

Progressive Islamic education model: synergizing holistic character and multiple intelligences

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Article Info

Article history:

Received May 21, 2025

Revised Apr 27, 2026

Accepted Jun 8, 2026

Keywords:

Boarding school

Entrepreneurial quotient

Holistic model

Multiple intelligences

Progressive Islamic education

ABSTRACT

Deep gaps between modern proficiency and spiritual advancement are still found. The separate curriculum pattern in the majority of traditional Islamic boarding schools tends to prioritise memorization methods rather than holistic growth. The main investigation in this research is focused on the synergy of strengthening holistic character and multiple intelligences in progressive Islamic education at the Muhammadiyah boarding school (MBS) Pleret, Yogyakarta. Through a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through documentation, field observations, and in-depth interviews with directors, educators, and students. Validity of findings by applying thematic triangulation techniques. The results of the study show that the acceleration of character and multiple intelligences is triggered by the synergy of religious education and soft skills. Apart from sharpening cognitive functions, psychological dimensions include spiritual, emotional, intellectual, adversity, and entrepreneurship quotient. This study proves that the basic trigger in producing strong graduates in times of disruption is the combination of belief values and modern skills. Through this education, the approach at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta becomes a crucial reference for values-based education. As a solution to the dualistic system, this strategy represents a real change towards a progressive Islamic school model.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary challenges the Indonesian education system faces have brought to light the pressing need for a revitalised approach to address the shifting moral landscape among students [1]. The rapid advancements in technology and social media have significantly transformed the educational landscape, leading to various issues, such as the erosion of character formation [2] and self-identity among students [3]. These challenges have given rise to a multitude of social problems, including disrespectful behavior toward teachers, promiscuity, early marriage, drug use, bullying, and excessive online gaming addiction [4]. The conservative Muhammadiyah school culture has emerged as a potential approach to address these shifting values.

However, formulating an appropriate school culture that can eradicate the normative value shift among students remains critical [5]. The widespread availability of digital technologies and social media platforms has exposed students to a vast array of both positive and negative information [6], leading to potential confusion and value conflicts [7]. Additionally, the rapid pace of societal changes and the influence of global culture have contributed to the erosion of traditional value systems, making it challenging for

students to grasp their cultural and religious identities [8]. While intellectual intelligence (IQ) remains a priority, the cultivation of emotional intelligence (EQ), spiritual intelligence (SQ), adversity intelligence (AQ), and entrepreneurial intelligence (EPQ) is frequently neglected [9]. This imbalance can result in a lack of holistic development [10], leaving students ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world while maintaining a strong moral compass and ethical behavior.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of educational revitalisation [11]. A theoretical study on the progressive Islamic movement in addressing societal issues was conducted by Suyatno *et al.* [12]. Furthermore, Hamami and Nuryana established a theoretical foundation for the holistic Muhammadiyah education system in Indonesia [13]. This aligns with the curriculum innovation mapped by Assegaf *et al.* [14], which emphasizes the reorientation of Islamic Education to remain adaptive toward modern challenges. The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of how revitalising the progressive Islamic education model enhances students' character and multiple intelligences in Muhammadiyah boarding schools (MBS). This research contributes to the broader discourse on religious education in pluralistic societies, proposing a novel framework for balancing progressive Islamic teachings with modern educational requirements.

The literature review underscores the importance of strengthening the integration between traditional Islamic education, progressive educational philosophies, and the demands of the modern era. The Muhammadiyah approach to Islamic education, as implemented in its boarding schools, plays a pivotal role in strengthening this synthesis [15]. This approach is designed to strengthen students' competencies, ensuring that graduates are well-versed in Islamic teachings and equipped with the necessary skills and mindsets to contribute positively to 21st-century society [16].

Furthermore, this educational framework aligns with Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which emphasizes strengthening various cognitive capacities rather than viewing intelligence as a singular, fixed trait [17]. Recent studies have further expanded this theory by identifying additional intelligence essential to Islamic education, such as spiritual intelligence and adversity intelligence [18].

In the context of Islamic education, SQ and AQ are better understood through their role in forming moral reasoning, spiritual awareness, and resilience, rather than through statistical precision. Therefore, this research positions them as pedagogical dimensions that support character education and faith-based learning, while contributing to strengthening resilience and ethical competence in the Islamic boarding school environment. However, in academic psychology, SQ and AQ are still debated. The SQ does not yet have an established measurement standard, while the AQ intersects with the concepts of resilience and coping, thus raising doubts about its psychometric validity. However, the integration of the two remains relevant in enriching holistic education. The strengthening of these intelligences is crucial in Islamic education, as it fosters not only academic excellence [19] but also moral and spiritual growth, ensuring a well-rounded development of students [20].

Islamic education is a scientific discipline based on Islamic treasures, encompassing pedagogy, learning processes, and the educational framework [21]. However, contemporary Islamic education faces several challenges. These include curriculum misalignment with current developmental needs [22], moral decadence reflecting shifting normative standards [23], and unfavourable social conditions impacting character and identity formation among students [24]. The rapid advancement of technology, particularly social media and the industrial revolution, has significantly altered the educational landscape [25]. Without an appropriate educational model to navigate these changes, various problems persist, such as disrespect toward teachers, social misconduct, early marriages, substance abuse, bullying, and excessive dependence on online gaming [26]. Therefore, these issues underscore the urgent need for an educational model that addresses shifting values, such as the conservative Muhammadiyah school culture approach [27].

Education in progressive Islamic studies, which was instituted by Muhammadiyah, applies the *jihad* (serious) paradigm to improve the welfare of society and overcome various complex global crises [28]. This intellectual trajectory is firmly rooted in the values of Islamic ethos and theological principles [29], which consistently re-evaluate the principles of religious values to ensure their relevance amidst the demands of today's modern era [30]. At its core, this paradigm is defined by a steadfast commitment to divine unity (*tawhid*), critical intellectual inquiry (*ijtihad*), and religious moderation (*wasatiyyah*), thereby framing Islam as a universal blessing for all creation (*rahmatan lil-'alamin*) [31].

Consequently, this approach actively promotes social justice, gender equality, and harmony [32], while advocating for an educational system that empowers Muslims to engage productively with the contemporary world without losing their religious identity [33]. The progressive Islamic education paradigm, pioneered by KH Ahmad Dahlan, serves as a strategic catalyst for societal modernization and national advancement [34]. By integrating general sciences with ethical leadership and critical thinking, this model effectively develops superior human capital and establishes centers of excellence within the Muslim community [35].

Holistic education in the Islamic context can be understood through the concept of comprehensiveness (*kaffah*), as mentioned in the Qur'an [36]. This approach aims to develop all students' potential aspects, including intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual. The Muhammadiyah education system is built on a holistic framework that aims to cultivate faith and piety (*taqwa*), develop noble character (*akhlaq*), and enhance knowledge and skills for independence and social contribution [37]. This holistic approach aligns with the theory proposed by several studies [38], which emphasizes the development of spiritual (SQ), emotional (EQ), adversity (AQ), and intellectual (IQ) intelligence [39]. MBS (*pesantren*) combine traditional Islamic education with modern pedagogical approaches, creating a comprehensive learning experience [40].

In Islamic education, the term boarding school refers to a residential educational system where students, teachers, and administrators live within the same compound. This setup allows intensive learning and character development beyond formal class hours. Islamic boarding schools, known as *pesantren* in Indonesia, have historically shaped the country's educational landscape [41]. These institutions aim to equip students with specialised knowledge of Islamic teachings and general knowledge necessary for societal engagement [42]. Islamic values, nationality, and modernity guide MBS' educational approach. This framework ensures that students develop a strong religious foundation, a sense of national identity, and the skills needed to thrive in the modern world. The immersive environment of these schools provides ample opportunities for students to cultivate soft skills through daily interactions and structured activities [43].

Character education theory underscores the integration of moral values with contemporary educational strategies to equip students for global challenges. These initiatives foster ethical reasoning, discipline, and empathy, enabling students to internalize core values through immersive learning and real-life applications [44]. These initiatives integrate strengthened ethical reasoning, discipline, and empathy, enabling students to internalise core values through real-life applications. Furthermore, strengthening character education involves integrating contemporary educational strategies with traditional moral teachings. Digital learning platforms, collaborative problem-solving activities, and ethical decision-making simulations contribute to the strengthening of students' cognitive, emotional, and moral capacities. Research suggests that students engaged in well-structured character education programs demonstrate strengthened self-regulation, leadership skills, and prosocial behavior [45]. As education continues to evolve, strengthening character development remains a cornerstone in preparing students to become responsible, ethical, and socially conscious individuals in the 21st-century.

This study explores the progressive Islamic education model at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta. The novelty lies in the integration of a holistic character to accelerate multiple intelligences (IQ, EQ, SQ, AQ, and EPQ) as a synergistic solution for modern education challenges. Specifically, the research answers three questions: i) how does the implementation of progressive Islamic education revitalization respond to modern challenges? ii) how does the holistic model increase the multiple intelligence spectrum of students? and iii) how does this model strengthen students' Islamic character, resilience, and identity in an era of disruption?

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to examine the progressive Islamic education model: synergizing holistic character and multiple intelligences in boarding schools. Phenomenology was deemed the most appropriate approach to explore the lived experiences of teachers, students, and school leaders at MBS Pleret, Bantul, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Unlike a case study or ethnography, phenomenology emphasizes uncovering the essential meanings of progressive Islamic education rather than merely describing cultural contexts or generating new theories [46]. MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, was selected as the research site for four strategic reasons: i) the integration of religious and general curricula into a holistic framework combining formal schooling, *pesantren* traditions, and entrepreneurial training aligned with the sustainable development goals (SDGs); ii) its strong commitment to value-based innovation, character education, and multiple intelligences; iii) its recognition as a national reference model for Muhammadiyah schools; and iv) its rich empirical context for examining the responsiveness of progressive Islamic education to globalisation and digital transformation.

2.2. Participants

Participants were purposively selected to ensure the collection of rich and relevant data. The final sample consisted of 17 stakeholders: one director, one deputy director, four teachers, ten students, and one head of school administration. Inclusion criteria required direct involvement in the educational process, a minimum of two years of experience, and voluntary consent to participate. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their strategic roles and direct involvement in the progressive Islamic education model for synergizing character and multiple intelligences at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta. This ensured that data

reflected both everyday practices and the school's broader reform initiatives. Besides that, the study was categorised as low-risk educational research. All participants provided informed consent voluntarily, and their identities were anonymised throughout data collection and reporting.

2.3. Data collection

Data were collected using three primary techniques. First, semi-structured interviews lasting 60-90 minutes were conducted to capture in-depth perspectives on character formation and multiple intelligences. Second, participant observation was carried out intensively over four weeks, focusing on classroom instruction, dormitory routines, and religious activities to capture authentic educational practices. Third, document analysis was conducted on lesson plans, teaching schedules, and school reports to provide contextual validation. The integration of these three techniques ensured methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing both the credibility and depth of interpretation of the findings.

2.4. Data analysis and trustworthiness

Data analysis followed four phenomenological stages: epoche, reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis, supplemented by Miles and Huberman's interactive model and Creswell's six-step framework. Manual open coding was performed iteratively until conceptual saturation was achieved. Trustworthiness was reinforced through triangulation, member checking, audit trails, reflexive journaling, and peer debriefing with fellow researchers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study of the progressive Islamic education model at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta, yielded valuable insights into how the institution effectively cultivates students' character and multiple intelligences. The results indicate that learning is organized through a multifaceted approach synergizing general knowledge, soft skills, and Islamic studies, thereby promoting both cognitive and non-cognitive growth. The main findings are presented as:

3.1. Curriculum integration and holistic development

A cornerstone of the MBS Pleret Yogyakarta model is its integrated curriculum, which unifies Islamic and contemporary knowledge into a coherent learning experience. As the institution's director explained, *"Our curriculum is designed to balance Islamic knowledge and contemporary skills. We do not see these as separate entities but as complementary aspects of holistic education"* (interview, director, October 21, 2023). This vision is reflected in the daily schedule, where Qur'anic recitation is followed by mathematics or science classes, demonstrating that religious and general subjects are not dichotomised but interconnected in practice. A student confirmed this integration *"In the morning, we start with Qur'an recitation, then move on to science or math classes. It is not like religion is separate from other subjects; they are all connected in our learning"* (interview, student, October 22, 2023). This integrated framework supports the development of five key intelligences that collectively shape holistic student growth.

3.1.1. Spiritual quotient

Daily prayers, Qur'anic studies, and Sunnah practices cultivate spiritual awareness beyond ritual formalism. As one Islamic studies teacher emphasised, *"We do not just teach Islamic rituals; we emphasise understanding the wisdom behind them. Our goal is to cultivate a deep, meaningful connection with Allah in our students' hearts"* (interview, teacher, October 25, 2023).

3.1.2. Emotional intelligence

Peer mentoring and community service initiatives foster empathy, collaboration, and leadership. The deputy director noted, *"Through our mentoring programs, students learn empathy, communication, and leadership skills. These are crucial for their personal growth and future roles in society"* (interview, deputy director, October 24, 2023).

3.1.3. Intellectual intelligence

Academic programs stress critical thinking and problem-solving rather than rote learning. A science teacher explained, *"We encourage students to question, explore, and apply scientific concepts to real-world problems. It is not just about memorising facts but understanding how to use knowledge creatively"* (interview, teacher, October 23, 2023).

3.1.4. Adversity quotient

Outdoor camps and homeland scouts (*hizbul wathan*) training nurture resilience and perseverance. A student leader remarked, “*The Hizbul Wathan program taught me to face difficulties head-on. I have learned that obstacles are growth opportunities, not just problems to avoid*” (interview, student leader, October 18, 2023).

3.1.5. Entrepreneurial intelligence

Entrepreneurship projects allow students to practise innovation, marketing, and financial management. The program head stated, “*Our students run small businesses within the school. They learn financial management, marketing, and innovation-invaluable skills regardless of their future careers*” (interview, program head, October 26, 2023). The findings highlight that the integrated curriculum at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta systematically fosters multiple intelligences through both academic and non-academic activities. This approach directly addresses critiques of conventional *pesantren* models that often dichotomise religious and secular learning, leading to fragmented educational experiences. By contrast, MBS Pleret offers a progressive and holistic framework that equips students to be academically competent, spiritually grounded, emotionally intelligent, resilient, and entrepreneurially capable.

3.2. Character transformation and behavioral changes

The progressive Islamic education model at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta has brought clear transformations in students’ character, behavior, and worldview. Teachers observed that many students who once lacked confidence grew into responsible and empathetic individuals with strong moral values (interview, teacher, October 23, 2023). Positive behavioral changes were also noted across the school. Discipline problems declined, and students became more respectful toward teachers, staff, and visitors, showing greater awareness of moral (*adab*) in everyday life (interview, director, October 21, 2023).

Students further demonstrated the ability to apply moderate (*wasathiyah*) Islamic principles in their daily decision-making. This moderation was reflected not only in personal conduct but also in how they interacted with peers, teachers, and the wider community. They displayed openness to dialogue, tolerance toward differences, and confidence in articulating Islamic values without being rigid or exclusive. A graduating student remarked, “*Being a good Muslim does not mean isolation. We can live in modern society while remaining true to our values*” (interview, student, October 22, 2023). Such reflections show that students are capable of harmonising faith with modern demands, embodying a balance between spirituality and social engagement. Ultimately, this ability illustrates the success of the holistic model at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta in preparing young Muslims to navigate pluralistic societies with wisdom and integrity.

Despite its success, the program faces challenges such as balancing tradition with modernity, responding to parental expectations, and finding qualified teachers for both Islamic and general subjects (interviews, director, October 21, 2023). Yet, these challenges are matched by opportunities. MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta serves as a model of Islamic education reform, opens space for interfaith dialogue, and nurtures future leaders. Alumni reported that the leadership and ethical foundations gained at the school have been invaluable in their professional lives (interview, alumni student, December 3, 2023). In sum, the holistic model at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta, strengthens students’ SQ, EQ, IQ, and AQ, and also EPQ while shaping balanced characters who are prepared for the demands of contemporary life.

3.3. Contribution to character formation and resilience in the 21st-century

The contributions reveal a comprehensive educational model integrating general knowledge, soft skills, and Islamic studies, specifically designed to develop various aspects of students’ multiple intelligences. This approach demonstrates how MBS adapt their educational practices to foster more holistic development of their students’ capabilities. The integrated curriculum approach observed at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta, aligns with the concept of Islamisation of knowledge, which has been further developed by contemporary scholars in the field [47].

The findings expand our understanding of applying the multiple intelligences theory in Islamic education contexts. The MBS Pleret Yogyakarta model not only adopts Gardner’s concept of multiple intelligences but also expands and contextualizes it within the framework of progressive Islamic education. The development of five types of intelligences: SQ, EQ, IQ, AQ, EPQ, reflects a holistic approach combining Islamic values with contemporary educational needs. This integration resonates with recent calls for “transformative Islamic education” that synthesises religious and secular knowledge rather than merely juxtaposing them. The education model in MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta, exemplifies this synthesis, addressing ongoing challenges many Islamic schools face in moving beyond a dichotomous view of religious and secular education [48].

The inclusion of SQ in the educational model aligns with emerging research on the importance of spiritual development in education [49]. However, the MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta approach differs from

Western conceptualisations of SQ by grounding it firmly in Islamic principles, addressing a gap identified in recent studies on contextualising spiritual intelligence in Islamic educational settings [50]. The emphasis on AQ and EPQ is particularly noteworthy. Recent research has highlighted the importance of developing resilience and entrepreneurial skills in Islamic educational contexts. This approach addresses the ongoing critique that Islamic education often fails to prepare students for the practical challenges of the modern world [51].

The success of MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta in fostering ethical behavior and decision-making skills supports recent arguments that Islamic education should go beyond ritual and doctrine to focus on character formation [21]. This outcome aligns with contemporary articulations of Islamic education goals, which emphasise the development of moral character and ethical behavior as central aims. As reported in the findings, the challenge of balancing Islamic teachings with modern educational approaches remains a recurring theme in contemporary literature on Islamic education reform. The MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta model offers a potential solution to this challenge through its integrated approach. This balance is particularly evident in implementing moderate (*wasathiyah*) Islamic principles, aligning with recent calls to promote moderate Islam in educational contexts. The MBS, Pleret Yogyakarta approach demonstrates how moderation can be practically implemented in an educational setting, potentially addressing ongoing concerns about extremism in some Islamic educational institutions [24].

The integrated curriculum model at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta offers a valuable template for developing more holistic Islamic education curricula. This aligns with recent policy recommendations for reforming Islamic education systems to meet 21st-century demands [13]. The approach facilitates the simultaneous development of students' multiple intelligences, supporting recent research on the importance of a holistic approach in developing multiple intelligences. The focus on multiple intelligences aligns with recent calls for more holistic assessment practices in Islamic education, potentially leading to new assessment tools designed explicitly for holistic Islamic education.

The progressive Islamic education model implemented at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta represents a significant innovation in Islamic education, effectively addressing many challenges identified in the existing literature. This model offers a promising approach to revitalising Islamic education for the contemporary world, demonstrating that it is possible to prepare Muslim youth for 21st-century challenges while maintaining a strong Islamic identity. This balance between tradition and innovation is crucial for the future of Islamic education, as highlighted in recent scholarship [37]. As Islamic education continues to evolve in response to global changes, models like MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta offer valuable insights into possible paths forward, providing practical examples of balancing tradition with innovation in pursuit of comprehensive human development.

Significant differences emerge when compared to the private Islamic schools (PIS) in Patani, Southern Thailand. While many PIS schools maintain a dualistic structure that separates secular and religious content, the MBS Pleret model presents a unified framework. The Patani model still emphasizes rote memorisation and classical jurisprudence, often without integrating modern competencies or soft skills development [52]. In contrast, MBS Pleret applies moderate Islamic principles (*wasathiyah*) to support balanced character growth and adaptability in pluralistic societies [53].

The comparison between MBS Pleret in Indonesia and Islamic schools in Patani, Thailand, reveals clear distinctions in how each institution approaches the integration of knowledge, character formation, and student preparedness for the 21st-century. While both models aim to preserve Islamic identity, MBS Pleret emphasizes an integrated and holistic framework that cultivates multiple intelligences, ethical values, and global competencies. In contrast, Patani schools tend to maintain a dualistic curriculum, which often limits students' capacity to develop resilience, entrepreneurial skills, and intercultural engagement. Table 1 (see Appendix) provides a comparative overview of the key variables identified in this study. This comparison makes it clear that while Patani schools maintain strong religious traditions, their dualistic approach often limits students' holistic growth. In contrast, the MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta model integrates religious depth with modern competencies, producing graduates who are not only faithful to their Islamic identity but also resilient, globally competent, and prepared to contribute constructively to contemporary society.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the progressive Islamic education model at MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta. By synergizing a spiritual foundation into 21st-century competencies, an increased focus on the education model was successfully achieved, moving from conventional rote learning toward a multifaceted development path that significantly optimizes students' character and EPQ. Within such a synthesis, the emergence of graduates who are not only anchored in faith but also possessed of the pragmatic expertise and entrepreneurial mindset vital for global survival and economic autonomy is ensured.

The distinction in this research lies in its ability to mitigate educational fragmentation; the true potential of this framework is already rooted. Beyond religious boundaries, a flexible blueprint for educational institutions globally is realised through an emphasis on structured guidance and the cultivation of EPQ. With this inherent versatility, the potential of this model as a cross-cultural strategy for deepening moral integrity and promoting economic autonomy in various social fields is increasingly confirmed.

Although this study provides in-depth insights, its coverage is still focused on a single institution, requiring careful adaptation to a broader educational spectrum. However, from these limitations, strategic opportunities emerge for future research to conduct cross-cultural comparative analyses across various global boarding school models. Despite these limitations, an important foundation for the transformation of modern religious pedagogy has been established through this inquiry, one that is fundamentally inclusive and capable of forming an economically resilient generation through the mastery of EPQ.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank Universitas Ahmad Dahlan for supporting this work. Thank you also to LPPM Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. This research obtained formal institutional permission from the Research and Innovation Division of LPPM Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia, with Decree No. PD-127/SP3/LPPM-UAD/VIII/2023.

FUNDING INFORMATION

The author declares that this research was not funded by any party in the implementation process.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nvestigation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : **O** Writing - **O**riginal Draft

E : **E** Writing - **R**eview & **E**ditng

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the writing and preparation of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [S], upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Comparative distinctions between MBS Pleret (Indonesia) and PIS (Thailand)

No.	Aspect	MBS Pleret, Yogyakarta	PIS
1	Curriculum design	Integrated curriculum combining Islamic studies, sciences, soft skills, and entrepreneurship	Dualistic structure separating religious and secular subjects
2	Spiritual development	Focuses on meaningful worship, global values, and ethical application in daily life	Emphasis on rituals and jurisprudence with limited reflective practice
3	Multiple intelligences	Strengthens SQ, EQ, IQ, AQ, and EPQ systematically through structured programs	Primarily SQ, with less attention to EQ, AQ, and entrepreneurship
4	Character formation	Promotes discipline, empathy, leadership, and respect for all through mentoring and service	Character formation often limited to obedience and ritual performance
5	Resilience (AQ)	Builds perseverance via Hizbul Wathan, camps, and project-based challenges	A few structured activities to develop resilience
6	Entrepreneurship (EPQ)	Student-run businesses enhance innovation, marketing, and financial management skills	Minimal exposure to entrepreneurship or economic life skills
7	Global engagement	Encourages interfaith dialogue and intercultural understanding for pluralistic societies	Restricted engagement due to sociopolitical and cultural constraints
8	Educational outcome	Produces balanced, resilient, and innovative graduates rooted in Islamic identity	Produces graduates with strong faith identity but fragmented competencies

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