Integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and Islamic Education in Developing Elementary School Students' Character

Iwan Satria*, Feri Riski Dinata

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Al-Hikmah Bumi Agung Way Kanan, Indonesia
*Correspondence: ✉ iwansatria155@gmail.com
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic educational values at UPT SD Negeri 02 Serdang Kuring. Addressing the limited scholarly attention on Islamic-values integration at the primary-school level, this research employs a qualitative descriptive design using observation, interviews, and documentation analyzed through the Miles and Huberman model. The findings reveal that integration is implemented systematically through instructional planning, teacher modeling, student habituation, reinforcement of a religious school culture, and collaboration between teachers, school leaders, and parents, supported by the use of local wisdom as contextual grounding. This integration strengthens students' character formation, particularly responsibility, honesty, discipline, and hard work, aligning with the Profile of Pancasila Students. The study's novelty lies in identifying a collaborative, context-based integration pattern as an effective character education strategy. The results suggest the need for adaptable Islamic-values-based character education models within the Merdeka Curriculum for wider application in diverse school contexts.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan proses dan hasil integrasi Kurikulum Merdeka dengan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam di UPT SD Negeri 02 Serdang Kuring. Penelitian didasarkan kesenjangan penelitian dimana penelitian terkait praktek integrasi nilai Islam dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di tingkat Sekolah Dasar yang masih terbatas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman. Penelitian menghasilkan simpulan bahwa integrasi Kurikulum Merdeka dengan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam telah dilaksanakan secara sistematis melalui perencanaan pembelajaran, keteladanan guru, pembiasaan, penguatan budaya religius sekolah, serta kolaborasi antara warga sekolah dan orang tua dengan memanfaatkan kearifan lokal sebagai konteks pembelajaran. Integrasi ini berkontribusi pada penguatan karakter peserta didik, khususnya nilai tanggung jawab, kejujuran, disiplin, dan kerja keras yang selaras dengan Profil Pelajar Pancasila. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada temuan mengenai pola integrasi yang bersifat kolaboratif dan berbasis kearifan lokal sebagai strategi implementatif dalam pendidikan karakter. Implikasinya, diperlukan pengembangan model pembelajaran karakter berbasis nilai Islam dalam Kurikulum Merdeka yang dapat diadaptasi oleh sekolah dasar lain, serta menjadi rujukan bagi guru dan pembuat kebijakan dalam meningkatkan efektivitas pendidikan karakter pada konteks multikultural.

A. INTRODUCTION

The formation of students' character, particularly at the elementary education level, has increasingly become a central focus, as indicated by the growing number of studies and discussions on character education, values education, and social-emotional learning.[1] Various theories agree on the importance of character education; however, they differ fundamentally in defining the most appropriate approach for its implementation. For example, Lickona emphasizes the integration of universal moral values within character education.[2] While other scholars such as Kristjánsson argue that character education should not merely involve teaching values but must be implemented comprehensively by encompassing affective dimensions as well as habituation.[3]

In addition to these conceptual perspectives, Biesta highlights the risk of "over-moralization" in educational contexts when institutions emphasize character value development without adequate contextual sensitivity.[4] These debates and differing viewpoints indicate that value integration has become a complex issue, one that underscores the need for approaches that are contextually grounded and culturally relevant.

International studies published in various journals indicate a shift in educational orientation from a sole emphasis on cognitive aspects toward the integration of values through diverse forms of learning, such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and virtue education. These learning concepts have become a fundamental basis for the design of modern curricula.[5] Curriculum development is required to position value formation as a central structure through practices that are consistent, planned, and sustained.[6] This trend signals the beginning of a reorganization of educational paradigms from epistemic approaches toward more ethical and humanistic forms of education.

Current literature on elementary education highlights two primary patterns of value integration within the curriculum: explicit integration through the delivery of various subjects and value-based modules, and implicit integration through the development of school culture and collaboratively implemented projects.[7] Meanwhile, empirical studies in the fields of positive education and virtue ethics demonstrate that combining explicit and implicit integration can generate long-term impacts on students' character formation, prosocial behavior, and intrapersonal competencie.[8]

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[1]M. Yunus, *Pendidikan Karakter* (Alfabeta, 2024).

[2]Thomas Lichona, "The Challenge of Character Education in Contemporary Schooling," *Journal of Character Education* 16, no. 1 (2020): 11–27.

[3]K. Kristjánsson, "Character Education and Moral Development: New Directions," *Educational Review* 73, no. 2 (2021): 29–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2020.1841045.

[4]G. Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy* (Paradigm Publishers, 2020).

[5] Margaret L. Kern and Michael L. Wehmeyer, *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education* (2021), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3.

[6]He Zhai et al., "Preference Structure in Refusals by Chinese Female International Students," *Arab World English Journal* 16, no. 3 (2025): 285–300, https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol16no3.17.

[7]Thomas P. Oeschger et al., "The Interplay between Teachers' Value-Related Educational Goals and Their Value-Related School Climate over Time," *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 39, no. 4 (2024): 3633–60, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-024-00849-y.

[8]Verónica Fernández Espinosa and Jorge López González, "Virtues and Values Education in Schools: A Study in an International Sample," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 45, no. 1 (2024): 69–85, https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2022.2158018.

The development of 21st-century education requires a strengthening of learning needs that not only emphasize academic competencies but also promote the holistic development of various forms of character, spiritual values, and diverse social competencies.[9] This paradigm shift, within the Indonesian context, is accommodated in the content of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed by prioritizing the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile), which is expected to serve as a framework for national character formation. The national character components consist of six core values: faith and noble morality, independence, responsibility, cooperation, creativity, and critical reasoning.[10] Through the Merdeka Curriculum, it is expected that learners will embody an integration of intellectual, moral, and spiritual intelligence, aligning with both global developmental demands and national values.[11]

Although the character values embedded in the Merdeka Curriculum provide an important foundation, they need to be reinforced by religious values, including Islamic educational values that have long served as an ethical cornerstone for Indonesian society.[12] Islamic education does not only shape cognitive dimensions but also the affective and psychomotor aspects through the internalization of values manifested in everyday practices.[13] Integrating Islamic educational values into the Merdeka Curriculum is regarded as a strategic step to strengthen students' character in a comprehensive manner while ensuring the curriculum's alignment with Indonesia's socioreligious context.[14]

Theoretically, Islamic education encompasses universal character values such as honesty (*ṣidq*), responsibility (*amānah*), diligence (*ijtihād*), and social care (*taʿāwun*).[15] These values align with the main dimensions of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, particularly the aspect of faith and noble morality.[16] Therefore, the integration of Islamic educational character values with the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* has the potential to create a balance between spiritual and social dimensions in the character development of elementary school students.

Value-based education as a global trend is also evident in studies by Kern (2021)[17] and Kristjánsson (2021)[18] in *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*, which emphasize that character education integrating moral and religious values can enhance both psychological well-being and academic achievement. Empirical evidence shows that this approach not only fosters positive behavior but also strengthens students' moral resilience.[19] Consequently, the integration of religious values into general education has become a global phenomenon that is

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[9]Yunus, *Pendidikan Karakter*.

[10]Kemendikbudristek, *Panduan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka* (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

[11]Marhamah Marhamah and Muhd Hayyanul Damanik, "Building a Generation of Character: Strategies and Challenges of Character Education at the Elementary School Level in Indonesia," *Journal of Social Work and Science Education* 6, no. 3 (2025): 1200–1216, https://doi.org/10.52690/jswse.v6i3.1198.

[12]Nur Khaerunnisa, *Integrating Islamic Values in Curriculum Design* (IIUM Press, 2025).

[13]Guntur Gunawan et al., "Methods for Achieving Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotor Aspects in Islamic Religious Education Learning: A Study at Senior High School in Rejang Lebong," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 15, no. 1 (2023): 981–91, https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i1.2793.

[14]Muhammad Misbah Irawan Setiawan, *Islamic Education and Character Formation in Indonesia* (Prenadamedia, 2025).

[15]Ahmad Taufiq & Siti Indriyaswai, *Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Islam Dalam Pendidikan Dasar* (UIN Maliki Press, 2025).

[16]Abdul Rahmat, *Pendidikan Islam Dan Pembentukan Karakter Siswa Sekolah Dasar* (Alfabeta, 2023).

[17]Kern and Wehmeyer, *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*.

[18]Kristjánsson, "Character Education and Moral Development: New Directions."

[19]Terence Lovat, *Values Education and Teachers' Work: A New Ethic for the New Millennium* (Springer, 2022).

relevant to be contextualized in Indonesia through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to develop various character dimensions within the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* as its core component. However, recent studies indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces several challenges, particularly in integrating Islamic educational values in general elementary schools.[20] One such challenge is that teachers often experience difficulties in translating religious values into contextual learning practices, either due to limited pedagogical understanding of values or inconsistencies between theory and practice in curriculum implementation.[21] These obstacles are also observed in various regions, including public schools in Lampung, such as UPT SD Negeri 02 Serdang Kuring, Bahuga Subdistrict, Way Kanan Regency.

Preliminary observations at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring show that the administrative implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is in place; however, the integration of Islamic values in learning has not yet occurred systematically. Initial interviews revealed that approximately 60% of teachers have incorporated Islamic values into their teaching, while the remaining 40% lack sufficient understanding to do so explicitly and in a structured manner.

The findings from the preliminary study also indicate that students' character development does not yet align with the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* or Islamic educational values. Indicators such as discipline, responsibility, social care, and religiosity remain low. Moreover, practices of worship, including prayer and congregational rituals, are not carried out with full awareness. These findings underscore the need for a more systematic pedagogical strategy to internalize Islamic values in daily learning.

The preliminary observations at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring highlight a gap between the normative expectations of the Merdeka Curriculum and its actual implementation in schools. This gap necessitates a comprehensive and contextual integration of values to ensure consistent character internalization. Therefore, learning strategies that can bridge the curriculum's objectives and classroom practice are required.

The problem identification from the preliminary study points to a gap between *das Sein* and *das Sollen*, indicating the need for more in-depth research on the integration of Islamic educational values in general elementary school learning. This aligns with Elton-Chalcraft's perspective, which emphasizes that the effectiveness of religious character education is highly dependent on the relevance of the learning approach to local culture and school conditions.[22] Thus, the integration of Islamic values must be designed in accordance with the characteristics of students and their socio-cultural environment.

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[20]Ruli Astuti et al., "Integration of Islamic Values into English Language Teaching in the Digital Era: Challenges and Prospectives," *Halaqa: Islamic Education Journal* 8, no. 1 (2024): 26–34, https://doi.org/10.21070/halaqa.v8i1.1680.

[21]Rumawang Rumawang et al., "Opportunities and Challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Islamic Religious Education Subject at SMA Negeri 1 Sakra, East Lombok," *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan* 9, no. 4 (2024): 2628–36, https://doi.org/10.29303/jipp.v9i4.2683.

[22]S. Elton-Chalcraft, "Culturally Responsive Religious Education in Diverse Contexts," *British Journal of Religious Education* 46, no. 1 (2024): 39–53, https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2023.2187034.

From a policy perspective, this study is expected to contribute to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in strengthening the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* and Islamic educational character. The integration of Islamic values is viewed not merely as a normative application of religious teachings but as a strategy to reinforce students' character through the contextualization of Islamic values in learning practices.[23] Hence, this study offers practical contributions for teachers and policymakers in designing applicable character education.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of contextual Islamic education studies through the integration of Islamic values within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The theoretical relevance aligns with the ideas of Mata-McMahon and Escarfuller regarding the importance of contextual spiritual education in shaping students' character.[24] A descriptive qualitative approach is deemed capable of revealing the natural processes of value integration occurring in classrooms in greater depth.

This research builds on previous studies indicating that Islamic value integration has mostly been explored in the context of madrasahs, whereas studies in public elementary schools remain limited, particularly within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.[25] This gap forms the novelty of the present study, which aims to uncover the practice of integrating Islamic values in general schools through a descriptive qualitative approach. Consequently, this study is not only contextual but also offers a methodological perspective that enriches the discourse on value integration in national education.

The results of this study are expected to serve as a basis for developing learning models aligned with Islamic educational values and the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Beyond theoretical contributions, the study also provides practical guidance for teachers and policymakers in designing applicable character education. Academically, it expands the discourse on the integration of Islamic education and national character education, helping bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Based on the above, this research is crucial for addressing the needs of character-based, religious, and contextual elementary education in Indonesia. Through qualitative study at UPT SD Negeri 02 Serdang Kuring, this research is expected to serve as a model for other elementary schools in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum grounded in Islamic values and national culture.

B. METHODS

This study is classified as field research, which is conducted directly in the natural context where the research subjects are located.[26] The primary focus of the study is the implementation of Islamic value integration within the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level. The selection of field research was based on the need to directly observe the

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[23]Syaiful Kurniawan, "Internalization of Islamic Values in Strengthening the Profile of Pancasila Students in the Independent Curriculum," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Indonesia (JPII)* 8, no. 1 (2023): 13–27, https://doi.org/10.35316/jpii.v8i1.2498.

[24]Jenifer Mata-McMahon & Juan Escarfuller, *Spiritual Education and Children's Learning Experiences* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

[25]L. Franken and B. Gend, "Religious Education and Character Formation: An Empirical Perspective," *Journal of Moral Education* 52, no. 3 (2023): 35–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2022.2109031.

[26]Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners (5th Ed.)* (Sage Publications, 2019).

social, cultural, and religious practices relevant to the study's focus at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring. This approach allows the researcher to obtain a contextual understanding of the educational phenomena being studied without separating them from the social environment in which these practices occur.[27]

The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand the processes, meanings, and subjective experiences of actors involved in integrating Islamic values into Merdeka Curriculum-based learning. Through this approach, interviews with teachers and students not only collect factual information but also uncover the reasons behind their practices.[28] The study also focuses on describing the forms of integration, implementation strategies, and emerging obstacles. This approach aligns with the perspectives of Flick and Creswell, who argue that qualitative research enables researchers to understand social realities from participants' perspectives.[29] The research was conducted at UPT SD Negeri 02 Serdang Kuring, Bahuga Subdistrict, Way Kanan Regency, Lampung, from August to October 2025.

The research data consisted of qualitative data, which are non-numerical and include verbal descriptions, symbols, and visual documentation. Data were collected from multiple sources through interviews, observation, and documentation.[30] The data sources comprised primary and secondary sources.[31] Primary sources included the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, classroom teachers, and students as key informants regarding the practice of Islamic value integration. Secondary sources included supporting documents such as teaching modules, the school's operational curriculum, and records of religious activities related to the study.[32]

Data collection was carried out through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to monitor teacher and student behaviors during the learning process. Interviews were employed to explore perceptions, experiences, and pedagogical considerations of the informants. Documentation was used to verify and strengthen the data obtained through observation and interviews. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation, as recommended by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña.[33] These triangulations ensure that the research findings are examined from multiple perspectives and techniques, thereby enhancing the credibility of the results.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion.[34] During the data reduction stage, information from interviews, observations, and documentation was selected and organized according to the research focus. Data were then presented through narrative

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[27]J.W. Creswell & C.N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (4th Ed.)* (Sage Publications, 2018).

[28]Feri Riski Dinata Feri, "Integrasi Metode Kualitatif Dan Kuantitatif Dalam Penelitian Manajemen Pendidikan Islam," *Islamic Management : Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 2 (2025): 28–32, https://doi.org/10.63097/f75r7p71.

[29]Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research (6th Ed.)* (Sage Publications, 2019).

[30]Situmoran, *Analisis Data Untuk Riset* (USU Press, 2020).

[31]Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (4th Ed.)*.

[32]M.B. Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook (4th Ed.)* (Sage Publications, 2019).

[33]Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook (4th Ed.)*.

[34]M.B. Miles and A.M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Sage Publications, 2020).

descriptions to illustrate patterns of Islamic value integration in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Conclusions were drawn inductively, taking into account the consistency of field findings and their relevance to existing theories and previous research. Data interpretation referred to the framework of Islamic education and the reinforcement of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, in line with Arthur et al.'s view on the importance of character development through the internalization of moral values within the curriculum.[35]

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was conducted at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring, Bahuga Subdistrict, Way Kanan Regency, Lampung Province. The research aimed to describe the forms of integration of Islamic educational values in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and to analyze their impact on students' character development. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and students, as well as document analysis. All data were analyzed using the Miles & Huberman model through the processes of data reduction, data display, and verification.

1. Integration of Islamic Values in School Culture and Learning

Observations and interviews indicated that the integration of Islamic values within the Merdeka Curriculum at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring was carried out systematically, involving all components of the school. The principal, teachers, students, and educational staff actively participated in fostering a religious school culture. However, some teachers acknowledged challenges in maintaining consistency, particularly when administrative workloads increased.

The principal acted as the initiator and coordinator of the integration program. Policies issued included the habituation of prayer before and after learning, a 10-minute *tadarus*, Friday alms (*infaq*), "Blessed Friday" and "Clean Friday" activities, habituation of *salat dhuha*, and the enforcement of Islamic ethics. The principal emphasized that these policies should be internalized across both academic and non-academic activities. He stated, "We want Islamic values to be visible not only in Islamic Religious Education lessons but also in the daily school culture, involving all school components".[36]

The findings reveal that the implementation of Islamic teachings in Merdeka Curriculum learning activities and the school culture at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring has been carried out systematically and in a planned manner, producing a positive impact on students' character, although it has not yet reached its full potential. The implementation of Islamic values in Merdeka Curriculum learning activities involved all school components, including the principal, teachers, students, and other school personnel.

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[35]J. Arthur et al., *The Routledge International Handbook of Character Education* (Routledge, 2021), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429295376.

[36] "Interview with Principal," October 15, 2025.

2. Leadership and Supervision of the Principal

The role of the principal in integrating Islamic values into Merdeka Curriculum-based learning is highly strategic. The principal acts as the initiator, director, and supervisor of program implementation. All policies issued are directed toward achieving the school's vision, namely the development of students' character as religious and morally upright individuals. Consequently, the principal mandates that teachers and educational staff integrate Islamic values into both academic and non-academic activities.

These policies are operationalized in the principal's work program at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring. The policies include habituation to reciting prayers before and after learning, 10-minute *tadarus* of the Qur'an or Iqra' before lessons, Friday alms (*infaq*), "Blessed Friday" and "Clean Friday" activities, as well as habituation of *salat dhuha*. The principal also emphasizes the importance of courteous behavior in accordance with Islamic ethics. The consistency in terminology and practice indicates that the integration of religious values is not merely symbolic but has become part of the school culture.

Field findings reveal that the principal's role extends beyond policy formulation. Observations indicate that the principal serves as the primary role model in applying Islamic character. The principal demonstrates discipline, honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), and responsibility in daily activities. As expressed by a Grade III teacher, "The principal always arrives first and greets us warmly. This makes us feel we should follow her example of discipline".[37] This interview excerpt confirms that role modeling serves as an internal motivator for teachers to implement Islamic values.

The research findings on the principal's leadership and supervision can be identified under three main themes, according to Miles and Huberman's coding analysis:

1) Formal religious policies, such as *tadarus* and collective prayers.
2) Personal role modeling, demonstrated by the principal's consistent practice of Islamic values.
3) Continuous supervision, including monitoring the integration of values in teaching materials and classroom practice

The principal also carries out supervisory functions through both academic and non-academic oversight. Supervision ensures that the integration of Islamic values remains consistent and monitors the development of students' character. As noted by a Grade IV teacher, "During supervision, the principal always asks which parts of the teaching module contain Islamic values and how we deliver them in class".[38]

Nevertheless, field observations reveal certain limitations in implementation. For example, *tadarus* has not been conducted uniformly in all classes due to students' varying Qur'an reading abilities. Moreover, character supervision requires intensive time, making in-depth monitoring challenging. These factors indicate that the success of integrating Islamic values depends not only on the principal's policies but also on teachers' capacity and students' readiness.

Theoretically, these findings align with Biesta's perspective on the importance of education in forming responsible subjects, while also cautioning against the risk of "over-

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[37] "Interview with Grade III Teacher," October 22, 2025.
[38] "Interview with Grade IV Teacher," October 22, 2025.

moralization" when values are taught without contextual sensitivity.[39] In this case, the principal has attempted to balance regulation, role modeling, and habituation to prevent an excessively moralistic approach.

3. Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers and Parents

The role of teachers in integrating the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic educational values at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring is complex and encompasses the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation of character development. In the planning stage, teachers embed Islamic values such as honesty (*ṣidq*), responsibility (*amānah*), cooperation (*taʿāwun*), and discipline as core components in developing teaching modules. These values are incorporated into learning outcomes across all subjects, not limited to Islamic Religious Education. Furthermore, teachers use Islamic values as one of the assessment indicators in the Student Profile Strengthening Projects (*Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila*).

During the implementation stage, teachers act as facilitators of value integration in the learning process. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers collaborate with classroom teachers, counseling teachers, and other school stakeholders to ensure that Islamic values are present in every learning interaction. This practice is observed in routine activities such as opening prayers, moral advice linked to lesson content, and reflections on the application of Islamic values in daily life. A Grade VI teacher stated, "When teaching the Inspirational Stories theme, I always include stories of the Prophet or his companions so that the children can take concrete lessons".[40]

Integration of Islamic values also occurs in general subjects. In Indonesian language lessons, for example, teachers connect reading materials to the exemplary behavior of Islamic figures. This practice helps students understand the relationship between texts, morality, and real-life context, aligning with the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), which emphasize the connection of material to real-world experiences.

Teachers reported that the most frequently used learning approaches include experiential learning, contextual learning, *imthāl* (providing examples), and *mauʿiẓah ḥasanah* (wise advice). These approaches are combined with deep learning and joyful learning to ensure meaningful value integration. A Grade V PAI teacher emphasized, "We want students not only to memorize the values but also to practice them. That is why we choose methods that allow children to experience them directly"[41].

One example of direct practice is the habituation of maintaining classroom cleanliness as a manifestation of the value of *ṭahārah*. Other practices include shared meals in the Free Nutritious Meal Program, where teachers guide students to pray before and after eating, clean the dining area, and recite wholesome phrases (*kalimat thayyibah*). These activities not only reinforce cognitive understanding of Islamic teachings but also cultivate moral habitus in students' daily lives.

Field observations further support these findings. Every morning, the school plays the recitation of Juz 30 to welcome students. Teachers greet students at the school gate, shake hands, and offer *salam*. This activity is followed by collective prayer led by students using a

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[39] Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*.
[40] "Interview with Grade VI Teacher," October 22, 2025.
[41] "Interview with Grade V PAI Teacher," October 22, 2025.

loudspeaker, while classroom teachers ensure order during the activity in each class. Observations indicate that religious values are not only taught but internalized through a consistent school culture.

Miles and Huberman's coding analysis of teachers' roles in integrating the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic education in character development identified three main themes:
1) Integration of values in lesson planning.
2) Implementation through habituation and teacher role modeling.
3) Parental involvement in reinforcing students' character at home.

The analysis highlights the crucial role of parents, particularly in ensuring continuity of habituation at home. As one parent reported, "Teachers ask us to continue the practice of prayers and cleanliness at home. This helps children remain consistent".[42] Nevertheless, the integration of values is not without challenges. Some students still have limited Qur'an reading skills, so *tadarus* is not implemented uniformly across all classes. Additionally, not all parents have the time or capacity to continue character habituation at home. These limitations indicate that the success of value integration depends not only on teachers but also on students' family and social environments.

These findings support the theory that character education requires collaborative work between school and family, while also reinforcing Biesta's view that moral education must be contextually sensitive to avoid "over-moralization.[43] Consequently, teachers have attempted to maintain a balance between moral instruction and authentic experiences, although there is still room for improvement, particularly regarding equitable implementation and parental support.[44]

4. Effectiveness of P5 Projects and Value Contextualization

The Student Profile Strengthening Project (*Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, P5) serves as an important medium for integrating the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic educational values. In the theme "Local Wisdom and Social Care," teachers guide students to identify local cultural practices that align with Islamic values, such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), *ta'āwun* (helping each other), and *syukr* (gratitude to Allah's blessings). Observations indicate that students participate enthusiastically, particularly during exploration of their surroundings and dialogues with community leaders. According to a classroom teacher, this enthusiasm "emerges because the children feel that the activity is close to their daily life".[45]

Value contextualization is also implemented through project-based activities, such as documenting local traditions or participating in community cleaning programs. This process helps students understand the relationship between culture and moral values while fostering empathy and social responsibility. Based on Miles and Huberman's analysis, the main themes emerging from the P5 implementation includ:
a. Internalization of values through real-life practice.
b. Strengthening of social-religious identity.

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[42] "Interview with Parent," October 30, 2025.

[43] Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*.

[44] Feri Riski Dinata et al., "Peran Deep Learning Dalam Optimalisasi Proses Manajemen Pembelajaran Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 1, no. 1 (2025): 33–36.

[45] "Interview with Grade V Teacher," October 22, 2025.

c. Cross-role collaboration involving teachers, students, and the community.

The role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in these projects is highly significant. PAI teachers do not merely deliver material; they also act as behavioral models through the *uswah ḥasanah* approach. In an interview, a PAI teacher stated, "Children understand better when they see direct examples, not just hear lectures".[46] This modeling approach enables students to comprehend the application of Islamic values in the context of project activities without feeling lectured. The practice aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes that moral behavior is formed through observation and imitation.[47]

In addition to teachers, parental involvement is a reinforcing factor in the successful integration of values. The school regularly sends reports on character development and guidance on practicing Islamic values at home. A parent explained, "We know what needs to be continued at home, such as praying together and encouraging children to read the Qur'an at night".[48] This finding highlights the importance of continuity between school-based and home-based education in shaping students' character.

Overall, the integration of Islamic values into the Merdeka Curriculum through P5 demonstrates effectiveness in several aspects, particularly in enhancing students' social empathy, discipline, and sense of responsibility. However, this effectiveness is not uniform. Observations show that some students still struggle to apply the values consistently, especially in activities requiring group cooperation. Factors such as family environment and students' religious literacy influence the internalization process. These limitations indicate that the success of value integration through P5 depends on three key causal factors:
 a. Consistent school policies.
 b. Teachers' daily role modeling.
 c. Parental support in habituating values at home.

Through the synergy of these three factors, SDN 02 Serdang Kuring has succeeded in creating an educational ecosystem that harmoniously combines academic competence and spirituality. These findings also reinforce the view that value integration in education requires not only curricular regulation but also shared understanding of values among schools, teachers, students, and parents.

5. Analysis of Integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and Islamic Education in Developing Elementary School Students' Character

The findings indicate that the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic educational values at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring is effective, systematic, and locally distinctive. Teachers not only focus on academic achievement but also strive to develop students' character through Islamic values. This approach aligns with Lickona's perspective, which emphasizes that contemporary character education should combine morality, religiosity, and knowledge acquisition.[49] Through this integration, character values are not merely taught as abstract concepts but are actively lived in the educational process. A

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[46] "Interview with Grade V PAI Teacher," October 22, 2025.

[47] D.H. Schunk, "Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective," *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 36, no. 3 (2021): 165–75, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2010.10.002.

[48] "Interview with Parent," October 30, 2025.

[49] Lichona, "The Challenge of Character Education in Contemporary Schooling."

classroom teacher explained, "In every teaching module, we always try to incorporate values such as honesty, responsibility, or cooperation so that children do not just learn the material, but understand the meaning of good behavior in daily life".[50] This statement underscores that value integration is deliberate and well-planned.

Teachers utilize the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum to strengthen character education. This principle of flexibility allows teachers to adapt learning activities to the social context of students. The findings support Kern and Wehmeyer's view that a flexible curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to cultivate moral values through learning experiences that are relevant to students' real-life situations. Consequently, Islamic values are not merely an "additional content," but become an intrinsic part of learning objectives.[51]

Value integration is implemented through habituation, role modeling, experiential learning, demonstrations, and project-based learning, all framed within deep learning approaches emphasizing meaningful and joyful experiences. These findings are consistent with the theories of Arthur, Kristjansson, and Walker, which highlight the role of moral exemplarity or teacher modeling as the foundation of character development. A PAI teacher emphasized this point, "Modeling is more impactful for students. They imitate what they see more than what they hear".[52]

Furthermore, teachers demonstrate competence in designing teaching modules that integrate academic and spiritual values. This reflects a comprehensive understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum principles. The findings align with Seligman's assertion that positive and meaningful education can enhance students' moral and social well-being, particularly when values are learned through real-life experiences.[53]

The Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), themed Local Wisdom and Social Care, serves as a crucial medium for integrating Islamic character values. Students are encouraged to learn values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), *ta'āwun*, gratitude (*syukr*), and responsibility through social environment exploration. Observations indicate high student enthusiasm during project participation. This supports Oeschger's perspective that successful value internalization is strongly influenced by teachers' ability to contextualize values within students' social environment.[54] Consequently, Islamic values are not only cognitively understood but are also practiced in meaningful and relevant situations.

Routine activities, such as morning Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*), communal prayers, greetings upon entering classrooms, Friday religious activities, and hygiene habits (*ṭahārah*), strengthen moral habituation. These routines create a religious ecosystem that allows students to experience values consistently. This finding aligns with Hasan's view that value internalization is effective when students repeatedly experience values within a supportive environment.[55]

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[50] "Interview with Grade V Teacher," October 22, 2025.

[51] Kern and Wehmeyer, *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*.

[52] "Interview with Grade V PAI Teacher," October 22, 2025.

[53] N. Fatimah et al., "Urgensi Pendidikan Karakter Dalam Membentuk Akhlak Mulia: Kajian Literatur Pendidikan Islam," *J-STAF: Siddiq, Tabligh, Amanah, Fathonah* 4, no. 2 (2025): 134–35, https://doi.org/10.62515/staf.v4i2.1047.

[54] Oeschger et al., "The Interplay between Teachers' Value-Related Educational Goals and Their Value-Related School Climate over Time."

[55] Hasan Basri and Alamin Abdullah, "Curriculum Integration Constructs in Integrated Islamic Elementary School," *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 1 (2024): 79–99, https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v5i1.873.

School leadership plays a central role, particularly in fostering a religious and conducive environment for value internalization. Observations show that the principal provides guidance, models behavior, and conducts routine supervision. These findings support Oeschger's assertion that school leadership is a key variable in the success of character education.[56] The principal explained, "We want every corner of the school to reflect Islamic values so that students experience an environment that guides them to become good individuals".[57]

Teachers act as key agents throughout the integration process, from planning to implementation and evaluation. In planning, teachers incorporate Islamic values into teaching modules, learning outcomes, and character assessments. This step aligns with the perspective that value integration should be designed from the outset so that values become an inherent part of learning rather than an add-on.[58] During implementation, teachers apply experiential learning and contextual teaching and learning approaches, as well as religious methods such as *mau'izah ḥasanah* (wise counsel) and *uswah ḥasanah* (role modeling). These practices are well-grounded in Lickona's theory, which explains that character formation involves moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.[59] Activities such as hygiene practices, Friday charity, communal prayers, and greeting routines are concrete manifestations of these three dimensions.

A consistently cultivated religious school culture reinforces the successful integration of values. Religious routines do not merely function as rituals but serve as habituation processes that shape students' personalities. Collaboration among teachers, especially between PAI teachers and classroom teachers, demonstrates collective awareness to strengthen character education. This finding aligns with Aierbe-Barandiaran's research, which emphasizes that consistency among teachers and subjects is a key factor in successful value education.[60]

Parental involvement through active communication, character development reports, and reinforcement of values at home ensures continuity between school and family-based character education. This supports Ki Hajar Dewantara's Tri-Center Education concept, which asserts that education succeeds when there is synergy among school, family, and community.[61] The contextualization of Islamic values with the local culture of Serdang Kuring, which upholds mutual cooperation and social care, is a major supporting factor in program success. This demonstrates that the integration of Islamic values does not occur in isolation but is harmonized with pre-existing social values in the community.

Overall, the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and Islamic educational values at this school is successful, although not yet fully optimized. The novelty of this research lies in the model of integration based on local wisdom and collaborative efforts of all school components and families. This approach illustrates that integrating religious values into the national

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[56]Oeschger et al., "The Interplay between Teachers' Value-Related Educational Goals and Their Value-Related School Climate over Time."

[57] "Interview with Principal," October 15, 2025.

[58]Fatimah et al., "Urgensi Pendidikan Karakter Dalam Membentuk Akhlak Mulia: Kajian Literatur Pendidikan Islam."

[59]Lichona, "The Challenge of Character Education in Contemporary Schooling."

[60]A. Aierbe-Barandiaran et al., "Family Involvement and School Effectiveness in Primary Education | Implicación Familiar y Eficacia Escolar En Educación Primaria," *Anales de Psicologia* 39, no. 1 (2023): 51–61.

[61]D.A. Albany, "Perwujudan Pendidikan Karakter Pada Era Kontemporer Berdasarkan Perspektif Ki Hajar Dewantara," *Jurnal Humanitas: Katalisator Perubahan Dan Inovator Pendidikan* 7, no. 2 (2021): 97–102, https://doi.org/10.29408/jhm.v7i2.3393.

curriculum can be effective when designed contextually, collaboratively, and based on a strong school culture.

In conclusion, the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic educational values at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring has been effectively implemented, although it has not yet fully developed students' character. The integration is contextual, involves all school components and parents, and incorporates local wisdom. All activities foster a school culture aimed not only at academic achievement but also at shaping students' character consistent with the Pancasila values and Islamic education. Students are expected not only to understand various character values but also to implement them in their daily lives.

D. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the integration of Islamic educational values within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (Technical Implementation Unit) *Sekolah Dasar Negeri 02* (Public Elementary School) Serdang Kuring occurs through structured institutional mechanisms, exemplarity (*uswah*) as a primary pedagogical strategy, and learning practices contextualized with the socio-cultural characteristics of the students. The findings indicate that the principal acts as a director, controller, and quality guarantor of value integration, while teachers particularly Islamic Education teachers play a central role in operationalizing these values in classroom practices and the Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Collaboration between the school and parents further strengthens the continuity of value internalization beyond the school environment. Theoretically, this study confirms the relevance of Lickona's framework on character education based on moral knowing–moral feeling–moral action, and reinforces Bandura's principle that moral behavior formation is strongly influenced by observation of authoritative figures. Additionally, the findings align with Biesta's view of education as a process of subjectification that requires spaces for freedom, exemplarity, and meaningful social interactions. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in affirming that the integration of Islamic values in the Merdeka Curriculum is most effective when linked to local wisdom contexts, so that character formation extends beyond the cognitive level into the practical daily behaviors of students. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the utility of a qualitative approach employing source and method triangulation, allowing for comprehensive mapping of value integration at the policy, implementation, and school culture levels. Nevertheless, several limitations were identified. First, the context-specific nature of the study in a single school limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the relatively short observation period did not allow for an in-depth study of the consistency of value integration practices across all subjects. Third, data from parents did not fully capture the diversity of family backgrounds, limiting its analytical contribution. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to adopt a multi-case design, extend observation periods, and include a broader range of perspectives from parents and the local community. Practically, schools should develop a more systematic model of value integration in lesson planning, strengthen teacher capacity through reflective practice-based training, and intensify school–family synergy to ensure the sustainability of value habits at home. Accordingly, this study provides significant empirical and conceptual contributions to the development of Islamic

value integration within the Merdeka Curriculum framework and opens avenues for further research in the context of primary education in Indonesia.

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