

A Comprehensive Scoping Review of Early Childhood Education in Malaysia and Its Neighbouring Countries: A Comparative Analysis of Government Tadika, Private Pre-Schools, and Islamic Pre-Schools

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Abstract: *This scoping review examines the landscape of early childhood education (ECE) in Malaysia by comparing three primary types of pre-schools: government Tadika (Pra Sekolah), private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools. The review explores key aspects such as curriculum frameworks, accessibility, affordability, teaching quality, infrastructure, and socio-cultural impact. It identifies the unique characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of each pre-school type based on an analysis of academic literature, government reports, and policy documents. The findings highlight that government Tadika emphasizes national unity and accessibility but faces challenges in infrastructure and class size. Private pre-schools offer flexible curricula and advanced facilities but are limited by high tuition fees. Islamic pre-schools balance religious and academic education, providing moderate affordability but with variable infrastructure quality. The review concludes that addressing disparities in quality and accessibility among these institutions is vital for fostering holistic development in Malaysian children. Recommendations include policy integration, teacher development, parental engagement, inclusive curricula, and infrastructure improvement. between these 2 groups for perceived ease of use, behavioural intention and users' experience.*

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Malaysia; Government Tadika; Private Pre-School; Islamic Pre-School; Curriculum Comparison; Accessibility; Socio-Cultural Impact; Teaching Quality; Educational Policy

1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) plays a pivotal role in shaping the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children (Mustafa, 2011). In Malaysia, ECE is provided through various institutions, including government-operated Tadika (Pra Sekolah), private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools. These pre-schools differ significantly in terms of curriculum, accessibility, teaching quality, infrastructure, and socio-cultural impact (Rahman & Yunus, 2016). Government Tadika focuses on promoting national unity through a standardized curriculum aligned with national education policies (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2022). However, challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and basic infrastructure persist (Omar et al., 2020).

Private pre-schools, on the other hand, offer diverse curricula, including Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and International Primary Curriculum (IPC), which provide flexibility and modern educational approaches (Chin & Idris, 2018). These schools often feature advanced facilities and smaller class sizes, leading to better student-teacher interaction. However, high tuition fees limit access for middle and lower-income families (Lim et al., 2017). Despite these challenges, private pre-schools are popular among parents who prioritize global competitiveness and English proficiency (Tan, 2019).

Islamic pre-schools in Malaysia combine formal academic curricula with religious teachings, including Quranic studies and Arabic language (Zulkifli & Ibrahim, 2021). These schools cater to the needs of Muslim families seeking religious grounding alongside academic development. Islamic pre-schools are generally more affordable than private pre-schools and play a significant role in instilling moral values and community cohesion (Salleh & Hamid, 2015). However, there is a lack of standardization in infrastructure and curriculum quality across different Islamic pre-schools (Abdullah et al., 2023).

This review aims to explore these differences and compare the advantages and disadvantages of each type to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ECE landscape in Malaysia. By examining existing literature and policy documents, this review highlights the need for equitable policies that bridge gaps in accessibility and quality among these pre-school types (Mohamad & Aziz, 2024). Future strategies should focus on creating inclusive curricula, enhancing infrastructure, and fostering collaboration among the public, private, and Islamic sectors (Kassim et al., 2022).

2. Objectives

The primary objective of this scoping review is to compare the government Tadika (Pra Sekolah), private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools in Malaysia, focusing on curriculum content, accessibility, and socio-cultural impacts (Aziz & Ramli, 2023). This comparison aims to provide a holistic understanding of how each pre-school type contributes to early childhood development while addressing the existing disparities in quality and accessibility (Chong & Tan, 2022).

Another objective is to identify the advantages and disadvantages of each type of pre-school. For example, while government Tadika offers affordable education with a standardized curriculum, it often struggles with large class sizes and outdated facilities (Rahman et al., 2023). Private pre-schools provide diverse and modern educational approaches but are often expensive and inaccessible to lower-income families (Lim & Idris, 2021). Islamic pre-schools balance religious and academic education, yet they face inconsistencies in curriculum and infrastructure standards (Ismail & Abdullah, 2022).

Additionally, this review seeks to examine the role of parental involvement and teacher qualifications in shaping early childhood education outcomes (Hassan & Wong, 2023). Understanding these factors is essential for developing policies that support teacher training and parental engagement, which are critical for improving the quality of ECE across all types of pre-schools (Mahmud et al., 2024).

Lastly, the review aims to propose strategic recommendations to enhance the overall quality of early childhood education in Malaysia. These recommendations include integrating best practices across different pre-school types, improving infrastructure, and standardizing teacher

training programs (Zainal & Karim, 2023). Such strategies are expected to create an inclusive and high-quality ECE system that supports the holistic development of Malaysian children (Latif & Hamzah, 2022).

3. Literature Review

3.1 Government Tadika (Pra Sekolah)

Government Tadika, such as Tadika KEMAS and Tadika PERPADUAN, primarily follow the national curriculum (KSPK) designed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2022). These pre-schools aim to promote national integration and provide affordable education for all children, especially those from lower-income families (Omar et al., 2020). Advantages include accessibility and standardized teaching methods, ensuring equal learning opportunities (Rahman & Yunus, 2016). However, disadvantages include large class sizes, limited teaching resources, and outdated facilities, which may hinder personalized learning (Chong & Tan, 2022).

3.2 Private Pre-Schools

Private pre-schools in Malaysia include institutions such as Smart Reader Kids, Q-dees, and Kinderland. These schools offer various international curricula like Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and IPC, emphasizing child-centered and inquiry-based learning (Chin & Idris, 2018). The primary advantages of private pre-schools are modern teaching methods, advanced facilities, and smaller class sizes, which enhance teacher-student interactions (Lim et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the high tuition fees make these schools less accessible to middle- and lower-income families (Tan, 2019). Additionally, variations in curriculum quality across different private schools can lead to inconsistencies in educational outcomes (Lim & Idris, 2021).

3.3 Islamic Pre-Schools

Islamic pre-schools, including PASTI, Little Caliphs, and Genius Aulad, integrate religious education with formal academic curricula (Zulkifli & Ibrahim, 2021). These schools focus on Quranic studies, Arabic language, and Islamic values, alongside subjects such as mathematics and science (Salleh & Hamid, 2015). Advantages of Islamic pre-schools include affordability, moral development, and community cohesion (Abdullah et al., 2023). However, disadvantages include inconsistent infrastructure standards and variations in curriculum quality, which may affect overall educational outcomes (Ismail & Abdullah, 2022).

Overall, this literature review highlights the distinct characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of government Tadika, private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools in Malaysia. Addressing disparities in infrastructure, curriculum quality, and accessibility remains crucial for creating an inclusive and high-quality early childhood education system in the country (Mohamad & Aziz, 2024).

4. Methodology

This scoping review adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to compare government Tadika (Pra Sekolah), private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools in Malaysia. The SLR framework was chosen due to its comprehensive nature, allowing for the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The methodology follows the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines, ensuring transparency and reproducibility (Tricco et al., 2018).

4.1 Research Design

The research design included defining clear research questions, setting inclusion and exclusion criteria, and selecting appropriate databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar for literature search (Pham et al., 2014). The review aimed to answer how different types of pre-schools in Malaysia compare in terms of curriculum, accessibility, socio-cultural impact, and quality of education (Aziz & Ramli, 2023).

4.2 Data Collection Process

Data collection was carried out systematically through keyword searches including "early childhood education Malaysia," "government Tadika," "private pre-schools Malaysia," and "Islamic pre-schools Malaysia" (Chong & Tan, 2022). Inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and policy documents published between 2015 and 2024. Exclusion criteria included non-peer-reviewed sources and studies not directly related to the Malaysian context (Mohamad & Aziz, 2024).

Table 1: Steps of Conducting the Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

Step	Description	Tools/Databases Used
Step 1: Define Scope	Establish research questions and objectives	Literature, policy papers
Step 2: Search	Conduct database searches using selected keywords	Scopus, WoS, Google Scholar
Step 3: Screen	Apply inclusion/exclusion criteria to filter relevant studies	PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram
Step 4: Extract	Extract data on curriculum, accessibility, infrastructure, etc.	Excel, NVivo
Step 5: Synthesize	Compare findings across government, private, and Islamic pre-schools	Thematic analysis
Step 6: Report	Present results with recommendations	Narrative synthesis

4.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes across the selected studies, particularly focusing on curriculum differences, teaching quality, affordability, and socio-cultural aspects (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A comparative analysis of advantages and disadvantages was performed to highlight unique features and common challenges among the three pre-school types (Lim & Idris, 2021).

4.4 Quality Assessment

Quality assessment of the included studies was performed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, ensuring that only robust and high-quality evidence was included (Hassan & Wong, 2023). Reliability was further strengthened through inter-rater reliability checks among multiple reviewers.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

All sources included in the review were publicly available, eliminating ethical concerns related to primary data collection. Proper citations were ensured throughout the review process, maintaining academic integrity (Zainal & Karim, 2023).

This systematic and rigorous approach in conducting the scoping review ensures that the findings accurately reflect the current landscape of early childhood education in Malaysia, providing a robust foundation for subsequent recommendations and policy implications.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis Table

Category	Government Tadika (Pra Sekolah)	Private Pre-School	Islamic Pre-School
Curriculum	National curriculum (KSPK); structured and standardized	Diverse curricula (Montessori, Reggio Emilia, IPC)	National curriculum + Islamic teachings (Quranic studies, Arabic)
Accessibility	Highly accessible; integrated with primary schools	Limited to middle and upper-income families due to high fees	Moderate accessibility; popular among Muslim communities
Affordability	Low-cost or free; government-funded	High tuition fees; privately funded	Moderate fees; affordable compared to private pre-schools
Teaching Quality	Certified by the Ministry of Education; standardized training	Highly qualified teachers; some with international experience	Qualified in early childhood and Islamic studies
Infrastructure	Basic facilities; integrated with primary schools	Modern facilities; advanced learning tools and smaller class sizes	Varies; includes religious symbols and prayer spaces
Socio-Cultural Impact	Promotes national unity and multicultural understanding	Emphasizes global competencies and English proficiency	Instills Islamic values, moral education, and community cohesion

Table 3: Advantages and Disadvantages Comparison

Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Government Tadika	Affordable, promotes multicultural unity, standardized curriculum	Rigid curriculum, basic infrastructure, larger class sizes
Private Pre-School	Flexible curriculum, smaller classes, advanced facilities	High fees, limited accessibility, may reduce exposure to local culture
Islamic Pre-School	Balanced religious and formal education, moderate fees, moral focus	Less emphasis on global competencies, variable facilities, limited multicultural exposure

5. Findings

The findings of this scoping review are elaborated in detail, focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of government Tadika (Pra Sekolah), private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools in Malaysia. Key aspects such as curriculum, accessibility, socio-cultural impact, affordability, and teaching quality are discussed with supporting citations.

The curriculum in government Tadika follows the national preschool syllabus, focusing on foundational literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2022). The advantage of this standardized curriculum is the consistency it provides in educational outcomes across the nation (Rahman & Lee, 2023). However, its limited flexibility in accommodating diverse learning styles may hinder some children's potential (Aziz & Ramli, 2023). Private pre-schools, on the other hand, adopt international curricula such as Montessori and Reggio Emilia (Tan & Lim, 2023), providing a holistic approach to education (Chong et al., 2023). However, these curricula may not always align with national educational goals (Lim & Wong, 2024). Islamic pre-schools like PASTI and Little Caliphs integrate religious teachings with academic content (Abdullah & Musa, 2024). This results in strong moral and spiritual development (Hassan & Aziz, 2023), although it may limit exposure to diverse worldviews (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2024).

When considering accessibility, government Tadika programs are widely available, especially in rural areas, due to subsidized fees (Ismail & Hamid, 2022). This widespread accessibility is a significant advantage (Rahman & Lee, 2023), but limited capacity often results in long

waiting lists (Aziz & Ramli, 2023). Private pre-schools are typically found in urban areas (Chong et al., 2023), offering flexible scheduling and specialized programs (Tan & Lim, 2023). However, high fees restrict access for lower-income families (Lim & Wong, 2024). Accessibility in Islamic pre-schools depends on community demand (Hassan & Aziz, 2023). They are easily accessible in Muslim-majority areas (Abdullah & Musa, 2024) but less so in multicultural or rural communities (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2024).

The socio-cultural impact of these institutions varies significantly. Government Tadika promotes national unity through multicultural environments (Rahman & Lee, 2023). While this fosters social cohesion (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2022), it lacks emphasis on global cultural exposure (Aziz & Ramli, 2023). Private pre-schools offer multicultural experiences through diverse curricula (Tan & Lim, 2023), encouraging global perspectives (Chong et al., 2023). However, they may not sufficiently promote national unity (Lim & Wong, 2024). Islamic pre-schools, meanwhile, reinforce religious and cultural identities (Abdullah & Musa, 2024), fostering strong community bonds (Hassan & Aziz, 2023) but offering fewer opportunities for cross-cultural interaction (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2024).

Affordability is another critical factor. Government Tadika programs are highly affordable due to government funding (Aziz & Ramli, 2023), making them accessible to all income groups (Rahman & Lee, 2023). However, budget constraints can limit the availability of resources (Ismail & Hamid, 2022). Private pre-schools, although equipped with premium facilities (Tan & Lim, 2023), charge high fees that may exclude middle- and lower-income families (Lim & Wong, 2024). Islamic pre-schools have variable costs depending on size and location (Hassan & Aziz, 2023). While affordable options exist for middle-income families (Abdullah & Musa, 2024), premium programs remain costly (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2024).

Finally, teaching quality differs across these pre-schools. Government Tadika teachers are trained under national standards (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2022), ensuring consistent teaching quality (Rahman & Lee, 2023). However, this may limit exposure to alternative teaching methodologies (Aziz & Ramli, 2023). Private pre-schools employ highly qualified teachers with diverse skills (Chong et al., 2023), offering innovative and personalized learning experiences (Tan & Lim, 2023). The challenge lies in maintaining consistent quality across institutions (Lim & Wong, 2024). Islamic pre-schools employ teachers proficient in both academic and religious education (Abdullah & Musa, 2024). This balanced approach benefits students holistically (Hassan & Aziz, 2023), though variations in teacher qualifications can impact overall quality (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2024).

Table 4: Enhanced Summary of Key Findings

Aspect	Government Tadika	Private Pre-schools	Islamic Pre-schools
Curriculum	Standardized national curriculum	International curricula (e.g., Montessori)	Academic + religious (e.g., PASTI)
Accessibility	Nationwide, subsidized	Urban-focused, limited rural access	Community-based, moderate accessibility
Socio-cultural	Promotes national unity	Multicultural exposure, less national focus	Religious/cultural identity emphasis
Affordability	Low-cost, government-funded	High fees, premium facilities	Variable costs, community-dependent
Teaching Quality	Uniform national standards	Diverse pedagogical skills, variable quality	Academic & religious dual proficiency

This detailed analysis offers a comprehensive understanding of how each pre-school type uniquely contributes to early childhood education in Malaysia, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent discussion section.

6. Discussion

This section discusses the findings in greater detail, incorporating a comparative analysis with pre-schools in neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand. The discussion highlights how curriculum, accessibility, socio-cultural factors, affordability, and teaching quality differ among government Tadika, private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools in Malaysia, supported by relevant citations.

Table 5: Comparative Summary Table

Aspect	Government Tadika (Malaysia)	Private Pre-schools (Malaysia)	Islamic Pre-schools (Malaysia)	Singapore	Indonesia	Thailand
Curriculum	Standardized national syllabus (Rahman & Lee, 2023).	International curricula: Montessori, Reggio Emilia (Tan & Lim, 2023).	Religious and academic integration (Abdullah & Musa, 2024).	Play-based, inquiry-driven (Tan et al., 2023).	Islamic teachings + national curriculum (Suryani & Karim, 2023).	National curriculum + global values (Somsak & Anan, 2023).
Accessibility	Widely available; limited capacity (Aziz & Ramli, 2023).	Urban-focused; costly (Chong et al., 2023).	Community-based; Muslim-majority areas (Abdullah & Musa, 2024).	Universal access (KidSTART) (Tan et al., 2023).	Demand-driven; community-funded (Suryani & Karim, 2023).	Urban-centric; expensive (Somsak & Anan, 2023).
Socio-cultural	Promotes national unity (Rahman & Lee, 2023).	Multicultural; lacks national emphasis (Lim & Wong, 2024).	Strengthens religious identity; limits intercultural exposure (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2024).	Bilingualism and global outlook (Tan et al., 2023).	Religious identity with cultural ties (Suryani & Karim, 2023).	Balance of global and national values (Somsak & Anan, 2023).
Affordability	Highly affordable; resource constraints (Ismail & Hamid, 2022).	High fees; premium facilities (Tan & Lim, 2023).	Middle-income accessible; cost varies (Hassan & Aziz, 2023).	Subsidized public schools (Tan et al., 2023).	Variable; public affordable, private costly (Suryani & Karim, 2023).	Public affordable; private costly (Somsak & Anan, 2023).
Teaching Quality	Consistent training; limited innovation (Aziz & Ramli, 2023).	Diverse qualifications; quality varies (Lim & Wong, 2024).	Dual academic-religious focus; consistency issues (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2024).	Continuous professional development (Tan et al., 2023).	Uneven teacher quality across institutions (Suryani & Karim, 2023).	Varies widely; international schools excel (Somsak & Anan, 2023).

The curriculum in Malaysia's government Tadika focuses on a standardized national syllabus that promotes literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional development (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2022). While this ensures uniformity in educational outcomes (Rahman & Lee, 2023), it lacks the flexibility seen in Singapore's Nurturing Early Learners Framework, which adopts a play-based and inquiry-based learning approach (Tan et al., 2023). Private pre-schools offering international curricula like Montessori and Reggio Emilia (Tan & Lim, 2023) align

more closely with Singaporean practices, fostering holistic development (Chong et al., 2023). Islamic pre-schools such as PASTI and Little Caliphs integrate religious education with academics (Abdullah & Musa, 2024), mirroring Indonesia's Raudhatul Athfal (Suryani & Karim, 2023).

Regarding accessibility, Malaysia's government Tadika are accessible due to government subsidies (Ismail & Hamid, 2022) but face capacity limitations (Aziz & Ramli, 2023). Singapore's KidSTART initiative addresses accessibility for underprivileged children (Tan et al., 2023). In contrast, private pre-schools in Malaysia and Thailand cater primarily to urban, affluent populations (Somsak & Anan, 2023). Islamic pre-schools are community-driven, often situated in Muslim-majority areas (Abdullah & Musa, 2024), similar to Indonesia's demand-driven model (Suryani & Karim, 2023).

The **socio**-cultural impact of government Tadika fosters national unity through multicultural learning (Rahman & Lee, 2023), differing from Singapore's emphasis on bilingualism for global competitiveness (Tan et al., 2023). Private pre-schools expose children to multicultural environments but may neglect national cohesion (Lim & Wong, 2024). Thailand's international schools integrate global perspectives with national values (Somsak & Anan, 2023). Islamic pre-schools in Malaysia and Indonesia strengthen religious and cultural identities (Abdullah & Musa, 2024; Suryani & Karim, 2023) but may limit intercultural engagement (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2024).

Affordability distinguishes these models significantly. Government Tadika are affordable but resource-limited (Ismail & Hamid, 2022). Singapore's subsidized public pre-schools maintain affordability (Tan et al., 2023). Private institutions in Malaysia and Thailand are expensive, limiting access (Tan & Lim, 2023; Somsak & Anan, 2023). Islamic pre-schools offer more diverse pricing, making them accessible to middle-income families (Hassan & Aziz, 2023), akin to Indonesia's broad Islamic education options (Suryani & Karim, 2023).

Lastly, teaching quality is standardized in government Tadika (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2022) but may lack innovative methods compared to Singapore's teacher development programs (Tan et al., 2023). Private pre-schools attract well-qualified educators but show variability in quality (Lim & Wong, 2024). Islamic pre-schools face challenges in maintaining consistent teacher quality despite dual academic and religious training requirements (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2024).

7. Conclusion and Added Value of the Study

This scoping review has provided a comprehensive comparison of early childhood education across government Tadika, private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools in Malaysia. The analysis included key aspects such as curriculum, accessibility, socio-cultural impact, affordability, and teaching quality, complemented by comparative insights from neighboring countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand. The findings highlight that while government Tadika promotes national unity through a standardized curriculum, it faces challenges related to accessibility and limited teaching innovation. Private pre-schools provide high-quality, diverse curricula but remain financially inaccessible for many. Islamic pre-schools successfully integrate religious teachings with academic learning but may limit intercultural exposure and face inconsistencies in teaching quality.

The added value of this paper lies in its multi-dimensional analysis that identifies potential areas for policy and educational reform. Firstly, it offers actionable insights for stakeholders to enhance curriculum adaptability by incorporating international best practices, such as Singapore's inquiry-based approach and Thailand's balance of global and national values. Secondly, it emphasizes the importance of addressing accessibility and affordability by suggesting community-based and government-subsidized initiatives, similar to Indonesia's Raudhatul Athfal and Singapore's KidSTART program. Thirdly, the study highlights the need for continuous professional development programs to improve teaching quality across all pre-school types.

Moreover, this paper adds value by addressing the socio-cultural dynamics of early childhood education in Malaysia. It suggests that promoting intercultural exposure within Islamic pre-schools and enhancing multicultural elements in private pre-schools can foster a more cohesive national identity. The comparative approach with neighboring countries provides a broader regional context, offering valuable lessons that Malaysia can adopt to strengthen its early childhood education landscape.

In essence, this scoping review not only sheds light on the current state of early childhood education in Malaysia but also offers practical recommendations for stakeholders to create a more inclusive, accessible, and high-quality educational environment. The insights provided can serve as a foundation for future research, policy formulation, and educational practice improvements that align with Malaysia's socio-cultural fabric and developmental goals.

Malaysia's early childhood education landscape is diverse, reflecting its multicultural and multi-religious society. Government Tadika, private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools each offer unique benefits. To ensure equitable early education, future policies should aim to bridge gaps in accessibility and quality across these different pre-school types. Addressing these disparities will contribute to the holistic development of Malaysian children.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions presented in this scoping review, several recommendations are proposed to enhance early childhood education across government Tadika, private pre-schools, and Islamic pre-schools in Malaysia. These recommendations aim to guide policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in refining strategies to ensure alignment with national goals and international best practices.

Firstly, curriculum enhancement and integration should be prioritized. Government Tadika could incorporate more flexible and innovative teaching methods, such as inquiry-based learning, which encourages critical thinking and creativity among young learners, as practiced in Singapore's Kindergarten Curriculum Framework (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2022). Private pre-schools, on the other hand, are encouraged to introduce elements of national and cultural values within their globally oriented curricula to foster a strong national identity alongside global competencies (Tan & Wong, 2021). For Islamic pre-schools, the integration of religious and academic components can be enhanced by adopting structured teaching methods that balance both areas, ensuring holistic child development (Ahmad & Nor, 2021). Secondly, improving accessibility and affordability is essential. Expanding government-subsidized pre-school programs and introducing sliding-scale tuition fees in private pre-schools would cater to diverse socioeconomic groups (Rahman & Wahab, 2021). Public-private partnerships can be encouraged to fund quality pre-school education in underserved areas, drawing lessons from Indonesia's Raudhatul Athfal model (Sukardi & Wijaya, 2020). These

initiatives would ensure that quality education is accessible to all children, regardless of their background.

Another crucial recommendation involves enhancing teaching quality. Standardizing teacher qualifications across all pre-school types by enforcing continuous professional development programs will elevate teaching standards (Yusof & Kamaruddin, 2022). In Islamic pre-schools, providing specialized training for teachers to improve pedagogical skills in delivering both religious and academic curricula is vital (Roslan & Hassan, 2022). Such improvements would contribute significantly to better learning outcomes and child development.

Moreover, promoting socio-cultural inclusivity is important in shaping well-rounded individuals. Cultural exchange programs among pre-schools should be encouraged to foster understanding and respect for diverse backgrounds (Lee, 2020). Language and cultural immersion sessions, especially in Islamic pre-schools, can expose children to multicultural experiences, further promoting unity and inclusivity among young learners.

Finally, policy and governance alignment are necessary for long-term success. Strengthening regulatory frameworks to monitor the quality of early childhood education across all sectors is crucial (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023). Aligning pre-school policies with regional best practices outlined by UNESCO will ensure Malaysia remains competitive in providing high-quality early childhood education (UNESCO, 2023). By implementing these recommendations, Malaysia can enhance the effectiveness of its early childhood education system, ensuring sustainable development and progress in the sector.

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Competing Interest declaration

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. All views expressed in this study are solely those of the authors and do not represent the positions or policies of any affiliated institutions or organizations.

Author Contributions Statement

Conceptualized the study; M.Z.G. & M.F.R

Design the methodology; M.Z.G. & M.F.R

Write, review and editing the manuscript; M.Z.G., M.F.R, M.S.A.S

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