

Holistic Management of Islamic Education in the 21st Century: A Strategic Framework for Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The strategic management of Islamic education is essential for nurturing a balanced, future-ready generation that excels intellectually, ethically, and spiritually in accordance with Islamic values. In the face of globalization and rapid technological change, Islamic education in Malaysia must be dynamically and systematically managed to remain relevant and impactful. One of the primary challenges lies in overcoming the dualism between religious and secular knowledge, alongside the increasing demands of 21st-century learning environments. This paper proposes that effective educational leadership, integrated curriculum management, and continuous professional development are key strategies to address these challenges. It highlights the importance of aligning technological innovation with Tawhidic principles, ensuring that digital tools serve not only pedagogical efficiency but also the moral and spiritual development of learners. Grounded in the framework of 21st Century Learning, this conceptual paper outlines holistic management approaches to advance Islamic education in Malaysia, preserving its identity while enhancing its sustainability, competitiveness, and alignment with global educational aspirations. It contributes a comprehensive Tawhidic-oriented strategic management model that integrates educational leadership, curriculum innovation, technological application, and teacher development, and offers practical and policy-relevant insights to guide the transformation of Islamic education in the 21st century.”

Keywords: Islamic Holistic Education, Educational Management, 21st Century Learning, Curriculum and Leadership, Technology Integration, Tawhidic Framework

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary educational landscape has experienced substantial transformations, particularly evident in educational policies, leadership practices, teacher professional development, and governance structures [1]. These transformations are notably influenced by the ten strategic shifts delineated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025, developed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), with an explicit emphasis on 21st-century learning (21st Century Learning). The 21st Century Learning paradigm aims to equip learners with the necessary skills to meet international education standards and global workforce expectations [2]. Consequently, there is an increased demand for dynamic educational management practices, capable of integrating modern technological advancements and accommodating the unique characteristics of Generation Z and Generation Alpha through blended learning methodologies [3].

However, globalization has introduced significant challenges, notably manifesting as a dualistic division between secular and religious knowledge, a phenomenon prevalent within contemporary educational frameworks [35]. According to [4], Malaysia’s curriculum, particularly through the adoption of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines inspired by Western educational models, has inadvertently led to the marginalization of Islamic education. Consequently, a stronger inclination towards

secular, science-oriented subjects has emerged among students, often relegating Islamic studies to a secondary role. This trend is further exacerbated by conservative perspectives among certain Islamic scholars, which maintain rigid separations between traditional religious instruction and contemporary educational innovations [5].

Given these conditions, there is an urgent imperative to reestablish Islamic education's central role within Malaysia's educational framework, emphasizing its integral contribution to developing individuals who actively embody Islamic principles while effectively engaging with modern societal challenges. The Malaysian Islamic education system currently endeavors to integrate traditional pedagogical practices with modern educational methodologies [6]. Yet, ongoing pressures of globalization, rapid technological developments, and evolving learner needs necessitate more adaptive, strategic, and integrative educational management approaches. Specifically, embedding essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy within the Islamic education curriculum has become paramount [1][7].

Islamic education plays a foundational role in character formation, ensuring students deeply internalize Islamic moral values, thereby offering continuous moral guidance throughout their lives [8]. Reference [9] argue that comprehensive Islamic education nurtures morally upright individuals, conscious of their duties towards Allah, their communities, and themselves, constantly striving for spiritual and moral growth. Therefore, educational management strategies in the 21st century must firmly ground themselves in Islamic ethical principles to cultivate a generation that is both spiritually anchored and globally competent. This involves restructured curriculum management, holistic integration of disciplines, and the deliberate application of Islamic perspectives within contemporary knowledge domains [5].

Reference [10] further emphasizes that Islamic education transcends the mere transfer of theoretical religious knowledge, highlighting instead the importance of practically applying Islamic values to solve real-world complexities responsibly and ethically. Aligning strategic management of Islamic education with global educational trends without compromising its foundational Islamic pedagogical principles remains essential [11]. Consequently, this study aims to critically analyze and propose a Tawhidic-based strategic management model for embedding 21st-century competencies into Islamic education in Malaysia. It contributes a holistic framework that integrates educational leadership, curriculum innovation, technological application, and teacher development, offering practical and policy-relevant insights to guide the transformation of Islamic education in line with both national aspirations and global standards.

CONCEPTUALIZING ISLAMIC EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

Islamic education is broadly conceptualized as a holistic process involving nurturing, educating, training, safeguarding, purifying, guiding, and refining human character and conduct to foster obedience and closeness to Allah SWT [8]. Reference [12] further elaborate Islamic education as a systematic effort to realize human potential in the role of Allah's khalifah (vicegerent) on Earth, guided by the fundamental principles of Tawhid (oneness of Allah), adherence to Sharia, and the cultivation of noble Islamic virtues. Reflecting these principles, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Malaysia emphasizes four core aspirations within Islamic education: devotion to Allah SWT, personal self-development, social responsibility and family values [12]. In contrast to Western-oriented education models primarily designed to equip learners with adaptability skills for modern industrialization, Islamic education emphasizes guiding individuals toward moral excellence, a devout lifestyle, and adherence to Islamic principles as articulated in the Quran and Sunnah. Spiritual and moral excellence, thus, is not inherently acquired but cultivated through rigorous personal efforts and continuous engagement with authentic Islamic knowledge [13][2].

In educational institutions, effective management necessitates systematic and dynamic approaches for addressing various internal and external factors such as leadership structures, technological advancements, institutional culture, organizational dynamics, and political environments. Within Islamic educational contexts, this form of comprehensive management becomes even more significant, as it encompasses not only academic achievements but also the cultivation of students' moral integrity, identity formation, and spiritual

well-being [4]. Amidst the challenges posed by globalization, Islamic education management anchored in Islamic values is critical to fostering a generation capable of competing globally while preserving the distinct moral and ethical principles inherent in the Muslim identity. Effective management of Islamic education necessitates a balanced curriculum integrating worldly (secular) and spiritual (religious) knowledge, complemented by innovative and contemporary teaching methodologies [14].

Nevertheless, research indicates persistent challenges in the practical implementation of such integrative Islamic education models. Specifically, a study by [15] highlighted a prevalent issue: many Islamic education teachers in Malaysia still lack sufficient pedagogical competence to implement Islamic principles effectively within the 21st-century learning framework (21st Century Learning). This deficiency often hampers educators' ability to embed Tawhidic perspectives into curricula, consequently restricting students' engagement with critical and analytical thinking skills integral to holistic education.

Central to Islamic education management is the principle of balance between spiritual and physical development, thereby promoting a comprehensive approach to student development [8]. Effective management strategies therefore advocate for harmonious integration between curricular and co-curricular activities, addressing both spiritual nurturing and intellectual growth. This holistic pedagogical strategy enables students to successfully navigate contemporary life's complexities while fulfilling their religious duties [16]. Such an approach not only ensures students' acquisition of essential scientific and technical competencies for global competitiveness but simultaneously reinforces Islamic ethics and moral values to guide their engagement with contemporary social and moral dilemmas [14]. Hence, Islamic education management emerges as an evolving field that strategically bridges traditional Islamic teachings and modern educational practices, fostering effective educational institutions committed to both academic excellence and steadfast adherence to Islamic moral and ethical frameworks.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION MANAGEMENT IN MALAYSIA

Islamic education in Malaysia is fundamentally structured to foster the moral, spiritual, and intellectual development of students, in accordance with the Philosophy of National Education (FPK), which emphasizes comprehensive spiritual growth [17]. The management of Islamic education in Malaysia involves systematic coordination among multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, and policymakers. The Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) serve as principal bodies overseeing Islamic education implementation, ensuring adherence to national educational policies such as the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 and the FPK.

Within this structured framework, Malaysia's educational system mandates Islamic studies (Fardu Ain) in both primary and secondary curricula, supplemented by Quranic teachings, Hadith studies, Aqidah (Islamic creed), and Tassawur Islam (Islamic worldview). This comprehensive approach is designed to reinforce students' moral identity and protect them from external influences that may conflict with Islamic teachings, particularly Western ideological paradigms [15]. Concurrently, Malaysia's Islamic education curriculum has undergone significant revisions to accommodate contemporary societal demands, including rapid modernization, liberalization, and the proliferation of digital technologies. These revisions, evident in the Integrated Primary School Curriculum (KBSR) and the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM), reflect national efforts to produce a competent and innovative workforce essential for Malaysia's vision of becoming a knowledge-based economy [15].

In response to these evolving demands, the MOE introduced the Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (KSSR), aimed at cultivating holistic human capital through a strategically reformed Islamic educational framework. The Islamic Education Division of the MOE outlined five strategic objectives to guide the management and implementation of Islamic education:

- Strengthening the administrative efficiency and effectiveness of Islamic education programs, Arabic language instruction, religious schools, outreach activities, Islamic values, and ethical education.

- Developing robust policies and guidelines to facilitate systematic Islamic educational development.
- Enhancing the operational quality and management focus of National Religious Secondary Schools (SMKA) and Government-Aided Religious Schools (SABK).
- Formulating programs and policies aimed at reinforcing Islamic faith (Aqidah), spiritual enrichment, and the cultivation of Islamic ethics.
- Establishing strategic collaborations with other divisions within MOE and external agencies to enhance advisory services related to Islamic education and Arabic language instruction.

These strategic objectives demonstrate Malaysia's commitment to harmonizing contemporary educational needs with traditional Islamic values, thereby reinforcing students' identities as khalifah (vicegerents) of Allah. Islamic education serves not only as a repository of faith-based knowledge but also as a foundational framework for students' ethical conduct, spiritual strength, and lifelong moral guidance [3]. Importantly, spiritual and ethical excellence is understood as an outcome of sustained personal effort, sincere knowledge acquisition, and deep engagement with authentic Islamic teachings from the Quran and Hadith [13].

The Malaysian government's continuous commitment to Islamic education is further evidenced through the establishment and expansion of SMKA, SABK, and other religious educational institutions, all managed under MOE's oversight. These institutions prioritize producing graduates proficient in religious knowledge and characterized by commendable Islamic morals and ethics [12]. Despite significant achievements, challenges remain, notably the influence of pluralistic and liberal ideologies coupled with the pervasive impact of Western cultural norms, which present significant barriers to maintaining a coherent Islamic identity among students. The rise in juvenile misconduct associated with exposure to conflicting ideologies further highlights the urgency of addressing these challenges [18].

Additionally, the persistent educational dualism separating religious and secular knowledge continues to impede the holistic integration of curricula, fostering confusion among students [19]. Another significant concern is the limited religious appreciation among Islamic education teachers, hindering the effective transmission of Tawhidic values within classroom settings [15]. Critics have also noted a predominant emphasis on theoretical Islamic knowledge, neglecting practical application, thereby limiting its relevance to students' contemporary experiences and societal contexts.

To effectively address these multifaceted challenges, Islamic education management in Malaysia must adopt proactive, integrative, and strategic approaches. Comprehensive policies must be formulated to seamlessly integrate religious and secular education while ensuring curriculum relevance to contemporary societal developments. Achieving these objectives necessitates collaborative leadership and sustained cooperation among government agencies, educational administrators, institutional leaders, and Islamic education practitioners. Through such collective endeavors, Islamic education in Malaysia can maintain its robustness, adaptability, and resilience amidst evolving modern educational landscapes.

INTEGRATING 21ST-CENTURY LEARNING INTO ISLAMIC EDUCATION

The Ministry of Education (MOE) of Malaysia is steadfast in its mission to establish a world-class education system, positioning education as a foundational pillar of national development. In pursuit of this goal, the national curriculum must be continuously refined to align with the realities of modernization, ensuring that future generations are equipped with the competencies, adaptability, and cognitive depth needed to confront global challenges [20]. The 21st Century Learning framework (21st Century Learning) is a visionary initiative designed to nurture highly skilled, ethical, and competitive individuals, guided by the aspirations outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025. These aspirations—knowledge, bilingual proficiency, ethics and spirituality, leadership skills, national identity, and thinking skills—serve as critical benchmarks for holistic student development [21].

Despite its noble objectives, the implementation of 21st Century Learning presents significant pedagogical challenges. One of the most pressing issues identified is the effective incorporation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and the need for more interactive and learner-centered classroom environments [1]. Addressing

these challenges requires sustained collaboration between educators, school leaders, and the MOE to reform teaching methods and enhance educational delivery. Such reform is essential in cultivating human capital that is not only intellectually competent but also spiritually anchored, innovative, collaborative, and morally upright [2].

21st Century Learning promotes a balanced instructional approach that actively engages students, educators, and educational resources through the application of diverse pedagogical strategies. In the context of Islamic education, blended learning has proven particularly effective in enriching students' comprehension of religious subjects while fostering a more holistic understanding of Islam's ethical and spiritual dimensions [21]. However, the success of this model depends significantly on the preparedness and professionalism of educators. Teachers remain at the heart of the learning process, not only as facilitators but as mentors and role models who shape students' cognitive and moral development. As emphasized by [22] teachers must be equipped with pedagogical strategies that enable students to think critically, solve problems, and apply knowledge in transformative ways.

Integral to the 21st Century Learning philosophy are the "4Cs"—Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, and Creativity originally introduced by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). These competencies are considered essential for navigating the demands of a rapidly changing, technology-driven world [21]. However, from an Islamic educational standpoint, the 4Cs must be interpreted within a Tawhidic framework. Communication should be rooted in *adab* (Islamic etiquette), collaboration must reflect the principles of *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), critical thinking must align with *fikr* (reflective contemplation), and creativity must be understood as a God-given capacity that serves constructive and ethical purposes. Through this spiritual lens, the 4Cs serve not only to prepare students for economic productivity but also to fulfill their role as *khalifah* (vicegerents) of Allah on Earth.

The integration of digital technology into Islamic education marks a significant paradigm shift, enabling students to utilize contemporary tools while reinforcing their connection to divine values. Reference [23] advocate the use of gamified educational applications such as Kahoot in teaching subjects like Quranic Studies, Hadith, Aqidah (Creed), Ibadah (Worship), Sirah (Prophetic Biography), Akhlaq (Morality), and Jawi. These tools, when used effectively, enhance student engagement while grounding their learning in the principles of Tawhid.

Moreover, Islamic education teachers bear multiple responsibilities, embodying roles such as *mu'allim* (instructor), *mudarris* (educator), *mursyid* (spiritual guide), and *murabbi* (moral nurturer) as outlined by [3]. These multifaceted roles are central to nurturing a generation that is intellectually sharp, emotionally resilient, spiritually conscious, and physically healthy, in alignment with the National Philosophy of Education. However, if educators are not adequately trained to internalize and implement 21st Century Learning principles through an Islamic worldview, the credibility of teacher training institutions and the broader educational mission may be called into question. Therefore, comprehensive professional development that strengthens both pedagogical competence and spiritual depth is essential for the future of Islamic education in the 21st century.

STRATEGIC ISLAMIC EDUCATION MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF 21ST-CENTURY LEARNING

The foremost aim of educational institutions within an Islamic framework is not only to nurture a society that is intellectually competent and professionally skilled but also to cultivate individuals who are morally upright and spiritually grounded. Such individuals should be capable of applying their knowledge in service to humanity and in alignment with the responsibilities of being *khalifah* (vicegerents) of Allah on Earth [2]. In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and digital globalization, the integration of technology into the curriculum has become indispensable for advancing educational effectiveness and relevance. Technology, when grounded in Islamic values, can be a powerful tool to support learning at all stages from lesson planning to classroom engagement.

However, research by [22] identifies ongoing challenges, particularly in Islamic education, where teachers often struggle to effectively integrate Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) with theological subjects such as Aqidah (Islamic Creed). This misalignment can hinder students' ability to engage in reflective reasoning and analytical thinking, thereby limiting their intellectual and spiritual growth.

In light of these challenges, a robust and spiritually oriented educational management strategy is essential. The integration of contemporary knowledge with Islamic teachings is fundamental to cultivating students who are resilient, ethically guided, and prepared to navigate the complexities of a fast-evolving world [24]. Therefore, the implementation of Islamic education management strategies based on the 21st Century Learning framework must be both structured and holistic, addressing the multifaceted needs of learners in today's globalized environment.

Such strategies require coordinated efforts from all stakeholders—educational authorities, school leaders, teachers, and communities. Fig. 1 shows five key components of an effective 21st-century Islamic education management strategy include:

- **Technology Integration:** Employing digital tools in ways that uphold Islamic ethical standards while enhancing accessibility and personalization in learning.
- **Pedagogical Innovation:** Encouraging creative, student-centered teaching practices that are deeply rooted in Islamic values and responsive to modern learning paradigms.
- **Curriculum Management:** Ensuring that curricula are balanced, incorporating scientific and technological advancements while remaining firmly grounded in Tawhidic principles.
- **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Providing ongoing, spiritually enriching training for educators to strengthen both pedagogical and ethical competencies.
- **Educational Leadership:** Establishing visionary school leadership committed to transforming institutions through prophetic ethics, strategic planning, and instructional excellence.

These strategic components, when integrated through a Tawhidic lens, ensure that Islamic education remains not only relevant and competitive but also spiritually enriching. They empower both educators and learners to uphold their faith while excelling in the global arena, demonstrating that true knowledge must lead to conscious worship, ethical action, and the fulfillment of divine trust.



Fig. 1 Islamic Education Management Strategy Approach Based on 21st Century Learning

Figure 1 presents the Islamic Education Management Strategy Approach, which is grounded in the principles of 21st Century Learning and guided by a Tawhidic worldview. The model comprises five interconnected components: technology integration, pedagogical innovation, curriculum management, teacher training and professional development and strengthening educational leadership. Each component contributes to strengthening the quality, relevance, and spiritual foundation of Islamic education. The following sections explain each element in detail and include examples from educational institutions in Malaysia to illustrate their practical application.

Technological Integration

Technological advancement has profoundly reshaped the landscape of education, making knowledge more accessible and interactions more dynamic. In the context of Society 5.0, the integration of tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and E-learning platforms is essential for meeting complex educational demands with greater personalization and efficiency. Reference [25] emphasize that rapid technological shifts necessitate a proactive adaptation of the education system to remain effective and relevant.

In Islamic education, the integration of technology must be firmly grounded in the values of Tawhid. While modern innovations offer powerful means to enhance pedagogy, they should never replace the spiritual essence of the learning process. Reference [26] assert that a balanced approach anchored first in Islamic teachings, then augmented by career-related knowledge and digital skills is vital for nurturing holistic human development. AI applications, such as chatbots, can serve as interactive assistants for learners, providing tailored responses to queries related to worship (ibadah), Prophetic history (sirah), and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) [27]. In Malaysia, several SMKA and SABK schools have adopted digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Quizizz, and Quran Explorer to support Islamic subjects like Quranic memorization, Hadith and Akhlaq. For example, Kahoot is used in Sirah lessons to test students' understanding in an interactive manner, making the learning process more engaging while maintaining Islamic etiquette and values. These tools, when used purposefully, support pedagogical goals without compromising spiritual development.

Nevertheless, technological tools must be employed responsibly, guided by Islamic ethics. As highlighted by [28] and [3], educators have a moral duty to ensure that digital content reinforces faith and moral development, shielding learners from harmful or distracting digital influences. Ultimately, technology in Islamic education should serve as a servant to knowledge and a tool for spiritual upliftment and not a substitute for it.

Pedagogical Innovation

Teacher competency in adapting effective instructional strategies is a cornerstone of successful 21st-century Islamic education. Within the 21st Century Learning framework, educators are urged to adopt dynamic, student-centered teaching methods that activate learner engagement while remaining faithful to Islamic principles [20]. Pedagogical innovation in Islamic education is not merely about method; it involves a transformative approach where teachers act as murabbi (nurturers), guiding students intellectually and spiritually.

Reference [29] notes the increasing impact of digital resources such as Quranic and Hadith software, interactive e-books, and Flash-based learning programs in enhancing the delivery of core religious subjects. In several SABK and tahfiz-integrated schools, teachers have adopted flipped classroom approaches where students explore Quranic content at home using pre-recorded video lessons or e-books, then engage in reflective discussions and problem-solving during class. For example, during lessons on Hadith, students may be asked to collaboratively analyze real-life ethical dilemmas based on prophetic traditions, guided by the teacher as a mursyid (spiritual guide). These tools not only improve comprehension but also facilitate deeper reflection (tadabbur) on divine messages.

Reference [30] affirm that student-centered strategies are instrumental in nurturing learners who are spiritually rooted, intellectually capable, and morally resilient. Educators, therefore, play an indispensable role in shaping

a curriculum that stimulates inquiry, ethical reasoning, and creativity—all within the parameters set by Islamic ethics. Pedagogical innovation, when harmonized with a Tawhidic worldview, enables learners to navigate worldly knowledge while remaining conscious of their responsibilities toward Allah and society.

Curriculum Management

The heart of Islamic curriculum management lies in harmonizing contemporary knowledge with timeless divine guidance. In Malaysia, the National Philosophy of Education (NPE) emphasizes balanced development—intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical as a foundational goal. Within this framework, Islamic education ensures that learners not only excel academically but also possess a strong moral compass.

Incorporating Western educational techniques is permissible as long as they do not conflict with Islamic values. Rather, such integration, when guided by a clear Tawhidic framework, can elevate the curriculum by combining global relevance with spiritual depth [24].

For instance, in some Islamic secondary schools, literature components from the Malay Language and English subjects are selected to reflect Islamic themes, such as justice, compassion, and humility. Poems and narratives with universal moral values are taught alongside related Quranic verses or Hadith to deepen students' moral understanding and encourage reflective thinking. This cross-curricular approach helps reinforce Islamic ethical principles while fulfilling national curriculum standards. Reference [26] further stress that Islamic education functions as a moral safeguard, preventing cultural disorientation by rooting students in divine ethics while engaging modern content.

The use of platforms like Google Classroom and applications such as Quran Explorer exemplifies how Islamic education can embrace technological efficiency without compromising spiritual integrity [10]. These tools promote collaboration, autonomy, and digital fluency while enhancing students' engagement with the Quran and prophetic traditions.

Ultimately, Islamic curriculum management must maintain a clear distinction between knowledge that serves to cultivate iman (faith) and that which merely satisfies utilitarian goals. Intellectual development without spiritual awareness is incomplete. By weaving Tawhid into every layer of curriculum planning and delivery, Islamic education cultivates learners who are intellectually equipped, ethically committed, and spiritually conscious—individuals who truly reflect the prophetic model of holistic excellence.

Teacher Training and Professional Development

The evolving educational landscape demands not only technical proficiency but also a deep moral commitment from educators. In Islamic education, teachers are entrusted with a dual role: transmitting knowledge and embodying prophetic character as murabbi (nurturers) and mursyid (guides). As such, the need for continuous teacher training and professional development is paramount to preserve the integrity and relevance of Islamic teaching in modern contexts.

Reference [31] emphasizes that professional development enhances teachers' pedagogical mastery, enabling them to align instructional strategies with the dynamic needs of contemporary learners. Beyond classroom instruction, educators are increasingly expected to fulfill leadership and administrative functions, necessitating training in curriculum management, assessment literacy, and digital integration [32].

The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE), through its New Teacher Development Program 2.0, has institutionalized this vision by prioritizing the empowerment of teachers in alignment with national goals. These initiatives promote flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness—attributes vital in a system that seeks to integrate digital tools without compromising Islamic ethical boundaries.

Furthermore, integrating technology into teacher training enables educators to navigate modern tools such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), virtual classrooms, and assessment analytics. However, effective

training also necessitates a spiritual component. Teachers must be reminded that their primary responsibility is not simply knowledge transfer but character formation guided by Islamic values [37].

A recurring concern, highlighted by [15], is the rising stress and burnout among novice educators due to administrative overload and lack of mentorship. This underscores the importance of structured mentoring programs that serve not only as technical support systems but also as platforms for spiritual and emotional guidance. Senior educators must act as *qudwahhasanah* (exemplary role models), nurturing a new generation of teachers who are resilient, reflective, and spiritually grounded.

Strengthening Educational Leadership

Educational leadership, from an Islamic perspective, is a sacred trust (*amanah*) that demands vision, justice, and wisdom. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 identifies strong school leadership as central to transforming educational institutions into centers of excellence that are globally competitive and spiritually coherent.

Leaders in Islamic schools are not merely administrators but also *murabbi*, responsible for shaping the moral and intellectual environment of the institution. They play a pivotal role in driving curriculum reforms, teacher development, and student outcomes. For example, in some SMKA schools, principals have implemented structured daily routines that begin with congregational prayers, Quranic recitation, and motivational *tazkirah* sessions.

School leaders also oversee *halaqah* programs and reflective journaling practices that integrate students' academic learning with their spiritual development. Such leadership initiatives ensure that school environments promote not just academic achievement but also religious consciousness and moral discipline. However, Reference [33] reveal that leadership inefficiencies particularly in KAFA programs hinder the full realization of Islamic education objectives due to poor coordination, limited supervision, and inadequate time for key religious activities such as prayer.

Effective leadership requires an understanding of both pedagogy and policy [34] affirm that school leaders must actively address scheduling conflicts, oversee spiritual development programs, and ensure adequate instructional time for Islamic subjects. Leaders must also guide teachers in implementing classroom-based assessments (PBD), particularly those integrating digital tools, while ensuring alignment with Islamic educational goals [28].

Traditional methods such as "chalk and talk" remain common in many schools, highlighting the need for leadership that encourages pedagogical reform. Leaders must possess a deep understanding of instructional strategies, including those promoted by 21st Century Learning, to support teachers in delivering spiritually enriched and intellectually stimulating lessons [15].

In sum, school leaders must embody prophetic leadership qualities—*hikmah* (wisdom), *sabr* (patience), and *amanah* (trustworthiness)—to cultivate learning environments that are both effective and spiritually nourishing. Their vision must extend beyond academic metrics to include the holistic development of learners who are prepared to serve humanity and fulfill their divine purpose.

CONCLUSION

Islamic education in Malaysia serves as a cornerstone for cultivating a generation that is intellectually capable, morally grounded, and spiritually conscious. Amid the accelerating tides of modernization and technological advancement, the education system must remain agile and responsive to contemporary challenges while safeguarding its spiritual essence. A persistent challenge, however, lies in the enduring dualism that separates religious and secular knowledge. This fragmentation often results in students gravitating toward scientific and technological fields, while spiritual development is relegated to a secondary status—an imbalance that undermines the holistic purpose of education in Islam.

To address this, Islamic education must be guided by strategic and visionary management aligned with the demands of the 21st century. Within the framework of 21st Century Learning, several critical strategies must be prioritized: the thoughtful integration of digital technology, the adoption of innovative and student-centered pedagogical practices, curriculum design that harmonizes Islamic and contemporary sciences, sustained teacher professional development, and the reinforcement of visionary educational leadership. These strategies are not merely mechanisms for operational improvement—they are pathways to preserving the spiritual identity of education while enhancing its global competitiveness.

Despite positive strides, including policy initiatives like the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) and curriculum reforms, challenges persist. These include inadequate appreciation for Islamic principles among some educators, excessive administrative workloads, and the difficulty of embedding Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) into theological instruction. Such obstacles can hinder the transformative impact of Islamic education if left unaddressed.

In essence, Islamic education must transcend rote transmission of knowledge. Its ultimate goal is to develop *insankamil*—individuals who are intellectually refined, ethically upright, and spiritually attuned. Achieving this vision demands a collaborative effort from all stakeholders: government authorities, educational leaders, teachers, families, and society at large. With effective educational management, faith-aligned technological integration, and committed teacher development, Islamic education in Malaysia can continue to thrive as a beacon of guidance and excellence in an ever-changing world.

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