

Contextualizing Curriculum Design in Islamic Schools: A Framework for Holistic Learning

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Abstract

This study explores the contextualization of curriculum design in Islamic schools through a holistic learning framework that integrates spiritual, academic, technological, and socio-community dimensions. The research is motivated by the growing need for Islamic education to respond to contemporary challenges, including globalization, rapid technological change, and the demand for character formation aligned with Islamic values. Using a qualitative approach through literature review and analysis of existing practices in Islamic education, this study identifies four key dimensions in holistic curriculum design: spiritual and moral development, cognitive and academic achievement, digital literacy integration, and community engagement. Findings suggest that curriculum design in Islamic schools should not merely focus on the transmission of knowledge, but also on nurturing ethical values, fostering technological adaptability, and strengthening social responsibility. The proposed framework demonstrates that a balanced integration of these dimensions is essential for producing graduates who are intellectually competent, morally grounded, technologically literate, and socially responsible. This study concludes that a holistic curriculum model provides a strategic pathway for Islamic schools to fulfill their dual role: preserving religious identity while remaining relevant in a globalized and knowledge-based society.

Keywords

Islamic Education
Curriculum Design
Holistic Learning
Digital Literacy
Community Engagement

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Received: April 17, 2025

Revised: May 23 2025

Accepted: July 15, 2025

Published: August 28, 2025

Introduction

Islamic education essentially aims to shape complete human beings (*insan kamil*) who are faithful, knowledgeable, and virtuous. This orientation emphasizes not only the mastery of cognitive knowledge but also the development of character, spirituality, and life skills that enable students to face complex social realities. In the context of globalization, modernization, and the era of technological disruption, Islamic schools are required to present a curriculum that is both contextual and comprehensive. The ever-changing sociocultural context, the development of information technology, and the demands of 21st-century skills require a curriculum design that does not simply copy general education models but affirms Islamic identity with a holistic approach (Nasir & Al-Khalifa, 2021).

Holistic education is defined as an approach that emphasizes the integration of intellectual, emotional, social, physical, creative, and spiritual aspects in the learning process (Miller, 2007). In the context of Islamic education, this approach finds relevance because Islam itself emphasizes balance between the worldly and the hereafter, the physical and the spiritual, and the individual and society. Recent research shows that holistic education can shape students with resilience, high empathy, and collaborative skills, which are essential prerequisites in the 21st century (Alavi & Idris, 2022). In other words, Islamic education that emphasizes a holistic approach is not merely a pedagogical strategy but also a strategic effort to ensure the continued relevance of Islamic education amidst changing times.

However, the reality on the ground demonstrates a gap between the ideals of holistic Islamic education and the curriculum implementation in Islamic schools. Many curricula are still dominated by a cognitive orientation, for example, with an emphasis on academic achievement or mastery of specific subject matter, while the affective, psychomotor, and spiritual dimensions often receive less equal attention (Hidayat, 2020).

Research at MIN 1 Berau shows that although a holistic curriculum has been designed, classroom implementation remains partial and does not fully address the life skills and character development of students (Sari, 2022). This highlights both structural and cultural challenges in the effort to provide a comprehensive Islamic education.

Another gap is evident in the integration of the national curriculum with the Islamic identity of educational institutions. Islamic schools often face a dilemma between following the highly academic national curriculum standards and the need to maintain distinctive Islamic values in learning. Rahman's (2021) research found that several Islamic schools attempted innovation through curriculum integration models, such as team teaching and strengthening Islamic character education. However, these efforts faced obstacles in terms of coordination between educators, limited resources, and low involvement of parents and the school community. Thus, the challenges in Islamic education relate not only to curriculum content but also to implementation mechanisms and support for the educational ecosystem.

Furthermore, the development of digital technology presents both opportunities and challenges for curriculum design in Islamic schools. On the one hand, technology enables more interactive, personalized, and collaborative learning, and opens up broader access to global sources of knowledge. On the other hand, the use of technology without filtering Islamic values can lead to disorientation in students, for example, by flooding them with information inconsistent with Islamic ethics. Therefore, the integration of technology into the Islamic school curriculum must be placed within a clear pedagogical framework grounded in Islamic values (Al-Hadad, 2020).

The urgency of presenting a holistic curriculum conceptual framework in Islamic schools is further strengthened when linked to the need to develop a generation of Muslims capable of playing an active role in global society, without losing their Islamic identity. Several international studies emphasize that values- and spirituality-based education can actually strengthen a nation's competitiveness, producing human resources who are not only competent but also possess moral integrity and a high level of social awareness (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). Therefore, curriculum design in Islamic schools must go beyond simply transferring knowledge to developing an Islamic personality and character capable of responding to contemporary challenges.

This article aims to fill this gap by offering a conceptual framework that can be used as a guide in designing a contextual and holistic Islamic school curriculum. This framework emphasizes three main aspects. First, the integration of Islamic values with 21st-century competencies, such as digital literacy, critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Second, the wise and productive use of technology to support relevant and innovative learning. Third, community involvement, including parents, religious leaders, and the community, in supporting curriculum development, ensuring it is more grounded in socio-cultural realities.

By combining philosophical, pedagogical, and practical perspectives, this article seeks to present a new discourse on how Islamic education can move toward a more relevant and transformative direction. Ultimately, it is hoped that this framework will make a tangible contribution to improving the Islamic education system, both at the elementary and secondary levels, so that Islamic education can truly realize the goal of producing a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable, have character, and are globally competitive without losing their identity.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a conceptual design focused on literature review (*library research*). A qualitative approach was chosen because it is appropriate for exploring the meanings, values, and philosophical principles underlying Islamic educational practices, particularly in the context of holistic curriculum development. The primary objective of this method is to develop a conceptual framework that can be used as a reference in designing an Islamic school curriculum that is relevant to the demands of the 21st century while remaining rooted in Islamic values. This type of conceptual research emphasizes critical

interpretation of various academic sources, thus producing a synthesis of new ideas that is not limited to empirical data alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The data sources in this study were obtained from relevant primary and secondary literature. The primary literature consisted of national and international journal articles discussing Islamic curriculum, holistic education, and integrative approaches to education. Meanwhile, the secondary literature included books, conference proceedings, and policy documents related to the national curriculum in Indonesia, such as the 2013 Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum. Sources were selected based on specific criteria, namely relevance to the research theme, recency (prioritization within the last five years), and publisher credibility. Thus, the literature used is not only conceptually rich but also representative in reflecting the state of Islamic education both locally and globally.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic review of the literature using the principles of a *systematic literature review*. This process began with the determination of keywords such as *Islamic curriculum design*, *holistic education*, *integrated Islamic education*, and *contextual learning in Islamic schools*. Next, a literature search was conducted through several academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. From the search results, literature relevant to the theme was selected through reading abstracts and keywords, then grouped into thematic categories such as holistic education theory, curriculum practices in Islamic schools, implementation challenges, and the integration of Islamic values with 21st-century competencies.

The collected data was analyzed using *content analysis*. The analysis began with data reduction, which involves selecting important information from relevant literature. This was followed by thematic categorization to identify patterns, such as the integration of spiritual values, community involvement, or the use of technology in learning. The final stage was conceptual synthesis, where various literature findings were combined with the author's critical analysis to produce a new framework for holistic curriculum design in Islamic schools (Mayring, 2014).

To maintain validity and reliability, this study employed source triangulation by comparing study results from various sources, including journal articles, books, and policy reports. *Peer debriefing* was also conducted through discussions with other researchers in the field of Islamic education to reduce subjective bias and enhance the accuracy of data interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through this method, the study is expected to present a conceptual framework that is not only theoretical but also practically applicable in the context of Islamic school curriculum development.

Results and Discussion

This study stems from the reality that Islamic education in Indonesia and other countries is at a crossroads between maintaining tradition and facing the demands of modernity. For example, Islamic schools and madrasas in Indonesia formally follow the national curriculum, but simultaneously strive to instill Islamic values through additional programs such as memorization (*tahfiz*), book study, and moral development (Azra, 2019). This duality often presents challenges in curriculum development, as a high academic focus often diminishes attention to affective, spiritual, and life skills aspects.

Similar phenomena have occurred in other countries. In Malaysia, private Islamic schools attempted to integrate the *Cambridge curriculum* with Islamic values, but found gaps in implementation, particularly in balancing academic achievement with Islamic character development (Hashim & Langgulong, 2008). Meanwhile, in Western countries, Islamic schools have emerged that offer community-based educational models to address the isolation of Muslim students' identities while meeting national education standards (Memon, 2019). In other words, the primary issue emerging across various contexts is how to design a curriculum that serves not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as an instrument for shaping students' identity and character.

The local Indonesian context demonstrates that the issue of a holistic curriculum is increasingly relevant when linked to the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum nationally promotes project-based learning, differentiation, and character building. However, in practice, many Islamic

schools still struggle to systematically integrate Islamic values into the curriculum framework (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022). This highlights both opportunities and gaps: opportunities to align Islamic education with contemporary needs, and gaps in the form of limited teacher resources, inter-institutional coordination, and partial policy support.

Based on this context, this article examines in more depth how holistic curriculum design can be realized in Islamic schools by integrating Islamic traditional values, 21st-century competencies, and the involvement of the educational community. The results of the literature review are then presented in the form of a conceptual framework that can serve as a reference for Islamic schools in developing a curriculum that is relevant, transformative, and rooted in spiritual values.

Conceptual Framework of Holistic Curriculum in Islamic Schools

Drawing from a comprehensive literature review, critical analysis, and cross-national perspectives on Islamic education, this study proposes a conceptual framework that positions the Islamic school curriculum as a vehicle for holistic transformation. Rather than reducing education to the mere transmission of knowledge, the framework underscores the need for curricula that integrate character formation, the internalization of spiritual values, and the cultivation of essential life skills. Such an approach reframes the curriculum as a “living curriculum”—a dynamic and context-responsive system that is continuously shaped by both religious principles and contemporary challenges. Importantly, this framework situates Islamic education within the dual horizon of transcendental (hereafter-oriented) goals and practical (worldly) demands, rejecting the false dichotomy between them. Instead, it asserts that authentic Islamic education thrives precisely at the intersection of these two domains, producing learners who are not only spiritually grounded but also socially and professionally competent (Nasir & Al-Khalifa, 2021; Moslimany et al., 2024; Nurfaizal et al., 2024).

The holistic curriculum framework proposed in this study is structured around four interrelated dimensions: (1) spiritual and moral, (2) academic and intellectual, (3) technological and innovative, and (4) socio-community. These dimensions are not discrete entities but function as mutually reinforcing components. A curriculum that emphasizes one dimension while neglecting the others risks producing fragmented educational outcomes. For instance, intellectual achievement without spiritual grounding may lead to utilitarianism devoid of ethical restraint, while technological advancement without socio-community awareness risks fostering individualism over collective responsibility. Therefore, it is through the comprehensive integration of these four dimensions that the vision of Islamic education as a system nurturing balanced, ethical, and socially responsible individuals can be fully realized.

Spiritual and Moral Dimensions

The first finding shows that the school curriculum of the Islamic school cannot be separated with the spiritual aspect. Islamic education does not only mean the transfer of knowledge but is also the manner of building personality and the noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*). These researchers highlight that generating an un-Islamic centered education can lose its way in building a whole Muslim entity (Hashim and Langgulang 2008). In the Indonesian setting, spiritual resources have been adopted most notably in the Quran memorization, collective prayers among other practices by the students during the learning process. But these practices tend to be self-contained and not be part of a coherent structure systematically linking them to general subjects. Hence, there is a stronger need to have a more inclusive theoretical framework, so as to guarantee that the spiritual dimension is not appealed to at random but to be integrated within a well-rounded curriculum that integrates moral, intellectual, and academic development.

The major issue in the contemporary practice is that spiritual component is narrowed down to ritual activities instead of being seen as knowledge basis that spills over to other aspects of studies. An example is that Quran recital and daily prayer could be done uniformly, but when it comes to the learning of mathematics, science and language the incorporation is minimal. This establishes a dichotomy of, on the one hand, religious subjects and, on the other hand, general subjects, which could potentially result in the development of a fragmented identity in the minds of the learners. It necessitates therefore a systematic planning of a

curriculum such that incorporates spiritual values into the epistemological basis of all knowledge areas by providing them meaning and coherence.

Moreover, the spirit of the *akhlaq al-karimah* must not be restricted to moral teachings but prolonged to character building in social relations and in the mind. Islamic studies in education have established that including spiritual aspects on the big picture of learning makes students more ready to internalize ethics like honesty, responsibility and compassion as daily practices rather than, just, as ideals. This implies that curriculum should be structured in a manner such that it will reinforce, practise and live values through various subjects, classroom culture and school activities. This is one way of ensuring that the Islamic schools can come up with graduates who are not only solid academically but also spiritually prepared and socially conscionable.

The other implication is the additional capacity building that should be invested in teachers. On the one hand, teachers are central to the task of translating the spiritual dimension into practical livelihood; on the other hand, many teachers are limited by narrow models of pedagogy, which focus on conveying knowledge as opposed to practicing holistic integration. Unless they have adequate training, there is always the likelihood that nothing transformative will emanate out of spiritual education as it might end up being reduced to ritualistic practices, or moral discourses. In that case, professional development programs should focus more on helping teachers to learn how to inculcate the values of spirituality across the different disciplines, reflective pedagogies, and being able to learn how to create a learning environment that embodies the essence of Islamic ethics in practice.

Lastly, the establishment of the spiritual aspect in the curriculum needs institutional dedication, and policy backing. The schools cannot contribute this transformation on their own; they require framework that are offered by educational authorities that do not undermine the importance of spirituality in the formation of holistic schooling. Such curriculum reformation should not consist only in the provision of religious courses of study but, rather, on the reshaping of the whole educational philosophy towards the development of all-rounded personality. The systemic approach, thereby, will make spirituality to be the connecting force that ties the cognitive development stages, moral formation and social involvement projects in the fulfilment of the bigger responsibility of Islamic education. EgyyAVbig learned technologically and motivated morally so as to be able to act accordingly in their social lives. EgyyAV learned technologically, inspired morally in order to be able to act accordingly in their social life.

Academic and Cognitive Dimensions

Although the Islamic schools are highly committed to spiritual and moral formations, they are also under pressure to meet the national and international standards in terms of academics. In the Indonesian scenario, the *madrasas* within the Ministry of Religious Affairs are still expected to meet the competency thresholds in science, mathematics, and language (Azra, 2019). This ambidexterity makes the job of a teacher very hard as he/she has to juggle between the demands of high academic goals and development of religious learning and practice. The conflict between the two spheres has fueled fragmented learning processes in which religious activities and academic learning are normally taken as independent.

To fill this gap, a unifying curriculum design is needed, the linking of the academic fields with Islamic principles into a meaningful and coherent fashion. An example, science class can be related to the idea of *tawhid* (monotheism) by focusing on creation unity and order and the study of the environment can be broken down through Islamic ethics of stewardship (*khalifah*). These modes not only enhance the status of the knowledge by the students but also give them a comprehensive world vision without the divide between the sacred and the secular. The experience of previous research terms that this integration model enhances the connection between knowledge and faith by promoting the intellectual soundness and the spiritual sense (Muchira et al., 2018; Fakhurrizi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, integrative approach draws a certain parallel on the relevance of education in the lives of students by showing how religious values can provide practical problem-solving in contemporary world.

Instead of thinking about science and faith as incompatible regions, the students will learn to consider them part of a common reality. This paradigm shift will make Islamic schools to graduate students that are not only capable of accomplishing their tasks academically but also have a practical morality and critical thinking. In this sense, curriculum integration serves as a bridge that harmonizes spiritual formation with academic achievement, ultimately advancing the broader mission of Islamic education.

Dimensions of Technology and Digital Literacy

In the digital era, Islamic schools are expected to prepare students not only in spiritual and academic dimensions but also in technological competence. Mastery of technology has become an essential requirement for participation in modern society, where digital literacy is closely linked to opportunities in higher education and the job market. However, many Islamic schools continue to face challenges in integrating technology into their teaching and learning processes. Studies have highlighted that a significant number of these institutions remain behind in adopting digital tools and platforms, which limits their ability to fully equip students with 21st-century skills (Memon, 2019).

Integrating technology into Islamic education, however, offers immense potential to enrich both pedagogy and values formation. Project-based learning can be enhanced through digital platforms, encouraging collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving skills among students. Tools such as digital Qur'an applications, Islamic values-based e-learning systems, and virtual discussion forums between madrasahs demonstrate how technology can serve as both a medium of instruction and a reinforcement of religious identity. When framed through the lens of Islamic ethics, these technological applications not only facilitate academic learning but also ensure that students engage with digital environments in a responsible and faith-conscious manner.

A holistic Islamic curriculum in the digital age therefore cannot remain isolated from technological developments but must actively integrate them as part of modern *da'wah* and education. Rather than viewing technology as a threat to tradition, Islamic schools can utilize it as a strategic tool to expand access to knowledge, foster innovation, and prepare students for the realities of contemporary life. In this way, the integration of technology does not undermine the spiritual mission of Islamic education but strengthens it by ensuring that faith and modern competencies coexist in harmony, producing graduates who are both digitally literate and spiritually grounded.

Community and Social Dimensions

Community participation comes out as a pertinent element in the achievement of Islamic education. Schools of Islam do not only serve academic purposes but also a source of socialization in communal values and unity. Incorporating households and the community would fortify the cultural and religious identity of the students and is likely to make education more applicable to their experiences. Such an attachment is especially valuable in environments in which the other cultural forces may be exerted on students that threaten to erode their sense of belonging.

According to research conducted by Memon (2019), community involvement in the Western Islamic schools has helped in strengthening the Muslim identity and minimizing the sense of isolation of students. These results are also relevant to the Indonesian scenario, where collectivist norms of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), Parent-led study circles, and mosque-based service learning projects have long played an important communal support role in education. These initiatives complement each other to show that learning is not restricted to the classroom and is in fact strengthened through networks of solidarity and shared responsibility.

To have a holistic curriculum in Islamic schools, there needs to be a deliberate synergy between schools, families and communities. This three-part relationship aims at ensuring both academic and moral maturity in students and motivating them to transform their classroom knowledge to the community through service and taking up leadership roles. A curriculum that transcends these realms not only yields students with better academic skills, but also individuals that possess the attributes of responsibility, empathy and service, which are key values in the mission statement of Islamic education.

Conclusion

This study affirms that the Islamic schools require a holistic framework to design curriculum by integrating the concepts of spiritual and moral, academic and cognitive, technological and digital literacy and community and social aspects into the holistic framework. Integration of these four dimensions is important because Islamic education is geared towards the transfer of knowledge besides building character, the knowledge of modern science, flexibility to change with modern technology and being a part of society. Islamic schools with a holistic approach can train graduates that are not only of higher intellectual level, but also of good character, digital literacy and high social minds. Such conclusion has a connotation of requiring the full implication of multiple stakeholders-government, schools, teachers, parents and the society-in such a way that curriculum design may be adopted uniformly and successfully to devise flawless human beings in terms of balanced faith, knowledge as well as good action.

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