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Living Islamic Work Ethics: A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Meaning-Making in Islamic Integrated Schools

Akhmad Nur Zaroni

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda, Indonesia
Norvadewi

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda, Indonesia
Muhaimin

Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari Banjarmasin, Indonesia
Darmawati

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda, Indonesia
Samsir Syata

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda, Indonesia
Email: akhmadnurzaroni@uinsi.ac.id

Abstract. The goal of the research is to find out the comprehension, internalization, and the practical side of the Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) concept by the teaching staff of an Integrated Islamic Junior High School (SMPIT) located in East Kalimantan. The study applies the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) technique to highlight the teachers' experiences in the course of balancing the spiritual values, the demands of the organization, and the social responsibilities. The research used semi-structured interviews, observations, and school documents to collect data, and then the data was analysed by the method of iteration to find out the main themes. The results uncovered four overarching themes that can be summarized as follows: (1) work as a form of worship and a responsibility that nurtures inner drive and ethical devotion; (2) the principal's (uswah hasanah) exemplary leadership is the major factor that either fortifies or undermines the practice of IWE; (3) the continuing interaction between the ideal religious principles and the organizational structures, especially in relation to work, administration, and pay issues; and (4) the promotion of IWE as a social distinction that places teachers in the role of moral protectors of the community. The research findings indicate that IWE is more than just a personal moral quality, rather, it is a lively and dynamic interpretable framework directed by the expected spirituality, the organizational environment, and the cultural norms. By this research, the theoretical engagement with IWE moves toward a phenomenological understanding and contributes to the discussions on the practical and policy implications of work culture strengthening, ethical leadership, and teacher well-being in Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: Interpretative phenomenological analysis, Islamic education, Islamic Work Ethics, Leadership, teacher professionalism

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Abstrak: Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui pemahaman, internalisasi, dan sisi praktis dari konsep Etika Kerja Islam (IWE) oleh staf pengajar SMP Islam Terpadu (SMPIT) yang berlokasi di Kalimantan Timur. Penelitian ini menerapkan teknik analisis fenomenologi interpretatif (IPA) untuk menyoroti pengalaman guru dalam menyeimbangkan nilai-nilai spiritual, tuntutan organisasi, dan tanggung jawab sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan dokumen sekolah untuk mengumpulkan data, dan kemudian data tersebut dianalisis dengan metode iterasi untuk menemukan tema-tema utama. Hasil penelitian mengungkap empat tema utama yang dapat diringkas sebagai berikut: (1) kerja sebagai bentuk ibadah dan tanggung jawab yang menumbuhkan dorongan batin dan pengabdian etis; (2) kepemimpinan teladan kepala sekolah (uswah hasanah) merupakan faktor utama yang memperkuat atau melemahkan praktik IWE; (3) interaksi berkelanjutan antara prinsip-prinsip keagamaan ideal dan struktur organisasi, terutama dalam kaitannya dengan masalah pekerjaan, administrasi, dan gaji; dan (4) promosi IWE sebagai pembeda sosial yang menempatkan guru dalam peran pelindung moral masyarakat. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa IWE bukan sekadar kualitas moral pribadi, melainkan kerangka kerja yang hidup dan dinamis yang dapat diinterpretasikan dan diarahkan oleh spiritualitas yang diharapkan, lingkungan organisasi, dan norma-norma budaya. Melalui penelitian ini, keterlibatan teoretis dengan IWE bergerak menuju pemahaman fenomenologis dan berkontribusi pada diskusi tentang implikasi praktis dan kebijakan penguatan budaya kerja, kepemimpinan etis, dan kesejahteraan guru di lembaga pendidikan Islam.

Kata Kunci: Analisis fenomenologi interpretatif, pendidikan Islam, etika kerja Islam, kepemimpinan, profesionalisme guru

Introduction

In Indonesia, Islamic educational systems have changed significantly over twenty years, which reflects social change within the communities and their members and has produced the establishment of the Integrated Schools (SIT) that offers both religious and general curriculum in a single day school environment.¹ This is not only an educational facility; it is also a social community that provides opportunities for individuals to discuss and develop their Islamic values into their daily lives. The increasing number of JSIT schools in East Kalimantan and the level of enthusiasm to enrol students into these schools is indicative of the rapid

¹ Witriani Witriani, et.al., "Negotiation Identity and Religious Expression in Early Childhood: A Case Study of SDITs in Lombok, Indonesia," *al-Jamiah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 62, No. 2 (2024). Jajang Jahroni, "The Rise of Tahfiz Schools in Contemporary Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 31, no. 2, (2024), p. 305-35. Zainal Abidin, et. al., "Kontribusi Jaringan Sekolah Islam Terpadu (JSIT) dalam Pengembangan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia," *Tapis: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmiah* 6 no. 2 (2022), p. 118-131.

establishment of the SIT model and the desire of urban Muslim families for modern educational facilities, coupled with religion, for their children.²

In the context of SIT, a teacher holds two roles: orienting students toward their academic needs and on the Islamic Value (IV) work ethic. The dual role of a teacher does not limit a teacher's job to just being a pedagogical educator; it also requires the teacher to embody an IWE work ethic within their professional identity. The work ethic of an Islamic educator is characterized by being trustworthy, honest, sincere and social services-oriented. In addition, IWE has received considerable cross-national research due to its relationship to various types of organizational behaviour, including citizenship behaviour, sharing knowledge, intrinsic motivation, and performance at work. The empirical literature shows a positive correlation between IWE and both Pro-Organizational Behaviour (P.O.B.) and Individual Educational Performance (I.E.P.) across educational service sectors.³

Despite the varied findings from prior IWE harvests - demonstrating either benefits or null effects of IWE on job productivity and organizational outcomes across different organisations/leadership styles - the methodologies employed in these studies often resulted in widely different conclusions as to how IWE influences productivity and commitment, as well as its role as a mediator/moderator of other factors such as psychological capital, ethical leadership and job satisfaction. The lack of consistency among the literature suggests that IWE research lacks coherence and is fragmented within the body of literature, and that studies examining meaningful practice of IWE within a particular industry/sector will assist researchers in producing numeric generalisations from IWE research results.⁴

In studying the Islamic Junior High School (SMPIT) in East Kalimantan, the data collected presents a number of interesting findings to support the claim that there is a strong positive correlation between these variables. The data indicates that there are many schools with a low level of teacher certification and adopting learning technologies at a high level, as well as differences among teachers' social roles at different schools, all of which represent structural

² Emawati, "School Culture Program: Implementation of School Innovation in the Disruption Era in SDIT Anak Sholeh Mataram Lombok", *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1, (2019), p. 27–50, Fauzan Ismael & Iswantir Iswantir, "Konsep Pendidikan Sekolah Islam Terpadu," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan Indonesia* 1 no. 2 (2022), p. 127-134.

³ Ghulam Murtaza, et al., "Impact of Islamic Work Ethics on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors and Knowledge-Sharing Behaviors," *Journal of Business Ethics* 133 no. 2 (2016), p. 325-333. Muhammad Qasim, et al., "Examining Impact of Islamic Work Ethic on Task Performance: Mediating Effect of Psychological Capital and A Moderating Role of Ethical Leadership," *Journal of Business Ethics* 180 no.1 (2022), p. 283-295.

⁴ Nikmatul Atiya, et. al., "Critical Review of Islamic Work Ethic Literature Across Diverse Organization and Its Future Direction," *Journal of Management and Digital Business* 4 no. 2 (2024), p. 250-275.

variables that could impact the role of Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) on actual teacher work. As a result of this, IWE is viewed as being in a dialectical relationship or tension with teachers based on how the IWE is being viewed relative to their workplace conditions, pay for their work, and the influence of local administrative leaders.⁵

The growth of the field of Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) has experienced a rapid increase over the past 20 years; however, research continues to highlight significant voids within IWE research and that alternative means for understanding IWE will be necessary for future research. This need is particularly true with regards to the context of IWE within modern Islamic Education. The first of these is what is referred to as an Epistemological Gap. A large portion of IWE research has been conducted using a quantitative methodology, aimed at identifying and measuring variables and establishing causal relationships between constructs. While quantitative IWE research has produced a number of important statistical patterns, it has been largely successful in examining the lived experiences of IWE practitioners (e.g. educators). The literature published on this topic through International Academic Publishers supports the notion that qualitative approaches have received limited attention, specifically in relation to the internalization of Islamic values and ethics.⁶ This is largely due to the fact that many aspects that influence Islamic work ethics occur through a process of internalization, symbolic interpretation and dynamics of social interactions that cannot simply be reduced to numerical measures. Thus, the Phenomenological Dimension of IWE is one of the major gaps in the current body of IWE research.

Secondly, there is a contextual gap in Islamic Welfare Education (IWE); while there has been significant research on Islamic Welfare Education in Islamic Business and Banking organisations, studies related to modern Islamic Education are limited, including Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT or SMPIT) in the JSIT network, in Indonesia and throughout the world. SIT is a unique socio-religious phenomenon where modern management practices and educational value and spiritual training are merged. The Local Context of SMPIT in East Kalimantan exhibits the Structural Dynamics occurring in the locality, such as workload Diversity, Certification Level Diversity, Leadership Pattern Diversity, and Teacher Social Role Diversity; all have not been researched extensively. Therefore, it is essential to gain insight into the way IWE operates and is

⁵ Andri Gunawan, et. al., "The effect of Islamic Leadership, Work Stress, Compensation, Promotion and Motivation on Employee Performance," *Proceedings of the European Union Digital Library (EUDL)*, (2022), p. 1-7.

⁶ Ghulam Murtaza, et al., "Impact of Islamic Work Ethics, p. 325-333. Keumala Hayati and Indra Caniago, "Islamic Work Ethic: The Role of Intrinsic Motivation, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment and Job Performance," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 65 (2012), p. 1102-1106.

negotiated in the rapidly changing Islamic Education Ecosystem within Indonesia.

Third, there is a theoretical gap. Empirical results on how Islamic leadership, Islamic motivation, and compensation interact with IWE show inconsistencies. Some studies show a positive relationship, while others show moderate or insignificant results. Theoretical reviews published in reputable repositories emphasize the existence of important mediators and moderators that determine the effectiveness of IWE, such as psychological capital, ethical leadership, and perceptions of organizational justice.⁷ This inconsistent result indicates that the mechanisms of the relationships between the variables have not been fully mapped, and studies are needed that can explain the theoretical dynamics in more depth through qualitative data.

There is a gap in socio religions where there is little research on how Islamic Work Ethics is created and how Islamic Work Ethics is created and reproduced and negotiated through social interactions within the school (teacher to student; leader to teacher; parent to student; community to school).⁸ Schools, particularly Islamic schools, are social spaces where values and norms are developed and operationalized in practice each day. Therefore, understanding the social process by which Islamic Work Ethics are created provides insight into the rationale behind why similar values create different practices in different settings. Without taking into account this socioreligious element, our understanding of Islamic Work Ethics will be limited in its normative way and will be unable to appreciate the full range of empirical realities of Islamic Work Ethics.

This study is positioned to fill the above-stated gaps from four different perspectives through an interpretative qualitative method of inquiry. This methodological approach provides an opportunity to explore and understand the meaning of, the practice of, the and negotiation process of Islamic work ethics as experienced by SMPIT teachers. In addition, the research provides insight into the role that the school structure and leadership play in moderating the implementation of Islamic values into professional practice. The research therefore contributes to the empirical literature of Islamic Work Ethics and offers theoretical and socioreligious contributions towards the development of contemporary Islamic education.

This qualitative study is designed to analyse the significance, application, and social-religious effects of the Islamic work ethics among teachers at SMPIT

⁷ Muhammad Qasim, et al., "Examining Impact of Islamic Work, p. 283-295. Wahibur Rokhman, "The effect of Islamic Work Ethics on Work Outcomes," *EJBO-Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies* 15 no. 1 (2010), p. 21-27.

⁸ Khairatun Hisan, et.al., "Parents Communication Patterns Towards Children with Mental Disorders," *Jurnal Sosiologi Dialektika Sosial* 10, No. 2 (2024). Dwi Nur Rachmah, et.al., "Do Peer Attachment, Perceived School Climate, and Parental Involvement Influence Self-Awareness in Students?" *Cakrawala Pendidikan* 42, No. 2 (2022).

JSIT in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. To achieve this, a phenomenological/interpretive approach was employed to elicit the lived experiences of the teachers regarding their interpretation of their professional obligations, spiritual obligations, and how their work ethics have determined their pedagogical and social behaviour. In addition, the teachers' experiences are explored with regard to how various organizational structures (certification, salary, workload, and administrative support) are related to the work ethics of teachers. By connecting the data from the field with the existing international literature on Islamic work ethics, performance, and socio-religious issues, this study offers a unique view of how religious values interact with the demands placed upon teachers in contemporary Islamic educational institutions.

Utilising a qualitative methodology that has a phenomenological-interpretive design, this study aimed to explore how Islamic work ethics are understood and interpreted by teachers at an Integrated Islamic Junior High School (SMPIT). Qualitative methodology allows researchers to examine aspects of experience/perception/construct social relationships that cannot be quantified. According to Creswell and Poth,⁹ when the objective of a research project is to gain insight into the way humans create meaning about something and then experience it within a particular context, qualitative methodology is the best option. The use of a phenomenological methodology stresses experiences based on "lived" or authentically real-world data. Therefore, a phenomenological approach lends itself well to exploring teachers' interpretations of Islamic work ethic as they carry out their daily duties.

The interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was appropriate because it analysed an individual's experience from many perspectives, including how they assign meaning to and what their experiences represent to them based on society, culture and religion. Smith explain that IPA uses a form of double interpretive hermeneutics to understand experiences (how informants understand their experiences) from multiple perspectives, i.e. informants understanding their lived experiences and how they interpret them and allows for the researcher to understand the different dimensions of lived experience (how the researcher interprets an informant's experience).¹⁰ Therefore, IPA allows for an understanding of the Islamic work ethic as a value that is not only taught to teachers but also negotiated between teachers and students during the course of the professional practice.

With this research, we wanted to see how teachers observe and apply the implementation of Islamic Work Ethics in East Kalimantan. In order to do this,

⁹ John W. Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2016), p. 5.

¹⁰ Jonathan A. Smith, et al., *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021), p. 69-72.

we conducted a study of three different Indonesian junior high schools (SMPIT) associated with the JSIT network located in East Kalimantan. These three SMPIT's were selected as they represent modern-day Islamic educational institutions that incorporate the integration of Tarbiyah and the use of Professional Management. The research sites of East Kalimantan have displayed structural variances such as certification level; view of compensation; workload; and religious guidance, which are able to be viewed as variables influencing the implementation of Islamic Work Ethics as those areas also are subject to differences based on geographical location.

For research participants, purposive sampling was utilized in order to identify informants with the appropriate qualifications to participate in the study. Tisdell report that purposive sampling is a common method in qualitative research as it permits researchers to acquire detailed, comprehensive information from sources with the ability to convey it accurately (i.e., information-rich cases).¹¹ The participants in the study included junior high school teachers that had been working as teachers in an SMPIT for a minimum of two (2) years, were actively involved in the Islamic guidance program of their school and agreed to share their personal reflections about the experiences.

Data consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with informants. The semi-structured interviews helped to gather the informants' personal experiences and meanings concerning Islamic work ethics. According to Yin, interviews provide a rich, natural, and meaningful form of narrative data that serves as a primary source for qualitative research.¹² In addition, through observations, the researchers were able to understand how work ethics values are represented in practice, including examples such as teacher-student interactions, religious routines, and the culture of the organisation. The documentation sources such as school vision and mission statements; teacher development guidelines; standard operating procedures (SOPs); and activity reports represented an additional layer of evidence in the triangulation process.

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach developed by¹³ was used to analyse the data collected through transcript readings, writing notes, identifying emerging themes, combining themes into higher-level categories and performing a detailed analysis. This iterative process allowed the researcher greater insight into how teachers make sense of their experiences of work ethics in Islam, leadership, motivation and structure of the school.

¹¹ Elizabeth J. Tisdell, et al., *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2025), p. 63-78.

¹² Robert K Yin, *Qualitative research from start to finish*, (New York: Guilford Publications, 2015), p. 145.

¹³ Jonathan A. Smith, et al., *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021), p. 49-68.

This research implemented a variety of trustworthiness methods, suggested by¹⁴, to ensure the quality and veracity of the results of the study. These methods include source triangulation, member-checking, creating audit trails, and peer debriefing. Triangulation was achieved by comparing interview information, observational data, and documentary evidence. Member-checking was utilized to seek confirmation from informants regarding the researcher's preliminary interpretations. Audit trails were created to document the entire research process, enabling an intuitive approach to following the analysis of the study by the researcher. Peer debriefing involved colleagues of the researcher in reviewing the process of data analysis and providing feedback on whether the researcher was being objective in his interpretation of the data collected.

This research will also consider ethical issues, including informed consent, confidentiality, the participant's right to withdraw from the interview at any point, and safeguarding of personal data. All participants were assigned an anonymous code for the protection of their confidentiality and comfort level.

The combination of a deep phenomenological approach and solid strategies for achieving high validity is anticipated to allow this research to offer an extensive understanding of how SMPIT teachers understand and practice Islamic work ethic(s) and how these values are negotiated within the structure of modern Islamic educational institutions.

Islamic Work Ethics

Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) refers to the Islamic values and ethics that define how individuals should behave at work, and therefore defines human nature at work through Islamic teachings regarding Trustworthiness, Justice, Honesty, Work Ethic, and Social Responsibility as outlined in both the Qur'an and Sunnah. Many contemporary scholars support the view that IWE influences both vertical (*habl min Allah*), and horizontal (*habl min al-nas*) relationships.

In a global perspective, IWE represents a group of values related to work and provides values that are associated with working hard, being honest and dedicated, having a benevolent orientation, and contributing to society. Research has been conducted by¹⁵ that indicates that IWE promotes prosocial behaviour such as organizational citizenship behaviour, and knowledge sharing within the educational and service sectors.¹⁶ also conducted research regarding IWE and found that IWE created the opportunity for increased psychological capital to improve performance on the job and that ethical leadership moderated the influence of IWE on Job Performance. Additional research conducted by Khan

¹⁴ Yvonna S. Lincoln & Egon G. Guba, "Criteria for Assessing Naturalistic Inquiries as Reports," *Educational Communication and Technology Journal* 29 no. 2 (1988), p. 75-91.

¹⁵ Ghulam Murtaza, et al., "Impact of Islamic Work Ethics, p. 325-333.

¹⁶ Muhammad Qasim, et al., "Examining Impact of Islamic Work Ethic, p. 283-295.

has identified that IWE influences intrinsic motivation, work morality, and developing one's Professional Character within the Public and Educational sectors.¹⁷

Additionally, a bibliometric evaluation of 62 Scopus articles on Integrated Women's Education by Atiya revealed that IWE is still at an early development stage and hasn't been fully defined as of this time; she argues that future studies should use qualitative methods to adequately capture the social, cultural, and historical contexts and meanings of IWE as it relates to how it is being implemented within religious institutions and other educational environments.¹⁸

When considering the current implementation of IWE in modern-day Islamic educational institutions such as Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT), it must be stated that IWE is no longer just an individual way of life, but part of a larger value system created and nurtured over time within organisations based on the Islamic belief system, organisational policies and practices, and the expectations of the broader Islamic community. Therefore, IWE must be viewed as a social phenomenon that takes shape through the structure and relationships of teachers, administrators, parents, and the community.

Islamic Work Ethics in the Context of Modern Islamic Education

Since Islamic education is fundamental to the understanding of work ethics, much research has been conducted on the subject. Teachers are viewed as moral examples who transfer value into the lives of their students. While today's Islamic schools recognize that work ethics as part of the institution's culture and pedagogical practices can strengthen the school culture, this does not mean that work ethics are simply an individual level characteristic; rather, they are an institutional level characteristic. Quantitative and qualitative studies show IWE's association with various performance indicators in educational settings and prosocial organizational behaviours and commitment.¹⁹

In educational settings, numerous empirical studies indicate a positive correlation between a teacher's IWE and that teacher's job performance. For example, in research conducted in a primary school in Punjab, IWE and teacher performance were positively correlated, and the three elements of trustworthiness, empathy, and social responsibility served as significant mechanisms for enhancing the professional commitments of the teachers in the study Mehnaz.²⁰

¹⁷ Khurram Khan, et al., "Organizational Justice and Job Outcomes: Moderating Role of Islamic Work Ethic," *Journal Of Business Ethics* 126 no.2 (2015), p. 235-246.

¹⁸ Nikmatul Atiya, "Critical Review of Islamic Work Ethic, p. 250-275. Rizqi Anfanni Fahmi, et.al., "Digital Nomad Influence on Malay Work Ethics: Exploring Cultural Dynamics," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, No. 2 (2024).

¹⁹ Ghulam Murtaza, et al., "Impact of Islamic Work Ethics, p. 325-333.

²⁰ Rohi Mehnaz, et al., "Impact of Islamic Work Ethics on Teachers' Job Performance at Elementary School Level in Punjab," *The Discourse* 6 no.1 (2020), p. 131-139.

Hayati and Caniago reported that IWE can enhance personnel motivation and commitment to work in the context of an Islamic organisation. Consequently, the impact of IWE on personnel performance is expected to be substantial.²¹

Nevertheless, several scholars have noted that much of the existing research on how Islamic work ethics affects workplace performance is inconsistent. They have concluded that Islamic work ethics influences workers indirectly through various factors such as psychological capital, ethical leadership, or job satisfaction.²² In other words, while Islamic work ethics are viewed as a prerequisite for workplace performance, they require support from elements of an organisation's environment before they can have any effect on individual or organisational performance.

The findings in SMPIT in East Kalimantan show clear differences in how Islamic work ethics manifests itself in practice, and such differences likely arise from variables relating to teacher certification levels, equity in compensation and the social roles of teachers in their communities. In order to determine how Islamic work ethics manifests itself in the workplace, therefore, it is critical to conduct qualitative research on how teachers negotiate Islamic work ethics in an organisation's environment.

Islamic Leadership and the Formation of Work Ethics

Islamic leadership provides a moral example for people to follow and is also characterized by justice and trustworthiness. Leadership in Islamic educational institutions derives its legitimacy from the consistent embodiment of moral values in daily interactions, decision-making processes, and relationships with subordinates, rather than from formal power alone.²³ All of these aspects play an important role in the development of an Islamic work culture. Research indicates that ethical leaders can enhance the impact that Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) has on an employee's work behaviour by providing a workplace environment that encourages the application of both religious and professional values. Qasim reported that the influence of IWE on psychological capital and task performance was significantly greater when school leaders exhibited ethical leadership.²⁴ Therefore, the influence of school leaders on translating values into practices, and subsequently, actions should not be underestimated.

Studies conducted in the educational and service sectors examining IWE also demonstrate the same trend: Individual-level internalization of IWE values

²¹ Keumala Hayati & Indra Caniago, "Islamic Work Ethic, p. 1102-1106.

²² Muhammad Qasim, et al., "Examining Impact of Islamic Work, p. 283-295.

²³ Irawan, et al., "Implementation of Islamic Universal Values-based Leadership Power at State Islamic Higher Education." *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5 no. 3 (2022), p. 1025–1035. Mujiburrahman Mujiburrahman, et.al., "The State Intervention in the Islamic Education in Aceh: Threats or Opportunities? *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, No. 2 (2024).

²⁴ Muhammad Qasim, et al., "Examining Impact of Islamic Work Ethic, p. 283-295.

cannot result in long-term organizational outcomes without strong leader support and the establishment of consistent organizational policies.²⁵ Therefore, qualitative studies are needed to identify the ways school leaders underline the translation of values into actions in relation to SMPIT, such as reward/recognition systems, communication about values, and institutional rituals

Islamic Motivation and Teacher Performance

A person's desire to worship Allah and direct their life to the afterlife makes up the religious aspect of Islamic motivation. Conversely, helping those around them (the members of their Islamic community) constitutes the social aspect of Islamic motivational factors and your desire to be a member of that community. According to Hayati and Caniago, an individual's personal or inward motivation is an intermediary factor between Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) and the commitment and performance of that individual.²⁶ IWE increases the person's level of intrinsic motivation; therefore, an increase in intrinsic motivation results in increased commitment and performance.

While motivation by itself can encourage productive behaviour, motivation does not always encourage productive behaviours if it is not supported with other factors such as workload, professional development, and pay compensation. Therefore, in addition to the above cited studies, there exists a need to conduct a qualitative study to better understand how SMPIT teachers interpret the meaning of their work and the best way to exemplify Islamic principles of motivation in their work day.

Islamic Compensation and Work Ethics Practices

According to Islamic principles, providing equitable and non-exploitive compensation while maintaining the dignity and honour of workers is ideal, in accordance with Maqasid al-Shariah (the overall definition of Islamic welfare). The inconsistent results across international literature have shown that studies of Human Resource Management (HRM) conducted on developing countries establish that the impact HR practices (including compensation) have on performance can only be achieved when appropriately adjusted to support the social and institutional context.²⁷

It is reported in some studies concerning Islamic Education and Organisation research that there is a positive correlation between compensation

²⁵ Wahibur Rokhman, "The effect of Islamic work ethics on work outcomes." *EJBO-Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies* 15 no. 1 (2010), p. 21-27.

²⁶ Keumala Hayati & Indra Caniago, "Islamic Work Ethic, p. 1102-1106.

²⁷ Mussie Teclemichael Tessema & Joseph L. Soeters, "Challenges and Prospects of HRM in Developing Countries: Testing the HRM-Performance Link in the Eritrean Civil Service," *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 17 no. 1 (2006), p. 86-105.

and job performance; in contrast, other studies report that when compensation is perceived either as inadequate or unwarranted, it can lead to employee dissatisfaction. In the case of SMPIT (Integrated Islamic Junior High School), it is important to investigate the concepts of fair compensation by SMPIT teachers within the framework of Islamic Values, and how this may correlate with their work ethics as a Professional Identity.

Islamic Work Ethics in Integrated Islamic Schools

A phenomenological study of in-depth interviews, observations and documentation revealed four major themes about how SMPIT teachers view and implement Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) daily. The four major themes identified show that IWE is more than just a set of moral codes; it is also a framework for understanding one's spirituality, the structural requirements of educating children in a modern Islamic educational setting and the social environment where teachers operate.

1. Work Ethics in Islam Are Worship and Trust

Theme one makes it apparent that the great majority of teachers consider their careers (or work) to be not just an occupation, but rather a form of worship and trust placed upon the teachers by Allah. This idea was a frequent response heard in the interviews, particularly when asked how they were intrinsically motivated to teach. Aspects of themselves like; sincerity, patience, and spiritual accountability (*mas'uliyah*) are the basis for their motivation and provide the teachers with the moral strength needed to face their work responsibilities and pedagogical challenges.

With respect to the SMPIT teachers, they see their work as inseparable from their intentions (*niyyah*) regarding the afterlife, which is also consistent with the literature indicating that the Islamic Work Ethos enables teachers to feel more intrinsically motivated and find work to be meaningful.²⁸ The teachers expressed that when they perform their duties with a worship orientation, they feel psychologically reassured, morally satisfied, and significantly more committed to developing their students' moral character.

This perspective on the subject of Worship may confuse some readers. While this perspective improves the consistency of our work effort, it can also cause some educators, or classroom teachers, to rationalize their own overworking or less than desirable compensation levels. Rokhman findings demonstrate that internalizing Islamic values may cause educators to rationally

²⁸Keumala Hayati & Indra Caniago, "Islamic Work Ethic, p. 1102-1106.

accept the limitations of structure within Islamic teachings as a manifestation of their ability to endure with patience and submission to Allah.²⁹

Here's an example from an interview: Teachers interpret their work as a form of worship (*ibadah*) and a sacred trust (*amanah*). Many informants described a deep spiritual connection between their professional duties and an orientation toward the hereafter, as explained by one of the teachers "I work here not merely for the salary, but because this is a field of worship. Every time I enter the classroom, I set my intention to seek Allah's pleasure."³⁰ This interpretation aligns with the findings of that the value of IWE increases intrinsic motivation and commitment.³¹

However, the value of sincerity also often leads teachers to accept excessive workloads, as one of the teachers expressed during the interview "Sometimes it's very tiring, but if I remember this is a trust, I just do it."³² This demonstrates the potential for ambivalence, where spirituality can mask the structural pressures of school.

2. Role Modelling and Leadership as Straighteners of Work Ethics

According to the second theme of the study, the school Principal is instrumental in the operationalisation of the Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) in schools. In this regard, the preferred representation of Islamic Leadership for teachers is in the form of an example - Uswah Hasanah - where an Islamic leader will not only direct but serve as a role model. When an Islamic principal exemplifies attributes such as discipline, modesty, and a commitment to being an exemplary Muslim, it encourages the teachers to perform better. However, when a principal does not have an active presence (i.e., involved with the teachers) and focuses solely on administrative duties, the teachers feel a disconnect between what is ideal and what is the actual organisational reality. This finding is consistent with the recent work of Murtaza, where an ethical environment increases the effect of the IWE on prosocial behaviour.³³

Some teachers expressed that they felt "inspired" by the principal's behaviour, while others felt they experienced "burnout" when rules and goals are not supported with moral support - this supports the findings of Qasim that ethical leadership moderates the relationship between IWE and performance.³⁴

²⁹Wahibur Rokhman, "The Effect of Islamic Work Ethics On Work Outcomes," *EJBO-Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies* 15 no. 1 (2010), p. 21-27. Sri Astuti A. Samad, et.al., "Teacher's Spiritual Competence and Its Implication in Islamic Religious Education Learning in Pidie, Aceh," *Ulumuna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 27, No. 2 (2023).

³⁰ Interview with MT, Teacher of SMPIT Nurul Ilmi Kutai Kartanegara, March 8, 2025.

³¹ Keumala Hayati & Indra Caniago, "Islamic Work Ethic, p. 1102-1106.

³² Interview with AF, Teacher of SMPIT Cordova Samarinda, March 15, 2025.

³³ Ghulam Murtaza, et al., "Impact of Islamic Work Ethics, p. 325-333.

³⁴ Muhammad Qasim, et al., "Examining Impact of Islamic Work Ethic, p. 283-295.

Therefore, the work ethic of teachers is established not only from their individual values, but also from how school leaders communicate, show interest, and provide role models for them. When the work ethic is present in the relationship between teachers and leaders, then IWE can be considered a social construct.

Therefore, the work ethic of teachers is shaped not only by their individual values but also by how school leaders communicate expectations, demonstrate genuine concern, and provide consistent role models. When ethical values are enacted within teacher and leader relationships, Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) emerge as a socially constructed practice rather than merely an individual moral attribute. From an Islamic leadership perspective, this reflects the principle of *uswah hasanah*, where leadership authority is derived from the consistent embodiment of values such as *amanah*, justice, sincerity, and service, rather than formal position alone.³⁵

According to the analysis, the teachers identified the influence of leadership as the main element in their practical implementation of the concept of Inclusive Workplace Equality (IWE). As stated by one of the teachers, "If the principal is present for prayers, then we, as teachers, become ashamed not to be disciplined."³⁶ However, the absence of visible and consistent role models may lead teachers to feel uncertain about whether their practices truly align with the school's core values. Although teachers generally agree with the values promoted by the institution, the lack of exemplary leadership can create ambiguity in their daily implementation. As explained by one of the teachers: "Even though we believe the values are right, when the principal is not consistently present in the field, we begin to doubt whether what we are doing is truly appropriate."³⁷ This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that ethical leadership functions as a moderating factor that strengthens the influence of Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) on work-related outcomes.³⁸

3. Negotiation between Idealism and Structural Demands

Teachers face significant challenges in their work, such as administrative burdens, parental expectations, academic expectations, staff development, and the discrepancy between what is expected of them and what they receive. While certified teachers have more structural support, certified teachers are under financial stress and workload. Because certification helps create more equitable pay, the separation of workloads of certified staff from uncertified staff also

³⁵ Irawan, et al., "Implementation of Islamic Universal Values-based Leadership Power at State Islamic Higher Education." *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5 no. 3 (2022), p. 1025–1035.

³⁶ Interview with RSM, Teacher of SMPIT Darul Hikmah Boarding School, Bontang, March 11, 2025.

³⁷ Interview with PMF, Teacher of SMPIT Al-Auliya Balikpapan, March 12, 2025.

³⁸ Muhammad Qasim, et al., "Examining Impact of Islamic Work Ethic, p. 283-295.

creates a situation where there needs to be negotiation of IWE between idealism and the reality of the teachers' work.

According to HRM literature, organizational support and compensation affect significantly on teacher performance. However, at SMPIT, teachers often have to balance their work with religious values of patience and sincerity in addition to their compensation and organizational support. Thus, the way teachers at SMPIT practice IWE supports the notion that IWE is contextual, i.e., the IWE is practiced through dialog between spiritual and organizational values. Some teachers expressed a moral dilemma regarding whether they were working for the sake of Allah (God) or for the sake of fulfilling the demands of the institution. This dilemma illustrates the complexity of Islamic work ethics in today's modern Islamic education system.³⁹

The administrative responsibilities that teachers face can create a great burden for them even though they have a strong commitment to their students. As stated by one of the teachers, "Teaching is where my heart lies; however, all the administrative work I have to do can be overwhelming."⁴⁰ There will always be additional responsibilities like coach and sponsor events and create experience-based learning for Islamic Education, etc. As another teacher reflected, "There are lots of events and expectations on us to act like professionals. There are times when we wonder; what is most important?"⁴¹

From an analytical perspective, these narratives indicate that workload and role accumulation directly influence teachers' motivation and performance. Excessive administrative demands may dilute teachers' focus on pedagogical and spiritual responsibilities, thereby affecting their ability to sustain motivation and deliver optimal performance. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that compensation structures and workload distribution play a significant role in shaping teachers' work motivation and performance outcomes.⁴²

4. Work Ethics as Social Identity and Community Preaching

The perspective of junior high school teachers on their roles as educators has been influenced by a dual purpose. These teachers view themselves not only

³⁹ Sumiati, et.al., "Maddate, Sufism, And Moral Education: A Study on Tarekat Khalwatiyah Samman in Bulumparee, Bone, South Sulawesi," *Malikussaleh Social and Political Review* 6, No. 2 (2025).

⁴⁰ Interview with ASW, Teacher of SMPIT Darussalam Sangatta, March 18, 2025.

⁴¹ Interview with SR, Teacher of SMPIT Darussalam Sangatta, March 18, 2025.

⁴²Mussie Teclmichael Tessema & Joseph L. Soeters. "Practices and Challenges of Converting Former Fighters Into Civil Servants: The Case Of Eritrea." *Public Administration and Development: The International Journal of Management Research and Practice* 26 no.4 (2006), p. 359-371. Musriadi Musriadi, et.al., "The Effect of Principal Transformational Leadership on Teacher's Performance," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 10, No. 2 (2022).

as educators, but as individuals who spread religious beliefs and positively impact the community through their work. At Islamic schools, the staff considers the relationship they build with students and the teacher's presence in the community (through the various Islamic organizations within it) a high priority.

Educators believe that they have a responsibility to act in accordance with values together over time as a group of educators and to support one another as colleagues. This means that they are aligned in their actions as a group and also share a common goal of supporting themselves as professionals. Additionally, educators think that who they are also morphs their behaviour as a teacher and how others will view them as a teacher.

IWE is viewed as a guide for teachers at SMP Islamic schools, as well as being part of their community's social identity. The research findings from Murtaza support this perspective on the role of workers under IWE, as they influence their communities as moral and social agents.⁴³ While IWE encourages all teachers to be moral leaders in their communities and to develop strong relationships with their students, it goes further than that by having IWE expand the roles of all employees of SMP Islamic schools to include the role of character builders in society. This suggests that character is developed through the way a person interprets his or her experiences in society and interacts with other members of the community, not simply through a set of personal religious beliefs as indicated in the findings.⁴⁴

Teachers perceive their roles as extending beyond that of knowledge-based educators; they view themselves as agents who actively contribute to shaping the moral fabric of their communities. This broader self-understanding positions teachers not only as instructors but also as moral and spiritual exemplars. As one teacher explained: "The public views us as spiritual leaders, so we should also behave in that manner as educators."⁴⁵ This perception is consistent with the argument advanced by Witriani et al., who emphasize that ethical and religious values in Islamic schools are enacted through everyday practices and interpersonal relations, positioning teachers as visible moral representatives within their communities.⁴⁶

While this heightened moral role strengthens teachers' ethical commitments and sense of responsibility, it simultaneously generates increased societal expectations. These expectations place additional pressure on teachers to consistently embody moral and spiritual ideals, both within and beyond the

⁴³ Ghulam Murtaza, et al., "Impact of Islamic Work Ethics, p. 325-333.

⁴⁴ Jonathan A. Smith, et al., *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021), p. 69-72.

⁴⁵ Interview with SNR, teacher of SMPIT Cordova, Samarinda, March 22, 2025.

⁴⁶ Witriani, et al., "Negotiation Identity and Religious Expression, p. 277-303. Yanwar Pribadi, "Sekolah Islam (Islamic Schools) as Symbols of Indonesia's Urban Muslim Identity", *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and National Studies of Southeast Asia* 10, no. 2 (2022), p. 203-18.

school context. From a phenomenological perspective, this duality reflects how ethical responsibility is experienced as both a source of meaning and a potential burden in teachers' professional lives.

This understanding is further reinforced by interview data from one teacher, who described how Islamic work ethics shape both professional conduct and social identity beyond the classroom. As the participant explained, "Being a teacher here is not only about teaching subjects. Wherever we go, people see us as representatives of the school and of Islamic values. So our attitude, our speech, even how we interact in the community must reflect that responsibility."⁴⁷ This statement illustrates how teachers internalize IWE as a continuous moral obligation that transcends formal teaching duties, positioning their professional identity as inseparable from their social and religious roles. The teacher's reflection highlights that ethical behaviour is not perceived as situational or limited to the school environment, but as a sustained form of da'wah through everyday interactions within the wider community.

Conclusion

In this research study, the purpose is to examine the way that the Islamic Junior High School teachers interpret and practice IWE within the modern Islamic educational context using a phenomenological-interpretive (IPA) approach. According to the findings, the IWE is not just a set of normative values, but a means of existence; it is the moral framework for how the teachers work, interact with others, and conduct themselves in their profession. Thematic analysis of the data resulted in the identification of four superordinate themes as they relate to the teachers' ethical experiences with Islamic education. The first theme revolves around the concept of the work itself being a form of worship and a form of trust. As such, this spiritual orientation serves as an intrinsic source of motivation and a source of meaning for the teachers when engaged in their work. Furthermore, because of the psychological impact of this orientation, teachers are able to find calmness of mind and commitment to doing what is right. On the other hand, this type of orientation could result in teachers normalising the less-than-ideal working conditions that many of them are currently facing (e.g., poor pay, inadequate resources, etc.). Leadership is an important factor in forming the IWE practices. The leaders who portray the ideal/characteristics of Islāmic work ethics (IWE) (i.e., Uswah Hasanah) enhance the Islāmic values in the workplace. The difference between a leader's value and their behaviour creates conflicts of ethics (Cohen et al., 2001) for teachers. Therefore, the application of IWE is a relationship between the teacher and the leadership and the way the institution exercises leadership. Teachers face the challenge of reconciling the ideals of IWE with the complexity of the organisational structures of their organisations. As a

⁴⁷ Interview with SFR, Teacher of SMPIT Cordova, Samarinda, March 22, 2025.

result of the various organisational parameters (e.g., Administrative burden, academic goals, and compensation), teachers will interpret and implement IWE uniquely within their daily professional operations. This adaptation process illuminates that IWE is not just an internalised value but is also a practice of working that is contextually dependent on the structure of the school. Overall, this research provides evidence for the notion that IWE has multiple facets - spiritual, structural, relational, and social - which all contribute to the formation of the values associated with the idea of IWE. IWE values do not simply develop out of the values or beliefs held by the members of an organisation; rather, they develop through a continual process of interpretation shaped by the situation of the organisation, the style of leadership employed, and the overall culture of the community in which the organisation operates. A phenomenological perspective enables us to gain a better understanding of these dimensions than could be gained through previous quantitative studies. The results of this research form a knowledge base for developing an IWE within an Islamic education framework.

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