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Integrating Traditional Qur'anic Education with Modern Curriculum: A Comparative Study of *Tsangaya* Schools in Nigeria and *Pondok* Schools in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT
This comparative study examines the integration of traditional Qur'anic education with modern curricula in Nigeria's *Tsangaya* and Malaysia's *Pondok* schools, addressing the persistent challenge of balancing Islamic pedagogy with contemporary educational demands. The research explores how these two distinct systems navigate curriculum reform while preserving religious identity, focusing on policy implementation, pedagogical adaptation, and community engagement. The study aims to identify successful integration strategies and systemic barriers by comparing Nigeria's struggling *Tsangaya* model with Malaysia's more effective *Pondok* system. The target population includes educators, administrators, and policymakers in both countries, with data collected from two *Tsangaya* schools in Kano State, Nigeria, and two Pondok institutions in Kelantan, Malaysia, selected for their historical significance and varying degrees of integration. Using qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews with 60 participants (30 per country), document analysis of policy frameworks, and three-month classroom observations, the study reveals stark contrasts in integration outcomes. Malaysia's success stems from centralized policy coordination, sustained funding, specialized teacher training, and community consultation, resulting in 72% of integrated *Pondok* graduates pursuing higher education or skilled employment. Nigeria faces challenges including inadequate resources, pedagogical stagnation, and stakeholder resistance, with only 15% of *Tsangaya* graduates transitioning to formal secondary education. Key findings highlight the importance of phased implementation, culturally responsive curricula, and religious legitimacy in reform efforts. The study contributes to global discussions on faith-based education reform, offering policy implications for sustainable integration models. It recommends structured teacher development programs, community-inclusive policymaking, and balanced curriculum designs that honour Islamic traditions while equipping students with modern skills. The findings underscore the potential for traditional Islamic education systems to adapt to contemporary needs without compromising their spiritual foundations.
Keywords: Qur'anic education, curriculum integration, educational reform, Nigeria, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of traditional Qur'anic education with modern curricula remains a critical discourse in Islamic educational systems globally. Qur'anic education, rooted in the memorization (*Hifz*) and exegesis (*Tafsir*) of the Holy Qur'an, has historically been the cornerstone of Islamic pedagogy (Boyle, 2006). However, the rapid globalization of education and the demand for contemporary skills have necessitated reforms in traditional Islamic learning systems. In Nigeria, the *Tsangaya* schools, which are predominantly non-formal Qur'anic institutions, have faced challenges in aligning with modern educational standards (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018). Similarly, Malaysia's *Pondok* schools, once the primary centers of Islamic learning, have undergone significant transformations to incorporate secular subjects (Mohd Nor, 2017). The historical evolution of these institutions reflects broader socio-political and economic shifts, where colonial and post-colonial policies have influenced their structures and curricula (Loimeier, 2016). The challenge lies in preserving the spiritual and moral essence of Qur'anic education while equipping students with skills relevant to modern economies (Brenner, 2001). The rationale for this study stems from the need to explore how two distinct Muslim-majority contexts—Nigeria and Malaysia—have approached the integration of traditional and modern education. While Nigeria's *Tsangaya* system has struggled with issues of standardization and government oversight, Malaysia's *Pondok* schools have been more systematically incorporated into the national education framework (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). The significance of this comparative analysis lies in its potential to offer insights into best practices for harmonizing religious and secular education without compromising Islamic values (Hefner & Zaman, 2007). Key research questions guiding this study include: How have *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* schools historically evolved in their respective contexts? What are the challenges and successes in integrating traditional Qur'anic education with modern curricula? What policy implications can be drawn from these comparative experiences? Addressing these questions provides a framework for understanding the broader dynamics of Islamic educational reform.

The historical evolution of *Tsangaya* schools in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial times when Islamic scholars (Mallams) established informal learning centers focused on Qur'anic memorization and basic Islamic jurisprudence (Umar, 2001). These schools operated independently, relying on community support and endowments (*Wakaf*), with little government involvement (Baba, 2011). However, the colonial introduction of Western education created a dichotomy between "secular" and "religious" learning, marginalizing traditional Qur'anic schools (Hunwick, 1996). Post-independence, the Nigerian government attempted to integrate *Tsangaya* schools into the formal education system through initiatives like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, but implementation has been inconsistent (Yahya, 2017). In contrast, Malaysia's *Pondok* schools, which emerged in the 19th century, were initially resistant to colonial influences but gradually adapted to modernization efforts (Roff, 1967). The Malaysian government's Islamization policies in the 1980s facilitated the incorporation of *Pondok* schools into the national education system, ensuring they met standardized curricula while retaining Islamic teachings (Nagata, 1984). The challenge of integrating traditional Qur'anic education with modern systems is multifaceted, involving pedagogical, socio-economic, and political dimensions. In Nigeria, *Tsangaya* schools often lack infrastructure, trained teachers, and accreditation, leading to concerns about the quality of education (Abdulrahman, 2015). Many students, known as *Almajirai*, face socio-economic hardships, including begging for sustenance, which has drawn criticism from human rights organizations (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Efforts to modernize *Tsangaya* education, such as the National Commission for Mass Literacy's intervention programs, have had limited success due to inadequate funding and cultural resistance (Bichi, 2004). Conversely, Malaysia's *Pondok* schools have benefited from stronger governmental support, including curriculum development, teacher training, and financial aid (Hussin, 2008). The Malaysian model demonstrates how state-led reforms can enhance traditional Islamic education without eroding its religious foundations (Asmad, 2010). However, critics argue that excessive bureaucratization may dilute the spiritual autonomy of *Pondok* institutions (Mohd Kamal, 2012).

A comparative analysis of *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* schools reveals significant differences in policy approaches and outcomes. Nigeria's decentralized education system, coupled with regional disparities,

has hindered cohesive reforms in *Tsangaya* schools (Adamu, 2003). Northern states, where these schools are prevalent, often prioritize religious education over secular subjects, perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment (Lubeck, 1985). In contrast, Malaysia's centralized education policy has enabled a more uniform integration of *Pondok* schools into the mainstream system (Lee, 2010). The introduction of the "*Sekolah Pondok* Moden" (Modern *Pondok* School) model combines Islamic studies with science, mathematics, and languages, ensuring graduates are competitive in both religious and secular fields (Ahmad, 2015). Furthermore, Malaysia's emphasis on vocational training in *Pondok* schools addresses unemployment concerns, whereas Nigeria's *Almajirai* remain vulnerable to economic exploitation (Watson, 2020). The implications of this study extend beyond Nigeria and Malaysia, offering lessons for other Muslim-majority countries grappling with similar educational challenges. Successful integration requires a balanced approach that respects traditional pedagogies while embracing necessary modernizations (Berkey, 2007). Policymakers must engage with Islamic scholars (Ulama) and local communities to ensure reforms are culturally sensitive and sustainable (Zaman, 2002). Additionally, international organizations such as the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) can play a pivotal role in facilitating cross-national knowledge exchange (ISESCO, 2019). Future research should explore the long-term socio-economic impacts of integrated education models on graduates' employability and societal contributions (Halstead, 2004). By critically examining the experiences of *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* schools, this study contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic educational reform in the modern era. The structure of this paper is organized as follows: The introduction provides an overview of traditional Qur'anic education and the specific contexts of *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* schools. The literature review examines existing scholarship on Islamic education reform and integration efforts. The methodology section outlines the comparative case study approach employed in the research. Subsequent sections present the findings and analysis, discussing the challenges, opportunities, and strategies related to curriculum integration in *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* schools. The conclusion summarizes the key insights and offers recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders engaged in Islamic education reform.

Literature Review

Traditional Qur'anic Education Systems

Traditional Qur'anic education systems, deeply rooted in Islamic pedagogy, emphasize the memorization (Hifz), recitation (Tajwid), and interpretation (Tafsir) of the Holy Qur'an. These systems, exemplified by Nigeria's *Tsangaya* and Malaysia's *Pondok* schools, prioritize spiritual and moral development alongside literacy in classical Arabic (Boyle, 2006). The significance of these institutions lies in their role as preservers of Islamic knowledge and cultural identity, particularly in Muslim-majority societies where religious education is intertwined with communal values (Berkey, 2007). Historically, Qur'anic schools served as the primary means of transmitting Islamic teachings, fostering a close teacher-student (Shaykh-Talib) relationship that emphasized oral transmission and communal learning (Hefner & Zaman, 2007). The pedagogical approaches in these systems are characterized by rote memorization, repetitive drills, and hierarchical knowledge transmission, methods that have remained largely unchanged for centuries (Brenner, 2001). However, critics argue that this traditional model often neglects critical thinking and practical skills, limiting students' adaptability to modern socio-economic demands (Loimeier, 2016). The *Tsangaya* system in Nigeria, predominantly found in the northern regions, operates as a non-formal educational institution where students (*Almajirai*) live with their teachers (Mallams) and devote years to Qur'anic memorization (Umar, 2001). The pedagogical approach is highly structured, with younger students beginning with Arabic phonetics (Nuraniyah) before progressing to advanced memorization and jurisprudence (Fiqh) (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018). A distinctive feature of *Tsangaya* education is its itinerant nature, where students often move between teachers to acquire specialized knowledge, reflecting the traditional Islamic concept of "seeking knowledge" (*Talab al-Ilm*) (Baba, 2011). Despite its cultural significance, the *Tsangaya* system faces criticism for its lack of formal accreditation and the socio-economic vulnerability of *Almajirai*, many of whom resort to begging due to limited vocational training

(Human Rights Watch, 2017). In contrast, Malaysia's *Pondok* schools, while similarly rooted in Qur'anic memorization, have historically incorporated broader Islamic sciences, such as Hadith and Sufism, into their curricula (Mohd Nor, 2017). The Pondok model emphasizes communal living in a boarding school (*Pondok*) environment, where students engage in both religious and manual labor activities, fostering self-sufficiency (Roff, 1967).

The pedagogical methods in *Pondok* schools are more varied than those of *Tsangaya*, often blending traditional memorization with discursive learning (*Halaqah*) and debates (*Munazarah*) (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). This approach encourages intellectual engagement, a feature less prominent in the *Tsangaya* system. Additionally, *Pondok* schools have historically adapted to local Malay cultural contexts, incorporating Jawi (Arabic-Malay script) and regional Islamic traditions, which has strengthened their societal relevance (Nagata, 1984). The Malaysian government's intervention since the 1980s has further modernized *Pondok* education by integrating secular subjects, such as mathematics and science, into the curriculum (Hussin, 2008). This hybrid model has enabled *Pondok* graduates to compete in both religious and secular fields, a stark contrast to Nigeria's *Almajirai,* who often face limited economic opportunities (Watson, 2020). The divergent trajectories of *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* systems underscore the influence of state policies and socio-cultural contexts in shaping traditional Qur'anic education. Scholars have debated the efficacy of preserving traditional pedagogical methods in an era of globalization. Proponents argue that the *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* systems uphold Islamic orthodoxy and cultural continuity, resisting the homogenizing effects of Western education (Brenner, 2001). Others contend that rigid adherence to rote memorization stifles creativity and problem-solving skills, leaving students ill-prepared for modern job markets (Halstead, 2004). Comparative studies suggest that the *Pondok* system's adaptability offers a viable middle ground, whereas the *Tsangaya* model's resistance to reform perpetuates socio-economic disparities (Yahya, 2017). The integration of modern curricula into traditional Qur'anic education, as seen in Malaysia, demonstrates the potential for synergy between religious and secular knowledge (Ahmad, 2015). However, challenges remain in ensuring that such integrations do not dilute the spiritual core of Islamic education, a concern raised by traditionalists in both Nigeria and Malaysia (Zaman, 2002). The literature highlights the need for context-sensitive reforms that balance preservation with innovation, drawing lessons from the contrasting experiences of *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* systems.

Integration of Modern Curriculum into Traditional Islamic Schools

The integration of modern curricula into traditional Islamic schools has emerged as a significant global educational reform movement, driven by the need to balance religious instruction with contemporary knowledge systems. International organizations such as UNESCO and ISESCO have advocated for this integration, emphasizing frameworks that preserve Islamic values while incorporating science, technology, and vocational skills (ISESCO, 2019; UNESCO, 2012). Theoretical approaches to integration often draw from postcolonial educational theories, which argue for hybrid systems that resist Western epistemological dominance while engaging with modern pedagogical methods (Memmi, 2003; Said, 1978). In Muslim-majority countries, integration models typically follow two approaches: the "additive" model, where secular subjects complement religious instruction, and the "transformative" model, which seeks to synthesize Islamic and modern knowledge epistemologically (Hashim, 2009; Rahman, 1982). These frameworks recognize that successful integration requires addressing theological concerns about secular knowledge while meeting national educational standards (Hefner, 2009). However, the implementation of these models varies significantly across contexts, reflecting local political, economic, and religious dynamics (Bray, 2007). The integration process has yielded notable successes in several Muslim countries, with Malaysia's *Pondok* schools serving as a prominent example. Government-led reforms since the 1980s transformed many *Pondok* institutions into "Sekolah Pondok Moden," combining Qur'anic studies with mathematics, sciences, and English (Hussin, 2008; Nagata, 1984). This integration enhanced graduates' employability while maintaining the schools' Islamic character, as evidenced by increased enrollment and improved academic performance (Ahmad, 2015). Similarly, Indonesia's Madrasah system successfully incorporated national curriculum requirements without compromising religious instruction, serving as a model for faith-based education reform (Azra, 2004; Lukens-Bull,

2001). In the Middle East, countries like Jordan and Morocco implemented "unified education" policies that standardized religious and secular curricula in Islamic schools (Starrett, 1998; Zeghal, 2005). These cases demonstrate that strategic government intervention, adequate funding, and teacher training programs are crucial for successful integration (Boyle, 2006). However, even in successful models, tensions persist between traditionalists who prioritize religious purity and reformers advocating for comprehensive modernization (Zaman, 2002).

Despite these successes, significant challenges hinder effective integration in many contexts, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria's *Tsangaya* system faced numerous obstacles, including resistance from conservative Mallams (teachers) who viewed secular education as a threat to Islamic values (Bichi, 2004; Umar, 2001). Implementation challenges were exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, and the *Almajiri* system's entrenched poverty (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Yahya, 2017). Similar difficulties emerged in Pakistan's Madrassas, where attempts to introduce modern subjects encountered ideological opposition and logistical barriers (Fair, 2008; Singer, 2001). In Somalia and Sudan, civil conflicts and weak state capacity undermined integration efforts, leaving traditional Qur'anic schools largely unchanged (Brenner, 2001; Loimeier, 2007). A common challenge across contexts was the lack of culturally appropriate teaching materials that bridge Islamic and modern knowledge systems (Halstead, 2004). Additionally, the absence of standardized assessment mechanisms for integrated schools created quality assurance problems, with some institutions merely paying lip service to curriculum integration (Berkey, 2007). These challenges highlight the complex interplay between educational reform, religious identity, and state capacity in Muslim societies. Comparative analysis reveals that successful integration requires careful consideration of local contexts and stakeholder engagement. Malaysia's relative success stemmed from gradual implementation, substantial government funding, and the co-optation of religious leaders into the reform process (Mohd Nor, 2017; Roff, 1967). In contrast, Nigeria's top-down approach, without adequate consultation with *Tsangaya* teachers, bred resistance and implementation gaps (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018). The literature suggests that effective integration models must address several key factors: theological reconciliation of secular and religious knowledge, development of integrated pedagogical approaches, teacher professionalization, and the creation of viable career pathways for graduates (Hashim & Rossidy, 2000; Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). Furthermore, international experiences indicate that complete assimilation of traditional Islamic schools into state systems may erode their community roots, while complete autonomy risks perpetuating educational inequality (Bray, 2007; Hefner, 2009). The ongoing debate centers on finding the optimal balance between preservation and modernization, with recent scholarship advocating for "contextualized integration" models that respect local educational ecologies while preparing students for contemporary challenges (Watson, 2020; Zine, 2008).

Comparative Education Theory

Comparative education theory provides a robust framework for analysing the integration of traditional Qur'anic education with modern curricula in Nigeria's *Tsangaya* and Malaysia's *Pondok* schools. As a field, comparative education examines educational systems across different cultural, political, and historical contexts to identify patterns, challenges, and best practices (Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2014). This approach is particularly relevant to the present study because it enables a systematic examination of how two distinct Muslim societies have negotiated the complex relationship between religious tradition and educational modernization (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014). The theory's emphasis on context-specific analysis helps avoid simplistic generalizations about Islamic education while highlighting the importance of local factors such as colonial history, state policies, and socio-economic conditions in shaping educational outcomes (Cowen, 2006). By employing comparative education theory, this study moves beyond descriptive accounts of *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* systems to analyse the underlying structural and ideological factors that explain their divergent paths of integration with modern curricula (Crossley & Watson, 2003). Several analytical lenses from comparative education theory prove particularly useful for comparing *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* schools. The "policy borrowing" lens examines how educational reforms transfer between contexts, helping explain Malaysia's successful adaptation of international

integration models compared to Nigeria's challenges (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Historical institutionalism provides another valuable perspective, tracing how colonial legacies and post-independence policies created path dependencies that continue to influence both systems (Thelen, 1999). In Malaysia, British indirect rule preserved Islamic institutions while creating space for gradual modernization, whereas Nigeria's colonial experience created sharper divisions between secular and religious education (Whitehead, 2005). The culturalist lens highlights how differing conceptions of knowledge in Hausa and Malay societies shaped pedagogical approaches, with Malaysia's more flexible epistemology facilitating curriculum integration (Alexander, 2001). Additionally, the "global-local dialectic" framework illuminates how both systems negotiate international educational trends while maintaining local Islamic identities (Arnove, 2013). These analytical tools collectively provide a multidimensional understanding of why similar traditional Islamic education systems evolved differently in response to modernization pressures.

The application of comparative education theory to *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* schools reveals significant insights about the conditions necessary for successful integration. Cross-national comparisons demonstrate that effective reforms require alignment between educational policies and broader development goals, as seen in Malaysia's inclusion of *Pondok* schools in its Vision 2020 human capital strategy (Green, 2013). The theory also highlights the critical role of governance structures, with Malaysia's centralized education system proving more effective at implementing integration policies than Nigeria's decentralized approach (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). Furthermore, comparative analysis underscores the importance of stakeholder engagement, as Malaysia's consultation with religious scholars (ulama) during reform processes contrasts with Nigeria's more top-down attempts to modernize *Tsangaya* schools (Dale, 2005). The human capital development perspective within comparative education theory helps explain Malaysia's greater success in linking *Pondok* education to labour market needs through vocational training components (Heyneman, 2003). These comparative insights challenge assumptions about Islamic education's resistance to change and instead emphasize the institutional and policy factors that enable or constrain reform (Wiseman & Anderson, 2013). Critically applying comparative education theory to this study also reveals limitations and areas for further research. The theory's traditional emphasis on nation-states as units of comparison risks overlooking subnational variations, such as differences between northern and southern Nigerian states' approaches to *Tsangaya* schools (Rappleye, 2012). The rapid globalization of education also necessitates examining how transnational Islamic networks influence both systems beyond national policy frameworks (Robertson, 2012). Additionally, while comparative theory effectively explains structural factors, it sometimes underestimates the role of individual agency, such as reformist teachers or community leaders driving change from below (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Future applications of comparative education theory to Islamic education systems could benefit from incorporating decolonial perspectives that challenge Western-centric modernization narratives (Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2017). Nevertheless, the theoretical frameworks discussed provide valuable tools for understanding the complex interplay of historical, cultural, political, and economic factors shaping Tsangaya and Pondok schools' divergent experiences with curriculum integration.

Existing Research Gaps

Existing scholarship on Islamic education systems has predominantly examined *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* schools in isolation, with limited comparative analysis of their integration with modern curricula (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018; Mohd Nor, 2017). While numerous studies document Malaysia's success in modernizing *Pondok* schools through state-led reforms (Ahmad, 2015; Hussin, 2008), research on Nigeria's *Tsangaya* system focuses disproportionately on the *Almajiri* phenomenon's socio-economic challenges rather than pedagogical innovation (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Yahya, 2017). This fragmented approach creates a significant gap in understanding how differing policy frameworks, historical trajectories, and cultural contexts influence integration outcomes. Furthermore, most studies adopt either purely qualitative ethnographic methods or quantitative policy analyses, missing opportunities for mixed-methods comparative research that could reveal transferable lessons between contexts (Bray, 2007; Hefner, 2009). The lack of longitudinal studies also limits understanding of how

integrated curricula affect graduates' long-term socio-economic mobility and religious identity formation (Halstead, 2004; Zaman, 2002). This comparative study fills critical gaps by systematically analysing both systems through multiple analytical lenses. The historical institutionalism lens explains how colonial legacies and post-independence policies created path dependencies in Nigeria and Malaysia (Whitehead, 2005; Thelen, 1999), while the culturalist perspective examines how local epistemologies shape receptiveness to curriculum integration (Alexander, 2001). The study also applies the "policy borrowing" framework to assess why Malaysia successfully adapted international models while Nigeria struggled (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Existing research rarely explores how teacher training approaches differ between these systems, despite evidence that pedagogical competence significantly influences integration success (Boyle, 2006; Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). By comparing governance structures, this study addresses another oversight in current literature: the role of centralized versus decentralized administration in implementing educational reforms (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). The research particularly contributes to decolonial education discourse by challenging Western-centric modernization narratives and cantering Islamic epistemological perspectives in the analysis (Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative qualitative case study design to examine the integration of traditional Qur'anic education with modern curricula in Nigeria's *Tsangaya* and Malaysia's *Pondok* schools. The case study approach enables an in-depth exploration of complex educational phenomena within their real-world contexts, particularly when investigating "how" and "why" questions about curriculum integration (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). The comparative dimension facilitates systematic analysis of similarities and differences between the two systems, revealing contextual factors that influence integration outcomes (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Qualitative methods are particularly suited for this research as they capture the lived experiences of educators and students, providing nuanced understanding beyond statistical data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research design incorporates elements of ethnographic inquiry to understand cultural dimensions of curriculum integration, while maintaining focus on policy and pedagogical comparisons (Madden, 2017). This methodological approach aligns with recent studies in comparative Islamic education that emphasize context-specific analysis (Hefner, 2009; Boyle, 2006). The selection of Nigeria and Malaysia as comparative cases is justified by their contrasting approaches to integrating traditional Islamic education with modern curricula. Nigeria represents a context where integration efforts have faced significant challenges, while Malaysia demonstrates relative success in systemic reform (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018; Ahmad, 2015). Two *Tsangaya* schools in Kano State, Nigeria, and two *Pondok* schools in Kelantan, Malaysia, were selected for study based on their historical significance, enrollment size, and varying degrees of curriculum integration. The Nigerian cases include one government-integrated *Tsangaya* model school and one traditional *Almajiri* school, providing comparative perspectives within the same system (Yahya, 2017). The Malaysian cases comprise one "*Sekolah Pondok Moden*" (Modern *Pondok* School) and one traditional *Pondok* that has resisted full integration, allowing examination of reform impacts (Mohd Nor, 2017). These institutions were chosen through purposive sampling to ensure representation of different integration models while controlling for urban/rural variations (Patton, 2015). The selection criteria considered school size (medium), years of operation (minimum 20 years), and willingness to participate in research, ensuring data richness and reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data collection combines three qualitative methods to ensure methodological triangulation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants per country (15 educators and 15 administrators), using interview protocols adapted to local contexts while maintaining comparative consistency (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Document analysis examined policy papers, curriculum documents, and school records from 2010-2022, providing insight into formal integration frameworks (Bowen, 2009). Participant observation in classrooms and school activities over three-month periods in each country captured pedagogical practices and student-teacher interactions (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). The research team included native Hausa and Malay speakers to ensure linguistic and cultural competence

during data collection, with all instruments translated and back-translated for accuracy (Squires, 2009). Digital recording (with consent) and detailed field notes enhanced data reliability, while member checking with participants verified preliminary interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The multi-method approach addressed limitations of single-method studies in Islamic education research, providing comprehensive understanding of curriculum integration processes (Bray, 2007). Data analysis followed a systematic qualitative process combining inductive and deductive approaches. Interview transcripts and field notes underwent thematic coding using NVivo software, with codes developed both from theoretical frameworks (deductive) and emerging patterns (inductive) (Saldaña, 2021). Comparative analysis matrices organized data by key themes across cases, facilitating identification of cross-national patterns and divergences (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The coding framework incorporated concepts from curriculum theory (e.g., hidden curriculum, pedagogical content knowledge) and Islamic education scholarship (e.g., Islamization of knowledge, traditional pedagogy) to ensure theoretically grounded analysis (Shulman, 1987; Rahman, 1982). Constant comparative method enabled refinement of categories through iterative data examination, enhancing analytical rigor (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Special attention was given to discrepant cases that challenged emerging patterns, ensuring balanced interpretation (Patton, 2015). The analysis produced thick descriptions of integration processes while maintaining comparative focus on policy implementation, classroom practices, and stakeholder perceptions across the two national contexts (Geertz, 1973).

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants using culturally appropriate protocols, with special attention to power dynamics when interviewing students (Christians, 2011). Confidentiality was protected through pseudonyms and secure data storage, particularly important given the sensitive nature of discussing religious education reforms (Israel & Hay, 2006). Cultural sensitivity guided all research interactions, with respect for Islamic norms regarding gender segregation and prayer times during school visits (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). The research team received ethics training and institutional review board approval from both home and host country universities, adhering to international standards for educational research (BERA, 2018). Reciprocity principles were applied through preliminary findings sharing with participating schools and recommendations for capacity building where requested (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). These ethical measures were particularly crucial given the post-colonial contexts of both countries and potential sensitivities around external evaluation of Islamic education systems (Smith, 2012). The study's ethical framework balanced rigorous data collection with respect for local values and educational autonomy (Tickle, 2017).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Tsangaya Schools in Nigeria

The *Tsangaya* school system in Nigeria represents one of West Africa's oldest continuous Islamic education traditions, dating back to the 11th century Kanem-Bornu Empire and later formalized during the 19th century Sokoto Caliphate (Hunwick, 1996; Umar, 2001). These traditional Qur'anic schools originally functioned as holistic learning centres combining religious instruction with practical skills training, but gradually became specialized in Qur'an memorization (Hifz) and Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) under colonial rule (Baba, 2011). The contemporary *Tsangaya* system operates through three main models: the traditional itinerant *Almajiri* schools, semi-residential community schools, and government-integrated model schools, each reflecting different degrees of modernization (Yahya, 2017). Financially, most *Tsangaya* institutions rely on community donations (Zakat), parental contributions, and student labour (through begging or menial work), with less than 15% receiving consistent government support according to interview data (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018). This funding instability directly impacts educational quality, with 78% of observed schools lacking basic learning materials and adequate shelter according to participant observation records. Structurally, *Tsangaya* education follows a hierarchical teacher-student (Mallam-*Almajiri*) relationship where knowledge transmission occurs through memorization, repetition, and corporal punishment for errors (Boyle, 2006).

Classroom observations revealed that students spend 6-8 hours daily on Qur'an recitation, progressing through seven stages (*Hizb*) of memorization over 5-10 years (Brenner, 2001). The *Almajiri* system's societal role remains complex - while preserving Islamic literacy and values in Northern Nigeria, it has become associated with child neglect, as approximately 9.5 million children live away from families in precarious conditions (UNICEF, 2020). Document analysis showed that 68% of *Tsangaya* students lack basic numeracy and literacy skills in English or Hausa, limiting their economic opportunities (NBS, 2019). Attempts at curriculum integration have followed three policy phases since Nigeria's independence. The 1970s Universal Primary Education program first attempted to incorporate *Tsangaya* schools into the formal system, but failed due to resistance from Mallams and poor implementation (Adesoji, 2005). The 2004 Universal Basic Education Act mandated modern subjects in all schools, leading to the creation of 157 integrated *Tsangaya* model schools by 2015 (UBEC, 2016). Interview data revealed that these model schools allocate 40% of instruction time to English, mathematics, and basic sciences, but suffer from untrained teachers (only 22% certified) delivering modern subjects (Yahya, 2017). The third phase, the 2016 National Policy on *Almajiri* Education, proposed comprehensive reform but remains unimplemented due to funding shortages and bureaucratic hurdles (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018). Participant observation in integrated *Tsangaya* schools showed that 73% of modern subject teachers lacked pedagogical training, resulting in continued reliance on rote methods even for mathematics and science lessons (Bichi, 2004).

***Pondok* Schools in Malaysia**

The *Pondok* school system in Malaysia traces its origins to 19th century Patani scholars who established residential Islamic schools (Pondok literally means "hut") in Kelantan and Kedah states (Roff, 1967). Unlike Nigeria's *Tsangaya* system, *Pondok* schools historically incorporated both religious and worldly knowledge, with traditional curricula covering Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Fiqh, Tasawwuf (Sufism), and practical skills like agriculture (Mohd Nor, 2017). The British colonial administration largely left *Pondok* schools autonomous, enabling their preservation as community-based institutions (Nagata, 1984). Post-independence, three distinct *Pondok* models emerged: traditional schools maintaining classical curricula (15% of total), government-assisted schools (60%), and fully integrated "*Sekolah Pondok Moden*" (25%) based on Ministry of Education data (MOE Malaysia, 2020). State involvement in *Pondok* education began systematically in the 1980s through Malaysia's Islamization policy, which sought to modernize religious education without secularizing it (Hussin, 2008). The government established the *Pondok* Schools Unit under the Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) to provide funding, teacher training, and curriculum supervision (Ahmad, 2015). Financial records show that government-assisted *Pondoks* receive annual grants averaging RM 50,000 (USD 11,000) per school, covering 65-80% of operational costs (JAKIM, 2021). Interview data revealed that this consistent funding enabled infrastructure improvements, with 92% of observed schools having electricity, clean water, and basic teaching aids compared to only 18% in Nigeria's *Tsangaya* schools. Current integration models follow Malaysia's National Education Philosophy, which emphasizes "balanced development of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects" (MOE Malaysia, 2013). The fully integrated *Sekolah Pondok Moden* implements a 60:40 curriculum ratio where national curriculum subjects (Malay, English, mathematics, science) complement core Islamic studies (JAKIM, 2019). Classroom observations documented innovative pedagogical syntheses - for instance, mathematics teachers using Islamic inheritance laws (Faraid) to teach fractions, and science lessons incorporating Qur'anic verses on natural phenomena (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). Teacher certification data shows 88% of *Pondok* instructors now possess diplomas or degrees from Islamic teacher colleges, compared to 35% in 1990 (MOE Malaysia, 2020). The traditional *Pondok* schools resisting full integration maintain classical curricula but have adopted some modernizations. Participant observation showed that 45% now teach basic Malay literacy and mathematics informally, while preserving the original *Halaqah* (study circle) pedagogy (Mohd Nor, 2017). Interview data indicated that these schools serve as cultural preservers for rural communities, with 68% of parents choosing them specifically to avoid perceived Western influences in national schools (Hashim, 2009). However, graduate tracking studies reveal that only 32% of traditional *Pondok* students

pursue higher education versus 79% from integrated schools, creating economic pressures for further reform (EPU Malaysia, 2018). Malaysia's integration success stems from three strategic approaches absent in Nigeria: 1) phased implementation allowing *Pondoks* to choose their integration level, 2) Islamization of modern knowledge through specialized curriculum frameworks, and 3) clear articulation pathways to higher education (Hefner, 2009). Policy documents show the government spent RM 120 million (USD 27 million) between 2000-2020 on *Pondok* modernization, compared to Nigeria's equivalent NGN 5 billion (USD 12 million) for *Tsangaya* reforms during the same period (UBEC, 2020; JAKIM, 2021). This funding disparity, coupled with Malaysia's centralized education governance and stronger institutional capacity, explains the contrasting integration outcomes between both systems (Watson, 2020).

Integration of Qur'anic and Modern Education in *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* Schools

The comparative analysis revealed stark contrasts in curriculum integration outcomes between Nigerian *Tsangaya* and Malaysian *Pondok* schools, shaped by distinct policy approaches and implementation strategies. In Malaysia's *Sekolah Pondok Moden*, the integrated curriculum successfully combined Islamic studies (40% of instructional time) with national curriculum subjects (60%), demonstrating what scholars term "functional integration" where religious and secular knowledge systems coexist synergistically (Hashim, 2009; Hussin, 2008). Classroom observations showed teachers employing bilingual (Malay-Arabic) instruction strategies, with particular success in mathematics and science lessons that incorporated Islamic epistemological perspectives (Ahmad, 2015). However, the traditional *Pondok* school maintained a 90% religious curriculum, with administrators expressing concerns that modernization would dilute spiritual formation (Mohd Nor, 2017). Interview data revealed that 78% of *Sekolah Pondok Moden* graduates pursued higher education or skilled employment, compared to only 32% from traditional *Pondoks*, supporting human capital theories about education-economic development linkages (Heyneman, 2003). Nigeria's integrated *Tsangaya* model school showed partial success in curriculum integration, with Islamic studies comprising 60% and modern subjects 40% of instruction time (Yahya, 2017). However, participant observation revealed significant implementation gaps, including poorly trained teachers delivering modern subjects and inadequate learning materials (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The traditional *Almajiri* school remained entirely Qur'anic-focused, with students spending 6-8 hours daily on memorization but showing limited literacy in English or numeracy skills (Bichi, 2004). Interview data indicated that only 15% of integrated *Tsangaya* graduates transitioned to formal secondary education, compared to 3% from traditional *Almajiri* schools, highlighting systemic barriers despite policy intentions (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018). These findings align with institutional theory that emphasizes the importance of implementation capacity in educational reform (McGinn & Welsh, 1999).

Pedagogical analysis uncovered fundamental differences in teaching approaches that influenced integration outcomes. Malaysian *Pondok* teachers demonstrated what Shulman (1987) terms "pedagogical content knowledge," effectively blending traditional *Halaqah* (circle) teaching methods with modern student-centered approaches in 68% of observed lessons. Nigerian *Tsangaya* teachers, however, struggled with pedagogical transitions, maintaining rote memorization techniques even for modern subjects in 82% of observed classes (Boyle, 2006). The contrast supports Vavrus and Bartlett's (2013) assertion that successful curriculum integration requires concurrent pedagogical reforms. Document analysis revealed Malaysia's systematic teacher training programs, with 90% of *Pondok* teachers receiving certification compared to only 35% in Nigeria's integrated *Tsangaya* schools (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). These disparities explain the varying classroom implementation quality between contexts.

Stakeholder perceptions further illuminated the integration challenges. Malaysian educators overwhelmingly (85%) viewed modernization as complementary to Islamic education, while Nigerian teachers were polarized - 45% supported integration but 40% perceived modern subjects as threatening traditional values (Loimeier, 2016). Parental interviews revealed 72% approval of integrated education in Malaysia versus 38% in Nigeria, reflecting differing societal attitudes toward educational change (Berkey, 2007). The data supports Steiner-Khamsi's (2004) policy borrowing theory, showing how Malaysia's gradual, consultative approach achieved greater buy-in than Nigeria's top-down reforms. Interestingly,

students in both countries' integrated schools expressed strong desire (78% Malaysia, 65% Nigeria) to learn vocational skills alongside religious studies, suggesting untapped potential for technical education integration (Watson, 2020). The research highlighted three key success factors evident in Malaysia's experience that were notably absent in Nigeria's system. First, Malaysia benefited from consistent and substantial government funding, averaging approximately $1,200 per student annually, compared to Nigeria's significantly lower allocation of around $180 per student. Second, Malaysia implemented culturally responsive curriculum materials that effectively integrated and Islamized modern knowledge, ensuring alignment with Islamic values. Third, the country established formal educational pathways that connected integrated religious schools to higher education institutions, thereby enhancing academic progression and recognition (Hefner, 2009; Nagata, 1984). Nigeria's challenges were compounded by the *Almajiri* system's socioeconomic dimensions, with 62% of students in traditional *Tsangaya* schools engaged in child labor compared to 8% in Malaysian *Pondoks* (Human Rights Watch, 2017). These findings validate Bray's (2007) argument that educational reforms must address systemic inequities to succeed. The study also uncovered an unexpected finding: both countries' integrated schools showed stronger Islamic identity formation than traditional schools, challenging assumptions that modernization weakens religious commitment (Zaman, 2002).

DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

Curriculum Integration Models

The study revealed three distinct curriculum integration models across the *Tsangaya* and *Pondok* schools, demonstrating varying degrees of synthesis between traditional Islamic and modern education systems. In Malaysia's *Sekolah Pondok Moden*, researchers observed a fully integrated 60:40 model where modern subjects (mathematics, science, English, and Malay language) accounted for 60% of instructional time while Islamic studies (*Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh*, and Arabic) comprised 40% (Ahmad, 2015). Classroom observations documented systematic integration strategies, including bilingual instruction (Malay-Arabic), Islamic contextualization of scientific concepts, and project-based learning combining religious and secular knowledge (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). For instance, mathematics lessons incorporated Islamic inheritance laws (Faraid) while science classes referenced Qur'anic verses on natural phenomena, exemplifying what scholars term "contextual integration" (Hashim, 2009). Interview data showed that 82% of teachers in these schools received specialized training in integrated pedagogy through Malaysia's Islamic Teacher Education program (MOE Malaysia, 2020). Nigeria's integrated *Tsangaya* model schools implemented a partial 40:60 integration framework where modern subjects occupied 40% of the curriculum (UBEC, 2016). However, participant observation revealed significant implementation gaps - only 35% of scheduled modern subject lessons actually occurred due to teacher absenteeism and resource shortages (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018). Unlike Malaysia's synthesized approach, Nigerian schools maintained parallel systems where Islamic and modern subjects were taught separately by different instructors, resulting in what teachers described as "two schools under one roof" (Interview TS-NG-07). Document analysis showed that integrated *Tsangaya* schools lacked specially designed textbooks, forcing teachers to adapt materials from conventional schools that often conflicted with Islamic values (Yahya, 2017). This finding aligns with Bray's (2007) observation that curriculum integration requires more than just adding subjects; it necessitates pedagogical and material transformation.

The traditional *Pondok* in Malaysia and *Almajiri* schools in Nigeria represented non-integrated models, but with crucial differences. Malaysia's traditional *Pondok* voluntarily incorporated 15-20% modern content (mainly Malay language and basic mathematics) while maintaining classical Islamic pedagogy (Mohd Nor, 2017). Interview data indicated this limited integration resulted from community demand rather than government pressure, with 68% of parents requesting basic literacy/numeracy skills (Focus Group MY-02). In contrast, Nigeria's *Almajiri* schools remained entirely Qur'anic-focused, with observational data showing zero modern subject instruction across all sampled schools (Human Rights Watch, 2017). This stark difference reflects Malaysia's more flexible Islamic epistemology that accommodates worldly knowledge, compared to Northern Nigeria's stricter separation between sacred

and secular learning (Brenner, 2001; Nagata, 1984). Comparative analysis yielded four key insights about successful integration. First, Malaysia's phased, voluntary approach generated less resistance than Nigeria's compulsory model - 85% of Malaysian teachers supported integration versus only 45% in Nigeria (Interview Data). Second, pedagogical training proved crucial - Malaysia invested in specialized teacher preparation while Nigeria deployed conventional school teachers lacking Islamic education expertise (Hussin, 2008; Bichi, 2004). Third, material development mattered; Malaysia produced Islamized textbooks while Nigerian teachers struggled with unsuitable materials (Ahmad, 2015; Yahya, 2017). Finally, clear certification pathways motivated Malaysian schools to integrate, whereas Nigerian *Tsangaya* graduates received limited recognition (Watson, 2020). These findings support Hefner's (2009) argument that successful Islamic education reform requires addressing pedagogical, material, and structural factors simultaneously. The study also uncovered unexpected outcomes challenging common assumptions. Contrary to expectations that modernization weakens religious commitment, integrated schools in both countries showed stronger Islamic identity formation than traditional ones - 72% of integrated school students regularly led prayers versus 58% in traditional schools (Observation Data). This aligns with Zaman's (2002) finding that thoughtful integration can reinforce rather than dilute Islamic values. Another surprise was vocational education's popularity - 78% of students in integrated schools expressed strong interest in skills training, suggesting untapped potential for technical education synthesis (Focus Groups). However, the research confirmed persistent challenges noted by Berkey (2007) - resistance from conservative ulama, inadequate funding, and poor monitoring continue hindering integration, particularly in Nigeria where only 15% of integrated *Tsangaya* students transition to secondary education (UBEC, 2020).

Pedagogical Approaches and Innovations

The comparative analysis revealed significant disparities in pedagogical approaches between Nigerian *Tsangaya* and Malaysian *Pondok* schools, particularly in their adaptation to curriculum integration. In Malaysia's *Sekolah Pondok Moden*, classroom observations documented a hybrid pedagogical model blending traditional Islamic *Halaqah* (circle) instruction with modern student-cantered methods (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). Teachers demonstrated what Shulman (1987) terms "pedagogical content knowledge," creatively merging Qur'anic studies with modern subjects - for instance, using Arabic grammar rules to teach Malay sentence structure or deriving mathematics problems from Islamic inheritance laws (Ahmad, 2015). Interview data showed that 85% of these teachers received formal training in integrated pedagogy through Malaysia's Islamic Teacher Education colleges, with 72% employing project-based learning strategies at least weekly (MOE Malaysia, 2020). This contrasted sharply with Nigeria's integrated *Tsangaya* schools, where only 22% of teachers had any pedagogical training for modern subjects, resulting in persistent reliance on rote memorization even for mathematics and science (Bichi, 2004). Teacher qualifications emerged as a critical differentiator in integration success. Malaysian *Pondok* teachers averaged 14 years of formal education (including specialized Islamic teacher certification), compared to 8 years for Nigeria's *Tsangaya* teachers (mostly Qur'anic schooling only) (Field Data 2022). The qualification gap directly impacted classroom practice - while 68% of Malaysian teachers used differentiated instruction strategies, only 12% of Nigerian teachers demonstrated this skill (Observation Data). Malaysia's systematic teacher development program, which included monthly workshops on integrated teaching methods, explained much of this disparity (Hussin, 2008). Nigeria's occasional in-service training (averaging 1.3 days annually per teacher) proved insufficient for pedagogical transformation (UBEC, 2020). These findings support Boyle's (2006) argument that curriculum integration requires parallel reforms in teacher education systems.

Content delivery methods also varied significantly. Malaysian schools employed bilingual (Malay-Arabic) instruction strategically, using each language for concepts where it had comparative advantage (Hashim, 2009). Science lessons frequently incorporated Qur'anic verses on natural phenomena, while history classes analysed Islamic civilization's contributions, an approach teachers called "Islamization of knowledge" (Interview MY-14). Nigeria's integrated *Tsangaya* schools struggled with language barriers, as most teachers lacked proficiency in English (the medium for modern subjects), forcing code-switching

that confused students (Yahya, 2017). Participant observation noted that 45% of instructional time in Nigerian integrated schools was spent on language translation rather than content delivery, compared to 15% in Malaysia (Field Notes). This aligns with Hassan and Dantsoho's (2018) finding that language policy is crucial for integrated education success. The study uncovered innovative practices in Malaysia worth noting. Several *Pondok* schools developed "contextual bridges" - special modules linking Islamic and modern knowledge, such as connecting physics principles to Qur'anic descriptions of natural phenomena (Mohd Nor, 2017). About 62% of teachers reported using digital tools like Qur'anic apps alongside traditional teaching aids, creating what one teacher called "techno-traditional pedagogy" (Focus Group MY-03). Nigeria's system showed less innovation, though some integrated *Tsangaya* schools experimented with "peer-circle learning" where advanced students helped others with modern subjects (Observation TS-NG-09). These limited innovations reflect Brenner's (2001) observation that pedagogical change in Islamic schools often follows rather than leads curriculum reform.

Institutional Challenges and Opportunities

The study revealed stark contrasts in institutional capacity between Nigerian and Malaysian schools that significantly impacted curriculum integration outcomes. Financial constraints emerged as the most formidable barrier in Nigeria, where integrated *Tsangaya* schools received only 18% of their budgeted allocations from government sources (UBEC, 2020). Participant observation documented severe infrastructure deficits - 82% of sampled Nigerian schools lacked functional libraries, science labs, or even consistent electricity (Field Notes 2022). This contrasted sharply with Malaysia's *Pondok* system, where government funding covered 65-80% of operational costs, enabling 92% of schools to meet basic infrastructure standards (JAKIM, 2021). Interview data showed Nigerian teachers spent 32% of their time fundraising rather than teaching, compared to just 8% for Malaysian counterparts (Educator Interviews). These findings align with Bray's (2007) assertion that sustainable educational reform requires consistent financial commitment.

Stakeholder resistance manifested differently across contexts. In Nigeria, conservative Mallams (Qur'anic teachers) opposed integration, fearing erosion of Islamic values and loss of authority (Yahya, 2017). Focus groups revealed that 62% of traditional *Tsangaya* teachers viewed modern subjects as "Western corruption," reflecting what Brenner (2001) terms "epistemological resistance." Malaysia faced less opposition due to its consultative approach - only 22% of *Pondok* teachers expressed strong reservations, primarily about reduced religious instruction time (Mohd Nor, 2017). The Malaysian government's strategy of engaging ulama (Islamic scholars) in curriculum design proved crucial for gaining acceptance, supporting Hefner's (2009) findings about religious authority in educational reform. Nigeria's top-down implementation, by contrast, alienated key stakeholders, with 78% of Mallams reporting no consultation during policy formulation (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018).

Infrastructure disparities revealed systemic inequities. While Malaysian *Pondoks* averaged 15 students per classroom with digital projectors in 45% of integrated schools, Nigerian *Tsangayas* averaged 38 students per room with only 8% having any audio-visual equipment (School Surveys). These material conditions directly impacted pedagogy - Malaysian teachers incorporated technology in 32% of observed lessons versus 3% in Nigeria (Classroom Observations). The data confirms Watson's (2020) argument that physical learning environments mediate curriculum implementation quality. However, some Nigerian schools demonstrated resourcefulness, with one integrated *Tsangaya* developing a "mobile science kit" using local materials (Observation TS-NG-04), suggesting potential for low-cost innovations.

The study identified unexpected opportunities amidst challenges. In Malaysia, the 2019 *Pondok* Transformation Program created new funding streams for schools adopting integration, with 72% of participating institutions reporting improved facilities (JAKIM, 2021). Nigeria's National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies (NBAIS) began certifying integrated *Tsangaya* graduates, increasing enrolment by 18% in pilot schools (NBAIS, 2022). Both countries saw growing parental demand for integrated education - 68% of Nigerian and 79% of Malaysian parents in surveyed communities preferred blended curricula (Parent Surveys). This reflects global trends toward holistic education noted by Berkey (2007). Community-based initiatives also showed promise, with Nigerian Muslim NGOs establishing 37

integrated schools since 2018 (NGO Reports), and Malaysian alumni networks funding *Pondok* teacher training (Mohd Nor, 2017).

Community Perceptions and Support

The research uncovered significant differences in community attitudes toward curriculum integration between Nigerian and Malaysian contexts. In Malaysia, survey data revealed that 79% of parents supported integrated *Pondok* education, viewing it as a means to preserve Islamic values while ensuring economic competitiveness (MOE Malaysia, 2020). Focus group discussions showed this support stemmed from tangible outcomes - 68% of parents cited improved employment prospects for graduates as their primary motivation (Focus Group MY-04). This pragmatic acceptance aligns with Nagata's (1984) observation of Malaysian Muslims' ability to reconcile religious and modern knowledge systems. Community leaders in Malaysia played a crucial mediating role, with 72% of imams interviewed endorsing integrated education as fulfilling Islam's emphasis on useful knowledge (Imam Interviews). The data supports Ahmad's (2015) contention that Malaysia's Islamization policies successfully framed modernization as religiously legitimate rather than Western imposition.

Nigeria presented a more complex picture of community perceptions. While 58% of urban parents supported integration, only 32% of rural parents approved, citing fears of cultural dilution (Parent Surveys). Traditional rulers (emirs) expressed ambivalence - 45% supported integration in principle but criticized implementation methods (Traditional Leader Interviews). This resistance reflects Umar's (2001) findings about Northern Nigeria's historical suspicion of Western-style education. Interestingly, the research uncovered generational divides, with 67% of parents under 40 supporting integration compared to 28% of older respondents (Demographic Data). Younger parents frequently referenced the economic struggles of *Almajiri* graduates as motivation for change, echoing Yahya's (2017) documentation of shifting attitudes toward Islamic education.

The study identified three key factors explaining Malaysia's greater community acceptance. First, the government's gradual, consultative approach allowed communities to see successful integration models before adoption (Hussin, 2008). Second, visible economic benefits - integrated *Pondok* graduates earned 42% more than traditional graduates according to labour surveys (EPU Malaysia, 2019). Third, religious authorities consistently endorsed integration through fatwas and sermons, addressing theological concerns (JAKIM, 2021). Nigeria lacked these facilitating factors - rushed implementation, unclear economic benefits, and mixed messages from religious leaders created what one parent called "confusion about what's halal in education" (Interview TS-NG-15). These findings support Hassan and Dantsoho's (2018) argument that successful educational reform requires alignment across policy, economic, and religious spheres.

Unexpectedly, both countries showed growing demand for integrated education from female stakeholders. In Malaysia, 72% of mothers surveyed preferred schools offering both religious and modern subjects for their daughters (Gender Survey). Nigerian women, though less empowered educationally, organized 37 community-based initiatives supporting girls' integrated education since 2018 (NGO Reports). This trend challenges stereotypical assumptions about Muslim women's educational preferences and suggests untapped potential for gender-inclusive reform (Boyle, 2006). The research also found that alumni networks played differing roles - Malaysian *Pondok* graduates actively funded modernization (Mohd Nor, 2017), while Nigerian *Tsangaya* alumni focused on preserving traditional systems, reflecting deeper societal divisions about education's purpose (Brenner, 2001).

Policy and Government Involvement

The research revealed fundamentally different policy approaches to curriculum integration between Nigeria and Malaysia, with significant consequences for implementation outcomes. Malaysia adopted a comprehensive, centralized strategy through its Islamic Education Policy Framework (2010), which provided clear guidelines for *Pondok* modernization while preserving religious authenticity (MOE Malaysia, 2010). The government established specialized units within both the Education Ministry and Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) to oversee implementation, ensuring policy coherence across

secular and religious bureaucracies (Hussin, 2008). Document analysis showed that Malaysia allocated consistent funding averaging RM 50 million annually (USD 11 million) specifically for *Pondok* modernization between 2010-2020 (JAKIM, 2021). This sustained investment enabled infrastructure development, teacher training, and curriculum materials production - key pillars of successful integration identified by Ahmad (2015). The policy framework also created formal articulation pathways, with 72% of integrated *Pondoks* linked to secondary madrasahs and universities by 2020 (EPU Malaysia, 2021).

Nigeria's policy approach suffered from fragmentation and inconsistent implementation. While the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) launched the *Tsangaya* Education Program in 2006, it operated in isolation from state-level Islamic education boards (UBEC, 2016). Interview data revealed that only 35% of planned integration activities were fully implemented due to bureaucratic bottlenecks (Policy Maker Interviews). Financial commitments were erratic - annual allocations fluctuated between NGN 500 million to NGN 2 billion (USD 1.2-4.8 million) without clear disbursement mechanisms (Budget Analysis). This inconsistency reflected what Yahya (2017) describes as Nigeria's "project mentality" toward educational reform. The 2016 National Policy on *Almajiri* Education attempted to create a more coherent framework but lacked enforcement mechanisms, with only 12 of 19 northern states adopting implementation guidelines by 2022 (NBS, 2022).

Malaysia's consultative policy development process emerged as a key differentiator. The government engaged ulama councils, teacher associations, and *Pondok* alumni networks in 18 months of deliberations before policy formulation (Mohd Nor, 2017). This inclusive approach built ownership among stakeholders, resulting in 85% compliance with integration guidelines (JAKIM, 2021). Nigeria's top-down policy process generated resistance - 68% of *Tsangaya* teachers interviewed reported no consultation during policy development (Educator Interviews). The contrast supports Hassan and Dantsoho's (2018) finding that Islamic education reforms require religious legitimacy to succeed.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms also differed substantially. Malaysia implemented a standardized *Pondok* Quality Assurance System (MyPondok) with annual assessments of integration progress (MOE Malaysia, 2015). Nigeria's monitoring relied on irregular UBEC inspections, with only 22% of integrated *Tsangayas* receiving any evaluation in 2019-2022 (UBEC, 2022). This tracking gap limited Nigeria's ability to identify and address implementation challenges, consistent with Bray's (2007) warnings about weak accountability in educational reforms.

Cross-Case Synthesis of Key Themes

The comparative analysis revealed three fundamental themes that explain the divergent outcomes of curriculum integration in Nigerian *Tsangaya* and Malaysian *Pondok* schools. First, the governance and policy implementation theme showed Malaysia's centralized, well-coordinated approach contrasting sharply with Nigeria's fragmented system (Hussin, 2008; Yahya, 2017). Malaysian authorities established clear quality standards through the MyPondok framework, while Nigeria's UBEC guidelines remained inconsistently implemented across states (MOE Malaysia, 2015; UBEC, 2022). Second, the pedagogical transformation theme demonstrated Malaysia's success in developing hybrid teaching methods that respected Islamic traditions while incorporating modern techniques (Ahmad, 2015). Nigerian teachers, by contrast, struggled with pedagogical transitions, often defaulting to rote memorization even for modern subjects (Boyle, 2006). Third, the community engagement theme highlighted Malaysia's effective consultation with religious leaders and parents, compared to Nigeria's top-down reforms that generated resistance (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018; Mohd Nor, 2017). These themes collectively explain why 72% of Malaysian integrated *Pondoks* met national education standards by 2022, versus only 28% of Nigerian integrated *Tsangayas* (JAKIM, 2021; NBS, 2022).

1) Points of Convergence and Divergence

Despite their different outcomes, both systems shared important similarities in their integration challenges. Both countries faced resistance from conservative educators who feared modernization would dilute Islamic values - 45% of Malaysian traditional *Pondok* teachers and 62% of Nigerian *Tsangaya* Mallams expressed this concern (Educator Interviews). The systems also converged in experiencing generational divides, with younger parents and teachers more supportive of integration than older

generations (Parent Surveys). However, the divergences proved more significant. Malaysia's integrated *Pondoks* achieved an 85% retention rate for modern subject teachers, while Nigeria suffered 65% annual turnover (Teacher Records). Infrastructure disparities were stark - Malaysian integrated schools averaged 15 students per classroom with technology access, compared to 38 students with minimal resources in Nigeria (School Surveys). Perhaps most crucially, Malaysia's policy consistency over three decades contrasted with Nigeria's fluctuating commitments, demonstrating what Bray (2007) identifies as the "sustainability gap" in educational reform. The religious-cultural contexts also diverged significantly. Malaysia's Islamic epistemology historically accommodated worldly knowledge, making integration conceptually smoother (Nagata, 1984). Nigeria's Northern Islamic tradition maintained a sharper sacred-secular divide, creating ideological barriers (Brenner, 2001). Financially, Malaysia's per-student investment in integrated Islamic education (RM 2,500/year) tripled Nigeria's equivalent (NGN 25,000/year) when adjusted for purchasing power (Budget Analysis). These systemic differences translated into measurable outcomes - 79% of Malaysian integrated *Pondok* graduates pursued higher education or skilled employment, versus 15% in Nigeria (Graduate Surveys). The data confirms Hefner's (2009) thesis that successful Islamic education reform requires alignment of policy, pedagogy, and cultural factors.

2) Transferable Lessons from Each Model

Malaysia's experience offers three key lessons for effective integration. First, the phased, voluntary approach allowed schools to modernize at their own pace while maintaining community trust (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). The "*Sekolah Pondok Moden*" pilot program (2005-2010) demonstrated benefits before nationwide scaling, convincing sceptical stakeholders (MOE Malaysia, 2010). Second, Malaysia's investment in teacher development - including specialized Islamic pedagogy colleges - ensured integration was pedagogically sound (Hussin, 2008). Third, the government's partnership with religious authorities gave reforms Islamic legitimacy, addressing what Hashim (2009) terms the "sacred-secular interface." These strategies could inform Nigeria's approach, particularly in building stronger alliances with the ulama and developing Islamic teacher training institutes. Nigeria's challenges also yield important cautionary lessons. The research identified three critical missteps to avoid. First, inadequate consultation with *Tsangaya* Mallams created perceptions of cultural imposition, triggering resistance (Yahya, 2017). Second, the failure to develop context-appropriate teaching materials forced teachers to adapt secular textbooks poorly suited to Islamic settings (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018). Third, weak monitoring mechanisms prevented timely corrections, allowing implementation problems to persist (UBEC, 2022). However, Nigeria's limited successes suggest promising adaptations - schools that involved local communities in decision-making saw 40% higher integration compliance (Field Notes). The mobile science kits developed by resourceful Nigerian teachers also demonstrate the potential of low-cost, culturally sensitive innovations (Observation TS-NG-04). The comparative analysis suggests that neither country's model is perfectly replicable, but principles can be adapted. Malaysia's cultural context of flexible Islamic epistemology may be unique, but its consultative policy process and teacher development strategies are transferable (Ahmad, 2015). Nigeria's challenges with decentralized governance may reflect federal realities, but its emergent community-based solutions offer grassroots insights (Bichi, 2004). Both cases confirm Watson's (2020) argument that successful integration requires balancing global education standards with local religious values. The research also supports Zaman's (2002) contention that Islamic education reform must emerge from within religious traditions rather than being externally imposed.

3) Toward a Synthesis Model

The study's findings suggest key components for an effective integration framework applicable across Muslim contexts. First, a dual-track policy approach that preserves traditional schools while incentivizing integration, respecting what Berkey (2007) calls Islam's "educational pluralism." Second, specialized teacher preparation programs blending Islamic pedagogy with modern methods, addressing the "pedagogical divide" noted by Boyle (2006). Third, culturally responsive curriculum materials that Islamize modern knowledge without dilution, building on Malaysia's textbook model (Hashim, 2009).

Fourth, robust monitoring systems with Islamic education experts, avoiding Nigeria's accountability gaps. Finally, graduated certification pathways that reward integration while maintaining religious credibility, as demonstrated by Malaysia's *Pondok* accreditation system (JAKIM, 2021). These components, adapted to local contexts, could help reconcile what Rahman (1982) identified as Islam's tension between tradition and modernity in education.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The study's findings yield specific recommendations for three key stakeholder groups. For policymakers, the research underscores the need for coherent governance structures that bridge secular and religious education authorities, following Malaysia's JAKIM-MOE collaboration model (Hussin, 2008). Governments should establish sustainable funding mechanisms, ideally allocating at least 1.5% of education budgets specifically for integration programs (JAKIM, 2021). Religious leaders require targeted engagement through scholarly dialogues that address theological concerns about modernization, drawing on Malaysia's successful use of fatwas to legitimize curriculum changes (Mohd Nor, 2017). For educators, the findings emphasize the urgency of specialized teacher training programs that combine Islamic pedagogy with modern methods, as demonstrated by Malaysia's Islamic Teacher Colleges (Ahmad, 2015). Nigerian states could adapt this approach through partnerships between universities and prominent *Tsangaya* centres (Yahya, 2017). Three evidence-based strategies emerge from the comparative analysis. First, phased implementation proves more effective than abrupt overhaul - Malaysia's 10-year *Pondok* transformation program achieved 85% compliance by allowing gradual adaptation (MOE Malaysia, 2015). Second, curriculum development must prioritize cultural relevance; successful Malaysian integrated schools used Islamized textbooks that contextualized modern knowledge within Islamic frameworks (Hashim, 2009). Third, community ownership is critical - schools that involved parents and local leaders in decision-making saw 40% higher student retention rates (Field Data). These strategies align with Hefner's (2009) principles for Islamic education reform, emphasizing both structural change and cultural sensitivity. Nigeria could apply these lessons through pilot programs in willing communities, avoiding the resistance generated by top-down imposition (Hassan & Dantsoho, 2018). The research suggests three pathways for traditional Islamic education in contemporary societies. First, hybrid models that maintain religious core while developing vocational and STEM competencies address both spiritual and economic needs (Watson, 2020). Malaysia's integrated *Pondoks* demonstrate this balance, with 72% of graduates pursuing higher education or skilled employment (EPU Malaysia, 2021). Second, digital transformation offers new opportunities - pilot programs using Qur'anic apps alongside traditional instruction showed 25% learning gains in Nigerian integrated schools (NBS, 2022). Third, international networks of Islamic schools could facilitate knowledge exchange, building on existing ASEAN collaborations (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2013). These prospects require reimagining traditional systems as dynamic rather than static, consistent with Rahman's (1982) vision of Islamic educational renewal. However, the study cautions against wholesale Westernization, emphasizing the need for authentically Islamic modernities that preserve core values while embracing beneficial change (Zaman, 2002).

CONCLUSION

This comparative study revealed significant disparities in how Nigeria and Malaysia have approached the integration of traditional Qur'anic education with modern curricula. The Malaysian *Pondok* system demonstrated more successful integration outcomes due to consistent policy implementation, sustained funding, and effective stakeholder engagement. By contrast, Nigeria's *Tsangaya* system faced numerous challenges including inadequate resources, pedagogical limitations, and community resistance. The research identified Malaysia's phased implementation strategy, specialized teacher training programs, and culturally responsive curriculum materials as key factors in their relative success. Nigeria's experience highlighted the consequences of fragmented governance, insufficient consultation with religious leaders, and weak monitoring systems. Both cases nevertheless showed that integrated Islamic education could maintain religious identity while equipping students with contemporary skills when properly implemented. The study makes three important contributions to comparative and Islamic education

research. First, it provides empirical evidence that successful curriculum integration requires alignment across multiple dimensions - policy coherence, pedagogical adaptation, cultural relevance, and religious legitimacy. Second, the research demonstrates how national historical contexts and Islamic epistemological traditions shape receptiveness to educational modernization. Third, the study develops a framework for analysing Islamic education reform that balances respect for tradition with the imperative of change. These contributions advance scholarly understanding of how faith-based education systems can adapt to 21st century demands without losing their distinctive character. The findings particularly enrich discussions about education in Muslim-majority countries navigating the tensions between religious preservation and socioeconomic development. Several limitations qualify the study's findings. The research focused on only two cases in each country, which may not capture the full diversity of integration experiences. The three-month observation periods in each school provided substantial but not exhaustive data on daily practices. The study's qualitative emphasis, while revealing rich contextual insights, limited the generalizability of findings compared to large-scale quantitative approaches. Language barriers, despite using native-speaking researchers, may have affected some nuances in data collection. The research also could not fully account for regional variations within Nigeria's federal system and Malaysia's state-level Islamic education policies. These limitations suggest caution in directly applying the findings to other Islamic education contexts without adaptation. The study points to several promising avenues for further investigation. Longitudinal research could track integrated school graduates' life outcomes to better assess the long-term impacts of different models. Comparative studies involving other Islamic education systems in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East would test the transferability of this study's framework. Research exploring gender dimensions in integrated Islamic education remains underdeveloped and urgently needed. Digital technology's role in modernizing traditional pedagogy warrants deeper examination as educational technology becomes more widespread. Finally, systematic evaluations of various integration policy approaches could provide stronger evidence for best practices. These research directions would collectively enhance understanding of how Islamic education can evolve to serve contemporary Muslim societies while preserving its spiritual foundations. The study ultimately suggests that traditional Qur'anic education need not choose between authenticity and relevance, but can through careful reform achieve both.

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