

Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Islamic Education Textbook Production in Malaysia: Aligning Inclusive Design Principles with the Malaysia MADANI Framework for Diverse Learners

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ABSTRACT

Textbooks remain primary instructional tools that govern educational equity for diverse learners, including low-achieving students. This study examines the internal quality assurance (QA) mechanisms embedded within the production of Form One Islamic Education textbooks in Malaysia. Specifically, it evaluates how administrative workflows, editorial interventions, and expert evaluation panels systematically uphold quality across content validity, linguistic readability, visual presentation, and assessment activities. Utilizing semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders—textbook authors, institutional editors, and private publishing editors—alongside document analysis of Ministry of Education guidelines, the study reveals a multi-tiered, 18-month quality control framework co-managed by the Educational Resources and Technology Division (BSTP) and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). Findings highlight that stringent linguistic auditing by language experts (*Munshi Bahasa*) and visual layout adaptations effectively reduce extraneous cognitive load for diverse learners. Furthermore, textbook QA operations are critically synthesized with the *Malaysia MADANI* policy framework, demonstrating how systemic quality controls embody the pillars of *Kesejahteraan* (Well-being), *Daya Cipta* (Innovation), *Hormat* (Respect), and *Ihsan* (Compassion) to foster an equitable learning ecosystem.

Keywords: Textbook Quality Assurance, Islamic Education, Inclusive Education, Cognitive Load, Malaysia MADANI

1. Introduction

Textbooks are central to curriculum delivery and classroom learning, while in Malaysia, centralized MOE oversight ensures standardization and

policy alignment across public schools (Brunswic & Valérien, 1995; Samani, 2000). In inclusive education, textbooks must address diverse cognitive and reading needs, not only high-performing pupils (Ivić et al., 2013; Smart & Jagannathan, 2018). In Islamic Education, conceptual clarity, factual accuracy, and linguistic accessibility are particularly important, as ambiguity and dense prose can increase cognitive load among struggling readers and pupils with slower processing speeds (Aisyah, 2014; Hussein, 1989). Despite established textbook guidelines (Durrani, 2012; Smart & Jagannathan, 2018), empirical evidence on how operational QA reduces cognitive barriers remains limited. This study therefore examines multi-stage QA in Malaysia's Form One Islamic Education textbook production involving BSTP, DBP, and private publishers, and relates these practices to Malaysia MADANI's principles of holistic development, social justice, and systemic integrity, positioning QA as a mechanism for educational equity and inclusion.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the operational quality assurance (QA) mechanisms, workflows, and criteria embedded within the national textbook publishing ecosystem. A qualitative approach was selected to provide a detailed, holistic understanding of the procedural interventions, administrative governance, and pedagogical evaluations executed across institutional contexts.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select four key informants ($n = 4$) with direct, extensive expertise in authoring, editing, and managing Form One Islamic Education textbooks in Malaysia. Selection criteria required participants to have active involvement in the 18-month national publishing cycle co-managed by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The sample comprised:

- Author 1: An experienced Islamic Education textbook author writing under the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) grant track.
- Author 2: A senior textbook writer specializing in Islamic curriculum translation and pedagogical implementation.
- Editor 1: An institutional senior editor at DBP managing government-funded textbook packages.
- Editor 2: A professional publishing editor overseeing commercial, tender-based textbook production for private publishing houses.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

Two primary qualitative data collection instruments were utilized to ensure methodological triangulation:

1. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: A comprehensive interview protocol was designed to examine technical workflow stages, operational QA dimensions (content, language, presentation, assessment), and policy alignments. The instrument was content-validated by academic experts prior to deployment.
2. Documentary Evidence: Official policy blueprints, technical specifications, and curriculum guides were retrieved for document analysis. These included:
 - *Spesifikasi Umum Buku Teks* (General Specifications for Textbooks) (Bahagian Buku Teks, 2004).
 - *Panduan Kawalan Mutu Aspek Teknikal Penerbitan Buku Teks* (Quality Control Guidelines for Technical Aspects of Textbook Publishing) (Bahagian Buku Teks, 2013).
 - *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP)* (Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document) for Form One Islamic Education (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2018).

2.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in systematic phases:

- **Interview Administration:** In-depth semi-structured interviews lasting between 45 to 60 minutes per participant were conducted. Sessions were audio-recorded with prior written informed consent and transcribed verbatim.
- **Documentary Retrieval & Review:** Relevant policy handbooks and technical guidelines were collected directly from institutional libraries and informant archives to verify reported workflow milestones.
- **Cross-Verification:** Empirical interview accounts were systematically mapped against official MOE timelines and workflow stages - spanning manuscript preparation, Page Proofs (*Pruf Muka Surat / PMS*), Camera-Ready Copies (*Naskah Sedia Kamera / NSK*), and Sample Copies (*Naskah Contoh / NC*).

2.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. Interview transcripts and documentary texts were iteratively coded to identify recurring operational patterns, technical constraints, and QA interventions. Findings were categorized into four core QA dimensions:

1. **Content Validity & Accuracy:** Evaluating factual cross-referencing, primary source authenticity, and sensitivity screening.
2. **Linguistic Readability:** Analyzing language auditing by certified language experts (*Munshi Bahasa*) and age-appropriate readability levels.
3. **Visual Presentation & Layout:** Assessing visual brief adaptations, typographic alignment, and cognitive load reduction.
4. **Assessment & Exercises:** Reviewing Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS/KBAT) items and assessment alignment with DSKP standards.

Methodological rigor was maintained through data triangulation between informant interviews and official policy documents.

3. Results

3.1 Production Workflows and Administrative Quality Control

3.1.1 Procurement Mechanisms and Publisher Roles

Quality control in Malaysian textbook publishing begins at the procurement phase. Under the Grant Direct Channel (*Kaedah Penyaluran Geran*), Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) receives government funding to publish core national textbooks including Bahasa Melayu, Islamic Education, History, and Moral Education - in alignment with decisions from the 1974 National Action Council (*Majlis Tindakan Negara*) and the 1979 Cabinet Report. Because DBP operates without commercial competition for these subjects, it can dedicate extensive institutional resources to iterative quality control. Conversely, private publishers bid through competitive tendering (*Kaedah Tender*) managed by the Educational Resources and Technology Division (BSTP). As Editor 2 highlighted, the competitive tender system encourages visual creativity and layout innovation:

"Tender memberi kebebasan kepada penerbit untuk menentukan konsep buku teks mengikut kreativiti masing-masing... Penawaran tender menjadikan syarikat lebih berdaya saing sekaligus membantu menghasilkan buku teks berkualiti daripada aspek reka bentuk, reka letak dan bahan." (Editor 2)

(Translation: Tendering gives publishers the freedom to determine the textbook concept based on their respective creativity... Offering tenders makes companies more competitive while helping to produce quality textbooks in terms of design, layout, and materials.)

3.1.2 Selection and Qualification of Key Quality Actors

Maintaining textbook quality depends heavily on selecting qualified authors, editors, project coordinators, and review panels:

- **Authors:** DBP selects authors through competitive writing trials and 2–3-day workshops advertised via the MOE portal. Candidates submit sample chapters based on DSKP standards and defend them before editors and BPK officers. Experienced school practitioners

and IPG lecturers are prioritized over university academics for their stronger awareness of diverse classroom needs.

- **Editors:** Bridge publishers and authors, guiding manuscripts to comply with DSKP requirements and technical SOPs.
- **Project Coordinators (Penyelaras Projek):** Appointed by BSTP, they oversee the 18-month production cycle, enforce quality benchmarks, resolve editorial issues, and ensure timely distribution.
- **Review Panels (Panel Semakan):** Conduct extensive external QA involving subject experts, university professors, Hadith and Fiqh

scholars, JAKIM and State Mufti representatives, examination officers, and teachers from diverse settings, including Sabah, Sarawak, rural, and boarding schools.

3.1.3 The 18-Month Multi-Stage Publishing Cycle

Quality control spans an 18-month timeline structured into distinct technical stages. Table 1 summarizes the key developmental milestones, primary outputs, and operational QA focus points across the multi-stage publishing cycle.

Table 1: The 18-Month Multi-Stage Textbook Publishing and Quality Assurance Cycle

Stage	Publishing Milestone	Primary Output	Operational Quality Control Focus
Stage 1	Procurement & Author Selection	Appointed Author Team	Competitive writing trials, DSKP mapping, and pedagogical alignment screening.
Stage 2	Manuscript Drafting & Internal Review	Draft Manuscript	Factual verification (<i>kitab muktabar</i>), primary source cross-referencing, and editorial SOP checks.
Stage 3	Page Proofs (<i>Pruf Muka Surat / PMS</i>)	Initial Layout & B/W Visuals	Format compliance, typography sizing, graphic brief matching, and margin specifications.
Stage 4	Expert & Stakeholder Auditing	Vetted Proofs	<i>Munsyi Bahasa</i> linguistic audits, JAKIM/Mufti sensitivity screening, and HOTS/KBAT vetting.
Stage 5	Camera-Ready Copies (<i>Naskhab Sedia Kamera / NSK</i>)	Fully Colored Production Copy	Final corrections, resolution/pixel check, color balance, and MOE high-level evaluation.
Stage 6	Sample & Edits (<i>Naskhab Contoh / NC & Edar / NE</i>)	Final Mass-Print Sample	Paper durability, binding strength, printing accuracy, and approval for nationwide distribution.

3.2 The Four Operational Dimensions of Quality Assurance

3.2.1 Content Validity and Factual Accuracy

Content QA mandates strict adherence to the DSKP. In Islamic Education, content validity relies on primary source cross-referencing (*Hadith* and Quranic texts), utilizing authentic classical references (*kitab muktabar*). To verify factual claims, authors and editors perform cross-checks with official statutory bodies (e.g., Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara, Tabung Haji, and Jabatan Meteorologi). Furthermore, manuscripts undergo rigorous sensitivity screening to avoid socio-political bias, sectarian controversy, or gender and cultural stereotypes.

3.2.2 Linguistic Readability and Language Auditing

Language QA ensures that prose density and terminology match the cognitive processing speed of Form One students. Sentences are audited to eliminate ambiguous phrasing that could induce cognitive overload, especially for struggling readers. Certified language experts (*Munshi Bahasa*) and Jawi experts (*Munshi Jawi*) systematically review vocabulary, syntax, and orthography to maintain linguistic precision and standard national language guidelines.

3.2.3 Visual Presentation and Layout Adaptation

Presentation QA focuses on page layout, visual briefs, visual-text balance, and graphic

authenticity. Authors prepare detailed graphic briefs for illustrators and photographers. Visual elements are screened to ensure cultural representation, modest attire (e.g., covering *aurat*), and appropriateness for young adolescents. By structuring white space, typography, and clear icon sets, visual adaptations actively reduce extraneous cognitive load and enhance accessibility for diverse learner cohorts.

3.2.4 Assessment Activities and Pedagogical Enrichment

Assessment QA evaluates end-of-chapter exercises and learning activities. Formative tasks are designed to operationalize the five DSKP core principles: *ilmu* (knowledge), *amali* (practical application), *amalan* (practice), *penghayatan* (internalization), and *pembudayaan* (culturalization). Question items are vetted by Examination Syndicate (*Lembaga Peperiksaan*) officers and Master Trainers (*Jurulatih Utama*) to ensure appropriate stimulus materials and accurate integration of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS/KBAT).

3.3 Synthesis with the Malaysia MADANI Policy Framework

The operationalization of textbook QA directly embodies the core values of the *Malaysia MADANI* policy framework. Table 2 outlines the alignment between the four operational QA dimensions, their underlying mechanisms, and the corresponding policy pillars.

Table 2: Alignment of Operational QA Dimensions with the Malaysia MADANI Policy Framework

QA Dimension	Operational Mechanism in Production	Malaysia MADANI Pillar	Operationalized Educational Impact
Linguistic Readability	Language auditing by <i>Munshi Bahasa</i> & sentence simplification	<i>Kesejahteraan</i> (Well-being)	Reduces cognitive load and anxiety for diverse and struggling learners.

QA Dimension	Operational Mechanism in Production	Malaysia MADANI Pillar	Operationalized Educational Impact
Procurement & Layout	Competitive private tendering & creative visual briefs	<i>Daya Cipta</i> (Innovation)	Fosters layout innovation, visual engagement, and modern pedagogical design.
Content Screening	Multi-ethnic representation, regional inclusivity & bias screening	<i>Hormat</i> (Respect)	Promotes mutual respect and cultural representation across diverse student groups.
Multi-Tiered Auditing	External expert reviews (JAKIM, Mufti, BPK) & primary source checks	<i>Ihsan</i> (Compassion)	Ensures systemic integrity to deliver high-quality, equitable learning materials to all pupils.

. **Discussion:** Synthesizing Textbook QA with Inclusive Education and Policy Frameworks

4.1 Quality Assurance as an Inclusive Pedagogical Mechanism

From an inclusive education perspective, systematic quality control is a structural intervention that reduces learning barriers for diverse learners (Ivić et al., 2013; Smart & Jagannathan, 2018). Poor organization, dense language, and visual clutter increase extraneous cognitive load, disproportionately affecting struggling, low-achieving, and mildly learning-challenged pupils (Aisyah, 2014; Hartley & Burnhill, 1977). The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that Malaysia's textbook QA protocols address these cognitive challenges through structured interventions:

1. **Linguistic Simplification:** Audits by certified *Munshi Bahasa* ensure vocabulary tiering and control sentence length, enabling struggling readers to decode core concepts without experiencing reading frustration (Kamarulzaman, 2005).

2. **Visual Ergonomics:** Enforcing clear typographical hierarchies, structured icon sets, and functional illustrations provides visual scaffolding, helping students digest abstract concepts (Hummel, 1988).
3. **Differentiated Scaffolding:** Structuring assessment activities across multiple cognitive tiers allows teachers to differentiate instruction, enabling low-ability students to achieve basic mastery while challenging advanced learners with HOTS items.

4.2 Alignment with the Malaysia MADANI Policy Framework

The meticulous quality management observed in Malaysian Islamic Education textbook publishing closely reflects the core philosophy of the *Malaysia MADANI* policy framework, which advocates for systemic integrity, social equity, and holistic human development. The institutional QA workflows embody the core MADANI pillars:

- *Kesejahteraan* (Well-being): By ensuring high readability, visual clarity, and

accessible language, quality control minimizes academic anxiety and emotional fatigue among diverse learners. Ergonomic textbooks foster a supportive, psychologically safe learning environment where every child can experience learning success. This ergonomic and psychological quality control directly supports the broader MADANI mandate to reform the educational curriculum to cultivate a mindset (*fikrah*) aimed at achieving true well-being (*kesejahteraan hakiki*), rather than prioritizing purely material acquisition. Teachers are thus empowered to implement pedagogical plans that prioritize individual student well-being at all educational stages.

- *Daya Cipta* (Innovation): Operationalized through the competitive private publishing tender system (*Kaedah Tender*), which encourages creative visual layouts, functional typography, and interactive learning components.
- *Hormat* (Respect): Reflected in strict content screening processes that enforce sensitivity guidelines, ensuring multi-ethnic representation, gender fairness, and the avoidance of socio-political or cultural bias.
- *Ihsan* (Compassion): Expressed through multi-tiered auditing by subject specialists, *Munsyi Bahasa*, and panel reviewers (including representatives from JAKIM and State Mufti Departments) to ensure that high-quality, authentic, and error-free learning resources are delivered equitably to all pupils regardless of socio-economic background.

4.3 Implications for Theory, Practice, and Policy

- Theoretical Implications: This study extends Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) to educational publishing governance, showing that administrative QA

operates as a structural instructional-design mechanism that reduces extraneous cognitive load before materials reach classrooms.

- Practical Implications: The findings offer authors, publishers, and editors a framework for balancing scholarly integrity (*kitab muktabar*) with pedagogical accessibility, emphasizing multi-tier expert review from the early drafting stage rather than relying on post-production correction.
- Policy Implications: Effective national textbook quality requires sustained collaborative governance among BPK, BSTP, DBP, and commercial publishers to ensure accurate, accessible, and consistent translation of curriculum standards.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

While this study offers comprehensive insights into the quality assurance mechanisms of Malaysian Islamic Education textbooks, two key limitations should be acknowledged:

1. Sample Scope: Although the four key stakeholders (n=4) provided rich cross-sector insights, the limited sample constrains generalizability. Future research should include downstream users, particularly teachers and students, to validate QA effectiveness in practice.
2. Subject Context: Findings are specific to Islamic Education, where specialized Jawi, Hadith, and Fiqh reviews shape QA. Their transferability to STEM or other disciplines therefore requires contextual validation.

5. Conclusion

Malaysia's QA framework for secondary Islamic Education textbooks provides an integrated mechanism for ensuring content, language, pedagogy, visual design, and assessment quality through coordinated oversight by BSTP, DBP, publishers, and multidisciplinary experts. It enhances accessibility and reduces cognitive load

while translating Malaysia MADANI values into practice: Kesejahteraan through *falāḥ*, Daya Cipta through ethical *ibtikār*, Hormat and Keyakinan through *amānah* and *karāmah*, and Ihsan through *itqān*. Beyond technical quality, QA supports the formation of balanced *fikrah* grounded in 'aqidah

and *akhlāq*, positioning textbooks as instruments of educational equity and holistic development. Future research should examine students' usability, accessibility, reading experiences, and learning outcomes across diverse contexts to strengthen inclusive and responsive textbook standards

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8. Author Declaration

Declaration of Originality

The authors declare that this manuscript is their original work, has not been published previously, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. All sources and literature cited within the study have been appropriately acknowledged and referenced.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.