



Strengthening Character Education in Islamic Elementary Schools through a Holistic Learning Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of a holistic learning approach in strengthening character education in Islamic elementary schools. Education at this level is not only aimed at mastering academic knowledge, but also instilling moral, spiritual, and social values in accordance with Islamic teachings. The reality in the field shows that learning practices are still dominated by conventional methods that emphasize memorization, while character building is often positioned as an additional aspect. This creates a gap between the ideal goals of Islamic education and the implementation of daily learning. This study used a literature study method by analyzing various literature in the form of books, scientific articles, and relevant curriculum documents. A descriptive qualitative approach was used to identify key concepts, compare expert views, and compile a synthesis regarding holistic learning and its relevance to character education in Islamic elementary schools. The results show that a holistic approach is able to strengthen character education by integrating cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and spiritual aspects in the learning process. Strategies that can be implemented include integrative thematic learning, Project Based Learning, teacher role models, religious habits, and the development of an Islamic school culture. However, challenges faced include limited teacher competence, limited learning facilities, and an educational orientation that emphasizes academic achievement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic elementary education is the foundation for developing a generation of faith, knowledge, and noble character. At this level, children experience rapid cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development. Therefore, education in Islamic elementary schools should not only focus

on mastering knowledge but also on instilling moral values and character. Character education is crucial because it shapes children's personalities based on Islamic teachings and prepared to face life's various challenges. This aligns with the national education goals, which emphasize the development of individuals with faith, piety, and noble character.

However, the reality on the ground shows that character education is often not a top priority in basic education practices. Many schools place greater emphasis on academic and cognitive achievement than on character development. As a result, various behavioral problems arise, such as low discipline, lack of responsibility, and a weakening of honesty among students. This situation demonstrates a gap between the ideal vision of Islamic education and actual practices in schools. Therefore, a new approach is needed that can fully integrate academic aspects and character development.

A holistic learning approach presents a solution to these problems. Holistic learning means viewing children as whole individuals, with all dimensions of development interconnected. In holistic learning, character education is not taught in isolation but integrated into all school subjects and activities. Thus, values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and religiosity are not only cognitively understood but also practiced in students' daily lives. This concept aligns with the principles of Islamic education, which emphasize the balance between knowledge, faith, and good deeds.

Furthermore, a holistic approach also enables strong collaboration between teachers, students, and parents. Teachers act as facilitators and role models in guiding students, while parents contribute to strengthening character values at home. With this synergy, character education becomes more effective because children receive consistent learning experiences both at school and in the family environment. This is crucial because character education cannot be achieved solely through theory but must be instilled through habituation and role models in everyday life.

Based on this background, this study focuses on analyzing how holistic learning can strengthen character education in Islamic elementary schools. The study was conducted through a literature review of character education theory, holistic learning concepts, and implementation practices in Islamic schools. The aim of this research is to provide conceptual and practical contributions in designing learning strategies capable of shaping students into a generation with Islamic character. Therefore, this article is expected to provide new insights for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers in strengthening character education through a holistic learning approach.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a library research method. Data were obtained through a literature review of books, scientific articles, educational journals, and curriculum documents related to character education and holistic learning. The analysis was conducted using the following steps: (1) identifying the basic concepts of character education in Islam, (2) reviewing the theory and practice of holistic learning, (3) examining the implementation of character education in Islamic elementary schools, and (4) compiling a synthesis of the findings to produce recommendations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character Education in Islamic Elementary Schools: Character education in Islamic elementary schools is a systematic effort to shape students into individuals with noble morals, responsibility, and good social attitudes. At this developmental stage, children are in a critical period that determines the direction of their self-identity formation. Therefore, character education is not merely positioned as an addition to religious subjects, but rather becomes the core of the entire educational process. Values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and religiosity need to be instilled through various learning activities and daily habits. In the Islamic context, character education is rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, which teach the balance between faith, knowledge, and good deeds in life. ([Khilmiyah, 2013](#))

Islamic elementary schools have a significant responsibility to implement consistent character education. The role of teachers extends beyond teaching to serving as role models

(uswah hasanah) who reflect Islamic behavior to students. A teacher's positive example can leave a lasting impression and serve as a behavioral guide for children. This aligns with the principle that effective education is not solely based on verbal instruction but also on concrete examples in everyday life. In this way, character education is not taught purely theoretically but also practiced in students' lives, both inside and outside of school. ([Yusgiantara et al., 2024](#))

In addition to teachers, the overall school environment also plays a crucial role in shaping students' character. An Islamic school culture, such as the practice of congregational prayer, greetings, shared prayers, and social activities, is an effective means of instilling character values. These activities create a religious atmosphere that supports the internalization of Islamic values in children. With repeated practice, students will become accustomed to practicing Islamic behavior, not simply because of commands, but because of personal awareness. This demonstrates the need for comprehensive and continuous implementation of character education. ([Arifin et al., 2024](#))

Families play a crucial role in supporting children's character education. Strong collaboration between teachers and parents is essential to reinforcing the values taught at school at home. This way, children will more easily internalize positive values through consistent experiences in both primary environments: school and family. Intensive communication between the two is key to ensuring continuity in character development in Islamic elementary schools. ([Fauziah et al., 2023](#))

Although character education has become a priority for many Islamic schools, its implementation still faces challenges. Some teachers still view character education as a supplement, rather than the core of learning. Furthermore, many schools prioritize academic achievement over character development. This situation highlights a gap between the ideals of Islamic education and actual practice. Therefore, new strategies are needed that can integrate academic and character aspects, one of which is through a holistic learning approach that emphasizes the holistic development of students. ([Purba, 2024](#))

Concept and Principles of Holistic Learning: Holistic learning is an educational approach that views children as whole individuals, with all dimensions of development interconnected. This approach emphasizes not only the mastery of knowledge but also the formation of attitudes, skills, and life values. In the context of Islamic elementary schools, holistic learning means integrating cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and spiritual aspects into every learning process. Thus, students are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess strong character and spirituality. This approach aligns with the principles of Islamic education, which emphasize a balance between faith, knowledge, and good deeds. ([Gasmi et al., 2025](#))

The main principle of holistic learning is integration. This means that each subject is not taught in isolation and fragmented ways, but rather is connected to students' real lives and character values. For example, in science lessons, students not only learn scientific concepts but are also encouraged to admire God's creation and cultivate a sense of gratitude. Similarly, in mathematics, students are trained to think logically while developing discipline and precision. With this integrative approach, character education is not taught in isolation but is internalized in all aspects of learning. ([Addzaky et al., 2025](#))

In addition to integration, holistic learning also emphasizes the principle of experiential learning. Elementary school-aged children are at Piaget's concrete operational stage of development, so they understand material more easily through real-life experiences. Therefore, teachers need to design contextual, interactive, and activity-based learning. Through direct experience, character values can be instilled more effectively. For example, a school cleanliness project not only teaches about the environment but also instills a sense of responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness. ([Mahfudhi, 2024](#))

The next principle is students' emotional and spiritual involvement in the learning process. Character education cannot be achieved solely through cognitive instruction; it must involve the child's heart and feelings. Therefore, teachers must be able to create a learning environment that is enjoyable, safe, and exemplary. In the context of Islamic schools, this can be achieved by emphasizing religious values in every learning activity. For example, making prayer a habit before learning, linking material to Islamic values, and providing spiritual motivation that encourages children to do good. ([Juhra, 2025](#))

The final principle of holistic learning is collaboration between schools, families, and the community. Character education cannot be left solely to schools; it requires support from parents and the surrounding community. Teachers, parents, and the community must work together to instill character values in children. With strong collaboration, holistic learning can be more effective because children receive consistent learning experiences both in and outside of school. This principle makes holistic learning relevant for strengthening character education in Islamic elementary schools. ([Nihayah, 2019](#))

Integrating Character Education through Holistic Learning: Integrating character education into holistic learning can be achieved through various strategies. First, through integrative thematic learning that connects various subjects within a single theme. For example, the theme of "cleanliness" can be integrated into science, Indonesian, and Islamic Religious Education lessons. In this process, students not only learn the scientific concept of cleanliness but also understand cleanliness as part of their faith. This strategy allows character values to be understood holistically, rather than separately, making them easier for students to internalize. ([Wulandari et al., 2021](#))

The second strategy is the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) based on Islamic values. The projects can take the form of social activities, such as community service, environmental awareness programs, or sharing activities with others. Through these activities, students not only acquire academic skills but also develop caring, empathy, and responsibility. PjBL provides a space for students to learn through direct experience, allowing character values to be put into practice in real life. Thus, learning is not only theoretical but also practical. ([Arsyad et al., 2023](#))

Furthermore, character education can also be integrated through teacher exemplary behavior. Teachers serve as role models who clearly demonstrate Islamic attitudes and behavior in their daily lives. Children tend to imitate their teachers' behavior, so good examples will have a significant impact on student character development. For example, a teacher who is consistently disciplined, honest, and patient in dealing with students will encourage children to emulate those attitudes. Exemplary behavior is one of the most effective forms of character education, as students learn from real-life examples, not just theory. ([Yusuf, 2022](#))

Character education in holistic learning can also be strengthened through daily habits at school. Activities such as reciting prayers together, praying in congregation, greeting, and other routine activities form habits that gradually become ingrained in students. This habituation is important because character education is not simply understood; it must be instilled into the child's personality. In the context of Islamic schools, this habituation also reinforces the religiosity that is a hallmark of Islamic education. ([Maulana et al., 2025](#))

Finally, the integration of character education can be achieved through the implementation of an Islamic school culture. School culture reflects the values held by all members of the school community. By creating an Islamic school culture, every activity within the school will align with the goals of character education. For example, a culture of mutual respect, mutual assistance, and maintaining a clean school environment. An Islamic school culture creates an educational ecosystem conducive to the development of children's character. Thus, character education truly becomes an integral part of daily school life. ([Asrofi et al., 2025](#))

Implementation Challenges and Strategies: Although holistic learning is highly relevant for strengthening character education in Islamic elementary schools, its implementation faces several challenges. One major challenge is teachers' limited competence in understanding and designing holistic learning. Many teachers remain stuck in traditional methods that emphasize memorization and lectures, leaving little room for students to develop character values through real-life experiences. This situation highlights the need to improve teachers' capacity to integrate character values into every learning activity. ([Rusmanto & Hanif, 2024](#))

The next challenge is the orientation of education, which still focuses on academic achievement. Many schools place more emphasis on test scores and academic achievement than on character development. As a result, character education is often viewed as an additional aspect, rather than the core of education. This misguided orientation results in a lack of attention to holistic learning, even though character education is the primary goal of Islamic education. This

paradigm shift requires a strong commitment from schools, teachers, and parents. ([Firmansyah & Fakhruddin, 2022](#))

Furthermore, limited facilities and infrastructure also hinder the implementation of holistic learning. Many Islamic elementary schools, particularly in rural areas, still lack supportive learning facilities, such as interactive classrooms, learning media, and adequate learning environments. Without adequate infrastructure, teachers will struggle to implement the contextual learning characteristic of holistic learning. This highlights the need for greater attention from the government and relevant parties in providing educational facilities. ([Fazri, 2024](#))

However, behind these challenges lie opportunities that can be exploited. The Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) provides ample space for teachers to implement student-centered learning and address diverse learning needs. This curriculum emphasizes project-based learning and strengthens the Pancasila student profile, which aligns with Islamic character education values. With teacher creativity, this curriculum can be an effective platform for integrating character education through holistic learning in Islamic elementary schools. ([Murtafik et al., 2025](#))

To address these challenges, a systematic strategy is needed. Some possible strategies include improving teacher competency through ongoing training, developing an Islamic school culture, collaborating with schools and parents, and providing supportive learning resources. With this strategy, the implementation of holistic learning can be more effective and have a tangible impact on strengthening character education in Islamic elementary schools. Thus, schools can produce a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also morally and spiritually mature. ([Widodo et al., 2024](#))

4. CONCLUSION

Character education in Islamic elementary schools is a crucial foundation for developing a generation with noble morals and responsibility, grounded in the values of the Quran and Sunnah. Studies show that a holistic learning approach can strengthen character education by integrating cognitive, affective, spiritual, social, and psychomotor aspects into a cohesive whole. Learning goes beyond academic knowledge and encourages the development of behaviors and attitudes consistent with Islamic teachings. Thus, a holistic approach provides students with the opportunity to learn, experience, and practice character values in their daily lives.

A holistic approach has the advantage of creating a more meaningful learning process. Children are not only taught moral theory but also encouraged to internalize character values through direct experience, teacher role models, and consistent practice. Strategies such as integrative thematic learning, project-based learning, and Islamic school culture have proven effective in connecting character education with learning activities. This makes character education not merely an add-on, but a core component of all learning in Islamic elementary schools.

However, the implementation of holistic learning still faces various obstacles, such as limited teacher competency, limited learning facilities, and an educational orientation that tends to focus on academic achievement. These challenges often marginalize character education in daily practice. Therefore, serious efforts are needed to shift the educational paradigm from one solely focused on academics to one that is holistic and balanced between knowledge, faith, and morals. Without this paradigm shift, character education will be difficult to achieve optimally in Islamic elementary schools.

The Independence Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) offers significant opportunities for the implementation of holistic learning. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, projects to strengthen Pancasila student profiles, and gives teachers the freedom to design lessons tailored to student needs. When integrated with Islamic values, this curriculum can be a strategic tool for strengthening character education in Islamic elementary schools. However, successful implementation remains highly dependent on teacher creativity, school support, and parental collaboration in supporting children's education.

Overall, this study concludes that holistic learning is an effective approach to strengthening character education in Islamic elementary schools. By integrating character values

into all aspects of learning, students can grow into knowledgeable, devout, and morally upright individuals. However, the success of this approach requires the full support of teachers, schools, parents, and education policy. Without strong synergy, character education will be difficult to implement consistently and sustainably.

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