

LIFE SKILLS BASED EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION FOR STUDENTS OF INTEGRATED ISLAMIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the implementation of life skills-based education in Islamic Junior High Schools in the Semarang Regency and to identify the associated challenges and potential solutions. Using an exploratory descriptive qualitative design, the research was conducted at selected Islamic Junior High Schools in the region. Data were gathered through interviews, observations, and documentation. The researchers conducted interviews with key informants, observed the implementation of life skills education, documented relevant activities and materials, and ensured the validity and reliability of the data through source and method triangulation. The findings reveal that the implementation of life skills education involves three key stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. During the planning phase, schools developed operational curriculum guidelines, strategic plans, and supporting documents such as syllabi, teaching modules, and instructional materials. In the implementation phase, two schools adopted a variety of strategies including: (1) the Reflect-Practice-Study (RTL) strategy, (2) learner-centered approaches, (3) contextually relevant life skills techniques, and (4) enhanced extracurricular activities as part of a community-based education approach. In the evaluation phase, schools employed the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) evaluation model to assess program effectiveness. This research provides valuable insights for schools and policymakers on the importance of

developing life skills-oriented curricula and underscores the need to continuously evaluate educational programs. It also contributes to the broader understanding of life skills education within the context of Islamic Junior High Schools.

Keywords: Curriculum Implementation; Holistic Approach; Life Skills; Social; Vocational.

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of Integrated Islamic Schools has created educational institutions that blend general academic content with Islamic values, resulting in a curriculum responsive to contemporary educational demands. This integrated approach enables students to gain knowledge and engage in activities that are closely aligned with Islamic teachings and principles.

In the current era of Industry 4.0, marked by rapid advancements in science and technology, there is an urgent need for Integrated Islamic Schools to enhance the quality of education in terms of religious understanding, intellectual development, and practical competencies. This is essential for students to compete and succeed on a global scale. In reality, not all graduates of Integrated Islamic Schools pursue careers in religious fields. Therefore, it is crucial that all students receive guidance in essential life skills

before entering broader society. Without adequate skills and knowledge, students risk becoming less competitive in the job market, potentially contributing to higher unemployment rates, which is clearly undesirable. Hence, early exposure to the world of work is vital to prepare a generation of Muslims who are competent, independent, skilled, and ready to contribute productively to society.

The integration of life skills education within the boarding school system of Integrated Islamic Schools is considered an effective strategy for addressing these challenges and reducing Indonesia's growing unemployment rate. Life skills education plays a critical role in fostering emotional intelligence, social competence, and personal development. According to Prajapati et al. (2017), a well-structured life skills program is essential for equipping students with the foundational abilities required to adapt to changing societal and global contexts. Life skills are fundamental tools for promoting well-being and happiness among the younger generation.

Preliminary survey results indicate that institutions such as Islamic Junior High School Assalam in Bandungan and Islamic Junior High School Nurul Islam in Tenganan, both of which attract students from various regions, have incorporated life skills education into their boarding school programs. These schools not only offer religious instruction but also provide training in life skills to help students develop individual competencies.

However, a review of existing literature shows that research on life skills education in Integrated Islamic Schools, especially at the secondary school level, remains limited. Previous studies have

primarily focused on Islamic boarding schools, such as the work by Suharmoko (2018), or on general school contexts, such as the study by Sri Wahyuni and Dinar Yulia Indrasari (2017). While some research addresses the significance of life skills programs, including studies by Jauk (2017), Eissa (2018), and Akfirat (2016), few have specifically examined how such programs are implemented. Additionally, many studies focus on internal and external factors affecting students, as seen in the works of Ndirangu (2022) and Kirchhoff (2021), rather than on the implementation process itself within integrated Islamic educational settings. Given these research gaps, this study aims to investigate how life skills-based education is planned, implemented, and evaluated in Islamic Junior High Schools in the Semarang Regency. The goal is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role and execution of life skills education in the context of integrated Islamic secondary education.

METHODS

This study employed an exploratory, descriptive, and analytical qualitative research design to investigate the implementation of life skills-based education. The researchers used purposive sampling to select two Integrated Islamic Junior High Schools in Semarang Regency as research sites: SMPIT As-Salaam Bandungan and SMPIT Nurul Islam Tenganan. Data were collected through three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations allowed the researchers to directly examine life skills education practices, while interviews with key informants provided deeper insights into

planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Documentation, such as curriculum materials and school records, was used to support and validate the data. This research design enabled the exploration of the issue in its natural context without manipulating any variables, aiming to describe, record, analyze, and interpret existing educational phenomena, in line with Creswell and Creswell (2018).

RESULT

In this research, researchers classified their findings into three main parts: the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages.

In the planning stage, researchers found that religious education plays a vital role in shaping students' life skills, both generic and specific. According to the results of an interview with the principal of Nurul Islam Tenggara Integrated Islamic Junior High School: "Life skills education aims to develop human resources who are noble, intelligent, skilled, healthy, independent, and have a high work ethic." In addition, life skills training is intended to help individuals and society develop health, intelligence, democratic awareness, strong ethical standards, and the ability to live a prosperous life while fostering overall human resource development.

This perspective was also echoed by the principal of As-Salaam Bandungan Integrated Islamic Junior High School, who stated:

"Life skills are based on faith and piety and are drawn from the essence within every human being. By embracing this, a person can realize the spirit of faith and piety in all aspects of life, both in their

relationship with God and with others, allowing them to live a good and happy life. On the other hand, if it is not based on faith, the human soul will die. It is like a light that illuminates a person and guides them in living a concrete life."

At this stage, schools begin by formulating strategies aligned with their institutional vision and mission. This was explained by the Deputy Head of Curriculum at Nurul Islam Integrated Islamic Junior High School, who stated:

"The life skills approach to every school subject must be based on the principle of a broad educational approach, one that is grounded in real-life facts. Broad education means adopting a stronger, more fundamental focus."

He further added that, philosophically, this board-based educational model is guided by the belief that education is a lifelong process occurring in families, schools, and communities. Therefore, education is a shared responsibility among families, communities, and the government. Psychologically, education should aim to develop each individual's potential through an environment that caters to their learning needs. Because humans need relationships to survive, a wide range of values must be instilled to support this growth.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Head of Curriculum at As-Salaam Bandungan explained: "At the planning stage, all elements of the education unit are actively involved in preparing the annual program, with direct supervision from the school foundation, which monitors all activities

weekly on Saturday mornings. Everyone gathers and contributes their ideas during the planning process.”

An interview with the Deputy Head of Human Resources also highlighted several key aspects connected to curriculum planning, both explicitly and implicitly. These include: refining the curriculum, emphasizing student participation in learning, applying diverse teaching methods, cultivating students’ perspectives and attitudes to develop their potential and face life’s challenges, providing facilities and supervision, promoting activities that support life skills development, optimizing the role of communities in implementing programs suited to local characteristics, and strengthening partnerships with external stakeholders such as businesses and NGOs.

Meanwhile, at the implementation stage, researchers found several strategies being applied at both schools:

a. Reflect-Practice-Study (RTL) Strategy.

Based on documentation data, it was found that life skills-based activities are embedded directly into classroom learning in specific subjects. This is evident in intra-curricular programs such as the Project for Strengthening Pancasila Learner Profile (P5) and Rahmatan Lil Alamin Learner Profile (PPRA), both of which focus on academic, social, and personal development. Supporting this strategy are co-curricular and extracurricular activities such as the student council (OSIS) and scouting, which aim to enhance students’ social and personal skills. In addition, vocational skills are fostered through various extracurricular options such as culinary arts, graphic design, multimedia,

calligraphy, English and Arabic clubs, music and vocal arts, dance, and robotics.

b. Learner Centered Strategy.

This strategy is built on four core principles: (1) developing skills based on the interests and needs of individuals or target groups; (2) linking skill development to the local socio-cultural and natural potential of the region; (3) supporting skills that align with the small-to-medium business sector and home industry; and (4) emphasizing practical rather than theoretical learning.

The first principle is reflected in the wide range of extracurricular activities offered at the schools. According to Student N (Head of the Student Council) at Nurul Islam Junior High School:

“I may choose extracurricular activities based on my hobbies. I chose the English Club and Arabic Club because I like foreign languages. My involvement in OSIS also helps improve my basic leadership skills.”

Meanwhile, Student L (Chair of the Female Student Council) also explained:

“I participated in culinary and sewing activities, and one of the final outcomes was that we were given the opportunity to exhibit our work through a Bazaar or Expo held by the school.”

Based on field notes and logbook documentation, students are also encouraged to explore skills based on local potential. For instance, agribusiness activities at SMPIT As-Salaam allow students to engage in avocado planting, which reflects the agricultural richness of the Bandung area. This not only builds agricultural skills but also connects

students to local economic and tourism opportunities.

Further development of skills related to small-scale enterprises is evident in activities such as sewing and embroidery, which are facilitated through extracurricular programs. Students' work is exhibited and marketed through school-organized bazaars and cooperatives. In addition, the development of operational and technology-oriented competencies is emphasized through programs such as graphic design and multimedia, which integrate theoretical knowledge with hands-on application. These initiatives aim to equip students with practical experience and readiness to engage directly with real-world industries.

This is in line with an interview from the Deputy Head of Curriculum for Student Affairs at SMPIT Nurul Islam Tenganan:

"The organization of extracurricular learning is designed using several methods, including: (1) implementing both mandatory and elective extracurricular activities, such as scouting for mandatory and interest-based clubs for electives; (2) emphasizing active and enjoyable student participation; and (3) involving educators and external experts in skills training."

- c. Integrating life skills education to the curriculum that is applied in the independent curriculum.

The strategy of integrating life skills education into the curriculum can be seen from the learning planning program within the scope of the Education Unit. Learning planning at the unit level includes documents outlining learning outcomes. The curriculum explicitly

incorporates life skills education through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, as stated in the project module. Additionally, student product expo activities related to the P5 program in both schools are evident in events such as bazaars and expos. Other supporting activities include industrial visits, outing classes, entrepreneurship projects, and market days. For example, outing class activities to Ambarawa involved observing the process of cooking serabi in Ngampin Village, while visits to Gemawang Village enabled students to observe and learn traditional batik production processes.

- d. Strengthening extracurricular activities that prioritize the community-based education model.

Indicators observed in the field show that both schools adopt a community-based education model. Data obtained from log books and field notes reveal that in managing the school environment, both institutions promote a school climate rooted in basic local wisdom values, such as: (a) developing self-discipline through responsibility, (b) enhancing learning motivation, and (c) cultivating a sense of togetherness and tolerance.

Furthermore, the schools have implemented reforms in school management by applying school-based quality improvement management (MPBS). Based on an interview with the principal of Nurul Islam Tenganan Integrated Islamic Junior High School, the curriculum model applied reflects a community-based education approach. This is evident in the principles applied, which involve the school committee in

decision-making regarding extracurricular activities.

This aligns with the statement from the principal:

"In the curriculum that we implement, we accommodate the aspirations of the community, especially in selecting extracurricular activities, such as multimedia and graphic design. Although our curriculum is an integration of the Islamic boarding school curriculum, the curriculum from the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Religion, because we implement an Integrated Islamic Curriculum, we also consider that mastery of information and technology is currently in high demand. Therefore, we offer these activities to enhance students' skills in those fields."

In general, the application of local wisdom values is also visible in students' daily routines, such as the habit of performing obligatory and dhuha prayers in congregation at the mosque, which is practiced by both male and female students at As-Salam Integrated Islamic Junior High School. This was supported by an interview with one of the class teachers, Mr. K, who stated:

"For prayer activities, all students must pray in congregation at the mosque, and a specific time is designated. For instance, there is a break at 12.00 for dhuhur prayer and lunch, after which students return to class at 12.45. Those who are absent or late will be subject to sanctions."

In the evaluation stage, both schools have emphasized the educational process over outcomes, without solely relying on measurable aspects. A review of the implementation of life skills education at both schools indicates that the evaluation model used is the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, and Product) model. This model is considered the most suitable because it takes into account multiple perspectives. Data from the field supports this, as expressed by Principal Y:

"In essence, life skills aim to help students develop learning abilities, eliminate inappropriate habits and mindsets, recognize their potential, appreciate realities that can be improved and practiced, and strengthen life skills. To assess whether our program is successful, we involve various parties in evaluating the outcomes. Besides the school community, we also involve the broader community and stakeholders through annual meetings and parenting activities held each semester. The school committee and parents play a significant role in decision-making."

The integration of life skills education into the learning plan is carried out both explicitly and implicitly. The development process includes the following steps: 1) Reviewing the subject curriculum, 2) Mapping life skills to each basic competency, 3) Developing a curriculum that teaches life skills, 4) Preparing a life skills learning plan, 5) Implementing the learning plan, and 6) Conducting an evaluation. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of implementing life skills education as part of the independent curriculum development relies on the optimal functioning of all components, such as context, input, and process, to

produce the desired outcomes. Evaluation steps taken by the two schools regarding life skills education encompass several aspects that can be described as follows:

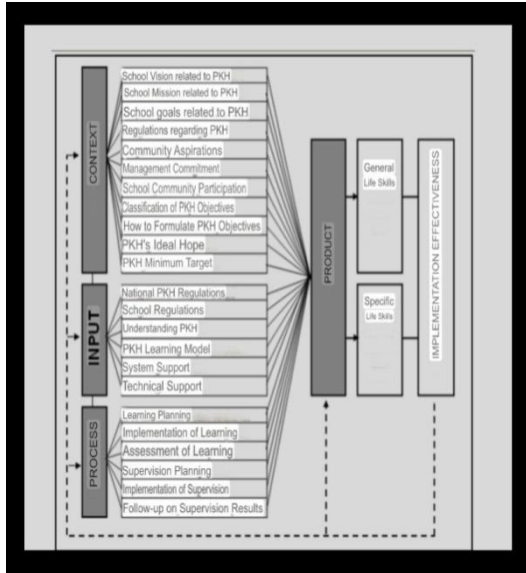


Diagram of Evaluation of Life Skills Education (PKH)

The diagram serves as a conceptual framework for evaluating Life Skills Education. However, its implementation at the practical level has not yet been fully realized and remains largely in the form of a draft or design. This is primarily due to the ongoing process of school adaptation and integration of life skills education within the Independent Curriculum. While the framework of the Independent Curriculum is inherently reflective of Life Skills Education and explicitly incorporates life skills as a foundational element in the learning process, its comprehensive evaluation has yet to be fully actualized. Current efforts primarily focus on classroom-level instruction, with limited attention to system-wide, technical, and supervisory dimensions of evaluation. This observation aligns with Richards, Jack C. (2001), who emphasizes in *Curriculum Development in Language*

Teaching the importance of systematic curriculum evaluation to ensure effective implementation and continual improvement.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher found that the implementation of life skills-based education in Integrated Islamic Junior High Schools in the Semarang area was carried out through the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. At the planning stage, all components were systematically programmed through the preparation of the operational curriculum document at the education unit level. All activities were required to align with the education unit's operational curriculum and the strategic planning documents of the school. Input and suggestions for the development of the guideline documents were gathered from both the internal school community and external stakeholders.

In the implementation stage, the schools applied several strategies, including the Reflection-Training-Review (RTL) Strategy, the Learner-Centered Strategy, integration of Life Skills Education into the curriculum explicitly (e.g., through the Independent Curriculum), and strengthening extracurricular activities that adopt a community-based education model.

The RTL strategy aligns with Marimba (1980), who argued that direct education involves three essential forms: exemplification through role models, training through habituation, and repetitive practice. Teachers, as figures of authority and role models, are expected to inspire and motivate students through their

actions. When educators demonstrate consistency between their words and actions, it significantly facilitates the transmission of values to students. Conversely, inconsistency may hinder the educational process. Repetitive religious practice, such as prayer and moral routines, serves as a form of habituation that shapes students' religious character. This corresponds with conditioning learning theory, which posits that behavioral changes arise from repeated experiences that connect stimuli to responses. Similarly, Frimayanti A.I. (2017) also supported this approach in her study on integrating life skills into Islamic education.

The learner-centered strategy, which is integral to the ethos of the Independent Curriculum, places students at the center of the learning process. This method grants learners the autonomy to explore knowledge independently and engage in deep learning, ultimately enhancing student quality. This approach reflects Masitoh (2005), who emphasized that the learning process should revolve around children's interests and that students should actively manage their own learning experiences. An, Y. and Mindrila, D. (2020) also emphasized the importance of strategies and tools designed for learner-centered instruction. This pedagogical approach consistently supports the development of human resources by fostering creativity, leadership, self-confidence, independence, discipline, critical thinking, communication skills, teamwork, technical expertise (including computer science and electronics), and global awareness. The child-centered approach is founded on three educational principles:

constructivism, developmentally appropriate practices, and progressive education, as described by Salahudin, A., and Alkrienciehie, I. (2013). Additional curricular development may also be informed by language teaching frameworks such as Richards, Jack C. (2001).

In the third strategy, life skills education is explicitly embedded within the Independent Curriculum, particularly in the development of thematic projects and curriculum design. This approach is consistent with Khujamberdiyeva (2021), who highlighted the central role of extracurricular activities in structuring the educational process. Similarly, Giang, T.T., Mai Quoc Khanh, Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong, and Vu Le Hoa (2022) supported the deliberate design of extracurricular programs to cultivate life skills.

The fourth strategy involves establishing a community-based education model in school practices. This aligns with Chauke, T. A. (2022), who developed a life skills education model suitable for non-formal educational contexts. It is also in accordance with Suoranta, Juha, Nina Hjelt, Tuuka Tomperi, and Anna Grant (2022), who emphasized the integration of life skills within non-formal education systems. Furthermore, Parvathy, V., and Pillai, Renjith R. (2015) found that life skills education has a significant positive impact on rural schools, particularly in developing holistic student competencies.

At the evaluation stage, the schools implemented the CIPP evaluation model, which consists of four components: context, input, process, and product (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). Context evaluation involves examining the environment, unmet needs, target

populations, and program objectives. Input evaluation assesses students' initial capabilities and the institutional readiness to implement the program. Process evaluation focuses on monitoring whether program activities are being conducted as planned. Product evaluation measures the impact and outcomes of the program. The CIPP model presumes a systemic and comprehensive evaluation approach.

However, in practice, the evaluation process at the schools has not been conducted in full. Specifically, the product evaluation component remains underdeveloped and is still in draft form. This indicates notable limitations in measuring the effectiveness of the life skills programs. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a thorough evaluation and analysis of each program component. Brown, T.G. (2022) also emphasized the need for a transdisciplinary perspective in evaluating educational plans. Likewise, Health, L. R. (2004) argued that life skills education programs must be assessed across multiple variables to ensure they adequately meet public needs.

CONCLUSIONS

In relation to the findings of the research, the school implements life skills-based education through three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. At the planning stage, the education unit develops a set of guideline documents, including the Education Unit Operational Curriculum, strategic plans, and curriculum components such as syllabi, teaching modules, lesson plans, and supplementary learning materials. These documents are formulated with input and considerations from various stakeholders within the learner ecosystem, including

school staff, community members, and parents or guardians of the students. During the implementation stage, the school adopts several strategies: the Renung-Latih-Telaah (RTL) strategy, a learner-centered approach, the explicit integration of life skills within the independent curriculum, and the reinforcement of extracurricular activities that emphasize a community-based education model. In the evaluation stage, the school assesses the program based on four dimensions: context, input, process, and product. The contextual aspect is implemented across various dimensions of student learning, while the input and process are supervised by the school principal. However, the evaluation has not yet been fully implemented in a comprehensive manner, particularly in terms of product assessment. At the product stage, the outcomes remain in the form of roadmaps and drafts, indicating the need for further development and refinement. This limitation is attributed to the school's ongoing efforts to adapt to the independent curriculum, despite one of the Integrated Islamic Junior High Schools already being designated as a "Sekolah Penggerak" (Model School).

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