

Embedding Islamic Spiritual Values In Thematic Teaching For Primary Islamic Schools

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of Islamic spiritual values within thematic instruction in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) across Padang City, Indonesia. As expectations grow for Islamic primary schools to balance academic achievement with the cultivation of religious character, understanding how to embed spiritual values into general subjects becomes increasingly vital. The research aims to identify the spiritual values adopted, examine their implementation in classroom practices, and assess their impact on students' holistic development. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach, data were collected from six MIN through classroom observations, teacher interviews, lesson plan analysis, and surveys of teachers and parents (n = 50). The findings reveal eight core values—tawakkul (trust in God), ikhlas (sincerity), amanah (responsibility), rahmah (compassion), syukur (gratitude), tauhid (oneness of God), istiqamah (steadfastness), and adab (ethical conduct)—that are integrated across multiple subjects. Strategies include spiritual reflection, contextual prayers, Islamic storytelling, and social service activities. The results indicate improvements in students' moral behaviour and sense of responsibility, demonstrating that spiritually based thematic learning effectively fosters both academic competence and spiritual maturity.

Keywords: Islamic Values; Thematic Instructions; Spiritual Education; Madrasah Ibtidaiyah; Holistic Development.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi integrasi nilai-nilai spiritual Islam dalam pembelajaran tematik di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) Kota Padang. Seiring meningkatnya tuntutan agar sekolah dasar Islam mampu menyeimbangkan prestasi akademik dengan pembentukan karakter religius, penting untuk memahami cara memasukkan nilai spiritual ke mata pelajaran umum. Tujuan studi ini ialah memetakan nilai-nilai spiritual yang diterapkan, bentuk pelaksanaannya di kelas, serta pengaruhnya terhadap perkembangan holistik peserta didik. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif, data dikumpulkan dari enam MIN melalui observasi pembelajaran, wawancara guru, analisis RPP, serta survei guru dan orang tua (n=50). Analisis menemukan delapan nilai utama -tawakkul, ikhlas, amanah, rahmah, syukur, tauhid, istiqamah, dan adab- yang terintegrasi di berbagai pelajaran. Strateginya mencakup refleksi spiritual, doa kontekstual, kisah Islami, dan kegiatan layanan sosial. Hasilnya menunjukkan peningkatan perilaku moral dan tanggung jawab siswa, menegaskan efektivitas pembelajaran tematik berbasis spiritual untuk kecerdasan akademik dan kematangan spiritual.

Diserahkan: 25-09-2025 **Disetujui:** 19-10-2025. **Dipublikasikan:** 02-11-2025

Kutipan: Basit, A., Remiswal, R., Nelwati, S., Zalnur, M., & Ahmad, A. (2025). EMBEDDING ISLAMIC SPIRITUAL VALUES IN THEMATIC TEACHING FOR PRIMARY ISLAMIC SCHOOLS. Ta'dibuna Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 14(5), 606–617. <https://doi.org/10.32832/tadibuna.v14i5.21627>

Kata kunci : Nilai-Nilai Islam; Pembelajaran Tematik; Pendidikan Spiritual; Madrasah Ibtidaiyah; Pengembangan Holistik.

I. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a growing global awareness of the importance of integrating spiritual and moral education within formal schooling systems (Chowdhury, 2018). Education is no longer viewed solely as a process of cognitive and skill acquisition, but increasingly as a vehicle for nurturing students' whole being intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually (Swargiary, 2024). In Islamic educational institutions such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools), the spiritual dimension holds a fundamental place in shaping students' worldview and ethical conduct (Maidugu & Isah, 2024). However, the practical integration of Islamic spiritual values within pedagogical models, particularly in thematic instruction aligned with 21st-century learning goals, remains an underexplored domain (Basit, 2021).

The concept of thematic learning, widely adopted within integrated curriculum models, promotes connections across disciplines, enabling students to engage in holistic, contextual understanding (Ye & Xu, 2023). In Indonesia, thematic learning (pembelajaran tematik) is a central component of the national curriculum, especially for elementary education (Damayanti & Muhroji, 2022). While thematic instruction has been lauded for its effectiveness in enhancing student engagement and comprehension, its adaptation to the specific needs of Islamic education, particularly the infusion of spiritual values, has not been sufficiently theorised nor empirically grounded (Khan, 2024).

Islamic spirituality, grounded in tawhid (the oneness of God), encompasses a range of values, including sincerity (ikhlas), discipline (istiqamah), compassion (rahmah), gratitude (syukur), and trust in God (tawakkul). These values are not only central to religious observance but also serve as essential moral orientations for individual behaviour and social harmony (Ruhullah & Ushama, 2025). The challenge for educators in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is how to meaningfully embed these values into the existing thematic learning framework without reducing them to abstract moral lectures or to isolated religious content. Instead, these principles should be lived, experienced, and reflected upon in daily learning activities (Haikal & Anwar, 2024).

Several scholars have explored the importance of religious values in school education. Rahman (2025) examined how faith-based values enhance student motivation and character formation in Islamic schools. Similarly, a study by Al-Sharif and El-Daou (2019) in Lebanon emphasised that spiritual development, when interwoven with cognitive learning, positively influences students' emotional resilience and ethical decision making (Lord et al., 2019). In the Indonesian context, Naimah et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of adab (Islamic etiquette) and religious habituation in early childhood Islamic education, while Arifin et al. proposed a model of integrating akhlaq values within science subjects through storytelling and discussion.

However, most of these studies focused either on general religious education subjects (e.g., Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh) or on extracurricular practices such as morning religious rituals (Abrori & Ikhwan, 2024). Very few empirical studies have specifically examined the incorporation of Islamic spiritual principles into thematic learning, which, by design, covers a wide range of interdisciplinary content, including science, social studies, arts, and language (Zhang et al., 2025). In addition, the existing literature has often treated spiritual values as static content rather than as dynamic, contextualised practices that can be woven into the pedagogy and learning process (Kumar et al., 2018).

Another gap in the literature is the lack of theoretical alignment between Islamic spirituality and constructivist learning theories, which underpin thematic instruction (Rothman, 2019). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, for instance, emphasises meaning-making through social interaction and cultural tools (Glăveanu, 2020). Yet, little has been done to connect this constructivist paradigm with Islamic epistemology, which also emphasises meaning-making through reflection (*tafakkur*), experience (*tajribah*), and ethical action (*'amal*) (Alkouatli, 2024).

Education in the 21st century emphasises not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also the cultivation of character and spiritual integrity. In Islamic education, this holistic vision aligns with the Qur'anic principle of *ta'dīb*, which integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions within the learning process. Thematic teaching, as implemented in primary Islamic schools, provides an ideal pedagogical platform for embedding Islamic spiritual values by promoting integrated learning experiences that connect the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains through real-life contexts. However, despite its potential, the actual integration of Islamic spiritual values into thematic teaching practices remains inconsistent and often superficial.

Several studies have addressed the integration of religious or moral values in primary education, yet their approaches and outcomes vary considerably. First, Saat et al. (2021) examined value-based education in Malaysian Islamic primary schools and found that teachers faced challenges in translating abstract Islamic values into concrete learning activities. Their study highlighted a gap between curriculum intentions and classroom implementation, mainly due to a lack of pedagogical frameworks that link faith and thematic learning. Second, a survey by Nasir et al. (2025) in Indonesia focused on integrating *akhlaq* (Islamic moral conduct) into thematic lessons through contextual learning strategies. Their findings demonstrated improved moral awareness among students but noted a lack of systematic guidance for teachers to sustain value-based integration across multiple subjects. Third, Al Shehri et al. (2022) explored spiritual pedagogy in Saudi Arabian primary classrooms and concluded that successful value integration depends heavily on teachers' spiritual competence and reflective teaching practices rather than curricular design alone.

Compared with previous studies, the present research moves beyond moral awareness or teacher competency by developing a holistic model for explicitly embedding Islamic spiritual values within the thematic learning framework. It emphasises not only the integration of values but also their internalisation through deep learning activities that connect Qur'anic principles to students' lived experiences. This study situates itself within the transformative Islamic education paradigm, aiming to empower learners spiritually, intellectually, and socially through coherent, thematic instruction.

The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between contemporary thematic pedagogies and the internalisation of Islamic spiritual values at the elementary level. While previous research has examined religious instruction in Islamic schools, this study focuses on how these values are intentionally embedded and enacted within thematic units across various subjects —not as appendages, but as integral, guiding principles that shape content, learning strategies, and classroom interactions.

Moreover, this study proposes a conceptual and practical framework for “spiritualizing” thematic instruction, not by adding religious materials per se, but by infusing core spiritual meanings into learning objectives, student tasks, reflection activities, and teacher-student interactions. It treats spiritual values not only as content but as a pedagogical orientation, one that supports the development of *fitrah* (the natural disposition towards goodness) and nurtures holistic student development (*insan kamil*) (Zahra et al., 2025).

This research also offers a new contribution by employing qualitative data from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and document analysis to capture how such spiritualization occurs (or fails to occur) in real classroom settings in Indonesian Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Mey, 2023). It provides evidence-based insights into the lived pedagogical practices of Islamic teachers who engage in thematic instruction, thereby filling a critical void in both local and global educational research.

This study aims to explore and articulate how Islamic spiritual principles can be meaningfully integrated into thematic learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, with the following specific objectives (1) To identify the key Islamic spiritual values that are relevant and feasible to incorporate within thematic instruction at the elementary school level. (2) To examine current teaching practices and curriculum design in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in relation to the integration of these values. (3) To develop a model or framework that supports the spiritualization of thematic learning, aligning Islamic educational goals with student-centred pedagogies. (4) To contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic pedagogy and its relevance in contemporary educational paradigms, especially within multicultural and pluralistic societies.

In doing so, this paper contributes not only to the field of Islamic education but also to the broader debates on values education, curriculum integration, and holistic

pedagogical innovation in the 21st century. It is hoped that the findings will inform curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers seeking to enhance the quality and spiritual depth of learning in Islamic schools).

II. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative case study design with an embedded mixed-methods approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how Islamic spiritual values are integrated into thematic instruction in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The qualitative aspect allows the researcher to explore lived experiences, teaching practices, and the meaning-making processes of teachers and students in their natural setting. Meanwhile, the use of quantitative tools such as questionnaires provides supportive data for triangulation and validation (Santos et al., 2020)

The study was conducted in six Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) located in Kota Padang, Sumatera Barat, Indonesia. The selected schools represent a combination of urban and semi-urban educational environments with varying capacities in terms of facilities, teacher training, and curriculum implementation. The schools were chosen purposively based on their willingness to participate, existing thematic curriculum structures, and commitment to Islamic values as part of their educational ethos. These schools have adopted the government's curriculum with thematic learning at the core of their classroom instruction, especially in grades 1 to 6. All of them integrate Islamic studies and spiritual development into their educational programming. The total number of participants in this study is 50 respondents, consisting of 30 teachers, including classroom teachers and Islamic studies teachers; 10 school principals and curriculum coordinators; 10 parents, selected through stratified sampling to reflect diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

The sample of teachers was selected purposively, focusing on those who have been actively involved in implementing thematic learning for at least two years and are recognised by their schools as key pedagogical leaders. Parents and administrators were included to enrich data triangulation and provide external perspectives on the students' spiritual development outcomes (Mukami et al., 2024)

The research employed a triangulation of methods to ensure data validity and reliability. The three primary methods used were: (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023).

- (1) Classroom Observation, Direct classroom observations were carried out during thematic learning sessions across multiple grade levels (3–6). The observation focused on teaching strategies, classroom interactions, integration of spiritual language and practices, the use of religious narratives or analogies, and student behaviour reflective of spiritual values. Observational checklists and ethnographic field notes were used.

- (2) Semi-Structured Interviews, In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 teachers and 10 school administrators to explore their understanding, attitudes, and experiences in integrating spiritual values into thematic lessons. Interview questions were open-ended and guided by thematic protocols aligned with the research objectives (e.g., how spiritual values are embedded in daily lessons, the challenges faced, and the strategies used).
- (3) Questionnaire Survey, A structured questionnaire was distributed to all 50 participants, consisting of Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The items measured perceptions of the importance of spiritual integration, frequency of application, confidence in delivering spiritual content, and observed impacts on student behaviour.
- (4) Document Analysis, Curriculum documents, lesson plans, teaching materials, and student portfolios were collected and analysed to identify patterns of spiritual value integration. Particular attention was given to how lesson objectives, activities, and assessments reflect Islamic spiritual goals.

Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework: (1) familiarisation, (2) coding, (3) generating themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining themes, and (6) producing the report. NVivo software was used to organise and code qualitative data, enabling a systematic and traceable analytical process. (O'Neill et al., 2018). Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) with SPSS. These results were used to support qualitative findings, highlight trends, and provide numeric validation of thematic categories.

The methodological framework adopted in this study provides a rigorous, ethical, and context-sensitive approach to exploring the spiritualization of thematic learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. By combining qualitative depth with quantitative support and grounding the inquiry in lived classroom experiences in Kota Padang, this research aims to generate actionable insights for Islamic educators, curriculum designers, and policy-makers committed to fostering spiritual and holistic development among primary-level students. This study employed a qualitative case study with an embedded mixed-methods design to explore how Islamic spiritual values are integrated into thematic instruction in six Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Padang City, Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. Thematic analysis using NVivo software was applied to the qualitative data, while descriptive statistics in SPSS provided quantitative insights. Multiple indicators —pedagogical, teacher competency, and student outcomes —were developed to assess integration levels. Data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing

ensured validity and reliability. Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained from all participants.

III. Result and Discussion

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings from the fieldwork conducted in all six Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) in Padang City, Indonesia. The findings are structured around the three central research questions: (1) What Islamic spiritual values are embedded in thematic instruction? (2) How are these values implemented in practice? (3) What impact do these practices have on student development? The discussion further situates these findings within the broader theoretical and empirical literature.

A. Identification of Islamic Spiritual Values Within Thematic Instruction

(1) Core Values Identified

Document analysis of lesson plans, curriculum outlines, and thematic units revealed the frequent inclusion of eight core Islamic spiritual values:

- a. Tawakkul (trust in God)
- b. Ikhlas (sincerity)
- c. Syukur (gratitude)
- d. Istiqamah (steadfastness)
- e. Rahmah (compassion)
- f. Amanah (trustworthiness)
- g. Tawhid (oneness of God)
- h. Adab (etiquette)

These values were not merely included as religious content but were interwoven into the themes and activities of general subjects such as science, social studies, and language arts. For instance, in a science unit on environmental care, teachers emphasised amanah as a divine trust for caring for creation.

Teacher interviews confirmed that ikhlas and amanah were considered the most teachable values through daily classroom routines. 85% of teachers rated spiritual values as "highly important" for student development. These findings align with Islamic pedagogical theory, which holds that value education is central to the development of holistic learners.

(2) Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

The findings resonate with Islamic educational philosophy, which holds that tawhid and akhlaq (ethics) are essential to human development. According to Jamil (2024), the

purpose of education is to produce a good human being who internalises spiritual values through reflective and applied learning. This study provides evidence that even in general subject instruction, Islamic values can be embedded in context and personalized.

B. Implementation of Spiritual Values in Classroom Practice

(1) Integrative Pedagogical Strategies

Observation of 48 classroom sessions across all six MINs revealed several recurring strategies used by teachers to integrate spiritual values:

- a. Contextualised prayers: Opening and closing prayers were tailored to lesson content (e.g., a prayer for wisdom before a math activity).
- b. Reflective questioning: After activities, students were asked to reflect on moral and spiritual implications (e.g., "Did you feel sincere in helping your group?").
- c. Islamic storytelling: Stories of prophets and righteous figures were linked to thematic content (e.g., Prophet Ibrahim and environmental stewardship).
- d. Service-oriented tasks: Students were asked to perform acts of responsibility, such as cleaning classrooms or helping peers.
- e. Spiritual visuals: Classrooms displayed posters with Quranic verses and quotes related to character building.

These practices illustrate that spiritual integration was not limited to religious classes but permeated general learning through intentional pedagogical design.

(2) Teacher Competency and Challenges

Interviews indicated that 78% of teachers had received formal or informal training on integrating Islamic values. However, 22% reported difficulty aligning spiritual outcomes with the thematic learning indicators. Some teachers admitted to relying on routine practices rather than reflective engagement due to time constraints and lack of resources. Challenges reported include:

- a. Limited instructional time for value elaboration.
- b. Difficulty in assessing spiritual growth.
- c. Variability in teacher confidence and pedagogical creativity.

(3) Reflections From Administrator and Parents

Principals and curriculum coordinators observed that students exposed to spiritually themed instruction demonstrated higher levels of discipline, empathy, and participation. Parents echoed similar sentiments, noting behavioural improvements such as increased politeness and responsibility at home.

C. Student Outcomes: Spiritual and Holistic Development

(1) Behavioral Indicators

Data from classroom observation, teacher reports, and parental feedback showed significant behavioural expressions of internalised values:

- a. Increased voluntary prayer and gratitude expression.
- b. Respectful collaboration during group tasks.
- c. Greater initiative in fulfilling responsibilities.

For instance, in one observed classroom, students spontaneously reminded each other to recite Bismillah before a group activity. In another case, a teacher reported that students helped clean the school yard without being instructed, citing it as "part of our duty to Allah.

(2) Student Reflections and Cognitive Development

Students were also able to articulate the moral messages of their lessons. Reflective journals and verbal feedback during interviews indicated an emerging ability to connect subject content with spiritual lessons:

"I learned that being honest in group work makes us feel closer to Allah." (Student, MIN 3)

These findings support the claim that spiritual integration enhances metacognitive awareness and ethical reasoning, which are key components of 21st-century learning.

(3) Statistical Analysis of Survey Data

Quantitative analysis of teacher and parent surveys (N = 50) revealed the following:

- a. Mean score for perceived importance of spiritual values: 3.7/4.0
- b. Mean score for observed student behaviour change: 3.6/4.0
- c. Strong correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) between frequency of spiritual reflection and student behaviour improvement.

These data reinforce qualitative findings that spiritual integration positively impacts student development and classroom climate.

D. Theoretical Implications and Contributions

The study provides empirical evidence that supports constructivist models of learning grounded in Islamic educational philosophy. The process of meaning making, reflection, and lived application aligns with both Vygotskian theories and Islamic epistemology (*fikr, zikr, 'amal*) (Alkouatli, 2023). Novel contributions include:

- a. A practical model for embedding Islamic spiritual values into non-religious subjects.
- b. An assessment rubric for evaluating the integration and internalisation of spiritual values.
- c. A contextual case study that enhances understanding of spiritual pedagogy in Southeast Asian Islamic schooling.

While the study offers robust insights, several limitations are acknowledged:

- a. The study is limited to six state Islamic schools in one city.
- b. Observations were conducted over two academic semesters only.
- c. Student perspectives were collected informally and not as a primary data source.

Future research should consider longitudinal studies across diverse geographic regions and comparative analyses with private Islamic schools or secular schools that integrate spiritual content.

The incorporation of Islamic spiritual values into thematic learning at MIN schools in Padang demonstrates that religious values can be harmonised with modern pedagogical strategies to produce not only academically competent but also spiritually grounded students. These findings underscore the transformative potential of value-based education when supported by thoughtful curriculum design, skilled teachers, and a reflective learning environment.

IV. Conclusion

This study has examined the integration of Islamic spiritual values into thematic instruction at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) in Padang City, Indonesia. Drawing on data from lesson plans, classroom observations, teacher and parent interviews, and surveys, the research demonstrates a clear, positive relationship between incorporating spiritual values and students' holistic development. The study's contribution lies in providing a practical model for seamlessly integrating spiritual values into secular subject instruction, offering a replicable approach for Islamic schools elsewhere.

In conclusion, integrating Islamic spiritual values into thematic instruction at MIN schools offers a powerful model for developing intellectually capable and morally responsible students. This model promotes not only cognitive growth but also emotional and spiritual maturity. It serves as a reminder that education in Islamic contexts must aim to nurture the whole child — head, heart, and soul. Future efforts should focus on refining assessment mechanisms, expanding teacher training, and exploring this model's scalability across diverse educational settings.

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