
INTEGRATING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TO FOSTER STUDENTS' NOBLE CHARACTER: A HOLISTIC SCHOOL-BASED APPROACH IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Received 02 January 2026; Received in revised form 14 February 2026; Accepted 14 March 2026

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan merumuskan konsep pendekatan holistik dalam integrasi Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) untuk pembinaan karakter mulia siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan wawancara mendalam untuk mengeksplorasi integrasi Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam pembentukan akhlak mulia siswa. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, serta observasi pembelajaran PAI dan analisis dokumentasi terkait pembinaan akhlak siswa. Analisis data dilakukan secara induktif melalui pengkodean dan kategorisasi tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola integrasi PAI dan kontribusinya terhadap pembinaan akhlak mulia peserta didik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan holistik dalam integrasi PAI dapat dilakukan melalui penguatan sinergi antara kurikulum, budaya sekolah, keteladanan guru, pembiasaan religius, serta kolaborasi dengan orang tua dan masyarakat. Integrasi yang komprehensif ini berkontribusi dalam membentuk karakter mulia siswa secara berkelanjutan dan kontekstual terhadap tantangan moral kontemporer. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi konseptual berupa kerangka integratif pembinaan karakter berbasis pendekatan holistik dalam konteks pendidikan menengah pertama.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Agama Islam, Pendekatan Holistik, Karakter Mulia, Sekolah Menengah Pertama.

Abstract

This study aims to analyze and formulate a holistic approach to the integration of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in fostering noble character among junior high school students. Employing a qualitative methodology with in-depth interviews to explore the role of IRE in character formation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations of IRE practices, and documentation analysis related to students' moral development. The data analysis was conducted inductively using thematic coding and categorization to identify patterns of IRE integration and its contribution to the cultivation of students' virtuous character. The findings indicate that a holistic integration of IRE can be achieved through strengthening the synergy between curriculum design, school culture, teacher role modelling, religious habituation, and collaboration with parents and the wider community. Such comprehensive integration contributes to the sustainable and contextually relevant development of students' noble character in response to contemporary moral challenges. Conceptually, this study offers an integrative framework for character education that adopts a holistic approach in the context of junior secondary education.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Holistic Approach, Noble Character, Junior High School.

INTRODUCTION

The processes of globalization and digital transformation over the past two decades have brought significant changes to patterns of social interaction and the character formation of younger generations. The ease of access to information through digital media not only creates opportunities for learning but also presents serious challenges, including the rise of online aggressive behaviour, intolerance, and the weakening of adolescents' self-control (Cricchio et al., 2021). Various international studies have demonstrated that the phenomenon of moral disengagement contributes significantly to the increase in deviant behaviours among adolescents, including cyberbullying and symbolic violence (Wang et al., 2021). In the Indonesian context, these challenges become increasingly complex due to shifting values brought about by modernization, which are not always accompanied by a corresponding reinforcement of character education in schools (Mujahid, 2021). The empirical data and findings indicate that the cultivation of virtuous character is no longer merely a normative agenda of education, but rather an urgent necessity in addressing the moral crisis among younger generations. Consequently, schools, as formal educational institutions, are required to implement systemic strategies that are not only instructional but also transformative in fostering students' character development.

Within the national education framework, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role as the foundation for shaping students' morality and ethical values. Normatively, IRE is intended to cultivate individuals who are faithful, pious, and virtuous, with these qualities reflected in their daily behavior (Mukhlis et al., 2024). From the perspective of Islamic education, character development is understood as extending beyond the cognitive dimension, encompassing the internalization of values through habituation, exemplary role modelling (*uswah hasanah*), and the creation of a supportive environment (Islamic et al., 2024). A holistic approach in Islamic education emphasizes the integration of curriculum, school culture, social relations, and collaboration with families as a unified system that mutually reinforces one another (Arsyad et al., 2023; Mohamed, 2014). This approach aligns with the paradigm of the whole school approach in character education, which positions the entire school ecosystem as a space for value-based learning (Zhao et al., 2024). Thus, the integration of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) through a holistic approach is highly relevant to addressing the need for comprehensive and sustainable character development among students.

Several previous studies have examined the integration of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) across diverse educational contexts. Chanifudin & Nuriyati, (2020); Riwanda et al., (2025) findings indicate that the integration of Islamic values into the learning process can reduce the dichotomy between general

knowledge and religious studies, while simultaneously strengthening students' moral orientation. Akbar & Erningsih, (2023); Wood, (2007) emphasize that the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers and their role-modeling practices contribute significantly to the internalization of character values. Naufal et al., (2024) found that extracurricular activities grounded in religiosity can consistently enhance students' habituation of virtuous behavior. At the international level, value-based approaches and systemic moral reinforcement in schools have been proven effective in reducing aggressive behavior and fostering empathy among adolescents (Wang et al., 2021). These findings suggest that integrating religious education has substantial potential for character development when implemented in a planned, comprehensive manner.

Although numerous studies have highlighted the importance of integrating Islamic Religious Education (IRE), most research remains partial and contextual, limited to implementation in specific schools or focused on particular aspects of learning. Explicit studies that reconstruct a holistic approach into an integrative conceptual framework for character development among junior high school students remain relatively scarce. Furthermore, previous research has tended to position IRE integration merely as curricular or extracurricular activities, without systematically examining the interrelationship between curriculum, school culture, leadership, and family involvement as a unified system. These limitations underscore the need for more in-depth conceptual studies to formulate a theoretical synthesis of the holistic approach in IRE integration. In other words, there remains academic space to develop an integrative framework that can serve as a conceptual reference for character education practices at the junior secondary level.

This study seeks to analyze and reconstruct a holistic approach to the integration of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in fostering virtuous character among junior high school students. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the development of an integrative conceptual framework that synthesises curriculum, school culture, teacher role modelling, and family collaboration in character formation. In practice, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for policymakers and education practitioners in designing adaptive IRE integration strategies that address contemporary moral challenges and remain relevant to the dynamics of the digital generation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews to explore how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) fosters virtuous character among junior high school students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with IRE teachers, school principals, and ninth-grade students at a junior high school in Cimahi City. The data collection was further supported by



participatory observations of IRE learning processes and documentation, including archives, activity records, and digital media related to students' character development (Creswell & Creswell, 2017)

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing information obtained from IRE teachers, school principals, and students (Sugiyono, 2013). The data analysis was conducted inductively through categorization and coding to identify key themes related to the forms of IRE integration and its influence on the cultivation of students' virtuous character (Matthew B & A Michael, 1994). Informants were selected purposively, with criteria including IRE teachers, school principals, and ninth-grade students at the school (Patton, 2014). The analysis focused on patterns of IRE integration within the school and its contribution to character development among junior secondary students.

The informants in this study comprised 10 individuals directly involved in the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning process at the junior secondary level. Two of them were female IRE teachers responsible for teaching ninth-grade classes. In addition, one male school principal served as an informant, providing policy perspectives and an overview of the school's religious culture. The remaining seven informants were purposively selected ninth-grade students, comprising four males and three females, representing diverse backgrounds and experiences with attending IRE classes and participating in character development programs at the school.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Integration of Islamic Religious Education at a Junior High School

The integration of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at a junior high school in Cimahi in fostering students' virtuous character, is carried out through a holistic approach involving school regulations and the internalization of moral values in daily life. IRE is embedded into the school ecosystem through curriculum design (Haera et al., 2025), habituation programs, and extracurricular activities based on worship and religious value internalization, thereby functioning as school culture rather than merely a subject. This integration combines conventional and innovative learning methods such as outing classes, *uswatun hasanah*, gamification, and collaboration with parents. Such practices are consistent with the findings of Peterson, (2020), who argue that effective character education requires a systemic approach that simultaneously engages multiple dimensions of education. The concept of the whole school approach in character education underscores that moral values must be integrated into the entire school system, not confined to specific (Irfan & Usman, 2023).

These findings affirm that the success of character formation at a junior high school in Cimahi rests on four key themes: an integrated curriculum, a religious school culture, teacher role modelling, and school-parent collaboration.

Hidayati et al. (2024) stated that these four themes do not stand independently; rather, they interact dynamically to shape a cohesive ecosystem for character development.

Integrative Curriculum Dimension

The data indicate that the integrative curriculum at the junior high school in Cimahi serves as the normative foundation for integrating Islamic Religious Education (IRE). The incorporation of Islamic values into the curriculum is not limited to the addition of subject matter but also involves reinforcing value orientation across learning objectives, strategies, and evaluation. One teacher stated:

“Our school integrates Islamic Religious Education not merely as a subject, but as the foundation of the curriculum and culture that shapes students’ character daily” (Interview, PAI Teacher 1, 2025).

The curriculum of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) contextualized to the digital era has been shown to strengthen students’ moral literacy (Mukhlis, 2024). Riwanda et al., (2025) emphasize that the integration of science and religion prevents epistemological dichotomies in education. The findings confirm that IRE has been systematically integrated through curriculum documents, lesson plans, and extracurricular programs. Documentary data reveal alignment between religious content standards and the academic structure and measurable student activity agendas. Akbar & Erningsih, (2023) further reinforce this perspective by highlighting the importance of pedagogical competence in ensuring that moral values are integrated holistically rather than treated merely as cognitive knowledge. Thus, the curriculum functions as a formal structure that systematically and measurably directs character development.

School Culture as a Values Ecosystem

The data reveal that school culture plays a significant role in the internalization of values and character. As one school principal explained:

“In integrating Islamic Religious Education into students’ daily lives, the school has habituation programs to cultivate virtuous character, which embed Islamic values. These habituation programs include flag ceremonies, recitation of Juz Amma, marching drills, literacy and numeracy activities, congregational Dhuha prayers, and congregational Dzuhur prayers” (Interview, School Principal, 2025).

Observational data show that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is concretely integrated through habituation programs. This implementation is carried out via routine worship practices and the internalization of religious values across all learning activities. As a result, IRE is no longer confined to formal subject matter but has become embedded as school culture and a daily behavioral guide



for the entire school community. A. Arsyad et al., (2020); Islamic et al., (2024) argue that a religious culture manifested through worship habituation, social ethics, and a conducive environment strengthens value internalization. From the perspective of moral psychology, consistent collective norms within the school environment can reduce tendencies toward moral disengagement among adolescents (Gini et al., 2020; Thornberg et al., 2021). In this sense, the school's social environment functions as a praxis space for values rather than merely a site of knowledge transfer. A holistic approach positions school culture as a sustainable moral learning environment.

Teacher Role Modelling and Value Internalization

The data indicate that teacher role modeling and value internalization play a crucial role in shaping students' character. As one student noted:

“Our behavior at school reflects how we observe the teachers' conduct. Teachers consistently reprimand us whenever our actions do not align with school rules” (Interview, Student, 2025).

Teachers occupy a central position in character education, functioning as moral exemplars. Gladstone & Cimpian, (2021); Tal et al., (2024) emphasize that teacher role modeling is more effective than normative instruction alone in shaping students' character. Within the framework of Islamic education, the concept of *uswah hasanah* positions exemplary conduct as the primary method of value internalization (Osman, 2024). The success of character formation requires IRE teachers to become creative facilitators who combine role-modelling strategies to address issues such as student laziness and low motivation to learn. Consequently, the integration of IRE must be supported by consistent teacher behaviour in representing virtuous values.

School-Parent Collaboration

The data demonstrate that character formation cannot be separated from the family's role. As one teacher explained:

“We strive to cultivate students' virtuous character through synergy with parents. This principle of collaboration is continuously reinforced so that moral values are not confined to the classroom but consistently practiced at home. Given the diverse backgrounds of students, such efforts must be understood and supported by their respective parents” (Interview, Teacher, 2025).

Consistency of values between school and home strengthens students' moral stability (Wang, 2023). Curriculum documents and evaluation reports confirm measurable synergy between teachers' roles and parental collaboration records. Findings by Latipah et al., (2025); Wahyuni et al., (2022) emphasize that teacher role modeling, collaboration with parents, and community involvement are

critical supporting strategies in linking IRE content with students' lived realities, thereby reinforcing the internalization of Islamic values and significantly influencing character development. A holistic approach views the family as a strategic partner in the sustainable formation of character. Without family support, value internalization at school risks experiencing dissonance. Thematic synthesis of holistic IRE integration in Tabel 1.

Tabel 1. Thematic Synthesis of Holistic IRE Integration

Main Theme	Key Findings
Integrative Curriculum	Integration of Islamic values into learning objectives, content, and evaluation
School Culture	Religious habituation and collective school norms
Teacher Role Modelling	Teachers as moral exemplars and agents of value internalization
Family Collaboration	Consistency of values between school and home

This table illustrates that integrating Islamic Religious Education (IRE) requires multidimensional synergy within a systemic framework.

Holistic Approach-Based Model of IRE Integration

Based on your thematic synthesis, we can now articulate the holistic integration model of Islamic Religious Education (IRE). How it can be framed academically on Figure 1.

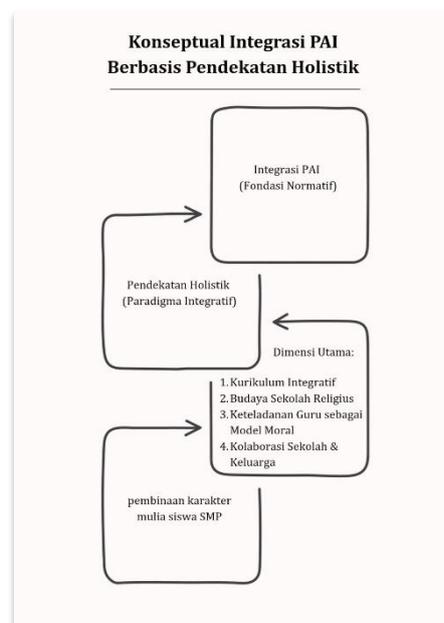


Figure 1. Holistic Approach-Based Model of IRE Integration

This model positions the integration of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as a normative foundation operationalized through a holistic paradigm, which is

subsequently manifested in four core dimensions: integrative curriculum, religious school culture, teacher role modeling as moral exemplars, and school–family collaboration. Conceptually, the holistic approach emphasizes that character education must be embedded within the entire school system *the whole school approach*, rather than confined to specific subjects (Gericke & Torbjörnsson, 2022). Within the context of Islamic education, the integration of moral values is not merely cognitive but encompasses habituation and internalization within a supportive environment (Dean et al., 2020). Thus, this model affirms that IRE integration cannot be understood solely as a curricular activity but as a comprehensive and sustainable value system.

The first dimension, namely the integrative curriculum, functions as a formal structure that embeds Islamic values into learning objectives, content, strategies, and evaluation. The integration of science and religion within the curriculum is believed to prevent epistemological dichotomies and strengthen students' moral orientation (Chanifudin & Nuriyati, 2020; Currier et al., 2023). Moreover, a curriculum that is adaptive to the challenges of the digital era enhances students' moral literacy in navigating contemporary social dynamics (Mukhlis, 2024). Within this model, the curriculum provides normative direction for character formation in a systematic manner.

The second dimension is religious school culture, which functions as a praxis space for value internalization. Values embedded in the curriculum are reinforced through habituation, collective norms, and social interactions within the school environment. A school climate that consistently upholds moral values has been shown to reduce tendencies toward moral disengagement among adolescents (Lo Cricchio et al., 2021). Accordingly, school culture serves as a concrete medium that bridges normative values with students' lived experiences.

The third dimension, teacher role modeling as moral exemplars, carries a transformational function in character formation. Teachers do not merely act as transmitters of knowledge but serve as living representations of values in everyday practice. Role modeling has been shown to exert a significant influence on value internalization compared to purely instructional approaches (Akbar & Erningsih, 2023). Within the framework of Islamic education, the concept of *uswah hasanah* positions exemplary conduct as the primary method of moral development (Sahnan, 2018). Accordingly, consistency between the values taught and teachers' behavior becomes a key factor in the successful integration of IRE.

The fourth dimension is school–family collaboration. Character formation cannot be optimized if the values instilled at school are not reinforced within the family environment. Consistency of values between school and home contributes to adolescents' moral stability and self-control (X. Wang et al., 2021). A holistic approach positions the family as a strategic partner of the school in building students' character in a sustainable manner (Wada et al., 2025).

The relationship among the components in this model is interdependent and dynamic. The curriculum provides normative direction, school culture offers a praxis context, teacher role modeling presents concrete moral figures, and the family reinforces value continuity. These four dimensions complement one another and collectively form a comprehensive ecosystem of character education. Thus, the cultivation of virtuous character is not the outcome of a single variable but the product of systemic interaction among integrated educational dimensions.

The synthesis of findings demonstrates that a holistic approach to IRE integration expands the perspective on character education from a partial approach to an ecosystemic one. This study does not merely compile previous findings but reconstructs IRE integration within a systemic perspective that positions all educational elements as agents of character formation. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the formulation of an integrative conceptual framework that can serve as a reference for developing policies and practices in character education based on Islamic values at the junior secondary school level.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that effective integration of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) cannot be achieved in a partial manner but must be understood as a value system embedded throughout the entire school ecosystem. The holistic integration model of IRE formulated in this research consists of four main dimensions: the integrative curriculum as the normative structure of learning, religious school culture as the praxis space for value internalization, teacher role modeling as living moral exemplars within educational practice, and school-family collaboration as the reinforcement of value continuity. These four dimensions are interdependent and collectively form a comprehensive and sustainable ecosystem of character education.

These findings indicate that the cultivation of virtuous character cannot be achieved solely through the reinforcement of IRE instructional content but requires systemic synergy among all educational components. Accordingly, this study contributes theoretically by offering an integrative conceptual framework that expands the discourse on IRE integration from a partial to a holistic, ecosystem-based approach. Several recommendations can be proposed for school administrators and education policymakers. IRE integration should be designed systemically by embedding Islamic values not only within the formal curriculum but also in school culture and institutional policies. Strengthening religious culture and the habituation of values must be carried out consistently and in measurable ways.

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