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Islamic interventions for students' mental well-being in school: a systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT

Student mental well-being remains a growing concern in school settings, while culturally and religiously grounded interventions are still underexplored and inconsistently implemented. This systematic review aims to critically examine empirical studies on Islamic interventions for students' mental well-being, identify key outcomes and highlight research gaps to inform future practice. Guided by preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, a systematic search was conducted in Scopus and Web of Science. Through identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion processes, 28 peer-reviewed studies were selected. These studies covered diverse interventions, including spiritual practices, Islamically adapted psychotherapy, character education, school climate initiatives and religious counseling. Overall findings suggest that Islamic interventions show promising effects in enhancing subjective well-being, emotional regulation, resilience and positive character traits, while reducing stress and anxiety symptoms. However, important gaps remain, such as the limited use of longitudinal and experimental designs, inadequate attention to individual differences including religiosity and personality, oversimplification of complex mental health issues and insufficient standardized training for educators. This review emphasizes the need for rigorous longitudinal and randomized controlled studies, intervention frameworks.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescent mental health is a critical global public health concern, with recent estimates indicating that one in seven individuals aged 10–19 experiences a mental disorder [1]. This developmental stage is highly vulnerable to the emergence of psychological symptoms, which have been exacerbated by contemporary academic pressures, rapid social change, and the lingering disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic [2], [3]. To mitigate these challenges, secondary schools serve as vital social institutions for early intervention. Evidence demonstrates that school-based programs are significantly more effective than clinic-based approaches in improving mental health literacy, reducing social stigma, and ensuring sustainable support by integrating teachers, school counselors, and peers into existing educational structures [4], [5].

Despite the established efficacy of school-based platforms, standard interventions frequently overlook the culturally specific psychosocial stressors faced by distinct student demographics. In Muslim-majority educational settings, adolescents encounter unique challenges, including value conflicts, distinct

social pressures, and identity-related anxieties that dictate their psychological well-being [6]. Current mental health frameworks often fail to integrate religious identity and cultural sensitivity, which are essential components for ensuring stakeholder acceptance and long-term intervention effectiveness [7]. Consequently, there remains a critical shortage of culturally grounded, systematically evaluated, and faith-aligned mental health interventions tailored specifically to Muslim students within secondary school environments.

To address this gap, this study presents a systematic literature review (SLR) designed to synthesize existing research on school-based mental health interventions that incorporate Islamic elements. The novelty of this study lies in its multi-perspectival synthesis framework, which integrates educational, psychological, and Islamic dimensions to evaluate intervention characteristics and their underlying operational mechanisms. By adopting a transparent and rigorous SLR methodology, this review minimizes evidence bias to provide actionable, evidence-based guidance on effective intervention design and outcome indicators for Muslim educational contexts [8]–[10]. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research question: How and to what extent do school-based Islamic interventions influence students' mental well-being, and what underlying mechanisms drive their effectiveness across existing literature?

2. METHOD

This study is guided by the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines developed by Moher *et al*. [11] and revised by Page *et al*. [12] to ensure a transparent, systematic and replicable SLR process. To ensure a comprehensive and systematic literature search, the researchers applied three main PRISMA-based steps: identification, screening, and eligibility. Identification involved locating relevant articles using appropriate keywords and databases, as shown in Figure 1. Screening filtered articles based on titles and abstracts to ensure relevance, while eligibility consisted of full-text assessments to determine article quality and suitability for inclusion in the analysis.

2.1. Systematic search strategy

The first step in this study was to define a clear scope to ensure a systematic search for relevant articles. The literature search was conducted using two major databases, Scopus and Web of Science. All retrieved articles were managed using reference management software EndNote to support the filtering process. The search strategy was developed by identifying keywords and synonyms related to the study focus, such as "Islamic", "Muslim", "intervention/program", "school-based", "mental well-being/mental health", and "Islamic education/Quranic education/faith-based education", which were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR). The search string was adapted to each database's search structure (e.g., TITLE-ABS-KEY in Scopus and ALL in Web of Science), using quotation marks for multi-word phrases and combining synonyms to maximize coverage of relevant terms in article titles, abstracts and keywords, in line with systematic literature search guidelines.

In the second stage, screening, articles were filtered based on purposive sampling to define criteria that ensure relevance and focus. The publication period was limited to 2021–2025 to reflect current developments in Islamic school-based interventions and students' mental well-being, an area that has expanded significantly in recent years. Additional criteria included language, document type and field of study. Only articles published in English and Malay were included and the document type was restricted to empirical and conceptual journal articles, while books, book chapters, conference papers, theses, and technical reports were excluded. The search was also limited to studies related to Islamic interventions for students' mental well-being and duplicate articles across databases were removed.

The third phase is the eligibility phase, which involves a manual selection process to ensure that screened articles meet the inclusion criteria and study objectives. At this stage, articles were reviewed by examining their titles and abstracts to confirm relevance to Islamic school-based interventions and students' mental well-being or mental health. When the title and abstract did not provide sufficient information, full-text reading was conducted for clarification. Articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria, were not aligned with the study theme, or were unrelated to the school and Islamic education context were excluded. In total, 267 articles were assessed for eligibility, of which 238 were excluded for not directly addressing Islamic school-based interventions or student mental well-being. At this stage, the researcher was able to identify the final number of articles to be used as a sample study in the SLR in this final phase. In total, 28 articles were selected at this stage.

2.2. Quality assessment

In this study, a quality assessment was conducted to evaluate the validity and relevance of each article before inclusion in the SLR, ensuring that only high-quality and eligible studies were analyzed, as suggested by Perera [13]. All 28 articles that passed the eligibility phase were read in full by the researcher

in accordance with systematic review procedures. Emphasizing quality appraisal enhances methodological rigor and credibility by identifying potential bias and limitations in primary studies, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness of the review findings [14]. For each of these criteria, three response options were provided: 1 (representing yes), 0.5 (representing partly), and 0 (representing no). An article was considered of good quality if it scored at least 4 out of a total of 6. Overall, all articles were included as quality studies. The quality of the selected articles was assessed using six criteria proposed by Abouzahra *et al*. [15]:

- QA1: Is the purpose of the study clearly stated?
- QA2: Is the interest and the usefulness of the work clearly presented?
- QA3: Is the study methodology clearly established?
- QA4: Are the concepts of the approach clearly defined?
- QA5: Is the work compared and measured with other similar work?
- QA6: Are the limitations of the work clearly mentioned?

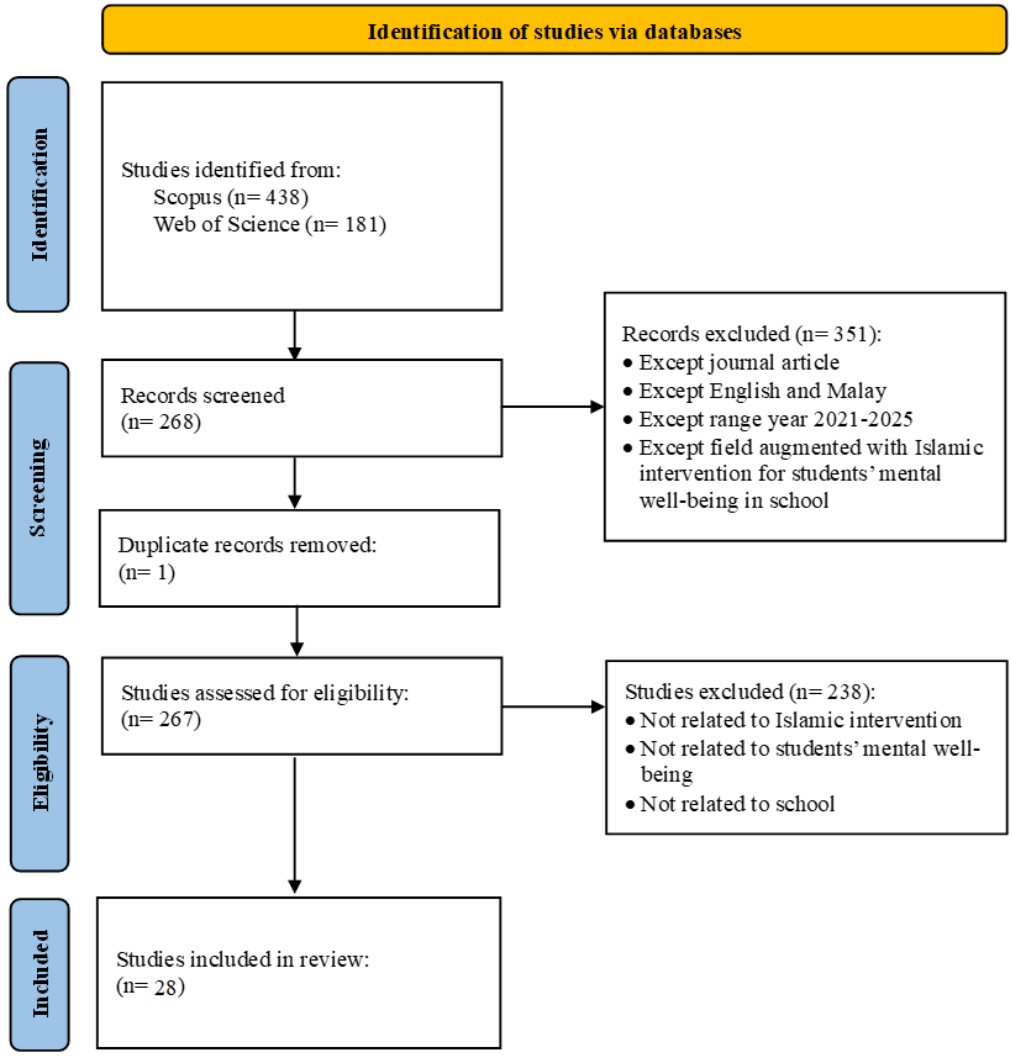


Figure 1. The process of identification of studies in PRISMA chart

2.3. Data extraction and analysis

The data were analyzed using a deductive thematic analysis approach, where the main themes were established in advance based on an initial review of previous studies. In addition, preliminary thematic suggestions generated through an AI-assisted tool (DeepSeek) were used as supplementary input to support the refinement of the thematic framework. This combined process enabled a more structured analysis of the data. As a result, five primary themes were identified, namely: i) trend of Islamic spiritual practices in

mental health interventions; ii) Islamic integrated therapeutic approaches in schools; iii) building positive character through Islamic education; iv) creating a positive school environment; and v) addressing contemporary stressors through Islamic guidance.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed, including maintaining an audit trail throughout the analysis process, conducting literature triangulation across consistent sources and engaging in informal peer debriefing to refine and validate the identified themes. In addition, the article selection process was conducted independently by two reviewers, who screened and assessed the articles based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This approach ensures that every theme developed is grounded in strong evidence and contributes meaningfully to addressing the research questions in a systematic and critical manner.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the integrated findings based on 28 articles that have been selected and discussion of the systematic review on Islamic-based interventions for adolescent mental well-being in educational settings. The synthesis follows a thematic structure like the reviewed article, where findings and discussion are presented together under each theme. The analysis highlights trends, characteristics, intervention models and contextual applications of Islamic approaches in supporting students' psychological well-being.

3.1. Findings

The analysis is organized into five major thematic areas: spiritual practices, therapeutic approaches, character education, school environment, and contemporary stressors affecting Muslim adolescents. These themes were identified based on recurring patterns and intervention approaches discussed across the selected studies. Each thematic area highlights specific strategies, psychological outcomes, and educational implications related to adolescent mental wellbeing. Table 1 presents a summary of the included studies according to theme, intervention type, reported outcomes, and sample studies.

3.1.1. Trend of Islamic spiritual practices in mental health interventions

Studies show that Islamic spiritual practices can improve mental well-being by strengthening individuals' spiritual resources and reducing psychological distress. The practice of remembrance of God (*dhikr*) was found to reduce stress and anxiety while improving emotional regulation [16], [17]. In particular, *istighatha dhikr* is shown to strengthen religious identity and spiritual awareness, contributing to holistic well-being [17]. Gratitude (*shukr*) interventions, grounded in Islamic theology, have demonstrated statistically significant increases in overall well-being, promoting positive thinking, optimism and spiritual conviction among college students [18]. Furthermore, regular engagement in prayers and spiritual self-reflection is identified as a critical factor in strengthening mental and spiritual resilience, helping students manage challenges like fear of missing out (FOMO) [19]. Adherence to religious teachings (e.g., prayer) positively impacted adolescents' physical, mental and social health [20]. The integrative power of these practices is underscored in conceptual models, where spiritual intelligence (SQ), cultivated through devotion and soul purification (*tazkiyyah al-nafs*), is posited as the foundation for authentic emotional intelligence (EI) and eternal happiness [21], [22]. Overall, these studies show that Islamic spiritual practices provide meaningful support for self-regulation, meaning making and connecting with a transcendent source of support, directly contributing to enhanced subjective well-being and anxiety management [23], [24]. As depicted in Figure 2, the process of engaging in Islamic spiritual practices plays a significant role in shaping students' mental health.

3.1.2. Islamic integrated therapeutic approaches in schools

Research shows that integrating Islamic principles into counseling and psychotherapeutic can improve the effectiveness of mental health interventions among Muslim students. These approaches adapt psychological techniques to align with Islamic beliefs and values, making them more relevant and acceptable for Muslim clients. Islamic rational emotive behavior therapy (IREBT) is an established form of religious psychotherapy that uses the Qur'an as a source of truth to dispute irrational beliefs and has shown significant positive effects on conditions like PTSD and low self-esteem [25]. Moreover, integrated approaches like Islamic cognitive behavioral therapy (ICBT) was found to help modify negative thoughts while incorporating spiritual elements [20]. Similarly, Islamic-based counseling interventions have proven effective in significantly improving multidimensional self-efficacy within Muslim communities [26]. Expressive writing interventions integrated with Islamic principles (e.g., *Iman*, *Shukr*, *Sabr*, *Tawakul*) effectively reduced adolescent anxiety by helping students process emotions through familiar religious values [24], [27]. The

development of a prophetic (Nabawi) psychotherapy model, derived from the Quran and Sunnah, was also proposed to address the spiritual dimensions often lacking in Western clinical models for treating conditions like teenage depression [22]. In practice, Muslim counsellors implemented single-session online counseling by incorporating Islamic greetings and prayers to build therapeutic alliance, while navigating challenges like scheduling around prayer times [28]. Religiosity-based psychoeducation programs were likewise effective in reducing academic procrastination, with outcomes varying according to personality traits [29]. These approaches underscore a trend toward culturally and religiously adapted therapeutic practices that resonate with Muslim students.

Table 1. Summary of Islamic-based interventions for adolescent mental well-being

Theme	Intervention	Outcome	Study
Spiritual practices	Dhikr (remembrance of God)	Stress reduction, anxiety relief, improved emotional regulation	[16], [17]
Spiritual practices	*Istighatha dhikr*	Strengthened religious identity and spiritual awareness	[17]
Spiritual practices	Gratitude (*shukr*) interventions	Increased well-being, positive thinking, optimism	[18]
Spiritual practices	Prayer and spiritual self-reflection	Strengthened mental and spiritual resilience, managing FOMO	[19], [20]
Spiritual practices	SQ cultivation	Foundation for EI and eternal happiness	[21], [22]
Therapeutic approaches	IREBT	Positive effects on PTSD and low self-esteem	[25]
Therapeutic approaches	ICBT	Modification of negative thoughts with spirituality	[20]
Therapeutic approaches	Islamic-based counseling	Improved multidimensional self-efficacy	[26]
Therapeutic approaches	Expressive writing with Islamic principles (*Iman*, *Shukr*, *Sabr*, *Tawakul*)	Reduced adolescent anxiety	[24], [27]
Therapeutic approaches	Prophetic (Nabawi) psychotherapy	Addresses spiritual dimensions of teenage depression	[22]
Therapeutic approaches	Single-session online counseling with Islamic greetings/prayers	Builds therapeutic alliance	[28]
Therapeutic approaches	Religiosity-based psychoeducation	Reduced academic procrastination	[29]
Character education	Islamic SQ	Positive relationship with emotional regulation	[30]
Character education	Core Islamic values (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility)	Positive mental health in boarding schools	[31]
Character education	Self-esteem as mediator	Mediates family communication, peer support, and social competence	[32]
Character education	Resilience as mediator	Mediates religiosity, social support, and subjective well-being	[33]
Character education	Peer support ("humanizing humans")	Enhanced self-efficacy for students with special needs	[34]
School environment	Positive school climate and academic hardiness	Positive effect on student engagement and subjective well-being	[35]
School environment	*Uswah* (exemplary) leadership	Essential component of bullying prevention	[36]
School environment	Character formation (caring, citizenship)	Sustained safe environment in boarding schools	[31]
School environment	Holistic health initiatives	Promotes psychological capital in students	[37]
Addressing contemporary stressors	Self-management strategies against FOMO	Disciplined routines, limited gadget use, offline hobbies	[19]
Addressing contemporary stressors	Islamic digital ethics education	Counteracts addiction and moral degradation from TikTok	[38]
Addressing contemporary stressors	Islamic moral values for social media use	Better mental health despite high usage	[39]
Addressing contemporary stressors	Positive thinking training (Islamic principles)	Reduced thesis-writing stress	[40]
Addressing contemporary stressors	Religious education as moderator	Enhances resilience against unsupportive family environment	[41]
Addressing contemporary stressors	Classical scholars' concepts (e.g., Al-Ghazali)	Combats spiritual emptiness	[42]

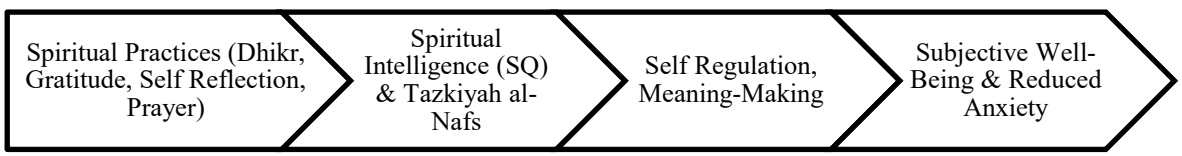


Figure 2. Islamic spiritual practices and mental well-being

3.1.3. Building positive character through Islamic education

Islamic educational philosophy actively cultivates internal strengths and positive character traits that protect mental health. EI is a key construct, with studies finding that SQ based on an Islamic perspective has a significant positive relationship with EI, particularly influencing emotional regulation [30]. Furthermore, core Islamic character values (e.g., trustworthiness, respect, responsibility), implemented through habituation and exemplary models, are linked to the rise of positive mental health in boarding schools [31]. The development of self-efficacy and social competence is mediated by factors nurtured in Islamic contexts: self-esteem partially mediates the relationship between family communication, peer support, EI, and social competence [32]. Similarly, resilience partially mediated the effects of religiosity, social support and self-efficacy on the subjective well-being of university students [33]. Peer support, guided by the principle of "humanizing humans," significantly enhanced the self-efficacy and independence of students with special needs, enabled them to take on active social roles [34]. Overall, these findings show that Islamic teachings provide a strong moral and social framework for developing resilience, positive character and social-emotional skills that support psychological well-being. The core values underpinning the development of positive character are illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Core Islamic values for promoting positive mental well-being in school

3.1.4 Creating a positive school environment

The systemic and climate-related factors within Islamic educational institutions constitute a critical environmental determinant of student well-being. A positive school climate, alongside academic hardiness, has a significant direct positive effect on both student engagement and subjective well-being, with engagement acting as a partial mediator [35]. Proactive leadership models, such as *Uswah* (exemplary) are identified as essential components of effective bullying prevention strategies, which also require comprehensive school policies and collaborative teacher-parent roles [36]. The strategic prevention of bullying in Islamic boarding schools through character formation based on pillars like caring and citizenship was emphasized for sustaining a safe environment [31]. Principals promoted psychological capital in students by advocating for holistic health initiatives that encompass physical, mental and spiritual well-being [37]. Figure 4 illustrates the roles within school settings in fostering students' mental well-being, as synthesized from existing works.

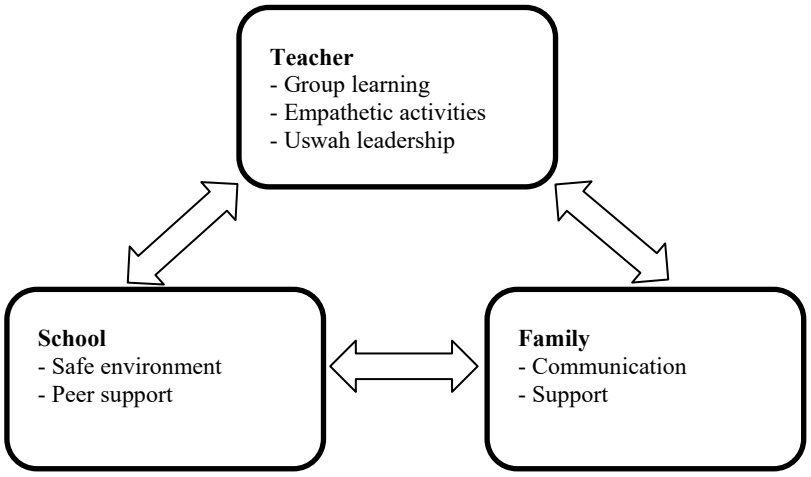


Figure 4. Roles beyond student intervention in school context

3.1.5. Addressing contemporary stressors through Islamic guidance

Contemporary education systems increasingly use Islamic guidance to address modern, context-specific stressors faced by students. A key focus is digital well-being. Students were found to develop self-management strategies against FOMO by maintaining disciplined routines, limiting gadget use and engaging in offline hobbies, with spiritual practices reinforcing this resilience [19]. Islamic education teachers also played role in addressing the negative impacts of platforms like TikTok including addiction and moral concern, by assuming roles as educators, motivators and mediators who emphasize digital ethics and provide religiously informed alternatives [38]. Notably, strong Islamic moral values allowed adolescents to use social media wisely, which correlates with better mental health, even amidst high overall usage [39]. Regarding academic stress, positive thinking training rooted in Islamic principles significantly reduced stress related to thesis writing among Muslim students [40]. Furthermore, religious education moderated the relationship between family environment and adolescent mental health, enhancing resilience against pressure from an unsupportive family context [41]. To combat spiritual emptiness in the modern era, integrated classical Islamic scholars' concepts (e.g., Al-Ghazali) into the curriculum provided a holistic framework that made religious education more applicable to real-life challenges [42]. These studies show that Islamic teachings are effectively adapted to help students manage cognitive, behavioral and ethical challenges in modern life. Based on the existing studies, the stressors that affected students are illustrated in Figure 5.

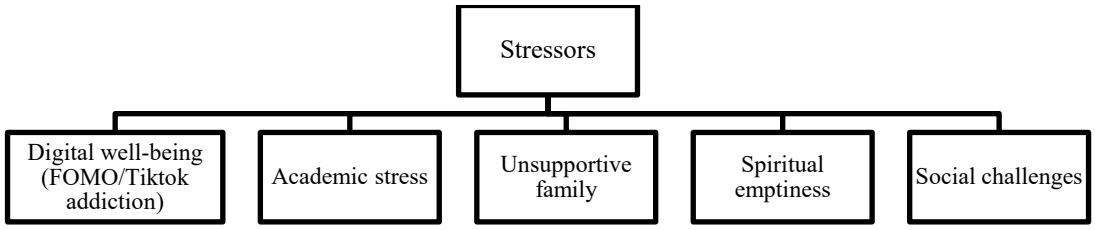


Figure 5. Contemporary stressors affected students

3.2. Discussion

The synthesized findings indicated that Islamic spiritual practices, therapeutic approaches, character education, supportive school environments, and guidance for contemporary stressors collectively contributed to adolescent mental well-being in educational settings. Islamic spirituality is positively associated with reduced academic stress and improved emotional regulation among adolescents in Islamic school contexts [43]. However, beyond the review sample, scholars have noted that the effectiveness of spiritual methods varies depending on how they are framed and internalized by students. This observation aligns with findings in educational and mental health literature, where rigid or overly prescriptive spiritual and religious programs can sometimes oversimplify complex psychological issues, treating them solely as issues of faith, sin or lack of observance [44]. Thus, careful pedagogical framing and teacher training are needed to ensure these practices support adaptive coping rather than unhelpful internal attributions. Teachers and counsellors should be equipped to facilitate reflective discussion around spiritual practices and psychological experience, encouraging students to contextualize stress within both theological and psychological frameworks.

Islamic counseling remains an emerging yet underdeveloped component within school-based interventions. Recent studies highlight the need for counsellors to integrate psychological competencies with Islamic values to ensure culturally responsive mental health support [45]. Studies underscore the potential value of an Islamic counseling paradigm that blends cultural understanding with structured therapeutic interaction. For instance, research on the role of school counsellors guided by Qur'anic principles demonstrates that Quranic counseling can strengthen students' religious values that will articulate emotional concerns [46]. Without dual competency in psychology and religious literacy, interventions risk superficiality or misalignment with students' experiences. Professional development pathways should cultivate competence in both domains, enabling counsellors to ethically support mental well-being within Islamic school settings.

Regarding character education, literature on moral education suggests that interventions moving beyond simple habituation toward ethical reasoning and critical moral judgement are more effective in preparing students to face complex life challenges [47]. In Islamic school settings, character education should therefore not only emphasize the practice of religious values but also encourage students to reflect critically on moral issues and apply Islamic principles thoughtfully in daily life. This approach has important practical implications for teachers and counsellors, as integrating reflective moral reasoning alongside traditional values education can help students apply spiritual frameworks adaptively when confronting digital, interpersonal and societal challenges that require nuanced ethical judgement.

A supportive school climate is foundational for well-being. School climate significantly predicts adolescent mental health outcomes, particularly when combined with teacher support [48]. Integrating psychological strategies with spiritual values can help manage stress and reduce stigma [49]. However, structural challenges such as limited professional mental health resources, insufficient teacher training, and cultural barriers to help-seeking constrain the potential of supportive environments. Schools should prioritize professional development, create clear referral pathways for mental health concerns, and embed inclusive policies that normalize discussion of emotional distress alongside spiritual growth.

For contemporary stressors, community-based educational approaches in Islamic boarding schools have been shown to enhance mental health literacy significantly, reducing stigma and improving help-seeking behaviors [50], [51]. Islamic school-based interventions should consciously integrate mental health education, peer support mechanisms, and culturally tailored resources to address modern stressors effectively. By combining spiritual frameworks with accessible psychoeducational tools, schools can create intervention models that protect against distress and actively build competence and agency in students.

3.3. Limitation of the study

This review has several limitations. Most reviewed studies used short-term outcome measures, cross-sectional designs, and self-report instruments, which limits causal inference regarding the long-term effectiveness of Islamic-based interventions. Few studies employed randomized controlled trials (RCTs), and most interventions were delivered in single-session or short-term formats. Outcome variability due to individual differences in personality and religiosity was rarely examined, and objective measures of school climate or mental health outcomes were largely absent. Additionally, the review did not systematically explore differential effects across student subgroups (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, or age). These methodological constraints suggest that findings should be interpreted with caution, and future research should prioritize longitudinal designs, RCTs, and standardized outcome measures.

4. CONCLUSION

This review of 28 studies demonstrates that the integration of Islamic principles through spiritual practices, culturally adapted therapeutic approaches, character education, supportive school environments and religious guidance contributes positively to the mental wellbeing of Muslim adolescents. The findings indicate that these approaches help improve emotional resilience, reduce stress and anxiety, strengthen moral development and promote a more positive educational environment. The review also highlights the importance of culturally and spiritually responsive interventions in addressing the psychological needs of Muslim students within educational settings. Overall, integrating Islamic perspectives with educational and psychological support systems provides a meaningful framework for promoting sustainable mental wellbeing among Muslim adolescents.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes and facilitate collaboration.

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C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors state there is no conflict of interest in this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY

All data analyzed in this study were obtained from previously published articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, which are cited within the manuscript.

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