A BILINGUAL APPROACH TO ISLAMIC STUDIES EDUCATION FOR UPPER PRIMARY STUDENTS IN MALAYSIAN INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Many international Islamic schools in Malaysia enroll learners from various multicultural and multilingual backgrounds. In these schools, proficiency in both Arabic and the language of instruction, typically English, is required for Islamic education. However, many students encounter difficulties because of limited proficiency in these two languages. Thus, it is crucial to examine how the teaching and learning (T&L) of Islamic studies (IS) is conducted in international Islamic schools. This study aimed to answer the following research questions: a) What is the nature of the curriculum of IS in international Islamic schools?; b) What bilingual teaching and learning methods are employed for IS in international Islamic schools? ; c) How is the assessment of IS conducted in international Islamic schools? ; d) What challenges are faced by stakeholders in learning IS in a bilingual environment? ; and e) What are the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the bilingual education of IS in international Islamic schools? The study adopted a mixed-method, sequential explanatory research design which involved the use of questionnaires and interview protocols. The participants of the study were from seven international Islamic schools in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, including principals/heads of department, teachers, students and parents (n=449). A purposeful sample of 54 participants was selected for stakeholder interviews. The results of the study revealed that: a) the curriculum appears to emphasise the inculcation and practice of Islamic philosophy, teacher and student- centered T&L as well as bilingual practices; b) T&L involves use of Arabic and English with a focus on the application of Islamic values; c) an emphasis on summative assessment, with English as the language of assessment; d) the use of two languages in T&L is a major challenge for teachers and learners; e) all stakeholders view the practice of bilingual education for the Islamic studies subject positively. This research contributes to our understanding of T&L as well as effective classroom communication by : a) highlighting the benefits of a bilingual approach to IS within multicultural and multilingual school communities; b) expanding the discourse in the interdependence of Arabic and English in mediating meaning during IS lessons; c) deepening knowledge on instructional policies in relation to language integration in the classroom, as well as challenges in the use of a bilingual approach to IS instruction; and d) providing insight to teachers' role and competencies in implementing IS lessons, and how they are related to teacher professional development.

Keywords: International Islamic schools, Islamic education, bilingual education, teaching and learning methods, Arabic and English, curriculum, stakeholders, perceptions

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Professor Dr Siow Heng Loke
Chairman, Examination Committee
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5th October 2023

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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Signature of Candidate: **Date**: 5 October 2023

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii
APPROVAL iii
DECLARATION iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS viii
LIST OF TABLES xi
LIST OF FIGURES xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATION xvii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Background of the Study 1
1.2 Statement of the Problem 7
1.3 Objectives 11
1.4 Research Questions 12
1.5 Definition of Terms as Used in This Study 12
1.6 Justifications and Significance of the Study 15
1.7 Theoretical Contributions 17
1.8 Structure of the Thesis 20

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE 21

2.1 Introduction 21
2.2 Bilingual Education 21
2.2.1 Concepts in Bilingual Education 22
2.2.2 Theories in Bilingual Education 31
2.2.3 Types of Bilingual Education 44
2.2.4 Bilingual Education in Practice (Curriculum, T&L and Assessment) 53
2.2.5 A Model to Study Bilingual Education Method 63
2.3 Islamic Studies 69
2.3.1 Islamic Education Curriculum and Assessment 69
2.3.2 Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Guidance for Islamic Education 79
2.3.3 Bilingual Education for IS Subject 83
2.3.4 International Islamic Schools and Islamic Education 86
2.4 Challenges in Bilingual Education 88
2.4.1 Challenges of ESL/EFL 89
2.4.2 Arabic as an ESL/EFL 93
2.5 Perceptions (Attitude and Belief) of Islamic Studies for Bilingual Education 95
2.5.1 Introduction 95
2.5.2 Perceptions (Attitude and Belief) in Bilingual Education 99
2.5.3 Perceptions (Attitude and Belief) for Using Another Language for T&L Islamic Studies Subject 100
2.6 Theoretical Framework 103
2.7 Conceptual Framework 107
2.8 Research Gaps on Bilingual Education of Islamic Studies Subject 109
2.9 Chapter Summary 111

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY 113

3.1 Introduction 113
3.1.1 Research Paradigm and Methodological Approach 113
3.1.2 Research Design 115
3.1.3 Research Population 119
3.1.4 Pilot Study 123
3.2 Quantitative Phase I- Methodology 125
3.2.1 Sampling Phase I 125
3.2.2 Instrumentation Phase I 126
3.2.3 Data Collection Procedures Phase I 129
3.2.4 Validation and Reliability Steps Phase I 130
3.3 First Integration Methodology 133
3.4 Qualitative Phase II-Methodology 135
3.4.1 Sampling Phase II 135
3.4.2 Instrumentation Phase II 135
3.4.3 Data Collection Process Phase II 136
3.4.4 Validation and Reliability Steps Phase II 136
3.5 Research Ethics 137
3.6 Chapter Summary 139

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS 140

4.1 Introduction 140
4.2 Quantitative Phase I 143
4.2.1 Demographics of the Respondents 143
4.2.2 Bilingual Curriculum Descriptive Analysis 161
4.2.3 Bilingual Teaching and Learning (T&L) Descriptive Analysis 169
4.2.4 Bilingual Assessment Descriptive Analysis 185
4.2.5 Challenges in Bilingual Education of IS Subject Descriptive Analysis 194
4.2.6 Perceptions towards Bilingual Education of IS Subject Descriptive Analysis 200
4.2.7 Phase I Reliability Statistics 211
4.3 First Integration-Findings 213
4.3.1 Identification of the Quantitative Results which Require More Understanding and Explanation 213
4.3.2 Identifying the Participants of Phase II (Qualitative Data Collection) 220
4.3.3 Developing the Interview Protocol for Qualitative Phase II 221
4.4 Qualitative Phase- II 222
4.4.1 Demographics of the Participants 222
4.4.2 Thematic Analysis 227
4.4.3 Phase II Reliability Statistics 250
4.5 Second Integration-Result 251
4.5.1 Research Question 1 251
4.5.2 Research Question 2 271
4.5.3 Research Question 3 294
4.5.4 Research Question 4 310

4.5.5 Research Question 5 333
4.6 Chapter Summary 356

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 358

5.1 Introduction 358
5.2 Recapitulation of the Study 359
5.3 Discussion of the Research Objectives 361
5.3.1 Bilingual Curriculum for Islamic Studies Subject in International Islamic Schools 361
5.3.2 Bilingual Teaching and Learning of Islamic Studies Subject in International Islamic Schools 364
5.3.3 Bilingual Assessment of Islamic Studies Subject in International Islamic Schools 369
5.3.4 Challenges in the Bilingual Education of Islamic Studies Subject in International Islamic Schools 374
5.3.5 Perceptions of Stakeholders Towards the Bilingual Education of Islamic Studies Subject 376
5.4 Limitations 379
5.5 Implications 382
5.6 Recommendations 384
5.7 Chapter Summary 387
REFERENCES 389
APPENDICES 410
Appendix A 410
Appendix B 416
Appendix C 419
Appendix D 477

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
2.1	Bilingual ideologies, goals, programmes and type of children	46
2.2	Ways teachers can address language errors in a bilingual classroom	57
2.3	Bilingual discourse strategy	58
2.4	Monolingual discourse strategy	59
2.5	Approach, method and technique	65
3.1	Population statistics	121
3.2	Phase I - quantitative data sample	126
3.3	Phase II - qualitative data sample	135
4.1	Steps of data analysis	141
4.2	Principal/HOD - respondent profile	144
4.3	Teacher – respondent profile	149
4.4	Student - respondent profile	154
4.5	Parent – respondent profile	158
4.6	Bilingual curriculum for IS subject - principal/HOD	162
4.7	Bilingual curriculum for IS subject - teachers	163
4.8	Bilingual curriculum for IS subject - student	165
4.9	Bilingual curriculum for IS subject - parent	167
4.10	Bilingual Teaching and Learning (T&L) for IS subject - principal/ HOD	169
4.11	Bilingual Teaching and Learning (T&L) for IS subject - teacher	173
4.12	Bilingual Teaching and Learning (T&L) for IS subject - student	177
4.13	Bilingual Teaching and Learning (T&L) for IS subject - parent	181
4.14	Bilingual Assessment for IS subject - principal/HOD	185

4.15	Bilingual Assessment for IS subject - teacher	187
4.16	Bilingual Assessment for IS subject - student	189
4.17	Bilingual Assessment for IS subject - parent	192
4.18	Challenges in bilingual education of IS subject - principal/HOD	194
4.19	Challenges in bilingual education of IS subject - teachers	196
4.20	Challenges in bilingual education of IS subject - students	198
4.21	Perceptions (attitude and belief) towards bilingual education of IS subject - principal/HOD	201
4.22	Perceptions (attitude and belief) towards bilingual education of IS subject - teachers	203
4.23	Perceptions (attitude and belief) towards bilingual education of IS subject - students	206
4.24	Perceptions (attitude and belief) towards bilingual education of IS subject - parents	208
4.25	Survey questionnaire reliability analysis	211
4.26	Item identification for phase II interview protocol development - principal/HOD	213
4.27	Item identification for phase II interview protocol development - teacher	215
4.28	Item identification for phase II interview protocol development - student	217
4.29	Item identification for phase II interview protocol development-parent	219
4.30	Phase II participant selection criteria	220
4.31	Transcription codes - principal/HOD	230
4.32	Transcription codes - teacher	235

4.33	Transcription codes - student focus groups	240
4.34	Transcription codes - parent	244
4.35	Inter rator reliability analysis	251
4.36	Transcription extract	258
4.37	Transcription extract	261
4.38	Transcription extract	264
4.39	Transcription extract	267
4.40	Transcription extract	269
4.41	Transcription - extract	281
4.42	Transcription - extract	283
4.43	Transcription - extract	285
4.44	Transcription - extract	288
4.45	Transcription - extract	291
4.46	Transcription - extract	300
4.47	Transcription - extract	303
4.48	Transcription extract	305
4.49	Transcription - extract	307
4.50	Transcription - extract	319
4.51	Transcription - extract	321
4.52	Transcription - extract	324
4.53	Transcription - extract	326
4.54	Transcription - extract	329
4.55	Transcription - extract	342
4.56	Transcription - extract	345
4.57	Transcription - extract	348

4.58 Transcription - extract 350

4.59 Transcription - extract 352

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
2.1	Iceberg analogy of Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model of bilingualism	39
2.2	Thresholds theory, above sourced from Baker, (Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism)	41
2.3	Cummins quadrants, above sourced from Baker, (foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism)	42
2.4	Theoretical framework	103
2.5	Step step-by-step process of literature review	106
2.6	Conceptual framework	107
3.1	Flowchart explanatory sequential design	118
3.2	Population and sampling	119
3.3	Target population	120
3.4	Thesis population map	122
3.5	Pilot study framework	125
4.1	Principal/HOD responses - language/s used at international Islamic schools for Islamic studies	146
4.2	Principal/HOD - language/s used at international Islamic schools for the assessment of Islamic studies	146
4.3	Principal/HOD - language skills	147
4.4	Teacher responses - language/s used at international Islamic schools for Islamic studies	150
4.5	Teacher responses - language/s used at international Islamic schools for Islamic studies subject assessment	151

4.6	Teacher - language skills	152
4.7	Student response - language/s used at international Islamic schools for Islamic studies	155
4.8	Student response - language/s used at international Islamic schools for the assessment of Islamic studies	155
4.9	Student – language skills	156
4.10	Parent response - language/s used at international Islamic schools for Islamic studies subject	159
4.11	Parent response - language/s used at international Islamic schools for assessment of Islamic studies subject	159
4.12	Parent - language skills	160
4.13	Principal/HOD - thematic analysis - concept cloud	229
4.14	Code search - example Atlas ti 22	229
4.15	Token/clustered codes to concept - example	230
4.16	Teacher - thematic analysis - concept cloud	234
4.17	Student - thematic analysis - concept cloud	239
4.18	Thematic analysis - concept cloud	243

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ABC	Affective, Behavioral and Cognitive
ATLAS ti	A Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
BES	Bilingual Education Survey
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
CBI	Concept-based Instruction
C-BLI	Concept-based Language Instruction
CBLT	Content-Based Language Teaching
CLAP	Cognitive Academic language Proficiency
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CUP	Common Underlying Proficiency
DLENM	Dual Language Education of New Mexico
FADEL	Foundation for the Advancement and Development of Education and Learning
FLs	Foreign Languages
HOD	Head of Department
IBERR	International Board of Educational Research and Resources
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
IQRA	International Quran Research Association

IS	Islamic Studies
ISC	International School Community
L1	First Language; Native Language.
L2	Second Language
LEAP	Language Education and Academic Progress
LUS	Language Use Survey
MI	Medium of Instruction
MLF	Matrix Language Frame Model
MM	Markedness Model
MOE	Ministry of Education
PEMANDU	Performance Management and Delivery Unit
RIC	Repetitive Intersentential Codeswitching
SCT	Sociocultural Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SUP	Separate Underlying Proficiency
T&L	Teaching and Learning
TAFL	Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language
UK	United Kingdom
WSCC	Web of Science Core Collection
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia, which is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation situated in Southeast Asia, is renowned for its rich tapestry of languages and cultures, primarily comprising Malays, Chinese and Indians (Ilhavenil & Logeswaran, 2023). This linguistic diversity is prominently reflected in the country's education system, where three distinct mediums of instruction prevail. Firstly, Bahasa Malaysia, which is the national language, serves as the medium of instruction in both primary and secondary national schools. Secondly, Mandarin and Tamil are authorised as mediums of instruction in national-type (vernacular) primary Chinese and Tamil schools respectively (Mohd Adnan & Airil Haimi, 2017; Santoso & Kinasih, 2022). Additionally, the English language is recognised as a second language in Malaysia, which is compulsory across all educational levels from primary to tertiary in the curriculum (Irma Wani et al., 2022).

In line with Malaysia's Education Blueprint (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013-2025), the Malaysian education system actively promotes bilingualism and multilingualism. This strategic approach advocates every child to acquire proficiency in an additional language, thus embracing and capitalising on the country's multicultural and multilingual ethos. In this context, Kartashova and Osipova (2022) highlighted that many students in Malaysia opt to expand their language repertoire beyond Bahasa Malaysia and English, aiming to better prepare themselves for the global workforce.

According to Savski (2020), the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Malaysia has primarily emphasised Bahasa Malaysia and English. This emphasis has resulted in other languages, especially indigenous and regional ones, being marginalised. Some view this one-sided implementation of the CEFR as a missed opportunity to establish a more inclusive and equitable language policy that can accommodate Malaysia's linguistic diversity. The advocacy for bilingual and multilingual education, which is in conjunction with the CEFR, presents a more harmonious alignment with Malaysia's linguistic and cultural complexity. It functions as a mechanism to honour and safeguard the nation's linguistic heritage and foster intercultural understanding among its diverse linguistic communities.

Tupas and Sercombe (2014) extensively examine the intricate relationship between language, education, and nation-building in Southeast Asia, shedding light on the region's historical complexities shaped by immigration and colonial influences. Through an analysis of language policies and their role in nation-building processes, the book underscores the pivotal function of education systems in institutionalizing dominant and national languages while addressing the challenges posed by linguistic diversity, particularly in relation to minority languages. The experiences documented in the book, particularly those of the Philippines in implementing bilingual education and Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), offer valuable insights into the management of linguistic diversity within a nation-building framework.

Drawing parallels with the Philippines' experiences, the book provides a framework for understanding similar challenges faced by other Southeast Asian nations, such as Malaysia. By examining the Philippines' efforts in incorporating

MTB-MLE and navigating issues of linguistic diversity, assimilation, and cultural preservation, the book offers practical lessons applicable to multicultural contexts like Malaysian international schools. As highlighted by Tupas and Sercombe (2014), education systems play a pivotal role either in reinforcing linguistic and educational status quos or in serving as platforms for cultural preservation and identity affirmation. Thus, the experiences documented in the book underscore the importance of awareness and understanding in leveraging minority learners' mother tongues in education, contributing to broader discussions on bilingual and multilingual education within the region.

In Malaysia, the education system faces challenges in promoting bilingual communication within its multicultural setting. Research conducted by Hamid and Razak (2017) examined the impact of bilingual education in Malaysian primary schools, revealing that students in such programs displayed greater proficiency in English compared to their counterparts in Malay-medium schools. However, concerns about unequal access to quality bilingual education were raised, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Hamid & Razak, 2017).

Another study by Wong and Noor (2019) delved into the obstacles surrounding the integration of mother tongue languages, such as Mandarin and Tamil, into Malaysian classrooms. They identified a dearth of qualified teachers and standardized curriculum materials for these languages within the bilingual education framework (Wong & Noor, 2019).

Further insights were provided by Beagrie et al. (2020), who explored the experiences of teachers delivering bilingual education in Malaysia. Their findings underscored the necessity for more robust teacher training programs focused on

effective bilingual instructional methods and strategies for managing multilingual classrooms (Beagrie et al., 2020).

These studies align with Tupas and Sercombe's (2014) emphasis on the complexities inherent in language policy and education. While bilingual education offers benefits such as enhanced language proficiency, ensuring equitable access and incorporating cultural understanding remain critical considerations for its successful implementation within Malaysia's diverse context.

Pakendorf et al. (2021) endorse the notion that nurturing a bilingual and multilingual approach within Malaysia not only recognises its historical linguistic richness, but also fosters an environment of inclusivity and equity for its citizens. This approach acts as a bridge among diverse linguistic communities, facilitating intercultural exchange and fostering a sense of unity in Malaysia’s diverse population. In the context of our increasingly globalized world, multilingualism emerges as an asset uniquely embodied within Malaysia's multicultural and multilingual society. When duly celebrated and supported, this multilingualism can significantly contribute to national cohesion, cultural preservation, and intercultural harmony.

The prevalence of a bilingual approach in Malaysian education is evident across public, private and international educational institutions. A noteworthy development is that Malaysia leads Southeast Asia in terms of student enrolment in premium English-medium international schools, with the recent removal of the 40% enrolment restriction on local Malaysian students in these institutions (ISC Research, ISC). International schools have been a cornerstone of the Malaysian education sector since their establishment in the 1950s, thus catering to the educational needs of expatriate families and those seeking a Western-style education (Siti Maziha et al., 2021; Miftahuljanah et al., 2020; Nor-Ahmad et al., 2023). These institutions have gained

prominence due to their emphasis on a rigorous academic curriculum, English-medium instruction and exposure to international cultures (Rahman & Singh, 2020; Ben-Jacob & Wang, 2020).

A recent study by Alnawasreh et al. (2019) explored the motivations of Malaysian parents for enrolling their children in international schools. The findings revealed that parents were primarily drawn to the perceived advantages of an international education, including better academic outcomes, enhanced English language proficiency and exposure to a global perspective. These findings aligned with those of Sahiruddin and Manipuspika (2021), revealing that parents' motivations for enrolling children in bilingual or international school were more integrative than instrumental. The use of English as a lingua franca within the context of a multicultural world has motivated parents and teachers to introduce English at the early stages of education. The bilingual approach was found to be effective in the English delivery system for social and cultural considerations.

The growth and popularity of international schools in Malaysia can be attributed to several factors, including the country's economic development, an increasing expatriate population and rising demand for quality education (Ahmad & Abdullah, 2020). As Malaysia transitioned from an agricultural to an industrialised economy, the demand for qualified professionals with international exposure grew, leading to a surge in demand for international education (Sulaiman & Ismail, 2019).

International Islamic schools in Malaysia have gained increasing popularity among Malaysian parents who seek an educational system that seamlessly melds international academic standards with the infusion of Islamic values. These schools offer a dual emphasis on a global curriculum and Islamic teachings, reflecting a growing demand for educational institutions that provide a holistic approach to