

## The Challenges of Islamic Education Novice Teachers in Teaching Method in Sarawak's Secondary Schools

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### Abstract

This study explores the challenges encountered by novice Islamic education teachers in secondary schools in Sarawak and how they navigate their early professional experiences. Guided by a phenomenological approach, the research examines teachers' perceptions, instructional practices, and efforts to sustain Islamic values in diverse classroom contexts. Data were obtained through purposive sampling and semi-structured online interviews, allowing participants to share detailed accounts of their teaching realities. The findings show that while novice teachers demonstrate strong personal commitment and adopt various coping strategies to maintain the goals of Islamic education, they face significant constraints arising from administrative workload, compulsory digital reporting, and limited institutional support. These pressures often reduce their capacity to focus on effective teaching and student engagement. The study highlights the importance of structured mentoring, professional development, and workload management in supporting novice Islamic educators and concludes with implications for policy and practice aimed at strengthening teacher retention and the quality of Islamic education in East Malaysia.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education occupies a central position within Malaysia's national educational framework, as it seeks to cultivate individuals who are intellectually competent, spiritually grounded, morally upright, and physically well developed. This holistic vision aligns with Al-Attas's (1979) conception of Islamic education as a process that nurtures the integrated growth of the human personality by harmonising the spiritual, intellectual, and physical dimensions of the learner. Within this framework, Islamic education teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge but serve as agents of moral and spiritual formation, shaping students' values through both pedagogical practice and personal example (Kasim et al., 2021).

The professional role of Islamic education teachers is therefore multifaceted. They are expected to master subject content while simultaneously embodying Islamic ethics and conduct in their daily interactions. Their influence extends beyond formal instruction to include attitudes, communication styles, and personal behaviour that serve as models for students. Consequently, the effectiveness of Islamic education is closely tied to the competence, readiness, and integrity of those who teach it. In the Malaysian context, this responsibility is particularly demanding for novice teachers—commonly defined as those in their first five years of service (Kasim, 2019; Stewart & Jansky, 2022)—who must navigate these expectations while still developing their professional identity and classroom confidence. At the same time, they are required to manage diverse classrooms, adopt contemporary pedagogical approaches, and integrate Islamic values within an increasingly complex and technologically mediated learning environment.

Many beginning teachers encounter what is often described as “reality shock,” referring to the gap between the ideals promoted during teacher education programmes and the practical

challenges of real school settings (Çakmak et al., 2019). For Islamic education teachers, this transition may be particularly demanding, especially when they are assigned to schools with limited instructional resources, students with minimal prior Islamic knowledge, or communities where Islamic educational traditions are not strongly embedded. These difficulties are even more evident in regions such as Sarawak, where religious diversity and varied cultural backgrounds require teachers to exercise heightened sensitivity, adaptability, and pedagogical flexibility. At the same time, national educational reforms encourage teachers to move beyond conventional teacher-centred practices toward more student-centred and contextualised approaches, further increasing the professional demands placed on novice educators (Kasim, 2021).

Within such environments, novice Islamic education teachers often face challenges related to classroom control, administrative responsibilities, the use of digital platforms, and cross-cultural communication. These pressures can limit their capacity to deliver meaningful and effective Islamic instruction. When left unaddressed, such early-career difficulties may contribute to stress, reduced motivation, and eventually teacher attrition, thereby undermining the sustainability and quality of Islamic education. For this reason, a systematic examination of novice teachers' experiences is crucial in order to inform professional development initiatives, strengthen institutional support systems, and ensure that the broader objectives of Islamic education are successfully realised.

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Although extensive research has examined the difficulties faced by novice teachers across various disciplines (Kasim et al., 2021) scholarly attention to the specific realities of beginning Islamic education teachers remains limited, particularly within the context of Sarawak's secondary schools. Existing studies commonly address general issues such as lesson preparation, classroom control, and professional adjustment; however, they rarely investigate how Islamic education teachers experience and negotiate these challenges in socially, culturally, and religiously diverse learning environments. As a result, the ways in which these teachers interpret, manage, and cope with their unique professional demands are not sufficiently understood.

Recent studies indicate that novice teachers frequently struggle to implement higher-order thinking skills, manage diverse student behaviour, and adapt to curriculum reforms such as the Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) (Syam et al., 2023). These instructional difficulties are further intensified by institutional demands, including extensive clerical work and mandatory engagement with digital management systems such as HRMIS, IDME, and SPLKPM. Such requirements reduce the time and energy available for instructional planning and student engagement, thereby affecting teaching quality and professional well-being. Furthermore, as highlighted by Mamat et al. (2021), novice teachers are increasingly expected to function as facilitators of learning, a role that requires strong pedagogical competence, adaptability, and emotional awareness—capacities that are still developing during the early stages of a teaching career.

In Sarawak, these challenges are often magnified by contextual constraints. Many novice teachers are placed in rural or semi-urban schools that lack adequate facilities, technological support, or consistent exposure to Islamic practices among students. These conditions restrict instructional opportunities and complicate efforts to deliver meaningful Islamic education. In addition, continuous curriculum restructuring has been shown to place considerable strain on teachers. Othman and Zaidi (2023), through the Controlled Rapid Approach to Curriculum Change (CRACC) model, found that frequent policy and curriculum adjustments can overwhelm teachers, particularly those who are still building professional confidence and pedagogical stability.

Taken together, these circumstances point to a significant need for focused research on novice Islamic education teachers in Sarawak. Understanding how they interpret their professional roles, adjust their teaching strategies, and respond to institutional and societal pressures is crucial for strengthening support systems and enhancing the quality of Islamic education. Without such targeted

investigation, policy makers and educational leaders may fail to address the structural, pedagogical, and emotional challenges that hinder the growth and retention of effective Islamic educators in this region.

### **3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Understanding the experiences of novice Islamic education teachers is essential for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in secondary education, particularly during the early stages of their professional careers. At this critical phase, novice teachers often encounter a range of pedagogical and contextual challenges that significantly influence their instructional practices, professional growth, and overall classroom effectiveness.

Within the context of Islamic education, these challenges are further compounded by the need to integrate religious knowledge with effective pedagogical approaches in a manner that is both meaningful and balanced. Therefore, this study aims to systematically explore the following:

1. To examine the perspectives of novice Islamic education teachers on the teaching methods employed in secondary school classrooms during their early years of service.
2. To investigate the challenges encountered by novice Islamic education teachers in implementing effective teaching and learning practices in secondary schools in Sarawak.
3. To analyse the strategies employed by novice Islamic education teachers to address and overcome the challenges in their teaching practices.

### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study is guided by the following research questions, which are aligned with the research objectives:

1. What are the perspectives of Islamic novice teachers on teaching methods used in secondary school classrooms during their early years of teaching?
2. What challenges do Islamic novice teachers face in implementing effective teaching and learning practices in secondary schools in Sarawak?
3. How do Islamic novice teachers address and overcome the challenges encountered in their teaching practices?

### **5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study contributes meaningfully to the field of Islamic education in several important ways. Foremost, it fills a notable gap in existing research by examining the experiences of novice Islamic education teachers within the distinctive context of Sarawak, a region marked by cultural diversity, varied religious backgrounds, and uneven educational development. By foregrounding the perspectives of early-career teachers, the study provides deeper insight into how Islamic education is enacted, negotiated, and reshaped within everyday school practice. These insights are valuable for strengthening teacher preparation and policy development in Malaysia, particularly for those serving in complex and under-resourced environments.

In addition, the outcomes of this research offer important implications for key educational stakeholders, including school leaders, curriculum planners, and teacher education institutions. By highlighting issues such as administrative overload, limited mentoring, and restricted professional agency, the study helps clarify the types of institutional support required for novice teachers to perform effectively and sustain their motivation. Such evidence can guide the development of

structured induction systems, mentoring frameworks, and workload management policies that promote both teaching quality and teacher well-being.

The study also provides practical relevance for Islamic education practitioners, especially those at the beginning of their careers. By illustrating how novice teachers cope with professional challenges through strategies such as self-regulation, effective time use, and engagement with school communities, the research offers concrete examples of adaptive practice that may serve as guidance for others. Moreover, greater awareness of the emotional and professional trajectories of new teachers can foster a more supportive and collaborative school environment among colleagues.

Beyond its contribution to Islamic education, the findings of this study have wider relevance for understanding novice teacher development, equity in education, and curriculum implementation in multicultural and rural settings. In this way, the research supports broader educational goals by emphasising the importance of teacher-centred inquiry and inclusive policy approaches, consistent with Malaysia's National Education Philosophy (Ministry of Education, 1988), which advocates holistic, balanced, and equitable educational advancement.

## **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the experiences and challenges of novice Islamic education teachers working in secondary schools in Sarawak. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and consisted of three female teachers who completed their Bachelor of Education in 2022 and had accumulated between two and three years of teaching experience. These participants were chosen because they were in the early stage of their professional careers and therefore able to provide rich insight into the realities of beginning teaching practice.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured online interviews. The primary interview responses were submitted in written form via WhatsApp using Microsoft Word files, while supplementary clarification was obtained through voice-note exchanges. This flexible mode of communication enabled participants to reflect carefully on their experiences and provide detailed, experience-based responses. In addition, relevant scholarly documents, including journal articles and academic publications accessed through Google Scholar and university library databases, were reviewed to contextualise and support the interview findings.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. This process involved organising and reading the interview transcripts, identifying meaningful units of data, assigning codes, grouping similar codes into themes, and interpreting these themes in relation to the research focus. Through this systematic process, key patterns related to instructional challenges, coping strategies, and professional beliefs were identified and examined.

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and their identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were maintained at all stages of the study. Overall, this methodological framework enabled a deep and context-sensitive understanding of the lived experiences of novice Islamic education teachers in Sarawak.

## 7. FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings derived from the thematic analysis of data collected from novice Islamic education teachers. The findings are organised into three main areas, corresponding to the research objectives: (1) teachers’ perspectives on teaching methods during their early years of service, (2) the challenges encountered in implementing teaching and learning practices, and (3) the strategies employed to address these challenges. The themes identified reflect the complex realities faced by novice teachers, encompassing contextual constraints, student-related factors, and institutional influences. The findings are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 to provide a structured and systematic overview, followed by detailed explanations to support interpretation and discussion.

### 7.1 The Islamic novice teacher's perspectives toward teaching method of secondary students in their early periods of teaching

**Table 1:** Novice Islamic Education Teachers’ Perspectives on Teaching Methods in Early Career Phase

Theme	Key Findings
<b>Lack of Facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “internet and electricity is okay”</li> <li>• “facilities... not sufficient... combining 2 classes... 35 students... wooden block... noise distractions”</li> <li>• “no LCD... need to bring students to library... far away... waste of time”</li> <li>• “school moving very slow towards digital-based education”</li> <li>• “chalk and talk... traditional lectures”</li> <li>• “deficiency teaches the meaning of difficulty... an opportunity I should not waste”</li> <li>• “experience will be beneficial in the future... today’s hardships for future pleasures”</li> </ul>
<b>Increasing Workload of Teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “e-Operasi, PBD, HRMIS... waste of time... burdening teachers”</li> <li>• “not familiar with actual work... why everything need to be passed on the first year?”</li> <li>• “IDME always jammed... irritating... stressful”</li> <li>• “PBD is less effective... focus should be on teaching”</li> <li>• “feel suffocated with the extra things at school”</li> </ul>

As shown in Table 1, novice Islamic education teachers’ early teaching experiences are strongly shaped by contextual realities, particularly limited facilities and increasing workload. Although basic infrastructure such as internet and electricity is available, it remains insufficient to support effective pedagogical practices. Teachers frequently reported overcrowded classrooms, lack of instructional tools, and dependence on traditional approaches such as "chalk and talk" due to limited digital readiness.

Despite these constraints, participants demonstrated resilience by reframing these challenges as opportunities for professional growth. This reflects an adaptive mindset that supports long-term professional development.

In relation to facilities, participants generally acknowledged that basic necessities such as internet and electricity were available. However, they repeatedly pointed out that these were not sufficient to support effective teaching practices. Several teachers described having to manage overcrowded classrooms, including situations where two classes were combined, resulting in a large number of students and frequent noise disruptions. The lack of teaching aids, especially LCD projectors, further constrained their ability to deliver engaging lessons. In some cases, teachers had to bring students to other locations such as the library, which was often far from the classroom and

required additional time. Because of these limitations, many felt that they had little choice but to rely on more traditional teaching approaches, particularly “chalk and talk,” as the transition towards digital-based education in their schools was perceived to be relatively slow.

Interestingly, despite these constraints, participants did not view their situation entirely negatively. Some expressed that these challenges helped them build patience and adaptability. They tended to frame their experiences as part of a learning process, believing that the difficulties they faced at this stage would contribute to their growth as teachers in the future.

Apart from infrastructural limitations, workload emerged as another major concern. Participants highlighted that a significant portion of their time was spent dealing with administrative tasks rather than focusing on teaching. Systems such as e-Operasi, PBD, HRMIS, and IDME were frequently mentioned as being time-consuming and, at times, technically frustrating. For novice teachers who were still trying to understand their core teaching responsibilities, this added pressure was particularly challenging. Some questioned why such a heavy workload was assigned during their first year of service, when they were still in the process of adapting to the profession.

This situation had a direct impact on their teaching practices. With much of their time taken up by administrative duties, teachers felt that they had less opportunity to plan lessons thoroughly or to engage students in more meaningful ways. A few even described feeling overwhelmed by the accumulation of tasks. There was also a sense that certain requirements, such as PBD documentation, did not always translate into improved classroom practices. Overall, these conditions shaped their perspectives by limiting their ability to implement more interactive and student-centred teaching approaches, even though they were aware of their importance.

## 7.2 The main challenges faced by Islamic novice teachers in implementing the actual teaching and learning practices in their classroom

**Table 2:** Challenges Faced by Novice Islamic Education Teachers in Classroom Teaching and Learning Implementation

Theme	Key Findings
Lack of Islamic Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “foster awareness of the importance of true understanding of Islam”</li> <li>• “students... don’t know how to read Al-Quran or Jawi”</li> <li>• “students developed thought of ‘education is not important’”</li> <li>• “weak in religious fundamentals and motivation”</li> <li>• “lack of morals... disrespect for teachers... interferes with learning”</li> <li>• “situation quite social... bullying, rowdiness, truancy”</li> </ul>
Feeling Stress and Burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “sometimes... my mood will be in bad condition”</li> <li>• “just a little burnout... need to handle it”</li> <li>• “hoping that my momentum will remain okay”</li> </ul>
Welcoming Surrounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “school management... always welcoming and supporting”</li> <li>• “senior teachers... guide me how to solve problems”</li> <li>• “cooperation with authorities... no issue... Alhamdulillah”</li> <li>• “principal diligent... teachers teach everything A to Z”</li> </ul>

Table 2 illustrates that novice Islamic education teachers encounter interconnected challenges involving student readiness, emotional strain, and environmental conditions. A key concern is students’ limited Islamic literacy, which compels teachers to revisit foundational knowledge before progressing to higher-level instruction.

Behavioural issues further complicate instructional delivery, requiring teachers to balance disciplinary management with pedagogical responsibilities. In addition, emotional pressures such as stress and early signs of burnout were reported, although these were generally manageable.

Importantly, a supportive school environment emerged as a mitigating factor. Guidance from senior teachers and positive leadership contributed to teachers’ ability to sustain their roles and adapt effectively.

One of the most prominent challenges relates to the lack of Islamic lifestyle among students. Participants consistently described situations where students demonstrated limited understanding of basic Islamic knowledge, including difficulties in reading the Al-Qur’an and Jawi. This lack of foundational knowledge made it challenging for teachers to deliver lessons effectively, as they were required to revisit basic concepts before progressing further. In addition, some teachers observed that certain students did not view education as important, which affected their motivation and engagement in class. This was further compounded by weak religious fundamentals and a lack of intrinsic motivation among students.

Beyond academic concerns, participants also highlighted issues related to students’ behaviour and moral development. Instances of disrespect towards teachers, disruptive classroom behaviour, and social problems such as bullying, truancy, and excessive rowdiness were reported. These conditions created a less conducive learning environment and often interrupted the flow of teaching. As a result, teachers had to divide their attention between managing discipline and delivering instructional content, which affected the overall effectiveness of their teaching practices.

In addition to student-related challenges, teachers also experienced emotional strain during their early years of teaching. Some participants shared that they occasionally felt emotionally affected by their workload and classroom experiences, which influenced their mood and motivation. Although the level of burnout reported was generally described as manageable, there was still a sense of ongoing pressure that required conscious effort to cope with. Teachers expressed the need to maintain emotional balance and resilience in order to sustain their performance in the classroom.

Despite these challenges, the findings also reveal the presence of a supportive and welcoming school environment. Many participants described receiving guidance and encouragement from senior teachers, who played an important role in helping them navigate professional challenges. School management was generally perceived as cooperative and supportive, while principals were described as proactive and attentive to teachers’ needs. In some cases, participants highlighted positive collaboration with relevant authorities, which contributed to a more manageable working environment.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while novice Islamic education teachers face considerable challenges related to student readiness and emotional demands, the presence of a supportive professional environment can help mitigate these difficulties. The combination of these factors shapes how teachers adapt their teaching practices and sustain their roles during the early stages of their careers.

### 7.3 Islamic novice teachers solve the challenges they face

**Table 3:** Coping Strategies Adopted by Novice Islamic Education Teachers

Theme	Key Findings
<b>Initiatives to Motivate Themselves</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “ask other teachers if I don’t understand... push myself”</li> <li>• “focus on learning self-control... adapt... good mindset”</li> <li>• “remind ourselves... students in front of us don’t know... our job to educate”</li> <li>• “look for hidden wisdom... be positive”</li> </ul>
<b>Hoping for Authority to Lessen the Burden</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “co-curricular not burdensome... issue is student attendance”</li> <li>• “too many platforms and systems... should upgrade, not add more”</li> <li>• “hope clerical work is not given to teachers”</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “work is never finished... follow the flow... enjoy the journey”</li> </ul>
<b>Rewards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “don’t need aid... just lessen programmes or online key-in”</li> <li>• “allowance for students’ reward... flight ticket home... flexible holidays”</li> <li>• “moral support... reward yourself... enjoy days well”</li> </ul>

As presented in Table 3, novice Islamic education teachers employ a combination of personal resilience and contextual strategies to manage professional challenges. Teachers actively seek peer support, develop self-regulation, and maintain a positive mindset to sustain motivation.

At the institutional level, participants expressed the need for reduced administrative burden and improved system efficiency. Additionally, both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards were identified as important in maintaining well-being and professional commitment.

Firstly, participants demonstrated strong personal initiative in managing their professional challenges. Many described actively seeking support from colleagues, particularly more experienced teachers, whenever they encountered difficulties in teaching or school-related tasks. This willingness to ask for guidance reflects an openness to learning and a recognition of the importance of collaborative practice. In addition, teachers emphasised the need to develop self-control and adaptability, especially when dealing with diverse student behaviours and classroom situations. Maintaining a positive mindset was frequently mentioned as an important coping mechanism, with participants reminding themselves of their role as educators responsible for guiding students who may lack prior knowledge. Some also reflected on their experiences in a more meaningful way, choosing to view challenges as opportunities for personal growth and as a source of hidden wisdom that could strengthen their professional resilience.

Secondly, participants expressed a clear expectation for institutional support, particularly in reducing the non-teaching burden placed on teachers. While co-curricular responsibilities were generally not perceived as overly demanding, issues such as inconsistent student attendance still posed challenges. A more pressing concern was the proliferation of administrative platforms and systems, which participants felt added unnecessary complexity to their work. They suggested that existing systems should be improved rather than continuously introducing new ones. There was also a recurring hope that clerical tasks could be minimised or reassigned, allowing teachers to focus more on their core responsibility of teaching. Despite these concerns, some participants adopted a more accepting attitude, acknowledging that teaching is inherently demanding and choosing to “go with the flow” while maintaining a sense of balance in their work.

Finally, the role of rewards—both intrinsic and extrinsic—was highlighted as an important factor in sustaining motivation. Participants indicated that they did not necessarily require extensive external assistance, but rather preferred a reduction in workload, particularly in terms of programmes and online administrative tasks. At the same time, small but meaningful forms of support, such as allowances for student-related activities, opportunities to return home, or flexible leave arrangements, were seen as helpful in maintaining well-being. Beyond material incentives, emotional and moral support also played a significant role. Teachers emphasised the importance of self-reward, taking time to rest, and appreciating small achievements as part of maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Overall, these findings suggest that novice Islamic education teachers rely heavily on internal motivation and peer support while simultaneously expressing the need for more structured institutional assistance. The interplay between personal resilience and systemic support appears to be crucial in enabling them to navigate the complexities of early-career teaching.

## 8. DISCUSSIONS

The findings collectively demonstrate that novice Islamic education teachers operate within a complex professional landscape characterised by structural constraints, pedagogical demands, and emotional challenges. The integration of Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 provides a structured representation of these experiences, linking contextual realities, encountered challenges, and adaptive strategies.

The persistence of administrative burden and infrastructural limitations highlights the need for systemic reform, while the strong presence of intrinsic motivation reflects the enduring commitment of Islamic educators. These findings reinforce the importance of structured mentoring, professional development, and institutional support systems.

### 8.1 Islamic Novice Teachers' Views on Teaching Methods During the Early Career Phase

The findings indicate that novice Islamic education teachers encountered notable challenges when attempting to translate pedagogical theory into classroom practice, particularly when working with students from varied social, academic, and behavioural backgrounds. This reflects the observations of Stewart and Jansky (2022), who reported that early-career teachers commonly experience professional strain arising from the gap between pre-service preparation and the realities of school environments, including difficulties in navigating institutional expectations and collegial relationships. Such misalignment between training and practice can undermine confidence and contribute to emotional fatigue among beginning teachers.

In contrast to many previous studies (Sydnor et al., 2024; Silva et al., 2021), participants in this study expressed generally favourable perceptions of school leadership and collegial support. They described feeling guided and encouraged by senior colleagues and administrators, a finding that diverges from Sydnor et al. (2024), who documented widespread feelings of marginalisation and lack of voice among novice teachers. Additionally, participants observed that student behaviour varied by grade level, with older students presenting more frequent disciplinary challenges. This observation aligns with Sydnor et al.'s (2024) conclusion that behavioural issues, particularly in the post-pandemic period, constitute one of the most persistent obstacles faced by teachers at the early stages of their careers.

### 8.2 Challenges Encountered by Islamic Novice Teachers in Teaching and Learning Implementation

The responsibility of Islamic education teachers extends beyond academic instruction to include the nurturing of students' moral and spiritual development, a dual expectation that adds considerable complexity to their professional practice. Participants in this study described difficulties in engaging students who possessed limited foundational religious knowledge and low learning motivation, particularly in rural school settings. These findings are consistent with those of Syam et al. (2023), who observed a significant gap between novice teachers' instructional aspirations and students' actual levels of participation and readiness. Such discrepancies between intended learning outcomes and classroom realities frequently result in emotional strain and professional dissatisfaction among beginning teachers.

In addition to instructional challenges, participants expressed concern about the heavy administrative and professional obligations placed upon them. Similar patterns were reported by Makoa and Segalo (2021), who found that teachers often felt overburdened by non-teaching tasks that limited their capacity to focus on instructional quality. Syam et al. (2023) likewise noted that novice teachers frequently experienced role ambiguity, as extensive documentation and reporting requirements led them to feel more like clerical workers than educators. Steinhoff (2024) further

highlighted that prolonged working hours devoted to lesson preparation, assessment, and administrative duties can disrupt work–life balance and negatively affect teachers’ overall well-being.

Another prominent issue identified in this study is the absence of systematic mentoring structures. In many Islamic schools, particularly those operating with limited financial and institutional resources, formal support mechanisms for new teachers are insufficient or entirely absent. As Fecho et al. (2021) have demonstrated, effective mentoring plays a vital role in reducing professional stress, strengthening teaching competence, and promoting teacher retention. Without consistent guidance and support, novice teachers may struggle to manage both classroom responsibilities and organisational expectations, increasing the risk of burnout and professional withdrawal.

### **8.3 Strategies Used by Islamic Novice Teachers to Manage Professional Challenges**

The participants highlighted effective time management and strong intrinsic motivation as key personal resources for dealing with the demands of early-career teaching. Prioritising tasks, setting realistic goals, and maintaining a constructive outlook were regarded as important in minimising stress and maintaining focus. These self-directed coping strategies are consistent with the work of Kasim et al. (2021), who emphasised that Islamic teaching involves not only knowledge transmission but also personal commitment to guiding and uplifting students. Teaching experiences in rural areas of Sarawak further strengthened teachers’ abilities to adjust their instructional approaches, build meaningful relationships with learners, and respond flexibly to diverse classroom needs, supporting the observations of Syam et al. (2023).

Participants also viewed professional learning opportunities as critical for improving their instructional competence. Continuous professional development enabled them to reflect on their teaching practices, identify weaknesses, and implement more effective strategies. As noted by Fecho et al. (2021), such programmes are most beneficial when they are sustained over time and closely connected to actual classroom challenges. In addition, support from school leadership, peer collaboration, and structured induction activities were reported as important sources of encouragement and guidance. However, as Steinhoff (2024) observed, many beginning teachers still experience insufficient institutional support, highlighting the need for stronger mentoring systems within schools.

Finally, participants identified personal qualities such as patience, persistence, and openness to learning as essential for long-term professional growth. Maintaining a growth-oriented mindset helped them remain resilient in the face of setbacks and ongoing demands. Syam et al. (2023) similarly found that teachers who believe in their capacity to develop are better equipped to cope with professional pressures and to sustain their commitment to teaching despite organisational and emotional challenges.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

This study offers a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of the lived experiences of novice Islamic education teachers in Sarawak. Drawing on thematic analysis of empirical data, the findings illuminate the dynamic interplay between environmental constraints, pedagogical challenges, and the adaptive coping strategies employed by teachers during the early stages of their professional careers.

The structured presentation of findings through Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 enhances analytical clarity and facilitates a more systematic interpretation of the data. Overall, the study highlights that while novice teachers demonstrate considerable resilience and commitment, their professional effectiveness is significantly shaped by the availability of institutional support and conducive teaching environments. This underscores the importance of achieving a balanced

integration between individual agency and systemic support to ensure sustainable teacher development.

Several important implications emerge from these findings. At the individual level, novice Islamic education teachers are encouraged to cultivate adaptability, proactive learning attitudes, and reflective practice, while actively engaging in collaborative support networks with peers and mentors. At the institutional level, experienced teachers and school leaders play a critical role in supporting novice educators through structured mentoring, instructional guidance, and emotional support. Creating a supportive professional ecosystem is essential to facilitate smoother transitions into the teaching profession.

From a policy perspective, the findings call for a closer alignment between teacher education programmes and the realities of contemporary school contexts, particularly in diverse and under-resourced settings such as Sarawak. Strengthening Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), expanding access to continuous professional development, and implementing workload management strategies are crucial steps in enhancing teacher well-being and instructional quality. Furthermore, targeted incentives and support mechanisms—especially for teachers serving in rural and underserved areas—are necessary to improve retention and sustain motivation.

In conclusion, fostering a holistic support system that integrates personal resilience, institutional structures, and policy-level interventions is essential for strengthening the quality and sustainability of Islamic education. Such efforts will not only enhance teacher development but also contribute to the broader goal of nurturing well-balanced, knowledgeable, and ethically grounded students within the Malaysian educational landscape.

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