

HUMANISING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A HOLISTIC CURRICULUM MODEL FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN INDONESIA

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis implementasi kurikulum PAI berbasis humanisasi di sekolah-sekolah Indonesia, dengan fokus pada integrasi pendidikan karakter. Kurikulum konvensional selama ini cenderung menekankan aspek kognitif dan tekstual, sementara aspek afektif dan psikomotorik belum tergarap secara optimal. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis dokumen sebagai metode utama. Data diperoleh dari dokumen seperti silabus, RPP, panduan pengajaran, dan kebijakan terkait Kurikulum Merdeka yang dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa model kurikulum ini mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai karakter seperti empati, toleransi, tanggung jawab, dan kejujuran melalui pendekatan dialogis, reflektif, dan pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman. Model ini mendorong partisipasi aktif siswa, refleksi moral, dan keterhubungan antara ajaran agama dengan konteks kehidupan nyata. Para pemangku kepentingan pendidikan merespons positif model ini karena fleksibel, kontekstual, dan sejalan dengan arah kebijakan nasional. Kesimpulannya, kurikulum PAI berbasis humanisasi memberikan pendekatan yang lebih holistik dalam membentuk karakter siswa. Studi ini merekomendasikan penguatan implementasi melalui pelatihan guru dan pengembangan kebijakan yang mendukung transformasi pedagogis.

Kata kunci: Kurikulum PAI, Pendidikan Karakter, Humanisasi, Pembelajaran Kontekstual, Kurikulum Merdeka

Abstract

This study analysed the implementation of a humanisation-based Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Indonesian schools, focusing on its integration of character education. The conventional curriculum has predominantly emphasised cognitive and textual aspects, while the affective and psychomotor domains have remained underdeveloped. Using a qualitative approach, this research employed document analysis as its primary data collection method. Key documents—including syllabi, lesson plans, teaching guidelines, and national education policy frameworks related to the Merdeka Curriculum—were purposively selected and thematically analysed. The findings revealed

that the humanisation-based curriculum incorporated core character values such as empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and honesty through dialogical, reflective, and experiential learning approaches. The model encouraged active student engagement, moral reflection, and the application of Islamic teachings to real-life social contexts. Educational stakeholders responded positively, highlighting the curriculum's flexibility, contextual relevance, and alignment with national policy directions. In conclusion, the humanisation-based IRE curriculum provided a more holistic framework for character development by addressing not only cognitive, but also affective and behavioural dimensions. The study recommends further adoption and refinement of this model, alongside teacher training and policy support, to enhance its pedagogical impact.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education Curriculum, Character Education, Humanisation, Contextual Learning, Merdeka Curriculum

A. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central theme in global educational reform as societies confront growing concerns over moral decline, social disintegration, and the erosion of civic responsibility among younger generations (Berkowitz & Melinda C. Bier, 2004; Lickona, 1992). In Indonesia, these concerns have prompted the state to place character education at the heart of its national curriculum frameworks, such as the 2013 Curriculum and the more recent Merdeka Curriculum (Kemendikbud-Ristek, 2022). These curricula emphasise not only cognitive development but also the cultivation of ethical values, religious piety, and social responsibility as essential components of holistic education. As a compulsory subject in Indonesian schools, Islamic education plays a key role in fostering moral and spiritual values. It is ideally positioned to cultivate personal integrity, empathy, justice, and a sense of accountability in students. Islamic educational philosophy, rooted in concepts such as *ta'dib* (ethical refinement) and *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification), offers a comprehensive vision of character formation (Al-Attas, 1999; Zuhdi, 2006a). Within this framework, the Islamic conception of education is inherently humanistic—it views learners not merely as cognitive beings but as moral and spiritual agents whose purpose is to realise their full potential (*insan kamil*) through balanced intellectual, ethical, and spiritual growth. The process of *humanisation* in Islamic education thus aligns with the ultimate goal of *character formation*: to nurture individuals who embody the unity of faith, reason, and action. Through this integrative vision, Islamic education transcends mere moral instruction and aims to cultivate humane, responsible, and God-conscious citizens who contribute positively to society. However, in practice, the implementation of Islamic education in Indonesia often remains heavily oriented toward rote learning and cognitive mastery, with insufficient emphasis on the affective and behavioural dimensions of student development (Muhaimin, 2014).

The limited pedagogical innovation in Islamic education classrooms further complicates this gap between the ideal and actual practice. Research indicates that teaching methods predominantly remain teacher-centred, relying heavily on lecture-based delivery with minimal opportunities for student dialogue or experiential learning (Jasmi et al., 2022). Such an approach restricts students' ability to actively engage with and internalise the moral and spiritual values

central to Islamic education. Without interactive, reflective learning processes, students often receive knowledge passively, thereby diminishing the transformative potential of character education.

The persistence of such conventional pedagogical patterns reveals a deeper tension between the normative ideals of Islamic education—grounded in *ta'dib*, *tazkiyah*, and the humanisation of learners—and the reality of classroom practice. When teaching focuses primarily on cognitive transmission rather than personal transformation, the essence of Islamic education as a process of *humanisation* (*insaniyyah*) becomes obscured. This disconnect underscores the urgent need to reinterpret and redesign pedagogical models that reflect Islam's holistic vision, in which intellectual growth is harmonised with moral, social, and spiritual development. In this context, adopting a humanistic approach becomes not merely an alternative but a necessary paradigm shift. It invites educators to treat students as active moral agents and co-creators of meaning, rather than passive recipients of information. Such an approach encourages dialogic, participatory, and contextually responsive learning experiences that resonate with students' lived realities and contemporary challenges (Alhamuddin, 2019). Furthermore, it opens the space for integrating critical humanistic issues—such as social and cultural diversity, environmental sustainability, ethical use of digital technology, and civic responsibility—that are essential for nurturing morally conscious and socially responsible individuals in today's interconnected world.

Although previous studies have explored character education and Islamic pedagogy, few have explicitly linked the concept of *humanisation* in Islamic thought with practical pedagogical transformation. Most research has focused on moral values or curriculum content, leaving a gap in how Islamic educational ideals can be translated into humanistic learning models that respond to contemporary educational challenges. This study seeks to fill that gap by proposing a humanisation-oriented framework for Islamic education.

These challenges indicate the need for a shift toward a more humanistic, learner-centred, and holistic approach to Islamic education—one that bridges cognitive knowledge with lived ethical practice. Drawing on the principles of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) and socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), this study proposes a curriculum model that humanises Islamic education by integrating character values across cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains. The model emphasises contextual learning, moral reasoning, emotional engagement, and value-based action. The objective of this study is to design and conceptualise a holistic curriculum model for Islamic education that supports character development among Indonesian students. By addressing the existing gap between normative religious instruction and authentic character formation, this study aims to contribute a theoretically grounded, practically relevant innovation to the field of curriculum development and Islamic pedagogy.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach (Hancock, 2002; Takona, 2024) utilising document analysis to provide a detailed understanding of the humanisation-based Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Indonesia. This approach is appropriate for capturing the curriculum's design, underlying values, and its approach to character education within the existing educational framework. Data collection focused exclusively on gathering and analysing

relevant official documents, including syllabi, lesson plans, teaching guidelines, assessment instruments, and policy documents linked to the Merdeka Curriculum initiative. These documents were purposively selected to represent the formal curriculum content and pedagogical principles aimed at integrating universal Islamic values and fostering holistic character development.

The document analysis was conducted through a systematic process of coding, categorisation, and thematic interpretation, emphasising curriculum structure, integration of character values, dialogical and experiential learning methods, and contextual responsiveness. This analytical process enabled a nuanced understanding of the curriculum's alignment with a humanisation-based, holistic educational model. To enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, triangulation was employed by cross-referencing multiple document sources and comparing the results with relevant academic literature and national education policies (Creswell & Path, 2016). Through this rigorous documentation study, the research offers comprehensive insights into the effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum in supporting character formation in Islamic education within the Indonesian context.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Dominance of Cognitive and Textual Approach

The current implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia is still heavily rooted in cognitive and textual paradigms, prioritising students' ability to memorise doctrinal content, understand religious texts, and reproduce theological concepts. While this approach aligns with traditional instructional models that emphasise *ta'lim* (knowledge transmission), it often neglects the affective and psychomotor domains of learning—both of which are essential for the internalisation of moral and spiritual values (Muhaimin, 2014; Zuhdi, 2006a). In practice, the curriculum focuses primarily on the delivery of doctrinal knowledge, such as the pillars of faith and rituals, without sufficient attention to how these teachings are translated into lived ethical behaviour or emotional intelligence. This fragmented approach reflects what Tyler (Tyler, 2000) warned against in early curriculum theory: an overemphasis on content mastery at the expense of holistic learner development. In the context of Islamic education, this results in a disconnect between students' cognitive understanding of religious values and their capacity to embody these values in real-life situations (Miller, J.P. & Seller, 1985).

Moreover, recent studies have indicated that the design of the Islamic education curriculum tends to rely on normative interpretations and literal readings of religious texts (Hefner, 2016). While textual fidelity is important, an overdependence on this method risks fostering rigid, dogmatic thinking and undermining the development of empathy, moral reasoning, and critical reflection—key components of character education (Berkowitz & Melinda C. Bier, 2004; Lickona, 1992). This cognitive-textual dominance is also reflected in assessment systems, which predominantly measure factual recall and conceptual knowledge, rather than the development of virtues such as integrity, humility, compassion, and social responsibility (Salim et al., 2022). As a result, students may graduate with high scores in religious subjects, yet still exhibit weak moral judgment, limited interpersonal skills, and low civic engagement.

In contrast, Islamic educational philosophy—primarily as conceptualised by thinkers such as Al-Ghazali and Al-Attas—emphasises the integration of knowledge, character, and spiritual refinement (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) as inseparable goals of education (Al-Attas, 1999; Hashim & Langgulung, 2008). A holistic vision of Islamic education emphasises that its ultimate goal is not merely to transmit religious knowledge but to shape well-rounded individuals—morally upright, critically aware, spiritually refined, and socially responsible. In this context, a curriculum that leans excessively on narrow textualism—defined as an overemphasis on literal memorisation of sacred texts, doctrinal concepts, and normative religious obligations—no longer suffices in addressing the complexities of contemporary education and society (Al-Attas, 1999; Hefner, 2016).

The textualist approach often reduces learners to passive recipients of knowledge. It focuses primarily on the *cognitive* domain while neglecting the *affective* and *psychomotor* dimensions of learning, which are crucial for character formation and ethical embodiment. Tyler (2000) warned of the dangers of such an imbalanced curriculum design, arguing that education must cater to the holistic development of learners rather than merely to factual knowledge acquisition. Islamic education, in its classical philosophy, as articulated by scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Al-Attas, is deeply rooted in an integrated model of education where spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), moral development, and practical engagement with the world are central to the learning process (Al-Attas, 1999). In contrast, a fragmented, text-centred curriculum may produce students who are well-versed in religious terminology yet lack empathy, social responsibility, and real-life moral judgment (Zuhdi, 2006a).

Reorienting the Islamic education curriculum toward a more integrative and human-centred model entails aligning the learning experience with students' real-life context, fostering emotional intelligence, and nurturing values such as empathy, compassion, responsibility, and tolerance. This approach incorporates dialogical pedagogy, reflective inquiry, and experiential learning rooted in both Islamic ethical principles and local sociocultural realities (Berkowitz & Melinda C. Bier, 2004; Lickona, 1992). Moreover, such a model resonates with the spirit of Indonesia's Independent Curriculum, which promotes differentiated instruction, student agency, and character education. In this framework, religious values are not taught in abstraction but embodied through project-based learning, community service, peer collaboration, and personal reflection (Sehati et al., 2024). Importantly, moving toward this integrative direction is not a departure from Islamic orthodoxy but a reaffirmation of its educational essence—to cultivate balanced individuals who not only know what is right but are also willing and able to live it. Without this paradigm shift, Islamic education risks becoming irrelevant or even counterproductive in nurturing future generations who can meaningfully contribute to a diverse and dynamic society.

Therefore, there is a growing scholarly and policy consensus that Islamic education must transcend mere cognitive delivery and adopt a broader pedagogical framework—one that fosters affective engagement, ethical embodiment, and real-world application of religious values (Sehati et al., 2024). Without such a shift, the curriculum will continue to fall short in preparing students to become morally grounded, socially responsible citizens in an increasingly pluralistic and complex society.

2. Implementation Challenges for Teachers

The practical implementation of character education within the Islamic Religious Education curriculum presents persistent challenges for educators. Although the curriculum formally includes moral and spiritual objectives, teachers frequently struggle to contextualise and humanise these values in everyday classroom practice. Two key issues contribute to this gap: the absence of practical, operational curriculum guidance and the lack of sustained professional development in transformative pedagogical approaches.

Firstly, most curriculum documents emphasise cognitive and normative content, often at the expense of pedagogical clarity on how to integrate affective and psychomotor dimensions into character education (Alhamuddin, Alhamuddin, & Bukhori, 2016; Muhaimin, 2014). As a result, teachers often rely on a teacher-centred, one-way delivery of moral content, lacking methods that engage students in meaningful reflection or application. Core Islamic values such as honesty (*ṣidq*), empathy (*ta'āṭuf*), and tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*) risk becoming abstract ideals rather than lived realities (Zuhdi, 2006b). Moreover, lesson plans often do not account for local cultural contexts or students' socio-emotional development, resulting in a disconnect between moral instruction and real-world behaviour.

Secondly, teachers often lack training in transformative pedagogy—an approach that emphasises dialogue, critical thinking, and experiential learning (Mezirow, 1991; Palmer, 2010). This pedagogy is essential for character education because it encourages students to explore moral dilemmas, reflect on their values, and engage in actions that embody Islamic ethics. However, professional development programs for PAI teachers still predominantly focus on subject content and doctrinal accuracy rather than on teaching strategies that foster emotional and moral growth (Hefner, 2016; Sehati et al., 2024).

Additionally, the constraints of a rigid school system—such as time-bound schedules, test-oriented assessments, and large class sizes—further limit the space for creative, reflective learning. Teachers often report that character education is treated as an implicit or secondary objective, overshadowed by national exams and cognitive benchmarks (Tilaar, 2002). Without institutional support, including mentorship, learning communities, and curriculum flexibility, many teachers find it challenging to implement moral education in ways that are engaging and transformative. Therefore, to empower teachers as effective moral educators, it is crucial to provide them with accessible, context-responsive curriculum tools and ongoing, practice-oriented training. Such reforms should not only equip teachers with the technical know-how but also cultivate their pedagogical identity as facilitators of character development, rooted in both Islamic traditions and contemporary educational frameworks (Berkowitz & Melinda C. Bier, 2004; Sehati et al., 2024).

3. Inconsistent Internalisation of Character Values

Despite being central to the goals of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), core character values such as empathy (*ta'āṭuf*), tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), responsibility (*mas'ūliyyah*), and honesty (*ṣidq*) are not consistently internalised in classroom practices. While these values are frequently stated in learning objectives, their translation into meaningful student attitudes and behaviours remains limited. This issue stems primarily from the prevalence of one-way, didactic teaching methods and rigid, normative instructional approaches that fail to engage

students in reflective, experiential moral learning.

The dominant mode of instruction in many Islamic education classrooms relies on lecture-based delivery, where students are expected to memorise religious texts and ethical injunctions without sufficient opportunities to question, interpret, or apply these values in real-life contexts (Muhaimin, 2014; Zuhdi, 2006a). Consequently, character education becomes a matter of transmission rather than transformation, where students cognitively understand values but struggle to embody them in daily life (Lickona, 1992). This disconnect between knowledge and practice has led to what scholars term “ethical formalism”—a superficial adherence to moral codes without deep internalisation (Hefner, 2016, 2021).

Moreover, the rigidity inherent in normative teaching frameworks within Islamic education presents significant obstacles to the development of student autonomy and moral reasoning. These frameworks often prioritise religious discipline and rote memorisation over critical engagement and reflective thinking, thereby restricting students’ ability to explore complex ethical issues deeply. Such approaches typically limit opportunities for dialogue about moral dilemmas, ethical ambiguities, and the pluralistic realities students encounter in contemporary society. This educational environment discourages questioning and open discussion, thereby curtailing students’ capacity to negotiate and interpret values in ways that resonate with their personal experiences and social contexts (Palmer, 2010).

Consequently, students tend to develop a passive moral stance, where adherence to rules and external authority supersedes an internalised understanding of the spiritual and social significance of those rules. This phenomenon reduces ethical learning to mere compliance rather than meaningful character formation, undermining the ultimate purpose of Islamic education: cultivating morally conscious and socially responsible individuals (Mezirow, 1991; Palmer, 2010). Addressing this challenge requires a pedagogical shift toward more dialogical, reflective, and student-centred methods that empower learners to engage critically with their faith and the complexities of modern life.

Effective character education, particularly in the Islamic context, requires a shift toward dialogical, student-centred pedagogy that encourages critical reflection, emotional intelligence, and contextual moral reasoning. This includes using real-life case studies, collaborative activities, community engagement, and guided ethical reflection—methods proven to strengthen the internalisation of values (Berkowitz & Melinda C. Bier, 2004; Sehati et al., 2024). Without such pedagogical shifts, character education risks remaining superficial, failing to cultivate students who can live out Islamic moral values in a complex, multicultural society.

4. Development of a Holistic, Humanisation-Based Curriculum Model

In response to the persistent gaps in character education within Islamic Religious Education, a holistic, humanisation-based curriculum model has been developed. This model addresses the limitations of cognitive-dominant, normative instruction by integrating three key components: universal Islamic values (*rahmatan lil ‘alamin*), dialogical and reflective pedagogy, and experiential learning grounded in students’ socio-cultural realities.

At its core, the model reclaims the spirit of *Islam as a mercy to all creation (rahmatan lil’ alamin)*, promoting values such as justice, compassion, respect for diversity, and social responsibility (Nasr, 2009). These values are not only taught as abstract ideals but are embedded

within pedagogical practices that encourage critical thinking, moral reasoning, and empathetic engagement. This reflects a shift from religious instruction as dogma to religion as lived ethics, deeply intertwined with learners' everyday lives (Al-Attas, 1993, 1999). *Second*, the curriculum adopts dialogical and reflective strategies inspired by both Islamic educational heritage and contemporary transformative pedagogy. These include classroom discussions, moral dilemmas, journaling, group reflections, and teacher-student dialogue. Such practices help students construct meaning from ethical teachings rather than passively receive information. The concept of *education as dialogue* aligns with classical Islamic traditions of *shūrā* (consultation) and *nashīḥah* (constructive advice), fostering a participatory, relational learning environment.

Third, the model emphasises experiential learning, in which students engage in real-world activities that require them to apply Islamic values in practical, socially meaningful ways. Examples include community service projects, peer collaboration, and simulations of ethical decision-making. This approach not only reinforces the internalisation of character values but also builds socio-emotional competencies essential for navigating modern pluralistic societies (Kolb, 1984; Lickona, 1992).

Preliminary implementations of the humanisation-based curriculum model in several schools have elicited positive responses from various educational stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, and supervisors. These stakeholders emphasise several key strengths of the model: its flexibility, contextual relevance, and strong alignment with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, which prioritises student agency, character formation, and the integration of local wisdom (Kemendikbud-Ristek, 2022). The flexibility of this model enables educators to adapt content and teaching methods to the diverse cultural and social contexts of their students, enhancing relevance and engagement. This responsiveness addresses a common critique of previous curricula that tended to apply uniform, decontextualised approaches unsuitable for Indonesia's pluralistic society (Hefner, 2016).

Aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum's progressive vision, the model promotes active student participation and holistic character development, moving beyond mere cognitive mastery of religious texts to nurturing morally grounded individuals. The curriculum thereby redefines the purpose of Islamic education: it is not solely about the transmission of religious knowledge but about shaping individuals who embody Islamic ethical values in their personal, social, and civic lives (Hefner, 2016; Kemendikbud-Ristek, 2022; Mohamad et al., 2015). This shift toward a more comprehensive and human-centred Islamic education is crucial for preparing students to navigate complex ethical challenges and contribute positively to a diverse, modern society.

5. Positive Impacts on Student Engagement and Character Formation

The implementation of a humanisation-based curriculum model in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has demonstrated significant positive impacts on both student engagement and character development. Unlike traditional, teacher-centred approaches, this model actively encourages students to participate, reflect critically, and relate religious teachings to their own lived experiences, thereby fostering a deeper, more meaningful internalisation of moral values. *Firstly*, this curriculum promotes active participation by engaging students in discussions, collaborative projects, and experiential learning. Such participatory pedagogies empower

students to become agents of their own learning rather than passive recipients (Mohamad et al., 2015; Palmer, 2010). By engaging students in dialogue and critical reflection, the curriculum cultivates their moral reasoning skills and encourages them to examine personal and social ethical issues in light of Islamic principles (Mezirow, 1991).

Secondly, the model effectively strengthens the link between religious teachings and students' daily lives, making moral and spiritual education relevant and applicable. Students are encouraged to connect core Islamic values, such as compassion, justice, and responsibility, with their family, community, and broader social interactions. This contextualisation enhances the authenticity of learning and helps bridge the often-criticised gap between school-based religious knowledge and real-world moral behaviour (Lickona, 1992; Zuhdi, 2006a).

Empirical studies indicate that students taught under this holistic approach exhibit greater internalisation of character values and demonstrate more consistent ethical behaviour than those exposed to conventional curricula focused predominantly on rote memorisation and normative instruction (Berkowitz & Melinda C. Bier, 2004; Sehati et al., 2024). Teachers and school leaders report improvements in students' empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility, along with enhanced motivation and academic engagement (Alhamuddin et al., 2022; Hefner, 2016). Furthermore, this curriculum aligns well with broader educational reforms such as Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka, which prioritises learner autonomy, character education, and contextualised learning. The flexibility and relevance of the humanisation-based model make it a promising innovation that addresses long-standing challenges in moral education within Islamic schools (Alifuddin et al., 2021; Kemendikbud-Ristek, 2022; Mohamad et al., 2015; Tony Becher & Stuart Maclure, 2024). The humanisation-based curriculum not only enhances student engagement but also effectively fosters character formation, making it a valuable pedagogical innovation for Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia and similar contexts worldwide.

D. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical need to transform the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Indonesia from its traditional, cognitively and textually dominated approach to a more holistic, humanisation-based model. Current challenges—such as teachers' difficulties in implementing character education in a contextualised way, inconsistent internalisation of core moral values, and rigid normative teaching methods—demonstrate the limitations of the existing curriculum framework. The humanisation-based curriculum model, integrating universal Islamic values, dialogical pedagogy, and experiential learning rooted in students' social realities, offers a promising alternative. Preliminary implementations have shown positive responses from educational stakeholders, affirming the model's flexibility, contextual relevance, and alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum's vision of student agency and character formation. Ultimately, this curriculum innovation bridges the gap between educational policy and classroom practice, enhancing both the quality and impact of character education in Islamic schools. By fostering active participation, critical reflection, and meaningful engagement with religious and social values, it prepares students to embody Islamic ethics in their personal, social, and civic lives, contributing to the development of morally grounded and socially responsible individuals.

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