



Community and Quality of Education: A Study on Perception and Motivation Towards Islamic Elementary School

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the community's perception and motivation regarding the Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo City. The objectives are: 1) to explore the community's perception of the school, 2) to identify factors motivating families to choose the school, and 3) to evaluate the quality of education provided. Using a qualitative, descriptive field study approach, data was collected through observations, interviews, and documentation from parents and teachers. The analysis included data condensation, presentation, and conclusion drawing, with credibility ensured through extended observations, triangulation, and accuracy checks. The findings reveal that the community holds a highly positive perception of the school, valuing its ability to develop students' character and morals in line with Islamic teachings, alongside a strong focus on Qur'an literacy. The school's comprehensive facilities and balanced integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT) curriculum, combining general and Islamic studies, also contribute to this favorable view. Factors like parents' educational background, economic status, and the school's location further influence their perceptions and decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a critical role in addressing ignorance and poverty within a nation, and it has long been considered a fundamental and contemporary issue (Spring, 2019). As a result, education remains a top priority for implementation, given its vital role in ensuring the quality and dignity of a nation (Hedley Beare, 2021; Munthe, 2022). Islam, as a comprehensive and perfect religion, places a strong emphasis on education, mandating every follower to seek knowledge (Irwanti et al., 2023; Wahab Syakhrani, 2020). Through the acquisition of knowledge, humans are empowered to create technology that enables the management of their environment, which is a gift from Allah swt. (Ilham, 2020; Nurdin, 2020). Islamic education is a process of shaping individuals according to the teachings and values of Islam as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Kosim et al., 2023; Wahab Syakhrani, 2021).

Historically, Islamic-based education has developed organically from, by, and for the community, which, in many ways, implemented the concept of community-based education long before the establishment of public schools by the government (Günther, 2020; Mahfud, 2019). Communities,

whether individually or collectively through organizations, built Islamic schools to meet their educational needs, ranging from pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) and madrasah to integrated Islamic schools (Malik, 2024b; Rokhman et al., 2023; Sa'dullah & Hidayatullah, 2020). Initially, these schools were often modest, utilizing makeshift facilities, driven by religious zeal and missionary spirit, but over time they yielded positive results.

Islamic-based schools, typically initiated by individuals or groups within the community, often started with limited resources and facilities compared to government-established schools (Arar et al., 2022). Nevertheless, over time, Islamic education has begun to assert its presence as a credible educational institution. As of today, 91.4% of Islamic-based schools, such as madrasahs (MI, MTs, and MA) in Indonesia, are privately owned, with the remaining being state-owned (Arar et al., 2022; Kusman, 2019). For instance, in South Sulawesi in 2021, of the 716 MI (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah), only 7.40% (53) were state-owned, while the rest, 92.59% (663), were privately owned. These MI accommodated a total of 118,701 students, with 34,952 enrolled in state MI and 73,749 in private MI (Ismail et al., 2021; Priatmoko et al., 2024). In the case of MTs (Madrasah Tsanawiyah), only 6.29% (48) were state-owned, while the remaining 93.7% (714) were privately owned (Ismail et al., 2021; Samsudding & Thaha, 2024). Similarly, for MA (Madrasah Aliyah), 6.9% (84) were state-owned, while 93.08% (417) were privately owned (Kurniati et al., 2021; Malik, 2024a). Additionally, there were 289 pesantren with a total of 73,739 students, and 16,628 integrated Islamic schools were spread across all provinces in South Sulawesi (Kasmah et al., 2023; Latif & Hafid, 2021).

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in parental attitudes toward education, with many parents opting to enroll their children in Islamic-based schools, such as pesantren, madrasah, or integrated Islamic schools. This shift is driven by social demand and the growing concern over juvenile delinquency, which has become a pervasive issue globally, including in Indonesia (Alshboul et al., 2021; Firdha Hayati, 2019). Common forms of juvenile delinquency include fights, known as "tawuran," traffic violations, theft, drug abuse, and even involvement in protests against authorities (Murfid et al., 2021; Rahman & Mufti, 2021). According to the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), juvenile delinquency is typically perpetrated by individuals aged 10 to 24 years who are unmarried, indicating that students within this age group are vulnerable (BKKBN RI, 2020; Tri Utami & Afwa, 2020). To prevent such issues, parents have increasingly sought to instill religious and moral values in their children from a young age, starting at the elementary level, through character-based Islamic education.

While parents are keen on providing a strong foundation of religious education, they also desire that their children receive a balanced education, encompassing both Islamic and general knowledge, such as mathematics, science, social studies, and language. This desire has led to the establishment of integrated Islamic schools, which harmoniously combine religious and general education, ensuring a well-rounded curriculum. The Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) model is an example of this approach, where Islamic values and academic subjects are taught in a balanced and integrated manner. This rationale forms the basis for selecting the Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo City as the focus of this research.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the community's perception and motivation regarding the Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo City and to assess the quality of education provided. The study explores how the school balances religious and general education, examining factors that drive the community to choose it for their children. It also evaluates the school's facilities, teaching methods, and curriculum. The findings aim to contribute to understanding how Islamic-based schools are valued and provide insights for policymakers to shape future education policies. This research will benefit the author, readers, and future researchers interested in Islamic education in Indonesia.

METHODS

Design

The research employed a qualitative approach (Kostere & Kostere, 2021), using field research with a descriptive design to explore the community's perception of Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo City. The study focused on interpreting patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language to understand how the community views the school. Data were collected through observation,

interviews, and documentation to address key questions about the factors influencing these perceptions and parents' motivations for enrolling their children.

Research Instrument

The research instruments used in this study were observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations, both structured and unstructured, captured informants' behaviors in natural settings, ensuring real-life data collection. Interviews, both semi-structured and unstructured, were conducted with teachers, administrators, and students to gather insights into their perceptions of the school. Documentation, including school profiles and policies, provided supplemental historical and factual data. Together, these methods offered a comprehensive view of the community's perceptions and the school's operational context.

Data Collection

Data for this research were gathered from multiple sources to explore the community's perception and motivation regarding Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo City. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents, focusing on the school's role in character development and academic achievement. Observational data provided context by capturing natural interactions within the school setting. Secondary data, including school profiles and meeting records, complemented the primary data. This combination of interviews, observations, and documentation offered a comprehensive understanding of the community's views and the factors influencing their decision to choose the school.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this research followed an interactive model, including data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (M. Wang et al., 2021). In the first stage, data reduction, the researcher summarized and categorized key information to focus on the most relevant data regarding the community's perception and motivation. The reduced data were then organized into concise narratives and tables, helping to identify patterns and relationships. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting these patterns, with ongoing verification to ensure accuracy and consistency, resulting in well-supported findings that reflect the research context.

RESULTS

The Community's Perception of Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo

The study reveals that the community's perception of Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) in Palopo is overwhelmingly positive, particularly among parents. They view the school as providing high-quality education with a strong emphasis on both academic achievement and Islamic values. Regardless of their background, parents consistently praise the school for instilling good character (*akhlak*) and adhering to Islamic teachings. The integration of religious and general education is seen as a major strength, with the curriculum offering a well-rounded approach that satisfies parental expectations.

Parents from diverse occupational backgrounds, earn between Rp. 4,000,000 to Rp. 7,000,000 per month, agreed that the school's balanced curriculum, which combines religious and general subjects, provides a comprehensive educational experience. Despite economic differences, all respondents considered the school's development fund a worthy investment in their children's future. Many parents cited recommendations from friends and family, alongside the school's strong reputation for delivering quality religious and moral education, as key reasons for enrolling their children.

Activities such as Qur'an recitation, prayer, and character development were frequently mentioned as crucial in fostering not only academic excellence but also moral growth. Parents like Mardiana noted that their decision was influenced by the school's ability to provide religious education they could not fully offer at home. Yusuf appreciated the school's focus on moral training, including respect and communal prayer, while others like Wirdawati and Fitriani highlighted extracurricular programs that enhance both religious and general knowledge.

The extended school hours, from 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM, were also praised by many parents for providing a structured, secure environment, particularly for working parents like Mardiana, who valued

the support it offered in balancing her work and family life. Parents emphasized that SDIT Darussalam prepares their children for both academic success and spiritual well-being. Fahma Ahmad pointed to the critical role Islamic education plays in shaping strong religious values, especially in today's world. Rosinar echoed this, highlighting the importance of the school's teachings in fostering piety and adherence to Islamic principles. In conclusion, the findings demonstrate high parental satisfaction with the educational experience at SDIT Darussalam. The school's balanced approach, combining academic rigor with religious and moral instruction, is highly valued. This positive perception is further strengthened by the school's excellent facilities, dedicated staff, and focus on Islamic character development, making SDIT Darussalam the preferred choice for many in the community.

The Community's Motivation toward Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo

The findings of this study reveal several key factors that motivate parents to enroll their children in Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) in Palopo. These motivations are deeply tied to the school's integration of religious and academic education, as well as its reputation for developing strong moral character. Parents' responses offer a glimpse into the school's impact, with many sharing their reasons for choosing SDIT Darussalam as the ideal institution for their children.

First, many parents are influenced by family members who have previously chosen the school, admiring the calm, religiously disciplined demeanor of the children in those families. One mother, Mardiana, often spoke of her nieces and nephews who, after attending the school, recited the Qur'an fluently and completed their prayers without hesitation. She nodded thoughtfully as she explained how her decision was shaped by these positive transformations. Another parent, Yusuf, gestured with confidence, stating that his children's exposure to regular Qur'an memorization and prayer instilled a sense of discipline he valued greatly.

Wirdawati, whose two children are alumni of SDIT, recalled with a proud smile how her children maintained impeccable manners, bowing their heads slightly whenever they greeted elders. These behavioral changes reinforced her belief in the school's ability to nurture not just academic excellence, but deep-rooted Islamic values. Meanwhile, Fitriani mentioned with a raised brow how her child's understanding of religious texts improved rapidly, crediting the school's structured curriculum for his growing interest in Islamic studies.

Purwati, softly adjusting her hijab as she spoke, emphasized the spiritual rewards, *pahala*, she sought for her child through the school's daily practices, echoing sentiments shared by Hasbiana Bulan, who saw the institution as laying the groundwork for her child's strong moral foundation. Similarly, Fahma Ahmad appreciated the balance between religious and general knowledge that shaped her child into a pious, responsible individual.

Parents also praised the school's facilities and extracurricular activities. Rosinar, animatedly describing the variety of programs, highlighted the broad opportunities available for her children, from Qur'an competitions to leadership training. Andi Apermatyu leaned forward, stating his view of SDIT as an investment—both for his child's future in this world and the hereafter. Tika, with a serene smile, described how the school's focus on early Islamic practices, like regular prayer and Qur'an recitation, deeply resonated with her. In summary, these findings reveal that parents are drawn to SDIT Darussalam not only for its strong religious foundation and focus on character development but also for its comprehensive academic programs and outstanding facilities. Positive experiences from other families, the school's ability to instill Islamic values, and its balanced educational approach contribute to its reputation as a leading institution, making it the preferred choice for many in the community.

The Quality of Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo

The curriculum at Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) in Palopo combines the *Merdeka Curriculum* mandated by the National Ministry of Education with Islamic teachings, providing a balanced framework for both academic and spiritual development. Teachers at the school emphasize that every subject, including science, mathematics, and physical education, is taught within the context of Islamic principles. This integration ensures that students not only gain knowledge but also develop strong faith-based values.

Nurhidayat Lahming highlighted that the Merdeka Curriculum is closely aligned with Islamic teachings, making all subjects part of a cohesive educational experience. Ade Miranda explained that

while the school adheres to the national curriculum, it incorporates additional Islamic content, ensuring that students receive an education rooted in Islamic values. Anita Dahlan further elaborated that general subjects are consistently linked to religious teachings, fostering a holistic education that nurtures both academic skills and spiritual growth.

The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects, from Qur'an recitation to general education like science and mathematics, providing students with a comprehensive foundation. One of the key features of the school is its *Tahfidz* and *Tahsin* programs, which focus on Qur'an memorization and proper recitation, ensuring that students understand and apply Islamic teachings in their daily lives. In addition to academic subjects, SDIT Darussalam emphasizes *adab* (manners) and *akhlaq* (ethics), teaching students discipline, respect, and social responsibility.

Teachers such as Ade Miranda and Arbiani Alimudin stressed the importance of Qur'an memorization, proper prayer, and daily religious practices. Leadership training and extracurricular activities also play a vital role in the school's approach, providing students with opportunities for personal growth beyond the classroom. In conclusion, SDIT Darussalam offers a well-rounded education that integrates the *Merdeka Curriculum* with a rich Islamic framework. The combination of academic rigor, religious instruction, and character development ensures that students are well-prepared for both worldly and spiritual success. The school's approach, from Qur'an memorization to leadership development, has earned widespread praise from parents and teachers, establishing SDIT Darussalam as a leading institution in integrated Islamic education.

DISCUSSION

The Community's Perception of Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo

The results of this study highlight the overwhelmingly positive perception of the community toward Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) in Palopo. The findings suggest that the school's ability to balance religious and general education plays a critical role in shaping these positive views. Parents from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds express their satisfaction with the school's comprehensive approach to education, which not only focuses on academic excellence but also emphasizes the importance of Islamic values and character development ([Hidayah et al., 2021](#); [Lavy, 2020](#); [Li et al., 2020](#)). This dual focus aligns with the expectations of parents who seek a holistic education for their children that prepares them both intellectually and morally ([Chitra & Gurung, 2021](#); [Ishartiwi et al., 2022](#); [Widodo, 2019](#)).

One of the key findings of this study is the significant role that the school's reputation plays in influencing parents' decisions. Many parents were motivated to enroll their children in SDIT Darussalam based on recommendations from family members and friends who had positive experiences with the school. This highlights the importance of social networks and word-of-mouth as powerful factors in school choice, particularly in communities where the reputation of religious education institutions is highly valued ([Abror et al., 2021](#); [Le et al., 2019](#); [Lu, 2024](#)).

The school's emphasis on *akhlaq* (character) and the structured religious education it provides were consistently mentioned as strong motivators. The fact that the school integrates Islamic teachings into every aspect of its curriculum resonates with parents who prioritize religious education alongside academic achievement. This is especially important in today's context, where parents increasingly seek environments that promote moral integrity and spiritual growth amidst concerns over rising moral issues in society ([Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2024](#); [Gale et al., 2023](#); [Walker et al., 2021](#)). The structured program, including Qur'an memorization, prayer, and Islamic behavioral guidance, reinforces the notion that SDIT Darussalam is seen as a moral compass for students, helping to cultivate individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also ethical and devout.

The study also reveals that the socioeconomic background of the parents does not appear to be a barrier to their overall satisfaction with the school. Despite varying income levels, parents agree that contributing to the school's development fund is a worthwhile investment in their children's future ([Fischer et al., 2019](#); [Rowe & Perry, 2020](#); [Wolf & McCoy, 2019](#)). This reflects the high value placed on

quality education, particularly in the context of Islamic schooling, where parents view education as an essential investment in both worldly success and spiritual well-being ([Lahmar, 2020](#); [Sudirman, 2023](#)).

Another significant point of discussion is the school's extended hours, which are viewed positively by parents, particularly those who have demanding work schedules. The school provides a safe and nurturing environment for students from morning until late afternoon, allowing parents to focus on their work without worrying about their children's well-being. This suggests that the school's ability to offer a structured, full-day learning environment is a key factor in maintaining parents' trust and confidence ([Catherine et al., 2024](#); [Langford et al., 2018](#); [Rokhman & Munir, 2019](#)).

Moreover, the positive perception of the school's facilities and teaching staff reinforces the notion that SDIT Darussalam offers a high-quality educational experience. The well-maintained facilities, combined with the dedication and professionalism of the teachers, contribute to an environment conducive to both learning and personal growth ([Asiyai, 2020](#); [Tambak et al., 2022](#); [K. C. Wang et al., 2022](#)). Parents particularly appreciate the personalized attention that students receive, which they believe enhances the children's academic and spiritual development.

In line with the findings, the school's focus on both academic and religious education is seen as essential for preparing students for success in both this world and the hereafter. Parents like Fahma Ahmad and Rosinar emphasize that Islamic education is crucial in shaping the moral character of their children, ensuring they grow up as pious individuals who adhere to Islamic principles. This dual focus on academic rigor and religious values distinguishes SDIT Darussalam from other schools and solidifies its standing as a preferred institution within the community.

The Community's Motivation toward Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo

The motivations driving parents to enroll their children in Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) in Palopo reflect a strong emphasis on religious education, character formation, and a holistic approach to learning. The study reveals that parental motivations are deeply rooted in the desire to provide a solid religious foundation for their children, with many parents influenced by the positive outcomes they have observed in other families who have chosen the school. This underscores the role of social influence and familial recommendations in shaping educational decisions, particularly in the context of Islamic education, where the community's trust in an institution's ability to cultivate both spiritual and academic excellence plays a crucial role ([Aljanyousi et al., 2019](#); [Ikhwan et al., 2019](#); [Rahman & Mufti, 2021](#)).

One significant finding is the importance of *akhlaq karimah* (noble character) in the decision-making process. Parents are not only concerned with their children's academic progress but also with their moral and ethical development. This aligns with broader societal concerns about moral degradation, particularly in a globalized world where children are exposed to a variety of influences ([Fattore et al., 2019](#); [Ilham et al., 2023](#); [Lahmar, 2020](#)). The fact that SDIT Darussalam places a strong emphasis on instilling Islamic values and character traits, such as respect, discipline, and responsibility, is a key factor that resonates with parents. For example, Yusuf's decision to enroll his children in the school was largely based on the school's commitment to teaching Islamic practices, including Qur'an memorization and regular prayer, which he viewed as essential for his children's upbringing.

Another crucial factor is the school's strong reputation for its *Tahfidz* program, where students are trained to memorize the Qur'an, and their participation in regional and national competitions adds further credibility to the institution's effectiveness. Parents like Mardiana and Fitriani were motivated by the structured religious education that helped their children develop strong religious habits, such as punctual prayer and Qur'an recitation. These findings highlight how parents perceive the school as not only an educational institution but also a place where Islamic faith and daily practices are reinforced in a supportive environment ([Ikhwan et al., 2019](#); [Muzakki, 2022](#); [OK et al., 2023](#)).

The integration of Islamic teachings into the school's curriculum and daily activities also plays a pivotal role in parental decision-making. As illustrated by parents such as Rosinar and Tika, SDIT Darussalam's curriculum goes beyond the academic subjects typically offered in public schools by embedding Islamic values and practices into the students' daily routines. This integration of religion

with academics is particularly appealing to parents who are seeking a balanced approach that ensures their children excel academically while also receiving a solid grounding in Islamic principles ([Akmaliyah et al., 2021](#); [Fischer et al., 2019](#); [Hussin & Tamuri, 2019](#); [Ratnawati et al., 2023](#)). The school's ability to incorporate both religious and general education reflects a holistic educational model that many parents find attractive ([Ismail et al., 2022](#); [Lee & Lee, 2020](#); [Widodo, 2019](#)).

Furthermore, the school's comprehensive extracurricular programs and well-maintained facilities are significant motivators for parents. The availability of various extracurricular activities that cater to different interests and talents is seen as a way to develop students holistically, ensuring that they receive a well-rounded education. Parents like Rosinar highlighted these programs, along with the school's superior infrastructure, as key reasons for their decision to choose SDIT Darussalam. This reinforces the notion that parents value a supportive and enriched learning environment where children are not only focused on academics but also have opportunities to engage in activities that foster social and personal development ([El-Batri et al., 2019](#); [Gorski, 2021](#); [Philp & Gill, 2020](#)).

Lastly, the perspective shared by Andi Apermatyu that education is an investment not only for the child's future but also for the afterlife captures the deeper spiritual motivations of parents. This reflects a commonly held belief within Islamic education that schooling is not merely about academic success but also about shaping a child's character for both worldly and spiritual fulfillment ([Isroani & Huda, 2022](#); [Moulin-Stožek, 2020](#)). Parents, therefore, view the choice of school as a critical decision that will have long-lasting effects on their children's lives, both in this world and the hereafter ([Assefa et al., 2022](#); [De Vuijst & Van Ham, 2019](#); [Meng & Zhao, 2021](#); [Sun et al., 2020](#)).

The Quality of Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Palopo

The curriculum at Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) in Palopo offers a distinctive educational model that successfully merges the *Merdeka Curriculum* mandated by the National Ministry of Education (Depdiknas) with Islamic teachings. This integrated approach ensures that both general and religious education is provided cohesively, allowing students to develop academically while being deeply rooted in their faith ([Ashraf, 2019](#); [Azami et al., 2023](#); [Sultmann & Brown, 2019](#)). The results of the study highlight that the school's curriculum framework is not just an adaptation of the national standards but an enhanced model that weaves Islamic principles into every subject, fostering a balanced learning environment for students.

One of the key insights from the findings is the way Islamic values are embedded across all subjects. Teachers at SDIT Darussalam, such as Nurhidayat Lahming, emphasize that every subject, including general ones like science and mathematics, is framed within an Islamic context. This ensures that students do not merely learn academic content but also understand how it relates to their faith, making the learning experience more holistic ([Arar et al., 2022](#); [Supriyanto et al., 2022](#)). The integration of Islamic teachings with subjects like mathematics, English, and science, as pointed out by Anita Dahlan, provides students with a comprehensive education that equips them with both intellectual and spiritual insights. This reflects a core strength of the curriculum: the ability to cultivate students who are knowledgeable in both worldly and religious matters ([Supriyanto et al., 2022](#); [Tambak et al., 2022](#)).

Furthermore, the inclusion of additional Islamic content, as noted by Asniar, distinguishes SDIT Darussalam from standard public schools. The supplementary curriculum, which includes Islamic practices, values, and ethical teachings, plays a crucial role in preparing students for both academic success and spiritual growth. This dual focus is a key factor that appeals to parents, as it ensures their children are well-prepared for the challenges of both this world and the hereafter ([Arar et al., 2022](#); [Irwanti et al., 2023](#); [Supriyanto et al., 2022](#)). The fact that the school follows the general structure of the *Merdeka Curriculum* while enriching it with Islamic elements highlights the flexibility of the curriculum in meeting the needs of the students and the expectations of the community ([Isroani & Huda, 2022](#); [Priatmoko et al., 2024](#)).

One of the standout features of the curriculum is the *Tahfidz* and *Tahsin* programs, which focus on Qur'an memorization and correct recitation using the *Qiroati* method. These programs ensure that students not only commit the Qur'an to memory but also understand and apply its teachings in their daily lives. This is a significant advantage for the students, as it enables them to practice their religion more meaningfully while gaining a strong foundation in their faith ([Amalia & Mahariah, 2023](#); [Choiri et al., 2024](#); [Nurfadilla et al., 2023](#)). Nurhidayat Lahming and Ade Miranda both stressed the importance of

these programs, which include the regular practice of obligatory and voluntary prayers in congregation, ensuring that students develop a strong religious routine.

In addition to Qur'an memorization, SDIT Darussalam places a heavy emphasis on *adab* (manners) and *akhlaq* (ethics). The focus on instilling good manners, respect for others, and discipline ensure that students not only excel academically but also grow into morally responsible individuals ([Huda et al., 2024](#); [Yusuf et al., 2022](#)). This emphasis on character education, as noted by Arbiani Alimudin, extends to the school's various daily religious practices, including leadership training and extracurricular activities that promote both personal and spiritual development. The school's leadership training programs, monthly Qur'an recitation events, and mentorship initiatives offer students additional opportunities to practice their Islamic values while developing essential life skills ([Jannah et al., 2023](#); [Rohimah, 2024](#)).

Moreover, the school promotes the development of social responsibility and personal discipline. Asniar pointed out that students are encouraged to be disciplined, confident, and respectful, with a strong emphasis on cleanliness and engagement in community activities. This aspect of the curriculum ensures that students are not only equipped with academic knowledge and religious understanding but are also prepared to become active, responsible members of society ([Ilham et al., 2023](#); [Syamsiah & Haryanto, 2024](#)).

CONCLUSION

The study shows that Darussalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) in Palopo effectively integrates the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic teachings, providing a balanced education that fosters both academic and spiritual growth. Parents are highly motivated to enroll their children due to the school's strong emphasis on akhlaq (noble character), Qur'an memorization, and Islamic practices. The school's reputation for producing well-rounded, religiously knowledgeable students, along with its strong extracurricular programs and facilities, enhances its appeal. Key strengths include the Tahfidz and Tahsin programs, leadership training, and the integration of Islamic values into daily activities. These elements ensure students are well-prepared for both academic success and moral development. In conclusion, SDIT Darussalam is recognized for its holistic approach, combining academic rigor with Islamic values, making it a trusted institution for nurturing knowledgeable and ethically responsible individuals.

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