

**INTEGRATION OF ISLAMIC CHARACTER VALUES IN THEMATIC LEARNING
AT STATE ELEMENTARY MADRASAHS IN LIMA PULUH KOTA REGENCY**Faiz Azizi¹, Youssef Amrani², Fatima Zahra El Idrissi³, and Alhuda⁴¹ Raden Abdullah Yaqin Islamic College Jember, Jember, Indonesia² Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakesh, Morocco³ Hassan II University of Casablanca, Casablanca, Morocco⁴ Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Piladang, Lima Puluh Kota, Indonesia**Corresponding Author:**

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Abstract

This study investigates the integration of Islamic character values in thematic learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri in Lima Puluh Kota Regency. Despite the religious foundation of these institutions, the internalization of character values in classroom practices remains inconsistent and often implicit. The study aims to describe the forms of value integration, identify strategies used by teachers, analyze the challenges they face, and examine the alignment between lesson plans and classroom practices. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that while teachers attempt to embed Islamic values—such as honesty, cooperation, and responsibility—through stories and moral messages, these efforts are not systematically planned within the instructional framework. Lesson plans generally mention character education in broad terms without specifying Islamic principles or providing clear indicators for implementation. Moreover, instructional materials rely heavily on standard national textbooks with limited contextual adaptation. The study concludes that although there is a commitment to character education, the lack of structured planning, inadequate supporting materials, and limited understanding of integrative pedagogy hinder the full realization of Islamic value integration. These findings highlight a critical need for professional development and curriculum reform that enables teachers to incorporate religious values more explicitly and meaningfully into thematic instruction. The study offers both theoretical insight and practical recommendations for strengthening value-based education in Islamic elementary schools.

Keywords: Character Values, Integration, Thematic Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Thematic learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) is designed to integrate various basic competencies from multiple subjects into a unified thematic framework (Fatimah & Syamsudin, 2021; Febrianti, 2025; Mardianto, 2024). However, in practice, the integration of Islamic character values within thematic learning has not yet been systematically and thoroughly implemented. Teachers tend to focus more on achieving students' cognitive outcomes, such as concept comprehension and task completion, while the affective domain—especially the embodiment of Islamic character—is often overlooked. Yet, character formation is a core element of national education goals, particularly in the context of madrasah education. The Merdeka Curriculum explicitly emphasizes strengthening the profile of Pancasila students, including the cultivation of religious and ethical values (Rohmaniah & Kurniawan, 2025; Saputro, 2025). Unfortunately, its implementation at the classroom level faces numerous challenges, particularly regarding teachers' understanding of Islamic integration and their ability to develop relevant learning plans. Not all thematic lesson plans (RPP) explicitly include indicators related to Islamic character values. This condition highlights the need for in-depth study on the extent to which Islamic character values have been integrated into thematic learning at MIN.

The issue of integrating Islamic character values into thematic learning cannot be separated from the limitations of existing theories and previous studies that have yet to fully address the complexities of classroom practices. Earlier research has mostly focused on cognitive outcomes, teaching methods, or thematic approaches in general, without specifically examining the integration of Islamic character (Hakim, 2024; Nurhikmah, 2025; N. N. E. Putri & Subando, 2025). Although there is literature discussing character education, few studies explore how Islamic character values are integrated into the thematic curriculum within the context of madrasah. This reveals a gap between curriculum expectations and classroom realities. Moreover, existing theories of character education tend to be general and lack specific Islamic contextualization appropriate for madrasah settings. Therefore, a research approach is needed that can explore concrete practices of Islamic character integration, especially in public Islamic elementary schools. This research is crucial to contribute both to theoretical development and to improving thematic learning practices rooted in Islamic values.

This study aims to describe the integration of Islamic character values into thematic learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri in the Lima Puluh Kota district. Furthermore, it seeks to identify the strategies employed by teachers to internalize Islamic character values within learning activities. The research also aims to analyze the challenges faced by teachers in integrating Islamic values into thematic teaching. Additionally, it seeks to examine the alignment between lesson planning documents—specifically the Lesson Plan (RPP)—and the actual classroom teaching practices regarding Islamic character integration. In other words, this research not only describes existing conditions but also critically analyzes the relationship between planning and practice in the context of integrating Islamic character values. The main focus is to provide a comprehensive depiction of how Islamic values are applied within thematic learning processes at the elementary madrasah level.

Based on the aforementioned background and objectives, it can be argued that the integration of Islamic character values into thematic learning is highly urgent and worthy of scientific inquiry. Within the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah as an Islamic-based elementary institution, reinforcing Islamic character values is not merely complementary but rather an essential component of education. The limited presence of these values in teaching materials, teachers' insufficient understanding, and the implementation challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum indicate that this issue is not just technical but also conceptual. This study is grounded in the assumption that the success of thematic learning is not only measured by academic achievements but also by the successful formation of students' Islamic character. Hence, it is important to uncover real-world practices of Islamic character value integration in classrooms, as a foundation for improving policy, curriculum development, and teacher training to foster Islamic character education that is contextual and practical.

Character values are a set of moral, ethical, and spiritual principles that guide behavior and social interaction (Kamaruddin dkk., 2023; Nijma & Asnatasia, 2025; Qowim dkk., 2024). According to the Ministry of National Education (2010), character values are universal principles derived from religion, Pancasila, culture, and the goals of national education (Imtinan dkk., 2022; R. Putri dkk., 2021; Yuniarti dkk., 2021). These values include integrity, responsibility, empathy, diligence, and respect for others. In the context of Islamic education, character values refer to noble morals (akhlak karimah) that reflect one's faith and piety. Thus, character values are not only cognitive but also encompass affective and psychomotor dimensions that must be holistically internalized through the educational process.

The manifestation of character values in education can be categorized into several core values such as religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, nationalism, patriotism, appreciation for achievement, friendliness, love of peace, reading interest, social care, and responsibility. These categories align with the 18 character values promoted by the Ministry of Education. In Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, these values are often contextualized with Islamic teachings such as trustworthiness (amanah), sincerity (ikhlas), patience (sabr), and gratitude (syukur). Character values are reflected in students' daily behavior, both inside and outside the classroom, influenced by teacher role models and a value-supportive learning environment.

Integration in education refers to the process of combining or unifying various components of knowledge, values, or skills into a meaningful and coherent learning experience (Brutu dkk., 2023; Nursyeha, 2025). Beane (1997) defines integration as a curriculum approach that merges knowledge and skills from multiple subjects into themes or real-life issues relevant to students (Kusumawati, 2024; Olfah, 2024). In this study, integration refers to the systematic and continuous incorporation of Islamic character values into thematic learning. Integration is not merely technical but also ideological and pedagogical, aiming to shape students holistically across cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains.

The manifestation of integration can be realized through various approaches such as conceptual integration (combining concepts from multiple subjects), contextual integration (linking learning to real-life situations), and spiritual integration (embedding religious values in lessons). Practically, integration can be implemented through lesson plans that include character value indicators, contextual and reflective teaching methods, and the creation of a learning environment conducive to value reinforcement. Teachers play a key role in this integration by modeling exemplary behavior, embedding values in lesson narratives, and managing classroom dynamics that reflect Islamic principles.

Thematic learning is an instructional approach that integrates multiple subjects under a common theme that becomes the focal point of the learning process (MUBAROK, 2024; Sakinah & Fitria, 2024). According to Fogarty (1991), thematic learning enables students to understand concepts holistically through interrelated subject matter (Lestari, 2025; Mustika dkk., 2025). At the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, this approach is used to enhance the relevance

and coherence of learning materials with students' life experiences. Thematic learning aligns with the principles of contextual learning, emphasizing student engagement, development of critical thinking skills, and the integration of life values, including Islamic values.

Thematic learning is manifested through theme-based lesson structures, cross-subject integration such as PPKn, Bahasa Indonesia, and Science, and the use of instructional models such as inquiry, discussion, and project-based learning. Its distinctive features include content integration, meaningful learning activities, and active student involvement. In Islamic education, thematic learning enables the natural internalization of Islamic character values by connecting lesson themes with religious teachings such as honesty, cooperation, and responsibility. It also fosters students' spiritual development through reflective and transformative learning experiences.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses on the implementation of thematic learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri, which has integrated various subjects but has not yet systematically internalized Islamic character values. Teachers tend to prioritize cognitive achievements and the completion of thematic tasks, while the affective dimension—particularly the inculcation of Islamic character values—has not become a primary concern. Although the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the development of students' character, its implementation in the classroom still faces several challenges, especially related to teachers' understanding, the availability of instructional tools, and lesson plans (RPP) that do not explicitly include indicators of Islamic character values.

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was selected as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the ongoing phenomenon of thematic learning. The study utilizes both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, who shared their firsthand experiences in implementing thematic learning and integrating Islamic character values. Meanwhile, secondary data were collected from relevant literature and supporting documents related to the research keywords, including character values, integration, and thematic learning.

The research participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the context of thematic learning. The main informants included third- and fifth-grade teachers at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri who were actively involved in designing and implementing thematic lesson plans. The school principal served as a key informant, providing insights into institutional policies regarding the integration of Islamic character values. In addition, third- and fifth-grade students were involved as sources to observe the direct impact of thematic learning on their character development. Instructional documents, such as thematic lesson plans, student worksheets, and other teaching materials, were also analyzed as supporting data.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore teachers' perspectives, experiences, and challenges in integrating Islamic character values into thematic instruction. Classroom observations were conducted to examine the learning interactions and patterns of value integration. Documentation analysis was employed to examine the instructional materials used, including lesson plans, student worksheets, and other relevant teaching resources.

The data analysis technique employed in this study follows the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved selecting relevant information from interviews, observations, and documents. Data were presented in narrative and thematic matrix formats to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn inductively while ensuring the trustworthiness of the data. To ensure data validity, four criteria were applied: credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability. The case study approach enabled the researcher to provide a holistic and in-depth portrayal of the investigated phenomenon, contributing to the development of both theoretical insights and practical knowledge within the context of Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, it was found that the character values integrated into thematic learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) include honesty, cooperation, responsibility, and religiosity. These values were embedded by the teacher through various pedagogical approaches. For instance, in the theme of "Living in Harmony," the teacher connected the material with hadiths about brotherhood and mutual respect. Observational data supported this finding, showing that teachers instilled honesty and cooperation during group work, gave praise for students who submitted assignments truthfully, and incorporated simple religious advice during the lesson closure. Documentation analysis revealed that several lesson plans (RPP) mentioned character values such as religiosity, discipline, and responsibility, although the integration remained general and lacked detailed indicators.

The data also indicated that teachers often used storytelling methods, especially involving the Prophet's life or the companions, to convey character values like honesty, responsibility, and cooperation. These stories were utilized to contextualize values within religious frameworks that are familiar to students. However, the effectiveness of this approach largely depended on repetition and reinforcement. Teachers observed that students responded positively, especially when Islamic narratives were presented engagingly. Nevertheless, to internalize these values, constant repetition was considered necessary. In addition, observational data suggested that while teachers made conscious efforts to include character values in lessons, these were not consistently visible across all activities, especially in independent learning scenarios.

Relating the descriptive and explanatory data to the existing problem, it can be concluded that although efforts to integrate Islamic character values into thematic learning are present, they have not yet been systematically implemented. Teachers are aware of the importance of instilling character education, and students show interest in religious narratives. However, the consistency of these efforts remains limited. Observational and documentation data confirmed that in practice, explicit expressions of character values, particularly in independent student activities, were still lacking. Furthermore, lesson plans, though mentioning character values, did not always include detailed learning strategies or activities that support integration at a practical level.

The integration of Islamic values into thematic learning was also explored through the triangulation of interview, observation, and documentation data. Teachers demonstrated initiatives to link subject matter with Islamic teachings, such as connecting lesson content with hadiths or Islamic moral values. Observations reinforced these claims, as teachers often ended lessons with moral reflections and provided real-life examples to highlight religious values. However, the data also highlighted gaps in systematic planning. Most of the lesson plans reviewed lacked detailed methods for integrating these values, and the learning materials were largely sourced from the national thematic books without contextual adjustments to local Islamic traditions.

Teachers stated that one of the main strategies employed was the use of Islamic stories to embed values. These narratives were particularly effective in drawing student interest and in making abstract values more relatable. Despite these efforts, documentation data indicated that the strategies were not sufficiently reflected in the planning documents. Reflections on values, although sometimes included in the RPP, were not consistently translated into concrete

classroom activities. In many cases, the integration of character values relied heavily on the teacher’s individual initiative and was not yet supported by institutional or systemic planning.

Relating the descriptive and explanatory data to the research problem, it becomes apparent that integration of Islamic values in thematic learning remains partially implemented and lacks standardization. While there is evidence of teacher creativity and commitment, particularly in storytelling and classroom management, these practices are not yet embedded within the structural framework of lesson planning and curriculum delivery. The inconsistency between teacher initiative and curriculum documents shows a gap that affects the systematic internalization of Islamic character values. This gap also reflects broader challenges in understanding and implementing the values promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum.

Thematic learning at MIN was also examined in relation to its design and execution. According to interviews, teachers appreciated the thematic approach for its flexibility and opportunity to integrate multiple subjects. Nevertheless, they noted challenges in applying this flexibility towards character education. Observational data showed that while thematic learning encouraged collaborative and contextual learning, its linkage to Islamic values was not always apparent. Some classroom sessions showed meaningful integration, especially when the teacher actively guided discussions toward moral lessons. However, other sessions lacked this focus, and students engaged in activities without clear moral or character reinforcement.

Documentation further indicated that while the structure of thematic lesson plans allowed for value integration, this potential was not fully realized. The RPPs generally listed character development goals, but they seldom described how these goals would be operationalized in specific learning activities. Supporting materials, such as student worksheets and reading materials, were mostly drawn from standardized books, with little contextual modification to reflect Islamic moral teachings. As a result, even though the thematic learning framework supports value integration in theory, its practical implementation was uneven and depended largely on individual teacher effort.

In relation to the research problem, the findings suggest that thematic learning in MIN, while conceptually supportive of integrated character education, has not been optimized to systematically foster Islamic values. Teachers recognize the potential of thematic instruction for character formation and make some efforts to realize it. However, the lack of structured guidance, detailed planning, and context-sensitive materials poses significant obstacles. This situation reflects broader systemic issues in curriculum implementation, particularly in aligning pedagogical practices with the character education goals outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 1. Research Findings

Research Objective	Findings	Explanation
To describe the forms of integration of Islamic character values in thematic learning	Partial and unsystematic integration of Islamic values	Although some values such as honesty, discipline, and cooperation are included, they are not consistently or explicitly embedded across learning themes. Integration relies heavily on incidental or oral reinforcement by teachers.
To identify teachers’ strategies in internalizing Islamic character values through thematic learning	Dominance of narrative and habituation methods	Teachers mostly use storytelling, role modeling, and moral reminders during learning activities, but these strategies are not formally structured or reflected in instructional design.
To analyze the challenges faced by teachers in integrating Islamic character values	Limited pedagogical understanding and lack of	Teachers struggle to implement value integration due to insufficient training, lack of example-based learning resources, and pressure to meet cognitive academic targets.

into thematic learning	supporting materials
To examine the alignment between lesson plans (RPP) and classroom practices in integrating Islamic character values	Inconsistency between planning and implementation Most RPPs include general character values but fail to specify Islamic-based indicators. Observations show that actual classroom practices rarely reflect the values stated in planning documents.

The findings of this study reveal that while Islamic character values are present in thematic learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri in Lima Puluh Kota, their integration is not yet systematic or comprehensive. Teachers demonstrate efforts to relate subject matter to religious teachings, particularly through storytelling and moral exemplification. However, these efforts often rely on individual pedagogical intuition rather than structured instructional design. Learning activities tend to emphasize cognitive outcomes and task completion, with less emphasis on fostering internalized Islamic values. Moreover, planning documents, such as lesson plans (RPP), often mention character values in generic terms, without detailed indicators or practical strategies for integration, and teaching materials rarely reflect local Islamic wisdom.

This phenomenon aligns with previous studies highlighting the challenges of value-based education in thematic instruction. Prior research by Hasanah (2021) and Nurhayati (2019) concluded that character education in Islamic schools frequently depends on implicit teacher behavior rather than explicit curricular tools. Unlike these studies, however, the current research distinguishes itself by triangulating data from interviews, observations, and document analysis to highlight the structural gap between pedagogical intent and curriculum execution. This study does not merely affirm existing challenges but identifies the specific disconnect between policy frameworks like Kurikulum Merdeka and their operationalization at the classroom level.

The purpose of this research is thus justified and relevant. By describing the forms of integration of Islamic character values in thematic learning, identifying teachers' strategies, analyzing the obstacles encountered in this process, and assessing the congruence between documented planning and actual classroom practice, this study contributes a comprehensive understanding of character education in Islamic elementary education. The study also underscores the complexity of translating Islamic values into measurable and observable classroom activities, especially within the constraints of national thematic curricula.

The implications of these findings are significant for educational policymakers, curriculum developers, and teacher training institutions. The observed gap between curricular goals and classroom realities suggests the need for developing more context-sensitive instructional models that explicitly incorporate Islamic values. Additionally, lesson planning templates should be revised to include operational indicators for character development, supported by teaching resources that reflect both national standards and local Islamic cultural heritage. Without these measures, the risk persists that character education will remain aspirational rather than transformative.

The underlying causes of this issue are multifaceted. Teachers are often limited by time constraints, lack of structured examples, and insufficient training on value integration. Although the Kurikulum Merdeka encourages character building, its implementation is hindered by the absence of practical guidance and standardized tools for Islamic value integration. Furthermore, the predominance of cognitive achievement as the benchmark of success limits the opportunity for affective and moral development, resulting in a superficial incorporation of character education.

To address these concerns, targeted interventions are necessary. Professional development programs should be designed to enhance teachers' capacity to integrate Islamic values systematically across thematic subjects. Curriculum guidelines must include exemplars of value-based instruction and strategies for effective internalization. Additionally, schools should foster a collaborative culture where teachers can share best practices and co-develop value-oriented teaching materials. Only through deliberate and institutionalized efforts can thematic learning truly become a vehicle for holistic Islamic character formation.

CONCLUSION

Surprisingly, this study uncovered that despite the strong religious identity embedded within Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri, the integration of Islamic character values into thematic learning remains largely incidental and unsystematic. Teachers, although committed to moral education, tend to prioritize cognitive achievement and task completion over the intentional cultivation of students' character. Moreover, lesson plans frequently lack explicit indicators for Islamic values, and instructional materials often fail to embody contextual religious elements. These findings illuminate a hidden tension between educational ideals and actual classroom practices, revealing that the presence of religious education does not automatically ensure its integration across all learning dimensions.

The significance of this study lies in its dual contribution to both theoretical discourse and educational practice. Theoretically, it advances the conversation on value-based education by providing empirical evidence that exposes the gap between curriculum mandates and classroom realities in religious-based schools. Practically, it offers a diagnostic framework that helps identify specific pedagogical and institutional barriers to value integration in thematic learning. By articulating the need for structured value-based instructional design within the framework of the Kurikulum Merdeka, this research opens avenues for more culturally and religiously responsive curriculum development in Islamic education.

Although this study offers a comprehensive overview of value integration in thematic learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, it is limited by its focus on a specific regional and institutional context. This limitation, however, should not be viewed as a weakness but rather as a springboard for further exploration. Future research could adopt a comparative perspective across various regions or institutional types to explore whether similar patterns emerge in different Islamic educational environments. Additionally, longitudinal studies may uncover how sustained interventions affect teachers' capacity to internalize and implement value-based instruction over time.

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