

Integrating Islamic Values and Individual Characteristics to Overcome Learning Difficulties in Islamic boarding schools

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ABSTRACT. Learning difficulties in Islamic boarding schools remain a complex and persistent issue, particularly due to the integration of religious and general education systems, which create cognitive, emotional, and social challenges for students as they adapt to intensive learning environments. This study aims to examine the types of learning difficulties students experience, analyze the implementation of Islamic approaches to address these challenges, and evaluate the relationship between individual characteristics and the effectiveness of these interventions within the boarding school context. The research employed a qualitative case study design at Islamic Boarding School Syamsul'ulum, Sukabumi, Indonesia, using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, with data analyzed through thematic analysis and triangulation to ensure credibility and contextual validity. The findings reveal that learning difficulties are multidimensional, including cognitive barriers in understanding classical Islamic texts, weak memorization and retention, low intrinsic motivation, and emotional instability such as homesickness, while Islamic approaches such as moral guidance (*man'izhab hasanah*), spiritual reinforcement, Qur'an-based contextual teaching, and *ukhawah* culture function as structured psycho-spiritual interventions that enhance emotional regulation, resilience, and learning engagement. These findings imply that educational institutions, particularly Islamic boarding schools, should adopt an integrative educational model that aligns spiritual practices with students' individual characteristics and adaptive instructional strategies to effectively address learning difficulties and improve both academic and character development outcomes.

Keywords: *Learning difficulties, Islamic boarding schools, Islamic values, individual characteristics, psycho-spiritual intervention*



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INTRODUCTION

Learning difficulties remain a persistent issue across educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools. Although Islamic boarding schools are widely recognized for emphasizing spirituality and character formation, Students continue to encounter various academic barriers. The integration of religious sciences, classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) is a distinctive feature of Islamic boarding school education. However, this integration often creates cognitive and academic challenges for students, particularly due to the complexity of the materials and the intensity of the learning system. Learning difficulties in Islamic boarding schools are therefore

multidimensional, encompassing limitations in comprehension, concentration, memorization, and psychosocial adaptation (Pulungan et al., 2025; Rabbani et al., 2025). In general, educational discourse, learning difficulties are defined as conditions in which students fail to achieve expected academic outcomes despite adequate instructional services (Şanal et al., 2025). These difficulties may originate from internal factors such as cognitive limitations, low motivation, and psychological distress, as well as external factors including teaching strategies and environmental influences (Snowling et al., 2022). Within Islamic boarding schools, such challenges are intensified by the demand to master Arabic grammar and traditional instructional methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan* (Nikmatullah et al., 2025; Walian et al., 2025).

Understanding this complexity requires a critical review of how prior research has conceptualized learning difficulties across different perspectives. Existing studies have addressed learning difficulties from several perspectives. Educational psychology research explains barriers through cognitive processing and reading science frameworks (Snowling et al., 2022), while pedagogical studies emphasize learning styles and instructional adaptation (Xie et al., 2022). Other scholars highlight the positive role of spirituality in enhancing resilience and motivation (Imron et al., 2023; Captari et al., 2023). Within Islamic education, the concept of *ta'dib* underscores the importance of aligning education with students' readiness and character (Fitryansyah, 2024), and holistic education integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions (Yanmei et al., 2024). However, previous studies tend to examine these dimensions separately. Research on Islamic boarding schools often discusses character formation or traditional pedagogy (Jallow, 2023; Islamic et al., 2024), while studies on learning difficulties focus predominantly on cognitive or instructional aspects (Prior, 2022; Zidan, 2023). What has not been sufficiently explored is how Islamic spiritual approaches can be systematically integrated with students' individual characteristics as a strategic intervention to overcome learning difficulties in Islamic boarding schools. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive and contextually grounded model.

This study seeks to address this gap by integrating three analytical lenses: learning difficulties theory (Zidan, 2023), Students' individual characteristics (Mahmud et al., 2022), and institutional strategy through SWOT analysis (Supriyadi et al., 2025), within an Islamic educational framework. The specific purpose of this paper is to examine how Islamic values such as *tawakal* (trust in God), sincerity, patience, and *ukhuwah* function not merely as moral teachings but as adaptive coping and managerial strategies tailored to students' diverse characteristics. Unlike previous studies that focus either on psychological factors or spiritual discourse alone, this research contributes to the literature by integrating spirituality, individuality, and institutional management into a unified analytical framework.

Accordingly, this study confirms that the effectiveness of Islamic approaches in overcoming learning difficulties depends on their alignment with students' individual characteristics and the institutional strengths of Islamic boarding schools. The research explores and tests this argument through a qualitative case study by identifying types of learning difficulties, analyzing their relationship with individual characteristics, and evaluating supporting and inhibiting factors in implementation. By positioning this inquiry at the intersection of educational psychology, Islamic pedagogy, and educational management, the study offers a novel contribution by integrating psycho-spiritual, individual, and institutional dimensions into a unified analytical framework. Practically, the findings provide strategic guidance for educators and Islamic boarding school managers to design adaptive, value-based interventions that are responsive to students' diverse characteristics.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To explore in depth the phenomenon of students' learning difficulties and the implementation of Islamic approaches at Islamic boarding schools Syamsul'ulum, Sukabumi City, West Java, Indonesia. The research was conducted over a four-month period from June to October

2025. A qualitative case study was selected because the study aims to understand a complex social and educational phenomenon within its real-life context. Creswell & Poth (2018) qualitative research is appropriate for examining participants' lived experiences and subjective meanings, while Yin (2019) emphasizes that case studies enable comprehensive investigation of contextualized phenomena using multiple data sources. In this study, the Islamic boarding schools was positioned not only as an educational institution but also as a socio-religious ecosystem influencing students' academic and spiritual development.

The researcher acted as the primary research instrument, directly engaging with participants and the research setting. The presence of the researcher in the field involved prolonged engagement through participation in daily academic and religious activities to gain contextual understanding. The research subjects consisted of students experiencing learning difficulties, while informants included *kyai*, *ustaz/ustazah*, academic coordinators, and dormitory supervisors. Participants were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus, particularly those directly involved in academic mentoring and the implementation of Islamic educational practices. This purposive sampling ensured that the data obtained were information-rich and aligned with the study objectives.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interview guides were developed based on the theoretical framework of learning difficulties (Naz et al., 2022; Zidan, 2023), individual characteristics (Mahmud et al., 2022), and Islamic educational values. Interviews explored participants' experiences regarding types of learning difficulties, coping strategies, and perceptions of Islamic approaches implemented in the Islamic boarding schools. Participant observation was conducted during classroom instruction, Qur'an memorization sessions, and daily religious activities such as dhikr and congregational prayers to capture authentic behavioral patterns and interactions. Field notes were systematically recorded to document contextual dynamics. Document analysis included reviewing students' academic records, curriculum documents, mentoring reports, and institutional guidelines to corroborate findings and strengthen data triangulation (Schlunegger et al., 2024).

The data analysis employed thematic analysis (Morgan, 2022). The process began with data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts and field notes, followed by initial coding to identify meaningful units of data. Codes were then categorized into broader themes representing patterns of learning difficulties, individual characteristics, and Islamic intervention strategies. Themes were reviewed, refined, and interpreted in relation to existing theoretical frameworks to ensure analytical rigor. The integration of multiple data sources enabled analytical triangulation, enhancing the reliability of interpretations.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024). Credibility was strengthened through member checking, where participants reviewed interview summaries to confirm accuracy. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation enhanced contextual validity. Peer debriefing was conducted with fellow researchers to minimize subjective bias in data interpretation. Transferability was addressed by providing thick descriptions of the research context, while dependability and confirmability were ensured through maintaining an audit trail of research procedures, field notes, and analytic decisions. Through these systematic procedures, the research method demonstrates validity and reliability in presenting trustworthy findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the research findings concisely while providing sufficient empirical evidence from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The findings are organized according to the four research objectives and are followed by proper interpretation grounded in relevant theoretical perspectives.

Types of Learning Difficulties Based on Students' Individual Characteristics

Data from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis at Islamic boarding schools Syamsul'ulum show that learning difficulties among students are diverse and closely related to individual characteristics such as learning style, educational background, motivation, and psychological readiness.

Table 1. Types of Learning Difficulties and Dominant Individual Characteristics

No.	Type of Learning Difficulty	Dominant Individual Characteristics	Empirical Indications
1.	Difficulty understanding classical Islamic texts and Arabic grammar	Limited prior religious education; visual/auditory learners without instructional variation	Slow comprehension, frequent errors in <i>nabwu-sborof</i> analysis
2.	Weak memorization retention (<i>Qur'an/nadbom</i>)	Extrinsic motivation; lack of consistent <i>muraja'ab</i>	Rapid forgetting, inconsistent recitation fluency
3.	Difficulty maintaining attention	<i>Kinesthetic</i> learning style; homesickness among new students	Easily distracted, passive classroom participation
4.	Low learning motivation	Limited family support; unclear academic goals	Decreased task completion, minimal initiative
5.	Social maladaptation and disruptive behaviour	Poor prior socialization; emotional stress	Talking during class, withdrawal, absenteeism

Note: All data was obtained from interviews, observations, and documents.

Several first-year students admitted difficulty in understanding classical Islamic texts. One student stated:

"When the ustaẓ reads directly from the classical Islamic texts without translation, I struggle because I never studied nabwu deeply before." (Interview, June 2025)

An ustaẓ confirmed:

"Students from general school backgrounds need longer adaptation because their Arabic foundation is limited." (Interview, July 2025)

Regarding memorization, another student explained:

"If I memorize only for deposit, I easily forget it after a few days." (Interview, August 2025)

Teachers also noted that students with intrinsic motivation demonstrate stronger memorization retention.

During *bandongan* sessions, some students appeared passive, frequently asking peers for clarification. In *tasmi'* sessions, several students hesitated and required prompting. New students were observed looking distracted or emotionally withdrawn, particularly in the first months of residence.

Academic score records show lower average results in Arabic grammar among students from non-madrasah backgrounds. Memorization logs indicate fluctuating progress among students who do not perform consistent *muraja'ab*. Attendance and discipline records also reveal minor disruptions predominantly among first-semester students.

Table 1 and the triangulated data confirm that learning difficulties are influenced by internal predispositions rather than solely by instructional factors. Students lacking foundational schemas in Arabic experience greater difficulty in comprehending classical Islamic texts, supporting Schema Theory that prior knowledge determines new information processing.

Students driven mainly by extrinsic motivation exhibit weaker memorization retention, reinforcing Self-Determination Theory that intrinsic motivation enhances persistence and depth of learning. Emotional instability, particularly homesickness, also reduces concentration, confirming

that cognitive performance is inseparable from affective conditions. Therefore, learning difficulties in Islamic boarding schools are multidimensional phenomena shaped by cognitive, emotional, and social variables.

Implementation of the Islamic Religious Approach

The Islamic boarding schools implements several structured and non-structured Islamic approaches at moral, spiritual, and pedagogical levels.

Table 2. Forms of Islamic Approach and Their Educational Functions

No.	Islamic Approach	Practical Form	Observed Educational Function
1.	Moral guidance (<i>mau'izhah hasanah</i>)	Regular advice from <i>kyai/ustaz</i> ; structured character-building sessions (discipline reinforcement, responsibility training, sincerity (<i>ikhlas</i>), and patience (<i>sabr</i>) development)	Strengthens self-discipline, responsibility, resilience, and moral awareness
2.	Spiritual reinforcement	<i>Tabajjud, dhuha, dhikr, muhasabah</i>	Reduces anxiety; increases emotional stability
3.	<i>Qur'an-</i> and Hadith-based contextual teaching	Integration of scriptural values into lesson explanations and real-life problem contexts	Deepens meaning-making, intrinsic motivation, and value internalization
4.	Brotherhood (<i>ukhuwah</i>) culture	Peer mentoring, collaborative study groups, dormitory-based learning assistance, communal worship (congregational prayers), and social service activities (mutual cooperation)	Enhances sense of belonging, social support, cooperation, and adaptive social behavior

Note: All data was obtained from interviews, observations, and documents.

A *kyai* explained:

"We teach patience and sincerity first. If the heart is strong, learning becomes easier." (Interview, July 2025)

A student shared:

"After *tabajjud* and *dhikr*, I feel calmer and more confident to follow lessons." (Interview, August 2025)

An *ustaz* stated that *integrating Qur'anic verses into lessons makes students "understand the deeper meaning of knowledge."* (Interview, September 2025)

Based on observed regular congregational prayers, night prayers, and structured *dhikr* sessions. Weekly *mau'izhah hasanah* sessions were attended attentively. Peer mentoring among senior and junior students was visible in dormitory learning activities.

The Islamic boarding schools daily schedule includes mandatory congregational worship and spiritual routines. Curriculum documents explicitly integrate character development objectives alongside academic targets.

The Islamic approach functions as a psycho-spiritual intervention rather than merely doctrinal instruction. Spiritual practices provide emotional regulation that reduces stress and enhances focus.

The integration of Qur'anic values into subject explanations promotes meaningful learning. When knowledge is connected to spiritual purpose, students show deeper engagement and intrinsic motivation. Thus, the Islamic approach supports both affective stabilization and cognitive reinforcement.

Relationship Between Individual Characteristics and Effectiveness of the Islamic Approach

The findings reveal that the effectiveness of Islamic interventions depends significantly on alignment with students' personal characteristics.

Learning Style Adaptation:

An *ustaz* explained:

"Students who are strong in listening improve faster when we repeat the recitation several times. But those who like to move or write need more active tasks." (Interview, August 2025).

A kinesthetic learner stated:

"I understand fiqh better when the ustaz asks us to practice directly, not just listen." (Interview, September 2025)

Meanwhile, a visual learner reported:

"When the lesson is written clearly on the board with diagrams, I can follow the explanation more easily." (Interview, October 2025)

During *tasmi'* sessions, auditory learners showed smoother memorization performance after repetitive recitation. In classes where teachers added writing exercises or practical demonstrations, kinesthetic learners became more engaged and attentive. Visual structuring of material on the whiteboard reduced passive behavior among several students who were previously less responsive.

Lesson plans from several *ustaz* show gradual incorporation of varied teaching methods, including structured board summaries and practice-based *fiqh* demonstrations. Comparative assessment records indicate moderate improvement in comprehension scores after method variation was implemented.

These findings confirm that adaptation to learning styles enhances the effectiveness of Islamic teaching. When religious values are combined with varied instructional strategies, comprehension increases substantially. This supports differentiated instruction principles and reinforces that Islamic approaches should not remain methodologically static.

Motivation and Spiritual Reinforcement:

A student with previously low academic performance stated:

"I used to feel I was not capable. After regular advice from the kyai and joining tabajjud prayers, I felt more confident and tried harder." (Interview, July 2025)

An *ustaz* added:

"We see changes in students who actively participate in spiritual routines. Their discipline and motivation usually improve." (Interview, September 2025)

Students who consistently attended night prayers and dhikr sessions appeared more disciplined in attending morning classes. Researchers observed that several previously passive students began asking questions after participating in structured moral counseling sessions.

Attendance logs show improved punctuality among students involved in mentoring and spiritual strengthening programs. Academic progress reports reveal gradual improvement in assignment completion rates among students identified as initially low-motivated.

Students with initially low motivation demonstrate measurable improvement after intensive moral counseling and structured worship routines. Their attribution patterns shift from self-blame ("I am incapable") to effort-based and faith-based explanations ("I need greater effort and sincerity"). This indicates adaptive attribution that strengthens persistence. The evidence confirms that spiritual reinforcement enhances intrinsic motivation and emotional resilience.

Family and Social Support:

One student stated:

"My parents often remind me that studying here is a form of worship. It motivates me to stay focused." (Interview, August 2025)

Conversely, another student admitted feeling less supported:

"Sometimes I feel alone because my family rarely contacts me." (Interview, September 2025)

Teachers also noted that students with strong family encouragement adapt more quickly.

Students who frequently communicated with supportive families appeared emotionally stable and socially active. Peer mentoring activities based on *ukhuwah* reduced isolation among students experiencing homesickness.

Guidance and counseling notes indicate fewer behavioral violations among students receiving consistent parental engagement. Dormitory supervision reports show improved adaptation among students involved in structured peer mentoring.

Students from supportive religious families internalize Islamic boarding school values more rapidly and recover faster from emotional distress. Social bonding through *ukhwah* reduces disruptive behavior and increases classroom participation. These findings confirm that Islamic approaches are most effective when personalized and supported by both family and social capital.

A uniform spiritual strategy without pedagogical adjustment yields limited results. Conversely, when moral guidance, spiritual reinforcement, and adaptive teaching intersect with individual characteristics, improvement becomes more visible. This aligns with humanistic educational theory emphasizing that fulfillment of belonging and esteem needs precedes optimal learning performance.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Implementation

Using SWOT analysis, the study identified structural influences supported by empirical evidence. To improve clarity and avoid excessive enumeration, the supporting and inhibiting factors are summarized in Table 3. and further explained narratively.

Table 3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Implementation

No.	Category	Factors	Empirical Evidence	Educational Implications
1.	Supporting Factors (Strengths & Opportunities)	Charismatic and knowledgeable kyai and <i>Ustaz</i>	Students show deep respect; moral advice has strong emotional impact (Interview, July 2025)	Strengthens motivation, discipline, and value internalization
2.	Supporting Factors (Strengths & Opportunities)	Strong religious culture and communal environment	Structured worship routines and daily schedules foster discipline and responsibility	Creates stable learning rhythm and holistic development
3.	Inhibiting Factors (Weaknesses & Threats)	Limited pedagogical and psychological training	Teachers acknowledge limited ability to diagnose learning difficulties (Interview, September 2025)	Limits individualized intervention and adaptive teaching
4.	Inhibiting Factors (Weaknesses & Threats)	Infrastructure and external challenges	Digital distractions and limited access to modern learning tools	Reduces learning focus and instructional effectiveness

Note: All data was obtained from interviews, observations, and documents.

The findings indicate that the Islamic boarding school's primary strength lies in its strong spiritual capital and communal culture. The presence of charismatic and knowledgeable kyai and *Ustaz* plays a central role in shaping students' motivation and discipline. Their moral guidance, delivered through structured religious activities such as *mau'izhab hasanah*, creates a powerful emotional connection that supports value internalization. In addition, the institutionalized religious culture, reflected in daily worship routines and structured schedules, contributes to a consistent academic rhythm and reinforces holistic educational goals.

However, several inhibiting factors were also identified. Limited pedagogical and psychological training among teachers constrains their ability to diagnose and address diverse learning difficulties effectively. This limitation becomes more evident in large classroom settings where individualized attention is required. Furthermore, infrastructure constraints and external challenges, particularly digital distractions and limited access to modern educational resources, reduce students' concentration and hinder optimal learning processes.

Overall, the effectiveness of the institution depends not only on its strong spiritual foundation but also on its professional and technological capacity. Therefore, enhancing teacher competence and improving educational facilities are essential steps toward strengthening the implementation of learning interventions while maintaining the Islamic boarding school's core religious identity.

Discussion

This study was designed to answer four main research questions: (1) what types of learning difficulties are experienced by students in Islamic boarding schools based on their individual characteristics; (2) how Islamic approaches are implemented to address those difficulties; (3) how individual characteristics influence the effectiveness of the Islamic approach; and (4) what supporting and inhibiting factors shape institutional implementation. The discussion below addresses these questions interactively, while explicitly grounding the interpretation in literature and the empirical findings of this study.

The findings demonstrate that learning difficulties in Islamic boarding schools are not merely cognitive deficits but multidimensional phenomena involving cognitive, motivational, emotional, and social variables. Students with limited prior exposure to Arabic grammar and classical Islamic texts experienced comprehension barriers, particularly in *bandongan* sessions. This condition is consistent with schema-based explanations of learning, where “understanding new information depends on the availability and activation of relevant prior knowledge stored in long-term memory” (Meylani, 2024; Mayer, 2024). Contemporary cognitive research further confirms that insufficient prior knowledge significantly constrains comprehension of complex academic texts (Snowling et al., 2022). Within the student context, the absence of foundational schemas in *nahwu* and *shorof* functions as a structural barrier, explaining why students from non-madrasah backgrounds require longer adaptation.

At the motivational level, the study found that students driven primarily by extrinsic motives demonstrated weaker memorization retention compared to those with intrinsic spiritual commitment. This finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that intrinsic motivation enhances persistence, depth of processing, and long-term retention (Osei & Bjorklund, 2024). Religious internalization strengthens resilience and academic engagement among adolescents (Shodiq, 2024; Yadi et al., 2025). However, the present study extends these findings by demonstrating that intrinsic motivation in Islamic boarding schools is not formed solely through individual reflection but is systematically cultivated through communal worship, moral reinforcement, and institutional routines. Thus, learning difficulties are embedded within a socio-spiritual ecosystem rather than functioning as isolated psychological constructs.

Emotional instability, particularly homesickness among first-year students, was also found to reduce concentration and classroom participation. This confirms theory of stress and coping, which states that emotional stress reduces cognitive processing capacity (Biggs & Brough, 2025). Adaptive stress significantly impacts students' focus and academic performance (Guo & Yang, 2025; Qi et al., 2025). In this study, emotional regulation was closely linked to spiritual practices, indicating a distinctive interaction between affective states and religious coping.

Regarding the implementation of Islamic approaches, the findings indicate that moral guidance (*mau'izhab hasanah*), structured spiritual routines (*tabajjud*, *dhiker*, *mubasabah*), *Qur'an*-based contextual teaching, and the cultivation of *ukhawah* function as systematic psycho-spiritual interventions. These practices are not incidental rituals but are embedded within institutional management structures, daily schedules, and leadership authority. This supports holistic education theory, which argues that effective education integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions (Miseliunaite et al., 2022; Faisol et al., 2024; Yanmei et al., 2024). Scholarship on faith-based education similarly suggests that spiritual development contributes positively to self-regulation and character formation (Masaki, 2023; Napolitano et al., 2024; Purwaningsih, 2024).

Students reported increased calmness and confidence after engaging in structured spiritual practices, which corresponded with improved classroom participation. Contemplative and religious practices have demonstrated that spiritual engagement enhances emotional regulation and reduces anxiety (Aggarwal et al., 2023). However, unlike secular mindfulness models, the Islamic boarding school's context frames these practices as acts of worship grounded in theological meaning. This theological framing strengthens attributional patterns: students interpret success as resulting from effort combined with divine facilitation. Such adaptive attributions align with Attribution Theory,

which explains that attributing outcomes to controllable factors enhances perseverance (Junfeng, 2024; Letuma & Nhlumayo, 2026). Consequently, the Islamic approach operates simultaneously as a spiritual, psychological, and managerial strategy.

The relationship between individual characteristics and intervention effectiveness further reinforces the importance of pedagogical adaptation. The findings show that visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners respond differently to instructional methods. When teachers varied instructional strategies adding repetitive recitation, structured board summaries, or practice-based *fiqh* demonstrations student engagement improved significantly. This is consistent with differentiated instruction theory, which asserts that adapting teaching to learner variability enhances academic achievement (Goyibova et al., 2025; Ramilo & Ting, 2025). Inquiry-based and active learning research in similarly confirms that active engagement strengthens retention and critical thinking (Nguyen et al., 2024; Gomez, 2025).

Traditional Islamic boarding schools' methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan* have historically emphasized textual transmission (Asyiah et al., 2025; Mahrus et al., 2025). The present findings do not reject these methods but demonstrate that their effectiveness increases when integrated with adaptive strategies aligned to student characteristics. This leads to a theoretical refinement: Islamic pedagogy should not be conceptualized as static traditionalism but as a normatively grounded yet pedagogically dynamic system. Spiritual values remain constant, while instructional techniques evolve in response to learner diversity. In this sense, the study extends differentiated instruction theory by embedding it within an Islamic normative framework.

Institutionally, SWOT analysis revealed that charismatic leadership and strong religious culture function as primary strengths. Leadership theory in international educational management literature emphasizes that moral authority and symbolic capital significantly influence institutional effectiveness (Rahman, 2025; Hamdanah et al., 2025). In the Islamic boarding school's context, the *kyai's* charisma amplifies motivational influence, reinforcing value internalization and discipline. The communal boarding environment further strengthens social capital, that dense social networks facilitate human capital development (Wahono et al., 2023; Nuryana & Sirojuddin, 2025).

Nevertheless, limitations were identified in pedagogical and psychological expertise. Teachers acknowledged limited training in diagnosing specific learning difficulties. International research underscores that teacher professional development is central to inclusive and adaptive education (Inês et al., 2022; Aas, 2023; Yunitasari et al., 2025). Therefore, while spiritual capital constitutes a major institutional strength, it must be complemented by professional competence and modernization of facilities. This confirms broader educational management research that strategic quality improvement requires integration of cultural identity with managerial innovation (Izzah et al., 2024; Hasbi et al., 2025; Fuad et al., 2022).

By synthesizing these findings, the study proposes a Holistic Islamic Educational Management Model in which psycho-spiritual reinforcement, differentiated pedagogical adaptation, and institutional capacity strengthening operate synergistically. This model modifies holistic education theory by positioning spiritual practice as an operational management variable rather than merely a philosophical principle. It also extends Self-Determination Theory by demonstrating that intrinsic motivation in Islamic boarding schools emerges through structured communal worship and collective reinforcement rather than exclusively through individual autonomy.

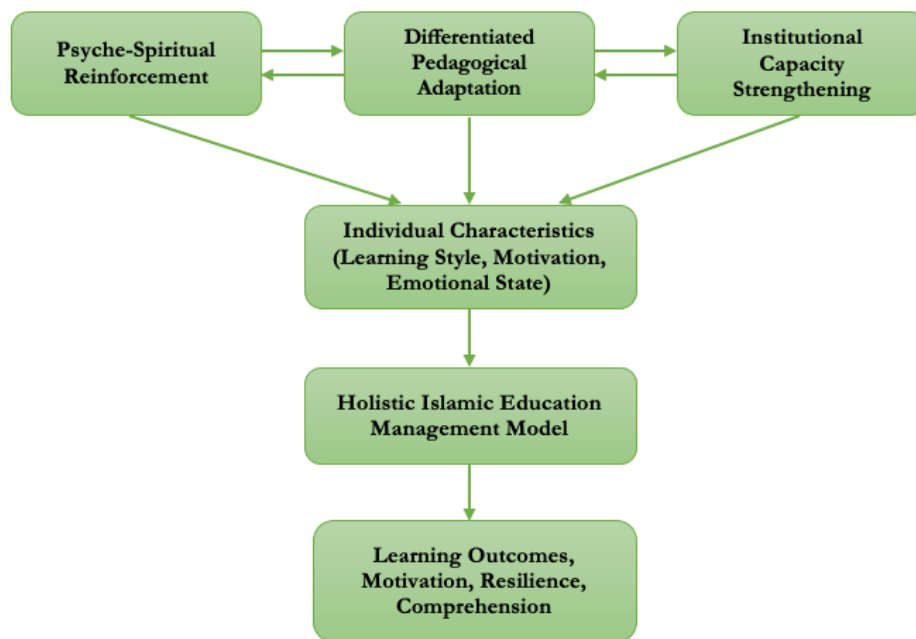


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Holistic Islamic Educational Management Model

The model illustrates the bidirectional interaction between psycho-spiritual reinforcement, differentiated pedagogical adaptation, and institutional capacity strengthening, mediated by students' individual characteristics, in shaping learning outcomes.

Overcoming learning difficulties in Islamic boarding schools requires integrative management that harmonizes spirituality, individuality, and institutional strategy. By empirically confirming cognitive–affective theories, extending motivational frameworks through socio-spiritual mechanisms, and reframing SWOT within faith-based educational management, this study contributes substantively to contemporary international discourse on educational management in religious institutions. The findings suggest that sustainable reform in Islamic boarding schools depends not on abandoning tradition but on integrating spiritual authenticity with pedagogical adaptability and professional modernization.

CONCLUSION

The research found that learning difficulties in Islamic boarding schools are multidimensional and significantly influenced by students' individual characteristics, including prior knowledge, motivation, emotional conditions, and social adaptation. Islamic approaches such as moral guidance (*mau'izhab hasanah*), spiritual reinforcement, and Qur'an-based contextual teaching were found to have a greater impact than expected in enhancing emotional regulation, intrinsic motivation, and learning engagement. These findings challenge the assumption that learning difficulties are predominantly cognitive, highlighting the importance of integrating psycho-spiritual dimensions in educational practice.

This research strengthens existing studies on holistic and faith-based education while extending them by integrating spirituality, individual characteristics, and institutional strategies into a unified analytical framework. It introduces an integrative perspective conceptualized as a Holistic Islamic Educational Management Model, which positions spiritual practices as functional mechanisms that contribute to both affective and cognitive development, thereby enriching the discourse in Islamic educational management.

This study is limited to a single Islamic boarding school with a relatively small and context-specific sample, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, variations related to gender, age, and broader socio-cultural contexts were not extensively examined. Future research

is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, incorporate quantitative or mixed-method approaches, and explore longitudinal impacts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of learning difficulties and intervention effectiveness.

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