

Curriculum Management in Creating Elite Classes: An Integrated Framework for Pesantren-Based Madrasahs

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines how curriculum management contributes to the development of elite classes in pesantren-based madrasahs, focusing on the balance between academic excellence and the preservation of Islamic educational identity. **Methods:** A qualitative case study was conducted at MAN 2 Cirebon, Full-Day Program. Data were collected from six purposively selected participants (school principal, vice principal of curriculum, teachers, and program coordinators) through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis focusing on curriculum planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation processes. **Findings:** The study finds that elite class development is supported by an integrated curriculum management system combining the national curriculum with structured academic enrichment. Key practices include blended learning implementation, STEM-oriented subject strengthening, and computer-based competency assessment. These practices are associated with improved student academic performance indicators, particularly higher achievement consistency in core subjects and increased competency test readiness. The analysis further identifies four recurring patterns of effective curriculum management: value-based planning, adaptive organizational structure, structured implementation strategies, and continuous performance evaluation. **Research Implications:** The findings provide practical guidance for madrasah leaders in designing tiered curriculum systems that can be adapted to different institutional capacities while maintaining academic quality and Islamic educational values. They also offer input for policymakers in strengthening curriculum differentiation strategies in Islamic education. **Originality:** This study contributes by empirically detailing how curriculum management practices are operationalized to support elite class development in pesantren-based madrasahs through an integrated and context-sensitive approach grounded in Islamic educational settings.



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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum management plays a central role in shaping student achievement and educational quality, particularly in institutions that aim to develop high-performing learners through structured and systematic instructional design (Fabelico & Afalla, 2023; Chytrý et al., 2020). In Islamic boarding school-based madrasahs (pesantren-based madrasahs), curriculum management carries an additional responsibility, as it must integrate academic excellence with religious character formation within a unified educational system.

One strategic approach adopted by several Islamic educational institutions is the development of elite classes or specialized academic programs designed for selected students with high academic potential (Zakariyah, 2024; Azizi et al., 2023). These programs are commonly characterized by enriched learning experiences, accelerated instruction, and additional academic support aimed at maximizing student achievement (U-Sayee & Adomako, 2021). However, in Islamic educational contexts, elite class implementation is not only oriented toward academic performance but must also preserve religious values as a core institutional identity (Bunyamin et al., 2020). In Indonesia, elite classes are not separate institutional entities but rather specialized programs within schools or madrasahs. While intended to improve academic quality, such programs may also create internal stratification if not managed properly, particularly when

access is influenced by prior achievement or socioeconomic background (Amir, 2019). This condition highlights the importance of curriculum management as a mechanism to ensure both quality enhancement and educational equity.

Effective curriculum management involves systematic processes of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating learning programs (Fahmi, 2020). In elite class settings, these processes must be adapted to support both academic enrichment and value-based education. From a Total Quality Management (TQM) perspective, curriculum management emphasizes continuous improvement, stakeholder involvement, and outcome orientation in educational processes (Khadziq, 2023; Mauludah et al., 2023). However, conventional TQM approaches are primarily rooted in secular managerial logic and do not fully address the religious-ethical dimensions inherent in Islamic education.

Similarly, classical management frameworks such as planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (Terry, 1960) provide structural guidance but remain limited in capturing the epistemological and value-based foundations of pesantren education (Mulyasa, 2006). In pesantren-based madrasahs, curriculum decisions are not only technical but also normative, as they must align with Islamic educational principles and contextual religious considerations.

Despite growing literature on elite classes (Wati & Trihantoyo, 2020) and curriculum management in Islamic education (Ramadhan, 2023), there is still limited empirical understanding of how curriculum management is operationalized to support elite class development in pesantren-based madrasahs. In particular, there is a lack of studies explaining how academic excellence and religious identity are simultaneously integrated through curriculum management practices at the school level. Addressing this gap, this study focuses on MAN 2 Cirebon, which implements a Full-Day Program as an elite class model within a pesantren-based environment. The study investigates how curriculum management is designed and implemented to balance academic enrichment with Islamic educational values, and how these processes contribute to elite class development.

Therefore, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How is curriculum management conceptualized and implemented in the elite Full-Day Program at MAN 2 Cirebon? (2) How are curriculum planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation structured to support elite class development? (3) How does the program integrate academic excellence with Islamic educational values within a pesantren-based environment?

This study contributes to the literature by providing an empirically grounded understanding of curriculum management in elite Islamic education settings, particularly in balancing academic and religious objectives within pesantren-based madrasahs.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore curriculum management practices within a bounded system, namely the Full-Day Program at MAN 2 Cirebon. A single instrumental case study approach was adopted as it enables an in-depth examination of a specific program while generating analytical insights that may inform similar contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The case was selected due to its representativeness of elite class implementation within a pesantren-based madrasah setting. The study was conducted at MAN 2 Cirebon, a state Islamic senior high school located in Babakan Ciwaringin, Cirebon Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The institution operates within a large pesantren environment and serves more than 2,600 students. The Full-Day Program, established in 2006 following the termination of the national MAN Model initiative, was designed to maintain academic excellence while preserving Islamic educational values.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling with clearly defined criteria: (1) direct involvement in curriculum design or implementation of the Full-Day Program; (2) minimum one year of experience in the program; and (3) willingness to provide rich, reflective data. Based on these criteria, six key informants were selected: the principal, vice principal for curriculum, program coordinator, a homeroom teacher, and two students representing the program. Data saturation was assessed iteratively during data collection through ongoing comparison of interview responses and observational findings. Saturation was considered reached when no new thematic information emerged across successive interviews and field observations.

Table 1. Six Key Participants Were Purposively Selected Based On Their Roles In The Full-Day Program

Nu.	Name	Role of Duties
1	Drs. H. M, M.Ag	School Principal
2	Drs. N. H.	Vice Principal for Curriculum
3	A. H, M.Pd	Full-Day Program Coordinator
4	U. K., M.Pd	Homeroom Teacher representative
5	A. Z.	Student representative
6	H. Z.	Student representative

Data Collection

Data were collected over six months (January–June 2024) using three techniques: (1) semi-structured interviews lasting 60–90 minutes focusing on curriculum planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation; (2) document analysis of curriculum guides, program policies, and assessment reports; and (3) 15 non-participant classroom observations across different subjects to capture instructional practices and student engagement patterns.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following a structured coding procedure. First, open coding was conducted to identify meaningful units from interviews, observations, and documents. Second, axial coding was used to connect categories across curriculum management dimensions (planning, organizing, implementing, evaluating). Third, selective coding was applied to integrate core themes into a coherent conceptual explanation of elite class curriculum management within the pesantren context. The analysis process was iterative, involving constant comparison across data sources.

Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, methodological triangulation was employed by comparing interview, observation, and document data. Member checking was conducted by returning preliminary interpretations to participants for validation. Prolonged engagement in the field (six months) and peer debriefing with experts in Islamic educational management further strengthened analytical rigor. In addition, an audit trail was maintained to document all coding and analytical decisions, enhancing dependability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Institutional Review Board (UI-IRB-2024-007). All participants provided informed consent after receiving a full explanation of the study. Confidentiality was ensured through anonymization of identities, and all digital data were securely stored with restricted access. Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

RESULTS

Program Development and Institutional Transformation

The Full-Day Program at MAN 2 Cirebon was established in 2006 following the discontinuation of the national MAN Model program. This transition represents an institutional adaptation strategy to sustain academic excellence within a pesantren-based environment. Rather than a simple continuation of previous programs, the data indicate a structural redesign of the school's academic system, particularly in extending learning time and integrating enrichment activities. Interview data from the principal indicate that the program was designed to respond to stakeholder expectations while maintaining institutional competitiveness. However, across interviews and document analysis, the dominant pattern suggests that program establishment was driven by institutional continuity needs and competitive academic positioning, rather than purely stakeholder demand as initially stated. This is evidenced by the consistent reallocation of resources toward elite-track infrastructure and staffing.

Curriculum Planning Structure

Curriculum planning demonstrates a hybrid design model, combining national curriculum requirements with structured enrichment components. Data from interviews and documents show that planning is not ad hoc but follows a multi-actor coordination system involving school leadership, program coordinators, and selected teachers. A key empirical finding is the expansion of planning participation beyond formal academic staff. However, observational and interview data suggest that this inclusion is hierarchical rather than fully participatory, as final curriculum decisions remain centralized at the vice principal and program coordinator level. The curriculum structure is operationalized through three dominant components: (a) National curriculum compliance (b) Academic enrichment (STEM and English acceleration) (c) Religious formation (tahfidz and Islamic character training). This indicates a dual-track curriculum logic, where academic acceleration and religious formation operate in parallel rather than fully integrated systems.

Organizational Restructuring

Findings show that the Full-Day Program introduces a differentiated organizational system compared to regular classes. This includes selective teacher assignment, dedicated administrative units, and segregated learning facilities. [Table 2](#) confirms systematic structural differentiation across time allocation, staffing, and infrastructure. The most significant empirical pattern is the institutional segregation of elite-class resources, particularly in teacher selection and classroom allocation. However, triangulated data reveal that external teacher involvement remains limited and

inconsistent, suggesting that the organizational model is partially dependent on internal staffing capacity rather than fully specialized recruitment systems.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Regular Class and Elite Class Organizational Structures

Dimension	Regular Class	Elite Class (Full-Day Program)
Time Allocation	Morning sessions (07:00-14:00 WIB)	Morning regular classes (07:00-14:00 WIB) plus afternoon enrichment (14:00-16:30 WIB)
Personnel	All teaching and administrative staff	Specially selected teachers (best regular class teachers plus external specialists)
Administrative Structure	Standard school divisions	Dedicated divisions: achievement, IT, educator/teaching, student
Physical Infrastructure	Shared classrooms	Separate classrooms and facilities
Planning Process	Standard curriculum implementation	Stakeholder-inclusive planning with religious epistemological considerations
Program Duration	Standard academic year	Extended with specialized programs (Tahfidz, Outdoor Teaching, English Area Pare)

Implementation Model and Learning Expansion

Program implementation extends the school day through structured afternoon sessions focused on STEM subjects and English language enrichment. Observational data confirm that these sessions are consistently implemented, although intensity varies by subject. In addition to academic enrichment, the program includes specialized interventions: (a) Tahfidz instruction (Ilhamku and Yada'in methods); (b) Matrikulasi (academic leveling); (c) Outdoor Teaching program; (d) English immersion program (Pare-based); (e) University entrance coaching

Empirical observation shows that implementation follows a modular enrichment system, where activities are added cumulatively rather than fully integrated into a unified pedagogical framework. During COVID-19 disruptions, blended learning (50% online, 50% offline) was implemented using digital platforms. This shift demonstrates adaptive instructional continuity, although data indicate variation in student engagement across online platforms. Figure 1 illustrates how these practices integrate within the wider Islamic Educational Management Framework



Figure 1. Central Pillar: Islamic Educational Values

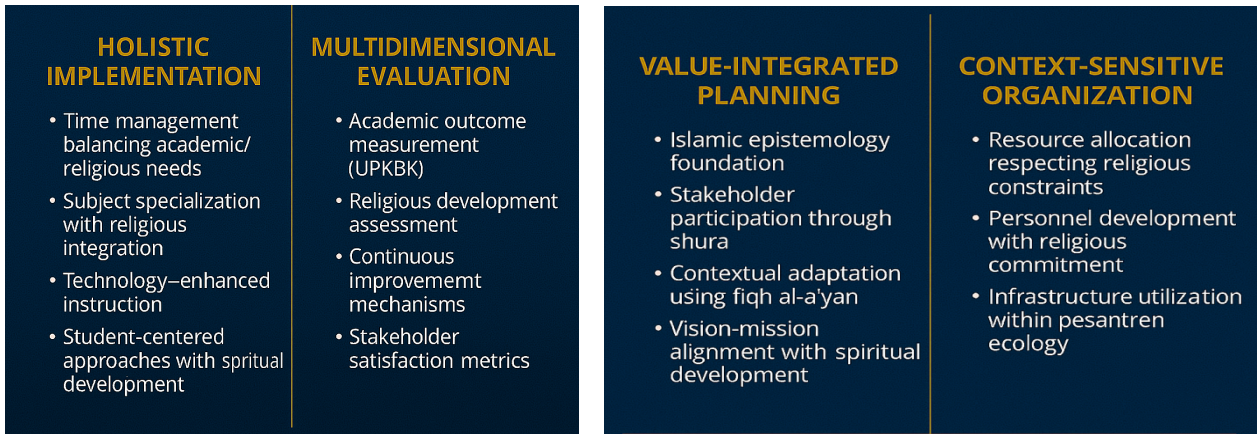


Figure 2. Four Interconnected Pillars Surrounding Central Pillar

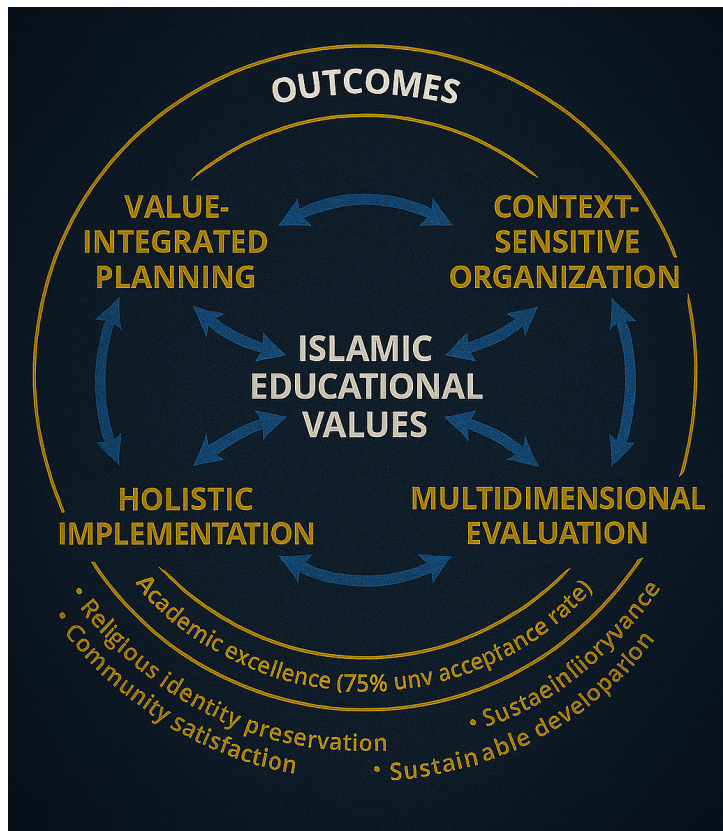


Figure 3. Arrows showing bidirectional relationships between all pillars

Evaluation System and Performance Indicators

The evaluation system is structured into a three-level learning assessment model, consisting of technical, adaptive, and reflexive loops. Empirical data from school documents indicate that: (a) Computer-Based Competency Tests (UPKBK) are conducted up to four times per semester; (b) Evaluation results are systematically used for instructional adjustment; (c) University admission outcomes are used as the primary macro-performance indikator However, the dominance of university admission as a success indicator suggests a strong outcome-oriented evaluation culture, with limited evidence of formative assessment mechanisms beyond standardized testing. No quantitative performance ratios (e.g., pass rates, university acceptance percentages) were explicitly documented in the available institutional records, indicating a limitation in formalized performance reporting systems.

Implementation Constraints

Three consistent operational constraints emerged across interviews, observations, and documents: (a) Scheduling conflict with pesantren routines, resulting in student lateness and reduced instructional synchronization. (b) Variable engagement in religious components, particularly tahfidz activities, indicating differential student motivation across curriculum domains. (c) Coordination instability, including teacher absence and communication gaps, which disrupt program continuity. These constraints suggest that program effectiveness is structurally dependent on institutional coordination capacity, rather than curriculum design alone.

Synthesis of Core Findings

Across all data sources, the Full-Day Program operates as a dual-system model combining academic acceleration with religious formation. However, the evidence indicates that integration between these two domains remains functional rather than fully conceptual, with coordination achieved through scheduling and program layering rather than pedagogical synthesis.

DISCUSSION

A. Core Theoretical Repositioning: From Linear Management to Contextual Islamic Curriculum Governance

The findings indicate that G.R. Terry's classical management functions (planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating) are present in the Full-Day Program, but they do not fully explain how curriculum management operates in a pesantren-based elite class. Rather than functioning as a purely rational-technical system, curriculum management at MAN 2 Cirebon operates as a contextually mediated governance system, where academic decisions are continuously adjusted to religious, institutional, and boarding-school constraints. This suggests that Terry's framework is not rejected but reinterpreted through an Islamic institutional lens, where decision-making is shaped by both educational effectiveness and religious legitimacy. This is evident in planning decisions (e.g., enrichment programs), which are not solely based on academic efficiency but also on compatibility with pesantren routines and values.

B. Planning: Evidence of Hybrid Decision Logic (Not Pure Technical Rationality)

The data show that curriculum planning is structured, but not purely technical. Instead, it follows a hybrid logic combining academic optimization and religious contextualization. Unlike [Rahman et al. \(2022\)](#), who describe elite classes primarily as time-extension mechanisms, this study finds that planning involves systematic curriculum differentiation, including STEM enrichment, language immersion, and tahfidz integration. However, the most critical analytical finding is that these components are not fully integrated into a single pedagogical system but operate in parallel structures. This partially supports [Khadziq \(2023\)](#), but extends it by showing that Islamic epistemology is not only normative but also operationalized through concrete scheduling and program design decisions.

C. Organization: Selective Structuring Rather Than Full Decentralization

The organizational findings demonstrate that the Full-Day Program uses selective staffing and differentiated administrative units. However, contrary to ideal TQM-based decentralization models ([Azizi et al., 2023](#)), the data indicate that decision-making remains structurally centralized at the vice principal and program coordinator level. Compared to [Rodriguez & Van Ruyskensvelde \(2021\)](#), who highlight meritocracy-driven fragmentation in elite education, this case shows a different pattern: controlled differentiation, where specialization exists but within a tightly managed institutional hierarchy. Thus, the contribution here is not organizational innovation per se, but contextual adaptation of hierarchical efficiency within religious schooling constraints.

D. Implementation: Modular Enrichment Rather Than Integrated Pedagogy

Empirical findings show that implementation relies on additive enrichment programs (STEM, English immersion, tahfidz, outdoor learning). However, the analysis reveals that these are modular components rather than fully integrated curriculum units. This partially contrasts with [Mulyasa's \(2014\)](#) input-output efficiency model, not by rejecting it, but by showing that implementation in pesantren-based elite programs is governed by temporal and cultural accommodation rather than efficiency maximization alone.

The key analytical insight is that "integration" in practice refers more to coexistence within a structured timetable rather than pedagogical synthesis. While the Full-Day Program at MAN 2 Cirebon demonstrates success, many madrasahs operate with significantly fewer resources. Based on our findings, we propose a tiered implementation model for madrasahs with varying resource levels at [Figure 2](#) and [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Cost-Benefit Analysis of Elite Program Implementation

Cost Component	Basic Tier	Intermediate Tier	Advanced Tier
Personnel Costs			
Additional teaching hours	IDR 5-10 million/month	IDR 15-25 million/month	IDR 30-50 million/month
Specialized teachers	Not applicable	IDR 10-15 million/month	IDR 20-35 million/month
Infrastructure Costs			
Classroom modification	IDR 5-10 million (one-time)	IDR 15-25 million (one-time)	IDR 30-50 million (one-time)
Technology investment	IDR 3-5 million (one-time)	IDR 10-15 million (one-time)	IDR 20-30 million (one-time)
Program-Specific Costs			
Specialized materials	IDR 2-3 million/month	IDR 5-8 million/month	IDR 10-15 million/month
External partnerships	Not applicable	IDR 2-3 million/month	IDR 5-10 million/month
Total Monthly Costs	IDR 10-18 million	IDR 32-56 million	IDR 65-110 million

The data in the table outline the key revenue streams and institutional benefits associated with implementing elite programmes in madrasahs, demonstrating both financial viability and strategic value. Such programmes typically boost student retention by 15–25%, thereby reducing recruitment costs, while also enabling institutions to charge 20–30% higher fees for participants. These financial gains are complemented by enhanced institutional reputation, which in turn drives increased enrolment and opens opportunities for external partnerships. Furthermore, elite programmes yield significant long-term outcomes, as evidenced by MAN 2 Cirebon’s reported 75% acceptance rate of its graduates into top universities. A break-even analysis indicates that most madrasahs can achieve financial equilibrium within 18 to 24 months, primarily through higher enrolment and elevated fee revenue, with sustained advantages accruing from improved reputation and student success. This phased, incremental approach ensures that programme development remains financially sustainable and does not overburden the limited resources typically available to religious educational institutions.

E. Evaluation: Outcome Dominance with Limited Formative Depth

The evaluation system is strongly outcome-oriented, with university admission rates functioning as the dominant success indicator. While triple-loop learning is conceptually present, the empirical data suggest that evaluation is primarily performance-output driven rather than fully reflective or developmental. Compared to Bouma et al. (2023), who emphasize balanced academic-spiritual metrics, this study finds that spiritual outcomes are implicitly embedded rather than explicitly measured, indicating a gap between conceptual evaluation ideals and operational practice. This is a key contribution: it shows that Islamic educational evaluation frameworks are often normatively holistic but operationally simplified.

F. Cross-Case Positioning: How This Study Differs from Prior Research

When compared to prior studies, three clear distinctions emerge: (a) Compared to Malaysia’s SBP model (Abdul Rahman et al., 2022). This study shows stronger integration of religious and academic systems within a single institutional structure, rather than parallel institutional tracks. (b) Compared to Turkey’s Imam Hatip model (Yilmaz, 2023). The MAN 2 Cirebon model avoids trade-offs between religious and academic goals, instead using modular enrichment to maintain both simultaneously. (c) Compared to Saudi advanced programs (Alharbi, 2023). This case demonstrates stronger community embeddedness and pesantren integration, rather than centralized elite schooling models. The key scientific contribution is therefore not the existence of elite classes, but the identification of a hybrid governance model that combines hierarchical control, modular curriculum design, and religious contextual adaptation.

G. Theoretical Contribution (Refined and Evidence-Based)

Based on the empirical findings, this study offers a refined understanding of curriculum management in Islamic elite education. Curriculum management should not be viewed merely as a linear managerial process, as suggested in Terry’s model, but rather as a context-sensitive governance mechanism shaped by three empirical logics: hierarchical coordination in the organizational process, modular enrichment in implementation, and outcome-dominant evaluation in assessment. Therefore, the proposed “Islamic Educational Management Framework” is best understood not as a fully integrated ideal model, but as a practical configuration of partially integrated systems that emerge in response to institutional constraints.

H. Overall Insight

The central finding is that elite-class curriculum management in pesantren-based madrasahs is not characterized by full integration, but by structured coexistence of academic acceleration and religious formation under hierarchical governance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined curriculum management practices in developing elite classes within a pesantren-based madrasah, as illustrated by the Full-Day Program at MAN 2 Cirebon. The findings indicate that the program operates through a structured combination of curriculum planning, organizational differentiation, extended instructional time, and tiered evaluation mechanisms that integrate both academic and religious dimensions.

Empirically, the program is characterized by four core features: (1) differentiated curriculum design combining national standards with enrichment activities; (2) specialized organizational arrangements for elite-class delivery; (3) extended learning time focused on academic and religious enrichment; and (4) a multi-level evaluation system using competency testing and university admission outcomes as primary performance indicators. These features collectively demonstrate a structured model of elite-class implementation within a religious educational setting. The study contributes by empirically illustrating how curriculum management in Islamic schools functions as a hybrid system combining academic acceleration and religious formation within a single institutional framework. It also offers an analytical model for understanding how elite classes are operationalized in pesantren-based madrasahs.

However, the study is limited by its single-case design, which restricts the generalizability of findings to other madrasahs with different institutional structures. In addition, the analysis is based on a limited number of informants, which may not fully capture the diversity of student experiences within the program. The study also does not include longitudinal data, making it difficult to assess long-term educational and spiritual outcomes. Finally, the absence of quantitative performance benchmarks beyond institutional reporting limits the ability to evaluate program effectiveness in more measurable terms. Future research is recommended to conduct multi-site and longitudinal studies, incorporate broader stakeholder perspectives (especially students and parents), and integrate quantitative indicators to assess both academic achievement and religious development outcomes more robustly.

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experiences and perspectives, which significantly enriched the findings of this research. Their openness and active participation were essential in achieving data depth and validity. Finally, the authors acknowledge all parties who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the completion of this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

AC and MD conceptualized and designed the study. AC conducted data collection, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. MD supervised the research process and validated the methodology. AK contributed to data interpretation and analysis. NMI assisted in data collection and provided contextual insights. AZ contributed to the validation of findings from the student perspective. All authors contributed to writing, reviewing, and approving the final manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors used ChatGPT during the preparation of this work for language refinement and editing purposes. After using the tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed and revised the content and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the publication.

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