



Bridging Faith and Knowledge: A Multi-site Study of Islamic-general Education Integration in East Kalimantan's Multicultural Context

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the integration of Islamic and general education at three Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Using a qualitative multi-site phenomenological approach, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with 13 teachers, including principals and curriculum developers, and document analysis of learning modules, *Adiwiyata*, and *P2RA* programs. The integration is reflected in three major forms, i.e., curricular integration linking *Akidah Akhlak* themes with general subjects through structured learning modules, integration of social programs through *Adiwiyata* environmental programs, and *P2RA* initiatives. The integration strengthens students' religious characters through habituation, reflection, exemplary modeling, and environmental support strategies. Particularly, each school acquired different approaches reflecting local multicultural contexts. In this case, Balikpapan emphasized structural integration through environmental programs, Kutai Kartanegara focused on collaborative reflection and teamwork, while Paser prioritized narrative-affective approaches with community engagement. The study identifies key opportunities including comprehensive student understanding, enhanced teacher collaboration, and holistic evaluation systems, alongside significant constraints such as absence of formal written guidelines, substantial teacher workload, and inconsistent implementation approaches. The study provides a practical model for developing academically excellent students with strong religious characters. Finally, the novelty and pedagogical implications of the research are discussed further.

Keywords: *Akidah Akhlak*; integration; Islamic and general education; multiple intelligences; opportunities and constraints

1. Introduction

The integration between Islamic and general education represents a determination of Islamic philosophical base unity as a future knowledge paradigm. The philosophical base includes epistemological, axiological, cosmological, and theological hierarchies that are in line with integralism principles, which include matter, energy, information, values, and resources (Bagir et al., 2005). In that framework, integration is often to be comprehended as a knowledge Islamization, which means the process of growing the Islamic values into the whole aspects of humans' lives, i.e., spiritual, intellectual, social and civilizational aspects (Musa, 2021; Raji al Faruqi & AbūSulaymān, 1989). The integration concept is not limited to conceptual area, but demand the real implementation in formal institutions including in Islamic junior high school level, i.e., Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Aulia et al., 2022). Furthermore, the science integration is perceived as a strategic approach in building excellent students both in academic and strong religious characters (Sarah et al., 2023). In line with how to strengthen the academic and religious characters of students, Amin Abdullah proposed the integrated and interconnected science paradigm which decline dichotomy between religious and secular knowledges. This paradigm is revealed through the concept of Islamic interdisciplinary (Abdullah, 2014; Gade, 2020), which is built above triadic epistemology in Islamic intellectual traditions; *bayānī*, *'irfānī*, and *burhānī* (Bagir et al., 2005). In order to connect those three epistemologies, Abdullah (2007) adapted hermeneutics circle approach which is well-known as *ta'wīl al-'ilm*, inspired by the thought of contemporary Muslim experts such as Al-Jabiri, Muhammad Arkoun, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. This epistemological framework stresses on the urgency of integrative, collaborative, and contextual Islamic education in answering contemporary challenges.

The idea of integration is increasingly finding its relevance in multiple intelligences which is proposed by Howard Gardner. Gardner explained that teaching and learning process cannot rely on merely one cognitive approach but should accommodate the variety of humans potentials, which include linguistic, logic-mathematic, musical, kinesthetic, visual-spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist intelligences (Morgan, 2021). This perspective is in line with integration paradigm which is suggested by Amin Abdullah because both theory from Howard Gardner and Amin Abdullah is stressing on the importance of cross-disciplinary as well as the interconnection between knowledge and reality. From normative perspectives, Islam demands balanced mastery between empirical knowledge (*kauniyah*) and religious knowledge (*shar'iyah*) in order to actualize the concept of perfect human being (*insan kamil*). In this framework, the religious character building of students cannot be achieved only through cognitive learning process, but also through Islamic values internalization into the whole aspects of knowledge, including science, social, and humanities (Asmaya, 2018). At this point, the subject of *Akidah Akhlak* plays a fundamental role. *Aqidah* learning is intended to strengthen faith, provide inner peace, and erode doubt (al Atsari, 2014), while *Akhlak* learning guides a noble characteristic both in vertical relationship to Allah and horizontal relationship between human beings (al-' Adawî, 1995). In short, *Akidah Akhlak* is a bridge to connect Islamic values with all knowledge fields, so that it drives to the learning process of students in the reinforcement of faith, moral integrity, and social responsibility.

The concept consisted in *Akidah Akhlak* subject is relevant to Imam Al-Ghazali thoughts which stresses on the main goal of education to get closer to Allah, not merely to achieve social status. Therefore, the teaching of *Akhlak* should be the base of every knowledge field. The religious character should be grown through a strong faith, noble character habits, and supportive

environment which can support the character building (al Ghazali ath-Thusi asy-Syafi'i, 2001). Hence, the integration of Islamic and general curriculums in Islamic junior high schools is functioned as a vital instrument which guarantees a balance education. Through the integration, every field of education learned by students are able to strengthen the human relations to Allah and other human beings, so it will shape a holistic characteristic (Nata, 2013). This framework relies on the principle of *tauhid*, which means all knowledge in this world should come from Allah (*ma'rifatullah*) and should be learned scientifically to deepen the relation between humans and Allah (Naşr, 1989). From this fundamental reason, Islam firmly rejects the separation between religious knowledge and secular knowledge as the legacy coming from Western cultures because the main goal of any education field is to facilitate the reinforcement of students religious characters (Molnar, 2021).

The rejection towards separation between Islamic and general educations is relevant when viewed from western historical thoughts, i.e., after Renaissance period, when the process of knowledge tends to be more materialistic and away from God. In this case, the Biner paradigm which separated the study of nature from the study of divinity (*tauhid*) had become pervasive into Islamic education systems, including in formal institutions (al- Attas, 1989). Therefore, curriculum integration is not only a pedagogical step, but also a decolonization paradigm strategy which intends to restore the essence of knowledge as the way to knowing Allah (*ma'rifatullah*). In this case, Nata (2012) pointed out that Islamic schools are an institution which integrate educational and general knowledges. Islamic schools' role is not only to teach Islamic knowledge, but also to meet the citizens' expectations so that their children can obtain an Islamic and general knowledges at the same time. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions play an important role in growing students' intellectual capacity as well as their moral character (Suprayogo, 2007). Through that role, Islamic educational institutions are able to contribute to students' comprehensive and deep understanding related to religious education and general knowledge (Fattah, 2004).

Moreover, variety of Islamic and general knowledges integration model have been studied in vary educational levels, e.g., in Islamic schools and Islamic education (Hadi et al., 2024; Mansir, 2022), general high schools (Prasetyo, 2024), Islamic high schools (Nurhasminsyah, 2023; Suroto, 2020), Islamic boarding schools (Aziz et al., 2023; Hajjaj, 2020), and higher education (Fauziyati, 2017). However, the study regarding the implementation of integration in the context of Islamic boarding schools in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, is still narrowed. Geographically, the previous studies tend to focus on the area of Java, Sumatra, and Nusa Tenggara islands. Meanwhile, East Kalimantan is one of areas in Indonesia which has multicultural element influenced by local tribes, e.g., Dayak, Banjar, Kutai, and Bugis with variety of religions adhered by the civilians which is possible to create a unique context which has not been explored previously. Additionally, other previous studies incline to observe technical aspect of curriculum integration, such as Fogarty model (Prasetyo, 2024), knowledge Islamization proposed by Al-Faruqi (Nurhasminsyah, 2023), perspective of Ahmad Dahlan toward modern integration of Islamic education (Fanani, 2019), and religious character development (Khadafie, 2022). Temporarily, critical links with subjects as learning outcomes tend to be neglected. Though Alwi et al. (2021) has been conducted a theoretical research related to the correlation between spirituality and extremism, there is limited research regarding the empirical studies especially on how a curriculum integration in Islamic junior high schools can strengthen students' religious characters up to the present time. From methodological perspective, previous studies were still dominated by micro qualitative

approaches, such as single case study or limited comparative analysis as presented in the research conducted by Aziz et al. (2023) and Suroto (2020).

Based on the existence of previous studies above, several gaps are offered in this research. Firstly, there is restricted research which combines in-depth qualitative study with integration effect towards the religious character development of students. Secondly, most of existed studies have a tendency to focus on internal factors, e.g., teachers, students, and the leader of Islamic boarding schools, while neglect the broader aspect of implementation in formal institutions. Thus, by considering the philosophical framework, theoretical perspective, and research findings from previous studies, there is an urgency of observing deeply regarding how to integrate Islamic and general educational concepts and apply them practically in the context of Islamic schools in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Lastly, most of previous studies only focused on one research site, so that the intercultural aspect is limited to be researched on. The current study provides broader view on the implementation of integration of Islamic and general knowledge in three different cities in East Kalimantan. Thus, the objective of this study is to investigate the implementation of integration of Islamic and general education comprehensively at Islamic junior high schools with multicultural context in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Additionally, the opportunities and constraints towards the implementation of the integration of Islamic and general education are also explored.

2. Literature Review

Integration is regarded as a process of integrating both scientific and religious knowledge in real life context. Barbour suggests four models of the relation between science and religion in a comprehensive form through intersubjective testability and creative imagination, while Holmes Rolston III stresses the concept of semi-permeability as a mutually reinforcing relationship (Abdullah, 2015; Barbour, 2002). Additionally, interconnective integration can be likened to sunlight which radiates in a trichotomous spectrum and refracts itself like a spider's web (Yulanda, 2019). This integrative knowledge respects the boundaries between science and religion, so that it allows for cooperation in methods and thought patterns (Abdullah, 2007). Conceptually, Amin Abdullah integrates triadic epistemology in Islam, i.e., *bayani*, *irfani*, and *burhani*, through a hermeneutical circle *ta'wil al-'ilm* which is inspired by the thought of Al-Jabiri, Arkoun, and Abu Zayd (Bagir et al., 2005). The paradigm of interconnected entities then evolved into a "spiderweb" model, linking religion (*hadarat al-nas*), philosophy (*hadarat al-falsafah*), and science (*hadarat al-'ilm*). Each discipline is understood as a distinct space with its own methodology and traditions, yet with permeable boundaries that allow for the exchange of ideas across fields. Through this epistemic interface, for example, quantum physics can interchange with monotheism, or neuroscience with the psychology of Sufism. Thus, integration and interconnection create a symbiotic relationship between disciplines without removing their respective identities (Abdullah, 2014).

Furthermore, the integration between science and knowledge concept is in line with the theory of multiple intelligences which is proposed by Howard Gardner, which theory is to reject a single approach in learning process. In this case, Gardner tends to stress on humans' capacity in having multiple intelligences including linguistics, logical mathematics, musical, kinesthetic, visual-spatial, interpersonal, and naturalistic (Morgan, 2021). It shows that every individual has a unique potency, so that an effective teaching and learning process should accommodate the various uniqueness of students. For instance, in Islamic religious education, linguistic intelligence can be

developed through sermons or Quranic memorization, logical-mathematical intelligence through analysis of *naqli* arguments, visual-spatial intelligence through creating moral posters, musical intelligence through verses, kinesthetic intelligence through worship practices, interpersonal intelligence through group work, intrapersonal intelligence through self-reflection, and naturalistic intelligence through observation of nature (Lubis et al., 2024; Nurhidayati, 2021).

The theory emerged as Gardner's critique of IQ tests against the Binet-Simon Test, which was defined in a limited manner (Thaha, 2006). Through his word of Frames of Mind (Gardner, 1983), the theory of Multiple Intelligence (MI) emphasizes that success is not determined solely by IQ, but rather through complementary interaction of various intelligences (Abdul Hamid, 2003; Suparno, 2007). MI-based curriculum enables cross-content connections, thus promoting the realization of integrative learning (Stavrou et al., 2011). From an Islamic perspective, this concept aligns with the paradigm of integrating faith and knowledge, where *tauhid* (monotheism) serves as the unifying foundation for all knowledge, while transcending the dichotomy between rational and empirical domains. The learning process is directed toward connecting religious and secular subjects with divine consciousness thereby forming holistic faith awareness. Within this framework, the integration of knowledge and faith in Islamic education not only reduces the dichotomy of knowledge but also presents a complete understanding that reaffirms the central role of Allah in human life (Barbour, 2002).

Furthermore, Islamic education is expected to produce students who are not only intellectually superior but also spiritually and ethically mature in this contemporary era. Thus, the integration of Islamic education with general knowledge is a necessity. As what is stated in Amin Abdullah's concept of integration-interconnection, which emphasizes the significance of interdisciplinary dialogue and the integration of revelation, reason, and social reality (Abdullah, 2015). This approach intersects with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which accommodates the diversity of students potential (Morgan, 2021), and Al-Ghazali's thoughts which emphasizes *tazkiyat al-nafs* or the purification of the soul, strengthening faith, and cultivating morals (al Ghazali ath-Thusi asy-Syafi'i, 2001). These three conceptual foundations serve as a reference in examining the practice of integrating Islamic education and general knowledge at Islamic junior high schools in Balikpapan, Kutai Kartanegara, and Paser, East Kalimantan, especially in the learning of *Akidah Akhlak* which seeks to combine spiritual values with mastery of knowledge in a balanced manner.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This research used qualitative approach with multi-perspectives to comprehend social interaction as constructed meaning by the participants (Muzari et al., 2022). This method allows a deep exploration towards daily experiences and social reality by stressing on 5W1H framework as well as reflectivity of researchers towards subjectivity (Lim, 2024; Mohajan, 2018). This approach was chosen to describe the integration of general and Islamic education through *Akidah Akhlak* subject, and how the implementation of social project such as *Adiwiyata* and *P2RA* can contribute to the development and religious character building of students at Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Moreover, this research integrates case study and phenomenology designs. Particularly, the case study was selected to capture all phenomenon happened in the context of real life with enables the implementation of curriculum integration as an analysis unit, so that the focus is more directed towards students and teachers' responses (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021; Priya, 2021). Additionally, the phenomenology research design was utilized in order to comprehend the essence of students' learning experiences, especially on how teachers and students interpret the implementation of integration in their daily lives (Yusanto, 2020).

3.2. Participants of the Study

The subject of this study includes three elements in three Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, i.e., headmasters, vice principle of curriculums, curriculum developer team, and 13 teaches of *Akidah Akhlak* subject with 5 years minimum of teaching experiences (female = 7 teachers, male = 6 teachers). The distinct background of the participants drive vary perspectives in comprehending the integration between general and Islamic educations in building religious characters of students in Islamic junior high schools.

3.3. Instruments and Data Collecting Techniques

Instruments utilized in this study include observation, interview, and documentation, which complement each other in assessing the integration of Islamic values and general knowledge in the teaching of *Akidah Akhlak* in three State Islamis Junior High Schools. The observation instrument was applied to grades VII, VIII, and VX, based on KMA No. 183 of 2019, KMA No. 450 concerning the Independent Curriculum, and textbooks published by *Erlangga* and *Tiga Serangkai*. The focus of the observation was directed at the dimensions of *akidah*, *akhlak*, and *adab*, including belief in the attributes of Allah, faith in angels and the unseen, repentance, *istiqamah*, sincerity, practice of *Asmaul Husna*, procedures for prayer and *dhikr*, ethics in the use of social media, and the exemplary behavior of Prophet Ibrahim and Sulaiman. These materials are in line with the domains of divine, prophecy, and *ghaibiyah* (Subairi et al., 2023), as well as with the classification of morals according to Al-adawi, namely personal, family, social, national, and religious aspects (al-' Adawî, 1995).

Firstly, the observation conducted in this research was focused on three aspects, i.e., (1) planning (preparations of teaching modules, learning objectives flow, and the chosen of materials which integrate the science and religious knowledge), (2) learning process (methods, media, value-based approach, and interaction between teachers and students), learning result (students' comprehension regarding the connection between religious knowledge and science, students' participation in discussion, and the changing of attitude as well as Islamic characters). Moreover, interview was used to dig deeper regarding context, process, and integration impacts, including vision and mission of Islamic junior high schools observed, the role of teachers, school facilities, programs evaluation, as well as the impact towards students' religious characters (al-Ghazali ath-Thusi asy-Syafi' i & Rofiq, 2016). Lastly, documentation was focused on the analysis of official documents, i.e., Islamic schools' curriculum and *Adiwiyata* and *P2RA* modules which can strengthen the data gained.

Moreover, to explore the opportunities and constraints of integration implementation, the interview protocol was extended to include questions about: (1) perceived benefits of integration for students, teachers, and institutional development; (2) collaborative experiences among teachers across disciplines; (3) challenges faced in implementing integration without formal

guidelines; (4) time and resource demands in developing integrated materials; (5) support systems and institutional barriers; and (6) suggestions for improving integration implementation. The observation also paid attention to practical challenges during integrated learning activities, such as time management, resource availability, and coordination between subjects.

3.4. Data Analysis and Validity Techniques

Data analysis was done using two techniques, i.e., interpretive phenomenological analysis and cross-case analysis. Regarding the first technique, interpretive phenomenological analysis in order to comprehend the subjective experiences in the research. Specifically, interpretive phenomenological analysis aims at understanding how individuals make sense of their personal and social world (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Meanwhile, regarding the second technique, i.e., cross-case analysis aims to systematically compare findings across multiple cases to identify common themes, differences, and variation (Ryan, 2012). In the current research, cross-case analysis was used to compare integration patterns at all Islamic junior high schools observed in this research comprehensively.

In analyzing opportunities and constraints data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns across the three schools. Specifically, positive impacts (opportunities) and implementation challenges (constraints) were coded and categorized based on their frequency, intensity, and relevance to integration practices. This analysis involved: (1) open coding of interview transcripts related to benefits and difficulties; (2) axial coding to establish relationships between identified themes; and (3) selective coding to develop core categories of opportunities and constraints that emerged consistently across all research sites.

Furthermore, triangulation was utilized to validate the data obtained by combining various techniques in analyzing phenomenon from different perspectives (Denzin, 2007; Given, 2008). The triangulation implemented include triangulation of source and analysis. Specifically, source triangulation was conducted by comparing the result gained from interview, observation, and documentation at three Islamic junior high schools in different cities in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, i.e., Balikpapan, Kutai Kartanegara, and Paser, in order to capture authentic data which reflects the real condition at each research site. Meanwhile, analysis triangulation was implemented by combining interpretative phenomenological analysis and cross-case analysis in order to recognize and identify pattern of integration comprehensively as well as comparing cases happened at three Islamic junior high schools. Additionally, trustworthiness of data analysis was also done to ensure the validity of the data gained by using four main criteria, i.e., intensive researcher involvement, triangulation, and participant verification (credibility); contextual descriptions that allow for application in other settings (transferability); systematic documentation and consistency across research sites (dependability), and objective determination (confirmability) (Sayi, 2025).

4. Results

4.1 The Integration of Islamic and General Education in Junior High Schools in East Kalimantan

4.1.1 Operational Curriculum in Islamic Junior High Schools in East Kalimantan

The three state Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan all emphasize the integration of Islamic and general education in their vision, mission, and educational goals. In terms of vision and mission, the integration of Islamic and general education in the three Islamic junior high schools in

East Kalimantan emerged from historical curriculum development processes. The principals emphasized the evolution from previous curriculum to the current Merdeka Learning Curriculum:

"If we compare the previous curriculum, i.e., K13 and Merdeka Learning, K13 implements thematic learning and it is integrated, and the Merdeka Learning curriculum has been running for three years, and it has no significant difference from the K13" (AR, Balikpapan)

Moreover, the schools' vision and mission serve as foundational frameworks for integration. School leaders described their institutional approach:

"As I know, vision of Islamic junior high school has a vision based on religion and research-based technology, which represents an integration of religion and science, showing that these two contexts of knowledge get equal portions in Islamic junior high schools" (AR, Balikpapan)

"The vision and mission existed in Islamic junior high schools compile the curriculum based on some considerations, including the development of science and global challenges based by following Islamic values. It is expected that the alumni of Islamic junior high schools are not only academically excellent, but also have strong Islamic character as well as have a capability to compete in the globalization era." (NZ, Kutai Kartanegara)

In terms of goals, the curriculum of Islamic junior high school goal is aimed at providing quality, integrated education by strengthening Islamic character, improving learning quality, optimizing teaching performance, providing adequate facilities, and encouraging collaboration with the community and government. The operational curriculum from three Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan is firstly displayed as the foundation of analyzing the integration between Islamic and general education existed at each school. As presented in the following table:

Table 1. Operational Curriculum in Islamic Junior High Schools in East Kalimantan

Component	Aspect	Islamic Junior High School in Balikpapan	Islamic Junior High School in Kukar	Islamic Junior High School in Paser
Vision and mission	Vision	Realization of religious and excellent human resources in research technology and environmentally cultured	Realization of Islamic, quality, competitive human resources, mastering knowledge and technology, and environmentally cultured	Excellence in religious studies, knowledge studies, knowledge and technology, foreign languages and environmental care
	Mission	Islamic culture, noble character, technological research, environmental care	Religious, curriculum development, innovative learning, literacy and numeracy, cooperation	Religious studies, Islamic character, science and technology, foreign languages, environmental care, skills
Curriculum structure	Legal basis	KMA No. 347 Year 2022	KMA No. 450 year 2024	KMA No. 450 year 2024
	Learning model	Subject approach	Regular and block learning	Subject approach
	Elective subjects	Traditional dance	Arts, culture and crafts	-
	Local content	Tahfidz (Quran memorization)	Quran reading and writing	Quran reading and writing

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Component	Aspect	Islamic Junior High School in Balikpapan	Islamic Junior High School in Kukar	Islamic Junior High School in Paser
Student profile	Theme	Voice of democracy, local wisdom, unity in diversity	Voice of democracy, build body and soul, entrepreneurship	Sustainable living, local wisdom, unity in diversity, build body and soul, Pancasila democracy, engineering and technology, entrepreneurship
Pancasila and <i>Rahmatan lil 'alamin</i>	Implementation	Through projects with special modules	Through projects with PJBL model	Through projects, habituation, learning, and student guidance
Extracurricular activities	Optional activities	Traditional dance, basketball, choir, martial art, soccer, <i>habsy</i> , <i>tilawah</i> , journalism, scout, PMR, green generation, volleyball	Scouts, Youth Red Cross (PMR), traditional dance and music, science Olympic, ACBA, English club, soccer, karate, badminton, marching leadership training, social studies Olympic, <i>tahfidz</i> (Quran memorization), <i>tilawah</i> and <i>rebana</i>	<i>Tahsin</i> <i>tilawah</i> , <i>tahfidz</i> (Quran memorization), <i>qasidah rebana</i> <i>habsy</i> , <i>muhadharah</i> , integrated science Olympic, Mathematics Olympic, integrated social studies Olympic, Islamic education Olympic, English club, Arabic club, singer/vocal arts, choir, drum band, volleyball, soccer, table tennis, badminton, takraw, marching leadership training
	Mandatory activities	Scout	Scouts	Scouts
Evaluation	Assessment type	Formative and summative	Diagnostic, formative, summative	Diagnostic, formative, summative
	Graduation criteria	Complete all learning programs, take summative assessment, take and pass school exams	Complete all learning programs, pass school exam (min. score 78), pass practical exam (min. score 78), character score min. good (B), attendance min. 90%	Complete all learning programs, pass school exam, pass practical exam, character score min. good (b), attendance min. 90%
Special characteristics	Environmental programs	<i>Adiwiyata</i> school, compose processing and used cooking oil	ASRI school (safe, healthy, neat, beautiful)	<i>Environmental education program (Adiwiyata)</i> , <i>child-friendly school (SRA)</i>
	Literature programs	School literacy movement (GELIMAD)	Literacy and numeracy movement	-
	Collaboration	Environmental department, regional library	Business world and natural/ environmental resources	-

Source: Data gained from operational curriculum document

From the findings obtained from interview above, the integration of Islamic and general education in the three Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan demonstrates a comprehensive approach that goes beyond just curriculum combination. The findings reveal a systematic effort to create holistic educational experiences that ridge religious and general knowledge, despite the absence of formal written guidelines.

4.1.2 Integration of *Akidah Akhlak* with General Subjects

The integration of Islamic and general education at state Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan emphasizes the framework of monotheism through the unification of relevance, knowledge, and philosophy. This approach aligns with the thoughts of Al-attas and Al-faruqi, who emphasize the harmony between relevance and reason, knowledge and practice, as further elaborated in Amin Abdullah's paradigm through the concepts of *hadrat al-nass*, *hadrat al-'ilm*, and *hadrat al-falsafah*. The different lies in orientation that the Islamization of science is more subjective, focusing on collaborative scholarship and social sciences based on monotheism, while the scientization Islam is more objective, strengthening religion through rational analysis and empirical data. Meanwhile, the integration-interconnection paradigm combines *hadrat al-nass*, *hadrat-al-'ilm*, and *hadrat al-falsafah* in a hermeneutical cycle hat interconnects relevance, scientific knowledge, and philosophical reflection. Collectively, these approaches into a holistic, contextual, and transformative model, with different emphases, i.e., thematic, axiological, and interdisciplinary, but culminating in the same goal, i.e., the dynamic integration of religious knowledge and general sciences towards epistemological unity. In general, the form of integration of *Akidah Akhlak* with general sciences can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Integration of *Akidah Akhlak* with General Subjects

Subjects	Themes in <i>Akidah Akhlak</i>	Integration to general themes	Remarks
Science	Faith in Allah	Solar system and universe	Relationship of faith with Allah's creation
Social Studies	Honesty	Economy and trade	Importance of honesty in transactions
Civic Education	Pillars of faith	Pancasila values	Harmony between religions
Information Technology	Media ethics	Information technology	Writing messages politely
Physical Education	<i>Ta'awun</i> (Cooperation)	Team games	Cooperation in sports
Mathematics	<i>Yaumul hisab</i> (day of judgement)	Integer calculations	Calculation of geed deeds
Arts	Creativity	Calligraphy art	Decorating calligraphy
Handicrafts	Hard work	Handicrafts	Making woven bags
Indonesian Language	Honesty	Life experience narrative text	Stories about honesty
English	Innovation	<i>Look Around You</i> (environment)	Maintaining cleanliness

Table 2. above shows that the integration between *Akidah Akhlak* and general subjects insert Islamic values as fundamental element in students' mastery towards various disciplines. Thus,

students are not only cognitively capable but also develops in terms of morals, so that they can implement knowledge they have in daily life.

4.1.3 Integration of School Programs through *Adiwiyata* and *P2RA*

The integration implementation is also reflected in *Adiwiyata* program and *P2RA* module, where the values of ecological ethics, social responsibilities, and commitment towards environmental preservation can be grown as the form of devotion and worship to Allah. Moreover, the *Adiwiyata* program and *P2RA* module are displayed on the following table:

Table 3. Integration of School Programs through *Adiwiyata* and *P2RA*

Schools	Module	Integrated Subjects	Integration Theme	Class Level
Islamic Junior High School in Balikpapan	<i>Adiwiyata</i>	<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Science	Obedience and environmental health	Grade 7-9
		<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Social Studies	<i>Asmaul Husna</i> and natural resource conservation	Grade 7
		<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Civic Education	<i>Qanaah</i> and environmental cooperation	Grade 8-9
	<i>P2 Rahmatan Lil Alamin</i>	<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Physical Education	<i>Istiqamah</i> and physical fitness	Grade 7-8
Islamic Junior High School in Kutai Kartanegara	<i>Adiwiyata</i>	<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Science	Prayer ethics and environmental cleanliness	Grade 7-9
		<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Social Studies	Allah's obligatory attributes and natural resource utilization	Grade 7-8
		<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Civic Education	<i>Qanaah</i> and environmental cooperation	Grade 8-9
	<i>P2 Rahmatan Lil Alamin</i>	<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Information Technology	Being knowledgeable and information technology	Grade 9
		<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Mathematics	Productive and relational functions	Grade 8-9
Islamic Junior High School in Paser	<i>Adiwiyata</i>	<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Science	Creativity and plant growth	Grade 9
		<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Social Studies	<i>Istiqamah</i> and soil conservation	Grade 7-9
		<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Civic Education	Gratitude and environmental cooperation	Grade 8-9
	<i>P2 Rahmatan Lil Alamin</i>	<i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Physical Education	Creativity and healthy eating patterns	Grade 7-9

The research results on the integration between Islamic and general education on three Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan show alignment with Al-Ghazali religious character indicators. Firstly, the teachers' role as a path opener (*miftah al-tariq*) is realized through cross-disciplinary collaboration and the facilitation of integrated learning modules. Secondly, the center of the heart as the core of character formation is reflected in repetitive activities such as cleanliness practices and environmental awareness that train moral dispositions. Thirdly, exemplary stories and inspirational narratives are utilized as media for internalizing values. Fourthly, *muhasabah* is implemented in the form of reflection, journal writing, and project evaluation. Fifthly, the arrangement of the school environment and community involvement reflect Al-Ghazali's principle of the importance of a supportive environment in the process of moral formation. Therefore, the *Adiwiyata* program can be understood as a concrete practice of *tazkiyah al-nafs* that combines spiritual, social, and intellectual aspects. As displayed in the following table:

Table 4. Integration between Islamic and General Education through *Adiwiyata* Program based on Al-Ghazali Indicators

Aspects (Al-Ghazali Indicators)	Balikpapan	Kutai Kartanegara	Paser
Teacher's role as path opener (<i>al-ustadh fatih</i>)	Teacher guides collaboration in <i>Akidah Akhlak</i> - Science - Social Studies modules; directs the meaning of worship in environmental activities	Teacher directs reflection and joint evaluation in " <i>Istiqamah</i> and Cooperation" module	Teacher guides through exemplary stories (<i>uswah hasanah</i>) and value discussions
Heart center in character formation	Linking water conservation with <i>Asma'ul Husna</i> ; cleanliness as faith internalized through repeated practice (community service, waste sorting)	Values of tolerance and cooperation trained through group work and structured social interaction	Environmental empathy and care built through field experience and character narratives
Exemplary stories/ <i>uswah hasanah</i>	Reflection on faith values through examples of teachers and religious figures during learning	Examples of national figures in cooperation and preservation themes	Stories of <i>Ibnu Hajar</i> to evoke affective dimensions and introspection
<i>Muhasabah</i> (reflection)	Spiritual reflection in class when connecting ecosystem and faith	Collective <i>muhasabah</i> post-project; joint evaluation	Reflection journal after field activities; group discussions
Supporting environment	Clean and green environment arrangement; community service routines	Teacher team support and role division in projects	Parent and community involvement in programs

The Table 6 reveals that each Islamic junior high school in East Kalimantan has its own unique strategy in integrating the Islamic and general education to strengthen students' religious characters. Specifically, Islamic junior high school in Balikpapan stresses on a concrete cross-disciplinary integration by focusing on physical environment and cleaning activities as the representation of faith to Allah. Different with the Islamic junior high school in Balikpapan, Islamic junior high school in Kutai Kartanegara stands out through collaboration and collective reflection, building structured values of tolerance and structured teamwork in cross-subject projects. Meanwhile, Islamic junior high school in Paser emphasizes more on narrative-affective approach, i.e., exemplary story and personal reflection which are strengthened by parents and community engagement. These differences display that the strengthening of students' religious characters is varied and adaptive based on the context of school ecosystem. Thus, the integration between Islamic and general education in Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan is multidimensional, i.e., conceptual (the values of faith and *akhlak*), practical (real activities), and social (community supports).

4.2 Opportunities and Constraints of Islamic - General Education Integration in Islamic Junior High Schools in East Kalimantan

The integration of general and Islamic education presents significant opportunities for creating comprehensive and meaningful learning experiences. One of the benefits is the development of comprehensive understanding among students. As articulated by participant MU from Kutai Kartanegara:

"I feel that there are benefits from the integration of Islamic and general education. By the integration, the students can learn one theme from various perspectives and sources." (MU, Kutai Kartanegara)

This approach extends education beyond mere theoretical instruction in classrooms to practical application in real-life contexts. Participant RU from Paser emphasized this point as follow:

"The integration is very important and its impacts is huge, where education is not merely about theory in class but how they practice it in real life context. Especially when talk about Akidah Akhlak, where its aim is for students' character building, everything will be connected to conditional issues with the integration of Islamic and general knowledge." (RU, Paser)

Furthermore, the integration approach enhances collaboration within educational institutions. In this case, participant RU from Paser noted that:

"Integration is not only impactful for students and teachers, comprehensively it also impacts the school. There is more collaboration between teachers from different subjects." (RU, Paser)

This collaborative environment has led to creative teaching methods, where teachers develop innovative approaches across disciplines. For instance, participant IK from Balikpapan explained:

"I get the responsibility to compile modules in the context of Adiwiyata, so I try to understand the whole of how the I teach, i.e., Akidah Akhlak. I try to collaborate with material from other disciplines, such as the topic of Asmaul Husna integrating to preserving water resources. In this case, social studies teachers help me to determine appropriate indicators." (IK, Balikpapan)

Similar participant further illustrated this creativity as follow:

"We try to connect one theme in Akidah Akhlak with natural science, e.g., integrating the topic of obedience environmental health. In his case, noble characters are in line with cleanliness, where it is part of faith in Islam." (IK, Balikpapan)

Teachers also employ concrete examples to make abstract Islamic concepts tangible for students. Participant IH from Balikpapan shared as follow:

"In explaining the theme of noble characters, I give students a task to revie BJ Habibie's life journey which showed his success. This attempt is aimed to present a concrete example of how BJ Habibie could achieve his success through praiseworthy behaviors such as ikhtiar, tawakkal, gratitude, patient, and qanaah." (IH, Balikpapan)

The integration also enables the implementation of comprehensive evaluation systems that go beyond traditional written tests. In this case, participant SA from Paser stated:

"We often evaluate learning, including the Akidah Akhlak subject. It is aimed to ensure the religious and general knowledge can go hand in hand well." (SA, Paser)

Additionally, participant AL from Paser emphasized as follow:

"We carry our evaluation comprehensively by not only relying on written and oral exams, but also observing how they apply Islamic values in daily life." (AL, Paser)

Finally, it can be concluded that the impact of this integration extends beyond individual classrooms to benefits the entire institutional system, creating a systemic effort toward holistic education.

Despite the numerous opportunities, the integration of general and Islamic education faces several significant constraints that challenge its implementation. The most prominent challenge is

the absence of formal written guidelines across all three Islamic junior high schools studied. Participant WES from Balikpapan clearly stated:

"In the context of our school, there is no written guideline that specifically regulates how the integration of Islamic and general education should be applied." (WES, Balikpapan)

This sentiment was echoed by participant AS from Kutai Kartanegara, who explained:

"We still refer to directions from the Ministry of education that indirectly leads to integration process, even though there is no explicit guideline on how to integrate the Islamic and general education." (AS, Kutai Kartanegara)

This lack of formal structure creates uncertainty and inconsistency in how integration is approached across different institutions and even within individual schools. The implementation process itself presents ongoing challenges that require continuous adaptation from teachers. Participant PA from Paser highlighted this ongoing effort:

"In this school, we often have discussion between fellow teachers to evaluate teaching method used to decide whether it is effective or still need improvement." (PA, Paser)

The process of continuous evaluation and adaptation can be time-consuming and demanding. Teachers face the substantial responsibility of independently developing integrated materials and understanding cross-disciplinary connections. As participant IK from Balikpapan described:

"I get the responsibility to compile modules in the context of Adiwiyata, so I try to understand the whole of how the subject I teach, i.e., Akidah Akhlak. I try to collaborate with material from other disciplines, such as the topic of Asmaul Husna integrating to preserving water resources. In this case, social studies teachers help me to determine appropriate indicators." (IK, Balikpapan)

Above resources and preparation demands require teachers to invest considerable time and effort in collaboration with colleagues from other subjects to determine appropriate indicators and ensure coherent integration, which adds to their already substantial workload, particularly without clear institutional support or standardized guidelines to streamline the integration process.

5. Discussion

From the results above, it indicates that the integration of Islamic and general education applied in Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan are shown in vision and mission of the schools, the integration between *Akidah Akhlak* subject and other subjects such as Social Studies and Science. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Warapsari et al. (2024) where they found the integration of Islamic and general education is found through school vision and mission as well as Islamic religious subject and general science such as Mathematics and Physics. Differently, Atika et al. (2025) points out that the integration between Islamic and general education is not only found in the integration of Islamic religious subject and Science, but also through activities such as *dauroh* (training) and BPI (Islamic personal development).

Moreover, our findings extend the understanding of integrating the Islamic and general education by revealing how integration operates through environmental program, i.e., *Adiwiyata*. The findings in this research indicate the religious characters built from the integration of Islamic and general education, especially through *Adiwiyata* program which is analyzed using Al-Ghazali's principle. The implementation of *Adiwiyata* program drives students to create more spiritual aspects as well as moral values. The environmental dimension adds depth to character

development approaches discussed by Lickona (2019) and Koesoema (2010) by providing a specifically Islamic framework for moral education. It is also in line with the findings from Hadi et al. (2024) that Islamic education is not merely about providing knowledge, but also to build spiritual and moral values so that general and Islamic education can be harmonized and balanced in real life context.

The intercultural aspects of this study reveal significant insights into how Islamic education adapts to diverse local contexts within East Kalimantan's multicultural environment. In this case, each of the three Islamic junior high schools developed distinct integration strategies that reflect their local cultural contexts while maintaining Islamic educational principles. The differences in implementation strategies across the three scholars demonstrate what Aziz et al. (2023) identified as contextual adaptation in Islamic education. Unlike previous studies that focused on single-site analyses, such as Suroto (2020) and Aziz et al. (2023), the current study focuses on multi-site and proves that the context of Java, Sumatra, and Nusa Tenggara Islands drives to different approaches existed in local tribes in East Kalimantan, i.e., Dayak, Banjar, and Kutai. These findings form exclusive educational dynamics which is not found in homogeneous regions.

Particularly, Islamic junior high school in Balikpapan sticks out through structural integration with strategic programs such as *Adiwiyata*. The school tends to pay attention to the internalization of school cultural values and spiritual motivation which is integrated in learning process. This approach differs markedly from rural contexts studied by Hajjaj (2020) in Islamic boarding school settings, where traditional Islamic boarding school environments provided different cultural frameworks for integration. In another case, Islamic junior high school in Kutai Kartanegara tends to point out holistic curriculum with character-based. This finding extends beyond Prasetyo's (2024) Fogarty model implementation by showing how local cultural values influence pedagogical approaches in Islamic education integration. Meanwhile, Islamic junior high school in Paser focuses on the representation of values into contextual actions. It presents more on the application of contextual evaluation towards religious values in contemporary social reality.

Those three different strategies are in line with integrative-interconnective paradigm of Amin Abdullah which rejects separation of religious and general education (Abdullah, 2007, 2014, 2015). Additionally, those strategies are suggested by the theory proposed by Howard Gardner which accommodates the variety of students' intelligences (Gardner, 1983). It is also relevant to the theory of religious character which is sourced from Imam Al-Ghazali, where the changing of students' attitudes and characters is the result of the educational process which is not merely relying on students' cognitive, but also touch the affective and spiritual sides. The strategy of integration between Islamic and general education cannot be built partially through the subject of *Akidah Akhlak* only, but need to be integrated to the whole learning process in all subjects existed at schools.

Regarding the opportunities and constraints of integration between Islamic and general education in Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan, the findings reveal significant opportunities emerging from the integration of Islamic and general education that extend beyond theoretical benefits discussed in previous literature. The development of comprehensive understanding among students through multi-perspective learning aligns with Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligences theory, which emphasizes diverse learning approaches. This integration creates what Abdullah (2014) described as permeable boundaries between disciplines, allowing students to see knowledge as interconnected rather than fragmented. The enhanced teacher

collaboration identified in this study represents a practical manifestation of the integrative-interconnective paradigm, where teachers from different disciplines work together to create meaningful learning experiences. This collaborative approach addresses what Barbour (2002) identifies as the necessity for interdisciplinary dialogue in bridging scientific and religious knowledge.

However, the constraints identified in this research highlight critical implementation gaps that have received limited attention in previous studies. The absence of formal written guidelines across all three schools represents a significant institutional challenge that differs from the structured approaches discussed by Prasetyo (2024) and Nurhasminsyah (2023). This lack of standardization creates what can be termed as “pedagogical ambiguity,” where teachers must independently navigate the integration process without clear institutional frameworks. This finding contradicts the assumption in much of the literature that integration occurs within well-defined curricular structures. The substantial workload demands on teachers identified in this study resonate with broader concerns about teacher preparation and support in Islamic education contexts (Hadi et al., 2024; Mansir, 2022).

This research contributes several novel elements to the field of Islamic education integration. Firstly, it provides the first comprehensive multi-site analysis of Islamic and general education integration specifically in East Kalimantan’s multicultural context, addressing the geographical gap in previous research that focused on Java, Sumatra, and Nusa Tenggara islands. Secondly, the study introduces environmental education (*Adiwiyata*) as a media for Islamic character development, creating a new model that connects contemporary environmental consciousness with classical Islamic pedagogy. This environmental-Islamic integration model provides a framework that other Islamic educational institutions can adapt to their local contexts. Lastly, the application of Al-Ghazali’s character development principles within contemporary educational frameworks provides a bridge between classical Islamic pedagogy and modern educational psychology, particularly through the integration with Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory.

Moreover, the current results offer several significant implications for Islamic educational practice. Environmental preservation program, i.e., *Adiwiyata* indicates that environmental education can be utilized as medium for Islamic values internalization. The next implication is in terms of teaching collaboration, where integration of Islamic and general education enables teachers from across disciplines to collaborate in arranging teaching syllabus and lesson plan, as well as in teaching and learning process. The next point is for the policy in educational development to assign more regulation explicitly regarding the integration of Islamic and general subjects existed both in general schools and in Islamic schools. In addition, opportunities and constraints have important implications for policy development in Islamic education. While the integration model demonstrates clear benefits for student learning and institutional collaboration, its sustainability depends on addressing the identified constraints through formal guidelines, adequate teacher preparation, and institutional support systems. The findings suggest that integration should be viewed not as a static curriculum model but as a dynamic process requiring continuous refinement and institutional commitment.

Finally, above the significant results explained, this research is limited to several aspects. In terms of the number of participants and research sites, the current research observed three Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan. Therefore, further research can conduct relevant study with broader research settings and more participants. The next point is in terms of the research focus,

where this study emphasizes the integration reflected in particular Islamic religious subject, i.e., *Akidah Akhlak*. It is possible for the future research to observe the integration between other Islamic subjects, e.g., Islamic stories or Qur'an and *Hadits* to general subjects. Finally, the cultural context appears in this finding, i.e., in the context of East Kalimantan, might not be relevant to other provinces in Indonesia. Replication studies in different Indonesian contexts would strengthen the evidence base for Islamic education integration approaches.

6. Conclusion

The research findings above indicate that the integration of Islamic and general education in three Islamic junior high schools in East Kalimantan has been effectively implemented, as well as strengthening students' religious characters. The integration is seen in the form of linking *Akidah Akhlak* themes with general subjects, integrating Islamic values into environmental program, i.e., *Adiwiyata* and sustainability program, i.e., *P2RA*. The research findings reveal that the process of internalizing Islamic values with general education grows students' tolerance, cooperation, and religious characters. Additionally, the findings also show intercultural aspect linked to East Kalimantan diverse communities; Balikpapan emphasizing environmental programs in urban contexts, Kutai Kartanegara fostering teamwork rooted in communal culture, and Paser integrating oral traditions engagement. These vary strategies highlight the strengthening of students' religious character which requires contextual approach rather than standardized models. Furthermore, the study identifies significant opportunities including comprehensive student understanding, enhanced cross-disciplinary teacher collaboration, and holistic evaluation systems that extend learning beyond traditional cognitive assessment. However, critical constraints emerged, particularly the absence of formal written guidelines, substantial teacher workload in developing integrated materials independently, and inconsistent implementation approaches across institutions. While limited to some aspects of research, this study provides valuable insights for Islamic formal institutions which seek holistic models that balance students' academic competences by integrating Islamic and general education.

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