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INTEGRATION OF ACADEMIC AND ISLAMIC CURRICULA IN SHAPING STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS CHARACTER AT AN INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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Abstract

The moral crisis among young people has made the integration of academic and Islamic curricula an important strategy for shaping students' religious character, especially in boarding school settings. This study aims to examine how such curricular integration is designed, implemented, and evaluated collaboratively at International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Al-Maahira. The study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method through interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings show that integration is carried out systemically through joint planning, learning practices that contain Islamic values, structured non-academic activities, and the school environment as a hidden curriculum. In conclusion, a holistically designed integrated curriculum makes a real contribution to the formation of students' religious character. The implications of these findings encourage the development of Islamic education curricula that are integrated conceptually and operationally in modern pesantren-based educational institutions.
Keywords: curriculum integration, Islamic education, religious character, boarding school.

Abstrak

Krisis moral di kalangan anak muda telah menjadikan integrasi kurikulum akademik dan Islam sebagai strategi penting untuk membentuk karakter religius siswa, terutama di lingkungan pesantren. Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti bagaimana integrasi kurikulum tersebut dirancang, diimplementasikan, dan dievaluasi secara kolaboratif di International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Al-

Maahira. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa integrasi dilakukan secara sistematis melalui perencanaan bersama, praktik pembelajaran yang mengandung nilai-nilai Islam, kegiatan non-akademik terstruktur, dan lingkungan sekolah sebagai kurikulum tersembunyi. Kesimpulannya, kurikulum terintegrasi yang dirancang secara holistik memberikan kontribusi nyata terhadap pembentukan karakter religius siswa. Implikasi dari temuan ini mendorong pengembangan kurikulum pendidikan Islam yang terintegrasi secara konseptual dan operasional di lembaga pendidikan berbasis pesantren modern.
Kata kunci: integrasi kurikulum, pendidikan Islam, karakter religius, pesantren.

A. INTRODUCTION.

The world of education is facing a serious challenge in the form of a moral crisis and the degradation of students' character, even in religion-based institutions. This phenomenon occurs alongside the rapid flow of globalization, secularization, and technological development, which often erode the spiritual values and social ethics of the younger generation. On the other hand, Islamic education is expected not only to produce knowledgeable individuals, but also to shape learners with strong religious character (Thomas Lickona, 1991). Therefore, the integration of academic and Islamic curricula has become an important issue because it can bridge the gap between academic achievement and the formation of students' spiritual values (Robin and Brian, 2009). In this context, the International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) offers a unique model that combines a modern education system with Islamic values, making it highly relevant for both academic and practical study (Ikhsan, 2021).

Previous studies have discussed the integration of Islamic values in learning and the importance of character education in Islamic schools. However, most of them still focus on religious activities or partial implementation in the learning process. These studies have not sufficiently addressed the strategic aspect of curriculum as a system that unites planning, implementation, and evaluation in an integrated manner. In addition, the involvement of multiple actors, such as general-subject teachers, religious teachers, and dormitory mentors, in the curriculum integration process has rarely been examined in depth. Another weakness lies in the lack of clear indicators for systematically measuring students' religious character outcomes. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by examining curriculum integration holistically, both from managerial and practical perspectives, in the context of modern boarding school-based Islamic education (Anna, 2025).

The literature map shows that many studies have examined the integration of academic and Islamic curricula in shaping students' religious character. However, most of them focus on normative and implementative aspects in Islamic schools or pesantren. Some studies emphasize the role of religious activities and

the boarding environment in character formation, but they have not systematically discussed the role of curriculum as an instrument of educational management. The tendency of previous research can be grouped into two categories: (1) studies that highlight the partial practice of value-based learning, and (2) evaluative studies on curriculum effectiveness without emphasizing integration among components. This study fills that gap through a holistic and integrative approach, focusing on the synergy between curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation as a strategy for shaping religious character.

Previous studies on curriculum integration and the formation of religious character tend to have a normative and practical thematic orientation. Many of these studies emphasize the importance of Islamic values in the education system, but they are largely descriptive and focus on the implementation of religious activities or the pattern of students' lives in pesantren. Several studies use a qualitative approach, but they are limited to describing activities or teachers' practices in delivering religious material without conducting an in-depth analysis of the curriculum system as an integrated whole. Meanwhile, studies such as Agustina (2025) and several studies on boarding schools have begun to discuss curriculum, but mainly as an evaluation of the implementation of distinctive school curricula or integration at the level of teaching materials, rather than as a comprehensive curriculum management strategy.

In addition, the writing style in previous studies generally presents Islamic education concepts such as ta'dib, tarbiyah, and akhlaq, but does not explicitly connect them with formal curriculum design and the measurement of students' character. Studies also tend to be micro in scope, with the unit of analysis limited to one aspect, such as Islamic Education teachers or student activity programs, without examining the relationship among educational structures. The approaches used are generally descriptive qualitative and are not strongly supported by triangulation or in-depth thematic analysis. Therefore, this study offers a new approach that is more systemic, thematic, and managerial in examining curriculum integration as a strategy for shaping religious character, while also enriching existing research models and approaches.

Although previous studies have made important contributions to understanding the practice of religious character education in Islamic schools and pesantren, most still have limitations in examining curriculum integration systemically and strategically. These studies generally have not considered how curriculum design, from planning and implementation to evaluation, is orchestrated as an instrument of character education management. In addition, only a limited number of studies have explored the involvement of multiple actors, such as collaboration between general-subject teachers and religious teachers, or between school leaders and dormitory mentors, in the development of an integrated curriculum. The aspect of religious character assessment is also often overlooked, making it unclear how character is evaluated in a structured way. In other words, there remains a gap in approaching curriculum as a holistic system,

rather than merely as separate activities or materials. This gap becomes the central point of this study.

This study is directed toward opening a new perspective in Islamic education studies by positioning the integration of academic and Islamic curricula as a managerial strategy in shaping students' religious character. The focus of the study is no longer limited to subject content or religious activities, but extends to how the curriculum is systemically designed, implemented, and evaluated by educational actors in a unified movement. This perspective places curriculum as a strategic instrument capable of harmonizing spiritual values and academic achievement. This study also introduces a new approach by examining collaboration among curriculum actors and the use of measurable indicators in the formation of religious character. Thus, this study expands the scope of Islamic education research from a normative orientation toward a more conceptual, applicable, and measurable direction.

This study aims to describe and analyze in depth the integration of academic and Islamic curricula as a strategy for shaping students' religious character at International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Al-Maahira. This aim is formulated as a response to the limitations of previous research, which has not examined curriculum as an integrated managerial system and has not comprehensively mapped the involvement of different educational actors. This study also seeks to explain how the curriculum is designed, implemented, and evaluated collaboratively by teachers, school leaders, and dormitory mentors. Thus, this article intends to offer an applicable and measurable model of curriculum integration in the formation of religious character, while strengthening the relevance of Islamic education curricula amid global challenges and moral crises.

Based on the mapping of issues and gaps in previous studies, it can be assumed that the integration of academic and Islamic curricula, when collaboratively designed and holistically implemented in a boarding school environment, contributes significantly to the formation of students' religious character. This integration does not merely unite teaching content, but also combines values, school culture, and a consistent evaluation system in shaping students' spiritual behavior. The active involvement of general-subject teachers, religious teachers, and dormitory mentors in curriculum design and implementation becomes a key factor in its success. Therefore, it can be argued that the integrated curriculum model at IIBS Al-Maahira reflects an effective practice of modern Islamic education in responding to the moral crisis among young people. This argument is examined through a qualitative approach in order to obtain a deep and contextual understanding of the educational process.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study specifically focuses on the practice of integrating academic and Islamic curricula at an International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) as the main

strategy for shaping students' religious character. This focus was chosen because character education in an Islamic perspective cannot be taught only at the cognitive level, but must also be designed and implemented comprehensively through an integrative curriculum system. The units of analysis in this study are school leaders, teachers of general and religious subjects, and dormitory mentors at IIBS Al-Maahira, because they play strategic roles in designing, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum integration. The researcher positions them as the main representatives of curriculum integration actors who can provide authentic and contextual information about the process of religious character education in a boarding school-based education system.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design because it aims to explore in depth the processes, meanings, and subjective experiences involved in implementing an integrative curriculum in a modern pesantren environment. This approach was chosen because it is naturalistic, holistic, and contextual, and it enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the direct actors. The purpose of this study is not to generalize findings, but to explore and reconstruct the meaning of social interactions that occur within the context of Islamic education. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation involving school leaders, teachers, and dormitory mentors. Interviews were used to explore the informants' understanding and reflective experiences, while observation was used to examine the implementation of curriculum integration directly in classrooms and in students' daily boarding life. Documentation included syllabi, lesson plans, religious activity programs, and guidelines for evaluating religious character (Creswell and Cheryl, 2018).

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the reduction stage, the researcher selected and grouped the data based on major themes related to curriculum integration and the formation of religious character. Next, the data were presented in the form of descriptive narratives and categorization matrices to make it easier to identify patterns and relationships among components. Conclusions were drawn inductively and verified through data triangulation, namely by comparing interview results, observations, and documents to strengthen the validity of the findings. The analytical process was carried out repeatedly and iteratively to ensure that the findings truly reflected the educational reality taking place at IIBS Al-Maahira (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The formation of students' religious character at an International Islamic Boarding School cannot be separated from the systemic integration between academic and Islamic curricula. This integration process begins with collaborative curriculum planning and continues into real and comprehensive teaching and

learning activities. The evaluation of religious character is also conducted systematically to ensure the internalization of Islamic values. In addition, structured non-academic activities and the role of the environment as a hidden curriculum further strengthen students' character. Thus, religious character education is implemented holistically across all aspects of school life.



Image 1. Diagram of Academic-Islamic Curriculum Integration in Shaping Students' Religious Character

The diagram above illustrates the stages of integrating academic and Islamic curricula in shaping students' religious character. The process begins with systemic integration between academic and Islamic aspects, followed by collaborative curriculum planning. The integration is then realized through applicable teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Students' religious character is evaluated systematically, while character education is carried out holistically. This process is also strengthened by structured non-academic activities and the school environment, which functions as a hidden curriculum (Caswita, 2019).

Systemic integration is carried out by combining the national curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the curriculum of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the school's distinctive curriculum. Teachers teach science and mathematics by inserting Islamic values, such as the oneness of Allah in the creation of the universe. Interviews with the principal indicate that all curricula are processed within a single system that supports the goal of religious character formation. In the school's curriculum documents, there is alignment between academic and spiritual basic competencies. Classroom observations show that tafsir lessons are connected with science. Students are also accustomed to relating natural phenomena to the power of God. This confirms that the integration is not merely theoretical, but is implemented comprehensively.

Curriculum planning is carried out through collaboration between subject teachers and dormitory mentors. In an interview, the vice principal stated that the preparation of syllabi and lesson plans is conducted in a joint forum so that continuity can be established between academic content and Islamic values. The reviewed lesson plan documents show a special column for spiritual values to be internalized. Each subject has implementation guidelines for religious values. Observations of teacher meetings recorded active discussions in agreeing on methods for strengthening character through learning. This collaboration ensures integration between cognitive and affective aspects. The result is a curriculum that is more contextual and meaningful for shaping students' character.

In practice, teachers do not merely deliver academic material, but also connect it with Islamic values. For example, in physics lessons, teachers explain the laws of nature as a form of sunnatullah. Classroom observations show that students actively discuss the wisdom contained in science topics. An interview with a biology teacher revealed that every topic must contain Islamic values. In English classes, students are invited to write speeches on the theme of morals. Learning instruments also include indicators of religious attitudes that must be achieved. This approach shows that integration does not only exist in planning, but is genuinely applied in the learning process.

Students' religious character is assessed through various evaluation instruments, such as worship journals, congregational prayer reports, and daily moral notes. Interviews with dormitory guardians show that every night students are evaluated qualitatively through reflection and religious dialogue. There is also a daily attitude assessment form used by class teachers. In the school's policy documents, character evaluation is part of the students' personality report. Field observations found that students receive feedback on their religious behavior every week. This evaluation is not only administrative, but also educational. Thus, students' religious character is monitored systematically and continuously.

Religious character education does not only take place in the classroom, but also in the dormitory, mosque, canteen, and surrounding environment. Interviews with the student council advisor revealed that the habits of greeting others, smiling, and observing eating etiquette are strengthened through role modeling. In the dormitory, students are guided through halaqah, Islamic mentoring, and tahfidz programs. Boarding activity documents show a dense schedule filled with the reinforcement of spiritual values. Observations of afternoon activities show that students regularly perform sunnah prayers and revise their memorization. All of this shows that character education takes place 24 hours a day. A supportive environment makes the formation of religious character more effective and natural.

Students participate in various non-academic activities, such as weekly halaqah, sermon training, fiqh studies, and youth da'wah activities. Interviews with students indicated that these activities improve religious understanding and build confidence in preaching. Extracurricular program documents show that

religious activities are clearly structured and scheduled throughout the year. Observations during Ramadan activities showed the active involvement of students in qiyamul lail and collective Qur'an recitation programs. These activities are not merely supplementary, but are integrated into the pesantren education system. This structure provides space for students to develop religious character in a practical way. Value education is not only theoretical, but is strengthened through real experience.

The physical and social environment of the school indirectly supports the formation of religious character. Each classroom has copies of the Qur'an, daily prayer posters, and moral slogans. Observations show that students are accustomed to greeting one another, maintaining proper speech etiquette, and dressing modestly in accordance with Islamic teachings. An interview with the head of the dormitory stated that the environment is designed so that every corner reminds students of Allah. Documentation of school activities shows a policy of using Arabic and English to habituate Islamic communication. Through this atmosphere, Islamic values are instilled without the need for constant preaching. The hidden curriculum works effectively in shaping character without students being directly aware of it.

This study focuses on the integration of academic and Islamic curricula in shaping students' religious character at an International Islamic Boarding School. The study found that integration is carried out systemically from planning and implementation to learning evaluation. The curriculum is designed collaboratively by uniting academic elements and Islamic values. The implementation of integration is reflected in the teaching and learning process, structured non-academic activities, and the habituation of values through the school environment. Evaluation of religious character is conducted systematically through various instruments. Character education is carried out holistically and comprehensively in students' daily lives. The main finding shows that this integrative approach is effective in shaping students' religious character deeply and sustainably.

The relationship between academic-Islamic curriculum integration and the formation of students' religious character shows strong and mutually reinforcing continuity. This integration is important because Islamic values are not sufficient if taught separately; they must be embedded in the entire educational process so that students' character can be shaped comprehensively. The findings of this study show that when the curriculum is designed and implemented collaboratively and contextually, students can more easily understand and internalize religious values. In addition, a conducive school environment and structured non-academic activities strengthen the process of character formation as a whole. This explains why religious character education is more successful when implemented systemically and holistically. This is in line with studies on boarding schools, which emphasize that an integrative approach provides space for the deeper development of students' spirituality (Setiawan, 2025).

This study has similarities with Agustina's (2025) research, which evaluated the distinctive curriculum at SMPIT Assalaam Boarding School and also emphasized the integration of Islamic values into general subjects to shape religious character. However, Agustina's study focused more on evaluating the implementation of a distinctive integration-based curriculum, whereas the present study examines the processes of planning, implementation, and evaluation systemically in the context of an International Islamic Boarding School. Similarities are also found in the studies of Musiran (2012) and Muchlis Solichin (2011), which examined religious education in boarding schools, but did not deeply highlight the integration of the formal curriculum. The important difference lies in the integrated curriculum management approach as the key variable, which becomes the novelty of this study. Thus, this study enriches the literature by showing that the success of religious character formation depends not only on curriculum content, but also on structured and sustainable integrative strategies (Agustina, 2012).

The findings of this study carry a deeper meaning: the integration of academic and Islamic curricula is not merely a technical strategy, but also an embodiment of the philosophical values of Islamic education that emphasize ta'dib and the formation of insan kamil. In the socio-cultural context of pesantren, religious character formation becomes effective because it is supported by collective life patterns and teacher role modeling. In addition, this curriculum integration represents a creative response to the policy dualism between national and religious curricula, which can be synergized into a distinctive education system. The findings also offer a solution to the challenges of globalization and moral crises, where the formation of spiritual values is urgently needed. Paradigmatically, this study strengthens the direction of modern Islamic education transformation toward an integrative and holistic model that is relevant to the needs of the times.

Reflection on the results of this study shows that academic-Islamic curriculum integration has strategic implications for the development of character education models in Islamic schools. By adopting Freire's praxis reflection model, these findings encourage educators not only to become teachers, but also to shape students' religious awareness through meaningful and contextual learning. This means that education does not stop at knowledge, but continues into the transformation of values through real action. Schools need to position curriculum as an instrument of spiritual empowerment, not merely as an administrative tool. This implication requires Islamic schools to be more intentional and directed in building synergy among academic, Islamic, and institutional cultural elements. Otherwise, the formation of religious character will remain sporadic and unsystematic (Freire, 2000).

Following up on the findings of this study, strategic policies are needed at the school level to strengthen the integration of academic and Islamic curricula. One important response is to prepare an operational guide for curriculum

integration that clearly regulates the roles of teachers, teaching materials, and the evaluation of religious character. The curriculum needs to be designed with holistic principles so that value education is not limited to religious subjects, but is integrated into all subjects. In addition, teacher training should focus on integrative pedagogical competence based on Islamic values. Implementation supervision also needs to be conducted regularly to ensure its application in classrooms and dormitories. This policy aims to create a more effective and transformative Islamic education system.

D. CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of this study shows that the systemic and collaborative integration of academic and Islamic curricula at International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Al-Maahira successfully shapes students' religious character comprehensively. The integration process is carried out through joint curriculum planning, implementation in teaching and learning activities, and reinforcement through non-academic activities and the school environment. The lesson that can be drawn from this study is that effective religious character education is not sufficient if it relies only on religious material. It requires the harmonious and sustainable unification of values, strategies, and curriculum structures that have a real impact on students' behavior.

The main strength of this study lies in its holistic and managerial approach to viewing curriculum integration as a strategic system, rather than merely as the implementation of learning activities. Scientifically, this study contributes by identifying new variables, such as collaboration among educational actors, religious character evaluation systems, and the function of the environment as a hidden curriculum in modern Islamic education. This study also enriches research on religious character education with in-depth empirical data obtained through interviews, observation, and documentation. In addition, the contextual case study approach in a modern boarding school provides a new analytical framework that is relevant to the dynamics of contemporary Islamic educational institutions. This study also presents a practical model of curriculum integration that can serve as a theoretical and practical reference in curriculum development for Islamic schools.

This study has several limitations that need to be noted as consequences of the focus and scope that have been determined. First, the study was conducted in only one institution, namely IIBS Al-Maahira, so the findings cannot yet be generalized to other boarding school models with different characteristics. Second, the study focuses on the level of implementation and has not deeply explored the influence of curriculum integration on long-term changes in students' behavior. In addition, the evaluation of the effectiveness of this integrative program remains descriptive qualitative and has not been accompanied by quantitative measurement instruments. Therefore, future research is recommended to develop standardized evaluative instruments and apply them to

various Islamic schools as an effort to validate a more comprehensive and representative integrated curriculum model.

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