



Islamic Education Integration in the Independent Curriculum: A Character-Building Strategy for Students in Society 5.0

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ABSTRACT The transformation of education in the Society 5.0 era demands an adaptive curriculum that emphasizes not only knowledge acquisition but also character development. This study explores the integration of Islamic education into the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) as a strategy to strengthen student character formation in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative literature review approach, this research critically analyzes the philosophical foundations of Islamic education, its alignment with the Independent Curriculum, and the implications for fostering adaptive, ethical, and socially responsible learners. The findings highlight that Islamic values such as honesty, discipline, empathy, and responsibility can be systematically embedded in the Independent Curriculum through thematic learning, project-based activities, and holistic character education. The integration ensures that students are not only academically competent but also morally grounded and socially aware in responding to the complexities of Society 5.0. This study concludes that the synergy between Islamic education and the Independent Curriculum is pivotal in creating a generation of students who embody both intellectual capacity and noble character. Keywords: <i>Islamic Education, Independent Curriculum, Character Building, Society 5.0, Educational Integration</i>			

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INTRODUCTION

The dawn of Society 5.0 has reshaped the global discourse on education, technology, and human development. Unlike Industry 4.0, which prioritized automation and technological efficiency, Society 5.0 envisions a human-centered paradigm where digital innovation including artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of Things is harnessed to improve the quality of life and address social challenges. Education, as the foundation of human resource development, plays a pivotal role in this transformation. It is no longer sufficient for schools to focus solely on the transmission of knowledge; instead, they must

cultivate holistic learners equipped with intellectual competence, digital literacy, moral integrity, and ethical responsibility.

In Indonesia, the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) was introduced as an adaptive response to these global challenges. This curriculum emphasizes differentiated learning, flexibility, and project-based approaches that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. At the same time, it explicitly underscores the importance of character development through the Pancasila Student Profile, which envisions learners who are faithful, globally aware, creative, collaborative, and responsible. This alignment reflects the recognition that preparing students for Society 5.0 requires not only academic and technological competence but also strong moral and spiritual foundations. However, a pressing question emerges: how can the enduring values of Islamic education be systematically embedded into the Independent Curriculum to ensure that character building is not reduced to rhetorical aspirations but is realized in tangible educational practices?

Islamic education (tarbiyah Islamiyah), rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, has historically prioritized the comprehensive development of human beings across intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions. Its ultimate goal is the formation of insan kamil (the complete human), a person who balances faith, reason, and ethical action. Within this framework, character formation (tahdzīb al-akhlāq) is central. Islamic education cultivates values such as ṣidq (truthfulness), amānah (trustworthiness), 'adl (justice), and raḥmah (compassion), which remain profoundly relevant to the ethical dilemmas of the digital era. In the context of Society 5.0, where issues such as misinformation, digital ethics, and ecological sustainability dominate, these values provide essential moral guidance. For example, the Qur'anic prohibition against spreading false information (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 6) addresses the challenge of online disinformation, while the principle of khalifah fil-ardh (stewardship of the earth) resonates with the global call for sustainability.

Meanwhile, the Independent Curriculum provides structural and pedagogical spaces that can accommodate the integration of Islamic values. Its emphasis on project-based learning allows for experiential internalization of ethics; for example, environmental projects can be framed as acts of stewardship grounded in Islamic teachings. Differentiated learning, by respecting diversity and inclusivity, aligns with the Islamic principle of justice. Similarly, the development of digital literacy can be enriched by embedding Islamic ethics, such as truthfulness (tablīgh) and excellence (iḥsān), into students' use of technology. Thus, integration does not imply the mere insertion of religious content into non-religious subjects, but rather the harmonization of Islamic ethical principles with curriculum goals, pedagogical design, and assessment frameworks.

Scholars have increasingly recognized the urgency of this integration. Hamdani & Nurdin, (2022) emphasize the importance of embedding Islamic values into digital learning environments, while Nurdin & Anshari, (2021) highlight the compatibility of Islamic pedagogy with technological transformation. However, much of the existing scholarship remains normative and philosophical, lacking concrete frameworks for how Islamic values can be systematically aligned with the Independent Curriculum's competencies. Most analyses stop at asserting the importance of character education without detailing practical

models for integration, such as curriculum alignment, project-based activities, or digital ethics training.

This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring the integration of Islamic education into the Independent Curriculum as a character-building strategy for students in the Society 5.0 era. The central argument advanced is that character education should not be treated as an isolated domain but must permeate all aspects of learning. Through intentional alignment, Islamic values can enrich the Independent Curriculum, producing learners who are not only academically competent and technologically literate but also morally grounded, socially responsible, and spiritually resilient. In doing so, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to curriculum reform in Indonesia, offering insights for policymakers, educators, and scholars concerned with preparing students for the moral complexities of the digital age.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a library research design, focusing on the critical interpretation of scholarly works, policy documents, and empirical studies related to the integration of Islamic education into the Independent Curriculum. The qualitative design is appropriate because the aim of this research is to build a conceptual framework rather than generate statistical generalizations.

The data sources in this study are categorized into two groups: primary sources, which include official policy documents such as the Kurikulum Merdeka guidelines from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), as well as normative Islamic texts (Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic educational works); and secondary sources, comprising peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings published in both national and international contexts. Priority was given to studies published within the last five years to ensure recency, while classical works were utilized to provide philosophical grounding.

The process of data collection was carried out through systematic searching in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ, Garuda, and Google Scholar, combined with official government repositories. Sources were screened based on three criteria: relevance to the research focus, credibility of publication, and recency of data.

Data analysis employed a Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) combined with thematic analysis. This method was chosen because it allows for the integration of diverse sources and provides a structured way to generate new theoretical insights. The analysis proceeded in three stages:

1. Data Reduction;
Identifying, coding, and categorizing recurring themes such as “Islamic values,” “character building,” “digital literacy,” and “curriculum flexibility.”
 2. Data Display;
Organizing and mapping the thematic linkages between the principles of the Independent Curriculum (differentiated learning, project-based learning, Pancasila Student Profile) and Islamic pedagogical principles (akhlaq, adab, taqwa).
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3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification;

Synthesizing insights into a coherent conceptual model (the Spiral Model of Integration), ensuring that the findings were consistent across multiple sources.

To strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was applied at three levels: (1) source triangulation, by comparing national policy documents with international case studies (Japan, Finland, Malaysia); (2) theoretical triangulation, by juxtaposing Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary curriculum theories; and (3) investigator triangulation, by consulting interpretations from multiple scholars to minimize researcher bias.

Through this methodology, the study develops not only a descriptive understanding but also a conceptual model that integrates Islamic education with the Independent Curriculum as a character-building strategy for students in the Society 5.0 era.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore that the integration of Islamic education into the Independent Curriculum provides a strategic pathway for strengthening character formation among students in the context of Society 5.0. The analysis reveals three major dimensions of integration: (1) the philosophical foundation, which aligns Islamic educational values with the holistic aims of the Independent Curriculum; (2) the pedagogical practice, which operationalizes Islamic principles through project-based learning and competency-based approaches; and (3) the socio-cultural implications, which situate character education in the broader demands of a digital and human-centered society.

1. Philosophical Foundation of Integration;

At the conceptual level, Islamic education emphasizes the harmonious development of intellectual, spiritual, and moral capacities, which is consistent with the Independent Curriculum's vision to nurture the Profil Pelajar Pancasila. Both frameworks share a holistic outlook: the Independent Curriculum advocates flexibility, creativity, and collaboration (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), while Islamic pedagogy stresses values of akhlaq, adab, and taqwa (Al-Attas, 2020). This convergence reflects a paradigm in which religious education is not treated as a separate compartment but is interwoven into the very fabric of educational objectives. The philosophical alignment underscores that character education is not only an instrumental goal but also a moral imperative grounded in Islamic ethics (Zuhdi, 2023).

2. Pedagogical Practices and Curriculum Design;

In practice, the Independent Curriculum provides flexibility through project-based learning (PjBL), thematic modules, and differentiated instruction (Prihantoro, 2022). These pedagogical features offer fertile ground for embedding Islamic values into classroom activities. For example, project-based learning in science can incorporate Islamic perspectives on environmental stewardship (khalifah fil-ardh), while social studies can highlight Islamic contributions to civilization (Hamdani & Nurdin, 2022).

Research indicates that when teachers contextualize competencies with Islamic values, students show higher levels of moral awareness and responsibility (Anshari, 2021). The analysis of lesson plan models shows that the incorporation of Islamic education in the Independent Curriculum does not necessitate additional subjects but requires contextual integration within existing domains. Teachers thus act as facilitators who guide students not only to master competencies but also to internalize values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility, which are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings (Azra, 2019).

3. Socio-Cultural Implications in the Society 5.0 Context;

The rise of Society 5.0 demands students who are technologically adept yet ethically grounded. Scholars argue that technological literacy without ethical anchoring may produce morally fragmented graduates (Nurdin & Anshari, 2021). The findings of this study suggest that Islamic education, when synergized with the Independent Curriculum, equips students with a dual literacy: digital literacy to navigate advanced technological environments, and ethical literacy to uphold integrity and empathy in social interactions (Fukuyama, 2018).

Without the integration of Islamic values, the Independent Curriculum risks producing students who are competent but spiritually hollow. Conversely, when Islamic education is positioned as a value system underpinning curricular activities, it generates balanced graduates who can adapt to automation and artificial intelligence without losing their human dignity and religious identity (Hosseini & Izadi, 2020).

4. Comparative Insights from International Experiences;

International case studies reinforce the feasibility of such integration. In Japan, values education (*dotoku*) is integrated across subjects to foster integrity and community responsibility among students (Yoshida, 2020). This resonates with Indonesia's attempt to embed Islamic character values across curricular activities. Finland's National Core Curriculum emphasizes transversal competences such as cultural literacy and multiliteracy, which align with both modern education and Islamic principles of inclusivity and justice (Halinen, 2018). Malaysia, through its long-standing KSSR/KSSM framework and j-QAF program, shows how religious education can coexist harmoniously with skills-based learning (Hashim & Langgulung, 2021).

These international parallels strengthen the argument that integration is not merely aspirational but achievable, provided that teachers are adequately trained, curriculum materials are contextually adapted, and schools foster environments conducive to moral and intellectual development (OECD, 2019).

5. Challenges and Opportunities;

Despite its promise, several challenges must be acknowledged. First, there is the issue of teacher readiness, as not all educators possess the pedagogical skills or religious literacy to integrate Islamic education effectively into interdisciplinary subjects (Huda, 2020). Second, the lack of standardized guidelines risks creating

uneven implementation across schools. Third, the technological divide poses a barrier, as not all institutions have equal access to digital infrastructure, which is essential for preparing students for Society 5.0 (Bank, 2021).

Nevertheless, these challenges open opportunities for innovation. Teacher professional development programs, curriculum co-design involving Islamic scholars and educational experts, and investments in educational technology can bridge the gaps (Nurdin, 2022). More importantly, the integration offers Indonesia an opportunity to craft an indigenous model of education that is simultaneously modern, religious, and globally competitive (Rahman & Abdullah, 2021).

6. Towards a Conceptual Model of Integration;

Based on the findings and comparative analysis, this study proposes a Conceptual Model of Integration between Islamic Education and the Independent Curriculum in the Society 5.0 era. The model rests on four interrelated pillars: philosophical foundation, curricular design, pedagogical practice, and socio-technological adaptation.

a. Philosophical Foundation: Value-Rational Education

At the base of the model is the philosophical assumption that education must not only produce skilled individuals but also morally upright citizens. Drawing from Islamic philosophy, the model emphasizes tawhidic paradigm that knowledge and character must be oriented toward serving God and humanity. This foundation aligns with the Independent Curriculum's vision of holistic education. Thus, the value-rational approach becomes the guiding principle for decision-making in curriculum design and implementation.

b. Curricular Design: Integrated Value Mapping

The second pillar is curricular design, where Islamic values are systematically mapped into the competencies and learning outcomes of the Independent Curriculum. For instance, the Profil Pelajar Pancasila can be infused with values of amanah (trustworthiness), ihsan (excellence), and ukhuwah (brotherhood). Rather than adding Islamic education as an isolated subject, this model suggests embedding it transversally across disciplines, similar to Japan's dotoku or Finland's transversal competencies. This ensures that every subject science, mathematics, language, or art becomes a site for character building.

c. Pedagogical Practice: Project-Based and Character-Oriented Learning

The third pillar focuses on pedagogy, where teachers employ strategies such as project-based learning (PjBL), inquiry-based instruction, and collaborative learning infused with Islamic values. For example, in a project on environmental sustainability, students not only apply scientific concepts but also reflect on Qur'anic injunctions about stewardship (khalifah fil-ardh). Such practices transform classrooms into ethical laboratories, where competencies are acquired alongside moral virtues.

d. Socio-Technological Adaptation: Ethical Digital Literacy

The fourth pillar acknowledges the imperatives of Society 5.0, where students are expected to navigate complex digital ecosystems. Here, the model integrates ethical digital literacy, blending technological competence with Islamic ethical principles. For instance, while learning coding or artificial intelligence, students are guided to reflect on ethical use, data privacy, and social responsibility in light of Islamic moral teachings. This prevents the risk of producing technologically adept but ethically disengaged individuals.

7. The Spiral Model of Character Formation;

Visually, the conceptual integration can be imagined as a spiral model consisting of four layers:

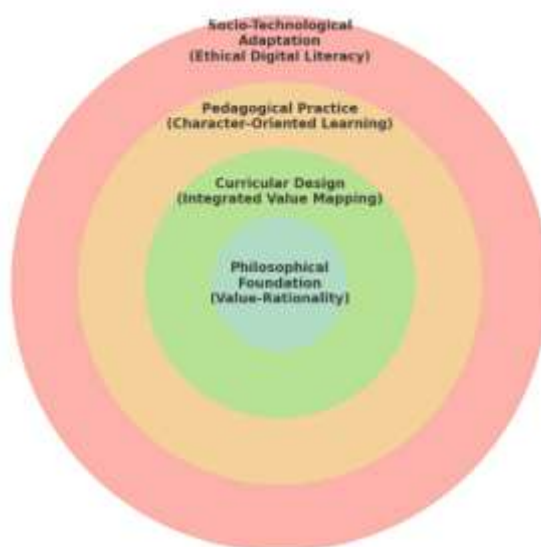


Figure 1. Spiral Model of Integration

The spiral model presented in the diagram above is a conceptual representation of the integration of Islamic education in the Merdeka Curriculum as a strategy for character building in the era of Society 5.0. The spiral was chosen as a metaphor because it reflects the dynamic, layered, and continuously evolving nature of education, from its foundation of values to its adaptation to socio-technological developments.

a. Philosophical Foundation (Value-Rationality)

The core layer of this model emphasizes that education must be rooted in a strong philosophical foundation. In the context of Islam, this foundation consists of the values of tauhid, akhlaq, and adab, which are combined with modern educational rationality. These values are not only moral norms but also a source of inspiration for curriculum orientation. With this foundation, education does not merely produce intelligent individuals but also meaningful and responsible individuals.

b. Curricular Design (Integrated Value Mapping)

From the foundation of values, the spiral moves to the layer of curriculum design. This is where the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, such as flexibility, project-based learning, and the Pancasila Student Profile, are linked to Islamic values. This process can be referred to as value mapping, which is the mapping of Islamic values (e.g., trustworthiness, honesty, cooperation, social awareness) into learning outcomes and character-building projects. Thus, the curriculum is not merely technical but also rich in ethical and spiritual content.

c. Pedagogical Practice (Character-Oriented Learning)

The next spiral is pedagogical practice in the classroom. Teachers act as agents of values who transform the curriculum into learning activities. For example, the use of project-based learning methods oriented towards solving real problems can be combined with Islamic principles such as *ukhuwah* (solidarity) and *maslahah* (benefit). The result is learning that not only sharpens cognition but also fosters Islamic character that is applicable in everyday life.

d. Socio-Technological Adaptation (Ethical Digital Literacy)

The outer layer of the spiral emphasizes adaptation to the context of the Society 5.0 era. In an era where digital technology and artificial intelligence permeate all aspects of life, Islamic education must equip students with ethical digital literacy. This integration is important so that students are able to use technology productively while maintaining moral integrity. Islamic digital literacy in this model includes ethical awareness in social media, critical thinking skills regarding information, and an orientation towards the use of technology for the good of the community.

This spiral model shows that the integration of Islamic education into the Merdeka Curriculum is not merely a normative addition, but a progressive conceptual engineering. Each layer of the spiral is interrelated: philosophical values guide the curriculum, the curriculum shapes practice, and practice reinforces socio-technological adaptation. Thus, this model offers a new theoretical framework that can be used as a reference for policy development and further research related to Islamic education in the era of Society 5.0.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Islamic education into the Merdeka Curriculum is a necessity in order to address the challenges of character building in the era of Society 5.0. The results of the analysis show that this integration should be viewed not only as a normative complement, but as a structured conceptual strategy. Through the spiral model developed in this study, there are four main dimensions that are intertwined: philosophical foundations (value-rationality), value-mapping-based curriculum design (integrated value mapping), character-oriented pedagogical practices (character-oriented learning), and socio-technological adaptation through Islamic digital literacy (ethical digital literacy). These findings confirm that Islamic education has the flexibility and innovative power to integrate

with the modern national curriculum framework. Furthermore, this integration can produce graduates who are not only intellectually intelligent but also have spiritual strength, moral sensitivity, and adaptive skills to face technological developments. In other words, the Merdeka Curriculum integrated with Islamic values can be a driving force for shaping students with excellent character, global competitiveness, and a strong Islamic identity. This research provides a theoretical contribution in the form of a conceptual model of integration that can be used as a reference for the development of Islamic education policy in the future. In practical terms, this model can be applied by educators in designing learning strategies that are more relevant to the needs of the digital age. The implication is that Islamic education is no longer seen as a separate traditional discourse, but as an integral part of national educational innovation to face the dynamics of the 21st century.

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