Malaysian Islamic Secondary School Leaders' Leadership Challenges

Cabaran Kepemimpinan Pemimpin Sekolah Menengah Agama Malaysia

Zunaidi Harun[a], Muhammad Faizal A Ghani[b]

[a,b] *Faculty of Education, University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*
Corresponding author: mdfaizal@um.edu.my

Abstract

This study aims to explore the Malaysian Islamic secondary school (SMA) leaders' leadership challenges. To respond to the study's aim, a qualitative method using interviews was applied to seven leaders of Islamic Secondary Schools. The informers were selected based on some criteria such as the length of service as a leader and leadership knowledge. The data that were analyzed using thematic analysis reported seven challenges of Malaysian Islamic secondary school leaders' leadership, namely: (i) lack of knowledge, in particular, the field of school management such as finance, IT, asset, data, and information, (ii) lack of management skill to figure out conflicts regarding incentive differences among senior and novice teachers, (iii) lack of collaboration among stakeholders, (iv) need to allocate more finance for the competency development program such as enhancing novice teachers' pedagogical skills, (v) Inadequate planning of valuable program for students residing in hostel, (vi) less concern to support some Ministry of Education's policies, and (vii) less concern on the changing environment, in particular, the field of pedagogical changes for the post of COVID-19 pandemic. The implication of this study is to be aware for the educational stakeholders, in particular, the school leaders, to take into account this study's findings to make self-improvement to enhance the students learning and school achievement.

Keywords: Malaysian Islamic, secondary, school leaders, leadership challenges

INTRODUCTION

In a world marked by ongoing evolution, the field of education finds itself at a critical juncture, influenced by two formidable factors the profound repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of Industry 4.0. Comprehensive research and analysis underscore how these dynamics have compelled nations like Malaysia to actively embrace transformation (The Asia Foundation, 2020). This commitment stands as a compelling testament to their steadfast dedication to providing high-quality education and nurturing skills development.

Efforts have been made by various international stakeholders to ensure that those responsible for education provide quality education with a focus on nurturing students' talents and skills as their primary goal. This goal is implemented to ensure that future generations remain relevant to the changing trends and the current job market demands (Wheatley, 2018).

Therefore, when viewed on the international stage, UNESCO is actively promoting the provision of quality education and the development of students' skills as a means to eradicate poverty (UNESCO, 2017; UNICEF, 2022). Hence, Malaysia has embraced these efforts, fully aware of their significant impact on the country's educational landscape. This commitment is reflected in Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which places a strong emphasis on both quality education and skills development (KPM, 2013).

Even earlier than that, Malaysia's dedication to using education as a tool for poverty alleviation and societal transformation can be traced back to as early as 1971 with the implementation of the New Economic Policy (DEB). The DEB represents a comprehensive national development plan that encompasses various sectors, with education being a crucial component. Its primary goal is to eradicate poverty and restructure Malaysian society (Bushra Yusof, 2008).

However, efforts to provide quality education and develop the talents, potential, and skills of students, or any policies/initiatives introduced by the government have fallen short or failed to achieve their intended impact due to various specific obstacles. One of these obstacles is ineffective leadership. Rahimah Ahmad and Simin (2014) stated that the role of principals in ensuring ongoing organizational excellence relies on their competencies. Supporting this viewpoint, Mohd Ibrahim K. Azeez (2017) explained that without these competencies, it is impossible to establish achievable policies, directions, as well as visions, and missions.

Therefore, any policy or initiative introduced should be thoroughly understood and effectively implemented by leaders at various levels, including those at the central level (division), state-level (JPN), district-level (PPD), and within all schools, this includes religious secondary school (SMA) leaders as well. In the context of SMA, its leaders must strive to achieve both of these objectives to ensure that students in the religious stream can compete in the future job market alongside students from other streams. This aligns with the goals of Islamic Education, which aim to provide skills, knowledge, and the development of individuals who are conscious of Allah SWT (Razaleigh Muhamat, 2014).

In light of this, it's essential to recognize that providing quality education and nurturing the talents, potential, and skills of SMA students cannot be accomplished without effective and capable leadership. This assertion is substantiated by numerous prior studies that underscore a strong connection between school success and school leadership (Dewi & Wibowo, 2020; Leithwood & Levin, 2008, 2010). This perspective is further reinforced by Widhyanti and Shahril@Charil (2016), who assert that the competence of school leaders is fundamental in determining the school's level of achievement. Likewise, Tschannen-Moran and Garies (2015) affirm that leadership competency significantly impacts student development.

Nonetheless, certain parties criticize the effectiveness of leadership in religious schools. Shedding light on this issue, a study conducted by Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani et al. (2013) reveals that principals in National Religious Secondary Schools (SMKA) exhibit fewer leadership practices compared to principals of Boarding Schools (SBP). This study reinforces the perspective put forth by Abdul Hamid Othman (1992) that the level of effectiveness in management and administration within religious schools is relatively weak. One of the root causes behind this perceived weakness in leadership within SMA is the limited scope of comprehensive research dedicated to studying leadership practices among these school leaders. This concern is further underscored by the findings of research conducted by Zunaidi Harun and Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani et al. (2020) which highlight the scarcity of research addressing leadership within the context of religious schools. This deficiency in research limits its utility as a reference point for enhancing the quality of leadership among leaders of SMA.

Hence, based on the findings of Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani et al. (2013) and Abdul Hamid Othman (1992) as discussed above, it is evident that there is a significant gap in leadership competency among SMA leaders, indicating a weak level of leadership. Furthermore, this gap is also apparent when considering the period between the studies, as the study by Abdul Hamid Othman (1992) was conducted in 1992 and Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani et al. (2013) were conducted in 2013, with both studies being more than 30 and 10 years old, respectively. This period is quite long. As a result, the relevance of their findings to the current developments and changes in the education system, particularly in SMA, may be questionable. Additionally, there is a notable lack of knowledge resources in the field of SMA leadership,

as highlighted by Zunaidi Harun and Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani et al. (2020), indicating limited available academic literature on the subject. Therefore, researchers must undertake this study to explore the leadership challenges in religious schools in Malaysia.

Therefore, the findings of this study will make a significant contribution to enhancing the leadership quality among SMA leaders. By addressing the identified gaps in leadership competency, this research will enable SMA leaders to attain a level of proficiency that is comparable to leaders from other school streams. Moreover, the study's insights will empower SMA leaders to effectively implement the policies introduced by the Ministry of Education (MoE). This will ensure alignment with the broader educational objectives and facilitate the successful execution of educational initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of Islamic Schools Leadership

The theory of leadership in Islamic schools encompasses a variety of leadership styles and models that are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and ethics. The theoretical framework of leadership in Islamic schools draws upon a range of leadership styles, which include transformational, transactional, prophetic, and servant leadership. These leadership styles are influenced by universal Islamic values and perspectives from the al-Quran and al-Hadith, to guide organizational behavior and educational governance based on Islamic principles (Muhammad & Sari, 2021; Sarnoto & Rahmawati, 2022; Syamsuddin & Maunah, 2020). Furthermore, Islamic leadership is characterized by the integration of Islamic teachings and ethics within educational institutions, emphasizing the significance of spiritual well-being and workplace spirituality (Na'imah et al., 2021; Ridwan, 2020).

Religious Schools in Malaysia

The establishment of religious schools in Malaysia initially stemmed from the activities of Muslim missionaries during the 10th to 15th centuries (Kayadibi & Buang, 2011). Atiqah and Liu (2018) elucidate that education in the country has a close connection to the historical context of the era of Islam's expansion and dissemination. The Malays of that era had already established their education system, which was pioneered by travelers from India and Arabia. This system took the form of informal institutions like Pondok and madrasahs. As a classic example, the renowned Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta recorded that the pondok system had already been established in Pasai in the 14th century (Kayadibi & Buang, 2011). Subsequently, with the arrival of Western colonizers, education in Malaya began to change according to the patterns desired by the British colonizers (Kayadibi & Buang, 2011).

Currently, Malaysia has various types of schools encompassing National Schools, National Secondary Schools, National Type Schools (Chinese), National Type Schools (Tamil), and religious schools. Religious education in Malaysia is divided into several categories, namely government religious schools such as SMKA which are under the jurisdiction of MoE, State's Religious Schools (SAN) which are under the control of state religious authorities, and Government-Aided Religious Schools (SABK), jointly managed by MoE and state religious authorities or school management boards (Amin & Jasmi, 2012; Azizi Umar & Supyan Hussin, 2008; KPM, 2017).

All government religious schools, including SMKA, adhere to the National Curriculum. In contrast, SABK schools implement the Integrated Religious Curriculum and the Integrated Tahfiz Curriculum, which combine subjects from the National Curriculum with religious studies (Bahagian Pendidikan Islam, 2015). The curriculum adopted by State's Religious School (SAN) and People's Religious School (SAR) is determined by the respective state religious (Ilhaamie & Raudah, 2018; KPM, 2013).

As of March 2021, the total number of religious schools under MoE is 284, including 60 SMKA, 181 Secondary Schools (SM) of SABK, and 43 Primary Schools (SR) of SABK. According to MoE (2013), some of the earliest SMKA schools were converted from SAN and SAR schools. Starting from 1977, MoE took over 11 SAN and SAR schools. Over time, the number of SMKA schools has grown, and currently, there are 55 SMKA (KPM, 2013).

In addition, there are approximately 350 private religious schools. These schools have the flexibility to choose whether to implement the National Curriculum or any curriculum that aligns with the respective school's vision and mission. Most of these schools are small in size, located in rural areas, and face resource constraints similar to SAN and private religious schools. However, the number of private religious schools in urban areas is on the rise and is approaching the number of international schools (KPM, 2013).

In general, Malaysia is considered one of the countries with a top-notch education system, including religious education. This is elucidated in the 2019 World Economic Forum report, which states that Malaysia is a country that exhibits a higher level of competitiveness in the field of education compared to 141 countries worldwide in 2018 (WEF, 2019).

Religious Schools Leadership in Malaysia

In reality, an evident gap exists in scholarly works concerning leadership in Islamic schools in Malaysia. Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani et al. (2013) and Abdul Hamid Othman (1992) have pointed out a significant discrepancy in the leadership aptitude of leaders in Islamic schools, indicating a dearth in leadership levels. Additionally, Zunaidi Harun and Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani et al. (2020) have emphasized the scarcity of knowledge resources about leadership in Islamic schools, suggesting a limited availability of scholarly literature on the subject. Consequently, there is an urgent necessity for further research to explore the challenges confronted by leaders in religious schools within the Malaysian milieu. Furthermore, "The Entrepreneurial Leadership Practices of Malaysian Secondary School Principals in Fundraising" by Ghazali et al. (2020) (Ghazali et al., 2020) provides pertinent insights into the entrepreneurial leadership practices of school principals in Malaysia. Given the distinctive challenges faced by leaders in Islamic schools, understanding entrepreneurial leadership practices can offer valuable perspectives on effective leadership strategies in this context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The design of this study employs a qualitative methodology. To delve deeper into this, the researchers utilize a fundamental qualitative design, which is one of the six qualitative research designs recommended by Merriam (2009, 2016), in addition to phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative analysis, and case study. The fundamental qualitative design is perfect match for this study, which aims to explore the challenges encountered by school leaders. However, it should be noted that Merriam (2016) does not confine qualitative research to these six design options. Instead, she presents these six types of designs based on the ones commonly used by her master's and Ph.D. students. This is because, according to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is a flexible research design, and it does not prescribe specifically what and how qualitative research should be conducted.

The rationale for selecting this design is rooted in the perspectives of Merriam (2009, 2016), who advocates that through qualitative inquiry, the researcher can attain more profound insights into a particular issue. Such a choice aligns with this study, which aims to explore holistically the leadership challenges confronted by SMA leaders.

Sampling Technique

This study employs a purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique is the most suitable approach for this study because it necessitates a sample with qualifications and experience in SMA leadership. Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2016) expound that purposive sampling is well-suited for qualitative research as it can provide essential information through knowledgeable individuals (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2016). This technique has also been widely utilized by local researchers such as Saedah Siraj (2008), Saedah Siraj, Muhammad Ridhuan Tony Lim, and Abdullah Rozaini Muhamad Rozkee (2020), as well as Mohd Ridhuan and Nurulrabihah (2020).

This study involves seven participants with more than six years of experience in SMA leadership. Further details about the study participants are provided in Table 1 below. research participants were selected from various institutions and different positions. Five research participants are from the MoE, comprising three individuals from the State Education Department (JPN) and two who are principals of SABK.

Table 1: Information of Study Participant

Study Participant	Position	Institution
First Participant	Principal Assistant Director (Islamic Education Unit)	State Education Department
Second Participant	Principal	Islamic Private School
Third Participant	Principal	SABK
Fourth Participant	Principal	SABK
Fifth Participant	Head of Administrative Unit, Islamic Education Division	State Islamic Religious Department
Sixth Participant	Director of State Education Department	State Education Department
Seventh Participant	Senior Principal Assistant Director (Islamic Education Unit)	State Education Department

Based on Table 1 above, One research participant was also drawn from the principal of a private school, and another from a State Islamic Religious Department. Consequently, the findings of this study apply to all types of SMA included in this research.

In terms of the adequacy of information or data, the study's sample size, consisting of seven participants in total, is considered sufficient. This assertion aligns with the perspective of Merriam (2016), who emphasised that in qualitative research, the focus is not on the quantity of samples but rather on the extent to which the samples can contribute to addressing the research questions.

Data Collection and Instruments

For this study, data were gathered through the use of interviews. Prior to conducting the interviews, thorough preparation and planning were undertaken. As emphasised by Creswell (2009), thorough preparation and planning are crucial components of qualitative research. The interview sessions were

guided by a set of semi-structured interview protocols, which had been validated by a panel of experts, including a language specialist and experts in the field of leadership.

The interview protocol was divided into three sections: (a) Opening Questions, which aimed to introduce the study and secure participants' consent to partake in the research; (b) Main Questions, comprising inquiries related to the challenges faced in SMA leadership; and (c) Closing Questions, where participants were encouraged to share any additional insights regarding SMA leadership. This research protocol was developed based on the format utilized by Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani and Crow (2013) in their research.

Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis as its method of qualitative data analysis. Regarding the methods for qualitative research analysis, Merriam (2016) asserts that there isn't a specific method exclusively designated for analysing qualitative research data. Chua (2012) shares a similar perspective with Merriam (2016), emphasizing the lack of consensus among experts and qualitative researchers concerning methods for qualitative data analysis. However, some other experts contend that, to streamline the analysis process, researchers should outline the procedures or steps they employ in data analysis. Through this approach, novice researchers can use the data analysis procedure as a guide for their investigations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Therefore, this study employed the thematic analysis method as recommended by Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, and Braun (Terry et al., 2019) involving the following steps: (a) Data Familiarization, (b) Identifying Relevant Statements, (c) Coding, (d) Refining Codes, and (e) Forming Themes. A similar approach was also used by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Dayang, Abdul Hafidz, and Rio Sumarni (2005), encompassing ten processes: (a) Data Collection, (b) Transcription and Interpretation of Transcripts, (c) Data Organization, (d) Data Reduction (the process of understanding data), (e) Sorting and Sifting Data, (f) Coding, (g) Themes and Subthemes, (h) Demonstrating Reliability and Validity, and (i) Reporting.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of the thematic analysis conducted on the data and information gathered from interviews have identified seven key themes related to the challenges faced by SMA leaders in their roles. Further details regarding these leadership challenges are explained as follows:

First: Knowledge Gaps

SMA leaders face challenges in terms of knowledge and skills in several core areas that are central to the effectiveness of leadership in an organization. The study findings indicate that secondary school leaders have limited mastery of knowledge and skills in the following four areas:

a. Insufficient financial management expertise

Financial management is a crucial aspect in any organization. Therefore, if secondary school leaders fail to manage their school's finances effectively, it can hinder the core services of the school. Indeed, this issue has been observed in schools, where school principals are found to be less attentive to school financial management. The first research participant elaborated as follows:

"...you know, I've heard cases where principals aren't really aware of what's being bought. Suddenly, things just show up, and the principal's only involvement is signing checks or vouchers, which is quite a concerning issue."

(P1: 141-143)

b. Inadequate knowledge of asset management

It is widely acknowledged that schools require quality equipment and facilities to ensure their proper functioning. Consequently, SMA leaders are expected to possess a comprehensive understanding of asset management, ensuring that school assets remain sufficient, well-maintained, and readily available for both teachers and students. However, the first research participant asserted that some secondary school leaders lack the requisite knowledge in asset management. This participant expounded upon the matter as follows:

"At the SABK school, there's an issue; we find that the knowledge about assets is very, very limited."

(P1: 210)

Furthermore, the situation becomes significantly more worrisome when secondary school leaders exhibit a lack of attentiveness towards asset management. This deficiency can have profound implications, not only on the teaching and learning processes but also on the safety of students, teachers, and other school staff. This concern was articulated by the fourth research participant in the following manner:

"That's the challenge I face here. No wonder this school [GPS] has a rating of 3.8, right? With its faulty wiring system, and another thing... I came here, and... we had a blackout. When I'm in the middle of discussing something like this, a blackout? Why? Nobody knew. Turns out, upon checking, we have 12 buildings and 10 acres here, can you believe it? Just one [electric meter], huh! How many principals, 10 of them, and no one noticed this… if we follow the regulations…impossible!"

(P4: 50-53)

c. Lack of proficiency in ICT knowledge and skills

This study found that some school principals have a limited grasp of ICT-related knowledge and skills. This was explained by the first participant in the study as follows:

"The issue we face here is the skill level of individuals in using ICT. We're dealing with a category of 'old-timers' who are about to retire, people who used typewriters back when they entered university. Suddenly, they're trying to use this technology, and we can see that those in the 'old-timer' category are somewhat behind when it comes to ICT."

(P1: 196-199)

In the 21st century, mastery of ICT knowledge and skills plays a crucial role in the management of an organization, including data and information management. Data and information management will become more challenging if school principals have limited ICT proficiency. This is because the efficiency of data and information management also relies on the competence of school principals in utilizing ICT.

d. Lacking expertise in data and information management

Basic data and information concerning students, teachers, school infrastructure, and related elements should be consistently updated by all schools, including SMA. The purpose is to ensure that SMA leaders can always provide accurate and efficient information and data to the key stakeholders, such as the JPN and the MoE at the central level. Occasionally, MoE requests schools to promptly submit information within very tight timeframes for various purposes, such as reports to parliament and the like. Due to various constraints, SMA leaders are compelled to mobilise teachers and staff to collect the requested data and information. This situation was elucidated by the second study participant as follows:

> *"The thing is, it's really urgent; it has to be. Sometimes, I even jokingly call the teachers and tell them not to sleep at night, but they still manage to sleep, haha [laughs]. But if I say, 'I need it in two days,' Ya Allah [oh my God] ... the teachers call me 'sister'; they don't call me 'ma'am' or anything. 'Sister, I can't sleep because of this.' 'Oh no! You have to finish it!'... because sometimes we get things late, especially from the State Education Department (JPN), [and] the Private Education Division... we often hear them say it's last-minute."*
>
> *(P2: 350-356)*

Second: Lack of sensitivity toward conflicts related to incentive disparities between senior and novice teachers.

The process of transforming an organization can become significantly more challenging when a leader fails to address conflicts and issues that emerge within the organization. Hence, in this study we've observed conflicts related to disparities in incentives among teachers; specifically, some senior teachers receive lower incentives compared to their novice counterparts. As a result, leaders in SMA encounter the complex challenge of formulating appropriate plans and strategies to effectively manage these incentive-related conflicts. These differences in incentives stem from the service policy established by the Public Service Department (JPA), as outlined in the Federal Constitution of 1997. This service policy dictates that salary and allowances are determined based on an individual civil servant's academic qualifications, as detailed in the Service Circular Number 9 of 2019. The first study participant shed further light on this issue:

> *"Senior teachers, their salaries... they've been working for seven, eight, ten years, and before they joined SABK, their basic salary was 800 [ringgit] only. But new teachers, as soon as they enter the school [begin their service], their starting basic salary is 2,200 [ringgit] something. So, in terms of salary amounts, there's already... you see, that's where the conflict starts among them."*
>
> *(P1: 141-143)*

Even more concerning, it has been found that these conflicts tend to persist due to the lack of efforts made by SMA leaders to gain a deeper understanding of the conflicts. This is because they are lacking the skills to gain a deeper understanding of the conflicts. This was highlighted by the seventh participant as follows:

> *"Sometimes, school leaders don't know whether it's an issue, a symptom, or a cause. So, we're dealing with leaders who don't know what the real issue is. The skill of identifying the issue is crucial..."*
>
> *(P7: 536-539)*

Third: Putting in minimal effort to adequately establish networks and linkages with stakeholders.

Leaders in the field of education need to establish constructive networks and linkages with stakeholders to make schools more competitive and effective. Educational networks and linkages can be established across various stakeholders including parents, the communities, government agencies, the private sectors, international institutions, and so forth.

However, the findings of this study have revealed that there are still some leaders in SMA who do not adequately establish networks and linkages in the implementation of school programmes. Their involvement is limited to their own groups within specific localities or certain states, without engaging with the broader global community. This was explained by the first participants of the study, as follows:

> *"...The thing is, when it comes to the school [SABK], it's not really operating on a global level. What we've found is that both the leaders and the teachers tend to confine their thinking to just the local state group."*

> *(P1: 141-143)*

The views of the first participant are echoed by the fifth participant, who states that some SMA leaders put relatively less effort into establishing networks and linkages. In alignment with the perspective of the first study participant, the fifth study participant similarly articulated that SMA leaders tend to restrict their network engagements to their respective groups. Presented below the fifth study participant views on their observations concerning networks and linkages:

> *"If we talk about the reality of (networking and linkaging) in religious school...haha [small laugh]...it's limited. Yes...there are some, but they take [implement the networks and linkages] within their own scope (group), sometimes they take from...what's that...but...they're used to, you know...with the regular mainstream daily secondary schools".*

> *(P5: 888-890)*

In other words, the remarks from both study participants illustrate that certain leaders within SMA harbor a form of *asabiyyah* rooted in sentiments tied to religious schools in specific localities and states. The first participant in the study articulated their apprehensions regarding this matter, as elucidated in the following quotation:

> *"...when this sense of asabiyyah (group loyalty) takes hold, they fail to make progress...they remain tethered to their orthodox methods."*

> (P1: 380-381)

Fourth: The need to allocate a larger financial provision for the development of teacher competencies.

The literature has clearly indicated that students' academic achievement in any school is dependent on the competence of teachers in various aspects. Among the key and vital aspects of teacher competence is pedagogy in teaching and learning. However, this study found that the ability of SMA teachers in pedagogy for teaching and learning significantly differs when compared to teachers from mainstream schools. This is because some SMA teachers are untrained and lack of specialised educational qualifications.

Therefore, this poses a challenge for leaders within SMA to secure funding aimed at enhancing teacher competencies, enabling them to conduct the teaching and learning process more effectively. This challenge is highlighted through insights from the second study participant, who expressed that:

"Most of the teachers we hire don't even have degrees in education. So, when it's time for them to teach, they're like, 'What's pedagogy? What's an induction set?' They're pretty clueless about it. And when we send our teachers off to courses or meetings, they tend to feel kind of low, you know?"

(P2: 233-235)

Fifth: Inadequate planning of valuable programmes for students residing in hostel.

Some SMAs provide hostel or dormitory facilities with the aim of reducing the travel burden for students who may come from rural or outlying areas, which are a considerable distance from the school. Students who take more than one hour to commute to school each day are eligible to apply for accommodation in the hostel (KPM, 2013). In this regard, school leaders should efficiently manage the school hostel to ensure that the objective of providing accommodation to students can have an impact on students' development.

However, this study has found that there are weaknesses in the management of the school hostel. These weaknesses have led students to take advantage and engage in activities that are conflict with the culture and values of religious school students, such as creating dance video content for upload on TikTok. This was explained by the third research participant who made the following statement:

"When they [student] don't have religious programmes, they find other things to do... they make TikTok [contents]... I received videos of them making TikTok in the hostel. They are in Form Three. The TikTok [content] that are not suitable for religious students! If [they were making] TikTok video about reading the al-Quran or alike…, that would be acceptable... they are all religious school students...but dancing on TikTok just doesn't fit them!"

(P3: 151-156)

The challenge was also brought to attention by the seventh research participant who stated that teachers are very hardly to spend time with the students in the hostel to oversee students' activities, attend to their well-being, cultivate social cohesion and values, and deter behaviours that contravene the established norms and cultural values. Discussing this issue, the seventh research participant brought up two points, first the importance of teachers being present with the students in hostel activities, and second the need for structured scheduling of hostel activities. The seventh research participant expressed:
The challenge was also brought to attention by the seventh research participant, who articulated the considerable difficulty faced by teachers in allocating ample time to oversee students' activities, attend to their well-being, cultivate social cohesion and values, and deter behaviours that contravene the established norms and cultural values within the hostel.

"...he [the teacher] never prays in congregation with the students [in the hostel] because if you see, religious schools mostly have dormitories, right! Even if there's no hostel, at the very least, they should schedule their time to be with the students during Zohor prayer and so on. This needs to be highlighted... it's called the visibility of their [teachers] presence..."

(P7: 208-213)

Sixth: Leaders of SMAs provide inadequate support for the achievement of the MoE's policies.

The achievement of the National Educational Philosophy (FPK) depends on the extent to which the education policies formulated by the MoE align with this philosophy, as well as how effectively a policy is implemented to achieve the intended outcomes as stated in the policy statement. Therefore, SMA leaders

are an integral part of policy implementation at the micro-level. They should execute each policy diligently to ensure its impact on the students.

However, one of the challenges in policy implementation within SMA leadership is that some of its leaders provide inadequate support for educational policy implementation. This study found that they lack the dedication and proactiveness required to devise more creative and innovative strategies for policy implementation at the school level. Moreover, some of them were also observed to lack support towards the creative strategies devised by their teachers. This was expressed by the first research participant, as quoted below:

> *"....'we address what's currently in place [not proactive],' and even if there's a great teacher, they'll eventually feel demotivated because they don't receive support from the leader."*

(P1: 504-505)

One of the factors contributing to the limited proactive support provided by leaders of SMA in the implementation of educational policies is the appointment of SMA leaders who possess relatively limited experience. This observation is rooted in the statement made by the first research participant, highlighting that the appointment of certain SMA leaders takes place without the implementation of any screening process to evaluate the experience and qualifications of these individuals. The following statement is provided by the first research participant. The following is the statement by the first research participant:

> *"...they [leaders] were just appointed in one fell swoop, and there you have it, they became the principal..."*

(P1: 141-143)

On top of that, the first research participant also indicated that the appointment of leaders in SMA is often influenced by elements of nepotism or family heritage rather than qualifications and competence. He stated that:

> *"...In SABK, there's no... no interviews, no nothing, the owner's child is directly appointed as the principal, or if they see even a hint of talent in someone, they immediately appoint the person as the principal, and they'll stay in that school as the principal, as the leader."*

(P1: 111-114)

Furthermore, as a result of the abovementioned SMA leadership appointments being conducted in a single instance, the first research participant also highlighted that leaders of SMA are often selected from among individuals of a relatively young age. The statement from the first research participant is as follows:

> *"...they are appointed as principals even at a very young age..."*

(P1: 107)

Likewise, the seventh participant elucidates that one of the contributing factors to the leaders of SMA offering limited support for policy implementation is attributable to the disposition of these leaders themselves. The participant asserts that SMA leaders often exhibit a deficiency in critical thinking and do not adequately prioritise data-driven decision-making. An excerpt from their statement is as follows:

"...And our principal's data analysis skills? Well, they don't really operate with data in mind. It's more like a routine for them – they go to school, and when it comes to classroom observations, they rarely do it, and even when they do, they're not sure what they're looking for..."

(P7: 280-282)

Seventh: Ineffectiveness in adapting to the changing landscape in the field of education, such as pedagogical shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Schools demand effective and proficient leadership that possesses a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies within the ever-evolving global landscape. The pace of change in recent years has been notably swift. As Klaus (2018) elucidates, the 21st century has borne witness to a plethora of transformations across diverse domains, encompassing the realms of social, economic, and various other spheres. These transformations exert a profound influence on virtually every facet of human existence, with education being no exception. This encompasses notable shifts in teaching and learning methodologies. Hence, it is imperative for every school leader to proactively address the emerging demands resulting from these transformative changes.

Nevertheless, this study has ascertained that certain SMA leaders may exhibit a limited sensitivity to prevailing changes. This is notably exemplified by their choice of teaching and learning methodologies, which predominantly adhere to traditional or 'talk and chalk' methods. This assertion is supported by the statements from the first participants, as follows:

"...In SABK, you'll see the people [leaders and teachers] who... their leadership style is really traditional, and when it comes to teaching methods, in Islamic education we call it 'talaqqiy musyafahah'... when they come to school, they teach with the 'talk and chalk' method..."

(P1: 230-232)

The same matter was also addressed by the second participant, who pointed out that SMA leaders exhibited a deficiency in sensitivity and responsiveness towards the ongoing changes. To provide additional context, participants in the initial phase of the study reported that SMA leaders seemed to perceive no imperative in guiding teachers to adapt to the shifting landscape of teaching and learning methods during the COVID-19 pandemic. This perspective is substantiated by the responses provided by the second participant, as outlined below:

"...but there are schools where the principals just feign ignorance. Leaders like that think, 'We can't possibly teach teachers how to teach,' they also don't analyse or assess anything, and in the end, students end up not attending classes..."

(P2: 518-519)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The qualitative study conducted successfully identified seven leadership-related challenges pertaining to SMA leaders. These challenges encompass various facets, including the leaders' knowledge base, where they were found to lack proficiency and competence in the management of school finances, IT, assets, and data and information. In these areas, Zawawi Zakaria and Yahya Don et al. (2020) explain that financial management, effective communication, leadership, and so forth are among the essential knowledge areas required by school leaders. They further emphasise that knowledgeable leaders are capable of reducing

conflicts that may arise between school leaders and teachers and can contribute to creating a more harmonious school climate. In this context, it can be said that effective school leaders, particularly in the realm of religious secondary education, are those individuals who have a firm command of the knowledge domains highlighted above (Pont, Moorman & Nusche et al., 2008).

Furthermore, to enhance leadership effectiveness, SMA leaders should possess expertise in both Islamic leadership principles and conventional leadership knowledge introduced by Western scholars. This viewpoint is supported by Mobarak (2016), who emphasises that Islamic leaders should continually identify existing knowledge gaps and take specific steps to address them. On another note, Azizi Umar, Jamsari Ezad, and Wan Zulkifli et al. (2012) discovered that one of the root causes of secondary school leaders' limited grasp of knowledge is the lack of formal training provided at the outset of their appointments. It's worth noting that Azizi Umar, Jamsari Ezad, and Wan Zulkifli et al. (2012) conducted their research on leaders in SABK.

Hence, SMA leaders should consistently seek opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills in specific areas based on their needs. They should regularly conduct Training Needs Analysis (TNA) to ensure that SMA leaders are on par with mainstream school leaders. This approach can also help dispel negative perceptions held by the public and academic experts regarding the level of professionalism among teachers and leaders of SMA (Azizi 2011).

Additionally, they were observed showing limited concern for conflicts related to disparities in incentives received by senior and novice teachers. This conflict manifests notably within a subset of SMA teachers who are serving in SABK. This matter has been clarified by Azizi (2011), who delves into a significant disparity in the remuneration packages in SABK that differentiate specific senior teachers from their novice counterparts. This conflict arises because some senior teachers are untrained; they were absorbed into government service after their original schools changed their status to become SABK. The majority of these senior teachers are permanent-untrained-teachers, commonly known as substitute teachers and contract teachers.

Statistics by Ilhaamie and Raudah et al. (2018) have revealed that as many as 73.2% of SAR teachers lack formal degrees, while 26.5% possess only certificates from Islamic SMAs, Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), or the *Empat Thanawi* Certificate. In contrast, novice teachers are professionally trained educators who hold higher academic qualifications and occupy superior job grades compared to their senior counterparts. This situation exists due to the policies governing salary rates and job grades executed by the Public Services Commission of Malaysia (SPA) as stipulated in the Federal Constitution 1997 (Federal Constitution, 1997).

Therefore, leaders in SMA should be more attuned to issues related to incentives, salaries, and teacher job grades. This is because these matters have the potential to engender serious conflicts and can significantly diminish teachers' motivation to work diligently. As elucidated by Pi and Zhang (2017), conflicts related to employee remuneration need to be effectively managed to prevent more severe social discord. If left unchecked, these compensation-related conflicts are feared to have detrimental effects on the quality of leadership among school leaders and consequently impede the school's operations.

However, the authority of SMA leaders to control conflicts related to appointments or remuneration is limited. Their authority varies, depending on the type of SMA, whether it is a SMA administered by the MoE such as SABK and SMKA, SMA owned by state governments like State's Religious Secondary Schools (SMAN), or SMA established by private entities such as private Islamic schools and People's Religious Secondary Schools (SMAR). Azizi Umar and Supyan Hussin (2012) explain about the authority of SABK leaders, stating that SABK leaders do not have jurisdiction over teachers appointments in SABK as it is subject to the Religious Schools Control Enactment (Azizi Umar & Supyan Hussin, 2012) and the Education Act 1996 (Akta Pendidikan 1996 (Akta 550)), Seksyen 15 (Malaysia), 2018).

This occurs following the mutual agreement of both parties with the content of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during the transition of SMAN and SMAR to become SABK. Two MoUs have been established involving agreements between three parties namely agreement between state government and MoE, and between the school authorities and MoE (Ilhaamie & Raudah, 2018). The content of the MoUs varies from state to state (Azizi Umar & Supyan Hussin, 2009). As a consequence of these MoUs,

the authority to establish teaching positions for SABK schools falls under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, specifically under the purview of the JPA. This aligns with the powers stipulated in Article 144(1) of the Federal Constitution:

> *"Subject to the provisions of any existing law and to the provisions of this Constitution, it shall be the duty of a Commission to which this Part applies to appoint, confirm, emplace on the permanent or pensionable establishment, promote, transfer and exercise disciplinary control over members of the service to which its jurisdiction extends."*

However, for SMAR that have not yet changed their status to SABK, matters related to employment, such as salaries and promotions remain under the authority of the School Management Committee. Meanwhile, the state authorities are considered nothing more than just a hosts or intermediaries for external parties seeking to engage with SMAR (Azizi Abu Bakar et al., 2014). The establishment of religious education institutions is provided under Article 12(2) of the Federal Constitution, which pertains to matters concerning Education.

> *"Every religious group has the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children in its own religion, and there shall be no discrimination on the ground only of religion in any law relating to such institutions or in the administration of any such law; but it shall be lawful for the Federation or a State to establish or maintain or assist in establishing or maintaining Islamic institutions or provide or assist in providing instruction in the religion of Islam and incur such expenditure as may be necessary for the purpose."*

Furthermore, SMA leaders were found to have limited networking and linkages with stakeholders. Delving further into the significance of networking and linkaging, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008) emphasised the need for school leaders to take a more proactive role in strengthening ties with their peers in schools, both domestically and internationally, as well as with educational bodies and associations within their local and global communities. These networks and linkages serve the purpose of empowering schools, educators, parents, and the wider communities. Furthermore, Davies and Davies (2010) underscored that in the realm of strategic leadership, fostering networks and linkages stands out as a fundamental and highly valuable element.

Therefore, building upon our earlier discussion, it becomes imperative for leaders of SMA to strategically strengthen their institutions by fostering networks and linkages, all with the ultimate aim of fostering highly knowledgeable and skilled students. This strategic approach is pivotal because, through these networks and linkages, SMAs leaders can foster the emergence of novel and more innovative ideas for school activities (Davies & Davies, 2010). Moreover, Maalouf (2019) asserts that networks and linkages possess significant potential in contributing to the overall success of any organization. This viewpoint aligns with the perspective put forth by Brown and Timothy (2016), who underscore that the topic of networks and linkages remains a widely discussed and popular theme in the field of education.

SMA Leaders also faced challenges in allocating a greater financial provision, specifically for funding teacher competency development programmes. These challenges are more pronounced in private SMA compared to SMA under the purview of the MoE. Teachers in private SMA are in dire need of skill enhancement programmes, particularly in pedagogy. Among the leaders of SMA, those most affected by the challenge of securing financial allocations for teacher competency development are primarily from leaders in the SMAR, SMAN, and private SMA types. This challenge stems primarily from the fact that a considerable proportion of educators recruited in these institutions possess relatively lower academic qualifications and lack the requisite specialised pedagogical training (Azizi Umar & Supyan Hussin, 2012). This fact is substantiated by data put forth by Ilhaamie and Raudah et al. (2018), where they reveal that a staggering 73.2% of SAR teachers lack formal degrees, while 26.5% possess only secondary religious school certificates or Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) or the *Empat Thanawi* qualification. It's worth acknowledging that there are some teachers in SMAR, SMAN, and private SMA who do hold

bachelor's degrees. Nevertheless, a substantial portion of these teachers often sees their roles in these schools as their interim job until they can secure positions that better align with their qualifications (Ilhaamie & Raudah, 2018).

Nonetheless, this challenge is also encountered by leaders in SABK, which are one of the types of SMAs. This circumstance arises due to the fact that a portion of the teachers absorbed into SABK lack formal training and do not possess specialised teaching qualifications. These individuals undergo specialised teaching training provided by the MoE to elevate their level of professionalism in teaching (KPM, 2020).

Therefore, it is the responsibility of leaders in SMA to provide adequate funding. This is because a leader's duty is to enhance the knowledge and skills of their subordinates (Melum, 2002). In this context, SMA leaders are tasked with providing training to untrained teachers, aiming to elevate their level of professionalism in several essential areas, such as pedagogy, and related aspects. The World Economic Forum (2019) explains that insufficient funding can lead to decreased competitiveness for an organization. The forum also emphasises that the lack of funding is one of the causes of the declining quality of education, training, and the employability of graduates. Therefore, SMA leaders should be individuals with a high level of commitment and proficiency in school financial management to ensure that critical areas receive adequate funding.

Furthermore, challenges arise from the lack of beneficial programmes planning for students residing in hostel. The residential programme is a crucial extracurricular activity. Mohd Suhardi Mat Jusoh (2015) stresses that the programmes or activity in hostel should not be disregarded or overlooked. Consequently, SMA leaders should possess strategic leadership skills to plan and implement hostel programmes that align with the students' needs. Ardiansyah (2019) emphasises this significance by asserting that leaders should have the capacity to plan and execute the most effective students' hostel programmes as part of the school's core initiatives to produce students who are morally upright and possess excellent *akhlaq* (good manners and character). This is because morality and *akhlaq* are a reflection of a nation (Amri et al., 2019). Hasmayni et al. (2020) also address this issue, expressing their concerns regarding the moral and ethical standards of school students. According to them, contemporary school students often display undesirable attitudes and behaviours, which is a matter of concern.

In connection with this, the study by Sahid et al. (2021) regarding the implementation of extracurricular programmes should serve as a guide for SMA leaders. The study identified several challenges, including the need to secure commitment from teachers and parents, which is fundamental for the success of extracurricular programmes for boarding students. Additionally, the study highlighted issues related to non-compliance with programmes guidelines and cited factors such as insufficient financial allocation and inadequate infrastructure as impediments to programme development and implementation (Sahid et al., 2021).

SMA leaders were also found to be less supportive of the educational policies introduced by MoE. Previous studies indicated that the lack of support for certain policies is due to several factors, including excessive workload, inadequate training and preparation, limited career prospects, and insufficient support and rewards (Pont et al., 2008). Pont et al. (2008) stated that these mentioned factors have led to a reduced interest among teachers in applying for school principal positions. This notion is further supported by Tintoré et al. (2022), who assert that one of the reasons school leaders find it challenging to effectively implement certain policies is the complexity of the introduced policies and the insufficient training received by school leaders. Therefore, to ensure the success of any introduced policy, these mentioned factors need to be taken seriously by stakeholders so that the introduced policy can yield the intended outcomes.

The last challenge pertains to a lack of attentiveness to changes in the educational landscape, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To discuss further, in accordance with the insights gleaned from the World Economic Forum (2020), leaders who are unresponsive to changes in the environment are characterised as leaders with limited concern and competence in addressing the alterations occurring in the surroundings. For instance, these changes may stem from the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) and the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Arlinwibowo et al., 2020; Isabella et al., 2020; Klaus, 2018; Schwartzman, 2020).

In light of this, these changes have placed significant pressure on SMA leaders. Fotheringham et al. (2022) elucidate that the pressures and impacts arising during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic's spread have left school leaders feeling disoriented and uncertain. They encounter challenges in comprehending and responding to the need for planning teaching and learning strategies that align with the new circumstances and regulations imposed by the government. One example of regulation enforced by the government is the closure of school operations.

Therefore, as a consequence of school closures, school leaders are confronted with the challenge of providing remote learning (Schwartzman, 2020). Various approaches are employed by schools to ensure the continuity of the teaching and learning process. Online teaching and learning method is one of the frequently employed approach (Isabella et al., 2020). However, this method encounters formidable challenges due to a numbers of students lacking device, having inadequate internet service, and other related issues (Nor Musfirah Mohamad, 2021).

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES, AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study hold significant implications. It is imperative that relevant authorities promptly address the seven challenges identified in the leadership of Islamic secondary schools. Resolving these challenges necessitates a comprehensive examination of their root causes and the formulation of strategic solutions. This course of action is paramount, considering its profound implications for the theory of Islamic school leadership.

Moreover, addressing these challenges is crucial for formulating effective policy responses and achieving the objectives set forth in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, particularly within the Student Aspiration component. Guaranteeing that all Islamic secondary school students acquire knowledge, critical thinking skills, leadership abilities, bilingual proficiency, ethical and spiritual values, as well as a robust national identity, is essential for the development of sound educational policies and the advancement of Islamic secondary education in Malaysia.

Through deliberate and focused initiatives aimed at surmounting these challenges, policymakers and educational authorities can forge a path toward a significantly enhanced and more enriching educational experience, in line with the aspirations delineated in the national education blueprint. This proactive stance will not merely elevate the quality of Islamic secondary education but also foster the comprehensive development of students, equipping them to navigate the intricacies of the contemporary world while upholding the foundational principles of Islamic education.

Further study could explore several avenues to enhance the leadership of Islamic secondary school leaders. One such avenue involves conducting comparative studies between high-performing and low-performing school leaders to understand the varying challenges they face and their beliefs toward these challenges. Additionally, experimental research could investigate differences in leadership levels among Islamic secondary school leaders transitioning from private Islamic schools (SAR, SMAN, etc.) to government schools, following interventions or training provided by the Ministry of Education.

In conclusion, the findings of this study shed light on the significant challenges faced by leaders in Islamic secondary schools, emphasizing the pressing need for policy interventions to address them effectively. The disparities in resource allocation and the varying levels of staff motivation uncovered by this research underscore the importance of strategic policy measures aimed at fostering equitable distribution of resources and enhancing staff morale. These challenges, if left unaddressed, could undermine the realization of the objectives outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, particularly regarding the holistic development of students and the promotion of Islamic values within the education system. Therefore, policymakers must prioritize these issues and formulate targeted policies that not only mitigate the identified challenges but also foster a conducive environment for effective leadership in Islamic secondary schools.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

REFERENCES

Abdul Hamid Othman. (1992). Ke arah penyelarasan dan penyatuan sistem pentadbiran dan pelajaran sekolah-sekolah menengah agama dan arab di Malaysia. In UKM (Ed.), Seminar Penyelidikan Islam di Malaysia. UKM Bangi (pp. 30–65). UKM.

Akta Pendidikan 1996 (Akta 550), Seksyen 15 (Malaysia), (2018).

Amin, M. H., & Jasmi, K. A. (2012). Sekolah agama di Malaysia: Sejarah, isu dan cabaran. Univerti Teknologi Malaysia.

Amri, M., Saharuddin, S., & Ahmad, L. O. I. (2019). The implementation of Islamic education: The process of instilling akhlakul karimah (noble characters) for Madrasah Tsanawiyah students. *Tadris: Jurnal Keguruan Dan Ilmu Tarbiyah, 4*(1), 117–125. https://doi.org/10.24042/tadris.v4i1.4070

Ardiansyah, M. Z. (2019). Pesantren Hybrid Worldview: Moderatisasi Paradigma Penalaran Keislaman dan Pemenangan Kontestasi Wacana Daring. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education Studies), 7*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.15642/jpai.2019.7.1.1-18

Arlinwibowo, J., Retnawati, H., Kartowagiran, B., & Kassymova, G. K. (2020). Distance learning policy in Indonesia for facing pandemic COVID-19: School reaction and lesson plans. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology, 98*(14), 2828–2838.

Atiqah, T. A., & Liu, O. P. (2018). Latar belakang sejarah sistem pendidikan dan masyarakat majoriti minoriti di Malaysia. International Colloqium on Integration Platform Binding Differences and Diversity, 74–100.

Azizi Abu Bakar, Mohd Nor Jaafar, Jazmi Md Isa, & Abdullah Shuhairimi. (2014). Transformation leadership at the Sekolah Agama Rakyat: A purpose towards the development of education. *Journal of Human Development and Communication, 3*, 1–7.

Azizi Umar, & Supyan Hussin, S. (2008). Peranan kerajaan negeri dan pusat ke atas sekolah agama rakyat: Suatu kajian masalah pengurusan bersama terhadap pemilikan kuasa (Issue Januari).

Azizi Umar, & Supyan Hussin. (2009). Pendaftaran Sekolah Agama Rakyat Sebagai Sekolah Bantuan Kerajaan : Kajian Implikasinya ke Atas Perlembagaan Persekutuan dan Akta Pendidikan 1996. International Conference on Research in Islamic Law, October 2015, 1–27.

Azizi Umar, & Supyan Hussin. (2012). Cabaran Penyelarasan Kuasa antara Kerajaan Negeri dan Persekutuan dalam Mengurus Sekolah Agama Bantuan Kerajaan (SABK). 4(1), 21–30.

Azizi Umar, Jamsari Ezad, Hassan, W. Z. W., Sulaiman, A., Muslim, N., & Mohamad, Z. (2012). Appointment as principal of government-aided religious school (SABK) in Malaysia. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences, 6*(10), 417–423.

Azizi. (2011). Perbandingan kadar gaji guru senior dan guru novis dalam Sekolah Menengah Agama. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 15*(2), 123–140.

Bahagian Pendidikan Islam, K. (2015). Pelasanaan Kurikulum Bersepadu Dini dan Kurikulum Bersepadu Tahfiz di Sekolah Agama Bantuan Kerajaan (SABK) Mulai tahun 2015. Bahagian Pendidikan Islam, KPM.

Brown, A. H., & Timothy, G. D. (2016). The essentials of instructional design. In The Essentials of Instructional Design (3rd. Editi). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315757438

Bushra Yusof. (2008). Dasar Ekonomi Baru (DEB). Percetakan Nasional.

Chua Yan Piaw. (2012). Asas statistik penyelidikan. McGraw Hill Sdn Bhd.

Creswell, W. J. (2009). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. In SAGE Publication Ltd (Vol. 3). https://doi.org/10.2307/1523157

Davies, B., & Davies, B. J. (2010). Strategic leadership. International Encyclopedia of Education, 34–39. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.00447-4

Dewi, N. N., & Wibowo, R. (2020). The effect of leadership style, organizational culture and motivation on employee performance. *Management Science Letters, 10*(9), 2037–2044. https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2020.2.008

Federal Constitution, (1997).

Fotheringham, P., Harriott, T., Healy, G., Arenge, G., & Wilson, E. (2022). Pressures and influences on school leaders navigating policy development during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Educational Research Journal, 48*(2), 201–227. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3760

Hamid, D. H. T. B. A. H., Omar, A. H. H., & Sariffudin, R. S. (2005). Aplikasi Perisian Nvivo Dalam Analisis Data Kualitatif. Qualitative Conference, 1–18. http://eprints.utm.my/2220/1/p24.Dayang_Hjh_Tiawa.pdf

Hasmayni, B., Siregar, F. H., & Aziz, A. (2020). Establishment of character through boarding school education in students in Pondok Pesantren. 384(Aisteel), 238–241. https://doi.org/10.2991/aisteel-19.2019.51

Ilhaamie, A. G. A., & Raudah, S. (2018). Job satisfaction level of non-government islamic religious school teachers. *Akademika, 88*(2), 35–57.

Isabella, Alfitri, & Ardiyan Saptawan. (2020). The Implication of COVID-19 Pandemic Towards Education, Social Life and Global Economics. In M. M. A. ALFITRI, S. K. MUCHLIS, & A. R. AHMAD (Eds.), The 3rd International Conference on Social Sciences & Humanities 2020 (Issue December, p. 1058). Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291974748_Analisis_Keperluan_Kurikulum_Pendidikan_Vokasional_Pelajar_Bermasalah_Pembelajaran_LD_di_Malaysia

Kayadibi, S., & Buang, A. H. (2011). The role of Islamic studies in muslim civilization in the globalized world: Malaysian experience. *Jurnal Hadhari, 3*(2), 83–102. http://irep.iium.edu.my/10528/

Klaus, S. (2018). The fourth industrial revolution. In World Economic Forum (pp. 49–78). Crown Business.

KPM. (2013). Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia 2013 - 2025. *Education, 27*(1), 1–268. http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0742051X10001435

KPM. (2017). Dasar pendidikan kebangsaan. Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia.

KPM. (2020). Pendidikan menengah/Sekolah Agama Bantuan Kerajaan (SABK). https://www.moe.gov.my/pendidikan/pendidikan-menengah/sekolah-agama-bantuan-kerajaan-sabk).

Leithwood, K., & Levin, B. (2008). Understanding and assessing the impact of leadership development. In P. P. J Lumby, G. Crow (Ed.), International Handbook on Leadership Preparation (pp. 280–300). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Leithwood, K., & Levin, B. (2010). Understanding how leadership influences student learning. International Encyclopedia of Education, 45–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.00439-5

Maalouf, G. Y. (2019). Effects of collaborative leadership on organizational performance. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, 6*(1), 138–144. https://doi.org/10.22271/ijmrd.2019.v6.i1.25

Melum, M. (2002). Developing high-performance leaders. Quality Management in Health Care/Fall, 11(1), 55–68.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. In Jossey-Bass. Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2016). Qualitati research: A guide to design and implementation.

Miles, M. B., & Michael Huberman. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook (2nd editio). SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd.

Mobarak, H. (2016). Leadership Pattern: A Comparative Study Between Conventional and Islamic Perspective. International Journal of Ethics in Social Sciences, 4(1), 2308–5096. http://www.crimbbd.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/07.-Mobarak-Hossain.pdf

Mohd Ibrahim K. Azeez. (2017). Kompetensi kepemimpinan pengetua sekolah berprestasi tinggi, sederhana dan rendah di Selangor. Universiti Malaya.

Mohd Ridhuan, M. J., & Nurulrabihah, M. N. (2020). Kepelbagaian metodologi dalam penyelidikan reka bentuk dan pembangunan.

Mohd Suhardi Mat Jusoh. (2015). Pelaksanaan program tarbiah dalam kalangan pelajar asrama sekolah menengah kebangsaan agama (SMKA) Pulau Pinang [Universiti Sains Malaysia]. In Universiti Sains Malaysia. https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2013.0625

Muhammad Faizal, A. G., & Crow, G. . (2013). Amalan komuniti pembelajaran profesional: Perspektif pemimpin sekolah cemerlang negara maju. *Jurnal Kurikulum & Pengajaran Asia Pasifik, 1*(1), 10–27.

Muhammad Faizal, G., Saedah, S., Radzuan, K., Husaina Banu, K., Shahril, M., & Faisol, I. (2013). Amalan Sekolah Cemerlang Di Sekolah Berasrama Penuh Dan Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama : Satu Perbandingan. *The Online Journal of Islamic Education, 1*(2), 30–50.

Nor Musfirah Mohamad. (2021). Cabaran pedagogi norma baharu di Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis (KUIPS) ketika pandemik wabak COVID-19. 14, 243–254.

Pi, J., & Zhang, P. (2017). Social conflict and wage inequality. *Journal of Economics/ Zeitschrift Fur Nationalokonomie, 121*(1), 29–49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00712-016-0515-3

Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2008). Improving School Leadership. In Improving School Leadership (Vol. 1). OECD. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264082915-et

Rahimah Ahmad, binti, & Ghavifekr, S. (2014). School leadership for the 21st century: A conceptual overview. *Malaysian Online Journal of Education, 2*(1), 48–61.

Razaleigh Muhamat. (2014). Peranan guru pendidikan Islam dalam pengurusan aktiviti dakwah. *Jurnal Pendidikan, 1*(2), 2–10.

Saedah Siraj, B., & Muhammad Ridhuan Tony Lim, Abdullah Rozaini Muhamad Rozkee, B. (2020). Pendekatan penyelidikan rekabentuk dan pembangunan. UPSI.

Saedah Siraj. (2008). The role of the principal in managing religious secondary schools in Malaysia. *Journal of Educational Administration, 46*(6), 704–719.

Sahid, U., Wasliman, I., Muchtar, H. S., & Insan, H. S. (2021). Management of student characteristics through extracurricular activities in the school environment based on Islamic boarding schools. *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, 2*(2), 116–125. https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v2i2.97

Schwartzman, R. (2020). Performing pandemic pedagogy. *Communication Education, 69*(4), 502–517. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2020.1804602

Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2019). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig & W. S. Rogers (Ed.), The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology (Second Edi, pp. 17–37). SAGE Publications, Inc.

The Asia Foundation. (2020). Enduring the pandemic: Surveys on the impact of COVID-19 to the livelihoods of Malaysian MSMEs and workers. The Asia Foundation.

Tintoré, M., Cunha, R. S., Cabral, I., & Alves, J. J. M. (2022). A scoping review of problems and challenges faced by school leaders (2003–2019). *Educational Management Administration and Leadership, 50*(4), 536–573. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220942527

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Gareis, C. R. (2015). Principals, trust, and cultivating vibrant schools. Societies, 5(2), 256–276. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc5020256

UNESCO. (2017). UNESCO moving forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 22.

UNICEF. (2022). Education 2030 in Malaysia.

World Economic Forum. (2019). The Global Competitiveness Report 2019. In World Economic Forum. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf

World Economic Forum. (2020). Schools of the future: Defining new models of education for the fourth industrial revolution. World Economic Forum Reports 2020, January, 1–33. www.weforum.org Not cited in teks (I did cited "world economic forum)

Wheatley, K. F. (2018). "Student achievement, marketable job skills, and global competitiveness": America's unhealthy education priorities. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 17*(6), 51–67. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.17.6.4

Widhyanti, R. & Shahril@Charil, M. (2016). Headmaster instructional leadership and organizational learning on the quality of madrasah and the quality of graduates the State Madrasah Aliyah at Jakarta capital region. *Higher Education Studies, 6*(1), 159–168.

Zawawi, Z., Yahya, D., & Mohd Faiz, M. Y. (2020). Differences in the level of teachers' well-being in SMK and SABK. *International Journal of Management 11*(7), 1133–1144. https://doi.org/10.34218/IJM.11.7.2020.101

Zunaidi Harun, A.Ghani, M. F., Radzi, N. M., & Ismail, Z. (2020). Leadership within Religious-Based School in Malaysia: A Meta-Analysis Study. JIEMAN: *Journal of Islamic Educational Management, 3*(1), 129–162. https://doi.org/10.35719/jieman.v3i1.67