ubuntu-josephine-walwema>
- Wan Mohd Nor, S. & Wan Mohd Nor, M. (2024). Unofficial cultural ambassadors: exploring the experiences and perceptions of Malaysian student scholars in America. *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, 20(1). pp. 53–75.

Mapping Outcome-Based Education Principles to Qur’anic Guidance for Islamic Higher Education

Muhammad Irwan Ariffin*

Afiza Mohamad Ali**

Nurul Nuha Abdul Molok***

Khadijah Khalilah Abdul Rashid****

Hamwira Yaacob*****

Abstract: This study evaluates Outcome-Based Education (OBE) through a Qur’anic lens by mapping six principles: clarity of focus, backward design, high expectations for all, expanded opportunity, constructive alignment, and continuous improvement, to relevant Qur’anic concepts and verses, corroborated by classical *tafsīr* sources. Using a thematic *tafsīr* method combined with the OBE literature, the analysis distils principle statements and specifies nonoverlapping implementation artefacts at programme and

*Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Kulliyah of Economics and Management Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: irwan@iium.edu.my. *Corresponding author*.

**Associate Professor, Department of English Language, Kulliyah of Sustainable Tourism and Contemporary Languages, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: drfiza@iium.edu.my

***Assistant Professor, Department of Information Systems, Kulliyah of Information & Communication Technology, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: nurulnuha@iium.edu.my

****Assistant Professor, Department of Language and Literacy, Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: khadijahkhalilah@iium.edu.my

*****Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science, Kulliyah of Information & Communication Technology, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: hyaacob@iium.edu.my

course levels. Findings indicate strong convergence between OBE logics and Qur'anic emphases on purposive ends, clarified criteria, equitable facilitation, curricular coherence, and evidence-guided review. The article proposes a synthesis that affirms theological compatibility and translates it into practical tools, including threshold tables, assessment blueprints, proficiency rubrics with feedback policy, equivalency matrices, programme alignment maps, and assurance-of-learning (AoL) cycles. The contribution is intended to support policy acceptance and implementation quality in Islamic higher education. Future work should pilot these instruments and evaluate impacts on attainment and quality assurance.

Keywords: Outcome-Based Education, constructive alignment, thematic *tafsīr*, Islamic higher education, quality assurance.

Abstrak: Kajian ini menilai Pendidikan Berasaskan Hasil (OBE) melalui lensa al-Qur'an dengan memetakan enam prinsip: kejelasan fokus, reka bentuk ke belakang, harapan tinggi untuk semua, peluang yang diperluas, penjajaran konstruktif, dan peningkatan berterusan; kepada konsep dan ayat al-Qur'an yang relevan, disokong oleh sumber tafsir klasik. Manggabungkan kaedah tafsir bertema dengan literatur OBE, analisis ini merumuskan pernyataan prinsip dan menetapkan artifak pelaksanaan yang tidak bertindih pada peringkat program dan kursus. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan penumpuan yang kuat antara logik OBE dan penekanan al-Qur'an terhadap matlamat yang bertujuan, kriteria yang dijelaskan, kemudahan yang saksama, kesepaduan kurikulum, dan tinjauan berpanduan bukti. Makalah ini mengusulkan satu sintesis yang mengesahkan keserasian teologi dan menterjemahkannya ke dalam alat praktikal termasuk jadual ambang (*threshold tables*), rangka tindakan penilaian (*assessment blueprints*), rubrik kecekapan dengan dasar maklum balas, matriks kesetaraan, peta penjajaran program, dan kitaran jaminan pembelajaran (*AoL*). Sumbangan ini bertujuan untuk menyokong penerimaan dasar dan kualiti pelaksanaan dalam pendidikan tinggi Islam. Kajian masa depan harus memandu uji instrumen ini dan menilai kesannya terhadap pencapaian dan jaminan kualiti.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Berasaskan Hasil; penjajaran konstruktif; tafsir bertema; pendidikan tinggi Islam; jaminan kualiti

Introduction

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is widely adopted in higher education as an approach that organises curriculum, teaching, and assessment around clearly stated learning outcomes that students

must demonstrate by graduation (Spady, 1994; Biggs, 1996). In this approach, outcomes guide curriculum and assessment decisions, while constructive alignment links intended learning outcomes with teaching activities and assessment criteria (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Accreditation frameworks operationalise these ideas through programme educational objectives (PEOs), student or graduate outcomes, and documented evidence of attainment within continuous improvement cycles (Malaysian Qualifications Agency [MQA], 2019).

Building on this foundation, outcome-based approaches have become mainstream across higher education. In engineering education, accreditation frameworks place student outcomes at the core, and multi-region reviews document the global diffusion of OBE practices (Mahrishi et al., 2025). In medical education, the outcomes movement is now institutionalised: competency-based medical education evolved from OBE and is widely implemented across jurisdictions, while outcome-based medical education has reframed curricular design and assessment at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Frank et al., 2010; Gruppen, 2012). In the social sciences, business and management programmes embed outcomes through assurance-of-learning requirements in international accreditation standards (AACSB, 2023). Legal education likewise reports OBE adoption at course and programme levels, with documented learning-outcomes frameworks and faculty engagement (Chan, 2023; Hamilton & Organ, 2024). Taken together, these sources indicate that OBE principles are embedded across disciplines through curriculum design, assessment practice, and continuous quality assurance.

In Malaysia, OBE is embedded across higher education via the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) 2.0 (2024) and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency's (MQA) *Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation* (COPPA). MQF 2.0 (2024) defines levels, generic learning outcomes, and credits as the backbone for programme design, while COPPA requires programmes to state clear intended learning outcomes and to evidence constructive alignment between curriculum, teaching, and assessment, supported by moderation and continuous-improvement processes. These requirements apply to all higher-education providers, including Islamic universities and colleges.

Although OBE is widely implemented, including in Islamic higher education institutions (HEIs), most practice documents and studies do not evaluate OBE principles through a Qur'anic lens. As a result, claims of alignment with Islamic aims remain implicit, and scriptural references are often illustrative rather than systematic, which can limit stakeholder confidence and weaken assurance that OBE authentically supports Islamic educational purposes.

To address this gap and move beyond implicit normative alignment, this study evaluates OBE through a Qur'anic lens by systematically mapping six core OBE principles to relevant Qur'anic concepts, verses, and the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. The novelty of this research lies in its theoretical and practical contribution: positioning the proposed OBE-Islamic Assurance Cycle as a conceptual bridge between thematic *tafsīr* and contemporary quality-assurance scholarship. By translating these theological alignments into a concrete implementation architecture: assigning specific, non-overlapping administrative artefacts such as threshold tables, assessment blueprints, and assurance-of-learning calendars to each mapped principle; the study provides a rigorous, evidence-informed framework. The aim is to equip Islamic HEIs with an evidence-informed rationale that strengthens institutional assurance, policy acceptance, and the capacity to execute OBE with both educational rigour and spiritual integrity.

Literature Review

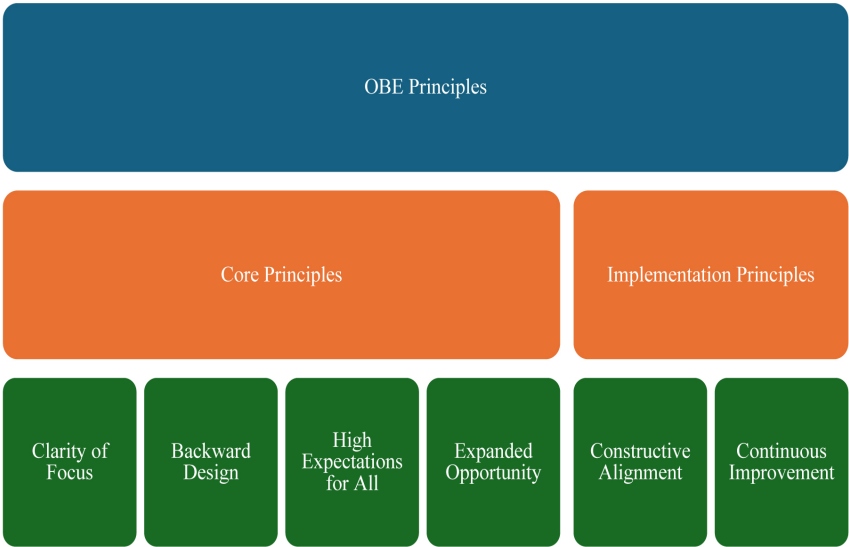
OBE Core Principles

OBE is a design philosophy that begins by specifying what learners should demonstrably know and do and then organises curriculum and assessment so that every graduate attains those ends (Spady, 1994; Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011). In Spady's (1994) account, four core principles shape this philosophy. Clarity of focus requires a small set of significant outcomes that render educational intent explicit and assessable. Backward design or design down directs planners to begin with culminating outcomes and then derive course outcomes, learning activities, and assessments from the declared ends. High expectations for all assert that rigorous performance standards apply to every learner, with success judged against explicit criteria. Expanded opportunity maintains the standard while allowing varied pathways and sufficient time for learners to demonstrate attainment.

OBE Implementation Principles

Subsequent scholarship complements these foundations with implementation principles that operationalise coherence among outcomes, teaching, and assessment. Constructive alignment links intended learning outcomes to teaching-learning activities and to assessment tasks and criteria, ensuring that the evidence gathered is valid for the stated outcomes and that judgments flow transparently from published standards (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Recent work characterises constructive alignment as an effective tool for aligning curricula, pedagogy, and assessments to make curriculum intent explicit, while noting that “fracture points” can persist between module- and programme-level outcomes and proposing a comprehensive mapping framework to address them (Frost & Ackrill, 2025). Related analyses frame alignment as the selection of teaching models and assessment methods in direct response to intended outcomes, thereby integrating curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment into a single outcomes-driven process (Noushad, 2024).

Figure 1
Core and Implementation Principles of OBE



Source. Adopted from Spady (1994), Biggs (1996), Biggs and Tang (2011), with modifications.

Continuous improvement extends alignment into a cyclical, evidence-informed process in which attainment data and exemplars are used to review design decisions, calibrate standards, and enact changes that progressively enhance the match between intended outcomes and realised learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Taken together, these six principles offer a theoretically integrated account of outcomes, means, criteria, and quality enhancement that has shaped contemporary discourse on curriculum and assessment design. In practice, OBE operates as a system that links explicit outcomes, assessment, and continuous quality improvement (Sun & Lee, 2020), and recent syntheses echo this integrated view by connecting graduate profiles and PLO-CLO formulation to constructive alignment, authentic and formative assessment, and accountability for quality enhancement (Ali & Jamin, 2025; Hristov, Nakov, & Miočinović, 2023). Figure 1 illustrates the four core and two implementation principles that structure the analysis.

Methodology

Thematic tafsir approach

This study employs a conceptual and hermeneutic design anchored in *tafsīr mawḍūʿī* (thematic tafsir) to evaluate OBE principles through a Qurʾanic lens. Thematic tafsir is an interpretive approach that examines the Qurʾan by gathering and analysing verses related to a specific theme or topic (*mawḍūʿ*) as the focal point to derive the Qurʾan's perspective on that subject (El-Mesawi, 2005). In this study, the focal topic is OBE, operationalised as six thematic pillars to derive a holistic Qurʾanic perspective on these educational constructs.

First, a theme definition is drafted for each OBE pillar by distilling its core constructs from the OBE literature and stating them in one sentence. Next, operative keys are prepared through a targeted lexicon-to-text workflow: key constructs are converted into Arabic lexical fields and roots and traced across the Qurʾan using *al-Muʿjam al-Mufahras li-Alfāz al-Qurʾān* (ʿAbd Al-Bāqī, 1996) for concordance-based retrieval, while *Al-Mufradāt fī Ghārīb al-Qurʾān* (Al-Rāghib Al-Iṣfahānī, 2006) is consulted to establish semantic range, nuances, and contrasts for each key term. These candidates are then cross-checked against usage in classical *tafsīr* to confirm semantic fit and contextual relevance. Finally,

a synthesis step integrates the collected evidence into a concise pillar statement that captures the Qur'anic thrust without over-specification.

A thematic *tafsīr* design is adopted because OBE requires principle-level synthesis across the Qur'anic corpus rather than verse-by-verse commentary. Compared with sequential (*taḥlīlī*) or comparative (*muqāran*) *tafsīr*, a thematic procedure better supports the derivation of portable educational principles by aggregating recurring lexical fields and patterns linked to purposiveness, clarification, facilitation, coherence, and evidence-guided review. To preserve exegetical integrity, the study constrains retrieval through concordance and lexicon analysis, verifies context and scope in classical *tafsīr* sources, and applies inclusion boundaries that privilege principle-level guidance while excluding narrow legal contingencies.

Interpretive Limits of Thematic Tafsir

It is important to acknowledge the interpretive limits of the thematic *tafsīr* approach employed in this study. The mapping of Qur'anic verses to OBE principles is strictly intended as a heuristic for educational design, rather than a basis for juridical derivation. While this method effectively supports the derivation of portable educational principles by aggregating recurring lexical patterns, it does not attempt to extract formal legal rulings (*aḥkām*). To preserve exegetical integrity and respect these interpretive boundaries, the verse selection process deliberately excludes texts whose interpretations depend on narrow legal contingencies, case-specific dispensations, or contested historical debates. Instead, by corroborating meanings with classical exegetical sources, the methodology ensures that the derived concepts remain conceptually robust as general, principle-level guidance for curriculum and assessment design.

Verse Selection

Verses are retained when they satisfy four conditions: conceptual relevance to the pillar's underlying idea; corroboration by at least one classical *tafsīr*; semantic clarity adequate for a stable principle statement; and transferability to a general educational principle rather than a case-specific rule.

To avoid methodological ambiguity, the study distinguishes corroboration from triangulation in describing how verse meanings

are verified. The choice of using the term corroboration rather than triangulation reflects the conceptual nature of this inquiry. While triangulation typically applies to empirical validation across data types, corroboration here denotes the interpretive verification of Qur'anic meanings through cross-reference to authoritative exegetical sources such as Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Ibn Kathīr (1999), and Al-Qurṭubī (2006). This phrasing better conveys the hermeneutic integrity of the thematic *tafsīr* process.

Mapping to OBE constructs

In parallel, canonical OBE sources (Spady, 1994; Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011; MQA, 2019) are used to operationalise each pillar as an educational construct. The thematic-*tafsīr* outputs are then aligned to these constructs to produce, for each pillar: (i) Qur'anic anchors with brief *tafsīr* cues, (ii) a one-sentence principle emerging from the mapping, and (iii) design implications indicating how the principle could guide programme learning outcomes (PLOs), course learning outcomes (CLOs), assessment criteria and tasks, and assurance-of-learning (AoL) routines. Figure 2 illustrates the thematic *tafsīr* analytical process used in this paper.

Figure 2

Thematic Tafsīr Analytical Process for OBE Mapping



Source. Authors' own summary of the methodology.

Result and Discussion

This section presents a Qur'an-anchored mapping of six OBE pillars and examines implications for Islamic higher-education practice. To streamline the presentation of the thematic *tafsīr* process and foreground the study's interpretive insights, Table 1 synthesises the lexicon workflows, core constructs, operative keys, and thematic boundaries

for all six principles. By establishing these methodological parameters upfront, the subsequent subsections proceed directly to outline the pillar's intent in the OBE literature, identify primary Qur'anic anchors with brief *tafsīr* cues, and formulate a concise emergent principle. Practical design implications are then indicated for programme learning outcomes (PLOs), course learning outcomes (CLOs), assessment criteria, and assurance-of-learning (AoL) routines. Considered collectively, the six mappings show where Islamic foundations affirm core OBE logics and where careful implementation is required to avoid reductionism.

Table 1

Lexicon Workflow and Thematic Boundaries for OBE Principles

OBE Principle	Theme Definition	Core Constructs	Operative Keys and Roots	Selection Boundary
Clarity of Focus	Educational aims are explicitly stated, meaningful, and oriented to virtuous ends, with learning judged by the quality of deeds and sincerity of intention	Purpose, intention, telos, meaningful ends, visibility of deeds	الغاية، المقاصد، النية، العمل الصالح، الإحسان، الجزاء، الحساب؛ غ-ي-ا (غاية)، ق-ص-د (قصد/ مقاصد)، ن-و-ي (نية)، ع-م-ل (عمل)، ح-س-ب (حساب)، ج-ز-ي (جزاء)	Prefer verses that frame ultimate purpose and evaluation of deeds rather than narrow legal rulings
Backward Design	Outcomes guide design choices, with proportion, measure, and guidance indicating ordered planning from ends to means	Measure, proportion, decree, guidance, wise ordering	القدر، التقدير، الميزان، الهدى، الحكمة، التبيان؛ ق-د-ر (قدر)، ز-ن- ن/و-ز-ن (ميزان)، ه-د-ي (هدى)، ح-ك-م (حكمة)، ب-ي-ن (بيان/تبيان)	Emphasise verses that signal principled ordering and clarity, not deterministic debates about <i>qadar</i>

OBE Principle	Theme Definition	Core Constructs	Operative Keys and Roots	Selection Boundary
High Expectations for All	Standards are demanding yet fair, coupling the call to strive and excel with recognition of human capacity	Striving, excellence, elevation in ranks, ability and burden	الجهاد/الجهاد، الإحسان/الإتقان، الدرجات، الاستطاعة، لا يكلف الله نفساً إلا وسعها؛ ج-ه-د (جهاد/جهاد)، ح-س-ن (إحسان)، د-ر-ج (درجات)، ط-و-ع (استطاعة)، ك-ل-ف (تكليف)	Select texts linking effort to guidance or rank and pair rigour with capacity
Expanded Opportunity	Learners are given accessible paths and reasonable accommodations to evidence the same outcomes without diluting standards	Ease, removal of hardship, facilitation, alternative paths	اليسر، رفع الحرج، التيسير، التخفيف؛ ي-س-ر (يسر)، ح-ر-ج (حرج)، خ-ف-ف (تخفيف)، س-ه-ل (سهل/تسهيل)	Focus on general principles of ease and facilitation, not case-specific dispensations
Constructive Alignment	Means are coherently aligned to ends, with guidance and clarification providing shared criteria that bind components together	Guidance to the straight path, clarification, unity and coherence, holding fast together	الهُدَى، الصراط المستقيم، البيان/ التبيان، الاعتصام، عدم التفرق؛ ه-د-ي (هدى)، س-ط-ر/س-ر-ط (صراط)، ب-ي-ن (بيان/تبيان)، ع-ص-م (اعتصام)، ف-ر-ق (تفرق)	Prefer verses that speak to coherence and shared standards rather than purely devotional adherence
Continuous Improvement	Communities regularly examine evidence of deeds, consult, and enact changes that move practice toward better alignment with stated aims	Self-audit, accountability, change through action, consultation leading to decisive implementation	المحاسبة/الحساب، الكتاب/سجل الأعمال، التغيير، الشورى، العمل؛ ح-س-ب (حساب/محاسبة)، ك-ت-ب (كتاب/كتب)، غ-ي-ر (تغيير)، ش-و-ر (شورى)، ع-م-ل (عمل)	Target verses that link review to action and improvement, not only eschatological judgment scenes

Clarity of Focus

Clarity of focus in OBE calls for programmes to name a small set of significant learning outcomes and to organise curriculum, teaching, and assessment so that every graduate can demonstrate them to an agreed standard (Spady, 1994; Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

A Qur'anic rationale for this emphasis emerges from verses that frame human action in purposive and assessable terms. The telos-setting statement “I did not create jinn and humankind except to worship” situates all activity within a clear end, and classical exegetes treat this as an orientation of intention and purpose across domains, which parallels the requirement to declare purposive programme learning outcomes (Q 51:56; Ibn Kathīr, 1999; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Another anchor is the description of “who is best in deed,” read in *tafsīr* as privileging the quality and sincerity of deeds rather than their sheer quantity; this supports the use of criterion-referenced rubrics that weight quality of evidence and integrity rather than task completion alone (Q 67:2; Al-Qurtubī, 2006; Al-Rāghib Al-Iṣfahānī, 2006; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Further, the sequence “that a person has only what he strives for” and “his striving will be shown” underscores demonstrability and record, which aligns with OBE's insistence on observable performances, transparent documentation, and verifiable evidence such as portfolios and capstones (Q 53:39-41; Ibn Kathīr, 1999; Biggs, 1996). Finally, rejection of purposeless creation and anticipation of accountability provides warrant for auditable ends and scheduled reviews of attainment against declared outcomes in programme quality systems (Q 23:115; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; MQA, 2019). This Qur'anic framing also resonates with the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, which emphasise purposeful action, intellectual clarity, and moral accountability as foundations of learning and human development (Auda, 2008; Rahman, 2009). Taken together, these anchors legitimise purposive outcomes, explicit quality criteria, the requirement for tangible student work, and accountable record-keeping that makes attainment visible and reviewable.

From this mapping, a practical principle follows: educational ends should be stated clearly, oriented to meaningful goods, and evidenced by demonstrable student performance that reflects quality and integrity.

Implementation begins by specifying the “what.” Ali and Jamin (2025) identify, as a first step, the formulation of *graduate profiles* and

learning outcomes, emphasising explicit and measurable outcomes at programme and course levels. Programmes should publish a concise set of PLOs together with a threshold rubric that states the minimum acceptable level of performance for each outcome, including value-infused competencies. The threshold table serves as the authoritative reference for judgments of attainment and communicates expectations to staff, students, and external reviewers (Spady, 1994; Biggs, 1996). These thresholds are recorded in programme quality documents and used consistently. The way in which learning activities and assessments align to these outcomes is treated in the principle of constructive alignment, while the review of evidence against thresholds is conducted within the continuous improvement cycle (Biggs & Tang, 2011; MQA 2019).

At course level, CLOs should be expressed in assessable language and mapped to the relevant PLOs in the course file, including the specific assessment tasks that will evidence achievement (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011). In assessment, criterion-referenced rubrics should emphasise the quality and integrity of student work and require authentic artefacts that permit direct judgment against outcomes.

Backward Design

Backward design is an outcomes-first logic where culminating learning outcomes guide the derivation of programme and course outcomes, learning activities, and assessment decisions to ensure coherence across all levels (Spady, 1994; Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

A Qur'anic rationale appears in verses that depict an intentional sequence from measure to guidance and from purpose to means. "He created, then proportioned; He determined, then guided" is read by classical exegetes as ordered arrangement followed by direction, which mirrors backward design's framing of means after ends are specified (Q 87:2–3; Ibn Kathīr, 1999; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Likewise, "everything We created with measure" is explained as purposive apportioning and precise proportion, a cue for measured criteria, explicit weightings, and planned structure in assessment blueprints (Q 54:49; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Descriptions of the Qur'an as *tibyān* and *hudā* supply notions of clarification and guidance, which align with constructive-alignment practices that publish standards and make the pathway to achievement transparent (Q 16:89; Al-Rāghib Al-Iṣfahānī, 2006; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Calls to reflect on the patterned order of

creation encourage purposive reasoning from declared outcomes toward coherent teaching and assessment (Q 3:190–191; Ibn Kathīr, 1999; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006). These anchors commend starting from explicit ends, specifying measures, and providing clarified guidance so that the route to attainment is intentionally ordered.

The resulting principle is that educational design should begin with clearly stated culminating outcomes and then proportion means to ends through measured criteria and clarified guidance, ensuring that teaching, tasks, and standards coherently serve the outcomes.

Planning now turns to the “how.” Implementation proceeds by declaring a concise set of culminating courses that attain PLOs with milestone indicators; deriving CLOs directly from their parent outcomes; and documenting the chain from outcome to learning activity to rubric criterion in syllabi and course files (Spady, 1994; Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Each course should prepare an assessment blueprint that shows, in prose or tabular form, how the CLOs are supported by specified assessment tasks, the criteria by which those tasks will be judged, and the relative weight assigned to each criterion (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Sun & Lee, 2020). Lesson-level method and assessment selection should be driven by intended outcomes, a point emphasised in Islamic-education design guidance that explicitly adopts constructive alignment (Kamalludeen, 2022). By declaring evidence types, timings, and grading rules in advance, the blueprint reduces drift between intended outcomes and assessed performances and enables transparent communication to learners (Spady, 1994; Frost & Ackrill, 2025). Publication and coherence checks are addressed within the constructive alignment principle; analysis of attainment against the declared measures is reserved for the continuous improvement cycle (MQA, 2019).

High Expectations for All

High expectations for all couple demanding performance standards with equitable support so that every learner can attain mastery of an agreed criterion (Spady, 1994; Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

A Qur'anic rationale rests on verses that pair effort with guidance and excellence with merited elevation. One anchor is the assurance that “those who strive in Our cause, We will surely guide them to Our

paths,” which exegetes interpret as facilitation that follows sustained effort; this maps naturally onto mastery learning cycles where formative practice and feedback lead toward the standard (Q 29:69; Ibn Kathīr, 1999; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Biggs & Tang, 2011). “Allah raises in ranks those granted knowledge” is treated as advancement tied to learning and refinement, which supports transparent proficiency bands and criteria for progression rather than norm-referenced comparison (Q 58:11; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006; Ibn Kathīr, 1999). The pair “be mindful as much as you are able” and “Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity” is read to affirm rigour moderated by recognition of human capacity; in OBE terms, the criterion remains constant while supports, time, and modes of demonstration may adapt to legitimate constraints (Q 64:16; Q 2:286; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006). Taken as a set, these anchors commend explicit, high standards linked to knowledge, structured opportunities for effortful improvement, and equitable accommodation that respects capacity without diluting the benchmark.

The emergent principle is to maintain demanding, clearly described standards for every learner while providing fair supports and flexible routes that enable attainment of the same criterion.

In practice, programmes should publish proficiency thresholds for each PLO, describe the “ranks” or performance bands with exemplars, and monitor equity of attainment across student groups (Spady, 1994; MQA, 2019). Course teams can calibrate rubrics, build formative checkpoints that require evidence of improvement across attempts, and allow alternative demonstrations of the same CLO under a common rubric to respect capacity while holding the line on quality (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Within constructive alignment, formative and summative methods are coordinated to guide students toward stated criteria, providing a basis for feedback practices that support movement across proficiency bands without lowering standards (Hristov, Nakov, & Miočinović, 2023). Findings in Islamic Religious Education associate structured formative assessment with improved movement toward criteria, reinforcing feedback-and-revision policies (Yusoff, 2025). Assessment moderation helps keep judgments consistent, and AoL reports should disaggregate results, record targeted supports where gaps appear, and review whether those supports move learners toward the declared benchmark in subsequent cycles (MQA, 2019).

Expanded Opportunity

Expanded opportunity provides learners with multiple pathways, timeframes, and methods to demonstrate intended outcomes without diluting established performance standards (Spady, 1994; Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

A Qur'anic case emerges from texts that frame divine intention as ease and those legitimate proportionate accommodations. “Allah intends for you ease and does not intend hardship for you” is read as a general principle of facilitation in duty, which parallels allowing different but equivalent assessment formats under one rubric so that the criterion remains intact while access improves (Q 2:185; Al-Qurtubī, 2006; Ibn Kathīr, 1999). “Allah wishes to lighten for you” is taken to mean removal or reduction of undue burden, a cue for revision windows, equitable extensions, and scaffolds that help learners reach the same standard rather than a lesser one (Q 4:28; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Commentators also highlight “He has not placed upon you in the religion any hardship,” which supports structured flexibility in how obligations are fulfilled; in OBE terms, course teams can vary tasks or timing while preserving the learning outcome and its performance descriptors (Q 22:78; Al-Qurtubī, 2006; Al-Rāghib Al-İṣfahānī, 2006). Read together, these anchors commend principled facilitation: ease where possible, lightening of undue constraint, and removal of unnecessary obstacle, all without compromising the stated end.

The emergent principle is to preserve high, explicit standards while designing accessible and equitable routes for demonstrating the same outcome.

In practice, programmes should specify at the PLO level where equivalent demonstrations are acceptable and publish rules for equivalency so that stakeholders know how different modes are judged against the same criterion (Spady, 1994; MQA, 2019). Course teams can provide a limited menu of task types mapped to one CLO and assess with a single criterion-referenced rubric, schedule staged milestones to distribute cognitive load, and allow justified extensions or reattempts that focus on improved evidence of learning rather than mere completion (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Because different teaching models can validly support the same outcome when alignment is explicit, equivalent task options may be offered without compromising the common criterion

(Noushad, 2024). Assessment moderation should verify that alternative formats yield comparable judgments, and AoL cycles should track whether flexibility closes attainment gaps without eroding the threshold standard, with actions recorded where inequities persist (Biggs, 1996; MQA, 2019). Alignment principles also require that any alternative task remains appropriate in workload and demonstrably linked to the same outcomes and criteria, ensuring equivalency in evidencing the CLO (Hristov, Nakov, & Miočinović, 2023).

Constructive Alignment

Constructive alignment ensures the coherent linking of intended learning outcomes to teaching activities, assessment tasks, and criteria, so that judgments of performance flow directly from the declared ends (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

A Qur’anic case draws on verses that foreground upright guidance, clarified criteria, and communal unity. “This Qur’an guides to what is most upright” is taken as direction toward the soundest path, a cue for aligning means with clear ends rather than allowing drift between intention and method (Q 17:9; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Passages describing the Qur’an as *tibyān* and *hudā* stress clarification and guidance, resonating with the provision of published standards and rubrics before assessment takes place (Q 16:89; Al-Rāghib Al-Iṣfahānī, 2006; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006). The call to “hold fast together to the rope of Allah and do not be divided” highlights unity around a shared reference point, mapping onto programmes coordinating PLOs, CLOs, tasks, and criteria so the learner’s path avoids fragmentation (Q 3:103; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006; Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Collectively, these anchors commend a design stance in which guidance to the most upright path is operationalised through clarified standards and communal coherence.

The emergent principle is to align teaching activities and assessment instruments explicitly with stated outcomes under shared, published criteria so that the path to achievement is coherent for learners and transparent for evaluators.

In practice, coherence is made transparent through a programme alignment map and published rubrics. The map describes how programme educational objectives (PEOs) are served by PLOs, how those outcomes are distributed across courses as CLOs, and which signature assessment

tasks provide principal evidence for each outcome (Ali & Jamin, 2025; Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Publishing this map alongside the rubrics enables students and evaluators to see how learning activities rehearse the very performances that assessments judge (MQA, 2019; Frost & Ackrill, 2025). The map itself is not a review tool; it is inspected within the continuous improvement cycle.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is the systematic use of evidence on outcome attainment to review programmes, enact targeted changes, and monitor their effects in recurring enhancement cycles (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011; MQA, 2019).

A sustained scriptural basis appears in verses that join self-audit, accountability, consultation, and purposeful change. “Let every soul look to what it has sent ahead for tomorrow” is read as a demand for reflective stock-taking in view of consequences, which parallels scheduled reviews against programme thresholds and curated evidence archives (Q 59:18; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006; MQA, 2019). The directive “work, and Allah will see your work” highlights the visibility and accountability of deeds; in OBE terms, this warrants transparent assessment records, moderated samples, and documented decisions grounded in evidence rather than impressions (Q 9:105; Ibn Kathīr, 1999; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Change is principled rather than cosmetic, since “Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” is taken to affirm efficacious action that follows reflection; this supports recording concrete pedagogic or assessment adjustments when attainment falls short (Q 13:11; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006). The call to “consult them in the matter, then when you have resolved, rely on Allah” links *shūrā* with decisive implementation and aligns with programme committees that deliberate on evidence, decide actions, assign owners, and schedule follow-up (Q 3:159; Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Read together, these anchors commend a loop of review, consultation, action, and reliance that closely matches assurance-of-learning practice.

The resulting principle is that evidence of learning should be gathered, reviewed, and acted upon through consultative cycles that document specific improvements and verify their effects on outcome attainment.

Improvement implementation is structured through a calendar of evidence-informed meetings and documented actions. Each cycle aggregates attainment against the PLO thresholds, checks compliance with assessment blueprints, examines rubric-band distributions, and inspects alignment evidence (Sun & Lee, 2020; MQA, 2019). Minutes and action logs must record decisions, named owners, timelines, and specific changes to pedagogy or assessment, followed by verification in the next cycle of whether the actions improved student attainment (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Biggs, 1996).

Integrative Overview of the Six OBE Principles

Table 2 below synthesises the six OBE principles alongside their primary Qur’anic anchors, key *tafsīr* cues, the emergent principle distilled from the mapping, and a single non-overlapping implementation artefact assigned to programme or course level.

Table 2
Synthesis of Pillars, Scriptural Anchors, and Implementation

No	Pillar	OBE Intent	Primary Qur’anic Anchors	Tafsīr Cues	Emergent Principle	Implementation Artefact (Owner)
1.	Clarity of Focus	Name a small set of significant outcomes; judge learning by demonstrable performance.	Q 51:56; Q 67:2; Q 53:39–41; Q 23:115	<i>niyyah, ghāyah, maqāṣid, iḥsān, ḥisāb, kitāb</i>	State purposive outcomes and require high-quality, visible evidence	PLO Threshold Table (Programme)
2.	Backward Design	Start from culminating outcomes; proportion means to ends with measured criteria.	Q 87:2–3; Q 54:49; Q 16:89; Q 3:190–191	<i>qadar, taqdīr, mīzān, tibyān, hudā</i>	Plan teaching and assessment backward from ends with clarified measures	Assessment Blueprint (Course)

No	Pillar	OBE Intent	Primary Qur'anic Anchors	<i>Tafsīr</i> Cues	Emergent Principle	Implementation Artefact (Owner)
3.	High Expectations for All	Hold fixed standards; provide equitable support so all can reach mastery.	Q 29:69; Q 58:11; Q 64:16; Q 2:286	<i>juhd, jihād, darajāt, istita'ah, taklīf-wus'</i>	Keep standards high and explicit; scaffold effort and feedback fairly	Proficiency Rubrics + Feedback Policy (Course)
4.	Expanded Opportunity	Offer equivalent routes and timing to evidence the same outcomes.	Q 2:185; Q 4:28; Q 22:78	<i>yusr, takhfīf, raf' al- ḥaraj</i>	Preserve the benchmark while widening accessible demonstrations	Equivalency Matrix (Course/ Programme)
5.	Constructive Alignment	Align outcomes, teaching, and assessment under shared criteria.	Q 17:9; Q 16:89; Q 3:103	<i>hudā, širāṭ mustaqīm, tibyān, bayān, i'tiṣām</i>	Make the path to attainment coherent and criteria transparent	Programme Alignment Map + Public Rubrics (Programme)
6.	Continuous Improvement	Use evidence cyclically to review, act, and verify impact.	Q 59:18; Q 9:105; Q 13:11; Q 3:159	<i>muḥāsabah, ḥisāb, kitab, shahādah, taghyīr, shūrā</i>	Gather, review, and act on evidence in documented cycles	AoL Calendar + Dashboard + Action Log (Programme)

The information provided in Table 2 functions as a navigational aid: it makes the logic from scriptural warrant to educational design transparent, and it clarifies “ownership” of each operational instrument to minimise redundancy across pillars. Verse references are kept concise to preserve readability. Collectively, the summary provides reviewers and practitioners a quick audit trail from outcomes theory to actionable quality-assurance practice.

The six OBE principles discussed in this study can be seen as practical expressions of the higher objectives of Islamic law, or

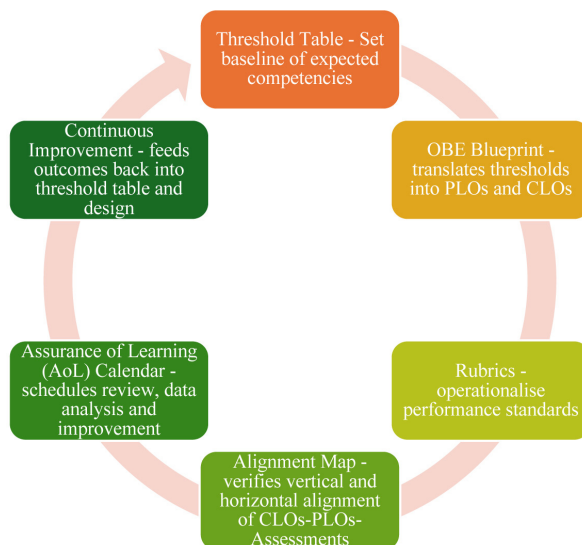
maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. These objectives aim to protect and develop the essential aspects of human life and learning, namely the intellect ('*aql*), the self (*nafs*), and faith (*dīn*). The principles of clarity of focus and backward design help safeguard the intellect by encouraging purposeful thinking, reasoned planning, and learning that is clearly directed towards meaningful ends. High expectations for all and expanded opportunity support the well-being of the self by recognising individual capacity and promoting fairness and perseverance in the learning process. Meanwhile, constructive alignment and continuous improvement uphold faith by linking effort to accountability, sincerity, and the pursuit of excellence (*ihsān*). Together, these principles illustrate that OBE is not merely an administrative model for measuring outcomes but a framework that can embody Qur'anic and *maqāṣid*-based values in action. This integrated perspective parallels Auda's (2008) systems-based interpretation of the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, which views purposeful design and continuous improvement as dynamic, interrelated processes within a moral system, and Rahman's (2009) articulation of purposive coherence in Qur'anic thought. In this sense, the Qur'an-anchored OBE model proposed here provides both a moral compass and a practical roadmap for nurturing quality and integrity in Islamic higher education.

To translate this integration into institutional practice, the proposed six artefacts, namely Threshold Table, OBE Blueprint, Rubrics, Equivalency Matrix, Alignment Map, and Assurance of Learning (AoL) Calendar, can be represented as a continuous quality-assurance system termed the OBE-Islamic Assurance Cycle. This cycle illustrates how each artefact functions as part of a coherent feedback loop: the Threshold Table establishes expected competencies; the OBE Blueprint translates these into programme and course outcomes; Rubrics make the standards measurable; the Equivalency Matrix maintains coherence across assessments; the Alignment Map ensures vertical and horizontal integration; and the AoL Calendar governs systematic review and enhancement. Together, these artefacts embody Qur'anic values of clarity (*bayān*), justice ('*adl*), and accountability (*muḥāsabah*), reinforcing that excellence in education must be both ethically anchored and evidentially verifiable.

Figure 3 conceptualises this process as an interlinked cycle of design, implementation, review, and improvement, illustrating how Qur'anic guidance can inform the full spectrum of educational governance, from purpose formulation to continuous enhancement.

Figure 3

Integrative OBE-Islamic Assurance Cycle Model



Source. Authors' own illustration.

Conclusion

Having demonstrated how each OBE pillar is grounded in Qur'anic concepts and applied in educational contexts, this conclusion brings together the key alignments and explains their relevance for teaching practice and future research.

This study evaluated core and implementation principles of OBE through a Qur'anic lens and produced a coherent mapping between six pillars of OBE and Qur'anic anchors supported by classical exegesis. The analysis shows strong conceptual convergence: clarity of focus is warranted by purposive and accountable ends; backward design aligns with scriptural patterns of proportion and guidance; high expectations for all is affirmed through the pairing of striving with guidance and elevation in rank; expanded opportunity is grounded in principles of ease

and the lightening of undue burden; constructive alignment is mirrored in guidance, clarification, and communal coherence; and continuous improvement resonates with self-audit, accountability, consultation, and decisive action. Read as a set, these linkages provide a theologically grounded rationale for the central logics of OBE and justify the use of explicit outcomes, transparent criteria, observable evidence, and cyclical review in Islamic higher education.

Beyond conceptual affirmation, the study contributes a practical implementation architecture based on the six OBE pillars. Each pillar owns a distinct operational instrument: outcome thresholds, assessment blueprints, proficiency bands with feedback policy, an equivalency matrix, a programme alignment map with public rubrics, and an AoL cycle with governance artefacts. Assigning clear ownership to these instruments helps faculties translate Qur'anic guidance into auditable practices while maintaining coherence across curriculum design, assessment, and quality assurance.

For institutions, the mapping and the accompanying instruments provide an evidence-informed basis to integrate spiritual aims with demonstrable learning. Policy makers can reference the pillar-specific artefacts in programme standards and accreditation handbooks. Programme leaders can use the alignment map and threshold tables to communicate expectations, the equivalency matrix to widen access without lowering standards, and the assurance cycle to document improvement actions and their impact. Collectively, these steps can increase stakeholder confidence that OBE practice is congruent with Islamic aims and can strengthen acceptance and consistency in implementation.

Future research could also empirically validate the integrative model visualised in Figure 3 previously through pilot implementation in Islamic higher-education institutions such as IIUM. An action-research approach may be employed to examine how the artefacts function in authentic curriculum-review settings, providing data on effectiveness, stakeholder engagement, and the sustainability of Qur'an-based assurance systems. Such validation would bridge the gap between theological insight and institutional performance, demonstrating that *maqāṣid*-driven OBE can serve as both an epistemic framework and a measurable pathway toward educational *falāḥ* (holistic success).

The study is limited to thematic *tafsīr* mapping and principle statements. Subsequent work should pilot the instruments in live courses, examine rubric reliability and attainment trajectories, and test whether the proposed assurance cycles lead to measurable gains in learning quality. Comparative studies across disciplines and institutional types would also be valuable to explore boundary conditions and to refine the instruments for different programme contexts.

A Qur'an-anchored reading of OBE does not merely tolerate outcomes-based practice; it offers principled reasons to adopt it and practical guidance for doing so with integrity. By tying outcomes, evidence, and improvement to scriptural anchors, Islamic higher education can pursue excellence in ways that are both educationally robust and spiritually coherent.

References

- ‘Abd al-Bāqī, M. F. (1996). *Al-Mu‘jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth.
- Auda, J. (2008). *Maqasid al-Shariah as philosophy of Islamic law: A systems approach*. Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Al-Qurṭubī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. (2006). *Al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān*. Damascus: Mu‘assasah al-Risālah
- Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī. (2006). *Al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur‘ān*. Damascus: Dār al-Qalam.
- Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. (2001). *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur‘ān*. Beirut: Dār Hajr.
- Ali, R. & Jamin, H. (2025). Curriculum development strategy based on Outcome-Based Education (OBE) to improve the quality of education in higher education. *Journal of Education and Religious Studies*, 5(2), 104–110. <https://doi.org/10.57060/jers.s9w3x850>
- Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). (2023). *2020 Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation (July 2023 rev.)*. Tampa, Florida: AACSB International.
- Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education*, 32(3), 347-364.
- Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University (4th ed.)*. Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

- Chan, J. Y. (2023). Law teachers' adoption and acceptance of OBE: A case study of Hong Kong. *The Law Teacher*, 57(4), 530–547. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069400.2023.2258023>
- El-Mesawi, M. E.-T. (2005). The methodology of al-Tafsīr al-Mawḏūʿī: A comparative analysis. *Intellectual Discourse*, 13(1), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v13i1.118>
- Frank, J. R., Snell, L., Cate, O. T., Holmboe, E. S., Carraccio, C., Swing, S. R., Harris, P., Glasgow, N. J., Campbell, C., Dath, D., Harden, R. M., Iobst, W., Long, D. M., Mungroo, R., Richardson, D. L., Sherbino, J., Silver, I., Taber, S., Talbot, M. & Harris, K. A. (2010). Competency-based medical education: Theory to practice. *Medical Teacher*, 32(8), 638–645. <https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2010.501190>
- Frost, D. & Ackrill, R. (2025). The multiple dimensions of curriculum mapping: Designing a comprehensive outcomes-based framework. *London Review of Education*, 23(1), 17. <https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.17>
- Gruppen, L. D. (2012). Outcome-Based medical education: Implications, opportunities, and challenges. *Korean Journal of Medical Education*, 24(4), 281-285. <https://doi.org/10.3946/kjme.2012.24.4.281>
- Hamilton, N. W. & Organ, J. (2024). Learning outcomes that law schools have adopted: Seizing the opportunity to help students, legal employers, clients, and law schools. *Journal of Legal Education*, 73(1), 85-111.
- Ibn Kathīr, ʿIsmāʿīl ibn ʿUmar. (1999). *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*. Beirut: Dār Ṭaybah.
- Kamalludeen, R. B. M. (2022). Technology infusion in the design of an impactful Islamic education learning experience. In M. Hussain (Ed.), *Transformative Islamic Education* (pp. 117–134). London, Routledge.
- Hristov, S., Nakov, D. & Miočinović, J. (2023). Constructive alignment between objectives, teaching and learning activities, student competencies and assessment methods in higher education. *Journal of Agriculture and Plant Sciences*, 21(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.46763/JAPS23212021h>
- Mahrishi, M., Ramakrishna, S., Hosseini, S. & Abbas, A. (2025). A systematic literature review of the global trends of outcome-based education (OBE) in higher education with an SDG perspective related to engineering education. *Discover Sustainability*, 6, 620. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-025-01496-z>
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). (2019). *Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA) (2nd ed.)*. Cyberjaya, Selangor.
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). (2024). *Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) (2nd ed.)*. Cyberjaya, Selangor.

- Noushad, P. P. (2024). Aligning learning outcomes with learning process. In *Designing and Implementing the Outcome-Based Education Framework* (pp. 139–202). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-0440-1_5
- Rahman, F. (2009). *Major themes of the Qur'an* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Spady, W. G. (1994). *Outcome-Based Education: Critical issues and answers*. Arlington, Virginia: American Association of School Administrators.
- Sun, P. H. & Lee, S. Y. (2020). The importance and challenges of outcome-based education: A case study in a private higher education institution. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 17(2), 253–278. <https://doi.org/10.32890/mjli2020.17.2.9>
- Yusoff, S. M. (2025). Investigating the influence of pedagogical content knowledge on formative assessment practices in Islamic religious education. *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, 21(2), 89–113. <https://doi.org/10.21315/ijaps2025.21.2.5>

Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities in Mainstream Classrooms: The Challenge of Teacher Preparedness

Ratnawati Mohd Asraf*
Harvindar Kaur**

Abstract: The global movement from special education to inclusive education has transformed mainstream classrooms. Students with physical and learning disabilities are now increasingly educated alongside other students who do not have these conditions. Although inclusive education is aimed at protecting the right to education of all students, this conceptual and analytical article focuses specifically on students with *learning disabilities*, because they present certain teaching challenges for classroom teachers. Outlining both the arguments supporting inclusion as well as the doubts regarding its feasibility, this article underscores the crucial importance of teacher preparedness in supporting these learners, whose ability to engage in learning depends largely on teachers' knowledge, skills, and confidence in meeting their learning needs. It concludes with implications for Malaysia and other contexts, including Muslim-majority countries where inclusive education initiatives are increasingly being implemented.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Inclusive Classrooms; Inclusion; Teachers' Readiness; Teachers' Preparedness; Learning Disabilities.

Abstrak: Gerakan global daripada pendidikan khas kepada pendidikan inklusif telah mengubah bilik darjah arus perdana. Pelajar yang mengalami masalah fizikal dan pembelajaran kini semakin dididik bersama pelajar lain yang

*Professor, Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: ratnawati@iium.edu.my; drratnaiiu@hotmail.com. *Corresponding author.*

**Assistant Professor, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology. Email: harvindarkaur@tarc.edu.my

tidak mempunyai keadaan ini. Walaupun pendidikan inklusif bertujuan untuk melindungi hak pendidikan pelajar yang mempunyai pelbagai kebolehan dan ketidakupayaan, artikel konseptual dan analitikal ini memberi tumpuan khusus kepada pelajar bermasalah pembelajaran, kerana ia memberikan cabaran pengajaran khusus untuk guru bilik darjah. Menggariskan hujah-hujah yang menyokong pendidikan inklusif serta keraguan mengenai kebolehlaksanaannya, artikel ini menekankan pentingnya kesediaan guru dalam menyokong pelajar-pelajar ini, di mana keupayaan mereka untuk melibatkan diri dalam pembelajaran sebahagian besarnya bergantung pada pengetahuan, kemahiran, dan keyakinan guru dalam memenuhi keperluan pembelajaran mereka. Untuk menyediakan konteks, artikel ini juga menggabungkan perbincangan tentang bagaimana ketidakupayaan pembelajaran mempengaruhi pembelajaran pelajar. Artikel ini diakhiri dengan implikasi untuk Malaysia dan negara-negara lain, termasuk negara majoriti Muslim di mana inisiatif pendidikan inklusif semakin dilaksanakan.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Inklusif; Bilik Darjah Inklusif; Kesediaan Guru; Masalah Pembelajaran.

Introduction

The movement from special education to inclusive education has transformed mainstream classrooms, bringing together learners with differing abilities and learning needs. Established on the principles of equity and the right to education, inclusion seeks to ensure that *all* learners are provided with the opportunity to obtain a good and sound education (UNESCO, 1994, 2005, 2009). In Malaysia, the development of inclusive education has been shaped by a series of policy and legislative frameworks aimed at widening access to education. The Education Act 1996 (Government of Malaysia, 1996), for instance, formally incorporated special education within the national education system, allowing for the placement of students with special educational needs (SEN) in both specialised and mainstream settings. This was further strengthened by the Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013 (Government of Malaysia, 2013), which clarified guidelines for the identification, placement, and support of SEN students, while more recently, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013) and initiatives such as the Zero Reject Policy ((Ministry of Education, 2019) were introduced to reinforce national commitment to inclusion.

Inclusive education involves, among others, the teaching of students with physical and learning disabilities in mainstream classes, where the latter account for a significant proportion of them. Supporting these learners requires more than placing them in inclusive settings; it requires that teachers adapt lessons to accommodate their learning needs as well as those of their peers, and an understanding of how learning disabilities affect their engagement with learning. This significantly transforms the expectations placed upon mainstream teachers, who are increasingly required to attend to diverse learning needs within the same classroom setting. Consequently, the role of the teacher has expanded beyond the conventional delivery of content to the use of differentiated instruction, where accommodations need to be made to meet the needs of learners of various abilities.

Inclusive education has been widely advocated for its potential academic, social, and ethical benefits. However, its expansion has not always been accompanied by comparable developments in teacher preparation, professional training, and classroom support systems (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Consequently, teachers are increasingly expected to accommodate a wide range of learning needs, often without sufficient preparation to do so effectively. This is more so when it comes to their preparedness to teach students with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms, and whether they possess the specialised knowledge and pedagogical skills required to support these learners effectively as this requires not only an understanding of the nature of these difficulties but also the ability to differentiate instruction to meet their learning needs (Forlin, 2010; Loreman et al., 2013).

Indeed, concern about teacher preparedness has been raised in many countries, including Malaysia and Muslim-majority countries, where the momentum towards inclusive education has accelerated in recent decades, reflecting global educational trends. Malaysia, for instance, through its national education frameworks and inclusive education initiatives, has demonstrated increasing alignment with inclusive education practices. However, there still exists a gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities, especially as it pertains to teachers' preparedness to support students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom (Ali et al., 2006; 2020). This concern is further echoed by Amar-Singh (2018), who has emphasised the need

for stronger professional support and training for mainstream teachers to effectively meet the diverse learning needs of children with special educational needs.

Given these circumstances, it is insufficient to discuss inclusive education only in terms of its philosophical justification or policy implementation. A more crucial concern is to address the issue of whether teachers are adequately prepared to support children with diverse learning needs in mainstream classrooms. While inclusive education supports the learning needs of all students, this article focuses specifically on the inclusion of children with *learning disabilities*, because their needs often present certain teaching challenges for classroom teachers, as their disabilities are not always visible and require specialised pedagogical strategies to support learning.

Adopting a conceptual and analytical approach, this article presents the arguments advanced by the proponents of inclusive education as well as the doubts about the feasibility of its implementation. Most importantly, it seeks to critically examine the issue of teacher preparedness in teaching these students in inclusive, mainstream classrooms as it is central to the successful implementation of inclusive education. By situating the discussion within the global context while touching on the Malaysian experience, this article argues that the success of inclusive education ultimately depends not only on policy implementation but also on the extent to which teachers are prepared to support diverse learners in mainstream classrooms. Further, it suggests that the issues examined here are also relevant to many Muslim-majority countries, where inclusive education is increasingly being implemented.

The next section examines the nature of learning disabilities and how they may affect students' participation and learning experiences in mainstream classrooms, thereby underscoring the importance of teacher preparedness.

Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms: Challenges for Learning and Teaching

The Learning Disabilities Association of America (n.d.) defines learning disabilities as those neurodevelopmental conditions that affect how individuals process information, impacting how they acquire, retain,

understand, and use information, causing them to have difficulties with specific skills such as reading (for those with dyslexia), writing (dysgraphia), or mathematics (dyscalculia). These difficulties often become apparent during the early years of schooling, when children are expected to acquire foundational skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics. They also vary in severity and often require focused instructional support, such as using differentiated instruction to adapt lessons to their strengths and challenges, and scaffold learning by guiding them through manageable steps until mastery is achieved (Lyon et al., 2003; Bender, 2012).

It is important to underscore the fact that children and individuals with learning disabilities¹ have between average and high intelligence and *can learn* and succeed if the appropriate support is provided. The learning challenges they face are brought about by their neurological condition, which affects how they process linguistic and cognitive information. This causes them to struggle with tasks that constitute the foundation of formal schooling, such as reading and writing, and remembering sequences of information or understanding numerical concepts. Without the appropriate emotional and instructional support, these challenges may lead to frustration, reduced academic self-concept, and negative learning experiences. Hence, it is crucial for teachers to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to support their learning needs, especially in inclusive classrooms, where they learn alongside their peers who may not have these challenges.

It is also important to point out that learning disabilities are not visually apparent in individuals with the condition. As such, these students, who take more time to learn how to read, write, and do arithmetic compared to their peers, may sometimes be misunderstood by their teachers as being “slow,” when in reality, they are experiencing specific difficulties in processing and responding to instructional demands. Such misinterpretations can influence teachers’ expectations and instructional decisions, and as a result, they may not be given the needed emotional

¹ The term, “learning disabilities” *does not* denote that an individual with the condition is “learning disabled.” The term is used for legal purposes to ensure that these individuals are recognised under national disability legislation, enacted in various forms across countries, and are thus afforded corresponding rights and protections.

support or the appropriate instruction that would help them to succeed. In this context, the success in meeting their educational needs depends significantly on teachers' ability to recognise their learning difficulties and respond with the appropriate instructional strategies (Lyon et al., 2003; Bender, 2012), especially given the context of the inclusive classroom, where students of various abilities and disabilities learn alongside each other.

Conditions such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and autism have sometimes been included in discussions on learning disabilities. This is because both are frequently associated with learning-related challenges that affect students' engagement with classroom instruction. Students with ADHD may experience difficulties with attention regulation, organisation, and task completion, while those on the autism spectrum may encounter challenges in communication, social interaction, and flexible thinking.

In contexts such as Malaysia, these distinctions are often less rigid. Students with ADHD and autism are frequently included within broader categories such as "students with special educational needs" (SEN) in view of the fact that they require similar forms of instructional adaptation and teacher support in inclusive classrooms (Ali et al., 2006).

To fully appreciate the challenges surrounding teacher preparedness in inclusive classrooms, it is necessary to critically examine both the arguments supporting inclusion and the concerns regarding its implementation, as these perspectives highlight the expectations placed on teachers as well as the constraints that shape their ability to carry out inclusive practices.

Support for Inclusive Education

Inclusive education views access to quality education as a fundamental right for all learners, and has emphasised the importance of ensuring that all children have opportunities to quality education (UNESCO, 1994, 2005, 2009).

Consistent with these principles, a growing body of research has examined the outcomes of inclusive education for students with disabilities. Studies conducted in various educational contexts have investigated whether inclusive classroom environments contribute to improved academic achievement, greater social participation, and

enhanced opportunities for learners with disabilities. Mitchell and Brown (as cited in Mngo, 2017) and Downing et. al. (1997), for instance, assert that inclusive education sets the platform for children's language competency development. As elaborated by Downing et al. (1997), this is because inclusive classrooms provide children with opportunities to engage with authentic language in natural learning environments. According to the teachers they interviewed, such exposure increases children's attentiveness and eagerness to learn. Similarly, Mitchell and Brown (as cited in Mngo, 2017) argue that social interaction with peers plays an important role in facilitating children's language development, particularly during the early stages of development. Its positive impact was also illustrated in a study by Bruwer et.al. (2014), where the teachers expressed their satisfaction with the improvement in their children's language competence; attributing this to the fact that the inclusive classes had had an enormous impact on the children's language development, which led to their rapid progress.

Research has also examined the educational outcomes associated with inclusive education. A systematic review conducted by Kalambouka et al. (2007), which examined a large body of studies on the academic outcomes of students with special educational needs, found that most of the research they reviewed reported positive, or at least neutral, effects of inclusive classrooms on academic achievement. Similarly, a comprehensive review and synthesis of 280 studies across 25 countries conducted by Hehir et al. (2016) shows that educating students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers benefits both groups academically and socially. However, the report also highlights that the successful implementation of inclusive practices is highly dependent on teachers' knowledge, skills, and professional training.

Researchers have also found that children with disabilities become more attentive and disciplined in the inclusive school setting. As reported by the teachers in Downing et al.'s (1997) study, when their students were placed in an inclusive classroom, they developed the passion to learn and became more focused. On the contrary, they portrayed unruly behaviour when they were put in special education classes. This is because, in mainstream classrooms, they emulated the behaviour of their non-disabled peers, who were more disciplined; hence helping them to become calmer and more active listeners. In other words, they regarded these peers as their role-models (Raj, 2002). The inclusive classroom,

then, becomes more manageable; and this, according to Farlow (as cited in Fried, 2007), results in their remarkable academic growth, which cannot otherwise be achieved in a segregated classroom setting. In other words, inclusive education ensures these students' active participation in classroom activities and the teaching and learning process in general (Renfroe, 2006).

Another benefit of inclusion, as reported in the literature, is that the non-disabled children in the mainstream classroom learn to respect and accept their differently abled peers. The teachers in the study conducted by Mngo (2017) believed that inclusion strengthened the children's understanding of their disabled peers by teaching the former to accept the latter. Cambridge-Johnson et.al (2014) also found that when children with learning disabilities were placed in the inclusive setting, it helped to develop high reverence and understanding among the classmates, while Leatherman (1999) reported that inclusion taught the children tolerance and acceptance. These researchers posit that inclusive education is likely to result in increased acceptance and tolerance of students with learning disabilities by their peers, and this, in turn, is likely to result in the curbing of the endemic discrimination faced by these children.

Doubts About the Feasibility of Implementing Inclusive Education

As discussed in the previous section, there is a substantial body of research that has highlighted the benefits of inclusive education. However, despite its merits, doubts have also been raised as to whether its implementation is feasible and whether it benefits all children.

Fried (2007) and Ketrish et al. (2016), for instance, caution against viewing inclusive education as a universal solution for learners with special educational needs. The researchers argue that inclusive settings cannot be treated as a "one-size-fits-all" model, stating that some learners—particularly those with conditions such as autism—may experience difficulties communicating their needs and interacting effectively with teachers and peers in mainstream classrooms. Because these learners often require more specialised forms of instruction, teachers need to recognise these differences and respond with the appropriate instructional strategies that can support their learning.

Questions have also been raised on teachers' knowledge of inclusion. Barned et. al. (2011), for example, discovered that their

teacher-participants did not have sufficient knowledge about children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to accommodate them in their classrooms. The same was also found by Sucuoğlu et. al (2013), who reported that 86.8% of the teachers they studied admitted that they had *no knowledge whatsoever* of children with learning disabilities while Amr (2011) and Page et al. (2018) reported that the teachers faced challenges in meeting the educational needs of their students in inclusive settings, as they lacked specialised training or support. These difficulties are also compounded by their perceptions of the additional instructional demands required of them to support learners with learning disabilities (Anderson et. al., 2017; Bari et. al., 2014; Muwana & Ostrosky, 2014; Obiakor et al., 2012; Round et al., 2015).

Hence, despite the support for inclusive education, there are still many unanswered questions that need to be addressed before it can be considered to have been successfully implemented. Many of the issues raised in this debate point to a central question: “Are teachers adequately prepared to support students with diverse learning needs in inclusive educational settings”? The following section, therefore, examines the issue of teacher preparedness and its significance in meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities and other learning difficulties.

Teacher Preparedness for Inclusive Education

The adoption of inclusive education in a majority of school systems across the world has significantly increased the responsibilities placed on teachers, particularly in mainstream schools where learners with diverse needs, including those with learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dyscalculia, are taught together in the same classroom. To help their students to learn, teachers are now expected to adapt their teaching to accommodate the different learning needs of their students, which requires that they have the requisite knowledge, skills, and professional training to be able to do so effectively. However, research conducted in different parts of the world indicates that many teachers do not feel adequately prepared—nor confident—to carry out inclusive education effectively (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Forlin & Chambers, 2011), while other studies suggest that teachers’ confidence is strongly shaped by their prior training in special and inclusive education.

Forlin and Chambers (2011), for example, found that teacher education programmes play a key role in enhancing teachers’ readiness

for inclusion. They found that teachers who had received the requisite training demonstrated higher levels of self-efficacy and were more willing to adopt inclusive practices compared to those who had not. Similar findings were found by Savolainen et. al. (2012), who reported that the teachers' perceived competence greatly affected their readiness to teach in inclusive classrooms. These findings highlight that teacher preparedness depends not only on knowledge, but also on the development of confidence through professional preparation.

Another aspect that affects teachers' preparedness for inclusive education is their understanding—or lack thereof—of learning disabilities. When teachers have limited awareness of conditions such as dyslexia or dyscalculia, they may misinterpret their students' learning difficulties as a lack of effort or "low ability" (Norwich, 2008; Slee, 2011). Consequently, they may form negative perceptions of these learners or fail to provide the required support to help them to succeed (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011).

In this regard, a substantial body of international research consistently indicates that teacher knowledge, awareness, and readiness to support students with dyslexia remain a persistent concern in many countries (Mather et. al., 2020). This is also illustrated in Folia and Malisiova's (2025) systematic review of research across multiple countries on EFL teachers' perceptions and preparedness to teach students with dyslexia, which found—according to their self-reports—that they had limited conceptual understanding of, and lack of formal training in dyslexia. They also reported having low confidence in tailoring instruction to students' individual needs, leading to insufficient classroom support. Similarly, Mather et.al. (2020), in their global overview of dyslexia-related services and educational opportunities, highlight that a common challenge across countries is the scarcity of teachers with specialised knowledge of dyslexia-specific instruction.

Large-scale meta-analytic evidence further demonstrates that teacher preparedness is a central factor influencing the implementation and success of inclusive education. Dignath et al. (2022), in a meta-analysis of 102 studies across 40 countries, found that teachers' beliefs about inclusive education are strongly shaped by factors such as professional training, self-efficacy, and prior experience in inclusive settings. It is important to point out that although teachers frequently express

positive attitudes toward inclusion, this does not always translate into effective classroom practices if they do not have sufficient knowledge of pedagogy. Systematic reviews of research further substantiate the fact that teachers' acceptance of students with special educational needs is closely linked to their perceived competence, training, and provision of professional support (DeBoer et.al., 2011). These findings suggest that teacher attitudes, knowledge, self-efficacy, and preparedness are closely connected, and that effective inclusive practices depend not only on positive beliefs about inclusion but also on teachers' practical knowledge and skills. Teacher preparation is therefore crucial in building their competence and confidence to teach inclusively.

The literature on inclusive education in Malaysia highlights the same concerns. Although educational policies support inclusive education, several studies suggest that teachers in mainstream classrooms often do not feel sufficiently prepared to address the diverse learning needs of students with learning disabilities. According to Jelas (2000), teachers frequently report limited knowledge and skills to support students with special educational needs. The same was found by Ali et. al. (2006), whose teacher-participants reported limited knowledge of learning disabilities and insufficient professional training to help learners. More recent studies have similarly found that teachers may possess general awareness of inclusive education but lack confidence in implementing appropriate instructional strategies for learners with disabilities; particularly those with learning disabilities (Bailey et al., 2015). As a result, teachers often rely on personal experience or informal strategies when supporting these learners.

Questions have also been raised on the disparity between policy and practice. Amar-Singh (2020), a respected practitioner and advocate for students with special needs, emphasises that mainstream teachers frequently lack specialised pedagogical knowledge and systematic professional preparation to support students with learning disabilities, and that their efforts are further constrained by insufficient institutional and professional support within schools. He emphasises that without sustained professional development and support, teachers are unlikely to implement inclusive practices in a meaningful and sustainable manner. Amar-Singh (2018) also argues that mainstream teachers require stronger professional support and training to effectively support children with special educational needs in inclusive settings. This is also

the view of Jelas (2010), who argues that the successful implementation of inclusive education in Malaysia requires that teacher education programmes be reoriented to address the issue of learner diversity and the need for inclusive pedagogical practices.

Broader critical analyses corroborate the research findings and views of the aforementioned scholars. In a critical review of special needs education in Malaysia, Alshoura (2023) identifies persistent structural issues such as inadequate teacher preparation, limited resources, and insufficient support services for students with SEN. Notwithstanding the advancements made in inclusive education in Malaysia as they pertain to students with special needs, these limitations constrain teachers' capacity to translate inclusive ideals into effective classroom practices.

As outlined in the preceding review, both global and Malaysian research point to the lack of teacher readiness for inclusive classrooms. Therefore, continuous efforts should be made to prepare teachers for inclusion as this is a primary prerequisite for its success. Recognising its importance allows for a more balanced and realistic understanding of inclusive education, where policy development, teacher training, and classroom practice are aligned. Such an approach ensures that inclusion moves beyond policy and becomes a reality for learners with diverse educational needs.

Preparing teachers for inclusion

To prepare teachers for inclusive education, we believe that schools, local education councils, and ministries of education should first attempt to change teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, where they have been reported to be dissatisfied when assigned the task of teaching in an inclusive setting (Kandhari & Chowdry, 2016; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016; Shah et. al. 2016; Sucuoğlu et al., 2013; Whitaker, 2011; Wiggins, 2012). However, initiating a change in their attitudes may not be possible unless the required support is provided for them. A similar view is shared by Main et. al. (2016), who observed in their study that the in-service teachers in Seychelles were more favourable towards accommodating children with learning disabilities upon completing a unit on inclusive education from Australia.

In addition to addressing teachers' attitudes, we should also increase the amount of administrative support that schools render to teachers.

Research has shown that teachers tend to support inclusion when support is provided (Ahmmed et. al., 2014; Anati, 2013). For instance, providing the necessary teaching aids, disabled-friendly facilities, teacher assistants, in-service training, and scrupulous guidelines on inclusion would boost teachers' confidence to teach in inclusive classes. Additionally, Murphy (2017), in her study, discovered that the school principals boosted their teachers' professional development through both formal and informal means by providing them with essential and proper training as well as staff development, thus, enhancing their ability to serve in the inclusive education setting effectively. The importance of in-service training is also highlighted by Cambridge-Johnson et al. (2014), where about 63% of the teachers in their study agreed that they became motivated to teach only after they had received adequate training. Meanwhile, continuous training endorsement by the Ministry of Education of the United Arab Emirates acted as a catalyst for teacher support for inclusive education as the teachers were more inclined to teach in inclusive classrooms after attending the training sessions (Anati, 2013). The same was found by Thomas (2017), where the participants recommended some form of training for teachers teaching children with learning disabilities in inclusive settings.

Finally, the synergy between academic staff is yet another form of support for teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms, as interacting and cooperating with other parties facilitate teacher readiness. Having close collaboration with early childhood teachers, special education teachers, and other resource teachers, for example, helped certain teachers prepare themselves for inclusion (Miller, 2015). Similarly, the synergy between colleagues and peer observation participants would also help to prepare teachers for inclusion as they boost their self-confidence through knowledge acquisition (Iaquinta, 2014).

Conclusion

Teacher readiness is central to the effective implementation of inclusive education. Without it, children with learning disabilities may not be able to receive fair and equitable educational opportunities. Hence, it is crucial that we give continuous attention to the professional development of teachers. This includes equipping them with the ability to recognise students with learning disabilities, adapt teaching strategies to meet their learning needs as well as that of their peers, and create learning environments that are conducive for all learners.

The discussion has shown that although inclusive education is widely supported for its academic, social, and ethical benefits, concerns have been raised regarding its implementation. These have to do with the challenges teachers face in addressing diverse learning needs within mainstream classrooms. These challenges do not undermine the value of inclusion; but rather, underscore the conditions required for it to be effective. The evidence reviewed in this article also suggests that while inclusive education is a commendable aim, its success ultimately depends on the extent to which teachers are adequately prepared for inclusive classrooms, particularly in supporting those with learning disabilities, whose ability to be engaged in learning depends, in large part, on teachers' ability to recognise their learning needs and respond with the appropriate instructional strategies. Hence, strengthening teacher readiness—through ongoing professional development and institutional support—is essential to ensure that inclusive education moves beyond policy aspirations to meaningful classroom practice.

In the context of Malaysia, national policies such as the Education Act 1996 (Government of Malaysia, 1996); the Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013 (Government of Malaysia, 2013); the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013); and initiatives such as the Zero Reject Policy (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019) have expanded access to inclusive education. This makes the role of teachers even more critical. While these frameworks demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusion at the policy level, they also place increasing demands on teachers to support a diverse range of learners within mainstream classrooms.

The issues discussed in this article also carry implications for Muslim-majority countries. As we continue to pursue the goals of providing educational equity and access, investing in teacher preparedness will remain a key factor in ensuring that the aims of inclusive education are translated into meaningful learning opportunities for *all* students.

Acknowledgement

The writers would like to express their appreciation to the Ministry of Education Malaysia for the grant, TRGS16-04-001-0001, that made the work on this project and the publication of this article possible.

References

- Ahmmed, M., Sharma, U., & Deppeler, J. (2014). Variables affecting teachers' intentions to include students with disabilities in regular primary schools in Bangladesh. *Disability & Society*, 28(3), 317-331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.796878>
- Ali, M. M., Mustapha, R., & Jelas, Z. M. (2006). An empirical study on teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education in Malaysia. *International Journal of Special Education*, 21(3), 36-44.
- Alshoura, H. (2023). Critical Review of Special Needs Education Provision in Malaysia: Discussing Significant Issues and Challenges Faced. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 70(5), 869-884. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2021.1913718>
- Amr, M. (2011). Teacher education for inclusive education in the Arab world: The case of Jordan. *Prospects*, 41(3), 399-413. DOI:10.1007/s11125-011-9203-9
- Amar-Singh, H. S. S. (2020). *Education in Malaysia for children with special needs: Progress, critical gaps, efforts under way and policy*. National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC). Intervention Council (NECIC).
- Amar-Singh, H. S. S., & Wong, W. Y. (2018, August 29). Five major gaps in services for children with disabilities. *Malay Mail*. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2018/08/29/five-major-gaps-in-services-for-children-with-disabilities/1667185>
- Anati, N. (2013). The pros and cons of inclusive education from the perceptions of teachers in the United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 2(1), 55-66.
- Anderson, D. L., Watt, S. E., & Shanley, D. C. (2017). Ambivalent attitudes about teaching children with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 22(3), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2017.1298242>
- Bailey, L., Nomanbhoy, A., & Tubpun, T. (2015). Inclusive education: Teacher perspectives from Malaysia. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(5), 547-559. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.957739>
- Bari, S., Yasin, M. H. M., & Hamzah, M. N. (2014). The readiness of special education trainees to teach in inclusive programs. *International Education Studies*, 7(13), 206-211.
- Barned, N. E., Knapp, N. F., & Pritchett, S. N. (2011). Knowledge and attitudes of early childhood preservice teachers regarding the inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 32(4), 302-321.

- Bender, W. N. (2012). *Differentiating instruction for students with learning disabilities: Best teaching practices for general and special educators* (2nd ed.). Corwin.
- Bruwer, M., Hartell, C., & Steyn, M. (2014). Inclusive education and insufficient school readiness in Grade 1: Policy versus practice. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 4(2), 18–35.
- Cambridge-Johnson, J., Hunter-Johnson, Y., & Newton, N. G. L. (2014). Breaking the silence of mainstream teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in the Bahamas: High school teachers' perceptions. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(84), 1–19. DOI:10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1099
- de Boer, A., Pijl, S. J., & Minnaert, A. (2011). Regular primary schoolteachers' attitudes towards inclusive education: a review of the literature. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(3), 331–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110903030089>
- Dignath, C., Rimm-Kaufman, S., van Ewijk, R., & Kunter, M. (2022). *Teachers' beliefs about inclusive education and insights on what contributes to those beliefs: A meta-analytical study*. *Educational Psychology Review*, 34, 2609–2660. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-022-09695-0>
- Downing, J. E., Eichinger, J., & Williams, L. J. (1997). Inclusive education for students with severe disabilities: Comparative views of principals and educators at different levels of implementation. *Remedial and Special Education*, 18(3), 133–165.
- Florian, L., & Rouse, M. (2009). The inclusive practice project in Scotland: Teacher education for inclusive education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 594–601. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.02.003>
- Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(5), 813–828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.501096>
- Folia, V., & Malisiova, A. (2025). Teachers' perceptions and preparedness for teaching English as a foreign language to students with developmental dyslexia: A systematic review. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 15(4), Article 64. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe15040064>
- Forlin, C., Loreman, T., Sharma, U., & Earle, C. (2009). Demographic differences in changing pre-service teachers' attitudes, sentiments and concerns about inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13(2), 195–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110701365356>
- Forlin, C. (2010). *Teacher education for inclusion: Changing paradigms and innovative approaches*. Routledge.

- Forlin, C., & Chambers, D. (2011). Teacher preparation for inclusive education: Increasing knowledge but raising concerns. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1), 17–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2010.540850>
- Fried, J. E. (2007). *Teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward special education and full inclusion* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (UMI No. 3290025)
- Government of Malaysia. (1996). *Education Act 1996 (Act 550)*. Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad.
- Government of Malaysia. (2013). *Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013*. Attorney General's Chambers of Malaysia.
- Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R., Borquaye, Y., & Burke, S. (2016). *A summary of the evidence on inclusive education*. Abt Associates. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596134.pdf>
- Iaquinta, T. (2014). *General education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy to teach in the inclusive classroom* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (UMI No. 3633491)
- Jelas, Z. M. (2010). Learner diversity and inclusive education: A new paradigm for teacher education in Malaysia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 7, 201–204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.10.028>
- Jelas, Z. M., Salleh, A., & Azman, N. (Eds.). (2010). *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Vol. 7). Elsevier. (International Conference on Learner Diversity 2010, Malaysia).
- Kalambouka, A., Farrell, P., Dyson, A., & Kaplan, I. (2007). The impact of placing pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools on the achievement of their peers. *Educational Research*, 49(4), 365–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880701717222>
- Kandhari, N., & Chowdhry, R. (2016). A pre-post study: Attitude of teachers towards inclusive education. *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing*, 7(1), 161–163.
- Ketrish, E. V., Dorozhkin, E. M., Permyakov, A. A., Tretyakova, N. V., Andryukhina, T. V., & Mantulenko, V. V. (2016). Building projecting competence among future teachers in the conditions of introduction of inclusive education. *International Journal of Environmental & Science Education*, 11(15), 8237–8251. Evgeniya V.
- Leatherman, J. M. (1999). *A comparison of inservice and preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (UMI No. 9942624)
- Learning Disabilities Association of America. (n.d.). *What are learning disabilities?* Retrieved March 15, 2026, from <https://ldaamerica.org/advocacy/lda-position-papers/what-are-learning-disabilities/>

- Lyon, G. R., Fletcher, J. M., Shaywitz, S. E., Shaywitz, B. A., Torgesen, J. K., Wood, F. B., Schulte, A., & Olson, R. (2003). Rethinking learning disabilities. In H. L. Swanson, K. R. Harris, & S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of learning disabilities* (pp. 259–287). Guilford Press.
- Main, S., Chambers, D. J., & Peters, S. (2016). Supporting the transition to inclusive education: Teachers' attitudes to inclusion in the Seychelles. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20(12), 1270–1285.
- Maizatul Azmah Ab. Latiff, Wan Azlinda Wan Mohamed, & Mohd Azrani Asran. (2015, July). Inclusive education program in Malaysia: Evolution in policy and challenges. Paper presented at the *First International Conference on Special Education*, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Mather, N., White, J., & Youman, M. (2020). Dyslexia around the world: A snapshot. *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 25(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.18666/LDMJ-2020-V25-I1-9552>
- Miller, M. S. (2015). *Beginning elementary education teachers' perceptions concerning teaching in inclusive classrooms: Beliefs and attitudes toward preparation* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (ProQuest No. 3722537)
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2013). *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Preschool to post-secondary education)*. Ministry of Education Malaysia.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2019). *Dasar sifar penolakan (Zero Reject Policy)*. Ministry of Education Malaysia.
- Mngo, A. Y. (2017). *An investigation of the attitudes held by general education teachers toward students with disabilities in a pilot inclusive education program in Cameroon* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (ProQuest No. 10273480)
- Murphy, C. R. (2017). *Educational leaders and inclusive education: Perceptions, roles, and responsibilities* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (ProQuest No. 10744610)
- Muwana, F., & Ostrosky, M. (2014). Zambian pre-service teachers' voices about successful inclusive education. *The Journal of the International Association of Special Education*, 15(2), 31–40.
- Norwich, B. (2008). *Dilemmas of difference, inclusion and disability*. Routledge.
- Obiakor, F. E., Harris, M., Mutua, K., Rotatori, A., & Algozzine, B. (2012). Making inclusion work in general education classrooms. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 35(3), 477–490.

- Page, A., Boyle, C., McKay, K., & Mavropoulou, S. (2018). Teacher perceptions of inclusive education in the Cook Islands. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(3), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2018.1437119>
- Raj, M. J. (2002). *The factors that influence teachers' perceptions of inclusion* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (UMI No. 3045081)
- Renfroe, K. D. T. (2006). *Factors that influence classroom teachers' perceptions of inclusion: A study of two rural Missouri public schools* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (UMI No. 3237442)
- Saloviita, T., & Schaffus, T. (2016). Teacher attitudes towards inclusive education in Finland and Brandenburg, Germany and the issue of extra work. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 31(4), 458–471.
- Savolainen, H., Engelbrecht, P., Nel, M., & Malinen, O. P. (2012). Understanding teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy in inclusive education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 27(1), 51–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/008856257.2011.613603>
- Slee, R. (2011). *The irregular school: Exclusion, schooling and inclusive education*. Routledge.
- Shah, R., Das, A., Desai, I., & Tiwari, A. (2016). Teachers' concerns about inclusive education in Ahmedabad, India. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 16(1), 34–45
- Sucuoğlu, B., Bakkaloğlu, H., Karasu, F. İ., Demir, Ş., & Akalın, S. (2013). Inclusive preschool teachers: Their attitudes and knowledge about inclusion. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*, 5(2), 107–128.
- Teng, K. Y., Yeo, K. J., & Jaffri, H. (2014, November). Implementation of inclusive education programme in Malaysia. Paper presented at the 1st International Education Postgraduate Seminar, Johor Bahru, Malaysia.
- Thomas, P. (2017). *A qualitative study of general education teachers' positive attitudes regarding inclusion* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (ProQuest No. 10689104)
- UNESCO. (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>
- UNESCO. (2005). *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2009). *Policy guidelines on inclusion in education*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf000017784>

- Whitaker, K. L. (2011). *General education teachers' perceptions regarding inclusion in Northeast Georgia middle schools* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (UMI No. 3481203)
- Wiggins, C. C. (2012). *High school teachers' perceptions of inclusion* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global). (UMI No. 3544866)

Language Learning Beliefs in Motion: The Role of Experience and Engagement

Alper Fener*
Ervin Kovačević**

Abstract: This study explores how learners' experiences shape language learning beliefs situated between tradition and progress, prescription and flexibility. The study specifically investigates whether the extent and recency of foreign language learning experience can account for the endorsement of traditional and progressive beliefs. A total of 294 participants completed the Questionnaire of Assumptions about Second Language Learning (QASLL). Results showed a significant difference on the progressive beliefs scale between learners who were not very active and those who were highly active; the latter supported more autonomous and flexible approaches. A further difference was found on the traditional scale between learners with 1–3 years and 9–12 years of experience, suggesting that extensive experience moderates rather than eliminates traditional beliefs. A three-dimensional model emerges with these findings, placing learners along axes of belief orientation, learning activity, and accumulated experience.

Keywords: Language Learning Beliefs, Experientialist Perspective, Traditional and Progressive Beliefs

Abstrak: Kajian ini meneroka bagaimana pengalaman pelajar membentuk kepercayaan pembelajaran bahasa yang terletak di antara tradisi dan kemajuan, serta preskripsi dan fleksibiliti. Secara khusus, kajian ini menyiasat sama

*Ph. D Candidate, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, International University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Email: 160103023@student.ius.edu.ba, alperfener@hotmail.com.

**Professor, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, International University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Email: ekovacevic@ius.edu.ba.
Corresponding author.

ada tahap dan tempoh masa pengalaman pembelajaran bahasa asing dapat menjelaskan sokongan terhadap kepercayaan tradisional dan progresif. Seramai 294 peserta telah melengkapkan *Questionnaire of Assumptions about Second Language Learning* (QASLL). Dapatan menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan pada skala kepercayaan progresif antara pelajar yang kurang aktif dan mereka yang sangat aktif; kumpulan yang lebih aktif menunjukkan kecenderungan yang lebih tinggi terhadap pendekatan yang autonomi dan fleksibel. Perbezaan lanjut turut dikenalpasti pada skala tradisional antara pelajar dengan pengalaman 1–3 tahun dan 9–12 tahun, yang mencadangkan bahawa pengalaman yang lebih luas berfungsi untuk memoderasi, bukannya menghapuskan, kepercayaan tradisional. Berdasarkan dapatan ini, satu model tiga dimensi dirumuskan, yang meletakkan pelajar sepanjang paksi orientasi kepercayaan, aktiviti pembelajaran, dan pengalaman terkumpul.

Kata kunci: Kepercayaan Pembelajaran Bahasa, Perspektif Eksperiensialis, Kepercayaan Tradisional dan Progresif

Introduction

This study examines whether language learning beliefs can be meaningfully understood from an experientialist perspective, specifically by emphasising the factors of extent and recency of personal language learning experience. Extent refers to the overall accumulated experience, while recency corresponds to a learner's current or recent engagement in language learning. To avoid adding further layers of complexity to existing classifications of language learning beliefs, this study reduces them to two categories: traditional, rooted in conventional foreign language methodology, and progressive, emphasising flexible approaches. Situated within the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, the findings offer a framework for interpreting how learners' beliefs are shaped by the extent and immediacy of their experiences.

It has been established that instructional contexts, extent of schooling experience, and reflective judgment skills can influence our beliefs about knowledge and learning (Hofer, 1994; King & Kitchener, 2004). Several studies also support this conclusion. For example, it has been found that instructors' and their students' beliefs can be affected by immediate experience, identity (i.e., previous beliefs), shared environment, and ongoing interactions (Barcelos, 2000). There may be direct effects of

beliefs and reflective thinking on students' subject-related identities (Guo et al., 2022). Combining critical thinking instruction with specific instructional activities can change students' beliefs (Valanides & Angeli, 2005). Involving students in open-ended applied learning can improve students' beliefs about a particular scientific area (Wilcox & Lewandowski, 2016). These findings imply that we regulate beliefs, at least in part, through our accumulated and novel experiences within various contexts, as well as through interactions with others. We rely on a socially or culturally mediated lens combined with individual capacities and inclinations as we construct meaningful understandings of learning. These premises make the foundation of the experientialist perspective on learner beliefs.

It has also been concluded that knowledge of second language learning affects strategic reasoning and beliefs about the requirements for learning subsequent foreign languages. Students learning L3 believe that their L2 learning knowledge and experiences facilitate learning tasks, strengthen language learning and grammar knowledge even in the case of distant and unrelated languages, and support the development of an open mind, metacognitive awareness, and learning styles (Golonka, 2010). Beliefs were also reported to correlate positively and negatively with language output, thus subject to partly opposing findings that have added a layer of relativity to the relationship between language proficiency and assumptions about how it can be achieved (Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Yuen, 2002; Jee, 2017; Kovačević, 2017; 2019). However, experiential variables such as recency or extent of language learning experience have not been recently accounted for in the research attempts to understand the relationship between learner beliefs and language learning.

The available studies do not prioritise examining how much language learning experience is necessary to develop a particular belief, or how actively engaged a learner must be to adopt it. A comprehensive understanding of the relationship between learning experience and belief strength is further complicated by the inconsistent use of belief taxonomies across studies. By reducing the taxonomies to two categories, traditional and progressive beliefs, and by integrating the variables of the extent and recency of language learning experience, this study seeks to contribute findings that may modestly advance our understanding of how language learning beliefs relate to learners' experiential profiles.

Theoretical Framework

Learning Beliefs in the Context of Learning Theory

Beliefs can be viewed as results of interpretations based on associative reasoning leading toward desired or away from undesired potential consequences (behaviourist perspective; Rilling, 2000), outcomes of socially mediated decoding efforts of encoded knowledge (constructivist/social constructivist perspectives; Sjøberg, 2010; Solomon, 1994; Beliaevsky, 2006), compressed values utilised for promoting individual or collective growth (humanist perspective; Aloni, 2007), agents entangled with and being in reciprocal relationship with experience (experientialist perspective; Kolb, 2015/1984), and as units of information existing in neuronal networks that can be assembled and reassembled on demand (cognitivist/neuronalist perspectives; Reed, 2007; Zull, 2011).

Choosing any of these definitions is legitimate and informs the overall progress on understanding how learning beliefs fit into the matrix of learning behaviours, outcomes, and underlying factors. However, less exclusive perspectives, such as the experientialist one, can inform all other perspectives as human experience subsumes behavioural, cognitive, social, and emotional components (Kolb, 2015, p. xvii). This perspective views learning as a product of a dynamic exchange between the agents of concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualisation, and experimentation/application.

Beliefs, Language Learning Traditions, and Dilemmas

A review of methodological approaches to understanding beliefs about second language acquisition led researchers to a preliminary agreement that beliefs are indeed embedded in people's experiences and interactions (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003). It established that we need to employ a variety of methods to evaluate links between beliefs and language learning outcomes, consider how teachers can facilitate change, and how their and their students' beliefs support or hinder learning experiences.

It is useful to examine the extent to which foreign language teaching approaches reflect evolving beliefs about how languages are best learned and taught. Now we know that a single method cannot answer all learners' needs arising within idiosyncratic contexts and phases of language instruction. However, many of the principles

developed throughout the history of language methods are still on the spectrum of instructional alternatives, allowing modern language instructors to rely on “permutations and combinations of the familiar principles and procedures” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 161). The task of choosing from the available options is facilitated through textbooks and supplementary teaching packages but remains a fundamental issue that can never be resolved in advance. The varying levels and types of proficiency, learning abilities, or linguistic backgrounds require continuous reassembly of endorsed principles through not always best configured personal eclectic philosophies (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2008; Prodromou & Mishen, 2008; Donini, 1988). To avoid any cluttered presentation of possible principles informing our beliefs about second language acquisition, a deliberate reduction to traditional and progressive categories is possible. It should be noted that traditional and progressive attributes are not linked to chronological factors in the development of language teaching methodology. The distinction is based on evidence that many classical teaching principles have withstood the test of time and invite the prefix ‘traditional.’ In contrast, invitations for schooling flexibility, fuelled by the advancement of humanistic reasoning or problem-based and discovery learning advocacy, date back to the beginning of the first previous century (see Dewey, 1938). The following segments distinguish between traditional and progressive beliefs and highlight alternative standpoints regarding how languages are believed to be learned best.

Traditional Beliefs about Language Learning

While the history of foreign language teaching methodology recorded various sets of principles informing instructional behaviours, two methods have preserved their presence in the era of communicative approaches: the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and the Audiolingual Method (ALM). GTM can be traced back to at least the first half of the 19th century (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Teaching activities integrate translation tasks, explicit grammar instruction, and vocabulary memorisation, emphasising accuracy, allowing for the mother language, and overlooking the creation of meaningful and spontaneous communication opportunities (Naghiyeva, 2025; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Today, these principles can still be identified in modern foreign language learning classrooms (Lan, 2025; Naghiyeva, 2025; Handayani & Sujito, 2025; Wu et al., 2023; Pitikornpuangpetch

& Suwanarak, 2021). Language teachers have been found to combine the method's techniques with progressive communicative language teaching principles (Pitikornpuangpetch & Suwanarak, 2021). In addition, several recent studies have highlighted the method's benefits (Naghiyeva, 2025; Handayani & Sujito, 2025; Wu et al., 2023), and students have been found to appreciate its trademark exercises (Wu et al., 2023).

The first half of the 20th century gave us the Audiolingual Method (Renau, 2016; Mart, 2013). It focused on the structure as a unit of learning, and prioritised listening and speaking drills over reading and writing (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Comparisons of target and mother languages' structures are believed to aid language acquisition, and mastering pronunciation is important. A recent experiment conducted with eighth-grade students demonstrated that this method could improve the students' scores on accuracy and comprehension but not fluency (Manda & Hermansyah, 2022). The method's predictability, linearity, and restrictive patterns of progression are recognised as promoting accuracy (Kumai, 2018). As is the case with the Grammar-Translation Method, there have been suggestions that language instructors should combine it with the Communicative Approach (Bidenko & Bespalova, 2017).

If we learn through the mechanism of experience (Kolb, 2015/1984), if learners' beliefs are shaped by their learning interactions and experiences (Barcelos, 2000; Wilcox & Lewandowski, 2016; Valanides & Angeli, 2005), and if our reasoning about language learning is grounded in our accumulated language learning experiences (Golonka, 2010), then it follows that when instructors apply teaching principles derived from traditional methods such as the GTM or ALM, they help sustain traditional beliefs. In such cases, curricula, teacher training programmes, and instructional routines become key agents in promoting and preserving learners' traditional conceptions of foreign language acquisition. The following findings support this conclusion.

For example, a group of language learners in China was found to believe that explicit vocabulary instruction, repetitive presentations of lexical items, utilising L1 teacher translations, prioritising exam-related content, and conventional drills, such as dictations, facilitate their language learning (Chung et al., 2025). A group of preservice teachers

in Spain was reported to believe that repeating and practicing a lot, and mainly not speaking at all until being able to speak correctly, is important (López Medina, 2024). The majority of Chinese and Thai learner-respondents in another study held the belief that translating from the mother language to English is the most important element of language learning and mainly agreed that learning grammar is also one of the most essential aspects of learning a language (Sun & Wudthayagorn, 2024). A study conducted in a primary school in Malaysia reports that learners believed all grammar mistakes in their essays should be marked and provided with their teachers' feedback, and their teachers practiced providing written feedback and detecting errors (Pui et al., 2023). Overall, these findings indicate that regardless of the L1 schooling cultural setting, certain traditional beliefs are held and employed.

Progressive Beliefs about Language Learning

The early to mid-20th century generated significant momentum for approaching education through cognitivist, constructivist, social-constructivist, and humanistic perspectives. Scholars began to emphasise that sensory input is not passively received but instead interpreted by the processing mind, transformed, stored, and later retrieved (Neisser, 2014/1967; Piaget, 2003/1947; Driver & Easley, 1978; Sjøberg, 2010). The view that knowledge is not only individually constructed but also socially mediated gained broader influence as Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories were increasingly contrasted and debated (Zhang, 2022). At the same time, there was a gradual shift in the key premises of foreign language teaching methodology. Chomsky (1957) disagreed that the creativity and uniqueness of languages had been adequately accounted for, and a growing consensus emerged that ALM-driving principles were insufficient (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The overall climate generated a broadly set approach intended to promote teaching practices aligned with the complex nature of the language, later to be known as the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. Since then, various curricular and language-promoting authorities have attempted to synchronise their communicative educational philosophies (see Wu et al., 2023; Diallo, 2014; Renau, 2016; Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025).

Suppose the primary functions of language are to act on the environment, interact with others, express thoughts and feelings, learn, discover, or articulate and create (see Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In

that case, languages should be taught to develop such competencies. Embracing this premise opens a variety of instructional paths that diverge from those advocated by the core assumptions behind the GTM and ALM. For instance, the target language may be learned while it serves as a medium for content instruction or task completion; grammar and vocabulary can be acquired inductively; and implicit instruction may support a specific instructional goal (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025; Diallo, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). To highlight their creative, purpose-driven, and liberating character, we will refer to the underlying beliefs that inform these principles as progressive beliefs.

As is the case with traditional beliefs, teachers promote and assert progressive assumptions about second language acquisition. For instance, language instructors were found to rely on students' general knowledge and experiences (Kovačević, 2017), encourage real-life language use in group- and pair-work activities (Pitikornpuangpetch & Suwanarak, 2021), and use authentic materials, project-based activities, and easily accessible media (Lestari & Margana, 2024). As a result, their students are reported to believe that movies, news articles, class conversations, presentations, role-plays, and group work facilitate their language learning efforts (Wu et al., 2023). They also disagree that error-free speaking should be expected at the beginning stages of language learning or that learning grammar and translation are the most crucial outcomes of language learning efforts (Jelesković & Mulalić, 2024).

Research outcomes have clearly identified a difference between the traditional and progressive reasoning about language learning (see Kumai, 2018), but do not necessarily advocate for one side at the expense of the other; there are instead calls for and accounts of combining the two categories (Naghiyeva, 2025; Pitikornpuangpetch & Suwanarak, 2021; Wu et al., 2023; Diallo, 2014). The act of combining can depend on situational, contextual, curricular, or preferential reasons, and this is precisely what the post-method era requires; language instructors are advised to match the best teaching solutions with their teaching intentions, curricular particularities, and students' needs (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2014), as well as develop their authentic teaching methodologies. If we combine the principles, then our language learners are likely to recognise valid aspects of both traditional and progressive reasoning.

Experience and Beliefs about Language Learning

A limited number of recent studies have produced findings that support the premise that language learners with different learning experiences are likely to hold different beliefs. Chung et al. (2025) report that highly proficient secondary school students in Hong Kong held stronger beliefs in the benefits of strategy-focused instruction than mid- and low-proficiency students. Additionally, students in the final two years of secondary school were more supportive of explicit vocabulary instruction than those in their first year. The same study showed that lower-proficiency students preferred games, movies, and songs.

Negative correlations between beliefs about accuracy, practice, and self-regulation and the indices of lexical complexity in an essay corpus collected from freshman English university exams in Sarajevo were identified (Kovačević, 2019). The findings suggested that lower-proficiency students may hold stronger beliefs in these areas compared to their higher-proficiency peers and vice versa. The same data sample also showed negative correlations between beliefs about language learning and syntactic complexity indices (Kovačević, 2017). The only positive correlation was found between motivational beliefs and lexical complexity levels.

A few earlier studies provided partly inconsistent findings about the relationship between proficiency and language learning beliefs (Mori, 1999; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Yuen, 2002; Jee, 2017). Mori (1999) and Yuen (2002) identified both positive and negative correlations between language beliefs and proficiency. Tanaka and Ellis (2003) found negative, and Jee (2017) found positive correlations. Wan, Low, and Li (2011) found that students of varying English proficiency levels attribute different roles to EFL teachers. This study also found that freshman university students anticipated more autonomy and less explicit teaching than their junior colleagues. In another study, sophomore university students were measured to hold stronger agreements with two beliefs than their freshman fellows: the effective teacher should “only correct oral errors indirectly” and “require students to speak L2 first day of class” (Brown, 2009, p. 53).

Ultimately, it remains necessary to ask what our learners today believe to be true about language learning and how their experiences shape their beliefs.

Research Design

This study explores three research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: What are the learners' most prevalent beliefs about foreign language learning?
- RQ2: How strongly do learners endorse traditional and progressive beliefs about foreign language learning?
- RQ3: To what extent can differences in these beliefs be explained by learners' EFL experience and level of engagement?

To investigate these questions systematically, the Questionnaire of Assumptions about Second Language Learning (QASLL) was developed and validated based on prior research (see Tables 6 and 7). A meta-analytic review of available studies revealed over 300 assumptions. After a preliminary reduction of items to 56, each rated on a five-point Likert scale (from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*), Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(1540) = 4273.19$, $p < .001$, indicating sufficient correlations among items to proceed with factor analysis. Additionally, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .73, suggesting that the sample ($N = 294$) was adequate for factor analysis. Principal Axis Factoring analysis with Equamax rotation generated three factors, which were refined to two interpretable constructs—progressive and traditional assumptions scales—based on the face validity of the additional assessment.

Data was collected using snowball sampling through the researchers' international professional networks, primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. The reason behind using an international sample was to dilute a particular cultural influence and obtain results that could inform global foreign language teaching practices. Analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25). The distribution of the data was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, as well as visual inspection of histograms, Q–Q plots, and box plots. The progressive scale data were found to be normally distributed. The traditional scale data showed mild skewness; therefore, a log transformation was applied to normalise the distribution before the statistical evaluation of mean differences.

The first two research questions were addressed by examining the means of individual items and subscales. The third research question

was investigated using a one-way ANOVA with Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons.

Participants

The participants (N = 294) represented diverse linguistic backgrounds, reported various occupations, and had different levels of EFL experience. The largest groups were of Bosnian (114), Bangladeshi (53), and Turkish (40) backgrounds. Most participants were women (58.16%), and 73.47% were young adults (18-35 years old). They were mainly proficient or very proficient, with almost 50% having more than 12 years of EFL experience. Over two-thirds were either active or very active in their current EFL engagement.

Table 1

Participants' Gender

Gender	n	%
Female	171	58.16
Male	115	39.11
Prefer not to say	8	2.72
Total	294	100

Table 2

Participants' Age

Age Group	n	%
18-35	216	73.47
36-50	67	22.79
51-65	9	3.06
65+	2	0.68
Total	294	100

Table 3

Participants' English Proficiency

English Proficiency	n	%
Not Proficient	18	6.12
Proficient	90	30.61
Very Proficient	98	33.33
Native-like	66	22.45
Native	22	7.48
Total	294	100

Table 4

Participants' EFL Experience

EFL Experience (in years)	n	%
1-3	17	5.78
4-8	49	16.67
9-12	59	20.07
More than 12	146	49.66
Not applicable	23	7.82
Total	294	100

Table 5

Participants' EFL Status

EFL Status	n	%
Not very active	64	21.77
Active	123	41.84
Very active	80	27.21
Other	27	9.18
Total	294	100

Results

RQ1 and RQ2: Learners’ Prevalent Beliefs and The Strength of Endorsement

In the case of progressive beliefs, the highest agreement was with items Q1 (*A foreign language can be learned easily when it is used in day-to-day activities*), Q22 (*A foreign language is best learned by speaking a lot*), Q54 (*Reading more often can improve your writing skills*), and Q2 (*A relaxed learning environment makes it easier to learn and appreciate a foreign language*). The weakest agreement was with items Q42 (*Online language learning environment is as effective as a traditional classroom*) and Q3 (*Mandatory homework in a language class is a waste of time*). Average agreement with the progressive beliefs was higher than agreement with the traditional beliefs.

Table 6
Progressive Beliefs

Item	M	SD	*
Q1 A foreign language can be learned easily when it is used in day-to-day activities.	4.49	0.78	HIGH
Q22 A foreign language is best learned by speaking a lot.	4.42	0.7	
Q54 Reading more often can improve your writing skills.	4.27	0.66	
Q2 A relaxed learning environment makes it easier to learn and appreciate a foreign language.	4.23	0.79	
Q24 Self-directed language learning is important because class time cannot cover everything.	4.15	0.66	
Q41 The internet offers great assistance with language learning.	4.15	0.71	
Q56 Giving and getting lots of feedback is a must in a foreign language class.	4.14	0.72	
Q8 Even very proficient foreign language users can face a language problem.	4.11	0.7	
Q16 You can have a better understanding of other countries and their cultures if you speak a foreign language.	4.11	0.79	
Q11 If you want to learn a foreign language, it has to become an important part of your routine life.	4.07	0.76	
Q9 Good language learners ask lots of questions, take extra responsibility, and make an extra effort to learn.	4.06	0.77	
Q44 Good foreign language instruction is not enough. You have to use your own ways to learn a foreign language.	4.04	0.69	
Q40 The internet is a great assistance in using a foreign language correctly.	3.99	0.79	

Q43 Networking with others is crucial for successful foreign language learning.	3.91	0.8	HIGH
Q19 If you experience a grammatical dilemma when writing in a foreign language, it is OK to google it right away.	3.86	0.82	
Q4 When you learn the language of a people, you have to learn about their culture.	3.85	0.93	
Q46 Interactive online games are a great way to improve your language skills.	3.82	0.89	
Q48 Foreign language teachers should focus more on communication and less on linguistic rules.	3.76	0.9	
Q10 Having internet access in a foreign language learning classroom is a must nowadays.	3.75	0.93	
Q53 Speaking one foreign language will not be enough in the near future.	3.71	1.05	MODERATE
Q35 It is important to learn how to coin new words in a foreign language class.	3.7	0.74	
Q6 It is OK to make pronunciation errors.	3.65	0.96	
Q12 Studying a foreign language at home is a great way to improve your proficiency.	3.65	0.93	
Q31 English is learned best by watching movies with English subtitles.	3.65	0.92	
Q20 A good language teacher must know her or his students a little better than other teachers do.	3.61	0.86	
Q47 Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social networks are good ways to improve your language skills.	3.56	0.98	
Q21 A foreign language can be learned with or without a teacher.	3.54	0.98	
Q13 Learning English as a foreign language helps appreciating the English culture.	3.42	0.89	
Q7 A foreign language is best learned by reading a lot.	3.4	1.03	
Q25 English does not belong to any particular nation. If you can speak English, you can say that it belongs to you.	3.38	1.02	LOW
Q17 People should learn a foreign language like they learn their mother tongue.	3.26	1.08	
Q34 English is best learned by researching online.	3.05	0.93	
Q18 A foreign language is best learned by writing a lot.	3.04	0.95	
Q42 Online language learning environment is as effective as a traditional classroom.	2.98	0.99	LOW
Q3 Mandatory homework in a language class is a waste of time.	2.45	0.94	
AVERAGE TOTAL	3.74	0.85	

* Level of agreement

The highest agreement with the traditional beliefs was identified with items Q37 (*Learner's self-confidence is very important in a foreign language class*), Q27 (*A foreign language is best learned by listening a lot*), and Q45 (*Reviewing previous lessons is very important in a foreign language class*). The lowest agreement was with items Q50 (*Native-*

like English proficiency can only be acquired in an English-speaking country) and Q55 (*It is impossible to master a foreign language unless you start learning it at a very young age*).

Table 7*Traditional Beliefs*

Item	M	SD	*
Q37 Learner's self-confidence is very important in a foreign language class.	4.28	0.74	HIGH
Q27 A foreign language is best learned by listening a lot.	4.15	0.68	
Q45 Reviewing previous lessons is very important in a foreign language class.	4.14	0.57	
Q52 Educated people must speak at least one foreign language.	3.92	1.03	
Q39 A good language learner is always interested in the class activities.	3.8	0.92	
Q33 To find jobs you must speak good English.	3.78	0.96	
Q49 Good language teachers give you some time to get ready before they ask you to speak.	3.77	0.84	MODERATE
Q23 Good language teachers often correct their students' speaking errors.	3.7	0.92	
Q5 In order to speak a foreign language, first you must have some grammar knowledge.	3.54	1.01	
Q36 Good language teachers always correct their students' mistakes.	3.54	1.06	
Q14 Grammar is a road map to learning a foreign language.	3.5	0.94	
Q26 A foreign language is best learned by memorising its words.	3.48	0.92	
Q15 It is OK to worry about your speaking skills in a foreign language class.	3.46	1	
Q29 Learning English is about mastering its sentence structures.	3.4	0.91	
Q32 Whole class speaking activities can be frightening in a foreign language class.	3.36	1	
Q30 Having enough vocabulary and grammar knowledge is enough to be proficient in a foreign language.	3.14	1.02	
Q28 Learning a foreign language is about mastering its grammar rules.	3.07	0.96	LOW
Q51 Good language teachers have a native-like accent.	3.05	1.03	
Q50 Native-like English proficiency can only be acquired in an English-speaking country.	2.85	1.21	
Q55 It is impossible to master a foreign language unless you start learning it at a very young age.	2.43	1.07	
AVERAGE TOTAL	3.44	0.94	

* Level of agreement

RQ 3: Mapping Belief Differences Across EFL Experience and Engagement Levels

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare progressive and traditional assumptions endorsement across gender, age, level of English proficiency, extent of EFL learning experience, and EFL status. Statistically significant group differences were found for the endorsement of traditional assumptions across levels of EFL experience ($F[4, 289] = 2.87, p = .023$) and for the endorsement of progressive assumptions in the case of EFL status ($F[3, 290] = 3.58, p = .014$).

Tukey’s HSD post hoc test revealed that participants with 9–12 years of EFL experience ($M = 69.41$) endorsed traditional assumptions significantly less than those with 1–3 years of EFL experience ($M = 75.59$), log-transformed mean difference = $-0.037, p = .040, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.07, 0.00]$. The same test revealed that very active learners ($M = 134.31$) scored significantly higher on the progressive scale than not very active learners ($M = 129.59$), mean difference = $4.72, p = .030, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.25, 9.18]$.

Table 8
Belief Endorsement Means across Participant Characteristics

Participant Characteristics	Progressive Beliefs		Traditional Beliefs	
	M	SD	M	SD
Female	132.11	10.39	72.18	7.68
Male	129.75	10.68	70.83	8.01
Prefer not to say	134.25	4.06	76.00	9.59
18-35	131.73	10.36	71.81	7.84
36-50	129.78	10.69	71.58	7.92
51-65	131.44	8.52	71.89	9.92
65+	127.00	22.63	71.00	9.90
Not Proficient	132.22	13.62	74.28	7.08
Proficient	129.33	8.74	73.00	7.45
Very Proficient	131.46	11.17	71.33	8.55
Native-like	133.92	10.09	70.67	7.92
Native	129.27	10.52	69.82	6.43
1-3	130.76	11.24	75.59*	7.83

4-8	131.06	9.04	73.12	7.70
9-12	129.24	8.85	69.41*	7.02
More than 12	132.58	11.32	71.99	11.32
Not applicable	128.65	9.99	70.61	8.08
Not very active	129.59*	10.84	71.34	7.67
Active	130.66	10.34	72.28	8.43
Very active	134.31*	10.29	72.08	7.50
Other (learner status)	128.74	8.70	69.44	6.90

*Statistically significant difference within the category

Discussion

The gender and age variables were not anticipated to yield any differences between the levels of endorsement of traditional and progressive beliefs. Still, it was considered that analysing their mean differences might provide additional insight into the data sample. The initial assumptions were correct; no differences were found. A few studies reported sporadic differences between male and female learners' beliefs, but the overall number was low and diagnosed with individual survey items (see Bernat & Lloyd, 2007; Tercanlioglu, 2005; Siebert, 2003). This study shows that gender does not account for differences in the endorsement of traditional or progressive beliefs.

Age was shown to influence beliefs in general, particularly across developmental stages from early childhood to full maturity (Hofer, 2005). The participants in this study were predominantly from the young adult group (18-35), with middle adulthood learners (36-50) showing no meaningful divergence in beliefs. Late (51-65) and older adulthood groups (65+) were underrepresented. Given the steady presence of both types of beliefs in our classrooms and considering the assumption that increasing maturity facilitates the adoption of more relativistic views, it seemed plausible to expect differences between different adult groups. That assumption, however, was not supported by the results.

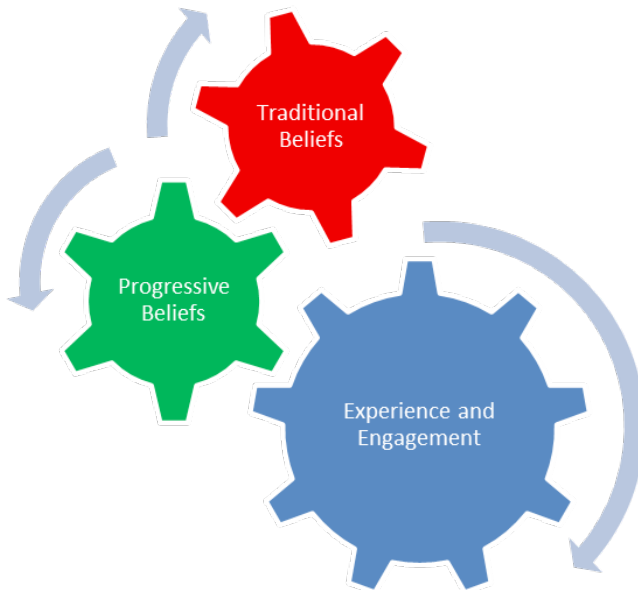
Nevertheless, three other findings were evaluated as crucial. First, EFL proficiency is not a variable that accounts for a preference between traditional and progressive beliefs. Second, learners with '9-12 years of EFL experience' and those with '1-3 years' embrace both traditional and progressive beliefs, but the former reported weaker endorsement of

traditional beliefs. Third, learners who reported being ‘very active’ held stronger progressive beliefs compared to those who reported being ‘not very active’ (see Figure 1).

The latter two findings confirm the interpretive utility of the experientialist perspective. Beliefs appear to be related to both the extent of language learning experience and the learner’s current level of engagement. However, no statistically significant differences were found between the groups with a moderate amount of learning experience (4-8 years) and ‘active’ learning status. Learners with either very little or extensive experience, and those who are either very or not very active, seem to adopt different beliefs. Being in between their poles obscures any significant differentiation.

Figure 1

Fluid Relations among Experience, Engagement, and Language Learning Beliefs



Although proficiency did not produce statistically significant differences, the mean values of traditional beliefs appear to decrease as self-reported proficiency increases (not proficient: 74.28, proficient: 73.00, very proficient: 71.33, native-like: 70.67, native: 69.82). Previous

research has related proficiency to the endorsement of beliefs (Mori, 1999; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Yuen, 2002; Brown, 2009; Jee, 2017; Wan, Low, & Li, 2011; Chung, Fung, & Wan, 2025). The regressive pattern identified in this study complements earlier findings reporting negative correlations between beliefs and proficiency (Mori, 1999; Yuen, 2002; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Kovačević, 2017; 2019). Increased experience seems to temper particular beliefs without rejecting them.

The average agreement with traditional belief items was 3.44 (1.00 = min; 5.00 = max). For progressive beliefs, it was higher ($M = 3.74$). Taken together, these mean scores suggest a balanced but slightly progressive-leaning orientation among learners. As argued in the review, teachers and their learners hold both types of beliefs because both are projected through instructional alternatives (Chung, Fung, & Wan, 2025; Pui, Pung, & Ho, 2023; Kovačević, 2017; Diallo, 2014), teacher training programmes (López Medina, 2024), and authoritative publications (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The present findings support the duality. However, the subtle observation that greater experience may encourage a more relativistic stance toward traditional beliefs calls for a nuanced argument: Long-term language learners may validate alternative principles and partly lower the value of traditional ones without entirely dismissing them.

The progressive scale produced a statistically significant difference between ‘not very active’ ($M = 129.59$) and ‘very active’ learners ($M = 134.31$). Despite their proficiency levels, the learners’ level of active engagement offers a valuable insight into the patterns of endorsement of language learning beliefs. The recency of experience does not impact the embracing of traditional beliefs, but it does influence the endorsement of progressive ones. This may be related to the increasingly autonomous learning environments available to learners today. There was a very low agreement with item Q42 (*Online language learning environment is as effective as a traditional classroom*). However, moderately strong agreement with items Q44 (*Good foreign language instruction is not enough. You have to use your own ways to learn a foreign language*), Q40 (*The internet is a great assistance in using a foreign language correctly*), Q43 (*Networking with others is crucial for successful foreign language learning*), or Q46 (*Interactive online games are a great way to improve your language skills*) suggests that autonomy of language learning experience helps learners recognise the benefits of flexible

learning modes. Interestingly, this is the case with specifically very active learners.

A learner who is not actively seeking language learning outcomes may underappreciate the advantages associated with the flexible, spontaneous, and nonlinear nature of progressive principles. Individuals who are *very* actively seeking language learning outcomes can be more receptive to their benefits. Although the ‘very active’ group also scored higher than the ‘not very active’ one on the traditional scale, the difference was not statistically significant. Still, it seems plausible that the ongoing learning experience, coupled with immediate goals and a sense of autonomy, can help learners attach more value to both types of beliefs.

The results confirm that the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) continues to hold an indirect presence. For example, a moderate level of agreement with items Q23 (*Good language teachers often correct their students’ speaking errors*), Q5 (*In order to speak a foreign language, first you must have some grammar knowledge*), Q36 (*Good language teachers always correct their students’ mistakes*), or Q14 (*Grammar is a road map to learning a foreign language*) yields awareness of grammar and accuracy as priorities. Therefore, recent calls for a reappraisal of conventional instructional principles (see Naghiyeva, 2025; Chung, Fung, & Wan, 2025) are reinforced by learners’ own expectations; the conventional approach is still anticipated.

Likewise, tenets of the Audiolingual Method (ALM) resonate with contemporary learners. There was a strong agreement with item Q27 (*A foreign language is best learned by listening a lot*) and moderate support for Q29 (*Learning English is about mastering its sentence structures*) and Q51 (*Good language teachers have a native-like accent*). This points to an appreciation for aural immersion, structural focus, and native-like pronunciation—ALM’s core staples. These findings imply that in contexts where communicative approaches are absent or underused (Diallo, 2014), traditional solutions step in to fill the void. Their persistence may not necessarily be a result of methodological superiority but rather a kind of experienced legitimacy shaped by historical authority, continuity, and familiarity.

Although conventional foreign language teaching principles have cemented their status in practice, progressive alternatives have also

secured firm ground. The participants support active language use, individual initiative, and pragmatic application. There was strong agreement with item Q48 (*Foreign language teachers should focus more on communication and less on linguistic rules*) and moderate support for items Q34 (*English is best learned by researching online*) and Q21 (*A foreign language can be learned with or without a teacher*). Learners also value a relaxed learning environment and view speech errors as acceptable. These findings suggest that instructors should rely on language learning activities that extend beyond drills, controlled repetition, and rule-based focus.

Conclusion

This study found that the tension between tradition and progress, between prescription and flexibility, is not only a theoretical binary but a deeply ingrained reality. To summarise the patterns observed in this study, a three-dimensional interpretive space may be conceptualised. The first axis represents learners' belief orientation, ranging from traditional to progressive. The second locates their level of recent engagement with language learning, from not very active to very active. The third reflects the extent of language learning experience, from minimal to extensive. The three intersecting axes are open-ended lines along which learners oscillate, pause, and reconfigure their beliefs. Each learner's belief, then, may be understood as temporarily occupying a unique point within this tri-axial space. Rather than suggesting rigid categories, this model captures fluid positioning and a nuanced account of how both recent activity and accumulated experience can explain beliefs.

One limitation of this study is the use of the Questionnaire of Assumptions about Second Language Learning (QASLL). The instrument was intended as a novel tool to capture the nuances of learners' language learning beliefs. While it offers originality, its emerging status warrants caution. Researchers aiming to compare their findings obtained with classical instruments, such as BALLI (Horwitz, 1985) or BALLI 2.0 (Horwitz, 2013), are advised to scrutinise QASLL items for construct alignment. Notably, QASLL's broader applicability now awaits cross-study validation. Nevertheless, the tool remains open for use and adaptation, and researchers are encouraged to consider its potential when investigating belief systems in varied contexts.

Another limitation concerns the decision to draw from an international sample. The choice aimed to broaden participant profiles and offer a more generalised interpretive model. However, this decision may conceal contextual dynamics that are often more visible in localised studies. Future research could replicate this study in specific cultural or educational settings to test the robustness of the proposed three-dimensional model. Such replications would offer more grounded comparisons, potentially revealing how local conditions shape the way learners occupy different points along the belief, experience, and engagement axes. In this way, the model's capacity to explain belief development could be assessed not only across individual profiles but also across different learning systems.

References

- Aloni, N. (2007). *Enhancing humanity: The philosophical foundations of humanistic education*. Springer.
- Barcelos, A. M. F. (2000). *Understanding teachers' and students' language learning beliefs in experience: A Deweyan approach* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.
- Belavsky, N. (2006). Revisiting Vygotsky and Gardner: Realizing human potential. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 40(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jae.2006.0013>
- Bernat, E., & Lloyd, R. (2007). Exploring the gender effect on EFL learners' beliefs about language learning. *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*, 7, 79–91.
- Bidenko, L., & Bespalova, H. (2017). Implementing audio-lingual method to teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language at the initial stage. *Advanced Education*, 3(7), 23–27. <https://doi.org/10.20535/2410-8286.82711>
- Brown, A. V. (2009). Students' and teachers' perceptions of effective foreign language teaching: A comparison of ideals. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93(1), 46–60. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40264128>
- Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structures*. Mouton.
- Chung, E., Fung, D., & Wan, A. (2025). Learner beliefs about vocabulary teaching in secondary ESL classrooms: A proficiency and grade-level analysis. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2024-0186>
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.

- Diallo, I. (2014). English in education policy shift in Senegal: From traditional pedagogies to communicative language teaching. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 9(2), 142–151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18334105.2014.1108202>
- Donini, P. (1988). The history of the concept of eclecticism. In J. M. Dillon & A. A. Long (Eds.), *The question of "eclecticism": Studies in later Greek philosophy* (pp. 15–33). University of California Press.
- Driver, R., & Easley, J. (1978). Pupils and paradigms: A review of literature related to concept development in adolescent science students. *Studies in Science Education*, 5(1), 61–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057267808559857>
- Fauzi, N. I., & Ridwan, R. (2025). The impact of communicative language teaching on English speaking skills. *Dinasti International Journal of Education Management and Social Science*, 6(3), 1774–1781. <https://doi.org/10.38035/dijemss.v6i3.3819>
- Fener, A. (in progress). *Learner beliefs in second language acquisition* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. International University of Sarajevo.
- Golonka, E. (2010). The influence of prior language learning experiences on learning of unrelated or distantly related languages. *Russian Language Journal*, 60(1). <https://doi.org/10.70163/0036-0252.1175>
- Guo, X., Hao, X., Deng, W., Ji, X., Xiang, S., & Hu, W. (2022). The relationship between epistemological beliefs, reflective thinking, and science identity: A structural equation modeling analysis. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 9, Article 40. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-022-00355-x>
- Handayani, S., & Sujito, S. (2024). Survey of the implementation of Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in teaching vocabulary and grammar to the first-year students of Al – Islam Kartasura Junior High School in 2023/2024 academic year. *English Education and Literature Journal*, 5(1), 16–20. <https://doi.org/10.53863/ejou.v5i01.1213>
- Hofer, B. K. (1994). Epistemological beliefs and first-year college students: Motivation and cognition in different instructional contexts. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association*.
- Hofer, B. K. (2005). The legacy and the challenges: Paul Pintrich's contributions to personal epistemology research. *Educational Psychologist*, 40(2), 95–101.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1985). Using student beliefs about language learning and teaching in the foreign language methods course. *Foreign Language Annals*, 18(4), 333–340. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1985.tb01811.x>
- Horwitz, E. K. (2013). *Becoming a language teacher*. Pearson.

- Jee, M. J. (2017). Examining beliefs about language learning in relation to perceived linguistic self-confidence: Learners of Korean as a foreign language in Australia. *Linguistic Research*, 34, 25–48. <https://doi.org/10.17250/khisli.34..201709.002>
- Jelešković, E., & Mulalić, A. (2024). Students' beliefs about language learning: A study of university students' beliefs about learning English as a foreign language. *Educational Role of Language Journal*, 2024(1)(11), 132–147. <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.01.11>
- Kalaja, P., & Barcelos, A. M. F. (2003). Conclusion: Exploring possibilities for future research on beliefs about SLA. In P. Kalaja & A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (pp. 231–238). Springer.
- King, P. M., & Kitchener, K. S. (2004). Reflective judgment: Theory and research on the development of epistemic assumptions through adulthood. *Educational Psychologist*, 39(1), 5–18.
- Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT Press. (Original work published 1984)
- Kovačević, E. (2017). The relationship between language learning beliefs and syntactic complexity. In S. Gudurić & B. Radić-Bojanić (Eds.), *Jezici i kulture u vremenu i prostoru 6* (pp. 455–464). University of Novi Sad.
- Kovačević, E. (2019). The relationship between lexical complexity measures and language learning beliefs. *Jezikoslovlje*, 20(3), 555–582. <https://doi.org/10.29162/jez.2019.20>
- Kumai, W. (2018). Audiolingual method vs. communicative language teaching from the perspective of complexity theory. 南山大学短期大学部紀要 終刊号 [Nanzan College Bulletin, Final Issue], 39, 131–147. https://nanzan.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/1795/files/nantan39_11_Kumai_William.pdf
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding language teaching: From method to postmethod*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lan, S. (2025). Language learning beliefs and teaching effectiveness: Exploring how teachers' beliefs shape classroom practices in second language acquisition. *Advances in Social Behavior Research*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7102/2025.21122>
- Lestari, M. B., & Margana. (2024). Communicative language teaching (CLT) implementation in *Kurikulum Merdeka*: A lesson from English teachers' voices. *JOLLT: Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 12(4), 1657–1672. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v12i4.11266>
- López Medina, B. (2024). Pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning and communication strategies: Does language proficiency make

- a difference? *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 21(2), 198–214. <https://doi.org/10.56040/btlm2122>
- Manda, I., & Hermansyah, S. (2022). AudioLingual method to improve students' English speaking skills. *Qalamuna: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Agama*, 14(1), 563–578. <https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v14i1.4460>
- Mart, C. T. (2013). The audio-lingual method: An easy way of achieving speech. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 3(12), 63–69. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v3-i12/412>
- Mori, Y. (1999). Epistemological beliefs and language learning beliefs: What do language learners believe about their learning? *Language Learning*, 49(3), 377–415. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00094>
- Naghiyeva, G. (2025). Revamping traditional methods: Evaluating the grammar-translation method in modern language teaching. *Acta Globalis Humanitatis et Linguarum*, 2(1), Article 02500111. <https://doi.org/10.69760/aghel.02500111>
- Neisser, U. (2014). *Cognitive psychology*. Psychology Press. (Original work published 1967)
- Piaget, J. (2003). *The psychology of intelligence*. Routledge. (Original work published 1947)
- Pitikornpuangpetch, C., & Suwanarak, K. (2021). Teachers' beliefs and teaching practices about communicative language teaching (CLT) in a Thai EFL context. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 14(2), 1–27.
- Prodromou, L., & Mishan, F. (2008). Materials used in Western Europe. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *English language learning materials* (pp. 193–212). Continuum
- Pui, K. P., Pung, W. C., & Ho, A. P. (2023). Learners' beliefs and teachers' practice of grammar-focused written corrective feedback in the Malaysian primary ESL classrooms: A pilot study. *AsiaPacific Social Science Review*, 23(4), Article 5. <https://doi.org/10.59588/2350-8329.1516>
- Reed, S. K. (2007). *Cognition: Theory and application* (7th ed.). Thomson Wadsworth.
- Renau, M. L. (2016). A review of the traditional and current language teaching methods. *International Journal of Innovation and Research in Educational Sciences*, 3(2), 82–88.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

- Rilling, M. (2000). How the challenge of explaining learning influenced the origins and development of John B. Watson's behaviorism. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 113(2), 275–301.
- Siebert, L. L. (2003). Student and teacher beliefs about language learning. *The ORTESOL Journal*, 21, 7–39.
- Sjøberg, S. (2010). Constructivism and learning. In P. Peterson, E. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education*, vol. 5, (pp. 485-490). Elsevier.
- Solomon, J. (1994). The rise and fall of constructivism. *Studies in Science Education*, 23, 1–19.
- Sun, L.-G., & Wudthayagorn, J. (2024). Investigating beliefs, attitudes and motivation toward English language learning among Thai and Chinese undergraduate students in different study programs. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 17(1), 734–758. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/LEARN/article/view/270441>
- Tanaka, K., & Ellis, R. (2003). Study-abroad, language proficiency, and learner beliefs about language learning. *JALT Journal*, 25(1), 63–85.
- Tercanlioglu, L. (2005). Pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about foreign language learning and how they relate to gender. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 3(1), 145–162. http://www.investigacionpsicopedagogica.org/revista/articulos/5/english/Art_5_58.pdf
- Tomlinson, B., & Masuhara, H. (2008). Materials used in the UK. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *English language learning materials* (pp. 159–178). Continuum.
- Valanides, N., & Angeli, C. (2005). Effects of instruction on changes in epistemological beliefs. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 30(3), 314–330.
- Wilcox, B. R., & Lewandowski, H. J. (2016). Open-ended versus guided laboratory activities: Impact on students' beliefs about experimental physics. *Physical Review Physics Education Research*, 12(2), 020132.
- Wan, W., Low, G. D., & Li, M. (2011). From students' and teachers' perspectives: Metaphor analysis of beliefs about EFL teachers' roles. *System*, 39(3), 403–415.
- Wenden, A. (1986). What do second-language learners know about their language learning? A second look at retrospective accounts. *Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 186–205.
- Wu, H., Su, H., Yan, M., & Zhuang, Q. (2023). Perceptions of grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching method used in

- English classrooms. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 5(6), 96–105. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2023.5.6.11>
- Yuen, C. O. G. (2002). *Secondary students' English language learning beliefs and oral proficiency: A Hong Kong case study* [Unpublished master's thesis]. The University of Hong Kong.
- Zhang, J. (2022). The influence of Piaget in the field of learning science. *Higher Education Studies*, 12(3), 162–168. <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v12n3p162>
- Zull, J. E. (2011). *From brain to mind: Using neuroscience to guide change in education*. Stylus.

Fostering National Harmony through Inter-Religious Education: An Analysis of *Pendidikan Moral* KSSM and *Pendidikan Islam* KSSM Syllabi

Nur Nisa Solehah binti Muhamad Haswazil*

Fatmir Shehu**

Ainul Azmin binti Md. Zamin***

Abstract: This article explores the role of inter-religious education in fostering national harmony in Malaysia, with a specific focus on the content of *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education) and *Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Education) syllabi under the *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah* (Secondary School Standard Curriculum). The goal of this study is to examine the inter-religious education elements present in both syllabi and assess their effectiveness in promoting understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among students of diverse religious backgrounds. This research is particularly important because it offers a critical lens for evaluating the current educational frameworks in shaping a unified, multi-religious society. The focus of the discussion is on: (a) defining the concept and urgency of inter-religious education in the Malaysian context;

*Postgraduate student, Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion and Philosophy, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: nurnisasolehah@gmail.com. *Corresponding author*.

**Assoc. Prof. Dr., Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion and Philosophy, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: fatmir@iium.edu.my

***Assoc. Prof. Dr., the Department of English Language and Literature, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: ainul_azmin@iium.edu.my

(b) introducing *Hikmah Pedagogy* as a suitable framework for Malaysia; and (c) analysing the content of both syllabi for the presence and depth of inter-religious education elements. The methods employed in this paper include textual analysis of curriculum documents, evaluation of textbook content, and comparison with existing scholarly research. This research concludes with the finding that, while inter-religious education elements are present, especially in the *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* syllabus at the lower secondary level, they are insufficiently integrated into the *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* syllabus.

Keywords: Inter-religious Education, *Pendidikan Islam*, *Pendidikan Moral*, KSSM, Malaysia.

Abstrak: Kajian ini bertujuan meneliti peranan pendidikan antara agama dalam memupuk keharmonian nasional di Malaysia dengan memberi tumpuan khusus kepada kandungan silibus *Pendidikan Moral* dan *Pendidikan Islam* di bawah Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah. Objektif utama kajian ini ialah untuk menganalisis elemen-elemen pendidikan antara agama yang terdapat dalam kedua-dua silibus tersebut serta menilai keberkesanannya dalam memupuk kefahaman, toleransi, dan kehidupan harmoni dalam kalangan pelajar yang berbeza latar belakang agama. Kajian ini penting kerana ia menyediakan kerangka kritikal untuk menilai keberkesanan sistem pendidikan semasa dalam membentuk masyarakat majmuk yang bersatu padu. Kajian ini menumpukan kepada tiga aspek utama, iaitu: (a) mentakrifkan konsep serta kepentingan pendidikan antara agama dalam konteks Malaysia; (b) memperkenalkan *Pedagogi Hikmah* sebagai pendekatan yang sesuai diaplikasikan dalam sistem pendidikan negara; dan (c) menganalisis kandungan kedua-dua silibus bagi menilai kewujudan serta tahap penghayatan elemen pendidikan antara agama. Kaedah kajian ini melibatkan analisis teks terhadap dokumen kurikulum, penilaian kandungan buku teks, serta perbandingan dengan kajian ilmiah sedia ada. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa elemen pendidikan antara agama sememangnya wujud, terutamanya dalam silibus *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* di peringkat menengah rendah, namun masih belum diterapkan secara menyeluruh dalam silibus *Pendidikan Islam KSSM*.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan antara Agama, Pendidikan Islam, Pendidikan Moral, KSSM, Malaysia.

Introduction

Malaysia's national identity has long been shaped by its diverse religious, ethnic, cultural, and traditional composition. Although Islam is the official religion of the Federation, Malaysia is home to other religions, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and others. In this multi-religious setting, the role of education becomes crucial in fostering social cohesion. One of the core strategies employed by the government to foster unity is through the national curriculum, via *Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Education) and *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education). These two subjects are compulsory core components: the former for Muslim students and the latter for students of other religious affiliations and ideologies. Generally, both subjects encompass universal and civic values, aiming to produce holistic citizens who are equipped for life after school, content with academic knowledge, strong moral character, and a firm national identity, which leads to the shaping of a generation that appreciates the diversity of Malaysia. Despite the government's vision, as outlined in key policy documents such as the *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia 2013-2025*, PPPM 2013-2025 (Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025) (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013), there remain concerns regarding whether these curricula adequately embed inter-religious understanding.

Previous studies on this subject include an article by Sulmi Badar et al. (2004), which critiques the limited presence of inter-religious elements in the *Pendidikan Islam* KSSM syllabus, but this study focuses its discussion on the textbook of Form 2 without the analysis of the *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education). Bakar (2010) and Mohd Khambali et al. (2023) advocate for inter-religious awareness through education, in fighting against exclusivity of the Muslim community and issues like discrimination or prejudice. However, both studies focus on philosophical arguments for inter-religious dialogue and portray the virtues of inter-religious education specifically, without conducting detailed comparative curriculum analysis. Önal's (2010) work focuses on identifying the intersection point between religions through the concept of wisdom. However, it does not explain the specific frameworks for educational implementation from an inter-religious approach.

Hikmah Pedagogy (HP) portrays the applicable pedagogical model for the Malaysian context, which has been applied and utilised in

numerous research studies and classrooms (Hussien et al., 2017). While it demonstrates the suitability and relevance for Malaysian classrooms, it has not been tested within the scope of both KSSM subjects. Therefore, this research addresses these gaps by offering a thematic, textbook-based evaluation of both *Pendidikan Moral* and *Pendidikan Islam* under the *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah*, KSSM (Secondary School Standard Curriculum) syllabus, through comparative curriculum analysis, along with a detailed narration of the importance of inter-religious education and introducing Hikmah Pedagogy as a suitable educational framework for the Malaysian context.

This article aims to: (a) define the concept and urgency of inter-religious education in the Malaysian context; (b) introduce Hikmah Pedagogy as a suitable framework for Malaysia; and (c) analyse the content of both syllabi for the presence and depth of inter-religious education elements. The methodology includes qualitative textual analysis of official curriculum documents: Standards-based Document for Curriculum and Assessment, textbooks, and selected academic research.

The Crucial Needs of Inter-religious Education in the Malaysian Context

The urgency of implementing inter-religious education in Malaysia's national education system needs to be comprehensively understood by the country's citizens.

Defining Inter-religious Education

"Inter-religious education" encompasses both direct and indirect perceptions concerning a religion or its adherents that may be processed and perceived by one's consciousness, leading to a discussion of mediated religious experience. It occurs through the co-socialisation between the adherents of different religions, including conversations in direct learning encounters. At the centre of these encounters lies a dialogue in which the interlocutors attempt to respect and understand one another (Rothgangel, 2016, p. 2). It aims to transform attitudes and behaviours that may stereotype, demonise, or view those of other religions with suspicion or a judgmental approach (Engebretson et al., 2010). It is understood from these definitions that inter-religious education is crucial in fostering mutual understanding and genuine

appreciation among the youth generation, aiming to produce a harmonious society that encompasses multi-religious and multicultural backgrounds. It provides a platform for students and teachers from diverse religious backgrounds to engage in meaningful dialogue, discover shared values within their respective religions, and transcend judgmental, discriminatory, and racist attitudes toward communities different from their own. This platform involves a dialogical learning process for students that could increase their understanding of the different worldviews of other religious groups and their appreciation of the world. This is the researchers' view on inter-religious education, which will be more relevant if it is applied in the context of *Wasatiyyah* (moderation). Indeed, *Wasatiyyah* is the backbone of inter-religious education, where the application is based on the spirit of tolerance, fairness, and humble treatment, which helps sustain religious harmony and peaceful coexistence between multi-religious communities (Mohd Khambali et al., 2023).

The Urgency of Inter-religious Education in Malaysia

Malaysia has a multi-faith composition, and Islam is the official religion in the country. With a population of about 34.2 million, ethnic groups are composed of Malays (58.1%), Chinese (22.4%), Indians (6.5%), and other Bumiputera (12.3%). This variety generates coexistence but also produces challenges of social harmony (Sulmi Badar et al., 2024). Unity is achieved through an education system that underscores the necessity of interfaith/intercultural dialogues in the education of religion in national religious formation. These actions could counteract racism and bias (Bakar, 2010; Mohd Khambali et al., 2023). However, the dangers of religious education include the drift of education towards secularism and segregated religious learning environments, where students are increasingly trapped in their ethnic or religious cliques (Hull, 2002).

Ethnic groups in Malaysia mostly speak their native languages. The Chinese mainly speak Cantonese, while Indians communicate in Tamil. The Malays speak Bahasa Melayu while Bumiputera communities in Borneo speak a multitude of ethnic languages. The three primary school types are *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (SK), *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina* (SJKC) and *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil* (SJKT). The issue of ethnic stratification has also raised serious problems, with parents opting for schools that mirror their own ethnicity, which contributes to

homogeneity. Students interact with classmates from backgrounds other than their own during secondary school – in the absence of a national secondary education system to integrate them – but early experiences likely restrict their experiences of cross-ethnic experiences. The government recognises that 7–17-year-old children go to school, spend many hours in various settings, and this can contribute to the sense of national unity. Therefore, the Ministry plans to promote social cohesion through education outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025.

The Razak Report 1956 (Report of the Education Committee, 1956) sought to reinforce national identity and access for everybody in the Malaysian education system through societal unity. Other initiatives, such as the Student Integration Plan for Unity (RIMUP) and 1 Student 1 Sport, were established to help build inter-ethnic friendships but faced challenges regarding funding. Islamic Education for Muslims and Moral Education for non-Muslims are core components of the curriculum. The transition from KBSM to KSSM aligns education with the needs of the 21st century, focusing on social intelligence, entrepreneurship, health, and social justice, thereby enhancing the national curriculum to international standards.

Although both *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* and *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* seek to cultivate an all-encompassing approach to development, they have different emphases. *Pendidikan Islam* wants to instil knowledge, faith, and good deeds to prepare the students as Allah's vicegerents. The curricula for both syllabi include 21st Century Learning Skills, Higher Order Thinking Skills, and Cross-Curriculum Elements. This alignment of the curriculum and government policies with the National Philosophy of Education 1996 reflects the overarching aim of Malaysia: a united and harmonious country. This initiative is designed to produce balanced and morally upright Malaysian citizens with knowledge and a strong national identity that embraces Malaysia's diversity. The Ministry's focus under KSSM on Islamic Education and Moral Education is to enhance social cohesion among both Muslim and non-Muslim students, emphasising national unity. However, questions arise about the effectiveness of these efforts in promoting a genuine appreciation for diverse traditions and beliefs. This emphasises the need for inter-religious education in the Islamic Education and Moral Education KSSM syllabi.

Inter-religious Education: Virtues and Hikmah Pedagogy

Inter-religious education will undoubtedly contribute numerous virtues to the Malaysian communities at the international level. The discussion in this section explores the benefits of inter-religious education in Malaysia and examines the *Hikmah* pedagogy as a proposed framework.

The Virtues of Inter-religious Education

Introducing inter-religious education via the KSSM syllabi for *Pendidikan Islam* and *Pendidikan Moral* is a means to promote national harmony among youth. This education features three core dimensions: cognitive, affective, and experiential. The cognitive dimension involves learning about various religions, delving into their breadth and depth. The affective dimension encourages students to connect personally with the content, reflecting on the implications for their values and potentially challenging their previous assumptions, without intending to convert or sow doubt. It is hoped that for many students the affective process will lead to reflection on personal values and attitudes, and perhaps a challenge to change previously held attitudes and assumptions (Engebretson, 2010), far from the intention to convert those of other faiths or make others have doubts about their faith (Shehu, 2014). Meanwhile, the experiential dimension engages students through listening to others' religious experiences, visiting places of worship, and participating in projects that promote justice, development, and peace.

It aims to help foster the development of interreligious understanding and mutual respect among different beliefs. It is a well-intentioned, non-discriminatory, and inclusive teaching practice for inter-religious education to help students appreciate the diverse perspectives of other religious communities with the purpose of encouraging social cohesion, peace, and a dialogue of mutual understanding (Engebretson, 2010). Studying other faiths adds awareness with a non-prejudiced view of differences (Danner & Akpinar, 2024). Dialogue helps students develop religious identities and align their beliefs (Girivirya, 2023).

Inter-religious education's function is to use religious teachings to highlight the demand for human rights, justice, and peace. It demonstrates the holism that religions stand for, dismissing violence and urging kindness. Such teaching promotes mutual respect and understanding among followers of separate religions (Engebretson,

2010). It is specifically intended to work in constructive relations for mutual understanding and improvement of cooperation in a multi-religious context, because positive perceptions for diverse believers are nurtured by dialogue (Mohd Khambali et al., 2023).

Hikmah Pedagogical Concepts for Malaysian Classrooms

Hikmah Pedagogy (HP) is an extension of the Philosophy for Children Programme (P4C), a method that promotes critical, creative, benevolent, ethical, and higher-order thinking through philosophical inquiry (Hashim & Alias, 2020). The Community of Inquiry (CoI) in the classrooms encourages students to think independently and consider different answers to issues. This trains them to be more open to accepting various answers. Students will learn that it is quite impossible to arrive at a single final answer, since some answers can be considered better than others based on their evidence or argument (Lipman, 2003).

The Centre for Philosophical Inquiry in Education, commonly known as the Centre for Teaching Thinking (CTT) at the International Islamic University Malaysia, has remodelled Lipman's approach to include religious and ethical values relevant to the Muslim and Malaysian society. The programme is known as *Hikmah* Pedagogy (HP). Originally an Arabic word, *Hikmah* has been assimilated into the Malay language, meaning "wisdom" (Hashim et al., 2014). HP offers a method of teaching thinking that can be done either as a 'stand-alone' approach or an infusion. Stand-alone is an approach where a thinking programme is taught outside the school curriculum, with its main objective focusing on the development of thinking skills. Infusion, on the other hand, integrates the development of thinking skills into a subject. The infusion approach considers mastery of the content and development of thinking skills as its objectives (Hussien et al., 2017).

Fisher (2013) mentions that teaching thinking and philosophical inquiry can be infused in numerous learning subjects, such as English, Mathematics, Science, Design and Technology, History, Geography, Physical Education, Religious Education, and Citizenship Education. In the Malaysia's strict curriculum and limited timeframe in the schooling system, the infusion approach is the most practical choice for teaching critical thinking. Recent studies have proven that HP is highly recommended for Malaysia's educational system (Hashim et al., 2014). Studies have shown the same findings that *Hikmah* Pedagogy

(HP) enhances students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTs), critical thinking, reasoning abilities, open-mindedness, and communication skills (Zulkifli & Hashim, 2019; Hashim & Alias, 2020; Hussien et al., 2021; Zulkifli et al., 2022; Aiyetoro et al., 2024).

Hikmah Pedagogy aims to produce the Community of Inquiry (CoI), which is also known in many studies as 'Community of Philosophical Inquiry' (CoPI) (Cassidy, 2025), and 'Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry' (CPI) (Millett and Tapper, 2012). The CoI is a moral and philosophical exploration journey, where a group of students can sit together and listen to one another with respect, build one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions (Lipman, 2003). While students in Malaysia are usually devout followers of a particular religion, they can bring their religious beliefs to the forefront of the discussion through moral and philosophical exploration. It is conducted through dialogical discussion, which encompasses elements of listening to others' views, empathy, respect, friendship, and cooperative thinking. Furthermore, CoI challenges students' unquestioned opinions and views, compelling them to think beyond conditioned and stereotyped views to form a meaningful reaction and a deeper understanding of specific issues in the real world (Hussien et al., 2017).

Students do not necessarily arrive at a definitive answer, and disagreement is commonly allowed if it is expressed subtly and respectfully. They must think independently for themselves. Even the teachers will be there, acting as facilitators, good listeners, open-minded, and skilful questioners to help students discuss at a deeper level. This could help students exchange and re-examine their views through logical analysis, revising them when necessary. To achieve those results, the classroom environment must be emotionally and intellectually safe, enabling participants to reason and reflect on the issues discussed without the influence of any authority. Therefore, CoI will eventually enable students to think together with tolerance and increase their understanding and appreciation of the world (Hussien et al., 2017).

Before conducting the five stages of CoI, students will be arranged to sit in a circle or horseshoe shape, facing each other, as this type of seating

signifies the equal status and rights of each CoI member. Then, the first stage involves offering a stimulus, such as a text, poster, or video, that contains values and issues to engage and prompt students to question. In the second stage, students will take turns reading aloud the stimulus to discover its meaning. Next, students will generate their questions based on the stimulus, with each question assigned to a specific questioner's name. This could help in discovering students' interests and what they consider important. The teacher will guide students to categorise the questions and determine which category to discuss first. After the fourth stage, the discussion must lead to deliberation and attempts to answer the questions. At this stage, the articulation of agreements and disagreements will begin, aiming to achieve a deeper understanding of the meaning and concepts in the stimulus (Hussien et al., 2017).

Consequently, the CoI fosters a democratic classroom, where the teacher must facilitate the classroom discussion and empower students to think and express their voices. The success of creating a CoI depends on the teacher's own thinking skills and disposition. Generally, teachers must undergo HP training, where they are involved in the CoI for an extended period until they have mastered the programme and can conduct it independently. Thus, any CoI conducted will help develop students' reasoning abilities, acknowledge their ideas, and teach them to value and tolerate others' different opinions, which fosters their open-mindedness and helps them cooperate with each other to achieve a common goal in the class. Additionally, they will be encouraged to understand the importance of working and living in harmony through tolerance, respect, and open-mindedness (Hussien et al., 2017). These qualities are of utmost importance and should be incorporated into our current syllabi of *Pendidikan Islam* and *Pendidikan Moral* under KSSM, enabling students to understand and become more tolerant towards others' views and religious practices.

The successful result of Hikmah Pedagogy could be seen in numerous published and unpublished studies, conducted and supervised by the members of CTT, highlighting the benefits of implementing HP in subjects like *Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Education), *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education), *Pendidikan Sivik dan Kewarganegaraan* (Civic and Citizenship Education, CCE), in both English and Malay. The study conducted by Hussien et al. (2017) shows that HP helps Muslim students improve their inquiry skills and have a better understanding

of Islam in the teaching of Islamic Education in secondary classes. Moreover, students become more open-minded towards contradictory views when they realise that there is no right or wrong in expressing an opinion (Hussien et al., 2021). Juperi (2011) exemplifies in his study the teacher's success in highlighting the right to have a prayer or worship place for both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The topic of 'Preserving the Sanctity of the Mosque' provides an opportunity for students to explore the rights and practices between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, fostering tolerance through better reasoning, guided by the teachings of their respective religions.

Kamarudin (2015) highlighted the case of a student who faced difficulty in finding a place to pray in a Christian country where cross symbols are found everywhere, which led him to raise the issue of whether Muslims are allowed to pray in such places. Their discussion continued with a controversial issue regarding a protest by Muslim demonstrators who forced a church to take down its cross, fearing it would pose a challenge to Islam and the faith of Muslim youth. Ultimately, some students realised that they held views that were mostly emotional rather than founded on Islamic principles and values. This discovery was an eye-opener for them, as they realised that many of their beliefs and views were shaped by society rather than rooted in true Islamic teachings (Hussien et al., 2017). HP also highlights the practice of fasting among all religions. Some Muslim students were unaware of this ritual in other religions. Dietary restrictions, halal food, vegetarian options, and *Eid* Open House were discussed as part of understanding and showing respect and tolerance across ethnic lines. Students expressed their views on HP's accomplishments in developing their respect, tolerance, and understanding for others' opinions, and breaking the stereotype of emotional perspective towards any controversial issues regarding differences in religious practices and others (Hussien et al., 2017, pp. 103-105).

Jarawi and Zulkifli (2020) demonstrated that HP and KBAT are successful in shaping students who accept the diversity of cultures in Malaysia, aligning with the aspirations of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. Yet the question of whether the current elements in *Pendidikan Islam* and *Pendidikan Moral* of the KSSM syllabi fulfil all the requirements for inter-religious education, particularly in terms of their relevance as a stimulus for conducting inter-religious education,

remains. It is necessary to delve into the analysis of both syllabi to identify what can be termed ‘inter-religious elements’ that are crucial in fostering a genuine understanding among students about the religions of their ‘neighbours.’

Critical Analysis of Pendidikan Moral KSSM and Pendidikan Islam KSSM

The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (PPPM 2013-2025) identifies societal unity and harmonious coexistence as its core aims. These objectives are reflected in both the syllabi of *Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Education) and *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education) under the KSSM. Through both curricula, the government hopes that students from diverse backgrounds, including teachers, will interact dialogically and intellectually via the national education platform known as ‘inter-religious education.’ It refers to the cognitive, affective, and dynamic experiential process of fostering understanding, genuine appreciation, tolerance, respect, and national harmony.

The researchers’ determination in choosing the secondary school level syllabi (KSSM) stems from multiple reasons, including *the* examination of inter-religious elements in both syllabi, as both are the Ministry’s main mediums for fostering national unity among students. It is imperative for students to genuinely understand their neighbours’ religions and traditions, build positive perceptions of differences, and foster national unity. This is none other than the urgency of fundamental information from all traditions that exist in Malaysia, connoted as ‘inter-religious elements.’

The secondary school level is considered the appropriate phase of theological maturity to introduce students to inter-religious knowledge without causing confusion. This is the phase where secondary school students are firm in their faith, as believing in God and engaging in religious practices have been cultivated in most of them from early stages, beginning with infancy, preschool, and the primary level (Farisia, 2020). Students learn under constant supervision and continuous monitoring by trained teachers in both subjects. Furthermore, many studies and models of inter-religious education implementation are always being established at the secondary level, where numerous experts trust this is the best developmental phase for students to enter the inter-religious education realm (Goldburg, 2010; Ng, 2010; Wanden, 2010; Erricker,

2010; Filus, 2010). The context of inter-religious education itself is far from converting participants, yet it keeps them aligned with their own religious identity/worldview after addressing the differences in religions from other communities. Therefore, this analysis will determine whether the current syllabi are embedded with inter-religious elements as a stimulus for students, to prove that the government's aspiration for national unity is being operationalised, or if they only remain aspirational ideals on paper.

Analysis of Inter-religious Elements in Pendidikan Moral KSSM

Pendidikan Moral KSSM textbooks, from lower secondary levels (Form 1, 2, and 3) to upper levels (Form 4 and 5), are structured similarly. The former is built around four key thematic areas and continues around three key themes. All the contents are organised under subunits of each area, comprising six key elements: stimulus, concept, reinforcement, enrichment, remediation, and assessment. Additionally, three disciplines of moral development – reasoning, emotion, and action – are also embedded through various activities across the textbooks, such as role-playing, exploratory projects, invention-based tasks, and teamwork. These activities open the floor for students to communicate, collaborate, and develop a caring, inclusive, and patriotic character, where teachers are encouraged to conduct the activities creatively, tailored to students' learning abilities, intelligence levels, and classroom contexts. Inclined towards DSKP (Standard-Based Document for Curriculum and Assessment) objectives in producing 21st-century learners, *Kemahiran Berfikir Aras Tinggi*, KBAT (Higher Order Thinking Skills), is also cultivated in every unit of the syllabus, evaluating pupils in applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating.

The analysis will be documented following the order from the lower to the upper secondary levels. The Form 1, 2, and 3 textbooks have four key thematic areas, namely: "Introduction to Morality," "Self, Family and Friendship," "Relationships between Self, Community and Society," and "Morality, Rules and Laws." Starting from Form 1 textbook, Unit 4: "Living a Religious or Faith-Based Life Brings Blessings" falls under the second theme, 'Self, Family, and Friendship.' This topic emerges as the most explicit example of inter-religious content in the syllabus. It presents a vast range of religious traditions practised in Malaysia from diverse backgrounds; Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians,

Sikhs, and indigenous belief systems, like the Kadazan and Semai communities. The description of how the communities perform the act of worship and prayers in the places of worship, celebrate their religious festivals, and connect themselves with the Divine in their daily religious experiences, such as the meditation of Buddhists, fasting for Muslims, and thanksgiving ceremonies like *Kinorohingan* of the Kadazan's tradition (Nur Munirah Teoh binti Abdullah et al., 2016).

Students are also taught to respect their friends during prayer times and not to disturb fasting friends during Ramadan, as well as how to participate appropriately during celebrations like Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Vaisakhi for Sikhs, or Vesak for Buddhists. Activities such as role-play, creative poetry, and folio projects are taught in the unit, including reflective KBAT questions and group discussions. The classrooms will be the platform for students to interact meaningfully with peers from different backgrounds, guiding them towards the realms of inter-religious dialogue and building mutual understanding across faith communities (Nur Munirah Teoh binti Abdullah et al., 2016). Overall, Unit 4 discusses the inter-religious elements that are central and detailed in relation to the learning objectives.

The *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* Form 2 textbook is the direct continuation of the Form 1 syllabus, with four key themes of its moral and pedagogical objectives, where the focus remains on shaping a morally upright, socially responsible student who is ready to engage harmoniously in a plural society. Unit 2, under the same theme "Religion or Belief as a Foundation for Noble Character Formation," introduces briefly to the moral teachings and role models of major religions in Malaysia, such as Islam [Prophet Muhammad], Christianity (Jesus Christ), Buddhism (Siddhartha Gautama), Hinduism (Swami Vivekananda), and Sikhism (Guru Nanak), including indigenous belief systems such as animism in Iban culture and spiritual healing in Kadazandusun communities, which is written in the *Adat Iban 1993* (The Iban Customary Law 1993) document. Students are exposed to Gawai celebrations, ancestral taboos, and traditional healing methods, along with reflective KBAT questions and researching and observing the religious traditional healing process. This allows students to satisfy their curiosity experientially and encourages respect across diverse religions (Nur Munirah Teoh binti Abdullah et al., 2017).

It indicates that Unit 2 is unique in its inter-religious content and other units focus on respect, harmony, and civic duty, highlighting the importance of cross-faith engagement throughout Unit 2. Units 5, 6, and 7 address the issue of intercultural dialogue (i.e., lessons on respect during the Gawai festival and lessons about empathy at funerals and weddings of members of different cultures). Though Unit 2 tackles inter-religious topics, the other units spread messages of tolerance and understanding among Malaysia's diverse citizens. Once again, inter-religious elements are only being highlighted in one unit, while the other presents indirect contact between traditions, emphasising the universal values of tolerance, respect, empathy, and genuine understanding as united citizens of Malaysia.

The Form 3 textbook contains the same structure of key themes, enriched with learning elements such as role-playing, group discussions, art-oriented activities, and KBAT-oriented tasks, with the same goals of developing pupils' moral reasoning, emotional maturity, and social skills, producing a well-prepared youth for the 21st-century challenges and demands. The Form 3 syllabus addresses inter-religious elements through cultural and traditional narratives, together with daily social conduct. Under theme 2 "Self, Family and Friendship," Unit 4: "Family Traditions as Our Shared Heritage," introduces students to traditional family practices, such as *bersalaman* (greeting elders by kissing their hands), *makan besar* (reunion dinner on Chinese New Year), *tang yuan* preparation for Dong Zhi Festival, placing *daun lalang* behind ear to ward off evil spirits (in *Bidayuh* traditional belief), and including traditional wedding ceremonies passed down through generations (Abdul Pabil bin Adam et al., 2018).

The third theme, "Relationships between Self, Community and Society" in unit 6 discusses "Living in Unity Generates Well-Being," where unity is encouraged through shared festivals, like celebrating Deepavali, Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, Christmas, and Hari Gawai with neighbours of different backgrounds (Abdul Pabil bin Adam et al., 2018). The same goes to Unit 13: "Traditions in a Multicultural Society," under the fourth theme, "Morality, Rules and Laws." Here, unity is practiced through the traditions such as *Pengirih* rituals (a *Bidayuh* mutual communal support), *Bedurok* (an Iban mutual communal support), and *Sewang* (an Orang Asli traditional dance ritual). Students also participate in cultural simulations such as making *ketupat*

(traditional Hari Raya dish), *tanglung* (Chinese lantern), and *rangoli* (Indian floor art), and traditional dances like *Sewang* (Pesta Kaamatan traditional dance) (Abdul Pabil bin Adam et al., 2018).

The traditions and practices reflect religious and spiritually rooted worldviews, such as purification rituals, symbols of protection, and cultural taboos. The *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* Form 3 curriculum leans more towards cultural literacy and civic integration in most of its contents, which could also be interpreted as incorporating inter-religious elements. While the other units in the textbook convey the message of unity and social harmony through various themes, it also asserts civic freedom and democratic rights, a message of societal unity that is not directly related to the ‘inter-religious elements.’

Both Form 4 and 5 syllabi are the direct continuation of the foundational curricula introduced in the lower secondary levels. The slight difference is only related to the continuation of the key thematic areas, where the continuation starts from the fifth to the seventh theme, namely, “A Person of Morality,” “Moral Identity,” and “Morality and Nationhood.” The Form 4 syllabus introduces moral identity, focusing on personal integrity, digital ethics, family values, and civic duties. It highlights ethical decisions based on fairness, compassion, and responsibility, and presents moral challenges in everyday interactions. Unfortunately, inter-religious elements are largely absent from the syllabus, compared to the previous one, where they were found in two units, albeit indirectly. Unit 9: “Social Unity as the Foundation of National Prosperity” lightly touches on multiple examples of religious festivals that are celebrated in Malaysia and some traditional cultural sports, underscoring the concept of patriotism and civic unity portrayal. A better example in Unit 11, though considered the most plentiful inter-religious elements compared to other units, is still far from the content presented in the lower secondary syllabi. The narrative in this unit categorises the Malaysian traditional foods, customs, and languages briefly (Abdul Pabil bin Adam et al., 2019). The list could possibly help students recall what they have learned from the lower secondary levels; however, the emphasis and major focus of the Form 4 textbook are largely on shared national identity and cultural solidarity.

Meanwhile, the Form 5 *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* textbook’s core focus topics are on global societies, international cooperation, and

cultural diplomacy, aligning national moral education with global moral reasoning. Even though the textbooks of Form 1 to Form 5 shared the same objective in shaping individuals of noble character and integrity who uphold universal values grounded in moral principles, and contribute towards national unity, societal well-being, and global harmony, this syllabus marks a significant shift from a diverse religious traditions narrative to a global ethics and responsibility portrayal. Overall, the textbook consistently promotes the core universal values of societal and national unity. The Form 5 syllabus scope has expanded to the global level, instilling international and global unity in students' minds (Mohd Hilmie bin Mohd Mokhtar et al., 2020). This could be part of the government's preparatory efforts for students before entering university life and the next, more challenging phase, in line with its aspiration to achieve 21st-century learning goals.

Analysis of Inter-religious Elements in Pendidikan Islam KSSM

The syllabus of *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* objectives, as documented in the DSKP, aims to equip students with the necessary qualities to become *Khalīfah* (vicegerent) of Allah with credibility based on *al-Qur'ān* and *al-Sunnah* to contribute to the improvement of the nation and national civilisation for the well-being of this life and the Hereafter. Consequently, the Form 1 to Form 5 textbooks are targeting the same objectives that we have mentioned, and they focus on six major fields, namely, *al-Qur'ān*, *Ḥadīth* [Sayings of the Prophet], *'Aqīdah* (Islamic Creed), *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), *Sīrah dan Tamadun Islam* (Islamic History and Civilisation), and *Akhlāq Islāmiyyah* (Islamic Ethics). Each lesson is structured around the teaching and learning elements of stimulus, activities, and assessments. They are slightly different from the *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* syllabus in terms of structure or style, but still include the KBAT, EMK, universal values, and creative thinking, reflecting their role as a societal unity agent as usual.

The analysis of *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* textbooks at the secondary level is conducted in reference to the study conducted by Sulmi Badar et al. (2024). The study examines inter-religious content included in the syllabus through a qualitative approach, drawing on an examination of textbooks, curriculum standards, official government papers, and research publications. The study also involves in-depth interviews with four expert teachers and one draftsman. Their findings are based on

research data, document analysis, and interview data. The themes are (a) orientation of inter-religious elements, (b) inter-religious interaction forms, (c) information about other religions, (d) teaching and learning strategies on inter-religious elements, and (e) assessment of inter-religious elements (Sulmi Badar et al., 2024). The current study was matched with the previous study's analysis following this thematic order.

The first theme, "orientation of inter-religious elements," aims to track inter-religious aspects in the objectives of the *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* in DSKP. Here, the study's findings align with those of the previous study, as the orientation of inter-religious elements in the objectives was not specifically highlighted, resulting in a broad and unfocused approach. Hence, Sulmi's (2024) study shows that the syllabus is more focused on the six major fields in the textbooks, where inter-religious elements were only discussed indirectly when they matched the lesson topics in class. Additionally, the present analysis reveals that inter-religious interaction forms are included in the syllabus but are presented in a limited number of instances, in the most general and indirect manner.

Sulim et al. (2024) found inter-religious interaction in various lessons, such as *al-Qur'an*, *Sīrah dan Tamadun Islam*, and *Akhlāq Islāmiyyah*, from the Form 2 syllabus only. The present study, however, reveals that interreligious elements are present in all textbooks from Form 1 to Form 5, with the most extensive representation being in the Form 2 syllabus, compared to other textbooks. Though the elements exist at all levels, they are indirect and generally presented. For example, the relation of Prophet with the Arabs of *Jahiliyyah* (the pre-Islamic Era), his kindness and *Akhlāq* towards them, are found in Form 2 and 3 syllabi (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 2, 2017; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 3, 2018). They encouraged the ethics of Muslims while interacting with non-Muslims in Form 2 and 5 textbooks (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 2, 2017; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 5, 2020). The characteristics of Arabs *Jahiliyyah* were found in Form 1 textbook, while the portrayal of the treatment of the Abbasid empire towards the Persians was found in Form 4 textbook (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 1, 2016; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 4, 2020).

The information about other religions was not included in the syllabus, as claimed by Sulmi et al. (2024), as Lesson 25 of the Form 1 textbook portrays only the belief systems of the *Jahiliyyah* Arabs, before the Prophethood of the Prophet. The lesson covers *Dīn Ḥanīf* (the comprehensive revealed way of life followed by Ibrahim), the religion of idol worshippers, Zoroastrianism, animism, Judaism, and Christianity (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 1, 2016). Additionally, “teaching and learning strategies on inter-religious elements,” is included in the textbooks. For example, the Form 1 and 5 textbooks include activities that involve inter-religious elements, i.e., research activities on Judaism and Christianity tasks for the pupils, and brainstorming activities on the importance of knowing the diversity of ethnic and races (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 1, 2016; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 5, 2020). The evidence proves the contrary claim of the previous study, which they only found in the Form 2 textbook under the *‘Aqīdah* field (Sulmi Badar et al., 2024). The assessment of inter-religious elements is also limited, which contradicts the claim of the previous study. They are found in the Form 2 and 5 textbooks, where the assessments encourage students to elaborate on their role in ensuring national harmony in Malaysia (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 2, 2017; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 5, 2020).

The *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* textbooks lack inter-religious elements, focusing mainly on historical interactions between the *Jahiliyyah* (Pre-Islamic Era) Arabs and Muslims. The *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* emphasises inter-religious content and promotes moral maturity. This disparity hinders national unity aspirations and reveals the exclusive approach of *Pendidikan Islam KSSM*, leaving non-Muslim students learning about Muslims while Muslim students remain isolated. An urgent re-evaluation is needed to ensure equal exploration of Malaysia’s diverse society for both Muslim and non-Muslim students.

Conclusion

While KSSM is meant to help build the nation’s culture of togetherness, inter-religious implementation remains inconsistent in Malaysia’s education system, this study confirms. The lower secondary *Pendidikan Moral* syllabus does fairly well and covers diverse religious denominations, yet in upper secondary levels, this exposure is minimal. The *Pendidikan Islam* syllabus does not sufficiently address inter-

religiousness; instead, it focuses on historical contexts rather than Malaysia's diversity, which contradicts national goals for cohesion. To boost respect for religious diversity, the Ministry ought to increase inter-religious education in every syllabus, and more particularly with the programme *Pendidikan Islam*. This comprises the periodic revisiting of syllabi every 10-15 years and enhancing the orientation of teachers towards religious diversity. Some proposed reforms are (1) the integration of the *Hikmah* approach by means of exemplary practices of different religions, (2) the adoption of *Hikmah* Pedagogy to promote critical thinking and dialogue. Future research can examine the effectiveness of current syllabi and how *Hikmah* Pedagogy influences *Pendidikan Islam* and Moral in terms of student attitudes toward religious diversity.

Acknowledgment

This article is a part of Erasmus+ Project "Facing Global Challenges-Environmental and Peace Education in Interreligious Cooperation for Religious Teacher Education ("R4ecology")"¹ between University of Augsburg, Germany, and International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia (Nov.2023-Nov.2026).

¹ This research project is registered with Research Management Centre of IIUM: ID: **SPI24-208-0208** "Erasmus Plus Partnership: Facing Global Challenges–University Didactic Conceptualisation of Interreligious Environmental Education in Different Contexts." and ID: **SPI24-209-0209** "Facing Global Challenges- Environmental and Peace Education in Interreligious Cooperation for Religious Teacher Training (R4ecology)."

References

- “Federal Constitution of Malaysia.” Laws of Malaysia, 2009. <https://www.federalgazette.agc.gov.my/>. (Retrieved on May 2025)
- Abdul Pabil bin Adam, Barathi a/p Santhasaran, and Vijayaletmy a/p Muniyandy. Pendidikan Moral Tingkatan 4. 1st ed. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) 0095. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2019. <https://dbp.gov.my/>.
- Abdul Pabil bin Adam, Uthayakumaran a/l Karuppiyah, and Vishalache a/p Balakrishnan. Pendidikan Moral Tingkatan 3. 1st ed. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) 0070. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2018. <https://dbp.gov.my/>.
- Aiyetoro, Abdulkareem Idris, Aliamat Omar Ali, and Nur-Ashikin Petra. “A Review of the Impact and Challenges of Hikmah Pedagogy in Teaching and Learning Environment.” *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengkajian Ilmu Pendidikan: E-Saintika* 8 (March 2024): 122–37. <https://doi.org/10.36312/esaintika.v8i1.1657>.
- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. (1989). *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Maryland: Amana Corporation.
- Bakar, Osman. “Interfaith Dialogue as a New Approach in Islamic Education.” *Viewpoints. ICR Journal* 1, no. 4 (2010): 700–704. <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v1i4.711>.
- Cassidy, Claire. “Uncertainty and Community of Philosophical Inquiry: From Thinking Locally to Acting Globally.” *Revista de Filosofia Aurora* 37 (March 2025). <https://doi.org/10.1590/2965-1557.037.e202532151>.
- Danner, Sonja, and Halid Akpinar. “‘I Learnt Much About...’ the Impact of Cooperative Interreligious Education.” *Religions* 15, no. 11 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111339>.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. Demographic Statistics, First Quarter 2025. Statistic Report. Ministry of Economy Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2025. https://www.dosm.gov.my/site/downloadrelease?id=demographic-statistics-first-quarter-2025&lang=English&admin_view=.
- Engelbreton, Kath, Marian De Souza, Gloria Durka, and Liam Gearon. *International Handbook of Inter-Religious Education*. International Handbooks of Religion and Education 4. Springer Netherlands, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2>.
- Erricker, C. (2010). Is Difference Good for Us? A Report on the Hampshire and Its Neighbour’s Social Cohesion Project, UK. In: Engelbreton, K., de Souza, M., Durka, G., Gearon, L. (eds) *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education*. *International Handbooks of Religion and Education*,

- Vol 4. Springer, Dordrecht. pp. 479-496. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_30
- Farisia, Hernik. "Nurturing Religious and Moral Values at Early Childhood Education." *Didaktika Religia* 8 (June 2020): 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.30762/didaktika.v8i1.1881>.
- Filus, D.M. (2010). Interreligious Education and Dialogue in Japan. In: Engebretson, K., de Souza, M., Durka, G., Gearon, L. (eds) *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education*, Vol 4. Springer, Dordrecht. pp. 779-804. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_48
- Fisher, R. *Teaching Thinking: Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013. <https://books.google.com.my/books?id=te56AAAAQBAJ>.
- Goldburg, Peta. *Developing Pedagogies for Inter-Religious Teaching and Learning*. 2010. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_21.
- Hashim, Rosnani, and Hendon Alias. "Developing High-Order Thinking in Primary School Students through Qur'anic Stories and the Hikmah Pedagogy of Philosophical Inquiry." *IJUM Journal of Educational Studies* 8 (October 2020): 89–111. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijes.v8i1.315>.
- Hashim, Rosnani, Suhailah Hussien, and Adesile Imran. "Hikmah (Wisdom) Pedagogy and Students' Thinking and Reasoning Abilities." *Intellectual Discourse* 22 (December 2014): 119–38.
- Hull, John. "The Contribution of Religious Education to Religious Freedom: A Global Perspective." In *Religious Education in Schools: School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination*. International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), 2002. <https://iarf.net/resources/publications/Religious%20Education%20in%20Schools.pdf>.
- Hussien, S., Hashim, R., Mokhtar, N.A.M. (2017). Hikmah Pedagogy: Promoting Open Mindedness, Tolerance and Respect for Others' Religious Views in Classrooms. In: *Interfaith Education for All* (pp. 97-106). Sense Publishers, Rotterdam. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6351-170-4_8
- Hussien, Suhailah, Mohd. Kaziman Abd. Wahab, and Rosnani Hashim. "Improving Students' Inquiry Skills in Islamic Education through Hikmah Pedagogy and Community of Inquiry." *Articles. Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction* 18, no. 2 (2021): 189–214. <https://doi.org/10.32890/mjli2021.18.2.7>.
- Jarawi, Nur Syahirah, and Hafizhah Zulkifli. "Pedagogi Hikmah Dan Kemahiran Berfikir Aras Tinggi (KBAT) Dalam Pendidikan Islam: Hikmah Pedagogy and Higher Order Thinking Skills in Islamic Education." *Articles*.

- ATTARBAWIY: Malaysian Online Journal of Education 4, no. 2 (2020): 90–102. <https://doi.org/10.53840/attarbawiy.v4i2.45>.
- Juperi, J.A. “Philosophical Inquiry in Islamic Education and Its Effect to the Questioning Skills of Secondary School Students.” Master’s Project Paper, International Islamic University Malaysia, 2011. Unpublished Master’s Project Paper.
- Kamarudin, Jamilah. “Taman Medan Church Protesters Acted Unlawfully, Says Jakim.” Malaysian Bar Badan Peguam Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), April 24, 2015. <https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/article/news/legal-and-general-news/legal-news/taman-medan-church-protesters-acted-unlawfully-says-jakim>.
- Lipman, M. Thinking in Education. Thinking in Education. Cambridge University Press, 2003. <https://books.google.com.my/books?id=yBJfLaiztU4C>.
- Lipman, Matthew, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick S. Oscanyan. Philosophy in the Classroom. S.n.], 1977.
- Maxwell, N. Is Science Neurotic? Imperial College Press: Distributed by World Scientific Pub, 2004. <https://books.google.com.my/books?id=tTelOhFriwMC>.
- Millett, Stephan, and Alan Tapper. “Benefits of Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry in Schools.” Educational Philosophy and Theory 44 (July 2012). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00727.x>.
- Mohd Hilmie bin Mohd Mokhtar, Barathi a/p Santhasaran, and Anuratha Bai a/p Subramaniam. Pendidikan Moral Tingkatan 5. 1st ed. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) 0088. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2020.
- Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, Khadijah, Suraya Sintang, Azarudin Awang, et al. “Al-Wasatiyyah in the Practice of Religious Tolerance among the Families of New Muslims in Sustaining a Well-Being Society.” Humanomics 33 (May 2017): 211-220. <https://doi.org/10.1108/H-02-2017-0025>.
- Mohd Khambali, Khadijah, Mohd Zaidi Daud, and Andi Thahir. “Interreligious Education as an Approach to End Racism and Discrimination.” KnE Social Sciences, ahead of print, September 26, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v8i16.14035>.
- Ng, P.T.M. (2010). Envisioning the Possibilities for Inter-religious Dialogue in Christian Colleges in Asia: The Case of Chung Chi College in Hong Kong. In: Engebretson, K., de Souza, M., Durka, G., Gearon, L. (eds) International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. *International Handbooks of Religion and Education*, Vol 4. Springer, Dordrecht. pp. 403-413. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_25

- Nur Munirah Teoh binti Abdullah, Chua Chu Tee, and Abdul Pabil bin Adam. Pendidikan Moral Tingkatan 1. 1st ed. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) 0061. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2016. <https://dbp.gov.my/>.
- Nur Munirah Teoh binti Abdullah, Mohd Hilmie bin Mohd Mokhtar, and Vijayaletmy a/p Muniyandy. Pendidikan Moral Tingkatan 2. 1st ed. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) 0059. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2017. <https://dbp.gov.my/>.
- Önal, Mehmet. (2010). *Wisdom (Hikmah) as a Holistic Basis for Inter-Religious Education*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_14.
- Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia 2013-2025: Pendidikan prasekolah hingga lepas menengah. Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013.
- Pendidikan Islam Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran Tingkatan 4 dan 5. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah. Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2018.
- Pendidikan Islam. Tingkatan 1: Buku teks. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah, KSSM. With Malaysia. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2016.
- Pendidikan Islam. Tingkatan 2: Buku teks. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah, KSSM. With Malaysia. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2017.
- Pendidikan Islam. Tingkatan 3: Buku teks. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah, KSSM. With Malaysia. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2018.
- Pendidikan Islam. Tingkatan 4: Buku teks. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah, KSSM. With Malaysia. Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2020.
- Pendidikan Islam. Tingkatan 5: Buku teks. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah, KSSM. With Malaysia. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2020.
- Pendidikan Moral Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Dan Pentaksiran Tingkatan 1. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah. Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2016.
- Pendidikan Moral Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Dan Pentaksiran Tingkatan 2. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah. Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2016.
- Pendidikan Moral Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Dan Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah. Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2017.
- Pendidikan Moral Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Dan Pentaksiran Tingkatan 4 Dan 5. Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah. Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2018.

- Razak-Report 1956. *Report of Education Committee 1956*. Kuala Lumpur: Printed at the Government Press by B.T.Fudge, Acting Government Printer 1956. <https://www.fcsm.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Razak-Report-1956.pdf>
- Rothgangel, Martin. (2016). Interreligious Education in the Context of Social Psychology Research on Attitudes and Prejudice. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, No. 4. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3297>.
- Shehu, Fatmir. (2014). Inter-Religious Dialogue and Contemporary Peace-Building: From Hostility to Mutual Respect and Better Understanding.” *Beder Journal of Humanities* Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 59-76.
- Simpson, J.A., E.S.C. Weiner, and Oxford University Press (eds). (1989). *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. Vol. 20.
- Sulaiman Girivirya. (2023). The Model of Inter-Religious Education in the Perspective of Moderation of Religion: A Case Study at the University of Defense. *International Journal of Science and Society* 5, No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.54783/ijssoc.v5i2.666>.
- Sulmi Badar, Asyraf Isyraqi Bin Jamil, and Khadijah Mohd Khambali@Hambali. (2024). Inter-Religious Elements in Pendidikan Islam KSSM for the Future of Islamic Religious Education in Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education* 39, No. 2, pp. 137-162. <https://doi.org/10.21315/apjee2024.39.2.8>.
- Wanden, K., Smith, L. (2010). Finding a Way Forward: Interreligious Education and Religious Education in Aotearoa New Zealand. In: Engebretson, K., de Souza, M., Durka, G., Gearon, L. (eds) *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education*, Vol 4. Springer, Dordrecht. pp. 457-478. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_29
- Zulkifli, Hafizhah, and Rosnani Hashim. (2019). The Development of Questioning Skills Through Hikmah (Wisdom) Pedagogy. *Creative Education*, 10, No. 12, pp. 2593–605. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1012187>.
- Zulkifli, Hafizhah, Mahfuzah Mohammed Zabidi, and Nur Lailatul Syahira Raduan. The Need for the Development of Hikmah Pedagogy Module to Preschool Students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 12, no. 6 (2022), pp. 1142-1151. <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v12-i6/14069>

The Spiritual Quest in Contemporary Muslim Speculative Writing: A Reading of *Bird Summons* (2023) by Leila Aboulela

Wan Nur Madiha binti Ramlan*
Raihan binti Rosman**

Abstract

This paper presents an examination of Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons* (2019) as a site where speculative writing and Islamic spirituality intersect. By employing Islamicisation of Knowledge as a framework, this paper analyses how Aboulela utilises motifs of pilgrimage, metamorphosis and the unseen to foreground the spiritual struggles of diasporic Muslim women living in the United Kingdom. The novel's magical realist elements are reoriented within an Islamic paradigm that emphasises *jihād al-nafs* (struggle of the self), *ṣabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (trust in God), and *tazkiyyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul). Through the journey of the three principal characters, *Bird Summons* dramatises the confrontation with inner deficiencies and the pursuit of spiritual rejuvenation by situating these processes within broader conversations about identity, migration, and modernity. In doing so, this study contends that Aboulela's work provides a counter-narrative to Western literary frameworks that often marginalise or misrepresent Islam, thereby contributing to an emerging corpus of Speculative writing, particularly by women writers, that both challenge and redefine boundaries of the genre.

*Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English Language and Literature, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: madyramlan@iium.edu.my. *Corresponding author.*

**Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: raihanrosman@iium.edu.my.

Keywords: Islamicisation of Knowledge, Muslim writing, Speculative Fiction, Islamic Literature, Spirituality

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis *Bird Summons* (2019) karya Leila Aboulela sebagai ruang pertemuan antara penulisan spekulatif dan kerohanian Islam. Berasaskan kerangka Islamisasi Ilmu, analisis ini meneliti penggunaan motif ziarah, metamorfosis, dan alam ghaib dalam mengenengahkan perjuangan kerohanian wanita diaspora Islam di United Kingdom. Unsur realisme magis dalam novel ini ditafsir semula menggunakan paradigma Islam yang memberi penekanan terhadap *jihād al-nafs* (perjuangan melawan nafsu dalam diri), *ṣabr* (kesabaran), dan *tazkiyyah al-nafs* (penyucian jiwa). Melalui perjalanan tiga watak utama, *Bird Summons* memperlihatkan pertembungan kelemahan dalaman serta usaha mencapai pembaharuan rohani dalam konteks wacana identiti, migrasi, dan kemodenan. Artikel ini mengemukakan hujah bahawa karya Leila Aboulela menawarkan naratif balas terhadap kerangka sastra Barat yang sering meminggirkan atau menyalahgambarkan Islam. Ini sekaligus menyumbang kepada perkembangan penulisan spekulatif khususnya oleh penulis wanita Islam yang mencabar dan mentakrik semula batasan genre tersebut.

Kata Kunci: Islamisasi Ilmu, penulisan Islam, fiksiyen spekulatif, sastra Islam, kerohanian

Introduction

A principal concern in Islamic thought is the spiritual journey of the self as it is a fundamental and essential component of a Muslim's life. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1987) explains that in Islam, the Spirit permeates everything, revealing to us the Unity of Allah (p. xv). Seyyed Hossein further argues that this awareness of the Principle of Unity (*al-Tawḥīd*) is inseparable from the core of Islamic spirituality. Al-Ghazali, who is one of the most prominent Muslim theologians and philosophers, asserts that spirituality is an important means to achieve happiness in life. The heart, al-Ghazali argues, is much like a mirror that needs to be polished to reflect God's Light, which is the ultimate source of happiness for a Muslim. Seyyed Hossein and al-Ghazali both underscore the importance of spirituality as a transformative process by which a Muslim actualises their faith and lives a life aligned to *al-Tawḥīd*. Whilst the Qur'ān is the source of guidance for Islamic spirituality, over the course of

history, Muslims have and continue to explore the human experience of attaining this state of being. Their effort in discovering the complexities and human experience concerning the spiritual journey is articulated in many types of cultural artefacts and other means of human expression, including literature. The twenty-first century presents a wide range of challenges to the spiritual life of Muslims, which largely stem from the rapid pace of globalisation, newer technology, and shifts in global culture. With these also come the rise of consumerist and materialist behaviour, where there is a relentless pursuit of material possession and consumer culture, which erodes the focus on God. Literature, being one of the principal means of human expression, has become a space for problematising the challenges and dichotomies of this modernity, whilst at the same time offering new narratives that discuss Islamic concepts.

Speculative writing, which includes subgenres such as fantasy, sci-fi, and magical realism, is a unique medium for portraying this journey of spiritual growth and attainment in Islam and the challenges that come with it. Indeed, in the past decade, there has been a notable rise in Muslim writers, particularly women, who explore themes of faith and identity through speculative writing. Whilst often dismissed as mere escapism or frivolous, this article contends that the novel *Bird Summons* (2019) by Leila Aboulela serves as examples of Islamicisation of Knowledge in contemporary literature. Through the use of speculative fiction, Aboulela foregrounds the spiritual journey and the process of self-purification. In doing so, she presents important counter-narratives that subvert reductive and monolithic portrayals of Muslims in popular media. At the same time, Aboulela helps synthesise an Islamic spiritual worldview with contemporary literary forms.

These acts of countering and reclaiming have their roots in a broader intellectual movement in the Muslim World. For a large amount of time, the dominant narratives in human knowledge, including literature, have been shaped by Western perspectives. In the last few decades, however, there has been a concerted effort by a group of Muslim scholars to re-orientate and re-centre disciplines of human knowledge through the lens of the Islamic worldview. This includes knowledge produced by Muslims as well. Much like the decolonisation movement, this process, termed by Mohd. Kamal Hassan as 'Islamicisation of Human Knowledge,' seeks to interrogate human knowledge systems, including those produced by Muslims, and integrate Islamic principles into these systems.

A Brief History of the Speculative and Muslim Writing

Speculative fiction, whether it is sci-fi, fantasy, or dystopia, is often situated between human imagination and reflection. By crafting narratives about possible futures and conscious deviations from reality, speculative writers create the often fantastical to highlight circumstances of the present. What this means is that speculative writing is not necessarily predicting the future, showing readers and audiences speculative futures and realities that are often strange and otherworldly; speculative works are rooted in current issues and problems. Having said all this, speculative writing is difficult to define. Robert A. Heinlein, who is an American science fiction author is often credited with the term. In his essay “On the Writing of Speculative Fiction” (1947), Heinlein discussed ‘speculative science fiction story’ as a means to create “new framework for human action” (pp. 16 -17). Heinlein is specifically referring to science fiction, but since his time, the boundaries of speculative fiction have changed significantly. Margaret Atwood describes speculative fiction as a subgenre in which the possibilities within our world are narrated within the framework of “what if?” whilst Ursula K. Le Guin refers to it as an umbrella term that encompasses many other genres, such as fantasy, science fiction, and even space opera. Marek Oziewicz (2017) argues that the focus perhaps should not be on trying to define speculative fiction. Rather, Oziewicz proposes that speculative fiction should be theorised instead as a term whose semantic register has continued to grow.

Speculative fiction’s growing popularity is a testament to its enduring quality and its commentary on the various anxieties across time. Yet, its fantastical character has often been at the root of dismissive criticism, with many simply describing it as a means of escapism. The importance of speculative writing within human material culture and reflection is aptly described by whom many consider one of the best speculative writers of all-time, Le Guin. In her work *No Time to Spare: Thinking about What Matters* (2017), Le Guin challenges the negative connotation associated with escapism: “What does *escape* mean? Escape from real life, responsibility, order, duty, piety, is what the charge implies. But nobody, except the most criminally irresponsible or pitifully incompetent, escapes jail. The direction of escape is toward freedom. So, what is “escapism” an accusation of? (Le Guin 65).

Despite these accusations, speculative writing is a genre that has a long tradition of providing readers with various social, cultural, and political commentary. Books such as *1984* (1953) by George Orwell, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) by Ray Bradbury and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood, for example, provide caution concerning the dangers of Totalitarianism and the loss of individualism, while *The Lord of the Rings* (1951-1954) by J.R.R. Tolkien, *Dune* (1965) by Frank Herbert and *The Foundation Series* (1951-1953) by Isaac Asimov present questions concerning knowledge, civilisation, and the corrupting influence of power. All these texts present us with various "what if?" scenarios as a means of reflection and the drive towards action.

Despite its significance and popularity, it has only begun to be appreciated as an area in need of scholarly attention within the last three decades. Many scholars studying speculative writing focus on a wide range of topics, such as black and intersectional speculative writing and writing from the Global South. Even though there is some scholarship on Islam and speculative fiction, it is rather limited. Seeing that this is the case, this project aims to be a substantial contribution to knowledge by finding relations between speculative fiction and Islam, and how Islam and Muslim cultures are capable of exploring issues and challenges faced by minority groups who are situated in various geographical settings. This potentially contributes to the development of Critical Muslim Literary Studies as mentioned in Peter Morey's *Islamophobia and the Novel* (2018), Geoffrey Nash's *Writing Muslim Identity* (2012) and Amin Malak's *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (2005).

Globally, more writers are producing works that are speculative in character. None more so than Muslim writers. Currently, there is a growing, vibrant wave of Muslim writers producing works of speculative writing, especially among women authors such as Leila Aboulela and G. Willow Wilson. Noor Hashem (2021), who has written extensively on Muslim American writing, states that a number of these Muslim women writers focus on speculative writing, especially for young adults, and frame their work within feminism and Islamic theology (p. 168). Noor Hashem also explains that the works of these writers also include discussion about representation especially concerning Muslim women, often in a setting where the worldbuilding includes elements that reference Muslim history and culture.

Notwithstanding these developments in Speculative writing, Arab and Muslim presence in this genre is not new, particularly in fantasy. This perception that speculative writing is a Western invention is driven by the genre often being viewed through a Western lens. *One Thousand and One Nights* (or *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* in the Arabic), which is the subject of much scrutiny concerning European innovation to the collection, is a collection of tales and fables that were collected over a large period of time across West Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, and North Africa, and compiled and translated into Arabic during the 8th century. In the 9th century, al-Farabi, a famed Islamic philosopher, wrote a treatise about a utopian city led by a philosopher-king in *The Virtuous City*.

A key dimension of this history is how speculative writing has been used by Muslim writers as a tool of resistance. Whilst earlier works tend to focus on philosophical aspects, Muslim speculative writing evolved and changed in response to Western colonialism. In the early 20th century, Muslim writers began exploring the speculative as a counter-narrative and resistance. In a world besieged by colonialism, Muslim writers began using speculative writing as a means to resist colonialism and other means of social and cultural oppression. In the early 20th century, as a response to misogyny and sexism in her society, Bengali writer Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain envisions a utopia where women hold the seat of power in *Sultana's Dream* (1905). In Nigeria, Muhamaddu Bello Kagara presented an alternative universe where Nigerian resistance against British colonialism is aided by fantastical and mythical creatures in *Gandoki* (1934). Despite this long folk and literary tradition, speculative writing, especially science fiction, had historically either neglected portrayals of Islam and Muslim characters or portrayed Muslim/Arab-inspired characters and cultures in a negative light, oscillating between being invisible and their depictions coloured by Orientalist stereotypes and tropes. This adds to the problematic framing of Islam and Muslims in the Western imaginary, often highlighting age-old Western anxieties concerning Islam and the often-touted Muslim-West irrevocable dichotomy. These depictions, which persist in literature and other forms of cultural production, point to what Sophia Rose Arjana (2015) calls the creation and sustenance of the 'Muslim Monster' in Western imagination.

Today, there seems to be a notable shift in how the genre is perceived and produced within a broader corpus of Muslim writing. A growing number of Muslim writers are using speculative writing as a means to explore, discover, interrogate, challenge, and reimagine understandings concerning Islamic culture, identity, and what it means to be Muslim in the twenty-first century. They also use speculative writing as a means to critique social, cultural, and political issues. At the same time, these writers add to the growing number of Muslim writings globally that provide an opportunity for readers to reassess their assumptions about Islam and Muslims. Writers such as Leila Aboulela, G. Willow Wilson, S.A. Chakraborty, Ahmed Sadaawi, Khadija Abdalla Bajaber, and Sabaa Tahir, many of them women, make up a new generation of Muslim writers reimagining our world and creating new ones through their writing. More importantly, they are redrawing the boundary of speculative writing, one that confronts and challenges assumptions about Islam, Muslims, and their cultures.

The last several decades have also recorded increased Global South scholarship concerning areas of the speculative. Key theorist on global imaginaries of the future Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay advocates for the reframing of science fiction and futurism outside the Euro-American framework that has since become the “default” lens in which speculative writing is perceived. In his work “Speculative Futures of Global South Infrastructures” (2022), Chattopadhyay argues that science fiction should be differentiated as a genre from what he calls ‘Future Fiction.’ Future Fiction differs from Science Fiction due to its approach of giving priority to socially, politically, and planetarily rooted futures. Unlike Future Fiction, Science Fiction often places emphasis on portrayals of purely technological and scientific imaginary futures. Furthermore, Chattopadhyay also frames the Global South not as a geopolitical space. Rather, he argues that it is a dual condition of disadvantage in terms of infrastructure and systemic marginalisation. Chattopadhyay’s framework supports the various themes that appear in many Middle Eastern and/or Muslim speculative writing by validating Global South epistemologies and by situating these literary traditions within Global South discourses of imagination and resistance.

Syed Mustafa Ali’s “Muslim, Not Supermuslim: A Critique of Islamicate Transhumanism” criticises Roy Jackson’s *Muslim and*

Supermuslim: The Quest for the Perfect Being and Beyond (2020). Jackson's work proposes a progressive transformation of a Muslim into a Supermuslim through Islamicate philosophical and theological approaches. Ali, on the other hand, argues that Jackson's approach is a product of white supremacy by framing attention to the assimilation processes of Islamicate Transhumanism. Ali defines 'transhumanism' and 'transhumanists' in terms of their "demographic constitution and where they tend to be located within the modern and colonial world system" (p.1). This paper is important in the areas of Muslim Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction as it successfully connects transhumanism and the Islamicate realm through Sufism. It invites readers to explore transhumanism in works by Rumi, Muhammad Iqbal, Ibn Tufayl, and Ibn Rushd. The only limitation in Jackson's work, as well as Ali's main critique, is that there is no attempt to view science or transhumanism using an Islamic epistemological lens.

A more recent publication by Anis Afifi Norbasudi and Raihan Rosman in their work "Palestinian Speculative Fiction: Reimagining Home in Virtual Palestine" (2025) explores an urgent situation that has been happening in Palestine over seven decades, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Selected short stories in *Palestinian +100: Stories from a Century after the Nakba* (2019) utilise the speculative genre in demonstrating the complexities of nostalgia and trauma under colonial anxieties. This work illustrates how speculative fiction can be empowering and a transformative form of storytelling, especially during difficult times.

Nazry Bahrawi's work on Islamic Utopianism is also of note. In "Islamic Utopianism" (2017), Bahrawi argues that the contemporary dismissal of utopia as a concept that is naive masks its role in Medieval European and early Islamicate thought as a serious practice toward human development. Referencing Karl Mannheim's work, Bahrawi frames utopia not only as an idealised place, but also a form of psyche or mode of thinking which contests dominant and hegemonic realities. He states that Islamic Utopianism has three main strains, which are mystical, eschatological, and reformist. Importantly, Bahrawi's work positions Islamic Utopianism within the landscape of speculative imaginaries where it functions more as a driver of hope whether it is through mystical perfectibility, eschatological perceptions, or reformist visions.

Islamisation of Human Knowledge and Speculative Writing

In a seminar in 2021 on “Islam and English Studies” hosted by the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), the late Mohd. Kamal Hassan underscored the function of Islamicisation of Human Knowledge (IOHK, which evolved from Islamisation of Knowledge). First advocated by Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas in 1978, IOHK aims at reorienting and reassessing human knowledge within the Islamic framework because it has the potential to be erroneous and/or contradictory to Islamic principles. Hence, IOK is a process that not only necessitates the conformity and harmonisation of human knowledge systems to Islamic thought but also validates knowledge systems that are compatible with Islam.

This project will be approached through the ways in which religion, here Islam, and popular culture are explored and interconnected with one another, and how all these points contribute to how the spiritual quest is situated within the texts. Thus, the approach that this project will adhere to is a faith-based perspective; one that encompasses Islam and its entirety. What this means is that, in order to present a reading of Islam in these speculative texts, we will scrutinise literature through the lens of Qur'an and Ḥadīth literatures, *sīrah*, Islamic jurisprudence, as well as Muslim cultures. By approaching literature through the lens of Islam, it signifies that Islamisation and integration of multidisciplinary areas of research are possible. This approach is in line with IIUM's mission to integrate instead of separating secular knowledge and Islamic revealed knowledge, following the concept of Islamisation of Knowledge expounded by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, Ismail al-Faruqi, and Mohd. Kamal Hassan. It is important to highlight al-Attas' concern about colonial ideologies and practices because the use of these, particularly the ones that are contrary to Islamic belief and culture, diverts the knowledge seeker from the truth. Al-Faruqi calls upon Muslims to integrate

Islamic and secular education systems, which will necessitate the deconstruction of all knowledge disciplines, including the natural sciences and humanities, and reconstitute them with Islam as the bedrock. This process of Islamisation enables these disciplines to prioritise Islamic principles in their creation and interpretation of knowledge. This need for integration of these two knowledge systems

is echoed by Mohd. Kamal Hassan (2013), who called for an urgent need to give more attention to “Qur’anic paradigms of true human development and of integrated knowledge” (p. 20). This is necessary to the transformation of what al-Faruqi terms as “malaise of the ummah.” With all of these considered, these three perspectives of Islamisation make up the trifecta for the theoretical underpinning of this project.

Nonetheless, faith and religion have had an arguably turbulent position in speculative writing subgenres such as science fiction. Farah Mendlesohn (2003) argues that religion is often depicted as an obstacle to true enlightenment and reason, dangerous and misleading (p. 269).

Studies on Faith in Speculative Writing: A Brief Overview

There is a preoccupation surrounding faith in speculative fiction, particularly science fiction novels and films. Academic discussion surrounding faith and religion in various speculative texts is equally prosperous, but a focus on how Islam in speculative fiction is lacking in two ways: firstly, in the dearth of what is available, and secondly, in the diversity of the discussions. Whilst there are some scholarly attentions given, they can be categorised only within two main trends; the first being how Islam and Muslims are represented in speculative writing by largely non-Muslim authors, and how Islam is drawn upon and used in their works. The second revolves around Muslim contributions to speculative writing where writers either present a sense of Muslimness or use their writing as a means to challenge dangerous myths and stereotypes concerning Islam and Muslim. One of the foci of scholarly work on Islam and speculative fiction pays attention to premising and interrogating the nature of speculative writing about Islam and Muslims. In her work, “Fictional Islam: A Literary Review and Comparative Essay on Islam in Science Fiction and Fantasy” (2010), Rebecca Hankins coins the term fictional Islam as “to define the various forms of speculative fiction by Muslim and non-Muslim writers who have used Islam and Muslims as characters, plots and colourful backgrounds” (p. 73).

Hankins suggests that not only Muslim authors either intentionally or unintentionally include Islam and Muslim cultures in their speculative writings but non-Muslims as well. Some examples of the popular ones would be *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and *Dune*. This shows how non-Muslim writers and producers have successfully popularised Muslim cultures

and contexts; however, we are left with a greater task as Muslim scholars: to explore works by Muslim authors and issues surrounding Islam. Hankins also reminds us that “one of the greatest examples of paranormal time travel is the account of the Prophet’s ascension from Jerusalem to Paradise while sitting in the Great Mosque in Jerusalem; for Muslims, these ideas were neither strange nor foreign” (p. 74). This is undoubtedly one of the most important stories in the *sīrah* of Prophet Muhammad, as this is the historic scenario where the ruling about *ṣalāh*, the five prayers, was instructed upon all human beings. Yet, interestingly, this particular *sīrah* takes the form of a subgenre in speculative writing, which is time traveling, or in some cases, a slipstream. Hankins also views that Muslim writers of science fiction and fantasy are not entirely different from non-Muslim writers when constructing stories. We are more well versed about Marvel and DC characters such as Iron Man, Captain America, Batman, and Spiderman, which has led us to forget or put aside stories that are Muslim and Islamic-centred like the *Arabian Nights* and *A Thousand and One Nights*. These stories also incorporate speculative themes of futurism, magic realism, space travel, and other subgenres, and at the same time include faith as an integral theme and message of their stories.

Other scholarly works on speculative fiction and Islam focus on feminist and gender perspectives. Noor Hashem’s article entitled “Muslim American Speculative Fiction: Figuring Feminist Epistemologies, Religious Histories, and Genre Traditions” (2021) examines the agentive role of Muslim heroines in the works of women Muslim writers such as G. Willow Wilson and how writers demonstrate feminist epistemologies in their work. Hashem argues that the increasing number of Muslim American women writers has a challenge ahead of them as they must navigate various politics of representation and anti-Muslim rhetoric that exist in America (p. 169). In doing so, Hashem raises important considerations such as how these works, which are inspired by Muslim histories and cultures, engage with representational politics that tend to typify Islam and stereotype Muslims, with Muslim women getting the brunt of such treatment. Much like Hashem, Noureddine Bendouma’s dissertation on Arab Muslim women in speculative fiction examines various iterations of feminism, particularly secular and Islamic feminisms, that shape how Arab Muslim women are represented. Referencing Abdel Aziz’s *The Queue* (2013), Mauren F.

McHugh's *Nekropolis* (2001), and G. Willow Wilson's *Alif the Unseen* (2012), Bendouma highlights how representations of Islam and Arab Muslim women have been at the mercy of androcentric readings that perpetuate the idea that Islam is backward and misogynist. Bendouma also states that whilst Abdel Aziz's texts critique the patriarchal structures that trap and marginalise women, he also points out that works such as McHugh's place the blame for the oppression of women on Islam (Bendouma, p. 206).

Most, if not all, of the scholarly literature surveyed points to a critique and challenge to master narratives concerning Islam and Muslims that can be seen in texts written by Muslim and non-Muslim authors. Despite taking into account various approaches, perspectives and premises including feminism and history, these papers have not integrated Qur'anic and Ḥadīth literatures, *sīrah* and Islamic jurisprudence as a fluid framework from which the literary texts could be interpreted. Hence, this project endeavours to explore how these bodies of Islamic knowledge could be used to study speculative writing by Muslims to unpack the various ways Muslim authors represent their faith.

Sacred Landscapes and Fragmented Lives: The Study of the Spiritual Metamorphosis in *Bird Summons*

Bird Summons is an interesting example of a growing corpus of speculative fiction in English that is written by Muslim authors due to the diversity of the genre, and it is considered a work of speculative writing, particularly magic realism, largely due to its inclusion of myths, fantastical, and supernatural elements, which appear in an otherwise normal setting. The novel is perhaps Aboulela's first foray into speculative writing and is a departure from her body of work, as her body of work suggests an inclination towards literary and historical fiction.

The novel concerns Salma, Moni, and Iman – three Muslim women who are making their way on a pilgrimage to the Scottish Highlands to visit Lady Evelyn Cobbold's grave (also known by her Muslim name as Zainab Cobbold), a White Scottish woman who had embraced Islam in 1915. Salma, Moni, and Iman's pilgrimage to Lady Cobbold's grave reflects a growing real-life trend of British Muslims all over the British Isles making that trip to the Scottish Highlands (Cox, 2022). For these

women, who are migrants to the UK, see Lady Cobbold as a source of inspiration because she was the first white British woman to perform the Ḥajj in Makkah. They also found that her reconciliation between her Scottish aristocratic background and her identity as a Muslim woman is motivating, especially when these women are forced to navigate their religious and cultural identities in the UK. Lady Cobbold being Muslim is an anchor that Salma, Moni, and Iman need.

The pilgrimage to Lady Cobbold's grave presents a spiritual quest where each woman is forced to confront their fears, desires, and shortcomings as a way they metamorphosise spiritually. Pilgrimage holds important historical, cultural, and spiritual importance in both Islamic and British cultures. From an Islamic perspective, pilgrimage is not merely a ritual or custom but is an important pillar of Islam. As the fifth pillar of Islam, it holds a chief position in the life of Muslims and global Islamic history and is a mandatory religious duty to be completed at least once for every able-bodied and financially able Muslim. Another form of pilgrimage is called the *'Umrah*, which is non-obligatory. The third type of pilgrimage familiar to Muslims is called *Ziyārah*, which means a visit to often important and pious figures in Islamic history, as a way Muslims are reminded of their faith and the Hereafter (Muslim, Ḥadīth 977). Similarly, pilgrimage holds a significant place in British history as it was a dominant feature of Christian life. During the Medieval period, for example, pilgrimages to key Christian sites in Britain were perceived as an important way a Christian could express their sense of piety (Sorabella, 2011). Chief among these key sites is the Shrine of Sir Thomas Becket, where pilgrimages to this shrine were made famous by Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1476).

One of the major aspects of the novel lies in its representation of the pilgrimage as a framework for a spiritual quest for the three main characters in the novel. Salma, Moni, and Iman are all beleaguered by crises that are rooted in their difficulties with their religious, cultural, and gender identities, forcing them to interrogate and confront their greatest desires and fears. Thus, Aboulela recentres the idea of pilgrimage beyond the literary motif or as a parallel to Christian understanding of pilgrimage by problematising what entails within the Islamic understanding of pilgrimage: *jihād al-naḥs* and *tazkiyyah al-naḥs* which is the struggle and purification of the soul, *ṣabr* or patience, and *tawakkul* which concerns placing one's trust in God. All three

women are confronted with different trials that force them to experience these various processes, underscoring the idea that from an Islamic perspective, pilgrimage goes beyond the physical journey and becomes a transformative inner journey to purify the soul.

The pilgrimage to Lady Cobbold's grave in Inverness can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it can be viewed as *hijrah*, whereby it is a migration for spiritual renewal. Secondly, it is viewed as a form of *jihād al-nafs* or struggle against the self.

This transformative inner journey is articulated in different phases in the novel. The first of these is the acceptance of the journey as a form of *hijrah* or migration. At the beginning of the novel, readers are told that Salma had arranged for members of the Arabic Speaking Muslim Women's Group to visit Lady Cobbold's grave as a way to "honour Lady Evelyn Cobbold...to educate themselves about the history of Islam in Britain, to integrate better by following the example of those who were of this soul and of their faith, those for whom this island was an inherited rather than adopted home" (p. 1).

Spiritual Restlessness

At an initial glance, Salma, Moni, and Iman are seen as archetypal figures representing different struggles in the lives of diasporic Muslim women of colour in the UK. However, Aboulela challenges these surface identities by placing each woman within a pilgrimage narrative that ultimately exposes each character's spiritual deficiencies and their transformation as a result.

Salma is initially presented to the reader as the character who is the most financially and emotionally secure. She works as a successful physiotherapist, has a loving husband, and healthy children. Despite all of these, Salma is challenged by moments of spiritual weakness and discontent. Her dangerous and provocative game of encouraging Iman and Moni to confess what major sins they might commit if there were no punishment or consequences (p. 26) hints at *nafs 'ammārah*, which is an inclination to sin. This game is a highly dangerous one as it makes sin trivial and entertains the possibility of sin without accountability. From an Islamic perspective, entertaining sin is not a harmless activity. Instead, it is a form of heedlessness and distances the soul from remembrance of Allah.

This is again demonstrated when Salma initiates and maintains a flirtatious online communication with her former boyfriend Amir not because of the desire to be loved, which is something she receives from her husband, but a craving for thrill and validation. Along the journey, her conversations with Amir become increasingly risky, as Amir begins to ask for details such as her whereabouts and address, and when Salma does not offer the information he wants, he threatens to find her anyway (p. 164). This slow betrayal of her relationship is manifested physically in the novel when her phone, the device that enables her liaison with Amir, begins to emit a pungent smell coming from a brand new handphone gifted to her by her husband only recently. This is made worse by visions of her past and the sacrifices she has made with her choices. This demonstrates not only Salma's ingratitude but also her inability to accept *tawakkul*, which is trust in God's judgment. She has numerous blessings in her life, but she takes all of these for granted and risks everything she has built for a fleeting feeling as she entertains "what if" scenarios about her life and her relationship with Amir. This seemed like a summon made by the Hoopoe bird in the novel, who is a reference from Farid ud-Din Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*, a mysterious bird who guides Iman specifically with stories and wisdom, much like how the Hoopoe bird guides the other birds in Attar's tale.

One of the Hoopoe's stories to Iman seems to encapsulate Salma's dilemma. At the beginning of the story, the bird explained that evil is often frozen not because people do not intend to commit it, but because there are limited means to do so (p. 170). The story about a snake catcher embodies the nature of lust and greed that lie dormant and the consequences of toying with them. The new phone becomes a means to commit the sin of betrayal, just like how the Hoopoe bird explains to Iman in his story.

Moni's life represents another type of test. Unlike Salma, Moni does not enjoy marital affection from her husband or experience domestic harmony. Additionally, Adam suffers from long-term health issues, and Moni exerts every ounce of her strength to take care of him. Her husband, who is often emotionally detached, particularly after Adam's birth, has left her to shoulder the burden of caring for Adam alone as he works in Saudi Arabia, whilst attempting to secure visas for his family. On top of this, Moni tirelessly cares for Adam, whose long-term health problems require her constant attention and energy.

Through these circumstances, Moni is not only tested through her marriage, but also her role as a mother and the fragility of her lineage. Her husband's emotional detachment and Adam's illness wear her heavily, so much so that she no longer cares for herself. These burdens require a sense of *tawakkul* and *ṣabr*. Nonetheless, they force her into a state of despair as she worries obsessively about Adam losing her identity and existence outside his needs. In this way, Moni exemplifies the human tendency to despair when tested. She initially could not see the Divine Wisdom present in her many sufferings. This intense inner turmoil surfaces in Moni's thoughts during Salma's game, where she envisions, at first, killing Murtada but then reconsiders and decides that perhaps she should kill herself and bring Adam along with her. These dark thoughts not only reveal the depth of her despair but also her struggle to reconcile her faith, hardship, and meaning in times of trouble.

At the loch, Moni discovers a child who strangely resembles Adam, albeit a healthier version of her son. This is interpreted as the Hoopoe's summons for Moni. This is the other indication of how the boundaries between the real world, magical, and spiritual are blurred, as there is little explanation of whether this boy is real or imagined. As Moni is highly tied to her role as a mother who yearns for her son and worries about his well-being, this boy could be a mirror for Moni to see herself and understand her identity outside her motherhood. Furthermore, the portrayal of a Hoopoe bird telling metaphorical stories throughout Salma, Moni, and Iman's journey resembles the story of the Hoopoe and Prophet Sulayman in the Qur'an. This can be seen in *Sūrah Al-Naml* where the Hoopoe bird was the messenger of Prophet Sulayman to deliver a message to the Queen of Sheba (Balqis).

Moni's life is framed as a constant test of her patience and sense of *tawakkul* in God's Will. Within the Islamic tradition, Prophet Muhammad states that patience is a spiritual light (Muslim 223) which illuminates the believer's path towards Allah S.W.T. through hardship. Trials and tribulations are, therefore, not necessarily earthly punishments or obstacles, but a means of spiritual purification and nearness to the Divine. However, Moni has not demonstrated this spiritual resilience and is, instead, beleaguered by a sense of helplessness. Rather than transforming her hardship into spiritual growth, she becomes stagnant

and immobilised by it, indicating the strain between seeing hardship as a transformative and redemptive force and the lived reality of overwhelming struggle and hardship. Moni's detachment from visiting Lady Evelyn's grave and her immediate concern to spend time with the other version of Adam at the loch symbolise her unreadiness to fully open herself up to self-examination.

Iman, the youngest of the three, is a character who symbolises freedom and rebellion. Back in Syria, Iman was married to a man who had later died during the Assad uprising. Later in the UK, she marries a man who only desires her for her beauty and later leaves her at the behest of his parents. Iman's desire to be free is expressed firstly through her rejection of the *hijāb*, which she interprets as a rejection of both cultural and religious identities. However, the freedom Iman decides to pursue is secular and individualistic in character, which privileges her personal desires over accountability. This limitation is foreshadowed in her earlier warning to Salma during their drive to the loch when she rebukes Salma by saying, "there is no sin that I *want* to do" (p. 28) other than not be accountable to other people. Iman's feelings of rebellion concretely manifest when she decides to undertake a physical transformation by "She had taken the ferry and then the bus to the nearest town, walked into a hair salon and demanded a bob like that of Lady Evelyn" (p. 166), demonstrating her willingness to let go of the veil. For Iman, who has been constantly treated as a pet by her husbands, she may have perceived the veil as a marker of her invisibility. Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014), in their examination of Aboulela's novel, *Minaret* (2005), argue that the veil represents the struggle Muslim women experience in order to be spiritually and religiously faithful.

This act of rebellion and renewal, however, is funded through dubious means as she steals money from Moni (p. 167), a woman who is struggling to care for her ill son whilst her husband works abroad. This exhibits that Iman's sense of freedom is, therefore, not free of consequences and relies on the exploitation of her friend. This pursuit of freedom and a new self is tested when she discovers a magical wardrobe full of dresses and costumes found in their lodging. This wardrobe is filled with costumes such as the ones from *Cinderella* and *Star Wars* with each costume showcasing her temptation to assume new identities grounded in fantasy.

From an Islamic perspective, the danger of Iman's desires lies in severing freedom from submission to Allah S.W.T. Islam warns about the limitations of this type of life pursuits because it removes the necessary submission to Allah, where she risks everything with her servitude to her desires. This tension culminates with Iman's magical realist metamorphosis into an animal, which may be an indicator of *Nafs al-‘Ammārah*, which is also known as *Nafs al- Hayawāniyyah*, or the Animal Self. This is the self that is controlled by base desires and the desire for the material (Rosalina, 2023). Iman, however, is not the only character who experiences metamorphosis in the novel. Moni transforms into a Swiss ball to showcase her physical exhaustion and need for self-care. Moni's transformation may be interpreted from an Islamic perspective to mean the need for spiritual grounding to be the centre of self-care. Salma, however, metamorphosises into a flat and two-dimensional object, an indicator of her penchant for denial and self-repression. This can be read as a form of spiritual stagnation or deficiency due to her lack of depth.

Consequently, Salma becomes the only one of the three women to reach Lady Evelyn Cobbold's grave. Unlike Moni and Iman, who are constantly preoccupied with their personal struggles. Salma demonstrates an openness to confront her inner conflicts and struggles. Her persistence in reaching Lady Evelyn's grave suggests Salma's positive trait, which is her strong perseverance. This foregrounds the concept of *jihād al-nafs*, which is the struggle of the self, thus positioning Salma as the character who is most open and prepared to reflect upon her feelings and actions. This also suggests that there is always a possibility for redemption and forgiveness, which is a core Islamic concept.

The novel employs magical realist elements which resonate with the Islamic metaphysics, especially the concept of *Ghayb* or the Unseen. In contrast to Western concepts of fantasy, which is often perceived as grounded in the imaginary or unreal, the *ghayb* is real in an ontological sense. The Unseen is mentioned in the Qur'an in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*: "This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God, who believe in the unseen, keep up prayer and give out of what We have provided for them (Qur'an 2: 2-3). On the other hand, the concept of *Qadā'* and *Qadar* (divine decree and predestination) can be considered as an unseen element in

Bird Summons; the journey to Lady Cobbold's grave evokes themes of death and what lies beyond (Unseen), indirectly reminding the principal characters, Salma, Moni, and Iman, of the afterlife (*ākhirah*). Their pilgrimage to the grave of Lady Cobbold in the Scottish Highlands is not merely a geographical movement, but a contemplative passage or spiritual reckoning that foregrounds mortality, resembling a Muslim's temporary voyage in this world.

Conclusion

Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons* may initially appear to be a typical addition to speculative fiction and magical realism. A deeper inspection of the novel's themes via Islamicisation of Knowledge as a literary framework reveals an alternative narrative. The journeys of Salma, Moni, and Iman are not just stories about diasporic Muslim women who are constantly negotiating their Muslim identities in Britain. Rather, the novel is a dramatisation of how the human soul continuously struggles against feelings of restlessness, despair, and heedlessness.

The pilgrimage serves as a mirror that forces the women to confront not only the fractures in their identities but also their own spiritual deficiencies. Aboulela shows how the journey to Lady Evelyn Cobbold's grave exposes hidden desires and disappointments and thus makes the trip a sort of allegorical journey that exhibits the soul's unrest.

Acknowledgement

This paper was made possible through the Mohamed Kamal Hassan Grant (Grant ID: MKH24-006-0006) funded by the AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and managed by the IIUM Research Management Centre.

References

- Aboulela, L. (2019). *Bird summons*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Al-Fārābī. (1985). *Al-Farabi on the perfect state: Abū Naṣr al-Farabi's Mabādī' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* (R. Walzer, Trans.). Oxford University Press
- Al-Karawi, S. T., & Bahar, I. B. (2014). Negotiating the veil and identity in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 14(3).
- Ali, S. M. (2024). Muslim, not supermuslim: A critique of Islamicate transhumanism. *Religions*, 15, 975.
- Arjana, S. R. (2015). *Muslims in the Western imagination*. Oxford University Press.
- Asimov, I. (1951). *Foundation*. Gnome Press.
- Attar, F. (2017). *The conference of the birds* (S. Wolpé, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company.
- Atwood, M. (1985). *The handmaid's tale*. McClelland and Stewart.
- Bahrawi, N. (2017). Islamic Utopianism. *Critical Muslim*, 22, 85-92. <https://www.criticalmuslim.io/islamic-utopianism/>
- Bendouma, N. (Year). *Arab Muslim women in speculative fiction: Examining secular and Islamic feminisms in representation* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Mohamed Khider University of Biskra, Algeria.
- Bradbury, R. (1953). *Fahrenheit 451*. Ballantine Books.
- Chattopadhyay, B. (2022). Speculative futures of global South infrastructures. In *Urban Infrastructuring: Reconfigurations, Transformations and Sustainability in the Global South* (pp. 297-308). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Chaucer, G. (1951). *The Canterbury tales* (N. Coghill, Trans.). Penguin Classics.
- Cox, A. (2022, June 11). Lady Evelyn Cobbold - why are Muslim pilgrims visiting her Scottish grave? BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-61759796>
- Hankins, R. (2010). Fictional Islam: A literary review and comparative essay on Islam in science fiction and fantasy. *Journal of the American Association of Academic Librarians*, 37(3), 203–216.
- Hashem, N. (2021). Muslim American speculative fiction: Figuring feminist epistemologies, religious histories, and genre traditions. *The Muslim World*, 111(2), 167-190.
- Hassan, M. K. (2013). Islamization of human knowledge. In A. Haneef, H. H. Basri, A. A. Ali, & M. A. Mastor (Eds.), *Islamic economics education in*

- Southeast Asian universities* (pp. 13–50). International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT).
- Heinlein, R. A. (1947). On the writing of speculative fiction. *Science fiction criticism: An anthology of essential writings*, 17-21.
- Herbert, F. (1965). *Dune*. Chilton Books.
- Hossain, R. S. (1905/2005). *Sultana's dream*. Feminist Press.
- Kagara, M. B. (1933/2016). *Gandoki* (A. A. Gidado & B. Hiskett, Eds.). Northern Nigeria Publishing Company.
- Le Guin, U. K. (2017). *No time to spare: Thinking about what matters*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Lyons, M. C. (Trans.). (2008). *One thousand and one nights* (Vols. 1–3). Penguin Classics.
- Malak, A. (2005). *Muslim narratives and the discourse of English*. State University of New York Press.
- Mendlesohn, F. (2003). Religion and science fiction. In E. James & F. Mendlesohn (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to science fiction* (pp. 264–275). Cambridge University Press.
- Morey, P. (2018). *Islamophobia and the novel*. Columbia University Press.
- Muslim, I. b. al-Ḥ. (2022). *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Imam al-Nawawī commentary; A. Salahi, Trans.). Kube Publishing.
- Nasr, S. H. (1987). *Islamic spirituality: foundations*. Routledge.
- Nash, G. (2012). *Writing Muslim identity*. Continuum.
- Norbasudi, N., Afifi, A. & Rosman, R. (2025). Palestinian speculative fiction: Reimagining home in virtual Palestine. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 31(1), 116-128.
- Orwell, G. (1949). *Nineteen eighty-four*. Secker & Warburg.
- Oziewicz, M. (2017). Speculative fiction. In Oxford research encyclopedia of literature. Oxford University Press.
- Rosalina, T. (2023). The soul (Al-Nafs) in the perspective of Islamic thought. *Archipelago Journal of Southeast Asia Islamic Studies*, 1(1), 46-53.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954–1955). *The lord of the rings* (Vols. 1–3). George Allen & Unwin.
- The Qur'an*. A new translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem. (2016). Oxford World's Classics.
- Sorabella, J. (2011). *Pilgrimage in medieval Europe*. In *Heilbrunn timeline of art history*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/pilgrimage-in-medieval-europe>

Water Symbolism in *Syair Perahu* by Hamzah Fansuri: A Reflection of Maritime Life and Islamic Values in the History of Malay Society

Mohd Firdaus Abdullah*

Mardiana Nordin**

Arba'iyah Mohd Noor***

Norazilawati Abd Wahab****

Yusry Sulaiman*****

Abstract: *Syair Perahu* is a classic Malay work that uses the symbolism of water as a primary metaphor in describing the journey of human life. Water in this poem serves as a source of life and supply, and even as a threat in the form of waves and storms that symbolise life's challenges. In a historical context, this poem reflects the close relationship between traditional Malay society and the maritime world, where the sea is not only a source of livelihood but also a meaningful spiritual symbol. This study places the water symbolism in *Syair Perahu* within the social historical framework of Malay maritime societies from the 16th to the 19th centuries. It examines how the element

*Lecturer, Center for Research in History, Politics and International Affairs, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Email: mfa@ukm.edu.my

**Lecturer, Department of History, Faculty of the Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya. Email: mardiana@um.edu.my

***Lecturer, Department of History, Faculty of the Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya. Email: arbaiah@um.edu.my. *Corresponding author.*

****Lecturer, Faculty of General Studies and Advanced Education, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. Email: norazilawatiwahab@unisza.edu.my

*****Lecturer, School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia. Email: yusry.sulaiman@uum.edu.my

of water was used as a reflection of the Malay worldview, which combined Islamic values with traditional cosmology. This approach uses historical analysis to connect the water symbolism in this poem with the dynamics of maritime life, including dependence on the sea, the challenges faced by coastal communities, and the influence of Islam as a guide to life. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the academic literature on the social history of Malay maritime, while offering a new perspective in understanding the role of symbolic elements of nature as a reflection of cultural and religious values. In addition, the study suggests an appreciation of the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, which is relevant to contemporary discussions on ecological conservation and sustainable development.

Keywords: Syair Perahu, Hamzah Fansuri, Malay, Islamic, Maritime

Abstrak: *Syair Perahu* merupakan karya klasik Melayu yang memanfaatkan simbolisme air sebagai metafora utama dalam menggambarkan perjalanan kehidupan manusia. Dalam syair ini, air berfungsi bukan sahaja sebagai sumber bekalan kehidupan, malah turut menjadi sebagai ancaman melalui gambaran ombak dan badai yang melambangkan cabaran hidup. Dalam konteks sejarah, karya ini mencerminkan hubungan yang erat antara masyarakat Melayu tradisional dengan dunia maritim, di mana laut bukan sekadar sumber ekonomi, tetapi juga simbol spiritual yang sarat makna. Kajian ini menempatkan simbolisme air dalam *Syair Perahu* dalam kerangka sejarah sosial masyarakat maritim Melayu dari abad ke-16 hingga ke-19. Ia meneliti bagaimana unsur air digunakan sebagai cerminan pandangan alam Melayu yang menggabungkan nilai-nilai Islam dengan kosmologi tradisional. Pendekatan yang digunakan berasaskan analisis sejarah bagi menghubungkan simbolisme air dalam syair ini dengan dinamika kehidupan maritim, termasuk kebergantungan terhadap laut, cabaran yang dihadapi oleh komuniti pesisir dan pengaruh Islam sebagai panduan kehidupan. Hasil kajian ini dijangka menyumbang kepada korpus akademik dalam bidang sejarah sosial maritim Melayu, di samping menawarkan perspektif baharu dalam memahami peranan unsur alam sebagai simbol yang mencerminkan nilai budaya dan keagamaan. Selain itu, kajian ini turut mengemukakan kepentingan menghargai hubungan harmoni antara manusia dan alam, yang relevan dalam wacana kontemporari berkaitan pemuliharaan ekologi dan pembangunan lestari.

Kata kunci: Syair Perahu, Hamzah Fansuri, Melayu, Islam, maritim

Introduction

Syair Perahu is a classic work of Malay literature, serving as an important legacy in understanding the cultural, historical, and religious dynamics of traditional Malay society (Winstedt, 1958). This work, produced by Hamzah Fansuri, raises the symbolism of water phenomena as the main metaphor in describing the journey of human life (Braginsky, 1975; Doorenbos, 1933; Van Ronkel, 1921; Braginsky, 1975). Hamzah Fansuri was a famous Sufi figure. However, the exact date of his birth is unknown. He lived from the late 16th century to the early 17th century. Most scholars agree that Hamzah Fansuri was born in Barus, North Sumatra, a place located between Singkel and Sibolga (Liaw, 2011). According to historical records, the region has been a place of visit for traders for a long time. According to Drewes, Hamzah was born in a village known as Fansur, located in the Barus district (Drewes, 1986). In the records of Tome Pires, the Barus Kingdom shared borders with the Singkel Kingdom and the Meulaboh or Daya Kingdom (Cortesao, 2016).

Syair Perahu contains extensive maritime and water symbolism that can be read in relation to the coastal and trading environment of Singkel, a region historically shaped by maritime networks and seaborne exchange (Cortesao, 2017). If observed clearly, water in the context of this poem not only symbolises life but also impermanence, challenges, and the spiritual tool that leads humans to the afterlife. Drawing on Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's interpretation of Malay-Islamic symbolism, *Syair Perahu* articulates the worldview of the Malay community concerning the interrelationship between humans, nature, and God (Al-Attas, 1966). Hamzah Fansuri developed the teachings of philosophical Sufism. He is regarded as one of the earliest scholars in the Malay world who contributed to the development of philosophical Sufism, reflected in his works. By focusing on the symbolism of water, we hope to connect this poem to global discourses about the relationship between human beings and nature, while highlighting the uniqueness of the historical experience of the Malay community. Furthermore, this approach opens up space for comparative studies with other cultural traditions, thereby enriching our understanding of the role of symbolic elements in shaping historical and cultural narratives.

Scholarly engagement with *Syair Perahu* has a long and well-established tradition within Malay literary and Islamic studies. Early philological and textual studies by Doorenbos (1933) and Van Ronkel (1921) focused primarily on manuscript transmission, textual variants, and linguistic structure, establishing *Syair Perahu* as a foundational text within the Malay Sufi canon. Subsequent studies by Al-Attas (1966) and Johns (1961) significantly advanced the field by situating Hamzah Fansuri within the intellectual tradition of philosophical Sufism, particularly through concepts such as *wahdat al-wujud* and metaphysical symbolism. These works convincingly demonstrate that *Syair Perahu* functions as a didactic Sufi poem that articulates the human journey towards divine unity. Later literary and structural analyses by Braginsky (1975) further examined the internal organisation of the poem, arguing that its symbolism operates within a coherent poetic and cosmological framework. More recent studies, including those by Fauziah (2013), Zulhelmi (2016), and Heinschke (2020), continue this trajectory by emphasising the poem's spiritual, philosophical, and aesthetic dimensions. These scholars generally interpret water, the boat, and the sea as allegorical devices representing the soul, the body, and the metaphysical path towards God. Amir H. (2024) extends this discussion by exploring water symbolism within Hamzah Fansuri's wider poetic corpus, reinforcing the centrality of aquatic imagery in his mystical thought.

While these studies collectively establish *Syair Perahu* as a profound Sufi and literary text, their analytical focus remains largely confined to doctrinal interpretation, metaphysical abstraction, and poetic form. The symbolism of water is predominantly treated as a universal spiritual metaphor, often detached from the material, social, and historical conditions in which the poem was produced. Little attention is given to the fact that Hamzah Fansuri emerged from a deeply maritime environment, shaped by seafaring, trade networks, coastal risk, and everyday engagement with the sea as both sustenance and danger. Moreover, existing scholarship rarely situates water symbolism within the broader social history of Malay maritime communities, particularly between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, when coastal societies in the Malay world were economically and culturally dependent on the sea. As a result, the lived maritime experiences that inform the poem's imagery, such as preparation for voyage, navigation, exposure

to storms, and the constant risk of loss, remain underexplored as historical contexts that shape symbolic meaning. This study addresses this gap by repositioning water symbolism in *Syair Perahu* within a social-historical and eco-cultural framework. Rather than viewing water solely as a metaphysical signifier, this article interprets it as a symbolic medium rooted in the maritime realities of Malay society, where spiritual discipline, economic survival, and environmental uncertainty intersect. By integrating literary analysis with social history and ecological awareness, this study offers a more grounded interpretation of *Syair Perahu* as both a spiritual text and a historical document reflecting the worldview of a maritime Muslim society.

This study asks the following research question: How does water operate as a composite Islamic symbol encompassing purity, peril, and providence in *Syair Perahu*, and through what textual strategies, such as metaphor, imperative discourse, maritime lexicon, and allegorical parallelism, are these meanings rendered intelligible within a Malay maritime worldview? This study aims to analyse water symbolism in *Syair Perahu* as a historically situated Islamic semiotic system that mediates spiritual doctrine, maritime experience, and Malay cosmology. Rather than treating water solely as a poetic motif, this study examines how symbolic imagery functions as a cultural mechanism through which Islamic ethical concepts are translated into a maritime social reality. This article contributes to Malay literary and historical studies by proposing a contextual model of symbolic mediation, demonstrating how Islamic concepts such as purification, trial, and divine dependence are embedded within the ecological and economic realities of a maritime society. By situating *Syair Perahu* within the historical ecology of Malay seafaring communities, the study advances an interdisciplinary approach that links literary symbolism, social history, and Islamic intellectual traditions.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative textual–historical methodology that integrates close reading, Islamic conceptual analysis, and comparative cultural interpretation. The primary corpus of analysis is *Syair Perahu*, which is attributed to Hamzah Fansuri. The analysis uses the critical edition edited by J. Doorenbos (1933) and includes cross-reference to Van Ronkel (1921) where necessary for textual verification. All

citations from the poem are referenced by stanza number, following the numbering system used in these editions, to ensure consistency and reproducibility. The analytical procedure follows four sequential steps. First, selected stanzas containing explicit maritime and water imagery are quoted in the original Malay text, accompanied by an interpretive English gloss where required for analytical clarity. Second, key symbolic terms (such as *air*, *laut*, *perahu*, *ombak*, *tali*, and *kemudi*) are briefly glossed semantically and culturally, drawing on classical Malay usage and established literary scholarship. Third, each symbolic element is analytically linked to a specific Islamic concept relevant to Sufi thought, such as *tawhīd*, *tawakkul*, *dhikr*, *ṭahārah*, or *maqāmāt*, supported by concise references to primary Islamic concepts or secondary Sufi studies. Once the conceptual grounding is established, the analysis proceeds to the fourth step: situating the symbolism within its historical maritime context, particularly the lived experiences of Malay coastal and trading societies between the 16th and 19th centuries. By combining textual analysis, Islamic conceptual mapping, and historically grounded interpretation within a clearly defined procedure, this methodology ensures that the reading of water symbolism in *Syair Perahu* remains systematic, transparent, and analytically replicable.

Water Symbolism in Malay Cosmology: Historical and Cultural Perspectives

Syair Perahu highlights the symbolism of water in shaping its narrative. Water, interpreted through a social-historical and Sufi cosmological perspective rooted in the Malay-Islamic worldview, functions not merely as a physical element but as a central metaphor for life and the spiritual journey, reflecting the relationship between humans, nature, God, and the afterlife (Radpour, 2019). This work provides an in-depth look at how Malay society interprets water as a symbol of spiritual strength, life's trials, and spiritual purification. Through this symbolism, *Syair Perahu* conveys the worldview of traditional Malay society, which integrates religious values with their cosmology and maritime experiences (Doorenbos, 1933). In Malay cosmology, water symbolises purity, life, and impermanence (Shamsudin, & Akhir, 2018). In *Syair Perahu*, water is depicted as a necessary supply for the journey, but at the same time as a test that challenges humanity. For example, the fourth stanza of the poem reflects this concept of duality:

*“Perteguh jua alat perahumu,
hasilkan bekal air dan kayu,
dayung pengayuh taruh di situ,
supaya laju perahumu itu.”*

(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

Water in this verse is not only a symbol of physical provision but also a spiritual element essential for preparing to face the journey of life in this world and life after death. An insufficient supply of water symbolises a lack of spiritual preparation, which will result in failure in the journey of life. However, water in this verse also represents the inevitable tests of life. These tests are depicted in the form of waves, corals, and storms, reflecting the challenges that must be overcome to achieve the final goal, as stated in the seventh verse:

*“Muaranya dalam, ikanpun banyak,
di sanalah perahu karam dan rusak,
karangnya tajam seperti tombak
ke atas pasir kamu tersesak.”*

(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

In this verse, water symbolises obstacles in life that can only be overcome with steadfast faith and true guidance. The coral and waves represent worldly temptations and sins that threaten man's spiritual journey. In Malay cosmology, the sea is often considered the abode of supernatural beings and a symbol of natural forces that cannot be controlled by man (Kembaren et al., 2020). Therefore, in this context, water is used as a symbol to depict human dependence on God to overcome challenges beyond their capabilities. This symbolism is also relevant in the historical context of Malay society as a maritime society. As a society that depends on the sea for their livelihood, water is an element that is very close to their daily experiences (Shamsul Bahri et al., 2024). The sea is not only a source of livelihood but also a space full of uncertainty and danger. In *Syair Perahu*, water becomes a reflection of this duality, where it is a source of life but also an inevitable testing ground. This illustrates how the Malay community harmonises their relationship with nature through religious and cultural values, resulting in a harmonious worldview between humans, nature, and God. This is reflected in the second stanza of the poem, which reads:

*“Wahai muda kenali dirimu
 Ialah perahu tamsil tubuhmu
 Tiadalah berapa lama hidupmu
 Ke akhirat jua kekal diammu.”*

(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

In the global maritime literary tradition, water symbolism is often used to describe the journey of life. For example, in *The Odyssey*, the sea becomes a symbol of spiritual trials and transformation for the main character (Garvie (Ed.), 1994). Similarly, in Polynesian epics, water is a medium for spiritual and physical journeys that take individuals to higher levels of life (Sinclair, (Ed.), 2019). However, in *Syair Perahu*, the symbolism of water demonstrates the uniqueness of the Malay worldview, which integrates religious values with their traditional cosmology. The use of this symbol illustrates how the Malay community understands their relationship with nature as part of their spiritual journey.

To move beyond thematic description, it is necessary to examine how water symbolism in *Syair Perahu* is performed at the level of language itself. The poem does not merely describe water as a symbol; it activates maritime meaning through imperative diction, allegory, and nautical lexicon. While earlier sections have discussed water symbolism at the thematic and conceptual level, it is equally important to demonstrate how the symbolism is performed through language itself. In *Syair Perahu*, Hamzah Fansuri does not merely describe water as an abstract symbol; rather, he activates it through imperative diction, nautical terminology, and allegorical compression, allowing the poem's language to enact purification, warning, and spiritual discipline. A clear example appears in the frequently cited fourth stanza:

*“Perteguh jua alat perahumu,
 hasilkan bekal air dan kayu,
 dayung pengayuh taruh di situ,
 supaya laju perahumu itu.”*

(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

Here, the imperative verbs “*perteguh*”, “*hasilkan*”, and “*taruh*” function as didactic commands, mirroring the tone of religious exhortation. The phrase “*bekal air*” is particularly significant. Linguistically, “*air*” operates on two registers simultaneously: as a literal maritime necessity

and as a metaphor for spiritual provision. The economy of the diction compresses physical survival and metaphysical preparedness into a single lexical unit, allowing water to function as both sustenance and moral capital. The allegory of the boat as the human body is made explicit in the second stanza:

*“Wahai muda kenali dirimu,
ialah perahu tamsil tubuhmu,
tiadalah berapa lama hidupmu,
ke akhirat jua kekal diammu.”*

(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

The use of ‘*tamsil*’ (allegory) is crucial here. Rather than relying on symbolic ambiguity, Hamzah explicitly instructs the reader to read the boat as the body. Water, by implication, becomes the environment in which the body-soul composite must operate. The sea is not external scenery but the condition of existence itself, reinforcing a Sufi ontology in which worldly life is a transient passage rather than a stable dwelling.

As noted in the introduction, previous studies on *Syair Perahu* have offered rich literary and philosophical readings, particularly in relation to Sufism and allegory. However, these analyses often treat symbolism at the conceptual level, with limited attention to how poetic language is embedded within the social and historical conditions of Malay maritime life. This study argues that water symbolism in *Syair Perahu* should be read not only as a metaphysical metaphor, but also as a linguistic and cultural expression shaped by the lived realities of a maritime society. In this context, water reflects both spiritual values and everyday experiences of risk, dependence, and uncertainty faced by coastal communities. By situating textual symbolism within a social-historical framework, this article highlights how the Malay worldview integrates religious meaning with environmental experience, while also offering insights relevant to contemporary discussions on ecological balance and human-nature relations.

Transformation of Maritime Culture and Islam in *Syair Perahu*

Syair Perahu is actually a profound reflection on the cultural and religious transition in Malay society, especially during the early era of the spread of Islam in the archipelago. This poem integrates elements of Islamic beliefs and Malay maritime cultural traditions. These elements

are expressed through the symbolism of boats and water, which serve as analogies of the human body and the spiritual journey towards the afterlife. This work not only offers insight into the worldview of Malay society, but also emphasises the role of Islam in shaping their cultural identity during the era of Islamisation.

Islamisation in the archipelago, especially in maritime regions such as Aceh, Malacca, and other islands around the Malay Peninsula, brought about a major transformation in the way of life for the people (Mutalib, 2008). *Syair Perahu* reflects this transformation by highlighting key concepts in Islamic teachings, including monotheism, faith, transience, and destiny. This poem combines Islamic values with a maritime narrative that simultaneously depicts the harmony between religion and culture.

One significant aspect of *Syair Perahu* is how the boat is likened to a symbol of the human body, while the journey through the sea symbolises the challenges of human life. For example, the following third stanza describes a boat as a metaphor for a body that needs spiritual guidance:

*“Hai muda arif-budiman,
hasilkan kemudi dengan pedoman,
alat perahumu jua kerjakan,
itulah jalan membetuli insan.”*
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

In this context based on Islamic teachings, “*kemudi*” (rudder) symbolises faith and “guidance”. This logic accords with the Sufi conception of *tawakkul*, which Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh defines not as abandonment of effort but as trust in God after disciplined action (*al-Ḥikam*, ḥikmah 4). This couplet emphasises that, to achieve success in life, one needs to ensure that their boat, symbolising their body, is steered correctly based on religious guidance. This symbolism reflects the integration of Islamic values into the daily lives of Malay society, where religion is the basis for all actions and decisions (Ishak & Abdullah, 2012). In addition, this poem highlights the concepts of transience and destiny, both of which are central to the teachings of Sufism. This concept is clearly illustrated in the couplet of the poem, which reads:

*“Ketahui olehmu hai anak dagang,
riaknya rencam ombaknya karang,*

*ikanpun banyak datang menyarang,
hendak membawa ke tengah sawang.”*
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

This eighth stanza depicts the world as a sea full of challenges and obstacles. “*Riak*” and “*karang*” symbolise worldly temptations and sins that can hinder human spiritual journey. Meanwhile, “*anak dagang*” refers to humans as travellers who are heading towards their final destination, which is the hereafter. In this context, *Syair Perahu* emphasises the need to remain focused on the ultimate goal of life, which is in line with Islamic teachings that prioritise the hereafter over this world. As in the ninth stanza, the last line of the couplet states, “*sempurnalah jalan terlalu ba’id*”.

The symbolism of water is also seen in the cultural transformation of Malay society as influenced by Islam. Water, frequently used in Islamic tradition as a means of purification, symbolises the need to cleanse oneself spiritually before embarking on the journey to the afterlife. This is in line with the concept of *thaharah* in Islam, which emphasises the importance of cleanliness as part of worship. For this reason, water is very important in the purification process, especially purification from minor ablution (*wuduk*) and major ablution (*mandi wajib*) (Farooq & Ansari, 1981). Repeating the fourth stanza, which describes the importance of water as an essential supply that needs to be prepared:

*“Perteguh jua alat perahumu,
hasilkan bekal air dan kayu,
dayung pengayuh taruh di situ,
supaya laju perahumu itu.”*
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

“*Air dan kayu*” in this context symbolises knowledge and charity, which are the main supplies to face the life of this world and the hereafter. This stanza emphasises that the spiritual journey requires mature preparation, just like a sailor needs sufficient supplies to sail the ocean. A clear analogy is seen in the eleventh stanza, which reads:

*“Lengkapkan pendarat dan tali sauh
Derasmubanyak bertemu musuh
Selebu rencam ombaknya cabuh*

La ilahaillahu akan tali yang teguh”
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

In addition to Islamic values, *Syair Perahu* also reflects elements of maritime culture that are characteristic of the Malay community. As a maritime community, their relationship with the sea is very deep; it serves not only as a source of livelihood but also as an element that shapes their worldview (Rohazid & Abdullah, 2022). The sea is often considered a testing ground that tests human mental and spiritual strength (Ali & Sulistiyono, 2023). In this poem, the journey through the turbulent sea symbolises the journey of life full of challenges, as stated in the following ninth stanza:

*“Muaranya itu terlalu sempit,
di manakan lalu sampan dan rakit,
jikalau ada pedoman dikapit,
sempurnalah jalan terlalu ba’id”*
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

“Muaranya terlalu sempit” describes life’s difficulties that require wisdom and religious guidance to go through. In the Malay maritime tradition, *“pedoman”* also refers to a navigation tool that helps sailors determine the direction of their voyage. The cultural and religious transformations depicted in *Syair Perahu* are part of a broader process of Islamisation in the archipelago. The spread and da’wah of Islam in this region occurred not only through trade but also through literature and cultural arts (Gunaish et al., 2024). *Syair Perahu* is an effective medium for conveying Islamic values, employing language and symbolism that are close to the daily experiences of the Malay community. By utilising simple yet profound metaphors, this poem is able to convey religious teachings in a way that is easy to understand and relevant to the local cultural context.

This change not only influenced the worldview of the Malay community but also led to the production of other works that reflected the synthesis between local culture and Islamic values. Additionally, examples such as *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Bustan Al-Salatin*, and *Hikayat Hang Tuah* shows how Islamisation has enriched the Malay literary tradition. These works incorporate new elements that deepen their symbolic and spiritual meaning (Adam, 2019: Haji Salleh, 1998: Hamzah, 2020, Winstedt, 1921). Therefore, *Syair Perahu* is not only

a literary work but also a cultural document that reflects a major shift in the worldview of Malay society during the era of Islamisation. Through the symbolism of the boat and water, this poem highlights the integration of Islamic values into Malay culture, reflecting the harmony between local traditions and the newly accepted religion. This analysis shows how *Syair Perahu* depicts a profound process of cultural and religious transformation, relevant in the context of Malay history, and providing rich insight into how religion and culture can interact to shape community identity.

Social Dynamics and Malay Maritime Economy in *Syair Perahu*

Syair Perahu displays maritime symbolism in depicting the social and economic dynamics of traditional Malay society. As a maritime society, the lives of the Malay community during that era were highly dependent on the sea and rivers as the main source of their economy, trade routes, and space to build social relationships (Siraj & Tayab, 2017; Ali & Abdullah, 2024). As discussed earlier, the boat in this poem is a symbol of the human body, while the sea reflects the real world full of challenges. Again, the fourth stanza can be used in analysing this view: it describes the boat as an important tool that needs to be well prepared before starting a journey, as indicated by the sentence, “*perteguh jua alat perahumu*” (Doorenbos, 1933; Van Ronkel, 1921). The sentence “*hasilkan bekal air dan kayu*” reflects the economic reality faced by the Malay community, emphasising the need to carefully prepare supplies for maritime travel, which is often dangerous and uncertain. In addition, the phrase “*air dan kayu*” is a symbol of the basic resources needed for survival, both physical and economic. In maritime societies, inadequate preparation can lead to disaster, just as in human life where failure to prepare oneself with knowledge and experience can lead to failure in facing life’s challenges (Hidayat & Tan, 2021).

To make the maritime context more concrete, this article foregrounds two specific seafaring practices familiar to the Malay world: monsoon timing and pilotage (*pedoman*). Premodern sailing in the Straits of Malacca depended on seasonal winds, departure at the wrong time risked shipwreck or prolonged drift. This reality surfaces in *Syair Perahu* through repeated injunctions to strengthen the vessel and prepare supplies (“*perteguh jua alat perahumu*”), where water signifies both sustenance and danger. The poem’s emphasis on readiness reflects

a monsoon-regulated worldview in which discipline and restraint determined survival. Equally significant is pilotage, essential for navigating narrow river mouths and reef-filled waters. In the poem, “*pedoman*” and “*kemudi*” function as metaphors for spiritual guidance, echoing the maritime logic that even a strong vessel fails without an experienced pilot. Read in this light, the poem’s water symbolism derives from concrete maritime practices rather than abstract seafaring imagery, grounding its spiritual allegory in the lived realities of a Malay maritime society (Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921: Reid, 1993).

Furthermore, this poem depicts the sea as a space full of opportunities but also risks. In the context of a maritime economy, the sea is the main medium for trade and communication between regions. However, the sea also carries risks in the form of storms, corals, and predators (Basiron, 2013). This is clearly illustrated in the nineteenth stanza:

*“Ingati sungguh siang dan malam
Lautnya deras bertambah dalam
Anginnya keras ombaknya rencam
Ingati perahu jangan tenggelam.”*
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921).

This stanza describes the reality of the Malay community, who often face the risk of losing ships and supplies due to natural threats. The deep sea and strong winds are symbols of the obstacles that require skill and wisdom to face. In a social context, this depicts the importance of wise and experienced leaders to lead the community through difficult times. The maritime world plays a major role in relations between regions within the Malay World and with the outside world. The Port of Melaka, for example, evolved into an international entrepot port, attracting traders from China, India, and the Arab World to trade (Wilkinson, 1935). This situation reflects the Malay community’s dependence on the sea as the main link between regions, including the Straits of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific (Yaapar, 2019). This is also reflected in *Syair Perahu*, which reflects the Malay community’s dependence on the sea as an important medium in their lives. These trade relations not only provided economic benefits but also served as a major channel for the spread of culture and religion, thereby enriching the social and spiritual lives of the Malay community. Therefore, water and the sea symbolise the connections between humans and the larger community.

The first line of the eighth stanza, which reads, “*Ketahui olehmu hai anak dagang*”, refers to traders or sailors who play an important role in building economic and social relationships in this maritime world. In an economic context, this verse illustrates the important role of trade in uniting Malay society with the outside world, where the sea becomes a route for the exchange of goods, ideas, and culture (Khaw et al., 2021). However, the sea also brings challenges that require society to build resilient social and economic systems. *Syair Perahu* emphasises the importance of guidelines and guidance to ensure safe travel. In the context of Malay society, this refers to the role of leaders and social structures in ensuring the stability and success of the community (Fang, 2007). The two lines in the tenth stanza further emphasise the importance of guidance in overcoming challenges:

“*Baiklah perahu engkau perteguh,
hasilkan pendapat dengan tali sauh*”
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921).

The lines in this verse reflect the importance of wisdom and experience in ensuring a safe journey. In a social context, these guidelines symbolise customary law and religious teachings that are the foundation of Malay society’s stability. In an economic context, this refers to strategic planning and wise management of resources to ensure the survival of the community. The sea was also a testing ground that shaped the identity and resilience of the Malay community (Lal, 1997). In their maritime tradition, the sea was considered not only as an economic resource but also as a terrain in which the community’s strength and resilience were tested. For example, the fall of the city of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511 shows that the challenges faced at sea were not limited to maritime dominance or economic exploration; they also involved geopolitical and military threats (Leifer & Nelson, 1973). In stanza 37, the sea is described as a place of testing that requires spiritual and physical strength:

“*La ilaha illallahu itu kata yang teguh,
memadamkan cahaya sekalian rusuh,
jin dan syaitan sekalian musuh,
hendak membawa dia bersungguh-sungguh.*”
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921).

This stanza depicts how the Malay community navigates maritime challenges by relying on spiritual beliefs and beliefs. In a social and economic context, this shows that the strength of the community lies in their ability to work together and rely on shared values in facing challenges. Overall, *Syair Perahu* is a reflection of the social and economic dynamics within the maritime Malay community. The symbolism of the boat and the sea in this poem illustrates their daily challenges, as well as emphasising the importance of wisdom, experience, and spiritual beliefs when facing uncertain circumstances.

Sufism in *Syair Perahu*: Water Symbolism as a Reflection of the Spiritual Journey

Syair Perahu is known for its deep philosophical and religious meaning. This work reflects the worldview of Sufism through the metaphor of a boat and water. In the context of Sufism, water is not only depicted as a fundamental element of life but also as a symbol of purification, impermanence, and an intermediary medium between the mortal world and the afterlife (Raju & Manasi(Eds), 2017). In classical Sufi thought, *ṭahārah* signifies both outward cleansing and inward purification; al-Ghazālī distinguishes *ṭahārat al-zāhir* from *ṭahārat al-bāṭin*, where water prepares the body while discipline purifies the heart (*Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, Kitāb Asrār al-Ṭahārah*). The symbolism of water highlights the significance of the Poem of the Boat in understanding the philosophy of Sufism in the archipelago region. In this context, the boat's journey through the turbulent sea becomes a reflection of the spiritual journey of man towards his God (Allah). Water, in Sufi doctrine, is often associated with the process of spiritual purification (Zarvani & Mashhadi, 2011). This concept is also reflected in the fourth stanza, as previously shown:

“Perteguh jua alat perahumu,
Hasilkan bekal air dan kayu,
Dayung pengayuh taruh di situ,
Supaya laju perahumu itu.”
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

In this stanza, water is not only an important supply for the journey, but it also symbolises the human need to purify himself before starting the spiritual journey. Sufism emphasises that having a clean soul is a prerequisite for approaching God. The process of purification involves introspection and complete surrender to God, just as a boat depends

on water to sail. This symbolism shows how the element of water is used to illustrate the importance of preparing oneself with good deeds, knowledge, and faith to face spiritual challenges. In *Syair Perahu*, water also functions as a symbol of testing, reflecting the twists and turns of life's journey full of obstacles. In Sufism, the journey to God is often described as difficult, requiring patience and perseverance (Radpour, 2019). This is illustrated in certain lines of *Syair Perahu*, such as:

“Muaranya dalam, ikanpun banyak, (Stanza 7)
Karangnya tajam seperti tombak (Stanza 7)
Anginnya kencang ombaknya cabuh (Stanza 10)
Riaknya rencam ombaknya besar (Stanza 15)
Taufan dan rebut terlalu azamah (Stanza 17)
 (Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

These verses show that the sea, filled with fish, sharp rocks, large waves, and storms, is an analogy for worldly trials and temptations that can destroy one's faith. In the Sufi tradition, worldly temptations are likened to obstacles that a seeker (spiritual path) must overcome to reach a state of spiritual perfection (Radpour, 2019). Water, in this case, becomes a metaphor for the uncertain worldly conditions, requiring guidance, perseverance, and direction for safe navigation. The elements of Sufism in *Syair Perahu* are also reflected in the use of the symbol of a rope as a connection that connects humans with God. Within classical Sufi doctrine, such imagery corresponds to the *maqāmāt of fanā* (dissolution of ego) and *baqā* (subsistence in God), as systematised by *al-Qushayrī* (*al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*). In the following stanza, it is stated:

“La ilaha illallahu akan tali yang teguh (Stanza 11)
Barang siapa bergantung di situ,
Teduhlah selebu yang rencam itu (Stanza 12)
 (Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

The rope, symbolised by the *dhikr*, “*La ilaha illallah*,” is a metaphor for *tawhid*—the belief in the oneness of God. In the doctrine of Sufism, *dhikr* is the primary tool for connecting the human heart with God, cleansing the heart of doubt, and strengthening faith (Karo-Karo et al., 2024). The symbolism of the strong rope suggests that holding fast to *tawhid* is the only way to face the storms of life and reach a peaceful spiritual destination. In the context of Sufism, *tawhid* is not just an intellectual belief, but a profound spiritual experience that leads

to the recognition of the oneness of God in every aspect of life (Cook, 2014). In addition, water in *Syair Perahu* also functions as a medium of transformation. In the Sufi tradition, the spiritual journey is often described as the process of transforming the soul from a state of *nafs al-ammarah* (a soul inclined to evil) to *nafs al-mutmainnah* (a soul at peace) (Wahab, 2022). This transformation requires a journey through difficult trials, as described in the 14th stanza:

*“Laut Silan terlalu dalam,
Di sanalah perahu rusak dan karam,
Sungguhpun banyak di sana menyelam,
Larangan mendapat permata nilam.”*
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921)

This stanza shows that although a journey by sea can lead to profound spiritual discovery, it is also fraught with the risk of failure. In Sufism, this journey is often described as *maqāmāt*, which denoted the spiritual stages that a seeker must pass through. Each stage involves a test of faith and a deeper surrender to God (Ni’am, 2020). To summarise this connection between water and the divine, the author includes four clear stanzas to illustrate it, as in stanzas 22-25:

*“Wujud Allah nama perahunya
Ilmu Allah akan dayungnya
Iman Allah nama kemudinya
Yakin akan Allah nama pawangnya

Taharat dan istinja’ nama lantainya
Kufur dan maksiat air ruangannya
Tawakkal akan Allah jurubatunya
Tauhid itu akan sauhnya

Selawat akan nabi tali bubutannya
Istighfar Allah akan layarnya
Allahuakbar nama anginnya
Subhanallah akan lajunya

Wallahu’alam nama rantainya
Iradat Allah nama bandarnya
Kudrat Allah nama labuhannya
Syurga Jannat al-Naim nama negerinya”*
(Doorenbos, 1933: Van Ronkel, 1921).

Overall, *Syair Perahu* offers a profound insight into the spiritual journey of man through the symbolism of water. In the Sufi tradition, this journey represents a path towards God, where man must purify himself, overcome worldly temptations, and achieve a deep understanding of monotheism (Ernst, 2017). This study shows the way in which *Syair Perahu* integrates elements of Sufism with the lived experiences of the Malay community, thereby making it relevant as a philosophical and religious text that transcends time and place. This reading accords with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's argument that Hamzah Fansuri's poetic language functions as a deliberate vehicle for transmitting Islamic metaphysics to a Malay maritime audience, translating Sufi doctrine into experiential symbols intelligible to a seafaring society (Al-Attas, 1966).

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how water symbolism in *Syair Perahu* operates as a key textual device through which Islamic concepts are rendered intelligible within the historical experience of Malay maritime society. The analysis demonstrates that water in this poem is not a passive metaphor, but a structured symbolic medium that links poetic form to Islamic metaphysics and lived maritime realities. Through images of the sea, waves, storms, and navigation, Hamzah Fansuri translates abstract Islamic concepts such as tawhid, spiritual purification, guidance, and eschatological orientation into a symbolic language grounded in the everyday experiences of seafaring life. By situating this symbolism within the social and economic conditions of Malay maritime communities, the study shows how Islamic values were not merely adopted at a doctrinal level but embedded within an existing cosmological and environmental worldview.

Water functions simultaneously as a source of livelihood, a space of danger and uncertainty, and a spiritual testing ground, allowing Islamic teachings to be articulated in forms that were historically legible to a society deeply dependent on the sea. In this sense, *Syair Perahu* should be understood not only as a literary or mystical text, but as a cultural document that records the synthesis of Islam and maritime life in the Malay world. Taken together, this analysis clarifies the central analytical payoff of the study. Water symbolism in *Syair Perahu* operates as a bridge between poetic expression, Islamic ethical imagination, and the historical realities of Malay maritime society. While grounded in a

historical and literary context, this symbolic configuration also gestures toward contemporary concerns, particularly ongoing discussions on Islamic environmental and maritime ethics, where harmony with nature, restraint, and spiritual accountability remain pressing lived issues.

References

- Abdullah, M. F. (2024). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Through the Water Treaty Between Kedah and Perlis (1971-1999): Implications for Water Resource Management and Equitable Resource Sharing in Malaysia and Globally. *Thammasat Review*, 27(2), 197-224.
- Abdullah, M. F., Mohd Noor, A., Padzil, R. & Nordin, M. (2024). The Impact of Inter-Basin Water Transfer between Johor and Singapore on Johor's Water Supply System, 1927 to 1941. *MANUSYA: Journal of Humanities*, 27(1), 1-22.
- Adam, A. (2019). *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.
- Al-Attas, S. M. N. 1966. *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri*. University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies: United Kingdom.
- Al-Ghazālī, A. Ḥ. (n.d.). *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn (Kitāb asrār al-ṭahārah)*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifah.
- Al-Qushayrī, A. Q. (n.d.). *Al-risālah al-qushayriyyah fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif.
- Ali, I. & Abdullah, M. F. (2024). The Homo Sapiens Seafarer Diaspora in the Southeast Asian Archipelago: Traversing Transoceanic Waters From the Mesolithic to the Neolithic Era. *Journal of International Studies*, 20(2), 95–117.
- Ali, I. & Abdullah, M. F. (2024). Tracing the Heritage and Civilization of Austronesian Seafarers Across Waters, Seas, and Oceans in the Archipelago of Southeast Asia. *Applied History Journal of Merong Mahawangsa*, 2, 41–55.
- Ali, I., & Abdullah, M. F. 2024. Waters of Unity: Maritime History of Nusantara from Hindu-Buddhist Kingdoms to the Pre-Colonial Era. *Asian Journal of Environment*, 8(2), 67-81.
- Ali, I., & Sulistiyono, S. T. (2023). Maritime Heritage and the Belt and Road Initiative: A Historiographical Perspective on Malaysia's Journey as a Maritime Nation. *SEJARAH: Journal of the Department of History*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 269-300

- Amir H. Zekrgoo. (2024). The Confused Whale of the China Sea: Water Symbolism in the Works of Hamzah Fansuri. *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC)*, 29(1), 79-98.
- Basiron, M. N. (2013). The search for sustainability and security: Malaysia's maritime challenges and opportunities. *Maritime Challenges and Priorities in Asia*, 72-81.
- Braginsky, V. Y. (1975). Some Remarks on the Structure of the Syair Perahu" by Hamzah Fansuri. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde*, 4de Afl, 407-426.
- Cortese, A. (2017). *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: an account of the east, from the Red Sea to Japan*. Routledge.
- Cortese, A. (2016). *Suma Oriental Karya Tome Pires: Perjalanan dari Laut Merah ke Cina & Buku Francisco Rodrigues*. Yogyakarta: Ombak.
- Cook, B. G. (2014). *Understanding Sufism: contextualising the content*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Tasmania.
- Doorenbos, J. (1933). *De Geschriften van Hamzah Pansoeri*. Leiden.
- Drewes, G. W. J. (1986). *The Poems of Hamzah Fansuri*. Leiden, KITLV.
- Ernst, C. W. (2017) *Sufism: An introduction to the mystical tradition of Islam*. Shambhala Publications.
- Fang, L. Y. (2007). Naskah undang-undang Melaka: suatu tinjauan. *Sari*, 25:85-94.
- Farooq, S. & Ansari, Z. I. (1981). "Philosophy of water reuse in Islamic perspective. *Desalination*, 39, 273-281.
- Fauziah, M. (2013). Pemikiran Tasawuf Hamzah Fansuri. *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*. 15(2), 289-305.
- Gunaish, C. F., Abdullah, M. F., Mokhtar, S., Abd Wahab, N. & Tahir, A. (2024). Da'wah through Documentary Films Produced by Malayan Film Unit (MFU) and Filem Negara Malaysia (FNM), 1957-1970. *Intellectual Discourse*, 32(1), 159–187.
- Haji Salleh, S. H. (1998). *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Terbitan Bersama Yayasan.
- Hamzah, N. H. (2020). The Sources of Writing Bustan al-Salatin by Nur al-Din al-Raniri: A Study Based on Book I-Book IV. *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, 15(2), 115-132.
- Heinschke, M. (2020). Hamzah Fansuri: Die mystische Dichtung, In *Kindlers Literatur Lexikon (KLL)*. Stuttgart: JB Metzler.
- Hidayat, A., & Tan, J. (2021). *Maritime Security Threats: Issues and Challenges in Malaysias Maritime Domain, Malaysia A Marit, Nation*.

- Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sakandarī. (n.d.). *Al-ḥikam al-'aṭā'iyah*. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Ishak, M. S. B. H., & Abdullah, O. C. (2012). Islam and the Malay world: An insight into the assimilation of Islamic values. *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization*, 2(2), 58-65.
- Johns, A. H. (1961) Sufizm as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History. *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 2(2), 10-23.
- Karo-Karo, D., Zuhri, A. & Simamora, N. A. (2024). Uncovering The Power of Dhikr from The Perspective of Sufism and Its Relevance in Resisting the Destruction of The World. *Tadrib: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 10(1), 645-654.
- Kembaren, M. M., Nasution, A. A. & Lubis, M. H. (2020). Cerita Rakyat Melayu Sumatra Utara Berupa Mitos dan Legenda dalam Membentuk Kearifan Lokal Masyarakat. *Rumpun Jurnal Persuratan Melayu*, 8(1), 1-12.
- Khaw, N. R., Jun, G. L., Saidin, M. M., Mokhtar, N. A. M., & Abd Halim, M. H. (2021). The Sungai Batu Archaeological Complex: Re-Assessing the Emergence of Ancient Kedah. *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies*, 39(2), 117-152.
- Lal, J. B. (1997). Community forest management in Southern Asia: A survival issue. *Journal of sustainable Forestry*, 4(3-4), 73-88.
- Leifer, M. & Nelson, D. (1973). Conflict of Interest in the Straits of Malacca. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)*, 49(2), 190-203.
- Liaw Y. F. (2011). *Sejarah Kesusasteraan Melayu Klasik*. Jakarta, Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- Mutalib, H. (2008). *Islam in Southeast Asia* (No. 11). Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Ni'am, S. (2020). The debate of orthodox Sufism and philosophical Sufism: The study of Maqāmāt in the Sirāj al-Ṭālibīn of Shaykh Iḥsān Jampes. *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 58(1), 1-34.
- Radpour, E. (2019). Symbolism of Water in Daoism: A Sufi Point of View. *Sophia Perennis*, 15(34), 5-17.
- Raju, K. V., & Manasi, S. (Eds). (2017). *Water and scriptures: ancient roots for sustainable development*. Springer.
- Reid, A. (1993). *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680, Volume Two: Expansion and Crisis*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

- Rohazid, M. N., & Abdullah, M. F. (2022). Industri Perikanan di Malaysia: Perkembangan Sektor Perikanan di Pulau Pinang, 1970-1990. *Asian Journal of Environment, History and Heritage*, 6(2), 73-90.
- Shamsudin, R., & Akhir, N. S. M. (2018). Kosmologi Islam dan Kosmologi Melayu: Analisis Perbandingan Aspek-Aspek Penciptaan Alam Berdasarkan Al-Quran dan Al-Sunnah. *Abqari Journal*, 16, 219-234.
- Shamsul Bahri, N. A., Wahab, N. A., Noor, A. I. M., & Abdullah, M. F. (2024). The Boatbuilding Practices Among Boatbuilders (*Tukang Timbal*) in Terengganu, Malaysia: A Case Study in Water Transportation, Maritime Heritage And Craftsmanship in Asean. *Alam Cipta: International Journal on Sustainable Tropical Design Research & Practice*, 17(1), 75-87.
- Sinclair, M. (Ed.). (2019). *The Path of the Ocean: Traditional Poetry of Polynesia*, University of Hawaii Press.
- Siraj, M. A. & Tayab, M. A. K. (2017). Water in Islam. *Water and Scriptures: Ancient Roots for Sustainable Development*, 15-58.
- Van Dijk, K. (1998). Dakwah and indigenous culture: the dissemination of Islam. *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land-en Volkenkunde*, 154(2), 218-235.
- Van Ronkel, P. S. (1921). *Catalogus van de Maleische en Sundaneesche handschriften* (Vol. 2). E.J, Brill.
- Wahab, M. A. (2022). Islamic spiritual and emotional intelligence and its relationship to eternal happiness: A conceptual paper. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 61(6), 4783-4806.
- Wilkinson, R. J. (1935). The Malacca Sultanate. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 13(2)(122), 22-67.
- Winstedt, R. O. (1921). Hikayat Hang Tuah. *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 83, 110-122.
- Winstedt, R. 1958. A History of Classical Malay Literature. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 31(3), 3-259.
- Yaapar, M. S. (2019). Malay navigation and maritime trade: A journey through anthropology and history. *IIUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies*, 2(1), 73-81.
- Zarvani, M. & Mashhadi, M. (2011). The rite of the water-carrier: from the circles of Sufis to the rituals of Muharram. *Journal of Shi 'a Islamic Studies Winter*, 4(1), 23-46.
- Zulhelmi. Z. (2016). Karakteristik Sastra Sufi Hamzah Fansuri: Kajian Terhadap Syair Perahu. *Jurnal Adabiya*, 18(2), 30-48.

Eco-political Discourse in Mahmoud Darwish's Poetry of Resistance

Hamoud Yahya Ahmed Mohsen*

Fahad Ibrahim Al-Bakr**

Ruzy Suliza Hashim***

Abdulrahman Alosman****

Abstract: Resistance remains the central theme in the poetry of the Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish. This article explores aspects of the eco-political discourse in Darwish's poetry that bind ecology and politics for resisting colonialism. The study argues that Darwish employs ecological imagery drawn from the Palestinian nature to advance his political narrative of resistance. Through the lens of eco-politics, the analysis reveals how the elements of nature, such as trees, stones, rocks, hills, mountains, valleys, rivers, animals, fruits, the sky, the cold, the rain, the sun, and the moon, function as potent symbols of resistance. These natural forms become both witnesses to and participants in the struggle. Just as Palestinian landscape persists despite human transgressions, so too do the poet and Palestinians remain steadfast in their quest for freedom. The study offers new insights into eco-politics as

*Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: hamoud@iium.edu.my

**Professor, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, College of Literature and Art, University of Hail, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Email: f.albakar@uoh.edu.sa

***Professor, School of Humanities and Fine Arts, VIZJA University, Warsaw, Poland. Email: rs.hashim@vizja.pl

****Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: abdulrahman@iium.edu.my. *Corresponding author.*

a literary approach and a fresh pathway for reading resistance in Arabic and Palestinian literature.

Keywords: Resistance, ecology, politics, eco-political discourse, poetry, Mahmoud Darwish, Palestine

Abstrak: Tema penentangan adalah teras utama dalam puisi penyair Palestin, Mahmoud Darwish. Artikel ini meneroka aspek wacana eko-politik dalam puisi Darwish yang menghubungkan ekologi dan politik dalam usaha menentang kolonialisme. Kajian ini berhujah bahawa Darwish menggunakan imejan ekologi yang diambil daripada alam semula jadi Palestin untuk mengukuhkan naratif politik penentangannya. Melalui lensa eko-politik, analisis ini memperlihatkan bagaimana unsur-unsur alam seperti pokok, batu, bongkah, bukit, gunung, lembah, sungai, haiwan, buah-buahan, langit, kesejukan, hujan, matahari dan bulan berfungsi sebagai simbol penentangan yang kuat. Bentuk-bentuk semula jadi ini menjadi saksi dan pada masa yang sama turut serta dalam perjuangan tersebut. Sebagaimana landskap Palestin terus kekal walaupun berdepan pelanggaran manusia, demikian juga penyair dan rakyat Palestin tetap teguh dalam usaha mereka mencapai kebebasan. Kajian ini menawarkan perspektif baharu terhadap eko-politik sebagai pendekatan sastera serta laluan segar untuk memahami penentangan dalam kesusasteraan Arab dan Palestin.

Kata kunci: Penentangan, ekologi, politik, wacana eko-politik, puisi, Mahmoud Darwish, Palestin.

Introduction

Resistance poetry in Arabic literature emerged as a powerful political response to Western colonial domination in the twentieth century. Resistance poetry first took root in Palestine, which has remained the epicentre of Arab cultural and political struggle. As Deshazer (1994) notes, “poetry is a genre frequently chosen by both first and third world resistance writers as a fugitive means of expression” (p. 13). More than any other literary form, poetry stirs collective consciousness, inspiring steadfastness in the face of oppression. The twentieth century was marked by some political and historical incidents that overshadowed the Arab World, including the colonisation of many Arab countries. However, almost all Arab colonised countries obtained their independence or forced the colonisers to leave their lands except Palestine (Ahmed & Hashim, 2014).

Historically, the Arab poets have at no time in history been free from political and social commitments. Since the pre-Islamic period, Arab poets have played a very important role in their societies. A poet was the voice of the tribe and people (Mattawa, 2008). Alshaer (2011) argues that Darwish can be considered the greatest Palestinian poet whose poetry of resistance shaped the history of Palestine. He occupies a distinctive position among Palestinian writers for his devotion and poetic production. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to explore how the poetry of Darwish is viewed through the lens of eco-politics that binds ecology and politics within the Palestinian context in which nature is employed not merely as a setting, but as an active agent of resistance against colonialism, offering some insights into the inseparable relationship between ecology and politics in the Palestinian literary and political contexts.

The Poet and Poems in Political Context

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) was born in a small village about nine kilometres from the port of Acre called Al-Birwa in the Western part of Galeel in Palestine on March 13, 1941. (Alshaer, 2011). Rahman (2008) argues that his poetry was highly preoccupied with imagery drawn from his homeland of Palestine. In this sense, Darwish emerges not only as a literary activist but also as a pioneer of eco-political discourse in the Arab literature in general and in Palestinian Literature in particular. As Kanafani (1987) notes, "resistance through poetry is no less valuable than the armed resistance" (p. 11), and Darwish's eco-political verse displays the enduring capacity of words to resist the occupation of the homeland through the various forms of nature surrounding him.

The focus on Darwish's eco-political discourse is both necessary and timely. While postcolonial readings of Palestinian resistance literature are numerous, few have explored the role of ecological imagery as a vital political strategy. The integration of ecological and political narratives in Darwish's work has not been examined within the broader field of eco-political criticism. Moreover, the contemporary ecocritical scholarship developed primarily in America and Britain has centred on poets from English-speaking contexts, often excluding Arab voices, even though much of the Arab World remained under colonial rule until the mid-twentieth century. The eco-political discourse in Darwish's poetry of resistance is still unaddressed. Therefore, the current study is meant to address this gap by the analysis of selected poems of resistance using

an authorised translation of Darwish's poetry by Fady Joudah in 2007. By placing Darwish's work within the eco-political discourse, the study contributes to both ecocriticism and postcolonial studies, offering a new perspective on how literature can merge environmental consciousness with the politics of freedom.

Literature Review

The current study is an attempt to explore Darwish's unique connection to his homeland, where every aspect of Palestinian nature seems to be documented in the lines of Darwish's poetry and utilised as a form of resistance to the colonisers of his homeland. He records his personal portrayal of Palestinian nature that becomes a collective memory that merges the past, present, and future of Palestinian resistance. He also bears witness to the loss of his land and home by highlighting the smallest details of Palestinian nature that he used as a form of resistance. The use of the imagery of nature provides a way for resistance proper in his poetry. Furthermore, Darwish seems to be its stones and sand, its plants and trees, and its soil and water. Furthermore, he is a part of Palestinian nature, but a part that makes nature a source of life and struggle. To him, the Palestinian nature is the companion and the supporter of Palestinians in the whole tragedy of resistance. In other words, Darwish and his people have become integral to the very nature of Palestine in the whole scene of resistance to the occupiers of their land. This idea has been reflected clearly in Darwish's public speech on the 50th anniversary of the occupation of Palestine, in which he declares, "We, the Palestinians, offspring of this sacred land, declare our resounding presence in time and place. We have refused to adopt their version of our history. In addition, we remain advocates and witnesses of the authentic narrative of Palestinian fortitude and will to live" (Hamidi, 2011, p.34). This declaration reveals the ripening sense of the Palestinian resistance and their robust faith in their rights to live peacefully on their land. Not only this, but they are closely related to their homeland and their own history. Accordingly, they will continue their struggle until they gain their independence and repossess their land. Moreover, Darwish explicitly emerges as a man and citizen of Palestine, who has a strong sense of resistance as a way to free his homeland. He opens new vistas for resistance by using nature as a form of resistance against the colonisers. Indeed, Darwish was the first Arab poet to give shape to resistance through nature in his poetry.

The pioneering academic studies of resistance poetry are regarded as prior studies to resistance literature in the Arab World in general and to the resistance poetry in particular because they introduce the term resistance literature to the Arab World and provide a distinctive definition for resistance poetry in Arab literature. The most important of which is the study conducted by Ghassan Kanafani, who is the pioneer in the field of resistance literature in the Arab World. For Barbara (1987), "the term resistance first applied in the description of Palestinian literature in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study *Literature of Resistance in the Occupied Palestine 1948-1966*" (p.13).

Palestinian resistance poetry was coined by the Palestinian critic Kanafani in the third chapter of this study, which provided some illustrative poems of resistance poetry. The second study was conducted by Kanafani (1968), in which he provides a broader definition of resistance poetry and makes a distinction between resistance poetry written by the Palestinian poets who are inside Palestine, like Darwish, and those who are in exile. For Kanafani (1968), "the political and literary resistance" (p.204) is considered an inexhaustible resource of the armed resistance. He adds that "the extreme importance of the cultural form of resistance is no less valuable than the armed resistance itself" (as cited in Barbara 1987: 11). In addition, he has not analysed the poems of Darwish to display the aspects of his eco-political discourse of resistance. He neglects entirely the way in which Darwish utilises nature as a form of political resistance to the colonisers of his homeland. Therefore, the current article is intended to fill this gap and address the aspects of eco-political discourse in Darwish's work.

Al-Khatib (1986) addressed Darwish's poems, focusing on situational and natural conditions rather than thematic concerns. His study covered only two poems by Darwish addressing the poet's political stance towards specific groups, such as the Kurds in Iraq. Marwah (1986) also viewed Palestinian poetry as cultural and public rather than a means of struggle and resistance. Shukri (1970) defined Darwish's poetry as the poetry of political opposition with three interconnected dimensions, namely, human, social, and national. He argued that Darwish is the typical voice of Palestinian struggle who has devoted his life and literary talent to resisting the occupation of his homeland. Al-Naqqash (1969), in his study entitled "Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet of the Occupied Land," addresses more explicitly the

link between Darwish's homeland and his poetry of resistance. To him, natural images of the poet's homeland shaped the imagery of his poetic production. However, he did not fully articulate the aspects and how the forms of nature are used as a form of Darwish's political discourse in his poetry of resistance. Furthering and deepening this discussion, Tawfiq (1991) highlighted Darwish's romantic aspect of using nature in his poetry rather than addressing it as an iconic form of political resistance inherent in his natural imagery. Elmessri (1981) explicitly connected Darwish's images to the deep rootedness of Palestinian with their occupied homeland.

Nasser (2011) argued that Darwish's poetry can be regarded as a transitional mark of resistance, observing that his use of natural images to portray the ongoing struggle for freedom was obvious throughout his works. Jaggi (2002) highlighted that Darwish's poetic imagery embodied the homeland in exile, while Saith (2005) echoed that Darwish's resistance is inseparable from the land itself. Ashqar (2005) also argued that the imagery and symbolism in Darwish's poetry of resistance were directly drawn from the natural and physical realities of the homeland of Palestine. Thus, the previous studies on Darwish's work have clearly revealed a tenacious yet underexplored gap for the study of the eco-political discourse of his poetry of resistance, which the current study is intended to scrutinise within Palestinian literary and political contexts.

Theoretical Framework

The current study applies the eco-political discourse as a central analytical framework, merging the theoretical currents of ecocriticism and postcolonial theory to interrogate Mahmoud Darwish's poetry of resistance. Eco-political discourse, in this context, shows the inseparable interplay between environmental representation and political struggle, where images of land, nature, and ecology are utilised as means of decolonisation. Although ecocriticism, emerging in the early 1990s as a critical approach exploring human-environment relationships, has secured a notable place in Western scholarship (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996), it remains underdeveloped in Arabic literary studies and academia. This gap is particularly visible in the study of Palestinian resistance poetry, where the ecological dimensions of Darwish's imagery have rarely been examined as thoughtful and strategic icons

of political resistance (Ashqar, 2005). Postcolonial theory, on the other hand, exposes the cultural, political, and literary legacies of colonialism, highlighting the ways in which texts resist imperial narratives and reclaim indigenous epistemologies (Said, 1993). It interrogates the structural and ideological mechanisms through which domination is enacted and sustained, and how literary texts work to undermine such systems (Young, 2001).

While Darwish's work has been examined through postcolonial readings (Allen, 2000), critical engagement with Arabic resistance poetry has declined in recent decades, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. In this period, securitisation discourse has increasingly framed Arab identity in reductive and politically charged ways (Suleiman, 2004). Such shifts have diverted attention away from the cultural and ecological registers of resistance, further marginalising interpretive approaches that foreground the land as a central site of struggle (Mamdani, 2004). By synthesising ecocriticism and postcolonial theory, eco-political discourse emerges here as a critical lens that redefines the Palestinian landscape in Darwish's poetry as an active agent in the struggle for freedom and independence. Nature is not a static backdrop, but a living entity that bears witness to displacement, preserves collective memory of resistance, and resists erasure (Gana, 2013). Nature becomes a form of political speech, ecological imagery transforms into an archive of identity, and the physical terrain evolves into a site of contestation, endurance, and hope (Yahya, 2012). This integrative framework not only deepens the interpretation of Darwish's poetry but also advances a non-Western, interdisciplinary methodology for reading resistance literature in the Arab World.

Analysis and Discussion

The following sections will briefly examine and analyse the three key aspects of the representations of eco-political discourse, highlighting how Darwish's poetry of resistance forges a profound connection between ecology and politics.

Naturalistic Aspect

By the naturalistic aspect, we mean the way in which Darwish employs various forms of nature to signify the maturity of his resistance upon returning home, such as the sea, the sun and moon, the wind, flora,

and fauna. This facet of Darwish's maturity of eco-resistance remains obvious in many poems upon returning home such as "A Cloud from Sodom," "Two Stranger Birds In Our Feathers," "If You Return Home," "To Our Land," "Nothing but Light," "The Strangers' Picnic," "Housework," "A State of Siege," "Mural," "The Traveler," and "Two Olive Trees."

For instance, in the following lines of the poem entitled "The Strangers' Picnic," the poet implicitly expresses his protest through the image of the sea, as can be explored in the following lines:

*Take me to the sea during the sunset
To listen to what the sea complains to us
I will join the sea waves and
Request the sea to take them away
From our land.* (Darwish, 2000, p. 610).

The images of the sea at sunset, the complaint of the sea to the poet, and joining the sea waves are a series of complementary images that expose the naturalistic aspect of the poet's maturity of resistance. The use of the imagery of the sea indicates the massiveness of their opposition to the colonisers of the land. His assertion to join the sea-waves and make an appeal to them to help him dismiss the occupiers of the land to whom he refers as "them" is insightful of the continuity and vividness of the poet's poetic voice of resistance. The poet's listening to the sea complaining is a mark of his maturity, which is followed by the image of the dual act of the poet and the sea to end the occupation. The tone is mellow and reveals a mature mode of resistance through the imagery of the sea.

Similarly, the imagery of the naturalistic aspect of the poet's eco-political discourse shifts from the sea to the river that is also depicted as a supportive agent of Palestinians in their struggle to regain their homeland, as in the poem entitled "The Strangers' Picnic," when Darwish observes that:

*Take me to the river
It remains the source of defiance
Its banks are my long way
Everything in it will keep on
Supporting us until
They leave our land.* (Darwish, 2007, p. 610).

In this stanza, the poet refers to the Jordan River, which separates the occupied Palestine from Jordan. The West Bank is a Palestinian part that has been occupied, and the East Bank is a Jordanian part, which is not occupied. By using the image of the river, the poet symbolically shows the mellowness of his resistance in this period because the river flows gently. The whole image is a clear attack on the two situations on the river's banks. The first situation is that of the West Bank of the river, which is entirely occupied, along with a continuous battle and struggle on the part of the Palestinians. However, the other bank is in a peaceful situation on the East Bank of the river. However, the poet, like the river that is a flowing source of water, will remain a streaming source of opposition.

The poem entitled "A State of Siege" presents another illustration of the poet's imagery of the naturalistic aspect of eco-political discourse in Darwish's poetry. The symbolic use of the sky reveals the poet's mature mode of eco-resistance upon returning home, as can be shown in the following lines when he says:

*The sky is leaden at twilight
Orange at night and it has remained
For the hearts like fence flowers.* (Darwish, 2007, p.121).

The image of the leaden sky at twilight suggests the naturalistic aspect of the eco-political discourse in Darwish's poetry. It is made overt from his reaction to the Israeli ground siege of the city of Ramallah. He feels that he is not besieged by the land siege of the occupiers. Instead, his heart is encircled by the sky of his homeland that protects and empowers him. The image of the fence of flowers evokes the ripeness of eco-resistance at this stage. The poet perceives the Palestinians under siege as the flowers fenced. The siege here symbolises the poet's restricted activism upon returning home, and it evokes the poet's sense of matured resistance and the mellowness of the tone of the poems of this period.

Similarly, the poet expands the imagery of the sky at sunset, which is symbolic of the poet's eco-political discourse and the mellow tone of his poems upon returning home, as can be traced in the following lines of the poem entitled "Housework," Darwish declares that:

*The red and golden sunset
Shinned in my blood and
Made me defend the land.* (Darwish, 2007, p. 55).

The image of the red and golden sunset, which refers to the point at which the sun is seen completely below the horizon, marking the beginning of the twilight, is a symbol of the mature imagery of resistance through nature at home. The colour of his blood and the colour of the sunset are the same to evoke the ripening of the poet's eco-resistance. When the sun is golden, it marks the end of the day and implies mellowness of the poet's resistance. This is representative of old age as well as the length of time the poet has been speaking against colonisation. Then, the poet turns to express his struggle through the moon as can be traced in the following lines of his "A State of Siege," when he asserts that:

*If you are not a stone
Be a moon in the lover's sleep
I can see the moon sleeping
Beneath each stone.* (Darwish, 2007, p.127).

The poet implicitly expresses his sense of eco-political discourse by using the words "a stone" and "a moon." The use of "a stone" symbolises the Palestinian resistance (which is known as "the children of stones" in the Palestinian Intifada). However, the use of "a moon" symbolises a Palestinian martyr who has been killed by the occupation forces during the Palestinian *Intifada*. The image "I can see the moon sleeping beneath each stone" evokes that there are many Palestinians martyrs who have sacrificed their lives to defend their land, and they are described as the moon to show their noble deeds in defending their land. Additionally, it shows that the Palestinian opposition has developed to show the comported public uprising against the occupiers.

Darwish used the olive tree as a symbolic form of resistance to the occupation in all his poetic stages of resistance. In the poem "The State of Siege," the poet addresses the Palestinian resistance upon returning home as his love because Darwish's love of his homeland implies his struggle to free his beloved land and describes the olive tree as a producer of the seeds of resistance:

*If you are not a rain my love
Be a tree
Soaked with fertility
Be an olive tree
That makes the seeds of resistance.* (Darwish, 2007, p.139).

This excerpt reveals the ripeness of Darwish's eco-political discourse upon returning homeland as he addresses the Palestinian struggle symbolically as "my love." He calls on his people to be as steady and strong on their land as trees that are at the best of their productivity. What makes his voice of resistance overt and ripe is the use of the olive tree, which represents the Palestinian defiance. The tree has its roots embedded in the ground, and its seeds will sprout more trees. This reproductive aspect of the tree demonstrates Darwish's desire to appeal to his countrymen and countrywomen to be rooted firmly in their resistance against illegal encroachment of their land.

Similarly, Darwish utilises the wheat for resistance in almost all three stages of his poetic output. Remarkably, he uses the wheat to reflect both the ripening and immortalisation of his eco-resistance, as can be proved by a close look at the following lines that have been extracted from his poem entitled "Mural" in which Darwish states that:

*I am a grain of wheat
That has died to live again
My death makes a new life.* (Darwish, 2000, p.732).

The use of the metaphor "I am a grain of wheat" indicates clearly the intimate attachment with the homeland where he feels renewed and invigorated. Therefore, the ability of the wheat to regenerate is symptomatic of the Palestinian will to remain in existence and a sign of Darwish's attempt to immortalise the Palestinian resistance. In the literary context, a grain of wheat has been used by many literary writers to symbolise people seeking independence. For instance, a Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o wrote a novel that weaves events during the state of emergency in Kenya's resistance against the colonial forces. The novel was entitled as "A Grain of Wheat." Similarly, Darwish's use of "a grain of wheat that has died to live again" evokes the eco-political discourse in Darwish's poetry implicitly. The expression "my death" is symbolic of Darwish's mode of resistance. This kind of resistance will remain active, as it is a step towards the immortalisation of the Palestinian resistance in the sense that it will remain influential even after his death.

Interconnected Aspect

This aspect is meant to show the representation of the poet's eco-political discourse as an attachment with his homeland in the context of

the struggle against the occupation of the land as revealed in the poems of the last phase of his poetry. The imagery of Darwish's resistance through nature arrives at the state of a full interconnectedness between people and land. This matured form of the interconnected resistance upon the poet's returning home as can be illustrated in many poems of this period such as "Low Sky," "The Stranger," "In My Mother's House," "On A Day Today," "And We Have a Land," "You will Be Forgotten," "Cadence Chooses Me," "Nothing but Light," and "To Our Land." For instance, in the poem entitled "The Stranger," the poet describes Palestinians and their land as one. This oneness of both people and land evokes the sense of a close attachment between them in front of the colonisers, as can be traced in the extract below:

*We are one in two
There is no name for us, when the stranger;
Stumbles upon himself in the stranger
Of our garden behind us we have
The force of shadow.* (Darwish, 2007, p. 27).

The poet depicts the inclusive interconnections between Palestinians and their land within the occupied homeland. The pronoun "we" refers to both people and land, as one existing force, and they are nameless since they are two parts of the same body that has one name, called Palestine. The image "of our garden behind us we have / the force of shadow" suggests the sense of hindrance made by Palestinians to defend their land from the occupation. The use of the shadow is insightful of the implied meaning. The shadow is the area where straight light from the light source cannot reach due to the barrier of another object. Thus, the lines show that Darwish arrives at a full form of interconnectedness between people and land in their struggle against the invaders of the land in the final stage of his poetic output.

The poem entitled "A State of Siege" is one of the longest poems of Darwish. It is written in the Palestinian city of Ramallah, where the poet settles down when he comes back from exile. As the title suggests, it is written in the context of a siege when the Israeli occupation forces besiege the city of Ramallah. It is a direct attack and a portrayal of the inhuman siege and the nonstop curfew in the occupied land. However, the tone of the poem remains mellow to reflect a mature aspect of interconnectedness. The following lines can illustrate the interconnected aspect of maturity between the poet and the homeland:

*I am she until the end
That is our love begins.
And when it ends
"She and I" (Darwish, 2007, p.155).*

These lines expose the poet's intimate seamlessness with his homeland, which he describes in human terms as a female beloved. Darwish arrives at the level of being the land itself, and the land is Darwish. The oneness of Darwish and land is revealed by the image of "she and I," which is insightful of the poet's interconnectedness with the land. This ultimate seamlessness in their connection is insightful of the poet's attempt to immortalise his eco-resistance upon returning home. As can be understood, the imagery of the poet-land attachment in the final phase seems to be completely different from that of the previous two phases. The analysis of Darwish's poems over the three stages reveals that the interconnectedness between the poet and land is perceived and depicted differently. In the early poems, the poet-land attachment is depicted metaphorically in terms of being from the family of the plough when he remarks that "my father belongs to the family of plough." In the poems of exile, the poet-land interconnectedness grows to be organic and intimate and is depicted as "our land and we are a bone and flesh". However, in the final phase, the poet-land interrelations arrive at the state of complete seamlessness as being one "She and I".

In addition, the interconnected aspect of his eco-political discourse is represented in his resistance upon returning home, as can also be illustrated in the poem entitled "Cadence Chooses Me" when the poet demonstrates communicative moments between him and the aspects of nature in the homeland, such as the stones and birds, as can be understood from his remarks:

*Whenever I listen to the stone, I hear
The cooing of a white pigeon
Grasp in me:
My brother! I am your little sister
So, I cry in her name the tears of speech. (Darwish, 2007, p.179).*

The images of listening to the stone and hearing the white pigeon communicating with the poet upon returning home reflect the maturity in the poet's sense of the interlock between Palestinians and their land. The white pigeon is always known as the release dove for celebrating

events such as weddings or sporting events. Although the white pigeons look like doves, they have increased in fame for such ceremonies. The white pigeons are also cared for pigeon racing purposes. However, the most important features about the white pigeons are that they can identify their homes and find the way home in the shortest possible distance. The cooing of the white pigeons reminds the poet of the displaced Palestinians who are interlocked with their homeland, and they can find their homes one day.

Similarly, in the poem “You Will Be Forgotten,” the poet’s undying involvement with the land is depicted as the future of the young generations in the occupied Palestine, as shown below:

*I am the road to the land
For those who will follow my footsteps
Those who will follow me to the end
Will be free at home by tomorrow.* (Darwish, 2007, p. 234).

The image of the road in which the poet describes himself as the road to land is insightful of his tendency to immortalise the Palestinian resistance as the only way to free the land. The portrayal of the poet as the road shapes a signpost for the upcoming Palestinian generations, inside and more keenly the displaced Palestinians outside, to strive, to find, and not to yield in their struggle to regain their lost homeland. His tone is suggestive of his role that there will be no end to their resistance until the country is free.

Furthermore, Palestine remains beautiful despite its years of war and struggle. When he touches the land of Palestine, he affirms that:

*O’ Palestine
You are the name of people
You are the name of the soil
You are the name of the sky
You will be victorious.* (Darwish, 2007, p. 306).

This stanza provides a comprehensive portrayal of the poet’s maturity of eco-resistance upon returning home. The people, the land, and the sky are bonded together to construct the name of Palestine. The word “victorious” is inclusive and revealing of the poet’s resistance within the full image of Palestine – people and land. This matured interconnectedness is expanded when the poet freely acknowledges his

devotion to his homeland when he declares his matured organic integrity with the land in the poem "The Subsistence of Birds."

Centric Aspect

Darwish's eco-political discourse is also manifested in the form of centric resistance. The poet's self and the forms of nature are concentrated among the poems, and they are manifested in the recurring use of the pronoun "I" for both human and naturalistic references. The poems such as "We are Missing a Present," "Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?," "I Waited for No One," "I Do not Know Your Name," and "I Did not Apologise to the Well" provide illustrations of the aspects of Darwish's resistance in its centric form. For instance, the following lines of the poem entitled "Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone" can be regarded as an example of this aspect of centric resistance to the occupation of the land in which Darwish declares that:

*I looked upon the trees that guard our nights
I looked upon the winds that
Protect their homeland
I look upon a procession of ancient prophets
As the climb barefoot toward Orshalim
And I ask: is there a new prophet for this new age.* (Darwish, 2000, p.595)

The poet is presented as a gazer of the natural scenes of the occupied homeland. The repeated use of the pronoun "I" and the verb "look" in "I look..." reveals that the poet's defiance has arrived at the stage of maturity. He seems to be a judicious and sensible observer of the forms of nature performing their opposing role in the whole scene of Palestinian conflict. The natural images depicted expose the poet's centric sense of resistance in employing the forms of nature for resisting the colonisers of his homeland. Similarly, in the poem entitled "In My Mother's House," the poet portrays the ripeness of his eco-political discourse through the images of home, where he captures his own experience of the past and present. The metaphor of a photograph represents the irrevocable change to the poet himself when he was a young man. This reversal transforms the poet's opposition into a site of memory that evokes the aspect of his centric resistance. Therefore, as he gazes at his lost youth, the photo in turn regards Darwish as the "guest." This stanza reveals a state of being estranged. The question of the gazing photo is repeated

several times before he depicts his symbiotic relations with the nature surrounding him:

*I said: I am you
But I jumped over the wall to see
What would happen if the unknown saw me
Respectfully plucking a violet
From its hanging garden
Perhaps it would have greeted me and said:
Return safely. (Darwish, 2007, 187)*

The poet highlights the ripening of his symbiotic relations with his homeland, along with his long experience of struggling, which generates his mature mode of protest upon returning home. His leap over the wall symbolises both Palestinian perseverance and hope for freedom. In the poem entitled “Do not Apologise for What You Have Done,” the symptom of the ripeness of his eco-political discourse upon returning home is shown through the portrait of the poet’s readiness to apologise to his motherland for being away from it for such a long period of time. This can be illustrated in the following lines when Darwish celebrates a moment of reproach to himself for being away from his motherland.

*I am the mother who gave birth to him
But the wind brought him up
I said to my other
Never apologise except to your mother. (Darwish, 2007, 179).*

The use of the pronoun “I” refers to both the motherland and the poet in their dualistic form of the symbiotic relations at home. The first “I” refers to the land that is described in human terms as the poet’s mother, whereas the second “I” refers to the poet who is alienated from the homeland for a long time. The image of the wind that brings him up evokes the centric aspect of the eco-political discourse of Darwish because he is described as the son of the wind. This metaphor is insightful of the strength and perseverance of the Palestinian resistance through the image of the symbiotic attachment between the poet and the wind at returning home.

Conclusion

This study has displayed the eco-political discourse of Darwish’s poetry of resistance, particularly in the final phase of his poetic production

that spanned the last twelve years upon returning home. The analysis of the selected poems has revealed that Darwish utilises the various forms of nature, such as trees, stones, rocks, hills, mountains, valleys, rivers, animals, fruits, the sky, the cold, the rain, the sun, and moon, and all other forms of flora and fauna as vital icons for resistance against the occupation of his homeland. The discussion has highlighted three distinctive aspects of the eco-political discourse in his poetry of resistance: the symbiotic attachment between the poet and nature; the organic unity between the poet and the land in opposing colonial dispossession; and the transformation of the natural environment into a living participant in the collective struggle. Darwish's self-identification as a grain of wheat that dies to give new life shapes his ultimate poetic philosophy, where resistance transcends literature to achieve political and ecological discourse. Nature ceases to be a mere metaphor and becomes a political force sustaining both land and people. Therefore, Darwish's poetry redefines resistance as an eco-political act, where the liberation of the homeland is inseparable from the preservation of its natural environment.

References

- Ahmed, H & Hashim, R. (2014) Resisting Colonialism Through Nature: An Ecopostcolonial Reading of Mahmoud Darwish's Selected Poems. *Holy Land Studies*, 13, 50-65.
- Al-Khatib, Y. (1968). *The Palestinian Resistance Poetry*. Research Center of the PLO.
- Al-Naqqash, R. (1969). *Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet of the Occupied Land*. Dar al-Hilal.
- Alshaer, A. (2011). Identity in Mahmoud Darwish's Poem "Dice Player." *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 1, 90-110.
- Ashqar, A. (2005). *Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet of Palestine*. Dar al-Hilal.
- Barbara, H. (1987). *Resistance Literature*. Methuen.
- Darwish, M. 2000. *Dewan Mahmoud Darwish 1-3*. Baghdad: Dar Al-Hurairh for Publishing.
- Darwish, M. 2007. *The Butterfly's Burden*. F. Joudah (trans.). Washington: Copper Canyon Press.
- Deshazer, M. K. (1994). *A Poetics of Resistance: Women Writing in El Salvador, South Africa, and the U.S.A*. University of Michigan Press.

- Elmessiri, A. (1983). The Palestinian Wedding: A Bilingual Anthology of Contemporary Palestinian Resistance. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12, 77-99.
- Gana, N. (2013). In Search of Andalusia: Reconfiguring Arabness in the Wake of the Arab Spring. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 15, 686-706. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2013.849449>
- Glottfelty, C., & Fromm, H. (Eds.). (1996). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press.
- Hamidi, T. (2011). Bearing Witness in Palestinian Resistance Literature. *Race and Class*, 52, 21-42.
- Jaggi, M. (2002). Poet of the Arab World: Mahmoud Darwish. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com>
- Kanafani, G. (1987). *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*. Institute for Arabic Research.
- Mamdani, M. (2004). *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. Pantheon Books.
- Marwah, H. (1986). *Critical Studies*. The Company of Arabic Research and Publication.
- Mattawa, K. (2008). *When the Poet Is a Stranger: Poetry and Agency in Tagore, Walcott, and Darwish*. Duke University Press.
- Nasser, H. (2011). Darwish and the Need for a New Poetry of Resistance for The Arab Spring. *Near East Quarterly*, 1, 1-7.
- Rahman, N. (2008). Threatened Longing and Perpetual Search: The Writing of Home in the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish. In H. Khamis & N. Rahman (Eds.), *Mahmoud Darwish: Exile's Poet* (pp. 41-56). Olive Branch Press.
- Said, E. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Saith, A. (2005). *Mahmoud Darwish: Hope as Home in the Eye of the Storm*. Arts & Media.
- Shukri, G. (1970). *Resistance Literature*. Cairo: Dar Al-Ma'arif.
- Tawfiq, H. (1991). *Mahmoud Darwish*. House of Scientific Books.
- Yahya, H., Lazim, Z., & Vengadasamy, R. (2012). Ecoresistance in the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 18, 75-85.

Mindfulness-Informed Parenting Interventions for Parents and Caregivers of Children with Atypical Development: A Scoping Review

Siti Inarah Hasim*

Jamilah Hanum Abdul Khaiyom**

Mardiana Mohamad***

Zunaidah Mohd Marzuki****

Jamiah Manap*****

Nellie Ismail*****

Nor Hayati Kasim*****

Abstract: Parents and caregivers of children with atypical development often experience high levels of stress and reduced well-being. This scoping review

*PhD Candidate, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100 Kuala Lumpur. Email: inarahhasim@iium.edu.my

**Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100 Kuala Lumpur. Email: hanum@iium.edu.my.

Corresponding author.

***Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100 Kuala Lumpur. Email: mardiana@iium.edu.my

****Assistant Professor, Department of Quran and Sunnah Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100 Kuala Lumpur. Email: zunaidah@iium.edu.my

*****Associate Professor, Psychology and Human Well-being Research Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor. Email: jamiah@ukm.edu.my

*****Senior Lecturer, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor. Email: nellie@upm.edu.my

*****Administrative Officer, National Population and Family Development Board, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, 50712 Kuala Lumpur. Email: yatie@lppkn.gov.my

mapped the literature on mindfulness-informed parenting interventions for this population, focusing on intervention types, methodological features, outcomes, and the integration of spirituality and religiosity. Reported in accordance with PRISMA-ScR, a comprehensive search of Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, and MyCite, with updated search alerts, identified 49 eligible studies. The evidence based was concentrated in North America and Europe, and hybrid mindfulness-informed interventions and mindful parenting programmes were the most common. Parent outcomes were more consistently positive than child outcomes, but the literature remained methodologically heterogeneous, and only one study explicitly integrated spirituality or religiosity. Future research should prioritise more rigorous and culturally responsive intervention development.

Keywords: caregiver well-being; cultural adaptation; neurodevelopmental conditions; psychosocial interventions; SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being)

Abstrak: Ibu bapa dan penjaga kepada kanak-kanak dengan perkembangan atipikal sering mengalami tahap tekanan yang tinggi serta kesejahteraan yang lebih rendah. Ulasan skop ini memetakan literatur mengenai intervensi keibubapaan berasaskan *mindfulness* (sedar akal) bagi populasi ini, dengan memberi tumpuan kepada jenis intervensi, ciri metodologi, hasil intervensi, serta pengintegrasian elemen kerohanian dan keagamaan. Dilaporkan selaras dengan PRISMA-ScR, carian komprehensif dalam Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, dan MyCite, bersama kemas kini carian berkala, telah mengenal pasti 49 kajian yang memenuhi kriteria. Asas bukti tertumpu di Amerika Utara dan Eropah, manakala intervensi berasaskan *mindfulness* hibrid dan program keibubapaan *mindful* merupakan pendekatan yang paling lazim. Hasil dalam kalangan ibu bapa didapati lebih konsisten positif berbanding hasil pada peringkat anak. Walau bagaimanapun, literatur ini kekal heterogen dari segi metodologi, dan hanya satu kajian yang secara jelas mengintegrasikan elemen kerohanian atau keagamaan. Kajian masa hadapan perlu mengutamakan pembangunan intervensi yang lebih rapi serta lebih responsif terhadap konteks budaya dan agama.

Kata kunci: kesejahteraan penjaga; penyesuaian budaya; keadaan neuropembangunan; intervensi psikososial; SDG 3 (Kesihatan Baik dan Kesejahteraan)

Introduction

Parenting children with atypical developmental conditions can place substantial psychological, relational, and practical demands on families. Globally, developmental disabilities affect millions of children, and parents or primary caregivers of children with conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning disorders, and intellectual disabilities often report elevated levels of stress, depression, anxiety, and reduced well-being (Davidsson et al., 2025; Olusanya et al., 2018; Pardo-Salamanca et al., 2025). In addition to emotional strain, these families may face financial burden, disrupted employment, and increased challenges in maintaining family and marital relationships.

Previous studies have consistently shown that parents of children with atypical development experience higher parenting distress than parents of typically developing children (Baker et al., 2002; Singer, 2004). This distress is often linked to the ongoing demands of caregiving, including repeated medical appointments, therapy sessions, behavioural management, and navigation of healthcare and special education systems. Such demands may also reduce parents' opportunities for self-care, rest, and social support, thereby compounding their psychological burden and affecting broader family functioning (Robinson & Neece, 2015; Roper et al., 2014).

In response to these challenges, a range of parenting and psychosocial interventions has been developed, including Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, Triple P, and Parent Management Training. More recently, growing attention has been given to mindful parenting and related mindfulness-informed parenting interventions. Mindfulness is commonly understood as purposeful, present-moment, and non-judgmental awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). In the parenting context, mindful parenting refers to bringing this quality of awareness into parent-child interactions in a deliberate, emotionally regulated, and non-reactive manner (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014). Existing literature suggests that such interventions may help reduce parenting distress, enhance parental well-being, strengthen parent-child relationships, and, in some cases, improve child behavioural or emotional outcomes (Caetano et al., 2024; Shorey & Ng, 2021). Despite this growing body of work, the literature remains fragmented.

Studies vary considerably in terms of intervention type, target population, study design, outcome focus, and cultural setting. In addition, while mindfulness has historical and conceptual links with spiritual traditions, the extent to which spirituality and religiosity have been integrated into parenting interventions for families of children with atypical development remains unclear. This makes it difficult to determine the breadth and characteristics of the evidence base and to identify important gaps for future research (Caetano et al., 2024; Donovan et al., 2022).

A scoping review was therefore considered the most appropriate approach for the present study. Unlike a systematic review, which is typically designed to answer a narrowly focused question about effectiveness, a scoping review is more suitable for mapping a heterogeneous and still-developing body of literature, clarifying key concepts, and identifying research gaps (Donovan et al., 2022). The present review aimed to provide a broad overview of mindfulness-informed parenting interventions for parents or caregivers of children with atypical development. This scoping review was guided by the following research question: What is the scope and nature of the existing literature on mindfulness-informed parenting interventions for parents or caregivers of children with atypical development?

Specifically, the review sought to:

1. identify the study characteristics and geographical distribution of the literature;
2. map the types of mindfulness-informed parenting interventions that have been used;
3. examine the methodological characteristics of the included studies;
4. synthesise reported parent and child outcomes; and
5. identify the extent to which spirituality and religiosity have been incorporated into these interventions.

By addressing these objectives, this review aims to provide a clearer picture of the current evidence base and highlight directions for future research, practice, and culturally relevant intervention development.

Methods

Review Design

This study employed a scoping review design to map the scope and characteristics of mindfulness-informed parenting interventions for parents or caregivers of children with atypical development. It was conducted using established scoping review methodology informed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and Levac et al. (2010) and was reported in accordance with the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018). A scoping review approach was selected because the existing literature in this area is heterogeneous in terms of intervention types, study designs, populations, and outcome measures. The aim of the present review was not to estimate effect sizes or determine intervention effectiveness, but to provide a comprehensive mapping of the available evidence, identify patterns, and highlight gaps, particularly in relation to the integration of spirituality and religiosity.

Research Question

This scoping review was guided by the following research question: What is the scope and nature of the existing literature on mindfulness-informed parenting interventions for parents or caregivers of children with atypical development?

To address this question, the review focused on:

1. study characteristics and geographical distribution;
2. types of mindfulness-informed parenting interventions;
3. methodological features of included studies;
4. reported parent and child outcomes; and
5. the extent of spirituality and religiosity integration.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search of the literature was conducted across five electronic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, and MyCite. The initial search was carried out between August and October 2020 and was used to identify relevant review papers from which original studies were traced. To ensure currency of the review, updated searching and search alerts were then used to identify additional records up to December 2025, including

articles published online ahead of print in 2025 and those appearing in 2026 journal issues.

The search strategy was developed using key concepts derived from the research question, including: (a) mindfulness and related approaches (e.g., mindfulness-based stress reduction, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, mindfulness self-compassion), (b) parenting or caregivers, and (c) children with atypical or neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g., autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, developmental delay, intellectual disability).

Boolean operators (AND, OR) and truncation were used to combine search terms. The full search strategy is available from the authors upon request.

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

1. involved parents or primary caregivers of children with atypical or neurodevelopmental conditions;
2. included an intervention with mindfulness elements;
3. reported outcomes related to parent or child psychological or behavioural functioning;
4. were empirical studies, including experimental, quasi-experimental, or pre-post designs; and
5. were published in English.

Studies were excluded if they:

1. did not involve a parenting or caregiver-focused intervention;
2. focused solely on typically developing children; or
3. were editorials, commentaries, or non-empirical papers.

Study Selection

All records identified from the relevant review papers and updated searches were compiled, and duplicates were removed prior to screening. The screening process was conducted in two stages. First, records were reviewed for relevance against the eligibility criteria. Second, full-text reports were assessed for final inclusion. The screening process was

conducted independently by two reviewers (first and second authors). Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus, with consultation from the wider research team where necessary to ensure consistency.

A PRISMA-style flow diagram was used to document the study selection process, including duplicate removal, full-text assessment, exclusions, and final inclusion.

Data Charting (Extraction)

Data from the included studies were charted using a structured data extraction form, which was refined during the review process. The extracted information included:

1. study characteristics (author, year, country);
2. participant characteristics (sample size, child condition, age group);
3. intervention type and features;
4. study design;
5. outcome measures;
6. key findings;
7. attrition rates; and
8. information on cultural adaptation and spirituality or religiosity integration.

Data extraction was conducted by one reviewer and independently reviewed by a second reviewer to ensure accuracy and consistency. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus, with consultation from the wider research team where necessary to enhance rigour.

Data Synthesis

Data were synthesised descriptively and analytically. Descriptive synthesis was used to summarise study characteristics and intervention types. Analytical synthesis was conducted to identify patterns across studies in terms of intervention approaches, methodological features, and reported outcomes. Particular attention was given to:

1. differences in outcomes across intervention types (e.g., MBSR, MBCT, ACT, hybrid approaches);

2. variations in findings by study design and sample characteristics;
3. trends in geographical distribution; and
4. the presence or absence of spirituality and religiosity components.

Given the heterogeneity of the included studies, a meta-analysis was not conducted.

Quality Appraisal

Consistent with scoping review methodology, formal quality appraisal of included studies was not undertaken. The purpose of this review was to map the breadth of available evidence rather than to evaluate the methodological quality or effectiveness of interventions. However, methodological features such as sample size, study design, and attrition rates were considered during interpretation of the findings in order to contextualise the strengths and limitations of the evidence base.

Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

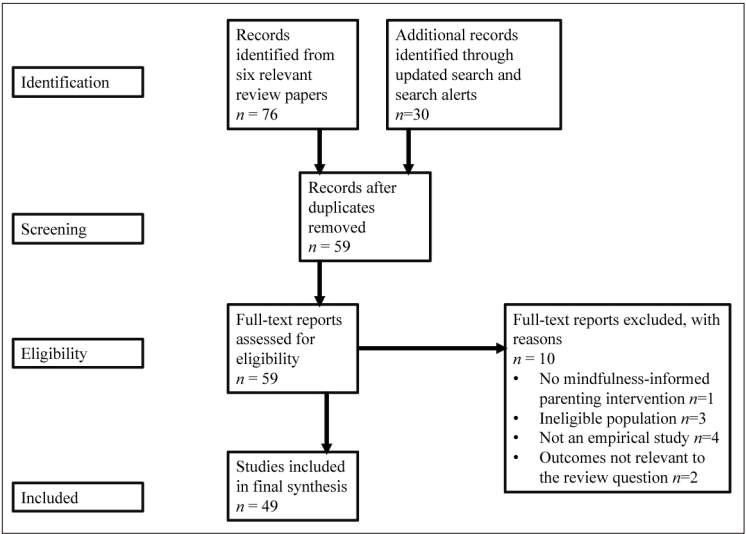
Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used only to support language refinement, organisation of ideas, and drafting assistance during manuscript preparation. All decisions regarding study selection, data extraction, synthesis, interpretation, and final content were made by the authors. The authors reviewed and verified the accuracy of the manuscript content and take full responsibility for the final version.

Results

Results of the Search

The search process combined two sources of evidence identification. First, six relevant review papers yielded 76 original studies. Second, updated searching and search alerts identified 30 additional records. After duplicate removal, 59 records remained for full-text eligibility assessment. Of these, 10 full-text reports were excluded for the following reasons: no mindfulness-informed parenting intervention ($n = 1$), ineligible population ($n = 3$), not an empirical study ($n = 4$), and outcomes not relevant to the review question ($n = 2$). This resulted in a final sample of 49 studies included in the synthesis. The study selection process is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The study selection process



Characteristics of the Included Studies

As shown in Table 1, the included studies were published between 2007 and 2026, with the more recent studies reflecting articles published online ahead of print by the end of 2025 and later assigned to 2026 journal issues. Geographically, the evidence base was dominated by North America ($n = 19$), followed by Europe ($n = 13$), Asia ($n = 10$), and the Middle East ($n = 5$). Two additional studies were from other regions. This pattern suggests that the field remains concentrated in Western settings, although studies from Asia and the Middle East are also represented.

In terms of child condition, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was the most frequently represented group ($n = 18$), followed by attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) ($n = 13$). Seven studies focused on developmental delay or developmental disabilities, and a further seven included mixed neurodevelopmental groups. Four studies involved broader mixed clinical presentations. Regarding age group, 19 studies focused specifically on children, 17 included mixed-age samples, 6 focused on preschool-aged children, and 4 focused on adolescents. This indicates that the literature has concentrated more on child and mixed-age populations than on adolescents.

Intervention and Methodological Patterns

As shown in Table 1, the interventions were heterogeneous, but several broad patterns were evident. Hybrid mindfulness-informed interventions were the most common ($n = 14$), followed closely by mindful parenting programmes ($n = 12$). ACT-based interventions, including one ACT combined with Behaviour Parent Training study, also formed an important subgroup ($n = 10$). MBSR-based interventions accounted for 7 studies, while MBCT-based interventions were less common ($n = 3$). A small number of studies used other mindfulness-related approaches.

The methodological profile of the literature remained mixed. Controlled designs were common, including 11 randomised controlled trials, 9 waitlist-controlled studies, and 8 active-comparator studies. However, 13 studies used uncontrolled pre-post designs, and a smaller number used other exploratory or single-case approaches. This suggests that although the evidence base includes some more rigorous study designs, a substantial part of the literature still relies on designs with limited causal strength.

Sample sizes were often modest. Thirteen studies had very small samples, 17 had small samples, 12 had medium-sized samples, and only 7 had large samples. Attrition rates also varied considerably. Seven studies reported no attrition, 10 reported low attrition, 11 reported moderate attrition, and 13 reported high attrition, while the remainder did not report attrition clearly. Overall, these patterns indicate that feasibility was often acceptable, but participant retention remained a recurring methodological challenge.

Table 1

Summary of study characteristics and methodological profile of included studies ($n = 49$)

Domain	Category	<i>n</i> (%)
Region	North America	19 (39)
	Europe	13 (27)
	Asia	10 (20)
	Middle East	5 (10)
	Other	2 (4)
Child condition	ASD	18 (37)

Domain	Category	<i>n</i> (%)
	ADHD	13 (27)
	DD	7 (14)
	Mixed NDD	7 (14)
	Mixed clinical group	4 (8)
Age group	Child	19 (39)
	Mixed	17 (35)
	Preschool	6 (12)
	Adolescent	4 (8)
	Unspecified	3 (6)
Intervention type	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	14 (29)
	Mindful Parenting programme	12 (24)
	ACT-based	10 (20)
	MBSR-based	7 (14)
	MBCT-based	3 (6)
	Other	3 (6)
Study design	Uncontrolled pre-post	13 (27)
	RCT	11 (22)
	Waitlist-controlled	9 (18)
	Active comparator	8 (16)
	Other exploratory designs	8 (16)
Sample size	Very small (<20)	13 (27)
	Small (20–49)	17 (35)
	Medium (50–99)	12 (24)
	Large (100+)	7 (14)
Attrition	0%	7 (14)
	Low (1–10%)	10 (20)
	Moderate (11–20%)	11 (22)
	High (>20%)	13 (27)
	Not clearly reported	8 (16)

A detailed study-by-study synthesis of the 49 included studies is presented in Table 2, including information on participant characteristics, intervention approaches, methodological features, outcomes, feasibility, and the presence or absence of cultural or religious elements.

Table 2
Study-by-study synthesis of included mindfulness-informed parenting interventions (N = 49)

Study/Year	Region	Child condition	Age group	Intervention	Study Design	Sample Size	Attrition	Parent Outcome	Child Outcome	Feasibility	Cultural/RS	Key synthesis notes
1. Singh et al., 2007	North America	DD	preschool	Mindful Parenting programme	other	very small (<20)	0%	positive	positive	yes	none stated	single-case study strong effects
2. Bögels et al., 2008	Europe	Mixed clinical group	adolescent	MBCT-based	waitlist-controlled	very small (<20)	high (>20%)	positive	positive	unclear	none stated	early controlled study high attrition
3. Epstein, 2010	North America	DD	unclear	MBSR-based	other	very small (<20)	0%	limited-null	not assessed	yes	none stated	paternal MBSR results weak
4. Benn et al., 2012	North America	Mixed NDD	mixed	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	RCT	medium (50–99)	moderate (11–20%)	positive	not assessed	yes	none stated	stronger RCT positive parent effects
5. van der Oord et al., 2012	Europe	ADHD	child	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	waitlist-controlled	small (20–49)	moderate (11–20%)	positive	mixed	yes	none stated	parent-rated gains teacher effects weak
6. van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012	Europe	ADHD	adolescent	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	uncontrolled pre-post	very small (<20)	high (>20%)	mixed	positive	unclear	none stated	adolescent gains waned longer term

Study/Year	Region	Child condition	Age group	Intervention	Study Design	Sample Size	Attrition	Parent Outcome	Child Outcome	Feasibility	Cultural/RS	Key synthesis notes
7. Ferrioli & Harris, 2012	North America	ASD	child	Other	active comparator	very small (<20)	high (>20%)	positive	not assessed	yes	none stated	mindfulness outperformed skills group
8. Kowalkowski, 2012	North America	ASD	not stated	ACT-based	active comparator	small (20–49)	high (>20%)	positive	not assessed	yes	none stated	Group ACT improved parent distress/adjustment
9. Bögels et al., 2014	Europe	Mixed clinical group	mixed	Mindful Parenting programme	waitlist-controlled	medium (50–99)	low (1–10%)	positive	positive	yes	none stated	broad parent and child gains
10. Dykens et al., 2014	North America	Mixed NDD	mixed	MBSR-based	active comparator	large (100+)	moderate (11–20%)	positive	not assessed	yes	none stated	large trial strong maternal gains
11. Neece, 2014	North America	DD	preschool	MBSR-based	waitlist-controlled	small (20–49)	moderate (11–20%)	positive	positive	unclear	none stated	parent stress reduction with child spillover
12. Bazzano et al., 2015	North America	Mixed NDD	mixed	MBSR-based	uncontrolled pre-post	medium (50–99)	moderate (11–20%)	positive	not assessed	yes	cultural adaptation	community bilingual MBSR feasible
13. de Bruin et al., 2015	Europe	ASD	adolescent	Mindful Parenting programme	uncontrolled pre-post	small (20–49)	low (1–10%)	positive	mixed	yes	none stated	feasible ASD adolescent program
14. Haydick et al., 2015	North America	ADHD	adolescent	MBCT-based	uncontrolled pre-post	very small (<20)	low (1–10%)	positive	mixed	yes	none stated	parent gains clearer than youth self-report

Study/Year	Region	Child condition	Age group	Intervention	Study Design	Sample Size	Attrition	Parent Outcome	Child Outcome	Feasibility	Cultural/RS	Key synthesis notes
15. Lewallen & Neece, 2015	North America	DD	preschool	MBSR-based	uncontrolled pre-post	small (20-49)	high (>20%)	positive	positive	unclear	none stated	social skills improved after parent MBSR
16. Meppelink et al., 2016	Europe	Mixed clinical group	mixed	Mindful Parenting programme Hybrid	uncontrolled pre-post	medium (50-99)	moderate (11-20%)	positive	positive	yes	none stated	larger clinical MP study positive
17. Gershly et al., 2017	Middle East	ADHD	child	mindfulness-informed intervention	RCT	medium (50-99)	high (>20%)	mixed	limited-null	unclear	none stated	add-on helped fathers more
18. Lo et al., 2017	Asia	Mixed NDD	preschool	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	RCT	large (100+)	low (1-10%)	positive	limited-null	yes	cultural adaptation	brief program feasible parent gains
19. Rayan & Ahmad, 2017	Middle East	ASD	child	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	active comparator	large (100+)	moderate (11-20%)	positive	not assessed	yes	RS integration	culturally adapted brief parent MBI
20. Voos, 2017	North America	ASD	mixed	Mindful Parenting programme	uncontrolled pre-post	small (20-49)	low (1-10%)	positive	not assessed	yes	none stated	group MP reduced parenting stress
21. Xu, 2017	North America	DD	preschool	MBSR-based	uncontrolled pre-post	small (20-49)	high (>20%)	mixed	limited-null	unclear	none stated	parent stress improved only

Study/Year	Region	Child condition	Age group	Intervention	Study Design	Sample Size	Attrition	Parent Outcome	Child Outcome	Feasibility	Cultural/RS	Key synthesis notes
22. Zhang et al., 2017	Asia	ADHD	child	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	mixed-method pilot	very small (<20)	low (1–10%)	limited-null	mixed	yes	cultural adaptation	feasible Chinese pilot objective gains only
23. Zody, 2017	North America	ASD	mixed	ACT-based	waitlist-controlled	very small (<20)	not reported	limited-null	not assessed	unclear	none stated	brief ACT workshop effects weak
24. Gould, 2018	North America	ASD	mixed	ACT-based	other	very small (<20)	not reported	positive	not assessed	yes	none stated	ACT improved values-directed parent behaviour
25. Jones et al., 2018	Europe	Mixed NDD	mixed	Other	uncontrolled pre-post	small (20–49)	high (>20%)	positive	limited-null	yes	none stated	parent well-being improved child change absent
26. Behbahani et al., 2018	Middle East	ADHD	child	Mindful Parenting programme	RCT	medium (50–99)	low (1–10%)	positive	positive	unclear	none stated	RCT showed parent and child gains
27. Corti et al., 2018	Europe	ASD	preschool	ACT-based	active comparator	small (20–49)	0%	mixed	not assessed	yes	none stated	ACT parent gains limited
28. Petcharat, 2018	Asia	Mixed NDD	mixed	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	waitlist-controlled	small (20–49)	not reported	mixed	not assessed	yes	cultural adaptation	Thai tailored program improved mindfulness/anxiety
29. Potharst et al., 2018	Europe	Mixed clinical group	mixed	Mindful Parenting programme	uncontrolled pre-post	large (100+)	moderate (11–20%)	positive	positive	yes	none stated	preventive and clinical gains similar

Study/Year	Region	Child condition	Age group	Intervention	Study Design	Sample Size	Attrition	Parent Outcome	Child Outcome	Feasibility	Cultural/RS	Key synthesis notes
30. Ridderinkhof et al., 2018	Europe	ASD	mixed	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	uncontrolled pre-post	small (20–49)	high (>20%)	positive	positive	yes	none stated	parallel ASD program with partial long-term maintenance
31. Hilkey, 2019	North America	ASD	child	ACT-based	other	very small (<20)	not reported	mixed	not assessed	unclear	none stated	online ACT pilot stress signals only
32. Lo et al., 2020	Asia	ADHD	child	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	RCT	large (100+)	low (1–10%)	positive	positive	yes	cultural adaptation	family-based RCT with child gains
33. Padgett, 2020	North America	ASD	child	Mindful Parenting programme	waitlist-controlled	small (20–49)	high (>20%)	mixed	not assessed	yes	none stated	Online mindful parenting showed limited effects
34. Mah et al., 2021	North America	ADHD	child	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	RCT	medium (50–99)	high (>20%)	mixed	positive	yes	none stated	mindfulness add-on improved parent regulation
35. Andrews et al., 2022	USA	ASD	child	ACT + Behaviour Parent Training	single-case experimental	very small (<10)	unclear	positive	mixed	yes	none stated	telehealth ACT improves adherence
36. Amiri et al., 2022	Middle East	ADHD	child	Mindful Parenting programme	active comparator	small (20–49)	moderate (11–20%)	not assessed	positive	unclear	none stated	small quasi-experimental ADHD improvement

Study/Year	Region	Child condition	Age group	Intervention	Study Design	Sample Size	Attrition	Parent Outcome	Child Outcome	Feasibility	Cultural/RS	Key synthesis notes
37. Lo et al., 2024	Asia	ADHD	mixed	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	waitlist-controlled	small (20–49)	low (1–10%)	mixed	positive	yes	cultural adaptation	Online parent MBP improved child ADHD symptoms
38. Li et al., 2025	Asia	ASD	not stated	ACT-based	RCT	small (20–49)	unclear	positive	positive	yes	unclear	Pilot ACT parenting RCT showed broad gains
39. Osborn et al., 2025	other	DD	mixed	Other	uncontrolled pre-post	very small (<20)	moderate (11–20%)	positive	not assessed	yes	none stated	Brief online mindfulness reduced parent distress
40. Owen, 2025	North America	ASD	mixed	ACT-based	other	small (20–49)	high (>20%)	limited-null	not assessed	unclear	none stated	Virtual ACT acceptable but high attrition
41. Suvarna et al., 2025	other	ASD	child	Mindful Parenting programme	other	very small (<20)	0%	positive	positive	yes	none stated	Brief mindful parenting programme reduced stress
42. Kosterman Zoller et al., 2025	Europe	ADHD	child	Mindful Parenting programme	active comparator	medium (50–99)	unclear	positive	not assessed	unclear	none stated	Family mindfulness improved parent outcomes
43. Papadopoulos & Maniadaki, 2025	Europe	ASD	mixed	MBCT-based	waitlist-controlled	medium (50–99)	moderate (11–20%)	positive	positive	yes	none stated	MBCT with mindful parenting improved parent mental health

Study/Year	Region	Child condition	Age group	Intervention	Study Design	Sample Size	Attrition	Parent Outcome	Child Outcome	Feasibility	Cultural/RS	Key synthesis notes
44. Law et al., 2025	Asia	ADHD	mixed	MBSR-based	RCT	small (20–49)	0%	positive	limited-null	yes	cultural adaptation	Pilot MBSR reduced parent stress; child change limited
45. Chong et al., 2025	Asia	ADHD	child	ACT-based	RCT	large (100+)	unclear	positive	positive	unclear	none stated	ACT-PAM improved parent and child outcomes
46. Li & Chien, 2026	Asia	ASD	child	ACT-based	RCT	large (100+)	0%	positive	positive	yes	none stated	Large ACT parenting RCT improved parent stress and child problems
47. Muratori et al., 2026	Europe	Mixed NDD	child	Mindful Parenting programme	uncontrolled pre-post	medium (50–99)	high (>20%)	positive	not assessed	yes	none stated	ND-tailored mindful parenting improved negative parenting
48. Win et al., 2026	Asia	DD	child	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	RCT	medium (50–99)	0%	positive	not assessed	yes	cultural adaptation	Mindfulness plus communication reduced maternal stress
49. Al-Natshah & Imam, 2026	Middle East	ASD	child	Hybrid mindfulness-informed intervention	active comparator	medium (50–99)	low (1–10%)	positive	not assessed	yes	cultural adaptation	Mindful Motherhood improved maternal QoL in Palestine

Outcome Patterns

Parent outcomes were more consistently positive than child outcomes across the 49 included studies. Thirty-five studies reported broadly positive parent outcomes, including reductions in parenting stress or distress and improvements in mindfulness, emotional regulation, or well-being. Nine studies reported mixed parent findings, four reported limited or null effects, and one study did not assess parent outcomes.

Child outcomes were reported less consistently. Nineteen studies reported positive child outcomes, five reported mixed findings, and five reported limited or null child effects. Importantly, 20 studies did not assess child outcomes directly. This suggests that the literature has focused primarily on parental functioning, with child-level benefits often treated as secondary or indirect outcomes. A related pattern was seen in feasibility reporting. Thirty-six studies indicated that the intervention was feasible or acceptable, whereas 13 provided unclear feasibility information. Taken together, the evidence suggests that mindfulness-informed parenting interventions are generally acceptable to families, but the strength of evidence for effectiveness varies according to intervention type, study design, and outcome measured.

Cultural Adaptation and Spirituality/Religiosity

One of the clearest findings of the review was the limited integration of cultural and spiritual or religious elements. In 38 of the 49 studies, no cultural, spiritual, or religious adaptation was explicitly stated. Nine studies reported some form of cultural adaptation, usually through language, delivery format, or contextual tailoring. Only one study explicitly incorporated spirituality or religiosity. One further study was unclear in this regard.

This pattern highlights a major gap in the literature. Although mindfulness has roots in spiritual traditions and the review included increasing contributions from Asian and Middle Eastern settings, explicit integration of spirituality or religiosity into parenting interventions for families of children with atypical development remained rare. A summary of parent and child outcome patterns, feasibility, and cultural or religious integration across the included studies is presented in the table below:

Table 3

Summary of outcome patterns, feasibility, and cultural/RS integration (n = 49)

Domain	Category	n (%)
Parent outcome	Positive	35 (71)
	Mixed	9 (18)
	Limited/null	4 (8)
	Not assessed	1 (2)
Child outcome	Positive	19 (39)
	Mixed	5 (10)
	Limited/null	5 (10)
	Not assessed	20 (41)
Feasibility	Yes	36 (73)
	Unclear	13 (27)
Cultural / RS	None stated	38 (78)
	Cultural adaptation	9 (18)
	RS integration	1 (2)
	Unclear	1 (2)

Summary of Main Patterns

Overall, the findings suggest that the literature on mindfulness-informed parenting for atypical development is growing and increasingly diverse but remains uneven. The evidence base is strongest for parent-level improvements, particularly reductions in parenting stress and better emotional regulation. However, the studies remain heterogeneous in intervention type, design, sample size, and target population. Child outcomes are less consistently examined, and spirituality or religiosity remains notably underdeveloped in the field.

Discussion

This scoping review mapped the existing literature on mindfulness-informed parenting interventions for parents or caregivers of children with atypical development. Several main findings emerged. First, the literature now includes a wider range of intervention models, including hybrid mindfulness-informed programmes, dedicated mindful parenting programmes, ACT-based approaches, MBSR-based interventions, and

a smaller number of MBCT-based studies. Second, the evidence base remains geographically uneven, with most studies conducted in North America and Europe, although studies from Asia and the Middle East are also represented. Third, parent outcomes were more consistently positive than child outcomes. Finally, explicit integration of spirituality and religiosity was extremely limited, despite the conceptual relevance of these elements to both mindfulness and family well-being.

The finding that parent outcomes were more consistently positive than child outcomes is important. Across the included studies, reductions in parenting stress, improvements in emotional regulation, and gains in parental well-being were reported more frequently than clear child-level improvements. This pattern is not surprising. Most interventions in this literature were directed primarily at parents rather than children, and many studies did not assess child outcomes directly. Even when child outcomes were included, these were often treated as secondary outcomes and may have been more difficult to change within a short intervention period. Taken together, the current evidence suggests that mindfulness-informed parenting interventions are better supported as approaches for improving parental functioning than as direct interventions for child behavioural or emotional change (Burgdorf et al., 2019; Shorey & Ng, 2021).

This pattern can also be understood in light of theoretical models of mindful parenting (Duncan et al., 2009). Duncan et al.'s framework highlights key processes such as listening with full attention, emotional awareness of self and child, self-regulation in the parenting relationship, non-judgmental acceptance, and compassion (Duncan et al., 2009). These processes operate first at the level of parental awareness and regulation. It is therefore reasonable that parent-level outcomes are more immediate and more consistently detected than downstream child outcomes. Child benefits may still occur, but these effects are likely to depend on broader relational processes, follow-up duration, and the extent to which changes in parental regulation are translated into consistent parenting behaviour.

The review also showed that the intervention landscape is heterogeneous. Hybrid mindfulness-informed interventions and mindful parenting programmes were the most common, followed by ACT-based and MBSR-based approaches. This diversity reflects the flexibility of mindfulness-informed work in parenting contexts, but it

also makes comparison across studies difficult, which is consistent with prior reviews that have noted substantial heterogeneity in intervention models, measures, and study designs (Burgdorf et al., 2019; Shorey & Ng, 2021). The term “mindfulness-informed parenting intervention” currently covers approaches that differ in theoretical emphasis, intensity, delivery mode, and target outcomes. Some interventions focus mainly on parental stress and awareness, whereas others integrate behavioural parenting skills, psychoeducation, acceptance-based strategies, or broader family-oriented elements. As a result, the field still lacks a clear consensus on which intervention components are most important, for whom, and under what conditions.

Methodologically, the evidence base shows both strengths and important limitations. The inclusion of randomised controlled trials and active-comparator studies indicates that the field includes some more rigorous designs. However, a substantial proportion of the studies still relied on uncontrolled pre-post or other exploratory designs. In addition, many studies had small sample sizes and variable attrition, with high attrition reported in a notable proportion of studies. These features limit confidence in the stability and generalisability of the findings, a concern that has also been raised in earlier reviews of mindful parenting interventions (Burgdorf et al., 2019; Shorey & Ng, 2021). They also make it difficult to determine whether reported improvements are attributable to the intervention itself, non-specific support effects, sampling bias, or natural change over time.

Another important pattern is the geographical concentration of the literature. Most studies were conducted in North America and Europe, with fewer studies from Asia and the Middle East and very limited representation from other regions. This suggests that the current evidence base is still shaped largely by Western research settings, assumptions, and service structures. This matters because parenting experiences, help-seeking behaviour, perceptions of disability, and understandings of mindfulness are shaped by culture, religion, language, and family systems. An intervention shown to be feasible in one context may not transfer easily to another without adaptation.

The cultural issue becomes even more important when considering spirituality and religiosity. Only one study explicitly integrated spirituality or religiosity, while most studies did not report any such

component. This is a striking finding. Mindfulness is often presented in contemporary intervention research in secular language, yet its wider conceptual history is closely related to spiritual traditions (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). In addition, many families, particularly in non-Western or religiously committed contexts, understand stress, caregiving, suffering, patience, and meaning through religious or spiritual frameworks, and these dimensions may shape coping, resilience, and mental health (Aggarwal et al., 2023; Lucchetti et al., 2021). The near absence of explicit spirituality or religiosity in this literature therefore reflects an important gap rather than a trivial omission.

This gap has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it suggests that mindfulness-informed parenting research has largely prioritised secularised intervention models, even when studying families for whom spiritual or religious meaning-making may be central to coping. Practically, it raises questions about cultural fit, engagement, and acceptability. In some communities, explicitly secular mindfulness language may feel unfamiliar, culturally distant, or even misaligned with local values. By contrast, carefully adapted interventions that retain the core functions of mindful awareness, emotional regulation, compassion, and reflective parenting while situating them within culturally meaningful frameworks may be more acceptable and relevant (Foale et al., 2025).

At the same time, the findings do not mean that mindfulness-informed parenting interventions are ineffective unless spirituality or religiosity is included. Rather, the review suggests that the field has not yet explored this issue sufficiently. The current evidence supports the usefulness of mindfulness-informed parenting for improving parental functioning, but it also shows that future research should examine whether culturally and spiritually adapted models produce stronger engagement, better fit, or broader benefits for diverse populations.

The review also has implications for future research design. More studies are needed with stronger methodological quality, larger samples, clearer reporting of attrition and feasibility, and more consistent outcome measurement. In particular, future studies should distinguish more clearly between immediate parent outcomes and later child outcomes, and should include follow-up periods long enough to detect whether changes in parental awareness and regulation are translated into changes

in child functioning. Comparative studies across intervention types would also help clarify whether hybrid models, ACT-based approaches, or dedicated mindful parenting programmes differ meaningfully in their effects.

Future research should also move beyond broad claims of effectiveness and examine mechanisms, context, and implementation. Questions of who benefits most, under what family circumstances, and in which cultural settings remain insufficiently answered. There is also a clear need for more work in low-resource settings and in communities where religious values play a central role in family life. In such contexts, intervention uptake may depend not only on efficacy, but also on practical barriers such as language accessibility, facilitator availability, cost, time burden, and perceived compatibility with local beliefs and parenting norms (Foale et al., 2025).

Overall, this review suggests that mindfulness-informed parenting is a promising but still uneven field of intervention research for families of children with atypical development. The strongest evidence currently relates to parent-level benefits, especially reductions in parenting stress and improvements in emotional regulation and well-being. However, the literature remains methodologically mixed, geographically concentrated, and conceptually limited in its integration of culture, spirituality, and religiosity. These gaps also point to important opportunities for the next phase of research and intervention development.

In summary, this review suggests that mindfulness-informed parenting is a valuable addition to the range of parenting interventions for families of children with atypical development, particularly for supporting parental well-being. At the same time, the limited attention to spirituality, religiosity, and broader cultural adaptation shows that the field remains incomplete. Future research should therefore focus not only on whether these interventions are helpful, but also on which models are most effective, for whom, and under what cultural and spiritual conditions.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia under Fundamental Research Grant (FRGS) (Project ID: FRGS/1/2023/SS09/UIAM/02/2).

References

- Aggarwal, S., Wright, J., Morgan, A., Patton, G., & Reavley, N. (2023). Religiosity and spirituality in the prevention and management of depression and anxiety in young people: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Psychiatry*, 23, Article 729. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-023-05091-2>
- Al-Natsheh, B., & Imam, A. (2026). Effectiveness of the Mindful Motherhood Support Program on quality of life among Palestinian mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder: A quasi-experimental study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 23(1), Article 14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph23010014>
- Amiri, M., Merajifar, M., & Babaei, K. (2022). The effectiveness of mindful parenting training on attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms in male students. *European Review for Medical and Pharmacological Sciences*, 26(2), 737–744. 10.26355/eurrev_202201_27759
- Andrews, M. L., Garcia, Y. A., Catagnus, R. M., & Gould, E. R. (2022). Effects of Acceptance and Commitment Training Plus Behavior Parent Training on Parental Implementation of Autism Treatment. *The Psychological Record*, 72(4), 601–617. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40732-021-00496-5>
- Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>
- Baker, B. L., Blacher, J., Crnic, K. A., & Edelbrock, C. (2002). Behavior problems and parenting stress in families of three-year-old children with and without developmental delays. *American journal of mental retardation : AJMR*, 107(6), 433–444. [https://doi.org/10.1352/0895-8017\(2002\)107<0433:BPAPSI>2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1352/0895-8017(2002)107<0433:BPAPSI>2.0.CO;2)
- Bazzano, A., Wolfe, C., Zylowska, L., Wang, S., Schuster, E., Barrett, C., & Lehrer, D. (2015). Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) for parents and caregivers of individuals with developmental disabilities: A community-based approach. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(2), 298–308. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9836-9>
- Behbahani, M., Zargar, F., Assarian, F., & Akbari, H. (2018). Effects of mindful parenting training on clinical symptoms in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and parenting stress: Randomized controlled trial. *Iranian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 43, 596–604.
- Benn, R., Akiva, T., Arel, S., & Roeser, R. W. (2012). Mindfulness training effects for parents and educators of children with special needs. *Developmental Psychology*, 48(5), 1476–1487. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027537>
- Bögels, S. M., Hoogstad, B., van Dun, L., de Schutter, S., & Restifo, K. (2008). Mindfulness training for adolescents with externalizing disorders and

- their parents. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 36(2), 193–209. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1352465808004190>
- Bögels, S. M., Hellemans, J., van Deursen, S., Römer, M., & van der Meulen, R. (2014). Mindful parenting in mental health care: Effects on parental and child psychopathology, parental stress, parenting, coparenting, and marital functioning. *Mindfulness*, 5(5), 536–551. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0209-7>
- Burgdorf, V., Szabó, M., & Abbott, M. J. (2019). The effect of mindfulness interventions for parents on parenting stress and youth psychological outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 1336. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01336>
- Caetano, B., Chorão, A., Alves, S., Canavarro, M. C., & Pires, R. (2024). Mindfulness-based interventions for parents: A systematic review of target groups, effects, and intervention features. *Mindfulness*, 15(10), 2429–2447. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-024-02451-1>
- Chong, Y. Y., Chien, W. T., Fung, K. P., Leung, S. P., & Lam, S. Y. (2025). Acceptance and commitment therapy–based parenting program in children with co-occurring asthma and ADHD: A randomized clinical trial. *JAMA Pediatrics*. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2025.1313>
- Corti, C., Pergolizzi, F., Vanzin, L., Cargasacchi, G., Villa, L., Pozzi, M., & Molteni, M. (2018). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy-oriented parent-training for parents of children with autism. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27(9), 2887–2900. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1123-3>
- Davidsson, M., Oldmark, M., Hagberg, B., Gillberg, C., & Billstedt, E. (2025). Parenting Stress and Neurodevelopmental Disorders: the Associations of Parental Factors and Child Psychosocial Functioning. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 34(4), 883–894. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-025-03042-x>
- de Bruin, E. I., Blom, R., Smit, F. M. A., Van Steensel, F. J. A., & Bögels, S. M. (2015). MYmind: Mindfulness training for youngsters with autism spectrum disorders and their parents. *Autism*, 19(8), 906–914. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361314553279>
- Donovan, M. O., Pickard, J. A., Herbert, J. S., & Barkus, E. (2022). Mindful parent training for parents of children aged 3–12 years with behavioral problems: A scoping review. *Mindfulness*, 13(4), 801–820. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-021-01799-y>
- Duncan, L. G., Coatsworth, J. D., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). A model of mindful parenting: Implications for parent-child relationships and prevention research. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 12(3), 255–270. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-009-0046-3>

- Dykens, E. M., Fisher, M. H., Taylor, J. L., Lambert, W., & Miodrag, N. (2014). Reducing distress in mothers of children with autism and other disabilities: A randomized trial. *Pediatrics*, 134(2). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-3164>
- Epstein, B. J. (2010). *Effects of a mindfulness based stress reduction program on fathers of children with developmental disability* (UMI No. 3421917) [Doctoral dissertation, Hofstra University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Ferraioli, S. J., & Harris, S. L. (2013). Comparative effects of mindfulness and skills-based parent training programs for parents of children with autism: Feasibility and preliminary outcome data. *Mindfulness*, 4(2), 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-012-0099-0>
- Foale, S., Seedat, S., & Heyns, T. (2025). Considerations for sociocultural adaptations of a mindfulness-based program within a low socioeconomic setting in Cape Town, South Africa. *BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies*, 25, Article 453. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12906-025-05122-3>
- Gershy, N., Meehan, K. B., Omer, H., Papouchis, N., & Schorr Sapis, I. (2017). Randomized clinical trial of mindfulness skills augmentation in parent training. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 46(6), 783–803. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-017-9411-4>
- Gould, E. R., Tarbox, J., & Coyne, L. (2018). Evaluating the effects of Acceptance and Commitment Training on the overt behavior of parents of children with autism. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 7, 81–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2017.06.003>
- Haydicky, J., Shecter, C., Wiener, J., & Ducharme, J. M. (2015). Evaluation of MBCT for adolescents with ADHD and their parents: Impact on individual and family functioning. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(1), 76–94. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9815-1>
- Hilkey, D. (2019). *Utilizing online learning of acceptance and commitment training and evaluating corresponding changes in parent stress* [Master's thesis, Southern Illinois University Carbondale]. OpenSIUC.
- Jones, L., Gold, E., Totsika, V., Hastings, R. P., Jones, M., Griffiths, A., & Silverton, S. (2018). A mindfulness parent well-being course: Evaluation of outcomes for parents of children with autism and related disabilities recruited through special schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 33(1), 16–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1297571>
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. Hyperion.

- Kabat-Zinn, J., & Kabat-Zinn, M. (2014). *Everyday blessings: the inner work of mindful parenting*. Hachette Books.
- Kosterman Zoller, B., Bögels, S. M., Meppelink, R., & de Bruin, E. I. (2025). Randomized controlled trial of parent and child mindfulness training (mymind) versus medication. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-025-03139-3>
- Kowalkowski, J. D. (2012). *The impact of a group-based acceptance and commitment therapy intervention on parents of children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder* [Doctoral dissertation, Eastern Michigan University]. Eastern Michigan University Digital Commons.
- Law, I. T. Y., Bressington, D., Ruan, J., et al. (2025). The effectiveness of a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programme for parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): A pilot randomized controlled trial. *BMC Psychology*, 13(1), Article 429. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02747-4>
- Levac, D., Colquhoun, H., & O'Brien, K. K. (2010). Scoping studies: advancing the methodology. *Implementation Science*, 5, 69. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-5-69>
- Lewallen, A. C., & Neece, C. L. (2015). Improved social skills in children with developmental delays after parent participation in MBSR: The role of parent-child relational factors. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(10), 3117–3129. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0116-8>
- Li, S. N., Tong, C. W., & Stanley, L. K. K. (2025). Effects of an acceptance and commitment-based parenting program for parents of children with autism spectrum disorder on parenting stress and other parent and children health outcomes: A pilot randomized controlled trial. *Autism*, 29(6), 1524–1539. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613241311323>
- Li, S. N., & Chien, W. T. (2026). Acceptance and commitment training for parents of children with autism spectrum disorder: A randomized clinical trial. *JAMA Network Open*, 9(1), e2552693. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.52693>
- Lo, H. H. M., Chan, S. K. C., Szeto, M. P., Chan, C. Y. H., & Choi, C. W. (2017). A feasibility study of a brief mindfulness-based program for parents of preschool children with developmental disabilities. *Mindfulness*, 8(6), 1665–1673. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0741-y>
- Lo, H. H. M., Wong, S. W. L., Wong, J. Y. H., Yeung, J. W. K., Snel, E., & Wong, S. Y. S. (2020). The effects of family-based mindfulness intervention on ADHD symptomology in young children and their parents: A randomized control trial. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 24(5), 667–680. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054717743330>

- Lo, H. H. M., Lam, J., Zhang, Z. J., Cheung, M., Chan, S. K. C., Wong, E. W. Y., Bögels, S. M., & Chui, W. H. (2024). Effects of an online mindfulness-based program for parents of children with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder: A pilot, mixed methods study. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15, Article 1376867. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1376867>.
- Lucchetti, G., Koenig, H. G., & Lucchetti, A. L. G. (2021). Spirituality, religiousness, and mental health: A review of the current scientific evidence. *World journal of clinical cases*, 9(26), 7620–7631. <https://doi.org/10.12998/wjcc.v9.i26.7620>
- Mah, J. W. T., Murray, C., Locke, J., & Carbert, N. (2021). Mindfulness-enhanced behavioral parent training for clinic-referred families of children with ADHD: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 25(12), 1765–1777. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054720925882>
- Meppelink, R., de Bruin, E. I., Wanders-Mulder, F. H., Vennik, C. J., & Bögels, S. M. (2016). Mindful parenting training in child psychiatric settings: Heightened parental mindfulness reduces parents' and children's psychopathology. *Mindfulness*, 7(3), 680–689. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-016-0504-1>
- Muratori, P., Catarina, A., Conversano, A., Levantini, V., Villani, S., & Milone, A. (2026). Mindful parenting for caregivers of children with neurodevelopmental disorder diagnosis. *Children*, 13(3), Article 325. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children13030325>
- Neece, C. L. (2014). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for parents of young children with developmental delays: Implications for parental mental health and child behavior problems. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 27(2), 174–186. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12064>
- Olusanya, B. O., Davis, A. C., Wertlieb, D., Boo, N. Y., Nair, M. K. C., Halpern, R., Kuper, H., Breinbauer, C., de Vries, P. J., Gladstone, M., Halfon, N., Kancharla, V., Mulaudzi, M. C., Kakooza-Mwesige, A., Ogbo, F. A., Olusanya, J. O., Williams, A. N., Wright, S. M., Manguerra, H., ... Kassebaum, N. J. (2018). Developmental disabilities among children younger than 5 years in 195 countries and territories, 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016. *The Lancet Global Health*, 6(10), e1100–e1121. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(18\)30309-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(18)30309-7)
- Osborn, R., Dorstyn, D., Roberts, L., & Kneebone, I. (2025). Feasibility of a brief online mindfulness intervention for parents of children with developmental disabilities. *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23297018.2024.2371118>

- Owen, A. (2025). *Exploring virtual group acceptance and commitment therapy format on participation of parents of children with autism* [Doctoral dissertation, Rowan University]. Rowan Digital Works.
- Padgett, E. E. (2020). *An online randomized controlled trial of mindful parenting among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder* [Doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global
- Papadopoulos, D., & Maniadaki, K. (2025). Effects of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy on parental mental health and child behavior in families of children with autism spectrum disorder: A randomized controlled trial. *Children*, 13(1), Article 53. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children13010053>
- Pardo-Salamanca, A., Rosa-Martínez, E., Gómez, S., Santamarina-Siurana, C., & Berenguer, C. (2025). Parenting stress in autistic and ADHD children: Implications of social support and child characteristics. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 55(7), 2284–2293. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-06377-4>
- Petcharat, M. (2018). *The effects of a brief culturally tailored Thai mindfulness intervention on stress, anxiety, and mindfulness in Thai parents of children with developmental disabilities* [Doctoral dissertation, Florida Atlantic University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Rayan, A., & Ahmad, M. (2017). Effectiveness of mindfulness-based intervention on perceived stress, anxiety, and depression among parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Mindfulness*, 8(3), 677–690. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-016-0595-8>
- Ridderinkhof, A., de Bruin, E. I., Blom, R., & Bögels, S. M. (2018). Mindfulness-based program for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their parents: Direct and long-term improvements. *Mindfulness*, 9(3), 773–791. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0815-x>
- Robinson, M., & Neece, C. L. (2015). Marital Satisfaction, Parental Stress, and Child Behavior Problems among Parents of Young Children with Developmental Delays. *Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 8(1), 23–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19315864.2014.994247>
- Roper, S. O., Allred, D. W., Mandeleco, B., Freeborn, D., & Dyches, T. (2014). Caregiver burden and sibling relationships in families raising children with disabilities and typically developing children. *Families, Systems, & Health*, 32(2), 241–246. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fsh0000047>
- Shorey, S., & Ng, E. D. (2021). The efficacy of mindful parenting interventions: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International journal of nursing studies*, 121, 103996. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2021.103996>

- Singer, G. H. S. (2004). A meta-analysis of comparative studies of depressive symptoms in mothers of children with and without disabilities. In K. Alexander & R. C. Hunter (Eds.), *Administering special education: In pursuit of dignity and autonomy* (Vol. 7, pp. 189–221). Elsevier JAI. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3660\(04\)07009-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3660(04)07009-X)
- Singh, N. N., Lancioni, G. E., Winton, A. S. W., Singh, J., Curtis, W. J., Wahler, R. G., & McAleavey, K. M. (2007). Mindful parenting decreases aggression and increases social behavior in children with developmental disabilities. *Behavior Modification*, 31(6), 749–771. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445507300924>
- Suvarna, V., Farrell, L., Adams, D., Emerson, L.-M., & Paynter, J. (2025). The Two Hearts Mindful Parenting programme for parents of autistic children: A proof-of-concept study. *Clinical Psychologist*, 29(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13284207.2025.2498396>
- Tricco, A. C., Lillie, E., Zarin, W., O'Brien, K. K., Colquhoun, H., Levac, D., Moher, D., Peters, M. D. J., Horsley, T., Weeks, L., Hempel, S., Akl, E. A., Chang, C., McGowan, J., Stewart, L., Hartling, L., Aldcroft, A., Wilson, M. G., Garritty, C., ... Straus, S. E. (2018). PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR): Checklist and explanation. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 169(7), 467–473. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M18-0850>
- van der Oord, S., Bögels, S. M., & Peijnenburg, D. (2012). The effectiveness of mindfulness training for children with ADHD and mindful parenting for their parents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 21, 139–147. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-011-9457-0>
- van de Weijer-Bergsma, E., Formsma, A. R., de Bruin, E. I., & Bögels, S. M. (2012). The effectiveness of mindfulness training on behavioral problems and attentional functioning in adolescents with ADHD. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 21(5), 775–787. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-011-9531-7>
- Voos, A. (2017). *An initial evaluation of the mindful parenting group for parents of children with autism spectrum disorder*. University of California.
- Williams, J. M. G., & Kabat-Zinn, J. (2011). Mindfulness: diverse perspectives on its meaning, origins, and multiple applications at the intersection of science and dharma. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2011.564811>
- Win, T. T., Prasopkittikun, T., Phetrasuwan, S., & Lenwari, C. (2026). Mindfulness and communication intervention for mothers of children with developmental disabilities in Yangon: A randomized controlled trial on parental stress and problem-solving communication. *International Journal of Nursing Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnss.2026.02.015>

- Xu, Y. (2017). *Parental stress, emotion regulation, meta-emotion, and changes following an MBSR intervention* (Issue September). Loma Linda University.
- Zhang, D., Chan, S. K. C., Lo, H. H. M., Chan, C. Y. H., Chan, J. C. Y., Ting, K. T., Gao, T. T., Lai, K. Y. C., Bögels, S. M., & Wong, S. Y. S. (2017). Mindfulness-based intervention for Chinese children with ADHD and their parents: A pilot mixed-method study. *Mindfulness*, 8(4), 859–872. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-016-0660-3>
- Zody, M. C. (2017). *Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) as a one-day workshop for parents of children with an autism spectrum disorder* [Doctoral dissertation, The Wright Institute]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Book Review

Haenni, Patrick & Drevon, Jerome. (2025). *Transformed by the people: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's road to power in Syria* (315 pp.) Hurst & Company. ISBN: 9781805264101

Reviewer: Mohamed Fouz Mohamed Zacky, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Madani Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: zackyfouz@iium.edu.my

Many observers continue to struggle to make sense of the rapid transformations in Syrian politics, from the fall of Bashar al-Assad to the rise of Ahmed al-Sharaa. Equally puzzling for many has been the manner in which global powers have begun to engage with the new Syrian leadership, including the easing of restrictions surrounding the once–most-wanted militant extremist organisation, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

In response, two dominant strands of debate have emerged across social media, policy, and journalistic commentary. One strand resorts to conspiracy theories, claiming that HTS functions as a covert agent of the United States and Israel (Sanar, 2024). The other acknowledges HTS's past as a terrorist organisation but argues that the movement has merely altered its external posture for pragmatic political purposes (Aldoughli & Al Kassir, 2021) .

These competing interpretations reveal a broader analytical difficulty in interpreting the current transformation: the emergence of political leaders who were once associated with violent extremist organisations such as Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, and who now seek to present themselves as legitimate political actors on the international stage. Even more intriguing within this debate is the absence of clear historical records indicating that these leaders, or HTS itself, have formally renounced terrorism or articulated a coherent ideological shift toward moderation.

The book by Patrick Haenni and Jerome Drevon makes an important contribution to the developing debates on the origins, evolution, and eventual de-radicalisation of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The authors argue that the group's trajectory of de-radicalisation has been unconventional, gradual, pragmatic, and ultimately sustainable. It is unconventional in the sense that HTS did not formally revise its Salafist ideological schema at any stage of its evolution. Rather, as the authors note, 'HTS's transformation stemmed from a series of tactical choices that gradually acquired a strategic dimension' (p.241). Put differently, 'HTS did not evolve through rigid adherence to doctrine; rather, it adapted to shifting political realities, and these adaptations progressively reshaped its ideological framework' (p.04). The book's central argument, therefore, is that through a series of strategic choices made in the struggle for power and in the fight against Bashar al-Assad, HTS inadvertently positioned itself as a more centrist actor within the Syrian Sunni political landscape. This argument not only reframes prevailing interpretations of HTS's trajectory but also sets the stage for a nuanced examination of how militant movements can transform through practice rather than formal ideological revision.

In unpacking its central argument, the book traces the trajectory of de-radicalisation within Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) across several critical fault lines. It begins by examining dominant perspectives on the influence of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and later al-Qaeda in Syria following the uprising. These perspectives suggest that both organisations exploited the militarisation of the revolution to consolidate their presence within the conflict. Within this context, the formation of Al-Nusra Front emerged as a key development, established in Syria under the leadership of Ahmed al-Sharaa (better known previously as Abu Mohammad al-Julani), who had previously served as a commander within ISIS. In contrast, the authors highlight that the Al-Nusra Front, the initial al-Qaeda branch in Syria, was conceived and solely directed by Al-Sharaa, operating entirely autonomously from other extremist factions in Iraq (p.18-22). From the outset, Al-Sharaa framed his movement as focused on a local cause and explicitly rejected international operations. Whenever Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or al-Qaeda sought to exert control over Al-Nusra Front or pressured its leader to adhere more strictly to jihadist principles, such as targeting minorities, Shi'a communities, or non-jihadist actors, the authors show that 'Al-Sharaa

consistently rejected the idea of foreign operations and attacks on civilians based on their religious affiliation, whether they were Shia or Alawite' (p.22) This suggests that the group's strategic orientation, even at an early stage, was shaped by considerations distinct from the more radical and indiscriminate approaches adopted by jihadist networks operating in Iraq. This is not to suggest, however, that al-Sharaa recruited an entirely new constituency of fighters in Syria. The majority of the movement's members were drawn from Salafi-jihadist milieus, and the organisation continued to employ Salafi-jihadist discourse. Yet, according to the authors, maintaining this ideological orientation was largely a pragmatic choice: overt ideological flexibility risked alienating rank-and-file fighters, many of whom might otherwise defect to more hardline factions (p. 30-33).

Haenni and Drevon further highlight that HTS's de-radicalisation deepened after it became the dominant force in Idlib province, formalised through the 2017 establishment of the Salvation Government. Significantly, this was the moment when HTS fully transformed into a centrist force. As the de facto ruler of the only rebel-controlled province in Syria, HTS was compelled to evolve beyond a militant front into a regional administrator. This transformation was complex: the landlocked province required engagement with local populations and technocrats, as well as coordination with international aid organisations and foreign states, to maintain both authority and popular support. In navigating these governance responsibilities, HTS gradually set aside many of its Salafi-Jihadist assumptions, pragmatically engaging with diverse actors to consolidate power, a practical and ongoing process of de-radicalisation. This was not an easy process, as the movement's core base remained grounded in Salafi-Jihadist ideological precepts. The authors aptly capture this transformation, noting that 'the Salvation Government (SG) was not merely about administering territory, but served as a deliberate mechanism to dismantle HTS's radical legacy, adapt to geopolitical constraints, and neutralise internal hardliners.' Importantly, they state that 'HTS's de-radicalisation was not born of theological epiphanies, but out of the pragmatic, bureaucratic necessities of consolidating power and governing a state.' (p.69-95).

Chapters 4-8 provide a detailed account of how HTS managed its internal hardliners who adhered to a Salafi-jihadist ideological framework that stood in the way of the organisation's emerging project

of pragmatic governance in Idlib. Rather than directly confronting or formally revising the Salafi-Jihadi ideological precepts, HTS adopted a strategy of regulation, purging, and the institutionalisation of religious education across the region. These measures gradually diluted and marginalised the ideological core of the movement, paving the way for a new generation of fighters less exposed to transnational jihadist doctrines. For instance, the authors note that when radical hardline preachers and texts began to challenge HTS's engagement with local society and the international community, the organisation moved to restructure the training manuals used for fighters and officers. Global jihadist literature was removed and replaced with more moderate Islamic guidebooks. At the same time, HTS promoted the codification of Islamic law in order to limit the influence of radical clerical fatwas, while introducing elements of traditionalist jurisprudence to make religious teaching and legal judgments more predictable and administratively manageable. HTS, a movement long associated with violent extremism, has begun to develop its own version of counter-terrorism (p.95-139). An even more intriguing dimension of this evolution, driven by the logic of governance, is that while diluting Salafi-jihadist elements, HTS also allowed previously suppressed Sufi communities to re-emerge as part of its effort to broaden social legitimacy and manage the movement's hardline base. In doing so, HTS appeared to replicate a strategy long employed by several Arab authoritarian regimes, co-opting Sufi networks to counter religious populists who might disrupt the prevailing power balance. As the authors note, 'HTS leadership realised that the Sufi community was politically quietist and posed no threat to their rule, unlike the disruptive Salafi populists' (139-155).

After demonstrating how the logic of governance, rather than ideology, reshaped a well-known Salafi-jihadist organisation like HTS, the book raises an important question: can this transformation be considered genuine, or might the movement re-radicalise if conditions once again become conducive to it? Examining the internal changes within the organisation, including reforms in education, curricula, training practices, the purging of radical elements, and broader efforts at rebranding, Haenni and Drevon argue that 'this transformation reinforced a self-sustaining dynamic. Through gradual and tactical departures from its original Salafi worldview, the movement crossed the threshold of no return' (p.247). Drawing from the HTS experience, the book ultimately

offers an important perspective on de-radicalisation, which is often assumed to begin with the denunciation of ideology and the embrace of moderate theology. Instead, the authors argue that the case of HTS demonstrates how ‘ideological reorientation often occurs more through practice than formal ideological shifts... Political calculations and power struggles drive the shift in ideas, not doctrinal revolutions’ (p.272). This insight offers a compelling reminder that ideological transformation within militant movements may emerge less from theological revision than from the practical demands of governance and political survival.

All in all, this book offers a fascinating study of the political sociology of the HTS movement and its pathway of de-radicalisation. It provides an insightful perspective on the organisation, as the authors draw on extensive first-hand engagement with its leadership, having lived among and interacted closely with key figures of the movement. This proximity allows them to capture the nuances of HTS’s internal debates, strategic recalibrations, and ideological shifts that are often inaccessible to outside observers. By situating these developments within the broader dynamics of the Syrian conflict and the spectrum of political Islamist movements, the book sheds light on how militant organisations evolve under political and social pressures, while also highlighting what distinguishes HTS from other factions in the Middle East. For years to come, this contribution is likely to remain a formidable reference for scholars seeking to understand the movement’s past trajectory and to assess its future role as its leaders navigate the evolving political landscape of contemporary Syria. An important observation of the book is that the authors deliberately distance their analysis from the dominant de-radicalisation frameworks commonly associated with the counter-terrorism paradigm. They explicitly state that the work ‘*is not a blueprint for Preventing Violent Extremism*’ (p.212). Although the book does not seek to provide such a blueprint, the legacy of HTS remains deeply intertwined with some of the most prominent violent extremist movements in the region. Therefore, it would still be pertinent to engage more directly with the question of de-radicalisation. Situating the case within existing de-radicalisation debates and critically assessing prevailing approaches could help identify key gaps as well as illuminate potential future directions in the broader discourse.

References

- Saner, Y. (2024, December 11). *The ties between Israel and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)*. United World International. <https://uwidata.com/36819-the-ties-between-israel-and-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts/>
- Aldoughli, R., & Al Kassir, A. (2021, July 15). *Empower Syrians not warlords: Against the re-branding of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham*. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/empower-syrians-not-warlords/>

Al-Kassimi, Khaled. (2022). *International law, Necropolitics, and Arab lives: The legalization of creative chaos in Arabia* (1st ed., 318 pp.). Routledge. ISBN 978-1-032-30714-5.

Reviewer: Nath Aldalala'a, Professor of International Relations, Department of Political Science and Madani Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Malaysia. Email: alnath@iium.edu.my

International Law, Necropolitics, and Arab Lives makes a significant contribution to contemporary debates on international law, sovereignty, and violence by interrogating the foundations of *jus gentium*, the body of law historically understood as governing relations among political communities. Originating in Roman law and later elaborated by scholastic jurists, *jus gentium* came to denote a universal legal order grounded in reason rather than revelation and was subsequently institutionalised as modern international law through secular, positivist jurisprudence. Khaled Al-Kassimi's central claim is that this universalist legal project is not merely uneven in its application, but structurally necropolitical in its effects on Arab life.

Anna Agathangelou, in her foreword, presents the book as a necessary contribution that exposes *jus gentium* as a violent epistemological structure and situates it as an uncompromising critique of Latin European modernity grounded in a reassertion of Arab epistemological and juridical self-understanding beyond the frameworks of secular sovereignty. She observes that, by interrogating the collation of *jus gentium*, Al-Kassimi seeks to clarify what Arabs have long attempted

to communicate about nature, law, and existence within a modern legal order that persistently misreads them (p. xiii).

The book advances an unsettling claim. Mass death, displacement, and political destruction across Arab societies are not approached as aberrations arising from legal failure, policy error, or weak enforcement. Instead, they are presented as outcomes that can be anticipated within a positivist *jus gentium*, where doctrines of sovereignty and humanitarianism structure the exercise of violence while simultaneously distancing actors from responsibility. Within this framework, law does not merely fall short of restraining violence in Arab space; it renders such violence lawful, intelligible, and administratively manageable, thereby normalising what it purports to regulate (emphasis in Ch. 4).

This is not a study of particular conflicts in the Middle East, nor a conventional critique of Western foreign policy. It positions the Arab World as a site through which the underlying structure of modern *jus gentium* is rendered visible, analysing international law as an ontological project that governs life and death through historically produced hierarchies of civilisation and legitimacy. In doing so, Khaled Al-Kassimi challenges the assumption, common across both International Law and International Relations, that law's violence lies in its misuse rather than in its structure. Therefore, the book's point of departure is the discourse of "creative chaos," articulated by United States policymakers during the invasions of Iraq and Lebanon and later retroactively applied to the Arab uprisings of 2011.

Creative chaos denotes a form of legal rationality in which fragmentation and demographic destruction are not unintended consequences but anticipated conditions of governance. Disorder becomes productive when administered within a legal regime that preserves the universalist self-image of international law (pp. 79, 176). Therefore, the book argues that the continuous disorder and destruction pervasive in Arabia since 2003 resulting in the deaths of over 6 million Arabs and the displacement of twice that number is not to be blamed on Arab civilisation "lacking democracy" and being "despotic in nature", but rather on a *jus gentium* that continues to be informed by principles based on a positivist jurisprudential logic using cultural differences as a (temporal) legal argument to adjudicate extrajudicial treatment" (p. 198).

From this starting point, the book reframes doctrines such as pre-emptive self-defence (Ch. 2) and the Bethlehem Legal Principles (Ch. 4) as technologies of legal authorisation rather than pragmatic responses to new security challenges/environments. Sovereignty is recalibrated from a principle of restraint into an entitlement to anticipatory violence, particularly against societies represented as incapable of ethical self-regulation. What emerges subsequently is not the marginalisation or erosion of international law, but its operationalisation as a framework for producing what necropolitical theory describes as death worlds (pp. 8-11).

Methodologically, the book is situated at the intersection of Third World Approaches to International Law and necropolitical analysis. This positioning enabled Dr. Al-Kassimi to historicise contemporary legal doctrines within longer colonial and theological genealogies while foregrounding their racialised effects. Sovereignty is considered a bio and necropolitical system that confers upon sovereign figures the authority to decide whose lives are protected, whose deaths are acceptable, and whose destruction is legally inconsequential.

The early chapters reconstruct the genealogy of modern international law by tracing the secularisation of revealed law within European jurisprudence. Through sustained engagement with Iberian scholastics, nineteenth-century positivist jurists, and colonial legal doctrine, the book demonstrates how cultural difference was translated into legal hierarchy. *Jus gentium* emerges, therefore, as a “civilisational project” that elevated a particular European epistemology to the status of universal norm while relegating non-European societies to conditions of legal inferiority. Within this framework, the book testifies that the war on terror constitutes “a (re)-turning point recounting the cultural civilizational legal marker of “sovereignty” being denied to Arab civilization because they are imagined as lawless, lack social organization, and are deficient in the arts of war” (p. 112).

From this genealogy emerges the positivist separation of law from morality at the core of the book’s argument. Once legality is detached from ethical judgement, violence requires only procedural validation, making pre-emptive war a routine instrument of governance in Arab contexts where threat is considered as permanent. Neo-Orientalist imaginaries convert cultural and temporal difference into legal

incapacity, a dynamic illustrated through the Arab uprisings, where liberal narratives alternately celebrate protest or condemn its aftermath while displacing Arab agency (Ch.3). Neo-Orientalism thus operates as a constitutive condition of legal reasoning, regulating access to sovereignty and allowing *jus gentium* to maintain a universalist form through systematic exclusion.

The book's most concrete analysis centres on the Bethlehem Legal Principles and Operation Timber Sycamore, which reveal how epistemic hierarchy is translated into operational violence through the outsourcing of killing to proxy forces and covert programmes, not as a failure of sovereignty but as one of its most effective expressions. Law insulates decision makers from accountability while rendering mass violence administratively lawful, so that death and displacement in Arab space appear not as legal breakdowns but as indicators of legal function. The later chapters extend this critique beyond doctrine into the ontological foundations of modern international law, theorising sovereignty as a violent relation oriented toward the production of expendable life, through which Arab bodies are constituted as living dead. Central to this analysis is the figure of the *muselmann* (pp. 229-237), treated as a juridical and political subject position that renders Arab life bare and disposable within zones where death is normalised and politically inconsequential, with camps, border zones, and devastated cities emerging as the spatial paradigms through which law and violence converge.

The concluding chapter shifts from diagnosis to epistemological confrontation by challenging the secular ontology underpinning modern *jus gentium*. Al-Kassimi argues that the separation of reason from revelation enables sovereignty to occupy a quasi-divine position, exercising the power to decide over life and death while disavowing moral responsibility. Against this, the book advances an alternative conception grounded in limitation rather than mastery. The reconciliation of revelation and reason operates here as an ontological limit on sovereign violence. This move will likely prove the most contentious aspect of the book, particularly for doctrinal international lawyers for whom the epistemological critique may appear excessive or resistant to reformist approaches. Its significance rests in redirecting attention from questions of legal refinement to the conditions under which legal reasoning itself authorises violence. Al-Kassimi is therefore less concerned with improving international law than with showing how its procedures make lethal outcomes both permissible and intelligible.

The book's reception is therefore likely to be uneven. Within International Law, particularly among scholars working in critical legal studies and Third World Approaches to International Law, it constitutes a serious and unsettling intervention that demands engagement with law's necropolitical foundations. In International Relations, it is likely to resonate most strongly within critical security studies, postcolonial theory, and political theology, while sitting uneasily with aspects of International Relations scholarship that treat law as an institutional backdrop rather than as a mechanism through which violence is authorised.

Roundtable Report

Understanding Islamophobia: Structural Dynamics, Internal Challenges, and Strategic Responses

This article synthesises discussions from the third roundtable of the Nexus Muslim Minorities Global Conference held at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) by the Peace, Dialogue and Xenophobia Studies Centre (PEDIXS). It was convened on 30 July 2025 under the theme “*Voices of the Oppressed: Addressing Islamophobia and Internal Challenges in Muslim Communities.*” Situating participant interventions within contemporary debates on Islamophobia, Orientalism, and postcolonial modernity, this report conceptualises Islamophobia as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing structural discrimination, media distortion, cultural hierarchies, internalised marginalisation, and institutional fragmentation. It further examines strategic responses proposed at the forum, including narrative reclamation, intellectual renewal, technological engagement, and the establishment of a global data infrastructure — the Madani Muslim Minority Prosperity Index for Southeast Asia (M3PI SEA). The roundtable’s deliberations collectively advance a framework that moves beyond reactive condemnation toward constructive institutional strategy.

Islamophobia as Structure, Not Sentiment

Participants at the roundtable approached Islamophobia not merely as prejudice or irrational fear, but as a structural phenomenon embedded in systems of representation, governance, and knowledge production. The discussion echoed insights associated with Edward Said, whose work on *Orientalism* demonstrated how Western scholarship historically constructed Islam as civilisationally inferior, static, and threatening. Such representations continue to inform contemporary media and political discourse. Professor Hamidullah Marazi (ISTAC) emphasised that epistemic marginalisation remains a persistent challenge. Muslim

scholars and intellectual traditions are often underrepresented within global academic institutions and international conferences, particularly where secular epistemologies define normative frameworks of legitimacy. Islamophobia, in this sense, operates not only at the level of social hostility but also through exclusion from authoritative spaces of knowledge. The forum, therefore, conceptualised Islamophobia as layered: discursive, institutional, political, and cultural.

Media Framing and Political Silence

Participants noted that Muslims are frequently framed in global media as primary perpetrators of violence, despite being among the principal victims of war, terrorism, and geopolitical conflict. Such framing sustains simplified binaries of “moderate” versus “extremist” Islam and reduces complex political struggles to civilisational narratives. Dr. AbuBakar Usman Abubakar (University of Malaya), reflecting on the Nigerian context, observed how extremist violence is often portrayed as Muslim aggression against Christians, obscuring the reality that Muslim communities themselves suffer heavily from such insurgent groups. The absence of coordinated Muslim media infrastructure, he argued, allows distorted narratives to circulate globally and unchecked. Parallel to media distortion, participants raised concerns about inconsistent or muted responses (during US university protests for Palestine, for example) from segments of the Muslim world to global crises affecting Muslim populations. This silence was framed not only as a moral issue but as a structural deficit in advocacy coordination. Without credible, data-driven mechanisms, communities struggle to influence international policy or public discourse.

Cultural Islamophobia and the Politics of Modernity

The roundtable also examined subtler manifestations of what was termed “cultural Islamophobia.” Arief Arman (PEDIXS) described how everyday Muslim practices — including modes of dress, eating, or bodily comportment — are sometimes portrayed as backward or incompatible with modernity, such as in the case of the newly elected NYC mayor, Mamdani. Such judgments reflect enduring hierarchies of civilisation rooted in colonial discourse. Here, participants analysed how colonial governance divided populations into “modern” and “traditional” subjects, assigning civilisational value to certain cultural forms while marginalising others. Cultural Islamophobia operates

within this inherited logic, pressuring minorities toward assimilation while delegitimising visible religious identity. The forum debated strategies of integration. Some advocated contextual adaptation (of not wearing Muslim dress, for example) to reduce social friction, while others warned that excessive assimilation risks eroding religious and cultural confidence. The tension reflects broader questions regarding identity in multicultural societies.

Internalised Islamophobia and Identity Confidence

Islamophobia's impact extends inward. Ahmad Akhlaq (ISTAC) described instances in which Muslims in minority contexts conceal aspects of their religious identity (of prayer in public, for example) to avoid discrimination. Such internalisation reflects the psychological effects of persistent negative stereotyping. Dr. Muhammad Shafiq Borhanuddin (IKIM) argued that countering this dynamic requires the construction of a well-informed, affirmative narrative capable of restoring intellectual and ethical confidence. Da'wah was reframed not narrowly as proselytisation but as being a good example as ethical witness — embodying justice ('adl), compassion, and excellence (ihsān) in public engagement. In this framing, Islamophobia cannot be addressed solely through protest or reactive discourse. It must be countered by visible competence, integrity, and constructive participation in society.

Educational Fragmentation and Intellectual Renewal

A recurring theme was concern regarding fragmentation within contemporary Muslim educational systems. Classical centres of learning produced polymaths — Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, Ibn Khaldun — who integrated philosophy, science, and theology. Contemporary systems, by contrast, are often divided between religious traditionalism and secular technocracy. Today, however, religious and secular knowledge often operate in isolation from one another, with traditional religious schools lacking a broader outlook and separate from universities. Professor Marazi called for intellectual renewal within Muslim society, capable of engaging modern philosophy, science, and ethics without defensive retreat. Without such renewal, participants warned, Muslim societies risk remaining consumers rather than producers of knowledge. Intellectual marginalisation, in turn, reinforces broader structural vulnerabilities.

Educational reform was thus presented not merely as internal development, but as a strategic response to Islamophobia at the level of global knowledge hierarchies.

Technology, Media, and Strategic Capacity

The digital sphere emerged as a critical arena. Qaisar Gibran (ISTAC) observed that social media can amplify misinformation yet also provide platforms for advocacy and outreach. Technological lag within the Muslim world, he argued, compounds vulnerability: narrative power increasingly depends upon digital literacy, data analysis, and communication infrastructure. “Unity without progress will not protect us,” he remarked. Ethical commitment must be accompanied by visible scientific and technological competence amongst Muslims. Participants emphasised that contemporary influence and identity are inseparable from media strategy and digital engagement.

Beyond Identity: Class and Structural Anxiety

Dr. Zahid Zamri (CENTRIS) broadened the discussion by urging attention to socioeconomic factors underlying xenophobic sentiment. Economic insecurity and labour competition often intensify hostility toward immigrants, including Muslim minorities. In this reading, Islamophobia sometimes operates as a displacement mechanism for broader structural anxieties (of people concerned about losing jobs to immigrants). Such economic analysis complicates purely theological explanations. Islamophobia may be religiously framed, yet materially driven, envisioning Muslims as a lower class. Addressing it, therefore, requires sensitivity to economic integration, mobility, and social cohesion.

Rethinking Terminology and Intellectual Literacy

Joining virtually from Australia, Dr. Zuhair Gabsi questioned whether the term “Islamophobia” adequately captures contemporary hostility. The language of “phobia” suggests irrational fear, whereas many manifestations appear organised and ideological. Whether framed as Islamophobia or “anti-Islam,” participants agreed that conceptual precision matters. Associate Professor Dr. Danial Yusof, Director of PEDIXS, emphasised the need for intellectual literacy regarding competing ideologies, such as Judaism. Communities seeking

recognition must also study the intellectual foundations of adversarial narratives with rigour and nuance.

Institutional Strategy: The M3PI SEA

The roundtable concluded with a concrete initiative: the Madani Muslim Minorities Prosperity Index for Southeast Asia (M3PI-SEA), to be housed at the PEDIXS Centre. The proposed index aims to document both negative indicators — incidents of Islamophobia, discrimination, and structural exclusion — and positive indicators such as civic contribution, socioeconomic mobility, and resilience. Participants stressed methodological transparency and international credibility. The M3PI SEA would not function solely as a register of grievance but as a balanced instrument documenting both vulnerability and agency. Importantly, contributors proposed that the database also record instances in which Muslims themselves perpetuate injustice, underscoring intellectual honesty and normative consistency. Through this initiative, the forum shifted from critique toward institution-building.

Conclusion: From Condemnation to Construction

The PEDIXS roundtable articulated Islamophobia as structural rather than episodic — embedded in representation, media, knowledge hierarchies, and socioeconomic tensions. At the same time, it identified internal challenges: fragmentation, educational decline, technological lag, and diminished confidence. Most significantly, the discussions moved beyond diagnosis. Dialogue, ethical excellence, intellectual renewal, digital competence, and credible data infrastructure were proposed as strategic responses. In this framework, resilience depends not solely on resisting prejudice but on constructing institutions capable of shaping narrative and policy. The forum thus advanced a constructive thesis: confronting Islamophobia requires both critique and capacity — moral clarity accompanied by intellectual and institutional strength.

Michelle R. Kimball

Senior Research Fellow

Peace, Dialogue and Xenophobia Studies Centre (PEDIXS)

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Intellectual Discourse is an academic, refereed journal, published twice a year. Four types of contributions are considered for publication in this journal: major articles reporting findings of original research; review articles synthesising important deliberations related to disciplines within the domain of Islamic sciences; short research notes or communications, containing original ideas or discussions on vital issues of contemporary concern, and book reviews; and brief reader comments, or statements of divergent viewpoints.

To submit manuscript, go to <http://www.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse>

The manuscript submitted to *Intellectual Discourse* should not have been published elsewhere, and should not be under consideration by other publications. This must be stated in the covering letter.

1. Original research and review articles should be 5,000-8,000 words while research notes 3,000-4,000 words, accompanied by an abstract of 100-150 words. Book review should be 1,000-1,500 words.
2. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with a 1-inch (2.5 cm) margins. Use 12-point Times New Roman font.
3. Manuscripts should adhere to the *American Psychological Association* (APA) style, latest edition.
4. The title should be as concise as possible and should appear on a separate sheet together with name(s) of the author(s), affiliation(s), and the complete postal address of the institute(s).
5. A short running title of not more than 40 characters should also be included.
6. Headings and sub-headings of different sections should be clearly indicated.
7. References should be alphabetically ordered. Some examples are given below:

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 annotated Bible. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Transliteration of Arabic words should follow the style indicated in ROTAS Transliteration Kit as detailed on its website (http://rotas.iium.edu.my/?Table_of_Transliteration), which is a slight modification of ALA-LC (Library of Congress and the American Library Association) transliteration scheme. Transliteration of Persian, Urdu, Turkish and other scripts should follow ALA-LC scheme.

Opinions expressed in the journal are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, or the publisher. Material published in the *Intellectual Discourse* is copyrighted in its favour. As such, no part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, or any information retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

IIUM Press (Marketing Unit)
Research Management Centre
International Islamic University Malaysia
P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Phone (+603) 6196-5014, Fax: (+603) 6196-4862
E-mail: intdiscourse@iium.edu.my; intdiscourse@yahoo.com.
Website: <http://iiumpress.iium.edu.my/bookshop>

In This Issue

Note from the Editor

Research Articles

Luay Hatem Yaqoob

Politics, Wisdom, and Happiness:
A Statistical and Comparative Analysis of Greek and Islamic Philosophy

Nur Alia Shamsul Bahri, Norazilawati Abd Wahab, Arbai'yah Mohd Noor, Mohd Firdaus Abdullah, Zuliskandar Ramli & Ruzaini Sulaiman

Islamic Influence on Traditional Water Transport and Boat Building in
Terengganu from the 13th to 20th Century

Muhammad Danial Azman & Kevin Fernandez

Ubuntu and Madani in Dialogue: Ethical Encounters, Lived Experience,
and the Moral Realities of Malaysia–Africa Relations

Muhammad Irwan Ariffin, Afiza Mohamad Ali, Nurul Nuha Abdul Molok, Khadijah Khalilah Abdul Rashid & Hamwira Yaacob

Mapping Outcome-Based Education Principles to Qur'anic Guidance
for Islamic Higher Education

Ratnawati Mohd Asraf & Harvindar Kaur

Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities in Mainstream Classrooms:
The Challenge of Teacher Preparedness

Alper Fener & Ervin Kovačević

Language Learning Beliefs in Motion: The Role of Experience and Engagement

Nur Nisa Solehah binti Muhamad Haswazil, Fatmir Shehu & Ainul Azmin binti Md. Zamin

Fostering National Harmony through Inter-Religious Education:
An Analysis of *Pendidikan Moral* KSSM and *Pendidikan Islam* KSSM Syllabi

Wan Nur Madiha binti Ramlan & Raihan binti Rosman

The Spiritual Quest in Contemporary Muslim Speculative Writing:
A Reading of *Bird Summons* (2023) by Leila Aboulela

Mohd Firdaus Abdullah, Mardiana Nordin, Arba'iyah Mohd Noor, Norazilawati Abd Wahab & Yusry Sulaiman

Water Symbolism in *Syair Perahu* by Hamzah Fansuri: A Reflection
of Maritime Life and Islamic Values in the History of Malay Society

Hamoud Yahya Ahmed Mohsen, Fahad Ibrahim Al-Bakr, Ruzy Suliza Hashim & Abdulrahman Alosman

Eco-political Discourse in Mahmoud Darwish's Poetry of Resistance

Siti Inarah Hasim, Jamilah Hanum Abdul Khaiyom, Mardiana Mohamad Zunaidah Mohd Marzuki-Jamiah Manap, Nellie Ismail & Nor Hayati Kasim

Mindfulness-Informed Parenting Interventions for Parents and Caregivers of
Children with Atypical Development: A Scoping Review

Book Reviews

Roundtable Report

ISSN 0128-4878 (Print)

ISSN 2289-5639 (Online)

