

# The Role of Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Teacher Belief: Strategies to Reduce the Impact of Stress on Special Needs Children's Mental Health

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**Abstract.** Children with special needs often experience stress due to the lack of inclusive environmental support, which can negatively impact their mental health and hinder the development of their full potential. This research discusses the role of education policy using the Integrated Education System (IES) as an effort to improve the quality of education in Aceh Besar district, Indonesia. The IES program organizes an education system by integrating national education with Acehese cultural wisdom, namely, implementing a gender mainstreaming system and teachers' beliefs in the education patterns of children with special needs. The main objective of this study was to reduce the impact of stress on the mental health of children with special needs. This research employs a mixed-methods approach in a concurrent design structure, combining primary research using quantitative surveys with semi-structured qualitative interviews. The sample included principals and teachers from primary and secondary schools. Materials were delivered to students through instructional videos to eliminate gender-based discrimination and create an inclusive environment for students with disabilities. The findings show that the establishment of character-based Islamic education rooted in local excellence in the form of gender equality and teacher beliefs can reduce the impact of stress on the mental health of children with special needs. Ultimately, this research has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of a more equitable and inclusive education system for children with special needs. An interdisciplinary approach that integrates gender policy and teacher beliefs as two key factors in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

**Keywords:** Characteristics; Disabilities; Gender; Performance; Teacher Belief.

## 1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental step toward achieving societal goals, while educational policy oversees its implementation (Clarke, 2020). Policymakers shape students' school choices, with recent decades highlighting five patterns: quality, equity, freedom, plurality, and innovation (Daramola et al., 2023). However, current policies at local and national levels often fall short, especially after decentralization through educational autonomy, which increased local government responsibility but also exposed challenges such as limited human resources and funding (Irawan, 2023). Education often serves as a tool for maintaining state authority (Paglayan, 2022). The use of power to shape and spread education, knowledge, and technology within global or social movements can change the social order (Maldonado, 2023), with policies embedded in curricula subtly advancing political agendas. The link between education administrators and governors influences higher education support (Tandberg et al., 2017). In Aceh, special autonomy enables an Islamic-based education system reflecting cultural values, but gender stereotypes persist, limiting women's participation and creating gender-based segregation. Addressing this requires cultural re-evaluation and gender mainstreaming to achieve equality.

Teachers' beliefs strongly influence gender dynamics in classrooms. For instance, assumptions that boys excel in mathematics may reinforce girls' perceived inferiority (Lindner et al., 2022b).

Such biases also affect the education of children with special needs. Gender mainstreaming in this context can promote inclusivity and equity but requires stronger government focus on related policies and teacher attitudes to reduce stress impacts on students' mental health. Children with disabilities face a higher risk of sexual victimization than their non-disabled peers (Fang et al., 2022; Kirkner et al., 2022; Mailhot Amborski et al., 2022). In Indonesia, about 3.3% of children aged 5–10 years have disabilities (~2.2 million). Government policies must consider diverse student identities, as gender perspectives shape school experiences and well-being. Teachers' education and commitment are vital for managing inclusive classrooms (Winta & Pribadi, 2020). Primary school teachers play a key role in shaping future attitudes toward gender equality (Jannah, 2022), making gender mainstreaming and teacher beliefs essential for improving education for children with special needs (Mutiawati, Syahputra, et al., 2023).

### **1.1. Problem Statement**

The integrated education program has significant implications for educational institutions, leading to the creation of astute schools and an enhancement of educational capabilities to improve the quality of education. The enhancement of education quality can be pursued through improving relevance, competitiveness, and educational governance. The intended educational governance can encompass advancements in teacher competency, the implementation of integrated education system programs, the promotion of national character education, and the enhancement of educational governance systems, including environmental cleanliness. This involves elevating the quality of students and teachers through targeted rewards and punishments. High appreciation should be given, especially to teachers who work with students with special needs. The study results show that these teachers experience significant stress due to various factors, such as a lack of government support, limited resources, heavy workloads, and time constraints (Schmidt et al., 2024). The inclusion of students with special needs in regular classes presents a significant challenge in education, especially for teachers.

Most teachers understand and feel responsible for the mental health of students with special needs in their classes. However, they often lack the necessary skills to support these students, which ultimately increases their stress. To address this issue, educational policies impacting the mental health of children with special needs in regular schools need improvement. One possible government effort is to provide more resources, reduce class sizes, offer better remuneration, and enhance teacher training (Schmidt et al., 2024). Consequently, this research focuses on three aspects: a) To examine the form of education policy implemented by the government to encourage gender mainstreaming and teacher beliefs in the school environment, b) to analyze the influence of education policy on reducing the impact of stress on the mental health of children with special needs, and c) to explore the implications of the Integrated Education Program policy on improving the quality of education in schools in Aceh Besar.

This research is essential to conduct because children with special needs often experience stress due to discrimination, a lack of emotional support, and non-inclusive teaching methods. Teacher beliefs and gender mainstreaming are key factors in improving student knowledge acquisition, performance, engagement, collaboration, and overall positive student experiences (Mutiawati, Syahputra, et al., 2023). Gender mainstreaming in education policy ensures that both boys and girls with special needs receive equal treatment and access to services that support their mental health. Including teacher belief factors plays a crucial role in creating a comfortable and safe learning environment. It can influence teaching strategies, interactions with students, and how teachers handle stress when working with students with special needs (ABK). Teachers beliefs about their roles and students contribute to forming positive attitudes and beliefs toward both boys and girls (Lindner et al., 2022). Ultimately, this research has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of a more equitable and inclusive education system for children with special needs.

### **1.2. Related Research**

The political system of a country is always closely linked to its policies, including those in education. Variations in the formulation of educational policies in a country arise from the

divergent political systems embraced by that nation. For instance, the educational reform in Italy introduced a decentralized governance structure and managerial accountability through hierarchical control (Grimaldi & Serpieri, 2014). Meanwhile, similar to many other countries, China's current laws also state that school curricula must reflect the interests of their nation's constituents (Johnson, 2000). In Indonesia, political shifts have also transformed the educational paradigm, known as the multicultural education paradigm (Jayadi et al., 2022). Multicultural education is an educational tool to provide equality for all students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, social class, and language groups (Banks & Banks, 2019; Jayadi et al., 2022; Lubis & Wekke, 2009; Muhammad & Bakar, 2013).

Multicultural education is aimed at providing equal opportunities to all children from diverse cultural backgrounds, while also enabling them to interact with communities from various backgrounds, thus producing a quality and resilient future generation that integrates physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects (Omar et al., 2015; Othman et al., 2017). This equality, within the province of Aceh, which enjoys special autonomy in regional governance, mandates that every policy taken must always consider the Qanun Syariat Islam. Thus, the Government of Aceh Besar Regency, through the Department of Education and Culture, implements a flagship program known as the integrated education system. The implementation of an integrated education system involves all elements, including students, parents, and the community, in achieving educational goals. Several previous studies have stated that the integrated education system has been implemented in various contexts to tackle educational challenges. Hasnadi's research states that implementing an integrated education system in Aceh Province—combining morning and afternoon programs, including Diniyah and Tahfidh lessons, using local wisdom-based methods—can help build students' character (Hasnadi, 2023). Furthermore, Silahuddin added that, in Aceh Besar in particular, the integrated education system can address moral issues and shape societal character through schools (Silahuddin & Sofia, 2021). In other countries, such as Malaysia and Brunei, an integrated education system has been implemented at the senior secondary level to foster reverence, morality, intellectual growth, and other positive traits in students (Mughtarom et al., 2016).

This study highlights the implementation of the Integrated Education system (IIES) in several Southeast Asian countries, aiming to address the needs and challenges of special education, particularly concerning students' morals and character. However, the researchers do not focus solely on these aspects. Instead, they emphasize the implementation of Integrated Education system policies by considering gender mainstreaming factors and teacher beliefs to mitigate stress and support the mental health of children with special needs. The inclusion of these two factors in the study was necessary because, in principle, the integrated education system implemented in Aceh Province separates male and female students. However, this system currently only combines morning and afternoon classes. Ideally, the integrated education system should go beyond this by modernizing traditional Islamic institutions, such as Dayah, into modern schools that blend Traditional Islamic Education with contemporary management principles and curricula (Nur, 2019). Thus, this research aims to establish the integrated education system as a model for local governments in achieving national education goals.

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

This study aims to investigate how the IIES policy between national education and local wisdom in the form of gender expectations and teacher beliefs can be strategically aligned to create a supportive educational framework, which in turn can reduce the impact of mental health on children with special needs.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Integrated Education System**

The integrated education system is a comprehensive teaching approach that combines various disciplines centralized around a problem or project-based topic, encompassing both theoretical and practical aspects. It integrates institutions between schools and outside school settings based on the needs of students and the community. Additionally, it blends teaching

and learning activities with students' individual characteristics. As a result, each country employs different techniques and methods in implementing the integrated education system. Singapore adopts a dual education system for children with disabilities, where education is carried out on one side as regular education, but on the other hand, schools provide specialized education for disabled children (Poon et al., 2013). The laws of Slovenia also still maintain a dual education system for children with special needs, where some special needs children are educated separately from their peers in special schools/institutions (specialization), while others attend regular schools with their peers of the same age (inclusion) (Rieser, 2022; Schmidt & Brown, 2015).

The integrated education system implemented by Germany involves the application of the method of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), where schools and companies share the responsibility of providing technical and vocational education with the aim of aligning dynamically changing economic demands with the skill profiles of graduates from educational institutions (Remington, 2018). The dual education system called 'Duale Ausbildung' implemented in Germany is an efficient and practical form of education as it combines theory and practice simultaneously (Wiesner, 2014). The main characteristic of the dual vocational system applied in Germany involves a collaborative network organization between companies, professional educational institutions, and secondary schools (Savchenkov, 2017).

Currently, worldwide, governments, educators, and businesses have shown an increasing interest in the German-style VET education method. This interest is evident in European countries and notably in the United States (Remington, 2017), as well as in Asian countries such as China and Thailand, which implement dual education with a tripartite system (an integrated three-dimensional system) involving technical and vocational institutions, employers, and the government (Liu et al., 2021; Mongkhonvanit, 2017). Governments, companies, and technical and vocational institutions must collaborate to establish trust and mutual benefit while ensuring the quality of the implemented dual education programs. The VET system implemented by the Swedish government (1945 – 2015) underwent reform, integrating VET into the upper secondary education system with the goal of offering more differentiated education controlled by industry needs (Olofsson & Thunqvist, 2018). In an integrated education system following the tripartite approach, there are nine important factors to enhance the capacity of Thailand's dual education system: technical and vocational institutions, curriculum, school teachers, accredited qualifications, students, employers, company trainers, government policies, and relevant government agencies (Mongkhonvanit, 2017).

Governments, educators, and businesses worldwide have expressed increasing interest in the German vocational education and training (VET) method, where the dual education system has ensured a close alignment between dynamically changing economic demands and the skill profiles of individuals graduating from educational institutions (Pleshakova, 2020; Remington, 2017). If the dual education systems implemented by Germany, Sweden, the United States, China, and Thailand follow a tripartite system that emphasizes collaboration between technical and vocational institutions, employers, and the government, the situation is different in Turkey. Since the rise of neo-conservatism, this ideology has been incorporated into Turkey's education system, influencing the curriculum structure of schools and national education policies throughout Turkish society. Neo-conservative policies have led to the emergence of a dual education system in Turkey, one with an Islamic orientation and the other with a secular orientation (Güven, 2019). Previous research findings also reveal that from French diplomatic archives, Galatasaray Lycee in Istanbul has implemented an integrated education system for centuries, from primary school to university (Ollivier, 2021). The model of the integrated Islamic education system, as practiced by Turkey and France, has also been adopted by the Malay Archipelago societies (Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia) in the context of 21st-century education, integrating academic and Islamic studies (Othman et al., 2017).

## 2.2. The Mental Health of Special Needs Children

The health of children with special needs is an important component of the overall learning and educational success of inclusive students. Children with special needs often face different challenges, such as social stigma being a major barrier to inclusive classrooms in mainstream classrooms, which in turn exacerbates stress and negatively impacts mental health outcomes for inclusive students. Not only that, but parents of children with special needs are also at risk of experiencing parenting stress and this may impact on their mental health (Cempaka Putrie Dimala & Puspa Rahayu Utami, 2024). Parents of children with special needs are likely to experience difficulties in managing stress, which in turn leads to parenting stress. Therefore, to reduce the impact of parenting stress on the mental health of children with special needs, positive teacher attitudes are essential to foster an inclusive environment where children with disabilities can thrive academically and socially.

In addition to teacher belief policies, gender mainstreaming policies are also very important to promote an equitable educational environment, which significantly impacts the mental health of children with special needs. Gender mainstreaming serves as a foundational strategy in improving educational practices that contribute to the mental health of vulnerable populations. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy that aims to integrate a gender perspective into all levels of policy-making to achieve gender equality (Mahapatro, 2014).

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Research Design

This research employs a mixed-methods approach in a concurrent design structure, combining primary research using quantitative surveys with semi-structured qualitative interviews. Mixed methods research in the field of language assessment involves the collection and combination of quantitative data and qualitative data in the test development and assessment process (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The research was conducted for six months in a school that implements an Integrated Education System. This design involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data first, followed by collecting and analyzing qualitative data, and then integrating the findings to draw conclusions (Ana Mufidah et al., 2024). This study is qualitative, utilizing a multi-case study design. The main case in this research is an implementation of an integrated education system that includes elements of gender mainstreaming and teacher beliefs in its application. The second case involves the teachers' responses to the implementation of the Integrated Education System. In the third case, the researcher examines teachers and the community's understanding of the policy and substance of the Integrated Education System, which incorporates elements of gender mainstreaming and teacher beliefs as an effort to reduce the impact of stress on the mental health of children with special needs in regular schools.

The research design was conducted using the Formula: O1 X O2. Namely, the first stage is carried out pretest first to determine the initial ability of students. In the second stage the researcher then provides treatment related to mental health material to mitigate the impact of stress on the mental health of children with special needs. Furthermore, in the final stage the researcher post-tests the results of the study. The research implementation was carried out through five main stages. The first stage began with the documentation of social processes within the realm of general education. The second stage involved a phenomenological examination of the implementation of educational policy politics aimed at reducing stress's impact on the mental health of children with special needs through an integrated education system. The third stage was a comparative study, analyzing the implementation, mechanisms, and strategies of the current integrated education system versus one incorporating gender mainstreaming and teacher beliefs. The fourth stage focused on analyzing and synthesizing policy politics to mitigate stress's impact on these children's mental health through the integrated education system. The fifth and final stage involved formulating educational policy politics that integrate gender mainstreaming and teacher beliefs into the system to enhance its effectiveness.

## **3.2. Respondent**

### **3.2.1. Quantitative Respondents**

The quantitative respondents in this study numbered 132 respondents. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique based on specific characteristics of the community. Respondents in the quantitative approach consisted of inclusive education teachers and regular class teachers who handle students with special needs in various inclusive elementary schools. Quantitative respondents were selected based on the criteria of having taught for at least 1 year, having handled children with special needs, and being willing to fill out the questionnaire in full.

### **3.2.2. Qualitative Respondents**

Qualitative respondents were key informants selected purposively to deepen understanding of teachers' beliefs and implementation of gender mainstreaming policies on children's stress. The total number of qualitative respondents was 66 school principals, including 44 elementary school principals and 22 junior high school principals. Regarding educational background, 56% (37 individuals) held a master's degree, while the remaining 44% held a bachelor's degree. The respondents' average age ranged from 31 to 50 years, and 72% (48 individuals) were female. The selection of the age range and educational background provides researchers with insight that respondents have a good understanding or perspective to support this research.

## **3.3. Data Collection**

### **3.3.1. Quantitative Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection was conducted using a closed questionnaire based on a Likert scale (1–5) that measured: 1) Teachers' perceptions of gender policies; 2) Teachers' level of confidence in managing PDBK stress; 3) Strategies used in inclusive learning practices and 4) The questionnaire was validated by experts and tested for reliability. The data collection process involved distributing questionnaires to measure teachers' beliefs regarding gender mainstreaming policies in the integrated education system and their impact on reducing stress in children with special needs.

### **3.3.2 Qualitative Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and principals. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with school principals and parents to gain deeper insights into the impact of gender mainstreaming and teachers' beliefs within the integrated education system program. Additionally, data were collected through classroom observations to examine how teachers implement strategies to reduce stress in children with special needs. In addition, researchers conducted a document analysis to examine government policies, implemented curricula, and inclusive education guidelines related to gender mainstreaming in regular schools. Therefore, the instruments used in this study included questionnaires, interview guidelines, observation checklists, and government policy documents. The research was conducted from January to June 2024.

## **3.4. Research Instruments**

### **3.4.1. Quantitative Instruments**

The main instrument is a closed questionnaire consisting of 3 parts, namely 1) Gender Mainstreaming Policy Perception Scale (10 items), 2) Teacher Belief on Inclusion Scale (10 items), and Stress Reduction Strategy Inventory (10 items). Each item is arranged with a Likert scale and tested for validity and reliability (Cronbach Alpha > 0.70).

### **3.4.2. Qualitative Instruments**

The main instruments are 1) In-depth interview guide; 2) FGD guide; and 3) Teacher and student behavior observation sheets. The instruments are designed to explore the meaning, experiences, and real practices of teachers in the context of gender and stress management in children.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Given that this research employs a multi-case study design, data analysis is conducted by analyzing individual case data and performing cross-case analysis (Sweetman et al., 2010). The steps involved in cross-case analysis include: 1) utilizing an inductive approach by comparing and amalgamating conceptual findings from each case, 2) utilizing the results as a foundation for constructing conceptual statements or cross-case propositions, 3) assessing the appropriateness of propositions against the reference facts, 4) reconstructing propositions based on the facts of each case, and 5) adhering to this process as intended, up to the point of saturation. This research was carried out in schools implementing the integrated education system in Aceh Besar District.

#### 3.5.1. Quantitative Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, namely 1) Descriptive: Percentage, mean, standard deviation; and 2) Inferential: Multiple linear regression to see the effect of gender policy and teacher beliefs on stress reduction strategies. Data processing was assisted by SPSS 21.0 software.

#### 3.5.2. Qualitative Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was conducted through thematic analysis techniques, namely: 1) Transcription of interview results; 2) Open coding to find themes; 3) Categorization and arrangement of meaning; and 4) Triangulation of data from interviews and observations. The analysis process was assisted by NVivo software.

### 3.6. Validity and Reliability

This study employs a mixed-method approach, and the validation of the research instrument was conducted using a triangulation convergence strategy. The results of the CFA test yielded a Standardized Regression Weight value of 0.75, with AVE = 0.57 and CR = 0.73. These results indicate that all factor loadings are significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), meeting the threshold values, thus confirming that the indicators used in the questionnaire exhibit good validity. Since  $AVE \geq 0.50$  and  $CR \geq 0.70$ , it can be concluded that the distributed questionnaire has a valid construct.

Furthermore, the CFA test results were combined with triangulation testing and respondent re-checking. To ensure data credibility, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews and systematic observations of the implementation process of gender mainstreaming and teacher beliefs in schools that apply the integrated education system policy. The reliability of the research instrument was measured using Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha = 0.735$ ). The results ( $CR = 0.73$  and  $\alpha = 0.735$ ) confirm that the instrument demonstrates good reliability and can be considered both valid and reliable.

## 4. Findings

Findings from research using a mixed method approach, namely a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, which complement each other to obtain a comprehensive picture of the role of gender mainstreaming policies and teacher beliefs in reducing the impact of stress on the mental health of children with special needs. The findings of this study are arranged into several main themes that represent the focus of the research, including: (1) The Formulation of Educational Policy: IIES towards the Improvement of Education Quality, and (2) Implications of Educational Policy from the IIES Program on Education Quality in Aceh Besar. In each theme, quantitative data is presented in the form of statistical analysis results, and qualitative data in the form of direct quotes from sources to describe the context, meaning, and experience in depth.

First, the formulation of the educational policy for the Integrated Education System (IIES) aimed at improving educational quality by the Department of Education and Culture in Aceh Besar District must consider 12 aspects: 1) effective communication among all parties involved in education, whether between students and educators, parents and teachers, or schools and the community; 2) availability of adequate and quality resources, such as textbooks, laboratory

equipment, and educational technology; 3) implementation of policy disposition done properly, in accordance with applicable rules, and considering the interests of all involved parties; 4) a good and effective bureaucratic structure in managing all aspects related to education; 5) the achievement of Graduate Competency Standards; 6) proper implementation of Process Standards in accordance with applicable rules; 7) fair and proper implementation of Assessment Standards; 8) effective and proper management of all aspects related to education, such as budget, resources, and administration; 9) a sufficient number of trained and qualified teachers; 10) the facilities and infrastructure must support the teaching and learning process; 11) proper implementation of Funding Standards in managing the budget effectively; and 12) fulfilment of Content Standards, such as structured and accurate content delivery, as well as the application of diverse and innovative teaching methods. Innovative learning is not only related to the implementation of new teaching models but also encompasses innovative educational goals and curricula. There are three fundamental ways for innovative development in higher education: 1) realization of competency-based models in vocational training; 2) utilization of information technology in education; and 3) the establishment of innovative educational institutions focused on innovative development (Vorontsov & Vorontsova, 2015).

*Secondly*, enhancing the quality of implementing school education policies through an integrated education system to improve education quality can be achieved when the Aceh Education Department implements gradual socialization steps. These steps include: 1) disseminating information through letters from the Aceh Education Department to all School Principals in the Aceh Besar District; 2) providing guidance to all school principals and relevant individuals responsible within their respective domains, in accordance with the fundamental policy of activities issued by the Department; 3) the Head of the Aceh Besar Department provides notification information to School Principals and teachers regarding the new education policies from the Education Department; 4) trained personnel from the Department, who have received training related to the application of the integrated education system, are responsible for providing training to school principals, teachers, and staff in district and sub-district schools, as well as villages; and 5) each sub-district provides training to relevant school principals and teachers concerning the core topics of policies issued by the Aceh Education Department.

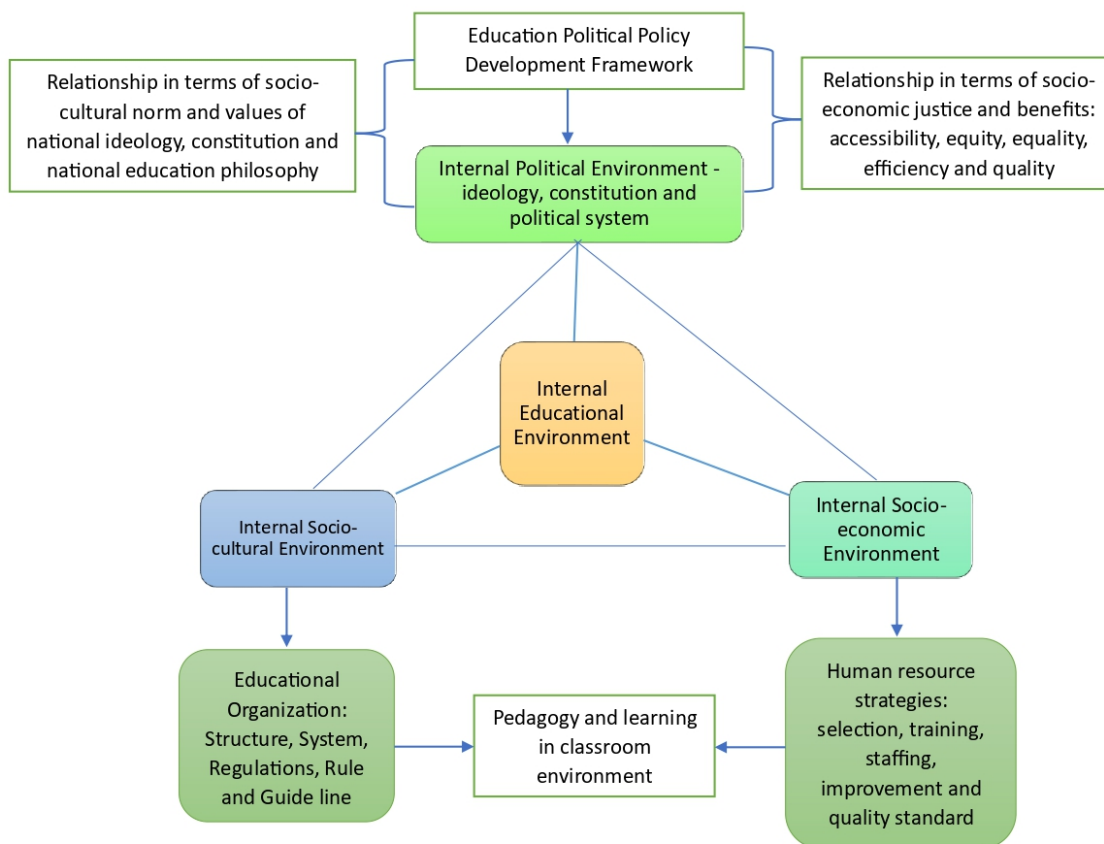
*Thirdly*, the implications of the education policy of the Integrated Islamic Education System (IIES) on the quality of education in Aceh Besar District are as follows: 1) the IIES program facilitates the Aceh Education Department in integrating government regulations with the Islamic Sharia Qanun in effect in Aceh; 2) formulating relevant policies based on field research results and documenting reports from each school principal in every sub-district; 3) providing training to school principals, teachers, and school supervisors related to integrated educational leadership; and 4) enhancing the quality and role of supervision by school principals.

This case study research was conducted in the year 2024, involving a total of 132 respondents, including school principals and teachers from 44 Elementary Schools and 22 Junior High Schools in the Aceh Besar region. The results of the survey conducted revealed three main aspects related to the IIES in Aceh, Indonesia

#### **4.1. The Formulation of Educational Policy: IIES Program towards the Improvement of Education Quality**

The educational policy of implementing the Integrated Education System (IIES) program in the Aceh Besar region, Indonesia, is developed through the conceptualization of three interconnected dimensions in the educational realm. There are generally three external environments that strongly influence the enhancement of educational quality in schools. The first pertains to the context of the internal political environment, including the formulation of laws, policies, and educational regulations applicable in a particular region. The second involves the sociocultural environment or external socio-cultural forces prevailing in society. The third relates to the context of the internal socioeconomic environment, encompassing supra and macroeconomic forces present in that area. These dimensions are interconnected, where field analysis results indicate that the relationship between cultural norms and values tends to

influence decision-making processes at the curriculum policy development level to be implemented in a region. Meanwhile, socio-economic relations tend to focus on the accessibility, equity, equality, efficiency, and quality aspects of a proposed educational policy program. The interplay among these three dimensions is illustrated in the following Figure 1.

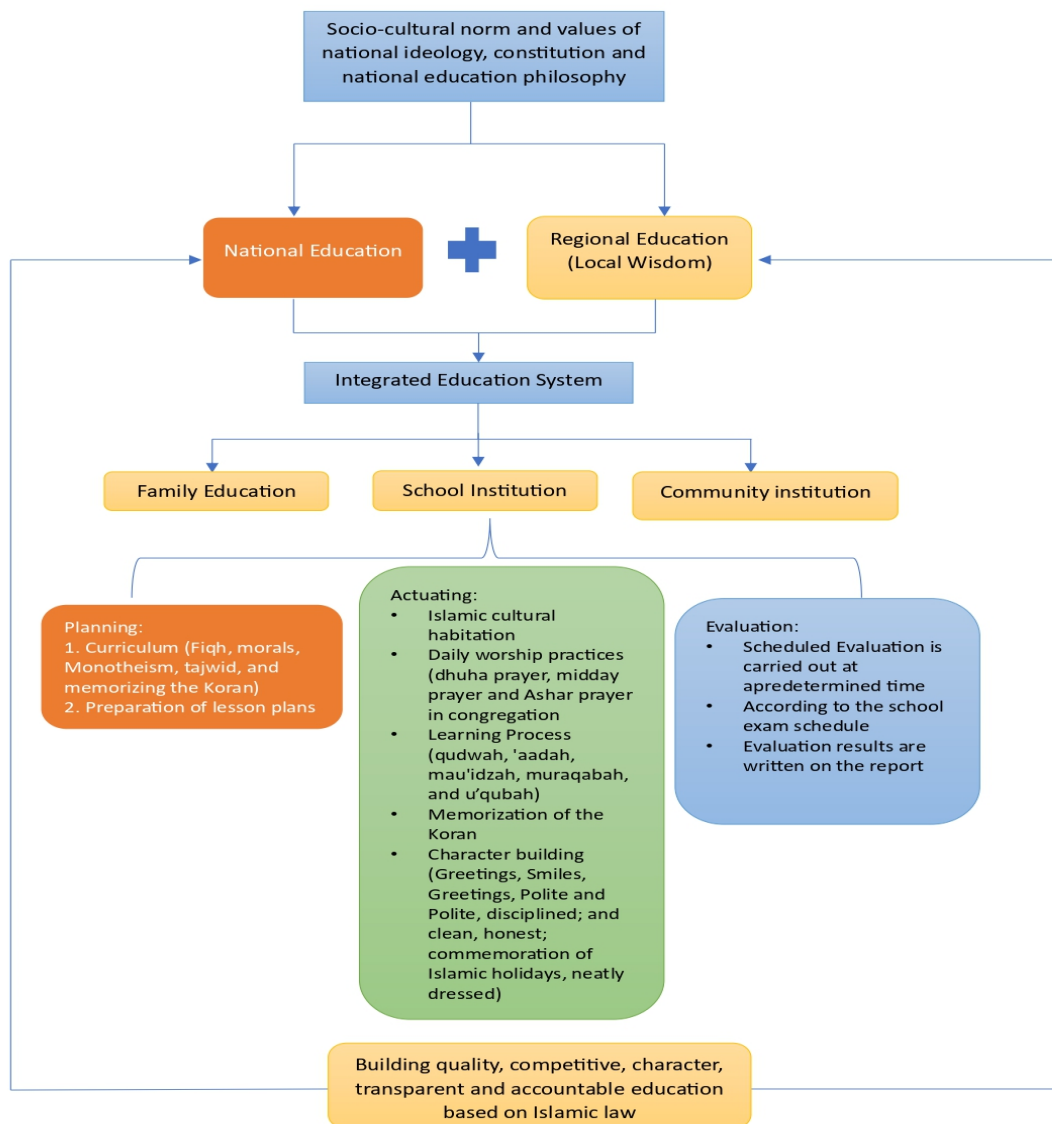


**Figure 1.** Formulation of Educational Policy

Political power wields a strong influence over critical variables within the realm of education, particularly in the context of the political environment and ideology. The constitution and political system play a pivotal role in the development of curriculum and learning within the school environment. Political policy power impacts human resource strategies encompassing selection, training, staff placement, enhancement, and quality standards for structures, systems, regulations, and guidelines. Moreover, educational political policies are intricately intertwined with the socio-cultural norms and ideological values of the nation, constitution, and national educational philosophy. Aceh is one of the provinces in Indonesia granted special autonomy in matters of development financing, economic empowerment, poverty alleviation, and the funding of education, social, and health initiatives (Law No. 11 of 2006 concerning the Aceh Government). Consequently, education in Aceh is an integral component of the national education system, tailored to the characteristics, potential, and needs of the Aceh community.

The implementation of education in Aceh, based on Islamic Sharia, is carried out to develop the full potential of students, aiming to realize a self-reliant, cultured, and dignified Acehnese society in accordance with religious teachings (Aceh Qanun Number 11 of 2014 on Education). Each district in Aceh is granted the authority to develop an educational concept that aligns with community needs. Thus, the Aceh Besar District government has adopted the IIES program as a response from the Regent and the Aceh Besar Education Department to prepare knowledgeable and religious generations of Acehnese. The Integrated Education System (IIES) is implemented by combining the content of the national curriculum with that of the local Islamic curriculum. Integrated Islamic schools provide an educational system that integrates

academic knowledge and Islamic studies (Othman et al., 2017). The findings regarding the Integrated Education System can be illustrated in the following Figure 2.

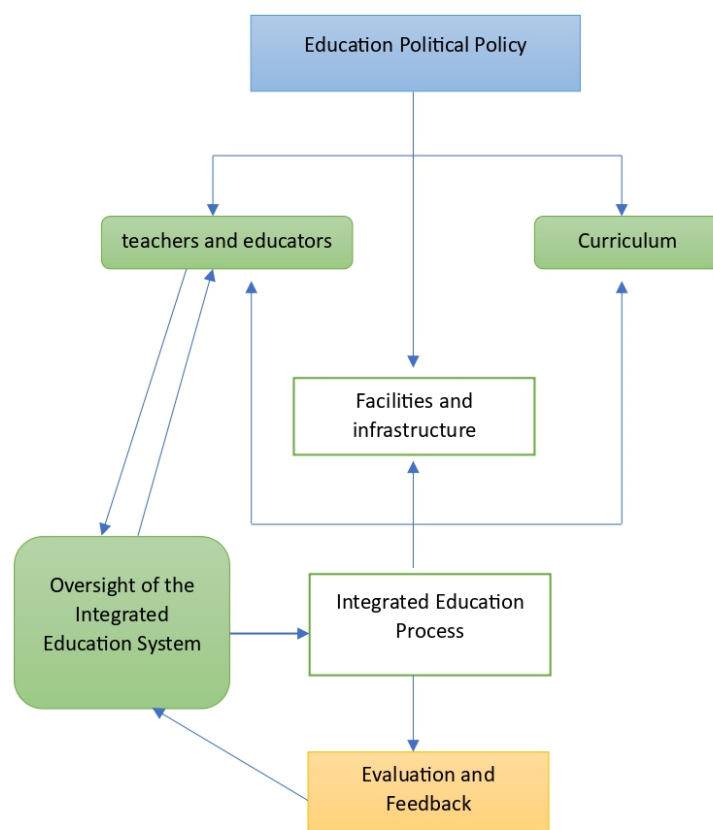


**Figure 2.** Formulation of the Integrated Education System Program Policy

The IIES implemented in Aceh Besar District is a program of educational activities that includes cultural familiarization with Islam, daily religious practices, classical theoretical learning, tajweed lessons, and Quran memorization, all conducted in integration with the national education system. The questionnaire on the implementation of the IIES program focuses on four constructs that depict the model of an Integrated Islamic School, namely the school concept, integration of Islamic and academic knowledge, teacher-student relationships, and the Islamic atmosphere of the school (Ollivier, 2021; Othman et al., 2017) The integrated education system program is implemented from the primary to secondary school levels, with a full-day education pattern for six days a week. The implementation of educational policy mechanisms has been carried out over the past two years, from 2021 to 2023, in several schools in Aceh Besar District, with the aim of enhancing the quality of education. The study of implementation outcomes has been conducted in 66 elementary and junior high schools located in Aceh Besar. Therefore, the implementation of the IIES program requires supervision and evaluation to ensure that changes, improvements, and enhancements in education quality can be achieved. Research findings reveal that in the effort to implement the IIES program throughout Aceh Besar, the integration of Islamic and academic knowledge is the weakest factor in the overall

concept of the integrated education system when compared to teacher-student relationships and school facilities.

These findings indicate the necessity of critically evaluating the implementation of the IIES Program to better prepare their students to face the challenges of future development. As for the overview of the integrated education system supervision model, it can be depicted in the following Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Form of Supervision for the IIES System Program

The supervision model applied to IIES program schools involves all stakeholders, starting with the formulation, determination, and adoption of educational policy. The educational policy of the IIES Program is determined based on an analysis of educational needs in a region, with a concept and reinforcement of education that encompass various elements and parameters. Several main parameters are strongly influenced within the IIES, including education quality, graduate quality, and alignment with current conditions or educational principles that correspond to the development of knowledge and educational technology. The design of the IIES curriculum must align with the analysis of emerging needs and achieving target outcomes is a primary consideration in formulating, planning, and determining educational policy through the IIES program.

#### 4.2. Implications of Educational Policy from IIES Program on Education Quality in Aceh Besar

The emergence of the educational policy of the IIES in Aceh Besar District deserves commendation, especially in terms of human resource development to support national education programs. This initiative involves the incorporation of various education laws that collaborate with the specific characteristics granted by the central government to the Aceh local government. The implementation of the integrated education system, conducted in 66 elementary and junior high schools under the administration of Aceh Besar District, is based on three fundamental regulations for the implementation of the integrated education system: Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Aceh Government Qanun Number 9 of

2015 on Amendments to Aceh Qanun Number 11 of 2014 on Education Implementation, and Aceh Besar District Government Qanun Number 6 of 2010 on Education in Aceh Besar District.

The IIES in Aceh Besar fundamentally has six main objectives: 1) Instilling a sense of nationalistic spirit from an early age; 2) Fostering character development among students in Aceh Besar; 3) Cultivating and internalizing good character within schools; 4) Occupying students' time and encouraging them to engage in educational activities; 5) Providing soft skills education (developing students' attitudes, personalities, self-improvement, and mental attitudes); and 6) Nurturing individuals with a Qur'anic perspective. In its execution, the Integrated Education System (IIES) program has applied six important principles to enhance the quality of education: 1) Teachers must possess pedagogical competence, personal competence, social competence, and professional competence; 2) Education based on students' potential; 3) Educational methods: *qudwah* (exemplary role model), *mauizah* (advice), *muraqabah* (the belief that Allah is always watching over every action of His servants), and *uqubah* (sanction/punishment as a preventive measure); 4) The environment as a crucial factor in education; 5) Education as a system; and 6) Integration of education with other educational institutions.

The Integrated integration of gender mainstreaming and teacher beliefs program, in general, is implemented to instill and shape the character of learners with its contents including: 1) Instilling Islamic attitudes; 2) Cultivating Islamic cultural habits; 3) Fundamental knowledge of individual and communal obligations; 4) Memorization of the Quran and prayers; 5) Acquiring knowledge and proficiency in daily worship practices; 6) Proficiency in foreign languages and proficiency in local culture (language and local arts); and 7) Proficiency in sports, entrepreneurship, and creativity development. The implications obtained from the IIES can realize and elevate the dignity and quality of education in the Aceh Besar region, all within the framework of Islamic law. This is to prepare a knowledgeable and religious generation in Aceh. Key outcomes derived from the application of the IES program in Aceh Besar include: 1) Establishment of character-based Islamic education rooted in local excellence; 2) Increased trust in schools within the Aceh Besar District; 3) Enhanced competence of teachers in the Aceh Besar District; and 4) Alignment of formal education with religious education.

Education with an integrated system program has been implemented in several primary (SD) and junior high (SMP) schools within the Department of Education and Culture of Aceh Besar District, with its implementation being carried out gradually. The schools chosen as pilot projects include 44 primary schools and 22 junior high schools, as detailed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Schools That Have Implemented the Integrated Education System (IIES)

Primary School		Junior High School
SDN Seulimeum	SDN Mon Mata	SMPN 1 Kota Jantho
SDN 2 Kota Jantho	SDN Sukadamai	SMPN 1 Seulimeum
SDN 1 Sare	SDN 1 Lamteuba	SMPN 1 Sukamakmur
SDN Banda Safa	SDN 7 Kota Jantho	SMPN 3 Ingin Jaya
SDN 1 Indrapuri	SDN Keumire	SMPN 1 Peukan Bada
SDN Samahani	SDN Sihoum	SMPN 2 Mesjid Raya
SDN Sibreh	SDN Aneuk Batee	SMPN 1 Darussalam
SDN Montasik	SDN Lamkrak	SMPN 1 Darul Imarah
SDN Simpang Tiga	SDN Piyeung	SMPN Ali Hasjmy
SDN Cot Meuraja	SDN Pertiwi Lamgarot	SMPN 1 Lhoong
SDN Lampeuneurut	SDN Lhok Seumeulu	SMPN 1 Lembah Seulawah
SDN Neusok Teubalui	SDN Garot	SMPN 1 Kuta Cot Glie

Primary School		Junior High School
SDN Bueng Cala	SDN Lamkunyēt	SMPN 1 Indrapuri
SDN Lambaro Angan	SDN Lamteh	SMPN 1 Simpang Tiga
SDN Lamreung	SDN Ulee Paya	SMPN 1 Montasik
SDN Lambada Klieng	SDN Lamlhōm	SMPN 2 Ingin Jaya
SDN Krueng Raya	SDN Lamteungoh	SMPN 1 Darul Kamal
SDN Keude Bieng	SDN Leupung 26	SMPN 1 Pulo Aceh
SDN Peukan Bada	SDN Lam Ujong	SMPN 1 Lhoknga
SDN geri Layeun	SDN Lamklat	SMPN 1 Leupung
SDN Kandang	SDN Kajhu	SMPN 1 Kuta Baro
SDN 1 Pagar Air	SDN Neuheun	SMPN 1 Baitussalam

The statistical results of the case study conducted on 132 respondents reveal that more than a quarter of school principals state that the implementation of policy using the IES program has a positive impact on the improvement of educational quality. The percentage related to this finding is 21% (21 respondents), indicating that school principals perceive the implementation of the IES Program as falling under the "good" category, suitable to be established as an educational policy in the Aceh Besar region. This demonstrates that despite integrated education content being relatively new in Indonesian society, especially in the Aceh Province, school principals welcome this policy. The detailed survey results can be presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Frequency of Policy Category Towards Improvement of Educational Quality from IES School Principals Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Very well	2	3 %
Good	21	32%
Enough	34	51%
Not enough	8	12%
Less Once	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>

Furthermore, when examined from the survey results among teachers, it is known that the policy of implementing the IES program also demonstrates a positive category for improving educational quality. About 53% of the responses from teacher respondents stated their agreement with the implementation of the IES program in Aceh Besar. The survey results among teachers are presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3.** Frequency of Policy Category Towards Improvement of Educational Quality from IES School Teachers Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Very well	1	1 %
Good	21	32%
Enough	35	53%
Not enough	8	13%
Less Once	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>

The survey results from both school principals and teachers have revealed that the implementation of the IES program in Aceh Besar overall falls within the "Adequate" category, indicating that there is still a need for significant fundamental improvements in terms of the implementation of educational policy for the IES program in Aceh Besar. The survey results also

indicate that 89% of the community agrees that the IES program requires improvements in its implementation and development. These improvements can be focused on nine aspects, including: 1) effective communication among all parties; 2) availability of adequate and quality resources; 3) well-positioned policy implementation; 4) an effective bureaucratic structure in managing all aspects related to education; 5) graduate competency structure; 6) proper and rule-compliant process standards; 7) satisfactory content standards; 8) proper and fair assessment standards; and 9) effective management of all budget, resources, and administration.

An addition to these aspects, the survey results also revealed that the number of trained and qualified teachers to execute the IES program is still insufficient. Furthermore, the survey results also identified schools with a shortage of educational staff, necessitating further recruitment to fill these vacancies. Just as the primary goal of the Integrated Education System is to resolve the dualism issue in education, instill Islamic elements throughout the curriculum, and provide holistic education that caters to the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of students through the delivery of knowledge that is both imparted and acquired by the students. An effective curriculum design needs to employ a complex thinking system so that the project can be viewed as a part of the larger system interconnected with the issues at hand (Park & Benson, 2013). Unfortunately, the survey results indicate that about 32% of students are still unable to read and write the Quran. As a result, the curriculum of the IES Program must align with the educational goal of nurturing innovative talents for social innovation and development through various educational perspectives within the context of the future curriculum. The future curriculum will evolve towards becoming an intelligent curriculum in the context of technology-based education (Zhang & Tsai, 2021).

## 5. Discussion

The implementation of education through the Integrated Education System (IES) program is carried out with a full-day learning system, effective from morning until evening. Indonesia's full-day school system aims to provide an educational solution for busy working parents while emphasizing character-building through active student involvement and the implementation of democratic, enjoyable learning (Suyatno & Wantini, 2018). The implementation of a full-day education system enhances supervision and guidance for students (Ainiah, 2020). The implementation of the full-day learning schedule system in schools in Aceh Besar has been in place for three years in schools that apply the integrated education system, which now serves as an example for other schools in Aceh Province. However, during the observation, researchers identified several shortcomings in the implementation of the integrated education system, such as gender discrimination through the separation of male and female students and teachers' perceptions that justify the superiority of male students' intellectual abilities over female students in certain subjects, such as mathematics or memorization. Consequently, students experience increased stress during the learning process, a condition that is particularly felt by children with special needs.

The concept of an integrated education system policy with a gender mainstreaming pattern and teacher beliefs initially faced challenges from parents, school principals, and the Aceh Besar Education Office. This is because they fundamentally assume that separating male and female students makes learning more Islamic and enhances character formation. However, after providing an understanding of learning behavior—where student behavior is directly influenced by the social environment through learning interactions and students' motivation—these concerns were addressed (Mutiawati et al., 2022). As a result, through the implementation of the full-day IES program, there is a highly significant change in students'

learning behavior, especially regarding etiquette and Islamic behavior, which is instilled independently at school and then practiced by students at home and within the community. Student learning behavior outside the classroom is influenced by technology, self-directed learning ability, learning resources, learning environment, and students' internal conditions (Mutiawati, Mailizar, et al., 2023). Ultimately, the community understands the importance of both gender mainstreaming and teachers' beliefs in the student learning process in the classroom.

Research findings related to the theory of Gender Mainstreaming also emphasize the integration of gender perspectives into education policies. However, a knowledge gap remains in the implementation of gender mainstreaming, particularly in policy execution (Caywood & Darmstadt, 2024). This statement aligns with the study's findings, which indicate that 89% of respondents agree that the Integrated Education System should be improved by incorporating gender mainstreaming policies and considering teachers' beliefs in learning. The recommendations include increasing training on gender issues, integrating gender perspectives into the curriculum, and enhancing policy support to foster an inclusive educational environment. In education, the successful integration of gender dimensions into learning content depends on factors such as institutional commitment, the mainstreaming of gender studies, and gender competency. The results include increased awareness, greater gender equality in representation, and organizational change (Palmén et al., 2020). The integrated education system represents an ideal form of corruption prevention within society (Ismunarno et al., 2022).

The educational policy of the IES is established within the process of realizing the national education vision and mission. As a result, the teaching paradigm in the IES program, which emphasizes the role of teachers in transforming knowledge to students, has shifted to a student-centered learning paradigm. Problem-centered learning and inquiry-based learning are pedagogies centered around the student (Thibaut et al., 2018). This learning paradigm requires students to develop their potential and creativity, with the aim of shaping individuals who possess spiritual and religious strength, noble character, personality, intelligence, aesthetics, physical and mental health, as well as the skills needed for themselves, society, the nation, and the country. However, in the educational environment of Aceh Besar, achieving this expectation is still challenging due to nearly half of the parents believing that their children need to assist them outside of school hours. Therefore, regular workshops and guidance are necessary for parents to underscore the importance of the primary and junior high school years in acquiring religious knowledge values and direct introduction. This preparation aims to help students face various life challenges on their journey.

The implementation of learning through the IES program has yielded significant results in enhancing the quality of education in Aceh Besar, aligning with the execution of education based on the Islamic Sharia concept applicable in Aceh. However, several challenges have arisen in its implementation, such as the difficulty in imparting an understanding to parents that education conducted using the full-day IES system will have a vital impact on the development of competence and the formation of Islamic character within students. Additionally, the implementation of the IES Program should also consider the principle of succession in adolescent physical education to establish the foundation for a healthy lifestyle in society (Kolesov et al., 2018).

This study has identified significant findings in education, highlighting that the implementation of effective gender mainstreaming policies can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students. Schools that adopt gender mainstreaming policies can reduce

gender bias in the curriculum, teaching materials, and teacher-student interactions. Furthermore, incorporating policies related to teachers' beliefs can influence how teachers and students interact, fostering positive understanding and attitudes in the classroom learning process. However, more comprehensive research is needed to address this issue effectively, particularly in the context of special education and gender mainstreaming policies.

## **6. Conclusion**

An exploration of gender mainstreaming policies and teacher beliefs applied in the Integrated Education System (IES) program underscores the critical role of teachers in reducing the impact of stress on the mental health of children with special needs. Effective implementation of the strategies developed can result in an inclusive education environment that not only recognizes but also actively addresses the unique challenges faced by special needs students in regular schools. With a strong gender mainstreaming policy and positive teacher beliefs in the integrated education system, stress levels in children with special needs can be reduced. This, in turn, contributes to improved psychological well-being, better social development, and enhanced academic achievement, particularly among students with special needs. Overall, this study highlights the importance of synergy between inclusive education policies and teacher beliefs in developing effective strategies to mitigate the impact of stress on the mental health of children with special needs. The findings of this study have positive implications for education policy, including strengthening policies related to gender mainstreaming and teacher beliefs in integrated education schools, increasing teacher training on effective teaching methods and stress management for children with special needs, and designing a curriculum that is more responsive to gender considerations and the needs of students with special needs.

The interaction between policy and individual belief systems forms a powerful framework that can redefine educational practice, ultimately prioritizing the well-being of children with special needs in the school setting.

## **Limitation**

This study only uses data on gender mainstreaming policies in schools that implement an integrated education system. As a result, its implementation is still limited. The respondents were randomly selected and included only teachers, principals, and students, which may introduce bias. Therefore, the impact of the policy cannot be assessed for long-term use.

## **Recommendation**

This study offers more contextual recommendations and adopts a more flexible approach to implementing gender mainstreaming policies and incorporating teacher beliefs in stress management strategies for children with special needs.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

## Declaration of Generative AI-assisted Technologies

This manuscript was prepared with the assistance of Generative AI Grammarly. The AI was used to assist in language refinement. All intellectual contributions, critical analyses, and final revisions were conducted by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented in this work.

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