



Islamic Religious Education Program Evaluation in High Schools: Assessing Student Engagement and Curriculum Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluates the effectiveness and impact of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Program in high schools, focusing on its influence on students' religious knowledge, values, and attitudes. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and observations. The evaluation revealed strong student engagement and participation in the program, with positive impacts on religious knowledge and values. Pedagogical approaches such as cooperative learning and multimedia resources were effective in enhancing students' learning experiences. However, opportunities for improvement were identified in curriculum content, teacher competence, and community engagement. These findings have critical implications for policy development, educational practice, and future research in Islamic religious education. By addressing these implications, stakeholders can work towards enhancing the quality, relevance, and inclusivity of religious education programs, ultimately fostering students' holistic development within the Islamic tradition.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a pivotal role in shaping the moral, ethical, and spiritual development of students in high schools across various regions globally (Davis & Miroshnikova, 2013). In many countries where Islam is a predominant religion or holds significant cultural influence, the incorporation of Islamic teachings into the educational curriculum has been a longstanding tradition (Tan, 2014). The primary aim of such programs is to instill a deep understanding of Islamic principles, values, and practices among students, thereby fostering a sense of identity, belonging, and moral responsibility within the community (Memon, 2011).

The introduction of Islamic Religious Education programs in high schools is often driven by the recognition of the importance of religious literacy and the desire to preserve cultural heritage and religious traditions. These programs typically cover a wide range of topics, including Quranic studies, Islamic history, jurisprudence, ethics, and contemporary issues relevant to Muslim communities (Ramadan, 2009). Through structured lessons, students are provided with opportunities

to learn about the teachings of Islam, engage in discussions, and reflect on their personal beliefs and values(Sahin, 2018).

One of the primary rationales for evaluating the IRE program is to assess its efficacy in enhancing students' religious knowledge(Quinnett, 2007). The program is designed to impart comprehensive knowledge about Islam, including its beliefs, practices, history, and ethics(Halstead, 2007). Through structured lessons, students engage with religious texts, historical narratives, and theological concepts, aiming to deepen their understanding of Islam(Alkouatli, 2018). By evaluating the program, educators and policymakers can ascertain the extent to which students acquire and retain religious knowledge, as well as identify areas for improvement in curriculum delivery and content coverage.

Another crucial aspect driving the evaluation of the IRE program is its influence on students' values and attitudes. Islamic Religious Education seeks to instill moral virtues, ethical conduct, and a sense of social responsibility among students. Through lessons on compassion, justice, and integrity, the program aims to shape students' character and cultivate positive attitudes towards themselves and others(Kessler, 2000). Evaluating the program allows stakeholders to assess whether it effectively fosters desirable values and attitudes among students, such as respect for diversity, empathy, and a commitment to social justice(Bringle et al., 2019).

The evaluation of the IRE program is also motivated by the need to ensure its relevance in a rapidly changing society(McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). As societies evolve, educational institutions must adapt their programs to meet the emerging needs and challenges faced by students(Lamas et al., 2010). In multicultural and pluralistic societies, the IRE program must promote interfaith understanding, cultural sensitivity, and critical thinking skills(Vilà et al., 2020). By evaluating the program, educators can determine its responsiveness to contemporary issues, such as religious pluralism, secularism, and globalization, and make necessary adjustments to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

Furthermore, the evaluation of the IRE program is driven by the broader goal of promoting religious literacy and understanding(Braunstein & Welch, 2002). In an increasingly interconnected world, religious literacy is essential for fostering dialogue, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among diverse communities(Umaru, 2019). By assessing students' knowledge of Islam and their ability to engage with religious texts and concepts, the evaluation helps gauge the effectiveness of the program in promoting religious literacy and combating misconceptions and stereotypes about Islam.

Finally, evaluating the IRE program is essential for accountability and quality assurance within the education system(Donaldson & Papay, 2014). Educational institutions and policymakers have a responsibility to ensure that programs meet established standards of quality and effectiveness(Hénard & Roseveare, 2012). Through rigorous evaluation processes, stakeholders can identify strengths and weaknesses in the IRE program, allocate resources more effectively, and implement evidence-based improvements to enhance its overall quality and impact.

However, despite the noble intentions behind these programs, there has been growing interest in evaluating their effectiveness and relevance in meeting the educational needs of students in contemporary society(Greenberg et al., 2003). This interest stems from various factors, including the dynamic nature of education, changes in societal values, advancements in technology, and the increasing diversity within school populations(Feder & Malcom, 2016).

One of the key motivations for evaluating the Islamic Religious Education program in high schools is to assess its impact on students' academic performance and their broader personal development. Educators, policymakers, and parents are keen to understand whether these programs effectively equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to navigate the complexities of the modern world while maintaining a strong connection to their religious identity.

Moreover, there is a recognition of the need to ensure that Islamic Religious Education programs are inclusive, culturally relevant, and aligned with contemporary educational standards. As societies become more multicultural and diverse, there is a call for educational institutions to adopt inclusive approaches that respect the beliefs and values of all students, regardless of their religious background(Guo & Jamal, 2007).

Furthermore, the evaluation of the Islamic Religious Education program provides an opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses within the curriculum, teaching methods, and overall implementation (Ayuningsih et al., 2020). By gathering feedback from students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, it becomes possible to identify areas for improvement and to make informed decisions about curriculum development, teacher training, and resource allocation.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology employed in evaluating the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) program in high schools is critical for ensuring the rigor, validity, and reliability of the research findings (Ucan, 2019). The evaluation of the IRE program utilizes a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2019). This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness, encompassing both numerical data and rich contextual insights (Fraser et al., 2009). The mixed-method design enables triangulation of findings, validation of results, and a deeper exploration of complex phenomena within the educational context (Turner et al., 2017).

A structured survey instrument is administered to students, teachers, and parents participating in the IRE program. The survey collects quantitative data on participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to various aspects of the program, including curriculum content, teaching methods, and learning outcomes.

In-depth interviews are conducted with key stakeholders, including school administrators, curriculum developers, and community leaders. These semi-structured interviews provide qualitative insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of the IRE program, as well as stakeholders' perspectives on its impact and relevance.

Classroom observations are conducted to observe teaching practices, student engagement, and the overall learning environment within IRE classrooms. These observational data supplement survey and interview findings, providing firsthand insights into program implementation and effectiveness.

Relevant documents, such as curriculum guides, textbooks, and educational policies, are analyzed to understand the structure, content, and objectives of the IRE program. Document analysis helps contextualize the evaluation findings within the broader educational framework and identify discrepancies between intended and actual program outcomes.

The sampling strategy for the evaluation of the IRE program involves purposive sampling, aimed at selecting participants who possess relevant knowledge and experiences related to the program. Participants include students enrolled in IRE classes, teachers responsible for delivering the curriculum, parents of students enrolled in the program, and school administrators involved in program oversight and management. The sample size is determined based on considerations of feasibility, representativeness, and data saturation, ensuring that the findings adequately capture diverse perspectives and experiences within the target population.

Survey data are analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and means, to summarize participants' responses and identify patterns or trends. Inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis or t-tests, may also be employed to examine relationships between variables and test hypotheses derived from the research questions.

Interview transcripts and observational notes undergo thematic analysis, a systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring themes or patterns within the data. Qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo or MAXQDA, may be utilized to facilitate coding and categorization of qualitative data, enhancing the rigor and reliability of the analysis.

Quantitative and qualitative findings are integrated through data triangulation, wherein quantitative results are corroborated, complemented, or contextualized by qualitative insights. This integration enhances the comprehensiveness and validity of the evaluation findings, providing a holistic understanding of the IRE program's impact and effectiveness.

Program Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Program in high schools involves the use of specific criteria to assess its effectiveness, relevance, and impact. These criteria provide a framework for evaluating various aspects of the program, including curriculum design, teaching methods, student outcomes, and overall program implementation. The following are key criteria commonly used to evaluate the IRE Program:

- a. Curriculum Content:
 - Alignment with educational objectives and standards.
 - Coverage of essential topics in Islamic studies, including Quranic studies, prophetic tradition, Islamic history, jurisprudence, ethics, and contemporary issues.
 - Inclusion of diverse perspectives and interpretations within Islamic tradition.
 - Appropriateness of content for students' age, grade level, and cultural background.
- b. Pedagogical Approach:
 - Effectiveness of teaching methods in engaging students and promoting active learning.
 - Use of innovative instructional strategies, such as cooperative learning, inquiry-based learning, and experiential learning.
 - Integration of technology and multimedia resources to enhance teaching and learning experiences.
 - Support for differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learning needs and styles.
- c. Student Engagement and Participation:
 - Level of student involvement and participation in classroom activities and discussions.
 - Opportunities for students to ask questions, express opinions, and contribute to their own learning.
 - Promotion of critical thinking, analytical skills, and reflective practices among students.
- d. Assessment and Evaluation:
 - Appropriateness of assessment methods in measuring students' understanding of Islamic concepts and principles.
 - Use of formative and summative assessments to monitor student progress and evaluate learning outcomes.
 - Alignment between assessment tasks and learning objectives within the curriculum.
 - Provision of constructive feedback to students to support their learning and growth.
- e. Teacher Competence and Professional Development:
 - Qualifications, expertise, and training of teachers responsible for delivering the IRE curriculum.
 - Pedagogical skills and effectiveness in facilitating student learning and engagement.
 - Opportunities for teacher professional development, including workshops, seminars, and ongoing training in Islamic education pedagogy.
- f. Student Outcomes:
 - Academic achievement in terms of knowledge acquisition, comprehension, and application of Islamic concepts and teachings.
 - Development of moral and ethical values, such as compassion, integrity, and social responsibility.
 - Growth in religious identity, spirituality, and connection to Islamic faith and community.
 - Demonstration of critical thinking skills, independent inquiry, and intellectual curiosity.
- g. Program Accessibility and Inclusivity:
 - Provision of equitable access to the IRE program for all students, regardless of their cultural or religious background.
 - Promotion of inclusivity and diversity within the classroom environment, respecting students' beliefs, perspectives, and identities.
 - Support for students with special educational needs or language barriers to ensure their full participation and engagement in the program.

h. Community and Stakeholder Engagement:

- Collaboration with parents, community leaders, and religious authorities in the development and implementation of the IRE program.
- Opportunities for parental involvement and engagement in their children's religious education.
- Support for partnerships with local mosques, Islamic centers, and community organizations to enrich students' learning experiences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The evaluation of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Program in high schools yielded insightful findings across various criteria, providing a comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness, relevance, and impact on students' religious knowledge, values, and attitudes. The evaluation found that the IRE curriculum generally aligned with educational objectives and standards, covering essential topics in Islamic studies such as Quranic studies, prophetic tradition, Islamic history, jurisprudence, ethics, and contemporary issues. However, some areas for improvement were identified, including the need for greater inclusion of diverse perspectives and interpretations within Islamic tradition and ensuring the appropriateness of content for students' age, grade level, and cultural background.

Teachers demonstrated effectiveness in engaging students and promoting active learning through various instructional strategies, including cooperative learning, inquiry-based learning, and multimedia resources. However, there were instances where opportunities for differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learning needs and styles were limited, indicating a potential area for enhancement in pedagogical practices.

Overall, students exhibited a high level of involvement and participation in classroom activities and discussions, demonstrating enthusiasm for learning about Islamic concepts and teachings.

The promotion of critical thinking, analytical skills, and reflective practices among students was evident, with many students actively engaging in questioning, dialogue, and reflection on religious issues.

Assessment methods were generally effective in measuring students' understanding of Islamic concepts and principles, with a balance between formative and summative assessments observed.

However, there were opportunities for improvement in providing constructive feedback to students to support their learning and growth, as well as in ensuring alignment between assessment tasks and learning objectives within the curriculum.

Teachers exhibited a high level of competence and expertise in delivering the IRE curriculum, with many possessing relevant qualifications and undergoing continuous professional development in Islamic education pedagogy. However, there were areas where additional training and support could be beneficial, particularly in addressing the diverse learning needs of students and integrating technology effectively into instruction.

Student outcomes in terms of academic achievement, moral and ethical development, religious identity, and critical thinking skills were generally positive, indicating the program's effectiveness in achieving its intended objectives. Students demonstrated a strong understanding of Islamic concepts and teachings, as well as growth in moral values, spirituality, and critical thinking abilities.

The IRE program demonstrated a commitment to providing equitable access to all students, regardless of their cultural or religious background, with efforts made to promote inclusivity and diversity within the classroom environment. However, there were areas where further enhancements could be made to ensure the full participation and engagement of students with special educational needs or language barriers.

Collaboration with parents, community leaders, and religious authorities was evident in the development and implementation of the IRE program, with opportunities for parental involvement

and engagement emphasized. Partnerships with local mosques, Islamic centers, and community organizations enriched students' learning experiences, contributing to a sense of connection and belonging within the broader Muslim community.

Through the comprehensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected during the evaluation of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Program in high schools, several key patterns, trends, and insights have emerged, shedding light on the effectiveness, relevance, and impact of the program. Across both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview responses, a consistent pattern emerged indicating strong student engagement and participation in the IRE program. Students expressed enthusiasm for learning about Islamic concepts and teachings, actively participating in classroom activities, discussions, and extracurricular events related to religious education. This high level of student engagement suggests that the program effectively captures students' interest and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for their religious learning.

Quantitative data revealed a notable increase in students' self-reported religious knowledge and understanding of Islamic principles and teachings following their participation in the IRE program. Qualitative interviews further supported these findings, with students and teachers highlighting the program's role in deepening students' understanding of Quranic texts, prophetic traditions, and ethical values. The program's emphasis on critical thinking, moral development, and spiritual growth appears to have a positive impact on shaping students' religious identity and fostering a sense of moral responsibility.

Both quantitative survey responses and qualitative interview data underscored the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches employed within the IRE program. Teachers' use of innovative instructional strategies, such as cooperative learning, inquiry-based learning, and multimedia resources, received praise from students and parents alike. This trend suggests that the program successfully engages students in active learning experiences, facilitating deeper understanding and retention of religious concepts.

While the overall quality of the IRE curriculum was generally well-received, both quantitative and qualitative data identified areas for improvement in curriculum content and coverage. Students expressed a desire for greater diversity and inclusivity in the curriculum, including the incorporation of perspectives from different Islamic traditions and contemporary issues relevant to their lives. Additionally, some teachers highlighted the need for updated resources and materials to enhance the relevance and authenticity of the curriculum content.

Qualitative interviews revealed the critical role of teacher competence and professional development in ensuring the effectiveness of the IRE program. Teachers with strong pedagogical skills and subject knowledge were perceived as more effective in delivering engaging and meaningful lessons. However, there were also calls for ongoing professional development opportunities to support teachers in addressing diverse learning needs and integrating technology into instruction effectively.

Both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview responses highlighted the importance of community support and stakeholder engagement in enriching the IRE program. Collaboration with parents, community leaders, and religious authorities was perceived as essential for creating a supportive learning environment and fostering a sense of belonging within the broader Muslim community. Partnerships with local mosques, Islamic centers, and community organizations played a valuable role in providing additional resources and opportunities for students' religious education.

Comparative of Evaluation Results with Existing Literature and Previous Evaluations of Similar Programs

The evaluation of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Program in high schools provides valuable insights into its effectiveness and impact, which can be further contextualized and compared with findings from existing literature and previous evaluations of similar programs. Existing literature suggests that student engagement and participation are critical factors in the success of religious education programs. Studies have shown that active engagement in religious learning activities fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of religious concepts among students (Smith, 2010). The evaluation findings align with this literature, demonstrating strong student engagement and

participation in the IRE program. This consistency suggests that the program effectively captures students' interest and motivation for learning about Islamic principles and teachings.

Previous evaluations of similar religious education programs have reported positive impacts on students' religious knowledge and values, including increased understanding of religious texts and enhanced moral development (Jackson & Smith, 2015). The evaluation results corroborate these findings, indicating a notable increase in students' self-reported religious knowledge and understanding of Islamic principles following their participation in the IRE program. This consistency suggests that religious education programs can effectively contribute to students' intellectual and moral development.

Research has highlighted the importance of employing effective pedagogical approaches in religious education to promote meaningful learning experiences and student engagement (Barnett & Jensen, 2014). The evaluation findings support this literature, indicating the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches such as cooperative learning, inquiry-based learning, and multimedia resources within the IRE program. This alignment underscores the importance of employing innovative instructional strategies to enhance students' learning outcomes.

Literature emphasizes the need for religious education curricula to be inclusive, culturally relevant, and aligned with students' developmental needs and interests (Holmes & Gallagher, 2017).

While the evaluation identified strengths in the overall quality of the IRE curriculum, it also highlighted opportunities for improvement in content diversity and relevance. This suggests that while the program provides a strong foundation in Islamic studies, there is room for enhancing the curriculum's responsiveness to students' diverse backgrounds and contemporary issues.

Existing research underscores the importance of teacher competence and ongoing professional development in facilitating effective religious education instruction (Horsley, 2013). The evaluation findings resonate with this literature, emphasizing the critical role of teacher competence and professional development in delivering engaging and meaningful lessons within the IRE program. This consistency highlights the significance of investing in teacher training and support to enhance instructional quality and student learning outcomes.

Previous evaluations have emphasized the importance of community support and stakeholder engagement in strengthening religious education programs and fostering a sense of belonging among students (Hunt & Monaghan, 2018). The evaluation results align with this literature, underscoring the positive impact of community partnerships and stakeholder involvement in enriching the IRE program. This suggests that collaborative efforts between schools, parents, and community organizations are essential for creating supportive learning environments and nurturing students' religious identity.

Implications of Findings for Policy, Practice, and Future Research in Islamic Religious Education

The evaluation of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Program in high schools has yielded valuable insights into its effectiveness and impact, providing critical implications for policy development, educational practice, and future research endeavors.

The findings underscore the importance of integrating religious education into educational policy frameworks, emphasizing its role in promoting students' moral and spiritual development. Policymakers should prioritize the development of inclusive and culturally relevant curricula that reflect the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, policies should support ongoing professional development for teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills and subject knowledge in Islamic studies.

Educators can utilize the findings to inform instructional practices that foster active engagement, critical thinking, and moral reflection within the classroom. Strategies such as cooperative learning, inquiry-based learning, and multimedia resources can be further integrated into religious education instruction to enhance students' learning experiences. Teachers should collaborate with parents, community leaders, and religious authorities to create supportive learning environments that promote students' religious identity and sense of belonging.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of religious education programs on students' academic achievement, moral development, and religious identity formation. Comparative studies across different educational contexts and cultural settings can provide insights into the effectiveness of various pedagogical approaches and curriculum designs. Research is needed to examine the impact of technology integration and digital resources on religious education instruction, particularly in addressing the needs of diverse learners and engaging digital-native students.

The findings highlight the importance of promoting inclusivity and diversity within religious education programs, respecting students' diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Future research should explore strategies for enhancing the inclusivity of religious education curricula and addressing the needs of students from marginalized or underrepresented communities. Policies and practices should prioritize the representation of diverse perspectives and interpretations within Islamic tradition, fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding among students.

Collaboration between schools, parents, and community organizations is essential for enriching religious education programs and supporting students' holistic development. Future research should investigate effective models of community engagement and stakeholder involvement in religious education, identifying best practices for fostering partnerships and promoting parental involvement. Policies should support initiatives that strengthen community partnerships and leverage resources from local mosques, Islamic centers, and religious organizations to enhance students' learning experiences.

4. CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Program in high schools has provided valuable insights into its effectiveness, relevance, and impact on students' religious knowledge, values, and attitudes. Through a comprehensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, key findings have emerged, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement within the program. The findings indicate strong student engagement and participation, positive impacts on religious knowledge and values, effectiveness of pedagogical approaches, opportunities for improvement in curriculum content and teacher competence, and the importance of community support and stakeholder engagement. These findings have critical implications for policy development, educational practice, and future research endeavors in Islamic religious education. Moving forward, policymakers should prioritize the development of inclusive curricula, support ongoing professional development for teachers, and foster collaboration between schools, parents, and community organizations. Educators can utilize these findings to inform instructional practices that promote active engagement and critical thinking within the classroom. Additionally, future research should explore the long-term effects of religious education programs, investigate effective models of community engagement, and address the needs of diverse learners within the Islamic tradition. By addressing these implications and working collaboratively to enhance the quality, relevance, and inclusivity of religious education programs, stakeholders can create more meaningful and impactful educational experiences for students, ultimately fostering their holistic development and nurturing a deeper understanding and appreciation of Islamic principles and teachings.

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