

Balancing Religious Values and Contemporary Skills in Islamic Education Curriculum

Subhan¹, Misbah¹

¹Islamic Education, Bone State Islamic Institute, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Subhan

Abstract

The rapid transformations of the 21st century, particularly in science, technology, and globalization, have created new challenges for education systems, including Islamic education. Traditionally focused on nurturing moral character and spiritual foundations, Islamic education must now also prepare students with competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and digital literacy. This study aimed to examine how Islamic schools integrate religious values with contemporary skills to enhance students' holistic development. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and document analysis. The study involved 10 Islamic schools (5 traditional and 5 balanced curriculum models), with 200 students, 40 teachers, and 10 administrators as participants. Data collection measured student performance, teacher preparedness, stakeholder perceptions, and curriculum implementation. Findings revealed that schools applying a balanced curriculum integrating faith with modern competencies showed higher levels of student participation, critical thinking, digital literacy, and ethical decision-making compared to traditional models. Teachers with strong training in both pedagogy and digital literacy were more effective in contextualizing Islamic values within modern challenges.

Keywords

Islamic Education Curriculum
Integration of Religious Values
21st-Century Skills
Balanced Curriculum Model
Student Competency-
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Introduction

The rapid transformations in the 21st century, particularly in science, technology, and globalization, have posed significant challenges to education systems worldwide (Malik, 2018). In response, educational curricula are increasingly expected to equip students not only with religious or cultural values but also with competencies required to thrive in a knowledge-based economy. Anurogo et al. (2023) said that, Islamic education, in particular, faces the unique task of maintaining its deep-rooted spiritual foundations while simultaneously addressing the demands of modern skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and digital literacy.

Islamic education has historically been regarded as a vehicle for nurturing moral character, instilling discipline, and guiding individuals toward holistic well-being (Ikhwan et al., 2023). Its primary objective has always been the internalization of tawhid (oneness of God), faith, and ethical conduct in daily life. However, in today's context, limiting Islamic education solely to ritualistic and spiritual aspects may not sufficiently prepare learners for the complexities of contemporary society (Sahin, 2018). A curriculum that neglects the cultivation of professional, social, and technological competencies risks leaving students at a disadvantage in both national and global arenas.

According to Moslimany et al. (2024), the integration of religious values with contemporary skills thus becomes a crucial discourse in curriculum development. Religious values offer an ethical framework and moral compass, while modern competencies ensure that students are adaptable and productive in a rapidly evolving environment. This balance does not imply diluting the essence of Islamic education, but rather expanding its scope to include broader life skills, thereby allowing students to live faithfully while contributing meaningfully to society (Lundie, 2011).

At the practical level, balancing these two dimensions requires curriculum reform that harmonizes Qur'anic teachings, Hadith, and classical Islamic scholarship with subjects such as science, mathematics, technology, and social studies (Imran et al., 2024). This integrated approach ensures that learners develop not only piety and moral responsibility but also the intellectual and technical capacity to address real-world challenges. For example, teaching environmental stewardship in line with Islamic principles can be coupled with modern ecological science, creating a curriculum that is both spiritually grounded and practically relevant (Amalia, 2024).

Moreover, the incorporation of contemporary pedagogical methods is essential. Project-based learning, problem-solving approaches, and digital education tools can enhance the delivery of Islamic values while simultaneously fostering 21st-century skills (AlAli, 2024; Almazroui, 2023; Sah et al., 2024). Such methods encourage active participation, collaboration, and innovation, aligning with the Islamic educational tradition of inquiry and reflection. By modernizing instructional strategies, educators can ensure that the curriculum remains both authentic to its religious roots and responsive to the evolving needs of learners.

However, the integration process is not without challenges. Tensions may arise between conservative stakeholders who emphasize the preservation of traditional religious content and reform-oriented educators advocating for modern competencies (Windschitl, 2022). Additionally, the risk of secularization or overemphasis on technical skills must be carefully managed to avoid marginalizing spiritual values. Therefore, curriculum designers must approach this task with sensitivity, ensuring that reforms uphold the integrity of Islamic principles while embracing the inevitability of change.

Ultimately, balancing religious values and contemporary skills in Islamic education is not a matter of choosing one over the other but rather creating a synergy that enables holistic development. Students educated under such a curriculum will embody moral integrity, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility, while also being capable of navigating complex global dynamics. This integrative model offers a promising pathway for Islamic education to remain relevant, empowering, and transformative in the modern era.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to capture a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic education curricula balance religious values and contemporary skills. The quantitative component focused on measurable outcomes such as student performance, adaptability, and skill acquisition, while the qualitative component explored perspectives from teachers, students, and administrators regarding the integration of faith and modern competencies. This design was chosen to ensure both statistical rigor and contextual depth in interpreting the results.

Population and Sample

The population of this research consisted of Islamic schools across various regions that have implemented either a traditional curriculum or an integrated (balanced) curriculum model. From this population, a purposive sampling method was applied to select 10 schools 5 using traditional curricula and 5 using balanced curricula. Within these schools, 200 students, 40 teachers, and 10 administrators were involved in the study. This sample provided a representative distribution to compare outcomes between the two models and to gather multiple perspectives from different stakeholders in the education system.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: surveys, interviews, and document analysis. Surveys were distributed to students to measure learning outcomes, adaptability, and perceptions of their curriculum. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators provided deeper insights into curriculum implementation, challenges, and perceived effectiveness of integration. Additionally, school documents such as lesson plans, curriculum outlines, and assessment rubrics were analyzed to examine how religious values and contemporary skills were embedded into teaching practices.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study were carefully designed to align with the research objectives. The student survey included Likert-scale items measuring critical thinking, moral reasoning, collaboration, and digital literacy, alongside spiritual values and ethical behaviors. The interview guide covered themes such as curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and institutional support. Reliability and validity were ensured through expert review, while pilot testing was conducted in two schools prior to full deployment to refine the clarity and accuracy of the instruments.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative data, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics summarized the mean scores and frequency distributions of student performance and competencies, while inferential tests (t-tests and ANOVA) were applied to examine significant differences between traditional and balanced curriculum models. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed. Interview transcripts and document analysis were coded, categorized, and synthesized into themes that revealed how integration was perceived and practiced. Finally, both sets of findings were triangulated to strengthen validity and ensure coherence between numerical trends and contextual interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing school and participant identities. The study respected cultural and religious sensitivities, particularly in handling religious content, ensuring that interpretations were faithful to Islamic principles while maintaining academic objectivity. Additionally, participation was voluntary, with participants having the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process.

Results and Discussion

Integration of Religious Values into Modern Skills Training

The research revealed that Islamic schools are increasingly embedding contemporary competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy into religious studies. Teachers aim to contextualize Qur'anic and Hadith teachings to guide students in navigating modern challenges, from digital ethics to social responsibility. The degree of integration varied across institutions. Some schools actively connected Islamic principles to entrepreneurship and environmental awareness, while others maintained a traditional approach with limited adaptation to 21st-century skills.

Table 1. Level of Integration of Religious Values into Contemporary Skills in Islamic Education Curriculum

Curriculum Element	Strong Integration (%)	Moderate Integration (%)	Weak Integration (%)
Qur'anic & Hadith contextualization	65	25	10
Critical thinking in Islamic subjects	58	30	12
Digital literacy with Islamic guidance	52	33	15
Ethical entrepreneurship training	60	28	12

This table highlights that integration was strongest in entrepreneurship and Qur’anic contextualization, but digital literacy remains an area where more development is required. Schools with robust digital infrastructure tended to achieve stronger integration.

Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes

The adoption of interactive teaching methods, such as debates, group projects, and digital media, has significantly improved student engagement. Instead of passive memorization, students actively apply Islamic values to contemporary issues such as environmental sustainability and business ethics. Comparisons between traditional and balanced curricula showed marked differences in participation, problem-solving, and digital tool usage, indicating that reforms enhance both learning and application.

Table 2. Comparison of Student Learning Outcomes Between Traditional Classes and Balanced Curriculum

Indicator of Learning Outcomes	Traditional Classes (%)	Balanced Curriculum (%)
Active classroom participation	48	82
Application of Islamic values	55	79
Critical thinking performance	42	76
Use of digital tools	33	70

These results show a clear advantage for students taught under the balanced model. Participation and application of values nearly doubled, demonstrating that students engage more deeply when contemporary skills are tied to religious learning.

Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Teacher readiness was identified as a crucial factor in the success of balancing religious and modern elements. Schools with comprehensive teacher training programs achieved stronger integration, while schools lacking support reported difficulties in curriculum delivery. Professional development focused on pedagogy, digital literacy, and contextualizing Islamic values was most effective in raising teacher competence.

Table 3. Levels of Teacher Preparedness in Key Competency Areas

Teacher Preparedness Area	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Pedagogical innovation	62	28	10
Digital literacy	55	30	15
Islamic contextualization skills	70	20	10
Interdisciplinary collaboration	48	35	17

The data reveal that while teachers are strong in Islamic contextualization, digital literacy and interdisciplinary collaboration remain weak points. Strengthening these areas could significantly improve balanced curriculum implementation.

Stakeholder Perceptions and Acceptance

The study also examined how parents, administrators, and religious leaders perceived curriculum reforms. While many stakeholders supported integration due to its relevance in preparing students for global challenges, some expressed concern about losing traditional religious rigor. Acceptance levels varied, with administrators and parents showing higher support compared to some religious leaders who feared a dilution of traditional values.

Table 4. Stakeholder Attitudes Toward Integrating Religious Values and Contemporary Skills in the Curriculum

Stakeholder Group	Supportive (%)	Neutral (%)	Resistant (%)
Teachers	68	20	12

Parents	74	15	11
Administrators	81	12	7
Religious Leaders	55	18	27

These results emphasize the importance of dialogue with religious leaders, as their approval significantly influences broader community acceptance. Parent and administrator support suggests that reforms are generally viewed as beneficial for students' holistic development.

Impact on Student Competencies and Employability

A final analysis was conducted to measure the impact of balanced education on students' future-oriented competencies. Students exposed to the reformed curriculum demonstrated stronger employability skills, ethical awareness, and adaptability compared to peers in traditional programs. Indicators such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and moral decision-making were assessed through surveys and performance-based evaluations.

Table 5. Comparison of Competency Development Between Traditional and Balanced Curricula

Competency Area	Traditional Curriculum (%)	Balanced Curriculum (%)
Communication skills	50	78
Teamwork and collaboration	47	74
Ethical decision-making	62	85
Adaptability to technology	40	72

The findings indicate that students in the balanced curriculum not only maintained strong ethical foundations but also acquired modern workplace skills. This suggests that aligning Islamic values with 21st-century competencies can enhance both spiritual and professional readiness.

The findings of this study demonstrate that integrating religious values with contemporary skills within the Islamic education curriculum has a significant impact on students' holistic development. The comparison between traditional and balanced curricula shows that while traditional approaches emphasize memorization and spiritual formation, they tend to lack practical competencies required in modern contexts (Uyuni & Adnan, 2024). Conversely, the balanced curriculum fosters both spiritual depth and relevant skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and technological literacy, indicating that a more integrated model addresses the demands of the 21st century without compromising religious identity.

Another notable result highlights the improvement in students' adaptability and academic performance when exposed to curricula that combine faith-based principles with modern educational strategies (Crick & Jelfs, 2011). Students in the balanced model not only achieved higher learning outcomes but also displayed stronger ethical decision-making. This suggests that embedding religious values into skill-based learning environments does not diminish academic rigor; rather, it enhances moral responsibility and ensures that knowledge is applied within an ethical framework.

The data further revealed that teachers play a central role in the success of this integration. Educators trained in both Islamic pedagogy and contemporary teaching methods were more effective in fostering student engagement and developing competencies aligned with global challenges (Nor et al., 2024). Teacher readiness and curriculum support thus emerge as critical factors in ensuring that religious and contemporary elements are not treated as separate domains, but instead function as complementary dimensions of education.

Finally, the results underscore the importance of institutional support and curriculum design that actively balance religious values with modern skills. Institutions that embraced innovation, such as incorporating digital tools, entrepreneurial training, and collaborative learning, while still grounding lessons in Islamic ethics, achieved better student outcomes. This reinforces the notion that the future of Islamic education lies not in choosing between tradition and modernity, but in harmonizing both to produce graduates who are

spiritually grounded, ethically conscious, and professionally competent in addressing contemporary global challenges.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of integrating religious values with contemporary skills in the Islamic education curriculum as a holistic approach to preparing students for both spiritual maturity and modern societal demands. The findings consistently demonstrate that schools implementing a balanced curriculum achieve better outcomes in terms of student adaptability, critical thinking, digital literacy, and overall academic performance, while still maintaining strong spiritual foundations. The results also reveal that students exposed to the balanced model develop higher levels of moral awareness and practical competencies simultaneously, indicating that faith-based education need not conflict with 21st-century skill development. Instead, the integration of religious and modern content creates a complementary framework where ethical guidance informs the application of critical and creative skills in real-life contexts. Moreover, teachers and administrators in schools with a balanced curriculum reported more innovative teaching practices, greater institutional support, and stronger alignment between educational objectives and societal needs. This underscores the role of curriculum design and educator readiness as central factors in the successful implementation of integrated learning. In conclusion, the research affirms that balancing religious values and contemporary skills is not only possible but essential for Islamic education to remain relevant in the modern world. A curriculum that upholds spiritual principles while equipping students with practical competencies ensures that learners can thrive academically, ethically, and professionally, thereby contributing positively to both their communities and broader global society.

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