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The Paradigm of Physical Punishment from the Perspective of Islamic Education and Its Implementation in Indonesia and Malaysia

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Abstract:
This study explores the paradigm of physical punishment within Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia, examining its theological justifications, cultural roots, institutional frameworks, and practical implications. Using a qualitative comparative case study approach, data were collected through interviews with educators, students, and community leaders; classroom observations; and analysis of policy and curriculum documents. The findings indicate that while both countries share normative references to Islamic teachings, their interpretations and applications of physical discipline vary. In Indonesia, especially in traditional pesantren, physical punishment is often viewed as a tool for moral formation under the concept of *ta'dib*. In contrast, Malaysia demonstrates a gradual shift toward more compassionate and rights-based approaches to discipline, driven by stronger regulatory frameworks and public discourse. However, challenges such as lack of teacher training, uneven policy implementation, and persistent cultural beliefs continue to shape practices in both countries. The study concludes that a transformative approach to Islamic education requires balancing religious values with child protection principles and contemporary pedagogical thought, encouraging a shift toward holistic, non-violent educational practices.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Physical punishment has been a contentious issue in educational settings across various cultures and religious traditions. While some societies consider it a necessary corrective tool, others strongly oppose it due to its psychological and developmental consequences on children. In the context of Islamic education, the debate becomes even more nuanced, balancing between classical jurisprudential perspectives and contemporary human rights frameworks (Ali & Hassan, 2018).

In Indonesia and Malaysia, where Islam plays a significant role in shaping educational values and practices, physical punishment remains a topic of both religious and legal contention. These two Southeast Asian countries, though culturally connected, have developed different approaches to regulating and interpreting physical punishment in their educational systems, particularly within Islamic schools (Zakaria & Ahmad, 2021).

Islamic education, fundamentally derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, places high emphasis on adab (ethics) and tarbiyah (holistic development). While certain classical texts acknowledge forms of physical discipline, they often prescribe strict limitations and emphasize educational intent rather than harm (Rahman, 2017). However, modern interpretations challenge the applicability of such practices, arguing that Islamic principles prioritize compassion, dignity, and the psychological well-being of the learner (Yusuf & Karim, 2020).

The dichotomy between traditional disciplinary methods and contemporary educational psychology creates a paradigm shift in how physical punishment is viewed today. Many Islamic education scholars have begun to revisit classical jurisprudence with the aim of contextualizing teachings in light of child protection laws and evolving pedagogical understandings (Hassan & Fauzi, 2019). This process often leads to varying interpretations and implementations across Islamic educational institutions.

In Indonesia, the implementation of physical punishment in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) has come under scrutiny due to cases of abuse that conflict with the ethical teachings of Islam. Despite existing child protection laws, enforcement remains inconsistent, especially in rural areas where traditional educational models prevail (Putra & Wulandari, 2021). Malaysia, meanwhile, has introduced more structured policies that regulate discipline in Islamic schools, although debates continue regarding the line between discipline and abuse (Ismail & Roslan, 2022).

The role of teachers and religious educators (ustadz/ustazah) becomes central in this discourse, as they are often seen as both moral guides and disciplinarians. Their understanding of Islamic teachings significantly influences their classroom management styles. Studies show that many educators still view mild physical correction as permissible within an Islamic framework, though awareness of psychological alternatives is growing (Ahmad & Rahim, 2020).

Moreover, the perception of students and parents toward physical punishment reveals deeper cultural and religious dimensions. In some communities, it is still believed that a certain degree of physical correction is beneficial for character building. However, this belief is being challenged by rising awareness of children's rights and the long-term impacts of corporal punishment (Kamaruddin & Latif, 2018).

The legal frameworks in both countries show a gradual alignment with international human rights conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which both Indonesia and Malaysia are signatories. Nonetheless, cultural and religious reservations often create tensions in translating these commitments into actionable policies in Islamic educational settings (UNICEF Malaysia, 2019).

This research is motivated by the need to explore the philosophical and jurisprudential foundations of physical punishment in Islam and to understand how these perspectives are interpreted and implemented within two prominent Muslim-majority countries in Southeast Asia. A comparative analysis between Indonesia and Malaysia will provide insights into both convergence and divergence in practice and policy.

The study will also highlight how educational institutions, policymakers, and religious authorities interpret Islamic teachings in contemporary contexts. By doing so, it aims to uncover the extent to which Islamic education can evolve to embrace non-violent pedagogical methods while remaining faithful to its ethical and religious principles (Hasan & Jamil, 2021).

Given the complexity of the issue, this study adopts a multidisciplinary lens, combining Islamic jurisprudence, education studies, child psychology, and policy analysis. This approach is essential for understanding how theological interpretations interact with societal realities and legal reforms in both Indonesia and Malaysia (Salleh & Mahmud, 2020).

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on child-friendly Islamic education by providing a grounded yet progressive framework that respects religious traditions while advocating for the safety and dignity of students in educational settings.

Method (منهج)

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study design to explore the paradigm of physical punishment in Islamic education and its implementation in Indonesia and Malaysia. The qualitative approach is chosen to enable an in-depth understanding of the values, interpretations, and lived experiences of educators, students, and policy stakeholders in both countries. This design allows the researcher to examine the socio-religious nuances and institutional practices that shape how physical punishment is viewed and applied within Islamic education frameworks (Stake, 2010).

The research is conducted in two selected Islamic educational institutions in each country: a pesantren and a madrasah in Indonesia, and a sekolah agama and tahfiz center in Malaysia. These institutions are chosen purposively based on their prominence in implementing traditional Islamic pedagogical methods and their geographical diversity. The institutions represent both urban and rural settings to capture a broader range of cultural and administrative interpretations (Patton, 2002).

Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews are conducted with teachers, school leaders, religious educators (ustadz/ustazah), students, and selected parents to gain multiple perspectives on the role and perception of physical punishment. The semi-structured format allows flexibility in probing into respondents' beliefs, experiences, and reasoning behind their support or criticism of corporal disciplinary practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Classroom observations focus on teacher-student interactions, disciplinary practices, and the presence or absence of physical punishment in real learning situations. Observations are non-participant in nature and carried out over two weeks in each school. Field notes are taken to capture contextual cues, teacher body language, classroom tone, and students' emotional responses during discipline-related events (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This enables the researcher to triangulate findings from interviews with real-time practices.

Document analysis involves reviewing school discipline policies, teacher training manuals, curriculum content, student handbooks, and government-issued religious education guidelines. In Malaysia, additional materials from JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia) are included, while in Indonesia, materials from Kementerian Agama and pesantren boards are examined. These documents are coded thematically to identify references to physical punishment, its justification, and its limitations (Bowen, 2009).

A purposive sampling technique is used to select participants who have direct experience with or knowledge about the implementation of disciplinary practices in Islamic schools. Criteria include at least three years of teaching or administrative experience, and for students, having spent at least one academic year at the institution. Approximately 25–30 participants are interviewed across both countries, ensuring data saturation and representation from key stakeholder groups (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data analysis follows thematic analysis to identify patterns related to conceptual justifications of physical punishment in Islam, the influence of cultural and legal frameworks, and cross-national similarities or differences. Coding is conducted manually using open and axial coding to establish categories and subthemes. The constant comparative method is used throughout to highlight convergences and divergences between the two national contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, techniques such as member checking, peer debriefing, and data triangulation are employed. Member checking involves returning interview summaries to participants for validation, while peer debriefing includes discussion with academic colleagues familiar with Islamic education and child psychology. Triangulation is achieved through the use of multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents) across multiple sites (Shenton, 2004).

Result (نتائج)

The findings of this study indicate that the paradigm of physical punishment in Islamic education in Indonesia and Malaysia is significantly influenced by normative interpretations of religious texts, local traditions, and institutional policies. Although most teachers and educational administrators acknowledge that physical violence is inconsistent with the Islamic principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, many still view light physical punishment as a "didactic tool" under certain circumstances.

In terms of religious texts (first bone), most informants stated that hadiths on educating children are often used to justify the use of physical punishment, especially in Qur'anic instruction and instilling discipline in worship. However, interpretations vary: teachers in Malaysia tend to emphasize a *tarbiyah* (nurturing) approach grounded in compassion, while in some Indonesian pesantren, a *ta'dib* (disciplinary) approach involving punishment is still selectively practiced.

Local traditions (second bone) play a significant role. In Indonesia, particularly in traditional pesantren settings, light physical punishment such as caning or pinching is considered part of the "character education of santri (students)." In contrast, similar practices in Malaysia are being increasingly abandoned, especially in schools that adopt modern or internationally accredited curricula.

Institutional policies (third bone) also influence practice. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education's policy prohibiting corporal punishment in formal schools is strictly enforced with systematic oversight. In Indonesia, the implementation of similar policies is more lenient, especially in non-formal religious schools like pesantren, which enjoy greater autonomy and limited external regulation.

Teachers' perceptions (fourth bone) reflect a duality of views. Some teachers argue that physical punishment helps maintain discipline and authority. However, others note that such methods foster fear rather than genuine moral understanding. Teachers who have undergone training in humanistic Islamic pedagogy tend to reject physical punishment entirely.

Student responses (fifth bone) reveal that those who have experienced physical punishment often feel discomfort and report obeying out of fear rather than understanding.

Meanwhile, students who are educated without violence tend to communicate more openly with their teachers and show a greater sense of accountability for their actions.

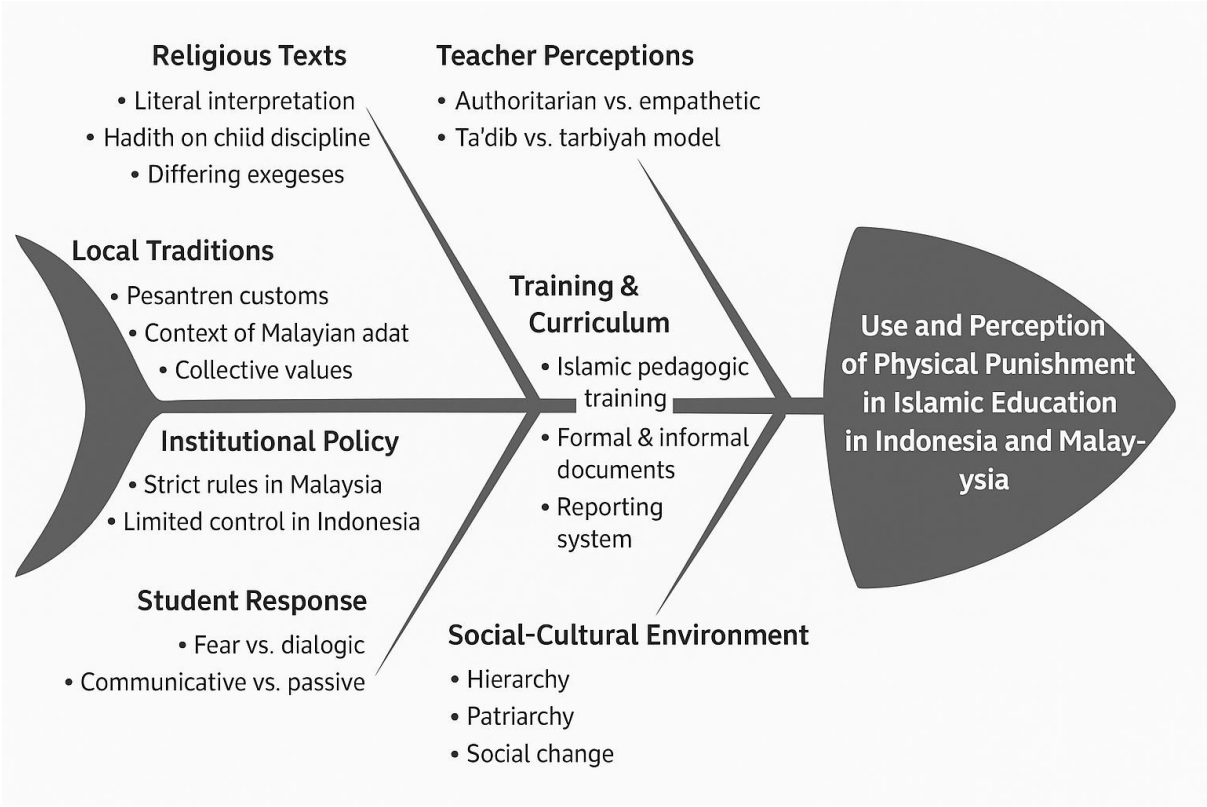
Parental support (sixth bone) varies. In Indonesia, some parents still support physical punishment as part of "tough love" in education. In Malaysia, however, most parents involved in this study strongly reject corporal punishment and prefer dialogic and motivational approaches, reflecting a shift in urban Muslim family values regarding child education.

Field observations support interview data. In several Indonesian pesantren classrooms, light disciplinary actions such as banging a desk or tapping a student's shoulder were observed as warning measures. In Malaysia, such practices have been replaced by non-physical reward-and-punishment systems such as behavioral assessments and social task assignments.

School curricula and regulatory documents in both countries show a trend toward banning corporal punishment, though implementation gaps remain. In Malaysia, there are already mechanisms for reporting and following up on violations. In Indonesia, most schools lack formal complaint systems, and student protection largely depends on the policies of individual school principals.

Teacher training has a decisive influence. Teachers who have received training in modern Islamic pedagogy tend to use more empathetic, spiritually reflective approaches. Conversely, those who rely on personal experience and traditional pesantren practices are more likely to retain physical punishment methods, citing effectiveness.

Sociocultural environments also play a role. In communities where patriarchal values and strict hierarchies are upheld, teacher authority is reinforced through harsh methods. In contrast, urban communities with access to modern Islamic educational literacy encourage teachers to act more as spiritual mentors than disciplinarians.



Finally, differences exist across educational levels. At the primary level, teachers are more cautious about using physical punishment due to awareness of its psychological impact. However, at the secondary level (equivalent to junior and senior high school), especially in boarding schools, physical methods are more commonly used due to the need for greater group control.

Overall, these findings show that the implementation of physical punishment in Islamic education is shaped by a combination of factors: religious texts, local culture, institutional policy, teacher perception, and societal expectations. A transformative approach to Islamic education requires ongoing dialogue between religious values, child rights, and contemporary pedagogy.

Discussion (مناقشة)

The findings of this study highlight the complex intersection between Islamic educational philosophy and disciplinary practices in both Indonesia and Malaysia. Although both countries share similar Islamic foundations, differences in interpretation and implementation emerge significantly due to contextual influences such as tradition, institutional policy, and teacher training (Hashim & Langgulung, 2008). These contextual variables shape how physical punishment is conceptualized—either as a justified disciplinary tool or as a practice in need of reform.

One of the key themes is the continued reliance on religious texts as a normative justification for physical punishment. While many educators cite hadiths about disciplining children, the interpretations vary. Teachers in Malaysia are more likely to adopt the *tarbiyah* (nurturing) perspective, emphasizing compassion and emotional development. In contrast, Indonesian pesantren teachers often refer to *ta'dib*, emphasizing discipline and correction (Abdullah, 2014). This divergence underlines the necessity for unified interpretive guidelines that align with child protection principles.

Local tradition emerged as a dominant factor influencing physical disciplinary practices. In Indonesia, corporal punishment—when mild—is often viewed as a traditional educational tool deeply rooted in pesantren culture. This stands in contrast to Malaysian institutions, where modern pedagogical reforms have begun to reduce or eliminate such practices (Jalal et al., 2009). These differences demonstrate that cultural embedding often resists legal or institutional directives unless accompanied by transformative training.

The impact of national policy is another significant differentiator. Malaysia's formal prohibition of corporal punishment in schools is relatively well enforced due to its centralized education system and consistent monitoring (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Meanwhile, Indonesia's decentralized system allows pesantren to function with relative autonomy, weakening policy enforcement (Nilan, 2009). This disparity raises questions about how policy frameworks can adapt to educational institutions with religious or cultural autonomy.

Teacher perceptions reflect ambivalence. Some educators view physical punishment as necessary to maintain order and demonstrate authority, especially in religious boarding schools. Yet, others who received training in contemporary Islamic pedagogy regard it as counterproductive and potentially harmful (Azra, 2012). These split attitudes show the need for widespread professional development focused on non-violent, values-based disciplinary strategies within Islamic frameworks.

Student experiences further affirm the divergence in implementation. Students subjected to physical punishment often express fear and anxiety, leading to compliance without comprehension. Conversely, students educated with humanistic and dialogical approaches tend to show increased responsibility and moral reasoning (UNICEF, 2014). This contrast

affirms that positive disciplinary methods are more aligned with long-term educational and ethical goals.

Parental views also show an evolving landscape. While some Indonesian parents still support "firm" methods as part of character building, Malaysian parents increasingly favor dialogical and motivational strategies. This generational and geographical shift suggests that parental involvement in reforming school discipline must be part of any policy agenda (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).

Observations revealed that some schools continue using physical gestures like tapping or desk-banging as symbolic warnings rather than punitive actions. While these may seem benign, their psychological impact varies depending on students' backgrounds and previous experiences (Straus, 2001). Non-physical reward and punishment systems seen in Malaysia offer a promising alternative, focusing on behavioral contracts and restorative tasks.

Document analysis reveals that both countries are making strides toward eliminating corporal punishment in official curricula and regulations. However, implementation gaps are still visible. While Malaysia has reporting and follow-up mechanisms, Indonesia lacks consistent institutional protection measures, especially in pesantren (Arifin, 2017). Bridging this gap requires a culturally sensitive approach that respects institutional autonomy while promoting children's rights.

The presence or absence of teacher training plays a decisive role. Teachers exposed to Islamic humanistic education are more likely to reject corporal punishment and embrace reflective, spiritually grounded methods (Rosnani, 2004). Meanwhile, those without such exposure rely on inherited practices. This gap signals the need for national investment in continuous pedagogical development, especially in rural and religious institutions.

Social structures also influence disciplinary preferences. In patriarchal or hierarchical communities, teacher authority is reinforced through harsh methods. In urban, educated Muslim communities, teachers are seen more as mentors and moral guides. This indicates that sociocultural transformation is essential for sustainable change in school disciplinary systems (Hariz, 2015).

This study suggests that physical punishment in Islamic education is sustained not only by religious justifications but also by cultural traditions, policy limitations, and inadequate training. Reforming such practices requires a multi-pronged approach: reinterpretation of religious texts, parent and teacher education, policy reinforcement, and a paradigm shift toward compassionate Islamic pedagogy that upholds both spiritual values and children's dignity (Al-Attas, 1979).

Conclusion (خاتمة)

The findings of this study reveal that the practice of physical punishment in Islamic educational settings in Indonesia and Malaysia remains influenced by a complex interaction between religious texts, cultural traditions, institutional policies, and teacher perceptions. Although both countries share common Islamic foundations, the interpretation and application of disciplinary approaches differ significantly, shaped by local values and the degree of policy enforcement. This highlights the importance of contextualizing educational reform within specific sociocultural environments to ensure both relevance and effectiveness.

Despite the increasing awareness among educators about the importance of compassionate, non-violent educational practices in line with the Islamic spirit of *rahmah* (mercy), remnants of physical punishment continue to persist, particularly in Indonesia's pesantren system. In contrast, Malaysia has shown more systematic efforts to eliminate corporal punishment from its formal educational institutions. However, both systems still face

implementation gaps, especially where institutional autonomy and traditional authority structures prevail.

Stakeholder perspectives—including those of students, teachers, parents, and community leaders—suggest that the shift toward more humanistic and culturally sensitive pedagogy is both necessary and increasingly supported. Students respond more positively to inclusive and empathetic disciplinary approaches, which foster intrinsic motivation and moral responsibility. Teachers who receive adequate training in Islamic pedagogical philosophy are better equipped to implement these alternatives, but structural support is still needed to make such approaches widespread and sustainable.

In conclusion, transforming disciplinary paradigms within Islamic education requires a collaborative, multi-level effort involving religious scholars, policymakers, school administrators, and families. A re-examination of religious texts with contemporary child rights perspectives, integrated with culturally aware teacher training and robust policy enforcement, can pave the way for a more holistic, ethical, and effective Islamic education system—one that upholds both the dignity of the learner and the moral ideals of the tradition.

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