

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ISLAMIC COUNSELLING IN MALAYSIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

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(Received 29th March 2025; revised 10th July 2025; accepted 19th July 2025)

Abstract. Islamic counselling plays a pivotal role in supporting the psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being of Muslims in Malaysia. While Artificial Intelligence (AI) introduces numerous innovative possibilities, its integration within Islamic counselling presents significant hurdles, particularly in aligning such technologies with Shariah principles. Although AI has shown great potential in enhancing accessibility and efficiency across many sectors, including counselling, its application in Islamic contexts necessitates careful attention to ethical standards, data confidentiality and religious compliance. The absence of standardized frameworks has led to inconsistent implementation and increased doubt among practitioners. Moreover, current AI systems are not yet equipped to grasp the nuanced spiritual and contextual needs of Islamic counselling. This study adopts a qualitative methodology, combining literature reviews and practitioner interviews, to explore the challenges and opportunities in embedding AI within Islamic counselling practices. The research reveals key issues such as the lack of unified guidelines, inadequate AI training for counsellors, and the scarcity of Islamic-oriented datasets. Nevertheless, stakeholders acknowledge AI's potential to broaden counselling outreach, especially in remote communities. For AI to support rather than replace traditional Islamic counselling, the development of Shariah-compliant systems, targeted training initiatives, and collaborative efforts among technologists and religious scholars are crucial. These measures will ensure the continuity of spiritually grounded, ethically sound counselling services in an increasingly digital world.

Keywords: *Islamic counselling, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Shariah ethics, digital mental health, AI integration religious practice*

Introduction

Islamic counselling in Malaysia is gaining importance as a culturally relevant approach to mental health care. It integrates Islamic principles with counselling services, addressing the diverse sociocultural and religious landscape of the country (Karim et al., 2024). Rooted in Islamic traditions of providing assistance, counselling has evolved from *nasihah* to a professional service (Zainab et al., 2014). The multicultural nature of Malaysia necessitates culturally competent counsellors and local approaches tailored to the country's traditions (Ayob et al., 2021). Islamic counselling plays a vital role in educational institutions, focusing on moral and personality development (Abdurrahman, 2019; Sartika, 2019). Counsellors' cultural identities, shaped by factors such as religious beliefs and values, influence the effectiveness of multicultural counselling (Ying et al., 2021). Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative technology across various fields, mimicking human cognitive abilities and enhancing performance in numerous industries (Tandalaskar et al., 2024; Pannu, 2015). AI applications have significantly impacted healthcare, banking, education, agriculture, manufacturing and service systems (Adithiyaa and Alamelu, 2024; Pannu,

2015). The technology has improved efficiency and quality in areas such as medical image classification, network intrusion detection and power system oscillation damping (Pannu, 2015). AI's rapid progress has led to the development of expert systems, solving complex problems in science, engineering and business (Mittal and Sharma, 2021; Aggarwal, 2019). Despite its benefits, AI faces challenges including algorithm development, data security and privacy concerns (Adithiyaa and Alamelu, 2024). As AI continues to evolve, it is expected to replace or enhance human capabilities in many areas, revolutionizing industries and daily life (Prasad and Choudhary, 2021; Jha et al., 2020; Shivale, 2018).

The integration of AI into Islamic counselling and related fields presents both opportunities and challenges. AI can enhance the reach and personalization of Islamic Da'wah efforts (Marlina and Ulya, 2024) and improve mental health counselling accessibility (Khan and Shaikh, 2024). In counselling, AI can be implemented at various levels, from augmenting practice to influencing public policy (Fulmer, 2019). However, ethical concerns regarding AI accuracy, privacy, and adherence to Islamic values must be addressed (Hemmet, 2023; Nawi et al., 2023). AI can assist in areas such as Qur'anic studies, Islamic finance and zakat distribution (Hemmet, 2023). While AI offers benefits in guidance and counselling, it can't replace human expertise in Islamic jurisprudence (Putri et al., 2024). Islamic counselling adds a spiritual dimension to integrative approaches (Inayat, 2001), and Islamic ethics can contribute to pluralist ethical benchmarking for AI (Elmahjub, 2023). Incorporating AI into Islamic counselling requires careful attention to ethical standards, robust data protection, and consistent adherence to Shariah principles to preserve the essence of faith-oriented services. The lack of standardized frameworks has led to variability in practice and increased uncertainty among stakeholders. Additionally, existing AI technologies often lack the cultural and religious sensitivity needed to address the distinctive needs of Islamic counselling. As such, this study explores these issues and offers practical recommendations for integrating AI in a manner that aligns with Shariah-compliant values.

Literature review

Historical development of Islamic counselling in Malaysia

The development of Islamic counselling in Malaysia has its roots in the country's colonial history and cultural diversity. Counselling services were introduced in Malaysian schools in the early 1960s, initially focusing on career guidance (Atan, 2013). The profession has evolved from its educational origins to encompass broader mental health services (Glamcevski, 2008). Islamic counselling, known as *nasihah*, has existed since the time of Prophet Muhammad SAW and was formalized during Saiyidina Umar al-Khattab's era (Zainab et al., 2014). The integration of Islamic principles into counselling faces challenges due to Malaysia's diverse sociocultural landscape (Karim et al., 2024). The development of counselling in Malaysia has been influenced by Western models, particularly from the United States, but has been adapted to suit local cultural characteristics (See and Ng, 2010; Pope et al., 2002). Recent efforts focus on developing multicultural counselling competencies and local approaches that incorporate religious perspectives, especially Islamic ones (Ayob et al., 2021).

Advancement in AI and its application in mental health and counselling

AI is revolutionizing mental healthcare, offering promising applications in early detection, prevention, and treatment of mental illnesses (Olawade et al., 2024; Shimada, 2023). AI technologies, including machine learning algorithms and chatbots, can analyse vast amounts of data to identify patterns associated with mental health disorders and provide personalized interventions (Shimada, 2023; Luxton, 2014). These advancements enhance clinical decision-making, psychological assessment, and treatment planning (Khan and Shaikh, 2024; Luxton, 2014). AI-assisted counselling interventions have shown positive outcomes and user acceptance (Khan and Shaikh, 2024). However, ethical considerations, including privacy concerns, bias mitigation and data security, must be addressed (He, 2024; Olawade et al., 2024). The integration of AI in mental healthcare has the potential to improve accessibility, efficiency, and effectiveness of mental health services (Luxton, 2020; Graham et al., 2019). Despite its promise, caution is necessary to avoid over-interpreting preliminary results, and further research is needed to bridge the gap between AI research and clinical practice (Graham et al., 2019).

The intersection of AI and Islamic principles in counselling practices

Recent research explores the intersection of AI and Islamic principles in counselling practices. AI technologies are being integrated with Islamic values to enhance mental health support and streamline financial transactions in Muslim-majority countries (Khan and Shaikh, 2024; Hemmet, 2023). Islamic counselling emphasizes understanding human nature, guiding individuals to their innate nature (fitrah), and utilizing the Quran and Sunnah as primary sources (Abas et al., 2024). Counsellors are incorporating Islamic elements into Western counselling processes (Abas et al., 2024) and adhering to principles such as providing advice in good words, treating heart diseases, directing clients to the right path and internalizing values of compassion (Zumrodi, 2021). Islamic counselling can also help reduce psychological distress during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Suud et al., 2020). However, challenges remain in representing Islamic values in AI semantics (Ziaee, 2012) and addressing ethical concerns (Elmahjub, 2023).

Challenges in aligning AI with Islamic counselling practices

The integration of AI in Islamic education and counselling presents both opportunities and challenges. AI can enhance the reach and personalization of Islamic teachings, improve curriculum development, and optimize Qur'an and Hadith learning (Achruh et al., 2024; Afif and Nawawi, 2024; Marlina and Ulya, 2024; Irsyad and Zakir, 2023). However, ethical concerns arise regarding data privacy, algorithmic bias and the potential for misinformation (Insana and Satriah, 2024; Hakim and Anggraini, 2023). The digital divide and the need to align AI with Islamic values pose significant challenges (Achruh et al., 2024; Firinci, 2024). Researchers emphasize the importance of collaboration between AI experts and Islamic scholars to ensure AI-driven initiatives respect Islamic principles (Marlina and Ulya, 2024; Ziaee, 2012). A balanced approach that preserves traditional Islamic teachings while leveraging AI's benefits is crucial for successful integration in Islamic education and counselling practices (Achruh et al., 2024; Hakim and Anggraini, 2023). The integration of AI into Islamic counselling faces challenges in aligning technology with Islamic principles. Key issues include the absence of Shariah-compliant frameworks, ethical concerns and data privacy risks. Lack of clear guidelines has led to inconsistent practices and scepticism among stakeholders.

Current AI systems struggle with contextual understanding, limiting their ability to meet the unique needs of Muslim clients. A comprehensive framework is needed to ensure AI enhances Islamic counselling while upholding its spiritual and ethical values.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the integration of AI into Islamic counselling in Malaysia. The qualitative method is ideal for examining the interplay between technology and faith-based practices, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social, ethical and cultural issues that can't be quantified. The methodology focuses on collecting and analyzing data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with AI in Islamic counselling. The study employs two primary methods of data collection: a systematic literature review and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The literature review provides the theoretical foundation for the research. It involves a comprehensive analysis of scholarly articles, books and reports related to Islamic counselling, AI applications in mental health and ethical considerations in technology adoption. This review draws on academic journals, institutional publications and conference proceedings to identify global and local trends in AI integration as well as the alignment of AI technologies with Shariah principles. The second method, semi-structured interviews, was conducted with a purposive sample of participants, including Islamic counsellors, AI developers, religious scholars, and policy-makers. These interviews were designed to capture diverse perspectives and practical insights on integrating AI into Islamic counselling. Interview topics included the current practices and challenges in Islamic counselling, the perceived role and potential of AI, ethical concerns regarding Shariah compliance, and recommendations for effective implementation. Interviews were conducted online, recorded with the consent of participants, and subsequently transcribed for analysis. This method allowed the study to gather rich, qualitative data directly from practitioners and experts in the field. *Table 1* is a list of informants involved in the study through semi-structured interviews.

Table 1. List of informants.

No.	Informants	Roles	Institutions
1.	Informant 1	Islamic Counsellor	Islamic Religious Department
2.	Informant 2	Senior Counsellor	Private Islamic Counselling Centre
3.	Informant 3	Religious Scholar	State Islamic Authority
4.	Informant 4	Imam and Community Advisor	Local Mosque
5.	Informant 5	AI Developer	AI Software Development Company
6.	Informant 6	Senior Data Scientist	Technology Consulting Firm
7.	Informant 7	Policy Maker	Ministry of Religious Affairs

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. Initially, the transcribed interviews and reviewed literature were systematically coded to capture key points related to ethical concerns, data privacy, Shariah compliance and AI's practical challenges. Software tools, ATLAS.ti were employed to manage and organize the coding process efficiently. Following the coding phase, themes were categorized to highlight areas of convergence and divergence between the theoretical literature and real-world insights from stakeholders. Cross-analysis was performed to triangulate the data, ensuring the validity and reliability of findings. Themes were then interpreted within the context of Islamic counselling

practices, providing a nuanced understanding of the interaction between AI technology and Islamic principles.

Results and Discussion

Challenges identified

Lack of unified guidelines and framework

The absence of standardized guidelines for integrating AI into Islamic counselling is a significant challenge. This gap has led to inconsistent practices and skepticisms among stakeholders, as highlighted by informant and supported by literature. Karim et al. (2024) noted that the integration of Islamic principles into counselling faces challenges due to Malaysia's diverse sociocultural landscape, further complicating efforts to develop unified frameworks. Informant 7 echoed this concern:

“Without standardized guidelines, AI applications in Islamic counselling may lack coherence, resulting in ethical and spiritual compromises.”

(Informant 7)

Similarly, Marlina and Ulya (2024) emphasized the importance of collaboration between AI experts and Islamic scholars to ensure AI-driven initiatives align with Shariah principles.

Insufficient training for counsellors on AI tools

A lack of technical skills among counsellors to effectively utilize AI tools is another key barrier. Informant 1 stated:

“Most of us have limited knowledge of AI and how to integrate it into our practice while maintaining an Islamic approach.”

(Informant 1)

This aligns with findings from Tandalaskar et al. (2024), who observed that the rapid adoption of AI technologies across industries requires tailored training programs to bridge knowledge gaps. Ayob et al. (2021) further emphasized the need for culturally competent counsellors in Malaysia, suggesting that training must also address the unique cultural and spiritual dimensions of Islamic counselling.

Limited datasets reflecting Islamic values

The lack of relevant datasets rooted in Islamic values and contexts restricts AI's ability to address the specific needs of Muslim clients. Informant 5 remarked:

“AI systems are only as effective as the data they are trained on. Without datasets that reflect Islamic teachings, their applications will remain generic and less impactful.”

(Informant 5)

This challenge is also reflected in the literature, with Ziaee (2012) noting difficulties in representing Islamic values in AI semantics, and Elmahjub (2023) emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations in developing AI datasets.

Opportunities for AI integration

Despite these challenges, the integration of AI offers significant opportunities to enhance Islamic counselling. AI can improve accessibility to counselling services, particularly in underserved areas. Informant 4 highlighted this potential:

“AI can serve as a bridge to reach individuals in remote areas who lack access to trained counsellors.”

(Informant 4)

This is consistent with research by Khan and Shaikh (2024), who demonstrated that AI-assisted counselling interventions have shown positive outcomes and user acceptance. AI also offers opportunities for personalized support, as it can analyse large datasets to provide tailored advice and interventions, as suggested by Shimada (2023). Furthermore, AI’s potential in streamlining administrative tasks and supporting counsellors in decision-making could enhance overall efficiency, allowing counsellors to focus more on the spiritual and relational aspects of their work.

Stakeholder perspectives on AI integration

Stakeholders expressed optimism about the potential of AI but also voiced concerns about maintaining the spiritual integrity of Islamic counselling. Informant 3 remarked:

“Technology must complement human interaction, not replace it. The spiritual and emotional connection in Islamic counselling cannot be replicated by AI.”

(Informant 3)

This perspective aligns with findings by Putri et al. (2024), who argued that while AI can support Islamic practices, it can’t replace human expertise in understanding the complexities of Islamic jurisprudence and counselling.

Proposed strategies for integration

Development of Shariah-compliant frameworks

The need for a comprehensive framework to guide AI integration in Islamic counselling is essential. This framework should incorporate Islamic principles, address ethical concerns, and ensure data privacy. Marlina & Ulya (2024) stressed that collaboration between Islamic scholars and AI experts is crucial to achieve this alignment. Informant 7 suggested:

“A Shariah-compliant framework would provide clarity and consistency, ensuring that AI applications respect Islamic values while meeting practical needs.”

(Informant 7)

Implementation of training program

Tailored training programs for counsellors are vital to equip them with the skills to use AI effectively while maintaining the spiritual essence of their work. Informant 2 recommended:

“Training should focus on integrating AI tools with counselling practices and include ethical considerations rooted in Islamic teachings.”

(Informant 2)

This is supported by Adithiyaa and Alamelu (2024), who noted that training programs are key to bridging the gap between AI adoption and practical implementation.

Collaboration between key stakeholder

Effective integration requires collaboration among AI developers, Islamic scholars, and counselling practitioners. This collaborative approach ensures that AI tools are not only technologically advanced but also culturally and spiritually relevant. Informant 6 emphasized:

“Partnerships are necessary to ensure that AI solutions are both innovative and aligned with the needs and values of Muslim communities.”

(Informant 6)

Addressing ethical concerns and ensuring data privacy

Establishing ethical guidelines to protect client data and maintain confidentiality is critical. Informant 5 remarked:

“Strict measures must be in place to ensure data security and prevent misuse, aligning with both Islamic ethics and global privacy standards.”

(Informant 5)

Olawade et al. (2024) also highlighted the importance of addressing privacy concerns in AI applications to build trust among users. The integration of AI into Islamic counselling offers transformative potential but requires addressing key challenges, such as the absence of unified frameworks, insufficient training and limited datasets. By developing Shariah-compliant guidelines, implementing tailored training programs and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, AI can enhance the accessibility and efficiency of Islamic counselling. These measures ensure that AI supports, rather than replaces, the spiritual and relational essence of Islamic counselling, maintaining its integrity in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Proposed framework for integration

Integrating AI into Islamic counselling offers an opportunity to modernize counselling practices while maintaining their spiritual and ethical foundations. However, this integration requires deliberate strategies to address challenges and leverage opportunities. The following sections outline the proposed strategies for effective and Shariah-compliant integration of AI into Islamic counselling.

Development of Shariah-compliant framework for AI use in Islamic counselling

The foundation for integrating AI into Islamic counselling lies in the creation of a comprehensive Shariah-compliant framework. This framework should be developed collaboratively by Islamic scholars, AI experts, policymakers and counselling practitioners. It must outline ethical principles grounded in Islamic values such as compassion (rahmah), justice ('adl), and transparency (amanah), ensuring that AI applications align with the spiritual and moral dimensions of counselling. The framework should also define specific use cases for AI, such as client assessments, administrative tasks, and supplementary resources, while preserving the human-centric nature of counselling. Additionally, regulatory oversight by bodies such as JAKIM can provide consistent monitoring and enforcement, ensuring that AI tools are implemented responsibly. A well-defined framework will enhance credibility, address stakeholder concerns, and establish AI as a trusted tool in Islamic counselling.

Implementation of training programs for counsellors in AI tools and technologies

Effective AI integration requires Islamic counsellors to be equipped with the necessary skills to use these technologies. Structured training programs should focus on technical aspects of AI, ethical considerations, and their application within an Islamic context. These programs must cater to varying levels of technical expertise among counsellors, ensuring accessibility for all. Training delivery methods, including workshops, online modules, and practical sessions, should provide counsellors with hands-on experience while fostering confidence in using AI tools. Continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives should also be introduced to keep counsellors updated on advancements in AI technologies. By empowering counsellors with these skills, training programs ensure that AI tools are integrated seamlessly into counselling practices without compromising their spiritual essence.

Collaboration between AI developers, Islamic scholars and counselling practitioners

Collaboration between key stakeholders is essential for the successful integration of AI into Islamic counselling. AI developers, Islamic scholars and counselling practitioners must work together to co-develop tools that reflect Islamic values and meet the specific needs of Muslim clients. Multidisciplinary teams can oversee the design, implementation and evaluation of AI systems to ensure cultural and spiritual relevance. Community engagement through pilot testing and feedback collection can further refine these tools, enhancing their acceptance and usability. Regular forums, seminars and conferences should be organized to facilitate knowledge exchange among stakeholders, promoting innovative solutions while preserving the core values of Islamic counselling. This collaborative approach ensures that AI is not developed in isolation but as a tool that is both technologically advanced and spiritually grounded.

Addressing ethical concerns and ensuring data privacy

The ethical use of AI in Islamic counselling is paramount, particularly in safeguarding the confidentiality and trust inherent in counselling relationships. Robust data protection protocols, such as encryption and anonymization, must be implemented to prevent unauthorized access and misuse of sensitive client information. Clear ethical guidelines should be established to ensure AI applications uphold fairness, transparency

and informed consent. Addressing algorithmic biases is also critical to avoid discriminatory practices and ensure accurate representation of Islamic values. Compliance with Malaysia’s Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) and additional Shariah-based considerations will further strengthen the ethical framework for AI use. By addressing these concerns, this strategy ensures that AI tools are used responsibly, maintaining the integrity and credibility of Islamic counselling. *Figure 1* illustrates the proposed Shariah-compliant framework for AI Use in Islamic counselling. The integration of AI into Islamic counselling requires a multifaceted approach to address challenges and maximize its potential benefits. Developing Shariah-compliant framework, implementing targeted training programs, fostering collaboration among stakeholders and addressing ethical and privacy concerns are critical steps in this process. These strategies ensure that AI serves as a complementary tool that enhances, rather than replaces, the human and spiritual dimensions of Islamic counselling, enabling it to remain a relevant and impactful practice in Malaysia’s evolving mental health landscape.

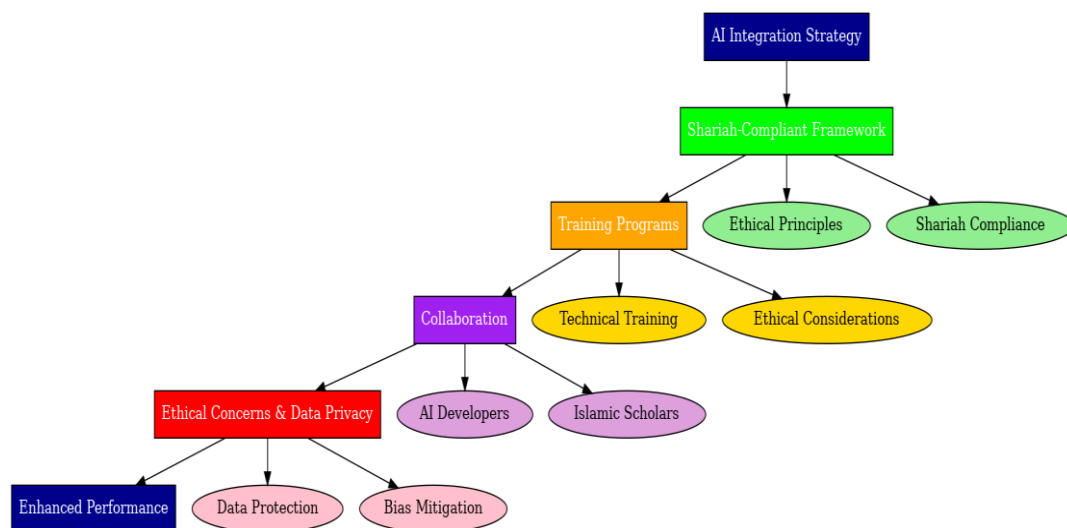


Figure 1. Proposed Shariah-Compliant framework for AI use in Islamic counselling.

Conclusion

This study highlights the transformative potential of AI in Islamic counselling while emphasizing the need to address several challenges to ensure its effective integration. Key findings reveal the importance of developing Shariah-compliant frameworks, implementing tailored training programs for counsellors, fostering collaboration among stakeholders and addressing ethical concerns such as data privacy and algorithmic biases. These measures are essential to preserve the spiritual and ethical integrity of Islamic counselling practices. The integration of AI into Islamic counselling requires a balanced approach that leverages technological advancements without compromising the human and spiritual dimensions central to this practice. AI can expand accessibility, improve efficiency, and support counsellors in administrative and decision-making tasks, but it must remain a complementary tool that enhances, rather than replaces, the counsellor-client relationship. Future research should focus on developing culturally and spiritually relevant AI datasets, exploring new technologies that align with Islamic principles, and evaluating the long-term impact of AI integration on counselling

outcomes. By addressing these areas, stakeholders can ensure that AI not only modernizes Islamic counselling but also upholds its foundational values in an evolving technological landscape.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to all individuals and institutions who contributed directly to the completion of this research. This research is entirely self-funded, with no external financial assistance received from any funding body, institution or organization.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest associated with any parties involved in this research.

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