



Islamic character building through the Kurikulum Merdeka and Tahfidz at SD IT Darussalam

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ABSTRACT

The rapid technological development and increasingly complex social dynamics demand the strengthening of students' character from the elementary school level, particularly within Islamic integrated schools. The rationale for this study is limited research on how the integration of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the Tahfidz Program is implemented in Islamic integrated elementary schools to shape Islamic character amid globalization and technological advances. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the forms and processes of integrating the Kurikulum Merdeka with the Tahfidz Al-Qur'an Program in shaping Islamic student character at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto, Ngalik, Sleman. This research employed a qualitative method through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that integration is carried out through daily tahfidz routines, linking Qur'anic values to thematic learning, teacher role-modelling, and a strong religious school culture, all of which contribute to improved student discipline, honesty, responsibility, and spiritual awareness. The integration of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the Tahfidz Program effectively strengthens Islamic character formation comprehensively and aligns with the needs of contemporary education.

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ABSTRAK

Perkembangan teknologi dan dinamika sosial yang semakin kompleks menuntut adanya penguatan karakter murid sejak jenjang sekolah dasar, khususnya di lingkungan sekolah Islam terpadu. Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar menawarkan fleksibilitas pembelajaran yang menekankan penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila, sementara Program Tahfidz Al-Qur'an berperan dalam membentuk religiusitas, kedisiplinan, serta kecintaan terhadap Al-Qur'an. Alasan penelitian ini dilakukan adalah karena masih terbatasnya kajian yang mengulas secara mendalam bagaimana integrasi kedua komponen tersebut diterapkan dalam konteks sekolah dasar Islam terpadu dalam membentuk karakter Islami di tengah arus globalisasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk dan proses integrasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar dengan Program Tahfidz Al-Qur'an dalam pembentukan karakter pelajar Islami di SD IT Darussalam Selokerto, Ngalik, Sleman. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi dilakukan melalui pembiasaan tahfidz harian, pengaitan nilai Al-Qur'an dalam pembelajaran tematik, keteladanan guru, serta budaya sekolah yang religius, yang berdampak pada meningkatnya kedisiplinan, kejujuran, tanggung jawab, dan sikap spiritual murid. Kesimpulannya, integrasi Kurikulum Merdeka dengan Program Tahfidz terbukti efektif memperkuat karakter Islami murid secara komprehensif dan relevan dengan kebutuhan pendidikan masa kini.

Kata Kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka; pembentukan karakter; pendidikan karakter Islami; program tahfidz

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INTRODUCTION

Character education, as a cornerstone in shaping a generation of citizens with noble character—particularly within the context of elementary education—holds strategic significance, as the developmental phase of elementary-aged children is a critical period for habit formation, the internalization of values, and the establishment of long-term moral and spiritual foundations. Therefore, a model for the internalization of Islamic Religious Education values is necessary (Haningsih, 2022). In Indonesia, character education has become a focus of national education policy, in line with the mandate of Undang Undang No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which states that the purpose of education is to help students reach their full potential as obedient, pious, virtuous, healthy, intelligent, capable, creative, and responsible individuals.

In the era of the Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar, education is not only focused on academic achievement but also emphasizes the development of students' character in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile (Furqanisah & Arifin, 2024; Nahdhiah & Suciptaningsih, 2024). This curriculum allows educational institutions to be flexible in adapting instruction to students' needs and abilities, including incorporating religious principles into the curriculum (Ahmed & Chowdhury, 2025). Although the Kurikulum Merdeka has been implemented nationally since 2022, various studies indicate that its implementation in Islamic-based schools still faces challenges. Integration of Islamic Values in Islamic Religious Education: The integration of Islamic values in elementary schools remains limited to routine religious activities and has not yet addressed the overall instructional design.

The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in Islamic elementary schools is still in the adjustment phase, where the integration of Islamic values is primarily manifested in routine religious activities such as Quran recitation, congregational prayer, and the cultivation of daily etiquette; however, it has not yet been structured into a learning design that links learning outcomes to Islamic character values (Iswandi, 2022). The study emphasizes that teachers still face difficulties in developing teaching modules and the Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila that align with the goal of moral development, resulting in religious value integration that tends to be partial rather than comprehensive across all subjects, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Integration Categories

| Integration Categories | Implementation Percentage (%) |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Routine Activities (Quran recitation, prayer, etiquette) | 75% |
| Spontaneous Practices (greetings, polite behavior) | 60% |
| School Religious Programs (Islamic Holidays, short-term Islamic boarding school) | 40% |
| Instructional Design (Teaching Modules / Lesson Plans with Islamic values) | 25% |

Source: *Iswandi, 2022*

Meanwhile, previous research indicates that implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in Islamic schools requires adaptive strategies to ensure that spiritual values are integrated with learning outcomes (Hadi & Al Idrus, 2025). In implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka, teachers need to conduct diagnostic assessments at the beginning of instruction to map students' initial abilities, readiness to learn, learning styles, and potential difficulties they may face. The results of this assessment then serve as the basis for implementing differentiated instruction—that is, adjusting learning strategies, activity formats, and assessment products to meet each student's individual needs. This approach ensures that the learning process is not uniform, providing space for every student to develop at their own pace and capacity.

This is particularly relevant in the context of Islamic education, especially in religious programs such as Tahfidz, where each student's ability to memorize, understand, and internalize Islamic values varies from one another (Alhamuddin, 2025). This situation underscores the urgency of this study to explore how the integration of curriculum and religious programs, such as Tahfidz, can be effectively implemented in integrated Islamic elementary schools (Kartika et al., 2023). Based on a review of reference books and previous research, the importance of integrating spiritual values into elementary education as a strategy for character building among the younger generation (Araniri & Nahriyah, 2025).

The tahfidz program can serve as an effective tool for fostering discipline, responsibility, and a love for the Qur'an (Sari et al., 2025). Based on findings from several Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools in Banyumas, students currently face challenges that are not only mental but also include a decline in moral values, rising individualism, and a diminishing interest in Islamic values. Therefore, the author conducted research on "Integration of the Kurikulum Merdeka with the Qur'an Memorization Program in Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools: Strategies for Islamic Character Development in the Era of Disruption" as a conceptual solution that combines academic approaches with spiritual development to address educational challenges in the current era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

Kurikulum Merdeka, launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, provides schools with significant flexibility to adapt their teaching methods to the characteristics and needs of their students (Ramadhan et al., 2024). In the context of Islamic schools, this offers significant opportunities to integrate the general curriculum with Islamic programs, such as Quran memorization and Quran-based thematic learning. Implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in religious schools can enhance student engagement in values-based learning (Ramadani & Fitriasia, 2023).

The model for the internalization of moral education values as formulated (Hasibuan, 2025). Through three main phases—value transformation, value exchange, and transinternalization—this model can serve as a framework for assessing the effectiveness of integrating the tahfidz program within the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. These three stages emphasize the importance of teacher involvement as role models, two-way reinforcement of

values, and character building through a continuous process of spiritual and social guidance (Dzattadini et al., 2025).

Islamic Character Education

A program to instill religious practices and Tahfidz in Islamic elementary schools increased students' religious observance by 72% and academic discipline by 68% over one semester (Sasmita et al., 2024). These data confirm that the development of Islamic character requires a consistent and targeted process of habit formation through structured religious activities, particularly the Tahfidz Program. Islamic character education not only emphasizes cognitive aspects but also instills moral and spiritual values from an early age to shape a generation of noble and responsible individuals amidst the progress of the times (Kurniawan et al., 2022). Values such as honesty, integrity, compassion, and care for others form the core of character development that fosters noble moral conduct (Hasyim, 2024).

Kurikulum Merdeka focuses not only on academic achievement but also on fostering Islamic attitudes and behaviors in students that are relevant to their daily lives. This approach has proven effective in instilling spiritual and social values that align with Islamic teachings and meet the needs of a modern generation capable of adapting to change (Muslimin, 2023). In addition to the curriculum, teachers' exemplary conduct significantly shapes students' Islamic character. Islamic Religious Education teachers serve as moral role models who not only teach theory but also exemplify Islamic practices in daily life, such as discipline in worship, good manners, and social responsibility (Nuryanti, 2023).

Character education innovation through Living Values Education, when integrated into Islamic schools, has also proven effective in comprehensively strengthening students' spiritual and moral character development (Hidayatulloh et al., 2024). Students who regularly participate in the tahfidz program demonstrate improved religious attitudes and more stable self-control compared to students without such a program (Hidayatulloh & Hilmi, 2024). These findings indicate that the Kurikulum Merdeka, when integrated with religious programs such as tahfidz, can strengthen the comprehensive and sustainable internalization of Islamic values among students.

Integration of Curriculum and Religious Program

The integration of the national curriculum with religious programs has been widely implemented in integrated Islamic schools as an effort to nurture students who achieve a balance between cognitive and spiritual development. This integration can be achieved through a thematic approach, strengthening Islamic school culture, and developing religious extracurricular activities. This strategy provides teachers with the opportunity to incorporate Quranic values into every subject and encourages character development through daily religious practices. Integration can be achieved through thematic approaches, contextual learning, and the use of digital media and religious applications to enrich the spiritual aspect of general education (Setiawan et al., 2025).

Other research supporting the practical aspects of this integration indicates that incorporating Islamic character values into the Kurikulum Merdeka allows for the inclusion of

spiritual values in every subject, not just Islamic Education (Junaidi et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the model of the Integration of Religious Studies and Science examined in the journal Naafi by researchers from STKIP Majenang demonstrates that uniting religious and scientific concepts within the curriculum can enrich students' understanding while strengthening their faith (Humairoh & Mustafidin, 2025).

Tahfidz Program in Islamic Education

Tahfidz Al-Qur'an Program is a program for memorizing the holy verses that has been widely implemented at various levels of Islamic education, including elementary schools. This program emphasizes not only memorization but also the development of students' character and discipline. Tahfidz can enhance cognitive skills, including memory, concentration, and discipline, which in turn influence students' competencies (Azizah & Murniyetti, 2023). Tahfidz Al-Qur'an is derived from the words "Tahfidz" and "Al-Qur'an"; "tahfidz" means to memorize (Kamila, 2024). Tahfidz Al-Qur'an refers to the memorization of the sacred verses of the Qur'an.

Research shows that students who participate in the Tahfidz program tend to exhibit higher levels of discipline and self-control compared to the general student population. This is attributed to the intensity of their interaction with the Qur'an, which is believed to instill spiritual tranquility and a more positive outlook on life. The Tahfidz program is highly effective in shaping students' religious attitudes at the elementary madrasah level, as the activity of memorizing sacred verses strengthens spiritual awareness and fosters a sense of responsibility toward religious values (Hidayatulloh & Hilmi, 2024).

Tahfidzul Qur'an Program not only fosters religious devotion but also strengthens students' discipline through consistent routines and exemplary behavior in the learning process (Sari et al., 2025). This program provides students with hands-on experience in applying the values of the Qur'an in daily life, enabling them to grow into individuals of noble character, integrity, and a commitment to goodness. Tahfidz Program serves as a tangible implementation of Islamic character education, capable of shaping an outstanding, disciplined, and morally upright Qur'anic generation (Azizah & Murniyetti, 2023).

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method based on the theory of Miles and Huberman as outlined in the book "The Qualitative Research Companion" to explore the integration of the Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar with the Tahfidz Program at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto, with a focus on teaching practices and school policies in fostering students' Islamic character. The research steps include determining the research focus, selecting subjects, collecting data, analyzing the data, and drawing conclusions. The research subjects include the principal, classroom teachers, Tahfidz teachers, and several fourth- to sixth-grade students, selected purposively to ensure data that reflect relevant and in-depth perspectives. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, direct observation of the learning process and habit-forming programs, as well as a review of documentation such as lesson plans, Tahfidz modules, learning schedules, and students' daily activities. Data analysis followed three interactive steps: data reduction, data presentation, and concluding.

Data validity and reliability were ensured through triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Practices of Integrating the Kurikulum Merdeka and Tahfidz Programs in Shaping Islamic Student Character at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto

Based on the results of research conducted through observation, interviews, and document analysis, the integration of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the tahfidz program at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto appears to be carried out in a systematic, well-planned, and comprehensive manner. In the initial phase of the research, it was found that the school positions the tahfidz program as a core component of the curriculum rather than merely an extracurricular activity. This aligns with interviews with the principal and tahfidz teachers, who emphasized that fostering Islamic character is the top priority in curriculum planning. When data was collected in the field, observations showed that tahfidz activities are conducted every morning for 30 to 45 minutes before classes begin.

This routine serves not only as a memorization exercise but also as a means of fostering discipline, calmness, and readiness to learn. Furthermore, an analysis of lesson plans and teaching modules reveals the integration of Qur'anic values into the thematic learning of the Kurikulum Merdeka. For instance, the theme "Love for the Homeland" is consistently linked to QS. Al-Hujurat, verse 13, to instill attitudes of mutual respect and brotherhood among students, as explained by a fourth-grade teacher during an interview. Further observations revealed that this integration is also strongly reflected in daily character-building practices. Students are encouraged to demonstrate honesty when reciting memorized material without fabrication, discipline by arriving on time for scheduled recitation sessions, and responsibility in ensuring the smooth progress of memorization, which has been set as a target.

Table 2. Results of Observations on Aspects of Kurikulum Merdeka and Tahfidz Program Integration at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto

| Integration Aspects | Score/Description |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Thematic Learning | High |
| Habit-Forming Program | Medium/High |
| Daily Worship Routines | High |
| Discipline | High |
| Responsibility | Medium/ High |
| Honesty | High |
| Love for the Qur'an | High |

Source: Primary Data from Interviews and Observations at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto, 2025

The tahfidz teacher explained that this habit-forming process is an indicator of the integration's success because character is not merely taught but consistently practiced. From the entire data analysis process (see **Table 2**), from data reduction to concluding, it can be understood that the integration of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the tahfidz program in this school does not occur merely at the planning level but is truly realized in daily learning

routines, school culture, and students' daily behavior. This provides the basis for concluding that the integration of these two programs is effective in holistically shaping Islamic student character.

Table 3. Field Findings Indicators

| Aspect | Field Findings | Data Source |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Supporting Factors | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The commitment of the principal and teachers to aligning the vision of Islamic education with the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka. 2. Teacher training on character-building methods based on the Qur'an. 3. Active parental support for memorization activities and the cultivation of religious practices. 4. The school's spiritual culture (morning dhikr, congregational prayer, "one day, one verse"). 5. Teachers serving as exemplary role models (uswah hasanah) for students. | Interviews with the school principal and Islamic Education (PAI) teachers (March 2025); Observations of daily school activities. |
| Inhibiting Factors | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Limited effective time for thematic learning due to additional tahfidz activities. 2. Uneven ability among teachers to integrate Islamic values into all subjects. 3. Variations in students' ability to memorize Quranic verses. 4. Lack of variety in contextual tahfidz teaching methods. | Interviews with tahfidz teachers and homeroom teachers; Field observation notes |

Source: Primary Data from Interviews and Observations at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto, 2025

Based on interviews with teachers and the principal, as well as observations in the classroom and school environment (see **Table 3**), it was found that students who consistently participate in the tahfidz program exhibit a calmer, more polite, and responsible demeanor, as well as a high level of spiritual awareness. Teachers serve not only as educators but also as exemplary role models (Uswah Hasanah) in guiding students. Factors supporting the success of this implementation include the commitment of the school principal and teachers to align the vision of Islamic education with the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka, teacher training in character-building methods based on the Qur'an, and the active involvement of parents in the educational process.

Table 4. Field Findings

| No | Aspects Investigated | Interview Results / Key Findings |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | Understanding of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the Tahfidz Program | The Kurikulum Merdeka is understood as an effort to shape students' character and competencies in alignment with Islamic values through flexible learning. The Tahfidz program is an integral part of achieving the school's vision. |
| 2 | Objectives of Integration | Integration is implemented to foster meaningful learning, enhance piety, and cultivate noble character in accordance with the school's vision. |

| No | Aspects Investigated | Interview Results / Key Findings |
|----|---------------------------------|--|
| 3 | Implementation of Integration | It is implemented through a full-day school system that combines the national curriculum with Islamic-specific subjects (Tahfidz, Aqidah, Akhlak, Sirah, Arabic) in 38 class hours per week. |
| 4 | Effectiveness of Implementation | The program is running smoothly; memorization targets have been met (grades 1–3 have memorized Juz 30, and grades 4–6 have memorized Juz 29 and 30). The integration is considered effective in fostering Islamic character. |
| 5 | Impact on Student Character | The daily practice of tahfidz, recitation, and remembrance cultivates discipline, good manners, responsibility, and the habit of resolving problems through a monotheistic approach. |
| 6 | Inhibiting Factors | Frequent rotation of memorization teachers, the absence of permanently employed foundation teachers, and a lack of parental support at home. |
| 7 | Recommendations for Improvement | Stronger collaboration among the school, teachers, and parents is needed, along with the formation of a competent, permanent tahfidz team to ensure the program’s sustainability. |
| 8 | Expectations and Reflections | Students are not only expected to memorize two juz of the Qur’an but also to understand its meaning, so that a complete and sustainable Islamic character can be formed. |

Source: Primary Data from Interviews and Observations at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto, 2025

In addition, a supportive school environment and a spiritual culture consistently fostered through morning dhikr sessions, congregational prayers, and the “one day, one verse” program also reinforce the internalization of Islamic values. Interviews with senior teachers (see **Table 4**) indicate that daily engagement with the Qur’an plays a significant role in shaping students' Islamic character at SD IT Darussalam. Teachers emphasized that changes in students’ behavior and attitudes were very noticeable after the integration program was implemented; every student issue was resolved through a tauhid-based approach and advice rooted in the Qur’an. Emerging barriers included limited effective time for thematic learning due to the burden of memorization and uneven teacher ability to contextually link curriculum content with Islamic values.

In addition, the varying levels of memorization ability among students require teachers to apply a differentiated approach so that the tahfidz process remains inclusive and does not cause undue pressure. Senior teachers also noted that the main challenges lie in the instability of the tahfidz support team and in inconsistent parental support at home regarding students’ memorization practice. The integration of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the tahfidz program at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto has proven to make a significant contribution to the development of Islamic character in students. Learning activities are not only focused on academic achievement but are also directed toward instilling spiritual, social, and moral values aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile and Islamic values. Teachers design lesson plans by incorporating verses from the Qur’an and hadiths into learning themes; for example, the theme “Cleanliness” is linked to Surah Al-Baqarah: 222 and the hadith “Cleanliness is part of faith.”

Classroom observations indicate that students are more active and enthusiastic when lessons are delivered through a spiritual approach. Teachers facilitate daily reflections that connect lessons to everyday behavior, reinforcing the internalization of character values taught in the Qur'an. Interview results show that students' memorization targets are being met gradually: grades 1–3 have mastered Juz 30, while grades 4–6 have memorized Juz 30 and 29, with a positive impact on student discipline and responsibility. Observation documentation results showed a significant improvement in students' affective aspects: they were more polite, mindful of cleanliness, disciplined, and demonstrated a sense of responsibility and enthusiasm for worship.

Teachers reported an increase in students' self-confidence and engagement in school religious activities. This demonstrates that character development through the integration of the curriculum and the tahfidz program is not merely theoretical but the result of consistent, habitual practice. These findings reinforce Al-Ghazali's view that virtuous character grows from continuous practice within a supportive environment. This integrative approach can create an effective, realistic, and sustainable model of Islamic character education. Schools not only produce students who excel in memorization and academic achievement but also cultivate individuals of noble character who are prepared to face the challenges of the era of disruption, grounded in strong Islamic values.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the combination of the Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar and the Tahfidz Program at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto has a positive impact on students' Islamic character development. This approach aligns with the theory of the internalization of Islamic character education, which emphasizes that moral values must undergo a process of direct instruction, modeling, and habituation, as well as the integration of Islamic values into the formal curriculum (Ikhwan, 2024; Marzuqi, 2022). The proposed religion-based character model also supports the idea that Islamic character will be stronger when Islamic values become part of the entire learning process, rather than just separate activities (Basril, 2023).

Schools must be institutions that organically integrate academic and moral aspects, rather than treating them as separate entities (Ahmed & Chowdhury, 2025). Islamic education should ideally foster moral integrity and spiritual intelligence as the foundation of character, so that students excel not only academically but also possess noble character (Sasmita et al., 2024). The integrative approach used by this school contributes to modern Islamic educational practices, which often still separate the formal curriculum from religious activities. Unlike public schools that predominantly apply the Kurikulum Merdeka to academic aspects, this school can synergize spiritual components within a thematic and contextual learning structure.

These findings reinforce research results emphasizing that the integration of religious programs into the national curriculum can enhance the effectiveness of character education, particularly in the context of elementary education (Hidayatulloh & Hilmi, 2024). Consistent practice of worship and Tahfidz directly contributes to the development of students' behavior and attitudes. Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators who not only guide students academically but also serve as role models in moral conduct. Such an approach creates an

educational environment that not only fosters cognitive development but also nurtures students affectively and spiritually (Dzattadini et al., 2025).

This integration model not only produces academically intelligent students but also equips them with strong moral and religious competencies to navigate complex social dynamics. This supports the finding that Tahfidz has a positive impact on students' learning behavior (Marwah et al., 2023). Teachers play a crucial role as moral and spiritual role models who not only teach but also guide and assess students' character holistically. Teachers serve as key actors in integrating religious values into the curriculum. A religious and collaborative school environment further strengthens teachers' professionalism in fostering a sustainable Islamic character culture (Syah et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The integration of the Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar and the Tahfidz program at SD IT Darussalam Selokerto is a strategic approach to fostering Islamic character in students. This integration not only creates harmony between academic and spiritual education but also fosters a learning environment that supports the holistic development of Islamic values. The integration process is carried out through the reinforcement of religious-themed learning, the practice of daily worship, and character building through the memorization of the Qur'an. The flexibility offered by the Kurikulum Merdeka can be optimized to integrate religious values into the formal education process. Teachers play a central role in ensuring that these values are embedded in every learning activity. This approach addresses the challenges of character education in the modern era by prioritizing a balance between intellectual and spiritual development. This integrative approach can serve as a model for integrated Islamic schools as well as other educational institutions seeking to strengthen character education grounded in religious values. Further research is recommended to explore the impact of this integration on students' academic achievement, as well as to develop more specific character evaluation instruments within the context of Islamic elementary education.

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