



## Protecting life: Qur'anic interpretation in kma no. 91/2025 and pesantren child care

Abdul Wahid\*

Universitas  
Annuqayah, Sumenep,  
Indonesia

Fairus Tamamah

Universitas  
Annuqayah, Sumenep,  
Indonesia

Zayyana Hariva

Universitas Cipta  
Wacana, Malang,  
Indonesia

Dwi Ratnasari

Universitas Islam  
Negeri Sunan Kalijaga  
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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### Abstract

The protection of children in faith-based educational institutions has become an increasingly urgent concern in global safeguarding discourse, particularly in contexts where religious authority strongly shapes institutional norms and practices. This study critically investigates the integration of the Qur'anic principle of *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life) within the framework of the Ministry of Religious Affairs Decree (KMA) No. 91/2025 and its implications for strengthening child protection in pesantren. Employing a qualitative normative-interpretive design, the study integrates thematic Qur'anic exegesis with systematic policy analysis through a structured analytical matrix that maps ethical constructs onto policy components. The findings demonstrate that *hifz al-nafs* constitutes a multidimensional safeguarding paradigm encompassing the sanctity of life, prevention of harm, preservation of dignity, ethical responsibility, and institutional accountability, all of which are substantively reflected in the structural design of KMA No. 91/2025. However, the study identifies a critical gap in the absence of explicit theological articulation within the policy, which constrains its normative resonance and limits deep institutional internalization. This study is among the first to operationalize *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* as a dynamic analytical framework for evaluating contemporary policy, thereby bridging the divide between Islamic ethical theory and modern governance. The findings further suggest that effective safeguarding in pesantren requires not only regulatory alignment but also the integration of Qur'anic ethical narratives to foster ethical internalization beyond procedural compliance. Ultimately, this study redefines faith-based child protection by proposing a value-driven policy model that is both culturally embedded and globally relevant, offering a new paradigm for safeguarding in religious educational systems.

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## INTRODUCTION

The protection of children's lives and dignity has emerged as a central concern in contemporary educational and policy discourse, particularly within faith-based institutions where moral authority and pedagogical practices are deeply intertwined. Across Muslim-majority contexts, Islamic boarding schools such as pesantren are widely recognized not only as centers of religious learning but also as key institutions shaping ethical consciousness and social character. These institutions operate at the intersection of tradition, authority, and community trust, making them uniquely positioned to influence the holistic development of children. However, the increasing visibility of child protection issues within educational environments has raised critical questions about how religious values are translated into everyday caregiving practices. Recent global scholarship emphasizes that integrating ethical-religious frameworks into institutional governance enhances both legitimacy and policy effectiveness, particularly in culturally embedded systems (AlQashouti & Shah, 2025; Warisno et al., 2025). Within Islamic intellectual tradition, the principle of *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life) represents a foundational ethical mandate that extends beyond physical safety to encompass dignity, psychological well-being, and social justice. Consequently,

\* Corresponding author:

Abdul Wahid et al, Universitas Annuqayah Sumenep, Indonesia  
[awihasan@gmail.com](mailto:awihasan@gmail.com)

examining how this principle can inform contemporary policy frameworks is both timely and necessary.

Despite the strong normative ideals embedded within Islamic education, empirical evidence suggests a persistent disjunction between ethical principles and institutional realities. Reports from national and international child protection agencies indicate that cases of physical, psychological, and sexual violence continue to occur within educational settings, including religious boarding schools. In Indonesia, recent data highlight a troubling pattern of underreported incidents, often shaped by institutional hierarchies and cultural norms that discourage disclosure (Bruce et al., 2026; Sjoraida, 2025). Similar patterns have been identified in other faith-based education systems, where authority structures and disciplinary traditions may inadvertently normalize coercive practices (Finerfer-Rosenbluh, 2022). These findings suggest that the issue extends beyond individual misconduct, reflecting systemic challenges rooted in governance, accountability, and interpretive frameworks. Furthermore, limited child-centered reporting mechanisms and weak institutional safeguards contribute to the persistence of these problems. As a result, there is an urgent need to critically reassess how ethical doctrines are operationalized within institutional settings. Without such examination, the gap between normative commitments and lived experiences of children is likely to persist.

The urgency of addressing this issue is reinforced by the growing global emphasis on child rights and safeguarding within educational systems. International frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child have established comprehensive standards for protecting children's physical, emotional, and social well-being. These frameworks increasingly influence national education policies, including those in Muslim-majority countries, where the challenge lies in harmonizing universal standards with local religious and cultural values. Studies show that policy interventions are more effective when they are normatively aligned with the belief systems of the communities they serve (Leifeld et al., 2022; Metz et al., 2023). In the context of pesantren, where religious legitimacy plays a decisive role, the integration of Qur'anic ethical principles becomes a critical factor for successful implementation. This highlights the need for an approach that does not merely impose regulatory frameworks but embeds them within the theological and moral fabric of the institution. Therefore, bridging the gap between global child protection standards and Islamic ethical paradigms is not only desirable but essential for sustainable reform.

A significant policy response to these challenges in Indonesia is the issuance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs Decree (KMA) No. 91 of 2025, which outlines a strategic roadmap for developing child-friendly pesantren. This policy represents a shift from reactive measures toward a more structured and preventive approach to child protection within Islamic boarding schools. It emphasizes the creation of safe, inclusive, and non-violent learning environments while promoting institutional accountability and caregiver responsibility. However, the effectiveness of this policy depends not only on its administrative design but also on its normative resonance within pesantren culture. Scholars have argued that policies lacking explicit theological grounding may encounter resistance or superficial compliance in religious institutions (Bamashmoos, 2025). In such contexts, the absence of clearly articulated religious justification may limit internalization and weaken long-term impact. Therefore, a critical question emerges as to whether KMA No. 91/2025 can function as both a regulatory instrument and a morally legitimate framework. Addressing this question requires an analytical lens that integrates policy evaluation with Qur'anic ethical interpretation.

Existing scholarship on child protection in Islamic education has made important contributions by examining institutional practices, governance structures, and pedagogical approaches. Recent studies highlight the importance of child-friendly education models in preventing violence and promoting well-being (Aisyah, 2024; Mangestuti et al., 2022). Other works emphasize the relevance of Islamic ethical concepts such as compassion (rahmah), justice ('adl), and trust (amānah) in shaping caregiving practices (Ali, 2025; Amiri, 2025). Research on pesantren governance further demonstrates that hierarchical authority and patron-client relationships significantly influence caregiving dynamics (Alwi, 2025). In addition, studies grounded in maqāsid al-sharī'ah provide a theoretical basis for understanding the broader objectives of Islamic law, including the protection of life, intellect, and dignity (Norman & Ruhullah, 2024; Wibisono & Roeslan, 2025). While these studies offer valuable insights, they tend to address these dimensions in isolation rather

than integrating them into a cohesive analytical framework. Consequently, the relationship between Qur'anic ethics and policy implementation remains underexplored in a systematic manner.

More critically, existing research exhibits a fragmented methodological orientation, often separating theological interpretation from policy analysis. Studies grounded in Qur'anic exegesis frequently remain at the level of normative discourse without translating ethical principles into operational policy frameworks. Conversely, policy-oriented studies tend to prioritize administrative and institutional analysis while neglecting the role of religious legitimacy as a determinant of implementation success. This dichotomy results in a conceptual gap that limits the effectiveness of both approaches. Furthermore, limited scholarly attention has been given to specific policy instruments such as KMA No. 91/2025, particularly from an integrative Qur'anic perspective. As a result, there is no comprehensive framework that systematically connects *ḥifẓ al-nafs* as a theological construct with actionable policy mechanisms in pesantren contexts. This absence is particularly problematic in environments where religious authority significantly shapes institutional behavior. Therefore, an integrative and interdisciplinary approach is required to bridge this divide and provide a more holistic understanding of child protection in Islamic education.

Responding to these gaps, this study aims to examine the integration of the Qur'anic principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* within the framework of KMA No. 91/2025 and to analyze its implications for strengthening child protection in pesantren. Specifically, the study seeks to reconstruct a thematic understanding of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* and evaluate its alignment with policy directives governing child-friendly pesantren. By combining thematic Qur'anic interpretation with normative policy analysis, this research offers a novel interdisciplinary contribution that bridges theology and governance. Theoretically, it advances the discourse on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* by positioning *ḥifẓ al-nafs* as an operational framework for policy analysis in Islamic education. Practically, it provides actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and pesantren leaders in designing culturally grounded and ethically robust child protection strategies. Ultimately, this study contributes to the development of a value-based model of child safeguarding that is both religiously legitimate and institutionally effective, thereby supporting the transformation of pesantren into safe, dignified, and child-centered educational environments.

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative normative-interpretive research design that integrates thematic Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) with systematic policy analysis to examine the alignment between the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* and the Ministry of Religious Affairs Decree (KMA) No. 91/2025. This design is particularly suitable for addressing research questions that require the reconstruction of ethical-theological concepts and their translation into institutional policy frameworks. Normative analysis enables the exploration of value-laden principles embedded in religious texts, while interpretive policy analysis facilitates a critical evaluation of how these principles are articulated and operationalized within regulatory structures. The integration of these approaches reflects contemporary interdisciplinary methodologies in qualitative research, especially within the fields of religion, education, and governance (Rana et al., 2025).

Although this study does not involve a physical field site, it is contextually situated within Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, particularly pesantren as socio-religious learning environments. The temporal scope of the study focuses on the contemporary policy landscape, specifically the issuance of KMA No. 91/2025 as a recent regulatory intervention addressing child protection. Data collection and analysis were conducted over a six-month period from January to June 2026. This timeframe allowed for iterative cycles of data familiarization, coding, verification, and analytical synthesis, ensuring depth and consistency in interpretation.

The units of analysis in this study consist of textual and documentary sources rather than human participants. Primary data sources include selected Qur'anic verses related to the protection of life, dignity, and prevention of harm, as well as the official document of KMA No. 91/2025. Secondary data sources comprise classical and contemporary *tafsīr* literature, peer-reviewed journal articles, and scholarly works on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, Islamic education, and child protection. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure conceptual relevance and analytical depth (Ahmed, 2025). Inclusion criteria required that sources be authoritative, widely cited, and directly

related to *ḥifẓ al-nafs* or child protection frameworks, while sources lacking scholarly credibility or thematic relevance were excluded. This sampling logic ensures that the analysis is both theoretically grounded and methodologically robust.

Data collection was conducted through a structured document analysis protocol supported by a rigorously developed analytical matrix. This matrix serves as the central research instrument, systematically mapping Qur'anic ethical constructs onto policy components. The matrix operationalizes *ḥifẓ al-nafs* into five analytical dimensions: (1) protection of life, (2) prevention of harm, (3) preservation of dignity, (4) caregiver responsibility, and (5) institutional accountability. Each dimension is associated with specific indicators derived from *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* literature and contemporary child protection frameworks. In parallel, policy components of KMA No. 91/2025 were categorized into objectives, mechanisms, governance structures, and implementation strategies. This dual-structure matrix enables a systematic comparison between normative ethical principles and policy provisions, thereby enhancing analytical precision (Ahmed, 2025; Huang, 2026).

To ensure methodological rigor, this study employs a transparent and replicable coding procedure. Data analysis follows a multi-stage coding process consisting of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Biswas, 2026; Tousei et al., 2025). In the open coding phase, key concepts related to *ḥifẓ al-nafs* and child protection were identified directly from the texts. During axial coding, relationships between categories were established, linking Qur'anic ethical constructs with corresponding policy elements. In the selective coding phase, core themes were synthesized to construct an integrated analytical framework. Coding categories were explicitly operationalized, including "violence prevention," "psychological safeguarding," "dignity protection," "ethical authority," and "institutional responsibility," ensuring that abstract concepts were translated into analyzable units. All coding procedures were systematically documented to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

Analytical validity and reliability were strengthened through multiple strategies aligned with qualitative research standards. Content validity was established through engagement with authoritative *tafsīr* sources and widely accepted interpretations within Islamic scholarship. Construct validity was ensured by grounding analytical categories in established *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* frameworks. To enhance credibility and reduce interpretive bias, iterative cross-checking and peer debriefing were conducted throughout the analytical process. Additionally, an audit trail was maintained to document coding decisions, category development, and interpretive reasoning. These procedures align with established criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transparency (Saber, 2024; Tousei et al., 2025).

The data analysis integrates thematic analysis with normative-hermeneutic interpretation. Qur'anic texts were analyzed using a thematic exegesis approach that emphasizes contextual meaning, intertextual relationships, and ethical implications. Policy texts were examined through qualitative content analysis to identify explicit and implicit normative dimensions. The analytical process follows a comparative logic, whereby each policy component is evaluated against corresponding Qur'anic ethical principles using the analytical matrix. This approach enables the identification of alignment, divergence, and normative gaps between theology and policy. Data coding and analysis were conducted manually to preserve interpretive depth, with structured documentation ensuring methodological consistency. The analytical procedures are fully articulated to enable replication in similar studies examining religion-based policy frameworks.

Ethical considerations in this study are primarily related to academic integrity and responsible scholarship, as no human participants were involved. All data were derived from publicly accessible sources, and proper citation practices were rigorously applied to acknowledge original authors. Interpretations of Qur'anic texts were conducted with methodological caution, ensuring fidelity to established *tafsīr* traditions and avoiding reductionist readings. Reflexivity was also maintained throughout the research process to minimize subjective bias in interpreting normative texts. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study ensures both academic credibility and cultural sensitivity.

Overall, the methodological framework employed in this study provides a rigorous, transparent, and replicable approach for analyzing the intersection between Qur'anic ethics and public policy. By explicitly operationalizing *ḥifẓ al-nafs* and systematically mapping it onto policy structures, this study advances an interdisciplinary methodological model that bridges theology and

governance. This approach not only strengthens the analytical depth of the research but also contributes to the development of value-based policy analysis within Islamic educational contexts, thereby enhancing its relevance and applicability in both academic and practical domains.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of this study demonstrate a structured and multi-layered alignment between the Qur'anic principle of *ḥifz al-nafs* and the substantive architecture of KMA No. 91/2025, while simultaneously revealing a critical normative gap in the explicit articulation of theological foundations within the policy framework. Through the integration of thematic exegesis and systematic policy analysis, the findings indicate that the protection of life, as conceptualized in the Qur'an, operates as a comprehensive ethical system encompassing physical safety, psychological well-being, preservation of dignity, ethical governance of authority, and institutional accountability. These dimensions are not discrete components but function as an interconnected normative structure that governs both individual conduct and institutional responsibility within hierarchical educational environments such as pesantren.

The thematic reconstruction of *ḥifz al-nafs* reveals a layered ethical architecture characterized by progressive levels of protection. At the foundational level, the sanctity of life establishes a categorical prohibition against all forms of violence, forming the ethical baseline of human interaction. This is reinforced by a preventive orientation that prioritizes the elimination of harm before it occurs, thereby shifting the logic of protection from reactive to anticipatory safeguarding. At a deeper level, the preservation of dignity extends the scope of protection beyond physical integrity to include psychological and symbolic dimensions, effectively delegitimizing practices that involve humiliation, coercion, or fear-based discipline. The framework further introduces a relational-ethical dimension through the concept of *amānah*, which constrains the exercise of authority by defining caregiving as a moral obligation rather than an instrument of control. Finally, the principle of continuity establishes that the protection of life must be institutionalized through sustained systems rather than implemented as ad hoc or situational responses.

These findings are systematically synthesized in Table 1, which operationalizes the Qur'anic ethical structure of *ḥifz al-nafs* into analytically measurable dimensions and their implications for pesantren caregiving practices.

**Table 1.** Thematic Construction of *Ḥifz al-Nafs* and Its Operational Implications for Pesantren Child Care

No	Qur'anic Ethical Dimension	Key Concept	Qur'anic Reference	Analytical Interpretation	Implication for Pesantren
1	Sanctity of Life	Protection of life	QS 5:32	Life is inherently sacred; any unjust harm is ethically prohibited	Establishment of zero-tolerance policies for violence
2	Prevention of Harm	Daf' al-ḍarar	QS 2:195	Ethical priority on preventing harm before occurrence	Elimination of fear-based and punitive discipline
3	Preservation of Dignity	Human honor	QS 49:11	Psychological harm is ethically equivalent to physical harm	Prohibition of bullying and degrading treatment
4	Ethical Responsibility	Guardianship	QS 66:6	Caregivers bear moral accountability for protection	Strengthening supervision and caregiving ethics
5	Trust and Authority	Amānah	QS 8:27	Abuse of authority constitutes moral betrayal	Restriction of coercive and authoritarian practices
6	Continuity of Protection	Sustainability of dignity	QS 17:70	Protection must be systematic and continuous	Institutionalization of safeguarding systems

The analytical synthesis presented in Table 1 confirms that *ḥifẓ al-nafs* operates as a fully integrated ethical system rather than a set of fragmented prescriptions. The interdependence between its dimensions indicates that effective child protection cannot be achieved through partial implementation. Instead, it requires a systemic transformation of both behavioral norms and institutional structures. This finding challenges the persistence of disciplinary practices that rely on coercion, hierarchy, or symbolic violence, demonstrating that such practices are not only pedagogically problematic but also normatively incompatible with Qur'anic ethics.

The second stage of analysis evaluates the extent to which these ethical dimensions are reflected in KMA No. 91/2025. The findings indicate a high level of substantive alignment between the policy framework and the core principles of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*. The policy demonstrates a strong preventive orientation, explicitly prioritizing the elimination of physical, psychological, and sexual violence. It also incorporates dignity-based protections, institutional accountability mechanisms, and a long-term implementation strategy. However, this alignment is primarily structural and implicit rather than explicitly grounded in theological discourse.

This relationship is further elaborated in Table 2, which systematically compares policy components with corresponding Qur'anic ethical principles and evaluates their level of alignment.

**Table 2.** Alignment Between KMA No. 91/2025 and the Qur'anic Principle of *Ḥifẓ al-Nafs*

Policy Component	Policy Directive	Corresponding Ethical Principle	Level of Alignment	Analytical Observation
Program Objective	Safe, inclusive, violence-free environment	Prevention of harm (QS 2:195)	High	Strong normative congruence with preventive ethics
Violence Prevention	Elimination of physical and psychological harm	Sanctity of life (QS 5:32)	High	Direct alignment with core Qur'anic prohibition
Protection of Dignity	Anti-bullying and anti-discrimination measures	Human dignity (QS 49:11)	High	Expands protection into psychological domain
Institutional Governance	SOPs and accountability structures	Collective responsibility (QS 66:6)	Moderate-High	Requires stronger enforcement mechanisms
Caregiver Role	Responsibility for safe caregiving	Trust (QS 8:27)	Moderate	Ethical framing remains implicit
Implementation Strategy	Gradual and sustainable roadmap	Continuous protection (QS 17:70)	High	Reflects long-term safeguarding logic
Theological Integration	Absence of Qur'anic references	—	Low	Critical gap affecting normative legitimacy

The analysis in Table 2 reveals that KMA No. 91/2025 is structurally robust and conceptually aligned with Qur'anic ethical principles, particularly in its preventive and dignity-centered approach. However, the absence of explicit theological articulation represents a critical normative gap. This gap does not undermine the policy's structural validity but significantly affects its interpretive resonance within *pesantren* contexts, where religious legitimacy functions as a primary driver of institutional behavior. As a result, the policy risks being implemented as a compliance-oriented framework rather than internalized as a moral obligation.

A key finding of this study is that substantive alignment without interpretive integration produces limited transformative impact. While the policy successfully incorporates the ethical logic of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* at the structural level, its lack of explicit theological grounding weakens its capacity to reshape deeply embedded cultural and pedagogical practices. This explains why policy effectiveness in religious institutions cannot be evaluated solely based on regulatory design but must also consider normative acceptance and ethical internalization.

Synthesizing the findings across both analytical stages, this study proposes a three-layer conceptual model of integration. The first layer consists of Qur'anic ethical principles that define the normative foundation of life protection. The second layer represents policy translation, where these principles are implicitly embedded within regulatory frameworks. The third layer involves

institutional practice, where the success of implementation depends on the degree of alignment between policy directives and culturally embedded belief systems. The findings indicate that the weakest link in this chain lies in the transition between the second and third layers, where the absence of explicit theological articulation limits policy internalization.

From a theoretical perspective, these results extend the application of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* by demonstrating that *ḥifẓ al-nafs* can function not only as a moral principle but also as an operational framework for policy evaluation. This repositions Islamic ethical concepts from purely normative discourse into actionable analytical tools within governance studies. At the same time, the findings challenge the assumption that policy effectiveness in religious contexts can be achieved through administrative design alone. Instead, they underscore the necessity of integrating ethical legitimacy into policy structures.

Overall, the results establish that *ḥifẓ al-nafs* provides a comprehensive and scalable framework for evaluating and strengthening child protection policies in Islamic educational institutions. The integration of thematic Qur'anic exegesis with policy analysis offers a robust methodological pathway for identifying alignment, diagnosing gaps, and guiding future policy refinement. By bridging the divide between ethical principles and institutional practice, this study contributes to the development of a more coherent and contextually grounded model of child safeguarding in pesantren.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Qur'anic principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* constitutes a multidimensional ethical architecture that extends beyond the conventional notion of physical protection toward a holistic safeguarding paradigm encompassing psychological integrity, dignity preservation, and institutional accountability. This reconceptualization signifies a critical shift from reductive interpretations of child protection toward a systemic ethical framework rooted in *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. While previous studies have acknowledged the centrality of life preservation within Islamic jurisprudence (Norman & Ruhullah, 2024; Wibisono & Roeslan, 2025), they have largely remained confined to normative discourse without operational translation. In contrast, this study advances the literature by demonstrating that *ḥifẓ al-nafs* can function as an actionable analytical framework for evaluating contemporary policy instruments. This finding not only supports but extends *maqāṣid* theory by repositioning it within governance and policy analysis. Moreover, it challenges the prevailing dichotomy between theological abstraction and institutional application, suggesting that ethical principles can be systematically embedded into policy structures. Consequently, the study contributes a novel conceptual bridge between Islamic ethical epistemology and modern safeguarding governance.

A second major finding reveals that both the Qur'anic ethical system and KMA No. 91/2025 converge on a preventive logic of safeguarding, emphasizing the primacy of harm avoidance (*da'f al-ḍarar*) over reactive intervention. This alignment reflects a deeper epistemological convergence between Islamic ethics and contemporary risk-based governance models (Leifeld et al., 2022; Metz et al., 2023). However, unlike modern frameworks that often derive from secular risk management paradigms, the Qur'anic approach embeds prevention within a moral ontology that frames harm avoidance as an ethical imperative rather than a procedural requirement. Empirical studies in child protection consistently demonstrate that preventive models yield more sustainable outcomes than corrective approaches (Aisyah, 2024; Mangestuti et al., 2022), thereby supporting the findings of this study. Nevertheless, this research advances the discourse by arguing that preventive safeguarding in pesantren contexts is more likely to succeed when anchored in religious legitimacy rather than purely administrative enforcement. This position diverges from technocratic policy perspectives that prioritize procedural compliance, suggesting instead that ethical internalization is a critical determinant of effectiveness. Therefore, the integration of preventive logic with theological grounding represents a key innovation in faith-based policy design.

The study further identifies dignity preservation as a central axis of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, thereby expanding the scope of child protection to include psychological and symbolic dimensions of harm. This finding aligns with emerging global scholarship that conceptualizes safeguarding as encompassing emotional well-being and identity protection (Bruce et al., 2026; Sjoraida, 2025). However, it also introduces a critical tension with traditional disciplinary practices in pesantren,

where hierarchical authority and cultural norms may normalize forms of symbolic violence such as humiliation or coercion (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2022; Alwi, 2025). In this regard, the study challenges existing pedagogical assumptions by asserting that such practices are not merely outdated but fundamentally incompatible with Qur'anic ethics. This argument extends beyond previous studies that treat dignity as a supplementary value, positioning it instead as an intrinsic and non-negotiable component of safeguarding. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the failure to address psychological harm may undermine the overall integrity of child protection systems. Thus, this study contributes a critical re-evaluation of disciplinary paradigms within Islamic education, emphasizing the necessity of aligning pedagogical practices with ethical imperatives.

Another significant contribution of this study lies in its reinterpretation of authority through the lens of *amānah*, which reframes caregiving as a moral trust rather than an instrument of control. This finding supports contemporary theories of ethical leadership that emphasize accountability, relational responsibility, and value-based governance (Bamashmoos, 2025). At the same time, it extends these theories by embedding them within a Qur'anic ethical framework, thereby strengthening their normative legitimacy in faith-based contexts. Empirical research has shown that institutions grounded in ethical leadership exhibit higher levels of trust and effectiveness (Warisno et al., 2025; AlQashouti & Shah, 2025). However, this study goes further by demonstrating that the misuse of authority constitutes not only a governance failure but a moral violation within Islamic epistemology. This reinterpretation challenges authoritarian governance models that rely on coercion and hierarchy, advocating instead for a relational and accountable model of leadership. As such, the study contributes to the broader discourse on institutional reform by proposing a value-based framework for redefining authority in educational settings.

A critical insight emerging from this study is the identification of a normative gap in KMA No. 91/2025, particularly the absence of explicit theological articulation despite strong structural alignment with *hiḏf al-nafs*. While the policy demonstrates high congruence in its preventive, dignity-centered, and accountability-oriented components, its lack of Qur'anic grounding limits its interpretive resonance within *pesantren* environments. This finding corroborates prior research indicating that policy effectiveness in religious institutions is contingent upon normative legitimacy and cultural alignment (Bamashmoos, 2025; Metz et al., 2023). However, this study advances the debate by providing empirical evidence that structural alignment alone is insufficient to ensure transformative impact. In contrast to policy models that assume rational compliance, the findings suggest that internalization is mediated by theological relevance. This creates a paradox wherein a structurally robust policy may yield suboptimal outcomes due to weak normative integration. Therefore, the study highlights the necessity of embedding explicit religious narratives within policy frameworks to enhance both acceptance and sustainability.

Building on this, the study proposes that the relationship between ethics, policy, and practice operates within a three-layered integration model, where the transition from policy translation to institutional implementation constitutes the most critical point of failure. This finding aligns with implementation theory, which emphasizes the role of contextual and cultural variables in shaping policy outcomes (Rana et al., 2025; Ahmed, 2025). However, this research introduces a novel dimension by identifying theological articulation as a key mediating variable within this process. Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on administrative or structural factors, this study demonstrates that religious legitimacy plays a decisive role in determining whether policies are internalized or merely complied with. This insight significantly expands the theoretical understanding of policy implementation in faith-based settings. Furthermore, it suggests that future research should move beyond binary evaluations of policy success toward more nuanced analyses of normative integration. As such, the study contributes a new analytical lens for examining the interplay between belief systems and governance structures.

From a broader theoretical perspective, this study advances the field by repositioning *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as a dynamic and operational framework for contemporary policy analysis. While previous scholarship has predominantly treated *maqāṣid* as a normative guideline, this research demonstrates its applicability as an evaluative and design-oriented tool in governance contexts (Tousi et al., 2025; Biswas, 2026). This represents a significant conceptual innovation, as it bridges the gap between Islamic jurisprudence and modern policy studies. Moreover, the study challenges the assumption that religious and secular frameworks are inherently incompatible, showing instead

that they can be integrated into a coherent and mutually reinforcing system. This positions the research within the global discourse on faith-based governance, where the integration of ethical values into policy design is increasingly recognized as a critical factor for sustainability. Consequently, the study not only contributes to Islamic education research but also offers broader implications for policy development in culturally embedded institutional contexts.

Finally, this study situates its contribution within the global landscape of child protection and educational reform, emphasizing the importance of context-sensitive and value-based approaches. While international frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child provide universal standards, their effectiveness in faith-based contexts depends on their alignment with local belief systems. This study demonstrates that Qur'anic ethics, particularly *ḥifz al-nafs*, offer a robust and culturally resonant foundation for such alignment. In doing so, it addresses a critical gap in the literature, where religious and secular approaches are often treated as separate or even conflicting paradigms. By integrating these perspectives, the study provides a new conceptual model for safeguarding that is both normatively grounded and institutionally applicable. Ultimately, the findings underscore that sustainable child protection requires not only regulatory reform but also ethical transformation, thereby offering a comprehensive framework for advancing safeguarding practices in Islamic educational institutions

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Qur'anic principle of *ḥifz al-nafs* constitutes a comprehensive and operational ethical framework capable of systematically strengthening child protection within Islamic educational institutions, particularly *pesantren*. By integrating thematic Qur'anic exegesis with policy analysis, the findings reveal a high degree of substantive alignment between the multidimensional constructs of life protection—encompassing physical safety, psychological integrity, dignity preservation, ethical responsibility, and institutional accountability—and the structural architecture of KMA No. 91/2025. However, the study critically identifies a fundamental limitation in the policy's design, namely the absence of explicit theological articulation, which constrains its normative resonance and weakens its potential for deep institutional internalization. This finding advances the literature by demonstrating that policy effectiveness in faith-based contexts is not determined solely by structural coherence, but is significantly mediated by ethical legitimacy and cultural embeddedness. In doing so, this study is among the first to operationalize *ḥifz al-nafs* as a dynamic evaluative framework that bridges Islamic ethical theory and contemporary governance analysis. This reconceptualization extends *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* beyond its traditional normative scope, positioning it as a functional instrument for policy design, evaluation, and transformation in religiously grounded institutions.

From a broader perspective, the study offers critical implications for both theory and practice in the global discourse on child protection and faith-based education governance. It demonstrates that effective safeguarding systems in culturally embedded contexts require not only regulatory alignment with international standards but also the integration of locally grounded ethical narratives that enable internalization rather than mere compliance. The findings suggest that policies lacking theological anchoring risk remaining procedurally implemented but normatively disengaged, thereby limiting their transformative capacity. Consequently, policymakers and institutional leaders must move beyond technocratic approaches and adopt value-based strategies that embed ethical legitimacy into institutional culture, training, and governance mechanisms. While the study is limited by its reliance on normative and textual analysis without direct empirical observation of implementation practices, it opens important avenues for future research to examine the dynamics of policy internalization across diverse *pesantren* settings using comparative and longitudinal approaches. Taken together, these findings suggest that sustainable child protection in faith-based institutions is not merely a function of policy design, but a process of ethical

transformation that aligns governance structures with deeply rooted moral epistemologies. Ultimately, this study contributes a new conceptual pathway for integrating religious ethics and modern policy frameworks, offering a globally relevant model for advancing safeguarding practices in educational systems where belief, authority, and institutional life are profoundly interconnected.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Abdul Wahid conceptualized the study, developed the research framework, and led the overall writing and supervision of the manuscript. Fairus Tamamah contributed to the development of the theoretical foundation, conducted the thematic Qur'anic analysis, and assisted in manuscript drafting. Zayyana Hariva was responsible for data collection, document analysis, and the coding process, as well as contributing to the interpretation of findings. Dwi Ratnasari contributed to policy analysis, critical revision of the manuscript, and refinement of the discussion and conclusion sections. All authors reviewed, approved, and agreed to the final version of the manuscript.

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