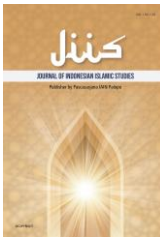
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e-ISSN 2808-8395

Journal of Indonesian Islamic Studies
Vol 6, No. 1, October 2026, pp. 494 - 508



JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC STUDIES

https://ejournal.iainpalopo.ac.id/index.php/jiis/index

The Principal's Leadership in Integrating Islamic Values into the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong

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Articles Information

History:
Received: July 30, 2026
Approved: October 5, 2026
Publish: October 17, 2026

Keywords:
Principal Leadership; Integration of Islamic Values; Merdeka Curriculum; Transformational Leadership; Integrated Islamic School

Abstract

Integrating Islamic values into the Merdeka Curriculum presents a leadership challenge for Islamic schools seeking to align national curriculum requirements with their religious educational missions. This qualitative case study examined how the principal of SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong facilitates this integration. Eight school-based informants were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and institutional document analysis, including the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP). Data analysis involved iterative data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by triangulation across data sources. The findings identified four interconnected leadership practices: articulating an Islamic educational vision, aligning curriculum planning with Islamic values, facilitating teacher development through professional learning communities and mentoring, and cultivating a school culture grounded in Islamic principles. These practices illustrate how leadership coordinates curriculum implementation and institutional values within a specific school context. The study provides a context-specific understanding of leadership practices without establishing their effects on student achievement, character development, spiritual growth, or long-term sustainability.

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Introduction

The transformation of Indonesia's education system toward the Merdeka Curriculum represents a fundamental paradigm shift in educational approaches and student character development (Rosmana et al., 2023). Unlike previous curricula that primarily emphasized the achievement of standardized competencies across narrowly defined academic domains, the philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum highlights student needs, contextual relevance, and holistic development encompassing intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions (Abdul Fattah Nasution et al., 2023). This flexibility enables schools to adapt learning content and pedagogical approaches according to their institutional missions and student characteristics. In general schools, this strengthening is primarily manifested through local content curriculum activities and enrichment programs (Fadillah & Wahyudin, 2024). However, for integrated Islamic schools, this curricular transformation creates distinctive tensions and opportunities that have received limited academic attention (Miftahuddin et al., 2024).

Within Indonesia's national curriculum framework, religious education is provided as a distinct subject, while moral and character development may also be promoted through other subjects and school activities. Thus, the distinction between public schools and integrated Islamic elementary schools (SDIT) lies not in the presence or absence of religious values, but in how these values are institutionally organized and integrated into educational practices. In the SDIT context examined here, Islamic values are intended to guide curriculum planning, classroom instruction, teacher conduct, and school culture. Research on pesantren offers relevant conceptual perspectives. Islamic et al., (2024) examine character education grounded in philosophical values, while Halomoan et al., (2023) investigate democratic values in Islamic boarding school environments. Other studies address character formation through extracurricular activities (Huda et al., 2024) and disciplinary practices (Anirah et al., 2024). However, these findings cannot be directly generalized to SDIT because of differences in institutional structures, learning environments, and curricular arrangements. From an integrated Islamic educational perspective, spiritual, moral, and intellectual development are understood as interconnected dimensions of learning. Accordingly, this study examines how principal leadership translates these educational principles into curriculum implementation and everyday school practices at SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong.

As the Merdeka Curriculum continued its phased implementation under Indonesia's national education policy, integrated Islamic schools faced challenges in aligning curriculum requirements with Islamic values. This study was conducted at SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong from August to September 2026. Recent studies of integrated Islamic elementary schools indicate that aligning the Merdeka Curriculum with school-specific Islamic programs requires deliberate curriculum coordination. Mizaniyyah and Sumarsono, (2026) identified pedagogical and administrative challenges in integrating the two curricula, while Rizky Firnanda and Mohamad Joko Susilo (2025) highlighted the principal's role in strategic planning, organizational coordination, and evaluation to support curriculum integration. This parallel approach risks fragmenting student learning experiences and weakening institutional identity. An alternative approach identified in previous studies as more effective involves genuine integration, where the national curriculum functions as a medium for value formation rather than existing in tension with religious principles (Agus

Pahrudin et al., 2025). Such implementation requires strong and transformative educational leadership.

The research gap addressed in this study concerns how principals connect Islamic educational visions with curriculum management, classroom instruction, teacher development, and school culture during Merdeka Curriculum implementation. Rahmat (2024) examined curriculum integration through a literature review, while Kamal and Widihastuti (2025) evaluated academic supervision using a quantitative approach. Similarly, Abidin et al. (2025) explored holistic curriculum management through ethnographic research. Although these studies provide insights into curriculum integration and educational leadership, the interconnected practices through which principals translate Islamic values into everyday school activities remain insufficiently explained. Therefore, this qualitative case study investigates how the principal of SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong coordinates these practices and responds to implementation challenges.

This study adopts instructional leadership as its primary theoretical perspective, emphasizing curriculum management, instructional practices, and teacher development (Hallinger, 2011). Three complementary perspectives inform the analysis: transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision articulation and organizational commitment (Bass & Avolio, 1993); prophetic leadership, which emphasizes the ethical principles of humanization, liberation, and transcendence (Dewantoro & Susilo, 2025); and spiritual leadership, which highlights meaning, calling, and organizational belonging (Martinez-Soto et al., 2024). The term spiritual-instructional leadership is used as a provisional analytical construct connecting instructional practices with Islamic educational commitments, rather than as a validated theory. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on four interconnected leadership practices: vision articulation, curriculum management, teacher development, and school culture, while considering implementation challenges and leadership responses.

This study focuses on SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong, an integrated Islamic elementary school that explicitly commits to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum while maintaining its Islamic educational foundation. The school represents an informative case because its leadership team consciously seeks systematic integration rather than merely accommodating competing demands between national curriculum requirements and religious identity. Through this case, the study investigates how principal leadership practices operate across four interconnected dimensions: visionary direction-setting, curriculum management, teacher development, and school culture development. These dimensions collectively support, rather than undermine, the integration of Islamic values within the educational process.

This study is based on the assumption that educational leadership operates simultaneously across multiple levels. Therefore, it is insufficient to examine merely whether a principal promotes Islamic values or manages curriculum implementation effectively. A more critical question concerns how these leadership functions intersect and reinforce one another, as well as what specific practices enable such coherence. Understanding this dynamic pattern is increasingly important for faith-based schools that face simultaneous demands for compliance with national educational standards and preservation of institutional missions. The findings provide theoretical clarification

regarding integrated Islamic school leadership while offering practical insights for institutional leaders managing similar tensions.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology designed to generate an in-depth understanding of principal leadership practices within a specific institutional context (Siregar et al., 2024). The case study approach enables researchers to explore complex and multifaceted leadership phenomena in their natural settings while examining how contextual factors shape leadership practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted at SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong, an integrated Islamic elementary school selected because the institution explicitly positions the integration of Islamic values as a core component of Merdeka Curriculum implementation rather than treating the adoption of the national curriculum as a separate educational agenda.

The research participants consisted of key institutional actors directly involved in curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. These included the principal, who provided overall institutional direction and leadership vision; the curriculum coordinator, who was responsible for translating curriculum policies into operational procedures and monitoring instructional practices; classroom teachers; and administrative staff who supported institutional operations. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained permission from the principal of SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong. All interview participants were informed about the research objectives and voluntarily agreed to participate. Their identities were protected using identification codes instead of real names. Classroom observations focused on teaching and learning activities without photographing, video recording, or collecting students' personal information. Interview notes and observation records were stored on a personal device accessible only to the researcher. As an external researcher with no employment relationship with the school, the researcher had no institutional authority over the participants. Institutional permission was distinguished from individual consent to respect participants' autonomy and reduce potential power imbalances.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation processes (Ahmad et al., 2025). A total of eight participants provided primary interview data. These interview data were complemented by classroom observations and document analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of leadership practices and value integration processes. Eight participants were purposively selected: one principal (P1), one curriculum coordinator (P2), four teachers (P3–P6), and two administrative staff members (P7–P8), based on their curriculum-related responsibilities and voluntary participation. Data were collected through eight semi-structured interviews in Indonesian (35–55 minutes each), covering leadership, curriculum integration, teacher development, school culture, and implementation challenges. Six non-participant observations in grades III and V (40–70 minutes each) were documented through structured field notes. Document analysis examined the 2026/2027 School Operational Curriculum (KOSP), lesson plans, meeting records, and school activity schedules. Multiple institutional perspectives and data sources supported an in-depth case analysis without claiming formal data saturation.

Data analysis followed an interactive and iterative model consisting of three interconnected processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2018). Data were analyzed iteratively through data reduction, coding, data display, and conclusion drawing. The lead researcher coded interview, observation, and documentary data into four analytical dimensions: vision, curriculum management, teacher development, and school culture, while identifying emerging implementation challenges. For example, the principal's emphasis on Islamic values across school activities was coded as "value-based vision" and interpreted under visionary leadership. Interpretations were reviewed against the original records and compared across data sources to identify consistencies and discrepancies.

The validity of the findings was ensured through data triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and institutional documents. This triangulation process strengthened the credibility of the research findings by providing multiple perspectives regarding how Islamic values were integrated into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong. For example, the principal's statements on Islamic value integration were compared with the KOSP and observed teaching practices, including the connection between fractions and fairness in mathematics lessons. Differences in teachers' reported confidence were considered alongside observed practices to avoid overstating implementation consistency. Triangulation supported contextual interpretation but did not eliminate potential participant or researcher bias.

Results

Visionary Leadership Based on Islamic Educational Philosophy

The principal's leadership fundamentally operates first and foremost at the level of vision articulation. Rather than presenting the Merdeka Curriculum and Islamic values as separate initiatives requiring parallel management, the principal explicitly reframes curriculum transformation as an opportunity to strengthen faith-based character development.

During the interview, the principal stated:

> "*The Merdeka Curriculum provides us with the freedom to determine what kind of character we truly want to develop. For this school, character development must remain rooted in Islamic principles. Islamic values must be present in learning processes, school culture, and the behavior of all members of the school community."* (P1, principal, interview, August 11, 2026)

The school's mission statement and the 2026/2027 School Operational Curriculum (KOSP) reflected this orientation by aligning academic learning objectives with Islamic character development. Observations of teacher meetings documented discussions on integrating Islamic principles into subject planning, particularly environmental stewardship in science lessons. Teachers and the curriculum coordinator also described the principal's communication of this vision as providing direction for curriculum planning and instructional practices.

Curriculum Management Strategies Supporting Value Integration

The findings revealed that curriculum integration was coordinated through collaboration between the curriculum coordinator and classroom teachers. The school used existing Merdeka Curriculum learning objectives as a basis for identifying connections with Islamic values rather than developing an entirely separate curriculum.

The curriculum coordinator (P2) explained:

> "*We did not create new materials from the beginning. We examined how the existing curriculum reflects Islamic principles and how we can make these connections more explicit for students*." (P2, curriculum coordinator, interview, August 14, 2026).

Classroom observations documented the integration of Islamic values into learning activities. In Grade III mathematics (OBS-01, August 14, 2026), the teacher connected fraction concepts with Islamic principles of justice through an exercise involving the division of objects into equal shares. Students compared equal and unequal portions and explained how fair distribution related to the mathematical concept of fractions. In Grade V (OBS-02, August 19, 2026), students evaluated fairness in a hypothetical community, connecting social relationships with Islamic ethical principles and the learning objective of understanding community responsibilities. Islamic religious education lessons also linked Qur'anic teachings on environmental stewardship with science concepts. These observations illustrate how Islamic values were incorporated into instructional activities but do not establish improvements in academic achievement or students' character development.

Teacher Development as Support for Value Integration

Beyond curriculum structures, successful integration requires teachers to possess a comprehensive understanding of Islamic educational principles and the ability to translate these principles into effective pedagogical practices (Prasetyo et al., 2024). The principal established a systematic professional development program designed to strengthen this dual competence among teachers. The school's monthly professional learning community brought teachers together to examine how specific learning units could be connected with Islamic values, observe each other's instructional practices, and discuss challenges encountered during implementation.

The school organized monthly professional learning communities, peer observations, and mentoring activities to support teachers in integrating Islamic values into classroom instruction. These activities provided opportunities for teachers to discuss lesson planning, share instructional experiences, and address implementation difficulties.

The principal participated in professional discussions and encouraged reflective dialogue when teachers encountered difficulties connecting academic concepts with Islamic perspectives. Experienced teachers also shared instructional approaches through peer mentoring and classroom observation activities. Participants described these collaborative activities as sources of pedagogical support, although differences in teachers' confidence and understanding remained evident.

School Culture as a Medium for Value Integration

School culture was reflected in daily Qur'anic recitation, collective prayers, Islamic greetings, and practices emphasizing cleanliness and mutual assistance. As an illustrative observation episode (OBS-03, August 26, 2026), students participated in cleaning the school environment after receiving guidance on cleanliness as an Islamic responsibility. Students collected litter, organized classroom materials, and assisted their peers, illustrating the practical expression of Islamic values through collective activities. Teachers perceived these routines as supporting character formation, although their long-term effects on students' character and spiritual development were not assessed.

Daily school practices provided opportunities for students to experience Islamic values through social interactions. One classroom teacher (P3) explained:

> "*Children learn Islam through practice. They hear about compassion and experience it when classmates who make mistakes are treated with kindness. They hear about justice and experience it when conflicts are resolved fairly. These daily practices contribute more significantly to character formation than lessons about Islamic values alone*." (P3, classroom teacher, interview, September 8, 2026).

These findings illustrate how school culture provides opportunities for students to practice Islamic values through daily routines and social interactions. The observed activities reflect the school's efforts to promote cleanliness, cooperation, and mutual respect, while the teacher's account highlights their perceived contribution to character formation. However, these practices do not necessarily indicate the long-term internalization of Islamic values among students.

Contextual Challenges and Implementation Constraints

The study identified several challenges in integrating Islamic values into the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly differences in teachers' readiness and instructional practices. While some teachers effectively connected subject content with Islamic principles, others experienced difficulties establishing meaningful connections, especially in non-religious subjects. The principal addressed these differences through mentoring and collaborative discussions, although the available evidence did not establish whether these challenges were fully resolved during the research period. These variations indicate that Islamic value integration remained an ongoing process requiring continuous pedagogical support rather than a uniformly achieved outcome..

The principal's response was not to disregard these differences or replace teachers who encountered challenges. Instead, the school provided targeted professional support while recognizing that capacity development requires a gradual and continuous process. Differences in teachers' theological understanding and their ability to integrate Islamic values indicate that competence development cannot be achieved instantly. Rather, it requires sustained professional support.

Discussion

The first finding, concerning visionary leadership, suggests that the principal's articulation of Islamic educational values provides a shared direction for curriculum implementation and institutional practices. The alignment between the school's mission, curriculum planning, and teaching practices reflects the prophetic dimension of leadership, which connects educational decisions with broader religious and ethical purposes (Ibnu Sholeh et al., 2023). The principal's educational vision was reflected in the school's mission statement and the 2026/2027 School Operational Curriculum (KOSP), which emphasized the alignment of academic learning objectives with Islamic character development. This orientation was reflected in Grade III mathematics (OBS-01, August 14, 2026), where fraction concepts were connected with fairness and equitable distribution. Similarly, teacher planning discussions incorporated Islamic principles of environmental stewardship into science lessons, although their classroom implementation was not independently established. The principal provided institutional direction, the curriculum coordinator facilitated curriculum planning, and teachers translated these principles into instructional practices. These findings indicate efforts to align educational objectives with Islamic values, although their consistency and effects on student outcomes remain unverified.

Table 1. Alignment of Learning Objectives, Islamic Values, Instructional Activities, and Assessment

Learning Objectives	Islamic Values	Learning Activities	Assessment Indicators	Data Sources
Understanding fractions through equal partitioning (Grade III Mathematics)	Justice ('adl) and fairness	Students divide objects into equal parts and discuss equitable distribution.	Students accurately represent simple fractions (½ and ¼) and explain the importance of equal distribution through practical tasks.	KOSP 2026/2027, p. 24; OBS-01, August 14, 2026
Understanding environmental sustainability and human responsibility (IPAS)	Responsibility (amanah) and environmental stewardship	Teachers plan activities connecting environmental preservation with Islamic teachings and everyday responsibilities.	Students identify at least two environmental problems, propose appropriate solutions, and demonstrate understanding of environmental responsibility through a simple project plan.	KOSP 2026/2027, p. 37; teacher planning meeting records

The alignment between academic learning objectives and Islamic values is illustrated in Table 1, which maps curriculum objectives, value-oriented learning activities, and assessment indicators. The mapping also distinguishes classroom practices from instructional activities documented at the planning stage.

This finding aligns with Nurbani et al., (2025), who highlighted teacher collaboration in value-based school planning, and Joni et al., (2025), who emphasized shared responsibility and participatory decision-making in curriculum implementation. The present study further illustrates how the principal's vision was perceived as guiding collaborative practices among school personnel. However, these perceptions reflect leadership direction rather than verified improvements in teacher motivation or institutional performance.

The curriculum coordinator explained that this clarity of vision was the most significant contribution of the principal because it prevented teachers from perceiving a conflict between maintaining Islamic educational commitments and implementing the national curriculum effectively. From the perspective of transformational leadership theory, vision articulation and idealized influence represent central leadership behaviors that enable leaders to inspire followers toward transcendent organizational goals (Ghufron, 2020; .Cempaka, 2025). The principal of SDIT Bin Baz demonstrates these transformational leadership dimensions by presenting a vision that connects everyday curriculum practices with broader Islamic theological purposes.

The second finding, concerning curriculum management, indicates that Islamic value integration was pursued through systematic curriculum alignment rather than developing a separate religious curriculum. The principal's educational vision was translated into instructional planning through collaboration between the curriculum coordinator and teachers. This approach aligns with Okojie et al. (2022), who emphasized curriculum mapping to connect learning objectives with instructional content, and Zweeris et al. (2023), who highlighted the relationship between curriculum orientations and teaching practices. Similarly, Daniel et al. (2024) demonstrated the relevance of curriculum integration to character education within the distinct context of Islamic boarding schools. These perspectives suggest that collaborative curriculum management can connect institutional values with instructional planning, although consistent implementation across subjects remains an important challenge.

The school's approach to curriculum documentation also reflected the principle of integration. The School Operational Curriculum Document (Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan/KOSP) included not only subject-specific standards and competencies but also explicit value-based learning objectives mapped to Islamic principles. This documentation served multiple purposes.

First, it communicated to parents and the wider school community that values were not supplementary elements but central components of academic learning. Second, it provided teachers with clear instructional guidance. Third, it established an accountability mechanism through which implementation could be systematically monitored. These findings demonstrate that value integration within curriculum requires systematic planning so that institutional identity can be translated into learning objectives, instructional activities, and school culture practices (Rahmawatie et al., 2025).

Building on these curriculum management practices, the third finding highlights teacher development as an essential component of Islamic value integration.

The building on curriculum management practices, the third finding highlights teacher development through mentoring and professional collaboration. For instance, the principal guided a teacher experiencing difficulties in integrating Islamic values into mathematics through reflective discussions. A classroom observation in Grade III documented the connection between fraction learning and principles of fairness, illustrating how value integration could be translated into instructional practice. This approach reflects instructional leadership through pedagogical guidance (Dwiyono et al., 2022) and collaborative learning through shared teaching strategies (Hasibuan et al., (2024). Although these practices demonstrate opportunities for instructional improvement,

the available evidence does not establish a direct causal relationship between mentoring and changes in teacher competence.

Beyond supporting teachers' instructional practices, the fourth finding highlights school culture as an extension of Islamic value integration. Daily religious routines, mutual assistance, and respectful interactions illustrate how values are communicated through experiences beyond formal instruction. This finding aligns with Malahati and Rokhimawan, (2024), who examined hidden curriculum practices in Islamic elementary education. It also reflects social learning principles, particularly observation and behavioral modeling, as discussed by Sumianto et al. (2024). From an Islamic educational perspective, these practices correspond with uswah hasanah, emphasizing educators' exemplary behavior (Wahidi & Syahidin, 2024). The present study extends these perspectives by illustrating how school leadership connects curriculum-oriented values with everyday institutional practices. However, observed routines and teachers' perceptions do not establish the long-term internalization of Islamic values among students.

While school culture reinforced Islamic values through everyday practices, the fifth finding highlights the challenges of sustaining this integration, particularly differences in teachers' instructional readiness. This finding aligns with Meti Wigiyantini et al. (2025), who emphasized collaborative, needs-based professional development grounded in actual teaching practices. In response to these challenges, the principal employed mentoring and reflective discussions, reflecting instructional leadership practices discussed by He et al. (2024). Thus, Islamic value integration requires continuous professional support rather than being treated merely as a curriculum implementation requirement, although improvements in teacher competence remain unverified.

During the August–September 2026 fieldwork, teachers reported tensions between academic assessment demands and the integration of Islamic values, particularly when subject-based evaluations prioritized measurable academic competencies. Although balancing academic achievement and character-related indicators was considered important, the available evidence did not establish the consistent use of a specific character assessment rubric or demonstrate changes in students' character development. Thus, developing practical and reliable assessment procedures remained an unresolved challenge.

The tension between academic demands and value integration demonstrates that assessment systems significantly influence teachers' instructional priorities. When assessment focuses exclusively on academic achievement, character and value development may become marginalized (Okta Rosfiyani et al., 2026). Therefore, schools need to establish balanced assessment systems that measure not only academic competencies but also students' development of values and character. This approach aligns with the principle of assessment for learning, which positions assessment as part of the holistic development process rather than merely a tool for measuring learning outcomes (Robinson-Jones et al., 2026).

Beyond assessment-related challenges, school personnel reported that some parents questioned how the integration of Islamic values into mathematics and science might affect academic learning. According to these staff accounts, the school responded through communication with parents, explaining that value integration was intended to complement rather than replace subject-specific learning objectives. As parents were not

directly interviewed, these concerns represent school personnel's accounts rather than parents' firsthand perspectives. The available evidence also does not establish whether the school's explanations fully addressed these concerns.

Concerns from some families regarding the integration of Islamic values into general subjects demonstrate that value-based education requires shared understanding and effective communication among stakeholders. Integrating values into mathematics or science does not mean reducing academic objectivity; rather, it provides ethical and reflective dimensions in the application of knowledge.

This approach corresponds with the concept of holistic education, which views education as a process of developing intellectual abilities alongside character formation and moral responsibility (Karthik & Sivakumar, 2025). Therefore, continuous engagement with parents through transparent communication becomes essential so that the school's vision is understood as an effort to strengthen, rather than replace, academic quality.

Viewed in light of these implementation challenges, the findings suggest an interconnected process of Islamic value integration rather than separate leadership functions. The principal's vision provided direction for aligning Merdeka Curriculum objectives with Islamic values through the KOSP and collaborative curriculum planning. Mentoring and reflective discussions then supported teachers in addressing instructional difficulties, while the reported Grade III mathematics activity illustrates how fairness could be connected to fraction learning. Religious routines and everyday interactions extended this orientation into school culture. Teachers' concerns about instructional readiness and assessment also provided feedback for professional discussions, although evidence of subsequent curriculum revisions remains limited. Building on instructional leadership theory (Hallinger, 2011), this study highlights the connection between curriculum coordination, teacher support, classroom practices, and Islamic school culture. These relationships constitute a provisional interpretive framework derived from a single case, rather than a validated leadership model applicable across schools.

Conclusion

This study identifies four interconnected practices through which Islamic values were integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong: articulating an Islamic educational vision, aligning curriculum planning with institutional values, supporting teacher development through mentoring and collaboration, and reinforcing Islamic principles through everyday school culture. Across these practices, differences in teacher readiness, assessment-related tensions, and parent-related concerns emerged as continuing challenges. The findings suggest that the principal played a coordinating role alongside the curriculum coordinator and teachers. However, these conclusions reflect documented practices and participants' perceptions within a single school, rather than demonstrating causal leadership effects or measurable improvements in student achievement and character development.

The findings indicate that the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and Islamic values does not primarily depend on curriculum modification alone, but rather on visionary leadership capable of aligning institutional vision, curriculum systems, teacher competence, and school culture. Through this alignment, Islamic values become

embedded as an integral component of students' overall learning experiences rather than functioning as an additional or separate educational element.

The study contributes to educational leadership discourse by demonstrating that leadership in integrated Islamic schools requires a multidimensional approach combining transformational, instructional, and spiritual leadership orientations. Principals must not only manage curriculum implementation but also construct coherence between national educational demands and faith-based institutional missions.

Practically, Islamic schools may consider collaborative curriculum planning, teacher mentoring, and value-based school routines to support curriculum integration. Clear assessment indicators and parent communication are also needed, with implementation adapted to each school's governance, teacher readiness, and resources. This study was limited to one school, eight internal informants, and fieldwork conducted during August–September 2026. It did not include direct student or parent perspectives or assess changes in academic achievement, character development, or long-term outcomes. Future research should employ comparative and longitudinal designs to examine these practices and their educational implications across different school contexts.

Acknowledgment

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the principal, curriculum coordinator, teachers, and administrative staff of SDIT Bin Baz Rejang Lebong for their cooperation and valuable contributions during the research process. Their assistance in facilitating interviews, classroom observations, and access to relevant school documents supported the completion of this study.

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