

Bridging Faith and Knowledge: Reframing Holistic Islamic Education for Integrity-Based Character Formation

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Abstract

This study addressed the fragmentation between faith and knowledge that has contributed to the weakening of integrity-based character formation in contemporary Islamic education. The study aimed to explore and interpret how holistic Islamic education was reframed to bridge faith and knowledge in strengthening integrity-based character formation within the pesantren context. A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using snowball sampling with teachers, institutional leaders, and alumni, as well as through document analysis of curriculum materials and various national and international scholarly articles. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through processes of coding, categorization, and interpretation. The findings indicated that holistic Islamic education operated through three interrelated dimensions: (1) epistemological integration between faith and knowledge, (2) internalization of integrity values through pedagogical practices and institutional culture, and (3) educators' role modeling as a key mechanism for character reinforcement. These processes demonstrated that holistic Islamic education not only integrated domains of knowledge but also systematically cultivated integrity-based character, including honesty, discipline, and moral responsibility, through sustained educational practices. Based on these findings, the study recommends that holistic Islamic education approaches that bridge faith and knowledge be considered in curriculum development and pedagogical practices to strengthen integrity-based character formation in contemporary Islamic education.

Keywords: *Holistic Education, Character Development, Gontor Curriculum, Islamic Education, Integrated Knowledge.*

INTRODUCTION

Modern educational systems face significant challenges in balancing cognitive mastery with moral and spiritual development. Education that prioritizes measurable academic outcomes often overlooks the cultivation of ethics, emotional intelligence, and spiritual awareness, resulting in students who may excel in examinations yet lack empathy, resilience, and moral wisdom in real-life contexts¹. This condition reflects a deeper educational crisis characterized by the fragmentation of curricula, where intellect is separated from character and knowledge is detached from wisdom². Within this fragmented framework, academic success is frequently achieved at the expense of ethical integrity, contributing to increased academic dishonesty, weakened moral exemplarity, and the marginalization of religious and moral values from educational practice. Consequently, this crisis underscores the need for a critical re-examination of educational approaches that can meaningfully integrate faith, knowledge, and character formation rather than treating moral education as a supplementary or normative component³.

Holistic education offers an alternative to this fragmented approach. According to Miller⁴, holistic education is not just a pedagogical method but a philosophical orientation aimed at developing the full potential of human beings intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically, creatively, and spiritually. It emphasizes interconnectedness: between the self, others, nature, and transcendent values. Although this concept has long existed within Islamic traditions, it has been eroded by the pressures of modernization, which prioritize measurable educational outcomes and fragmented policy-making⁵.

Gontor Modern Islamic boarding school in Indonesia is an example of an Islamic educational institution that consistently applies a holistic approach in its curriculum⁶. At Gontor, religious and general sciences are not separated; rather, they are integrated into the *Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islamiyyah* (KMI) curriculum. This integration creates a model of education that unites the depth of religious knowledge with the advancement of general knowledge an approach that is rare in many other educational institutions⁷.

¹ Parker J Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

² Shela Khotijatul Muna, Suhaiella Suhaili, and Randi Muhammad Gumiang, "Reflection Method in Shaping Student Character on Islamic Education: Ibn Thufail's Perspective," *TATHO: International Journal of Islamic Thought and Sciences*, February 9, 2024, 14–26, <https://doi.org/10.70512/tatho.v1i1.4>.

³ Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (Bantam, 1992).

⁴ Wayne Miller, J.P & Seller, *Curriculum; Perspectives and Practices* (New York: Longman, 1985).

⁵ Gert JJ Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy* (Routledge, 2015).

⁶ Alhamuddin, "Pendidikan Islam Modern Ala Trimurti Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor," *Ta'dib* 3, no. 2 (2008).

⁷ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Imam Zarkasyi's Modernization of Pesantren in Indonesia: (A Case Study of Darussalam Gontor)," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2020): 161–200, <https://doi.org/10.21043/QIJS.V8I1.5760>; Rieke Diana Putri and Rieke Diana Daughter, "KH Imam Zarkasyi's Jurnal At-Ta'dib

One distinctive element of Gontor that has received limited attention in previous studies is the systematic internalization of integrity through a structured 24-hour educational environment, in which formal curriculum, non-formal activities, and institutional culture function as an integrated pedagogical system. Character formation is not confined to classroom instruction but is reinforced through consistent role modeling by educators, regulated daily routines, and institutional norms that dissolve the boundary between academic and moral spaces. This approach positions integrity-based character formation as a *lived curriculum*, rather than a purely declarative or normative educational objective.

Character education at Gontor is also not seen as an extracurricular activity but as the core of the entire learning process⁸. Teachers at Gontor do not merely serve as instructors; they also act as moral exemplars and spiritual mentors who live alongside students in their daily routines⁹. The entire educational environment at Gontor is designed to cultivate discipline¹⁰, responsibility, spiritual consciousness, and social skills, integrated with academic excellence¹¹. While several studies have explored Gontor from various perspectives—such as. Darda¹² proposed the concept of a "symbiosis-mutualism" curriculum that integrates academic and social reconstruction frameworks within the *pesantren* context. Other studies have highlighted the role of the hidden curriculum in shaping students' moral and spiritual character¹³). Zarkasyi¹⁴ further analyzed the modernization agenda of Gontor in reforming traditional *pesantren* education while maintaining its Islamic identity. However, despite these contributions, little research has examined the broader impact of Gontor's educational model in addressing the ethical, epistemological, and pedagogical crises faced by global education systems—particularly in an age marked by moral dislocation, identity fragmentation, and utilitarian views of learning. This study aims to critically

Educational Thoughts," in *ISCIS2023: International Seminar and Conference on Islamic Studies*, vol. 2, 2023, <http://jurnal.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/ISCIS/index>.

⁸ Rahmat Yasin, "Implementation of Wasathiyatul Islam in the Curriculum of Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor (Study of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's Thought)," *At-Ta'dib* 14, no. 2 (December 18, 2019): 75, <https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v14i2.3656>.

⁹ Putri and Daughter, "KH Imam Zarkasyi's Educational Thoughts."

¹⁰ Jusubaidi et al., "A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 23, no. 1 (February 1, 2024): 171–212, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol23.iss1.art6>.

¹¹ M Arif Musthofa, Martinis Yamin, and Badarussyamsi Badarussyamsi, "Implementation of the Kulliyat Al-Mu'allimīn Al-Islāmīyah Curriculum in Improving the Quality of Graduates in Islamic Boarding School," *Journal of Educational Research* 2, no. 2 (May 12, 2024): 365–76, <https://doi.org/10.56436/jer.v2i2.280>.

¹² Abu Darda, "Integrative Curriculum Management Model: The Relation of Symbiosis-Mutualism Academic Subject Curriculum and Social Reconstruction in Modern Islamic Boarding School of Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo," *Educan : Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 2 (August 9, 2018): 95, <https://doi.org/10.21111/educan.v2i2.3267>.

¹³ Alhamuddin and Fahmi Fatwa Rosyadi Satria Hamdani, "Hidden Curriculum: Polarisasi Pesantren Dalam Upaya Membentuk Kesalehan Individu Dan Sosial (Case Study Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo)," *AL-MURABBI: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan Dan Keislaman* 5, no. 1 (2018): 50–65, <http://ejournal.kopertais4.or.id/mataraman/index.php/murabbi/article/view/3351>.

¹⁴ Zarkasyi, "Imam Zarkasyi's Modernization of Pesantren in Indonesia: (A Case Study of Darussalam Gontor)"

analyze the philosophical foundations, curriculum design, and pedagogical practices at Gontor, as well as evaluate its contribution as a transformative model of Islamic education amid the fragmentation of values in modern educational systems.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the method of library research. Library research enables the researcher to explore and reconstruct scientific ideas from primary and secondary sources critically, systematically, and in-depth, making it highly relevant to the research objectives.

The research used a qualitative approach with case study method¹⁵ to gain an in-depth understanding of how Gontor's educational philosophy shapes both intellectual growth and character building, with particular attention to the roles of teachers and the school community within the *pesantren* context. The research was conducted at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor in Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia, known for its unique combination of Islamic and modern education. This setting was chosen because of its established reputation in implementing a holistic educational approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using *snowball sampling* with teachers, administrators, and alumni. to gain insights into how the integration of religious and general subjects influences academic and moral outcomes. Additionally, relevant documents, books, and articles related to Gontor's curriculum and educational philosophy were analyzed.

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Interviews were transcribed and coded to identify common themes such as the integration of knowledge, teachers' roles as moral guides, and the influence of school activities on character development¹⁶. Content analysis of written materials was also conducted to examine how Gontor's philosophy is conveyed through its curriculum. By combining these methods, the research aimed to provide a clear understanding of how Gontor's holistic education model functions and its impact on students¹⁷.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Philosophical Foundations of Gontor's Education

Gontor's educational philosophy is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and emphasizes the development of the whole person—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. Unlike many modern educational systems that prioritize cognitive achievement, Gontor advocates for an approach that sees the development

¹⁵ James P Takona, "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches / Sixth Edition," .." *Quality & Quantity* 50, no. 1 (2024): 1011–13.

¹⁶ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Path, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage Publication, 2016).

¹⁷ John W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 4th Ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014).

of character and moral values as equally essential¹⁸. This integrated approach challenges the reductionist model found in many contemporary education systems, which often isolate academic achievement from ethical and moral development. The school's holistic model is grounded in the belief that knowledge is incomplete without moral wisdom, a concept that is consistent with the holistic principles of education articulated by Miller¹⁹, who argues that education should develop the whole individual, rather than focusing solely on academic achievements. This view of education sees the student not only as a learner but also as a developing human being whose intellectual and moral faculties must grow in tandem²⁰.

In the Gontor philosophy, intellectual growth is not just about acquiring knowledge but also about refining one's character, fostering a balanced personality, and contributing to the welfare of society. This approach is based on the understanding that knowledge and wisdom are inseparable in the formation of a complete individual. The emphasis is not only on gaining facts but also on how those facts are applied in ethical decision-making and social responsibility. As articulated by Gontor's founding figure K.H. Imam Zarkasyi, "*Ilmu tanpa amal adalah gila, amal tanpa ilmu adalah sia-sia*"—knowledge without action is madness, and action without knowledge is useless. In line with this, Gontor emphasizes that "*Pendidikan bukan hanya mengajar, tapi juga mendidik*," underscoring the role of teachers not merely as instructors but as character builders. This comprehensive vision reflects Gontor's mission to produce "*kader umat dan kader bangsa*"—leaders who are spiritually grounded, intellectually capable, and socially committed. Gontor's model, thus, refutes the idea that educational success should only be measured by academic achievements like test scores or degrees. Instead, it posits that true success is a synthesis of intellectual growth, emotional maturity, spiritual awareness, and social engagement. This philosophy aligns with the views of prominent scholars in education; ethical education is a crucial part of developing the whole person²¹. The purpose of education should be to nurture not only the intellect but also the heart and soul, focusing on character and relational development²². Similarly, Gontor's model emphasizes the importance of students becoming not only skilled professionals but also individuals who act with integrity, contribute positively to their communities, and align their actions with moral and spiritual principles²³.

¹⁸ Rusdiono Mukri et al., "Concept and Making of Aqidah Learning Curriculum at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor," *JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION (JPSE)*, vol. 2, 2025, <https://journal.p2ti.com/index.php/jpse/index>.

¹⁹ Miller, J.P & Seller, *Curriculum; Perspectives and Practices*.

²⁰ Miller, J.P & Seller.

²¹ Ismail Suardi Wekke and Akmal Riswandi, "The Gontor Way: Bringing Islamic Education.... The Gontor Way: Bringing Islamic Education to Sulawesi," *Shautut Tarbiyah*, vol. 30, 2024.

²² Zarkasyi, "Imam Zarkasyi's Modernization of Pesantren in Indonesia: (A Case Study of Darussalam Gontor)."

²³ Wekke and Riswandi, "The Gontor Way: Bringing Islamic Education.... The Gontor Way: Bringing Islamic Education to Sulawesi."

Furthermore, this holistic education at Gontor also reflects the Islamic concept of *"ilm and amal,"* which links knowledge with action. According to this concept, knowledge is not fully realized unless it is reflected in a person's behavior and social interactions. The relationship between knowledge and moral wisdom is integral to Gontor's curriculum, ensuring that students learn not only to excel academically but also to embody the values of justice, compassion, and humility in their daily lives. As such, the school's educational approach transcends traditional academic boundaries, creating a framework for lifelong learning that is deeply anchored in ethical living.

This approach, when viewed within the context of global educational challenges, offers an important critique of contemporary education systems that often view moral and intellectual development as separate domains. While the growing emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)²⁴ subjects in global curricula is important, it frequently overlooks the equally vital need for fostering moral character and social responsibility. The focus on STEM subjects is essential for developing technical skills and advancing innovation, but it often neglects the humanistic aspects of education—such as ethical reasoning, empathy, and social responsibility that are equally crucial for preparing students to navigate the complexities of the modern world²⁵

Gontor's approach suggests that an integrated model can produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also ethically grounded and socially responsible²⁶. This integration of intellectual and moral development allows students to acquire knowledge and skills that are informed by values such as justice, integrity, and compassion²⁷. The philosophy behind this model challenges the reductionist view prevalent in many contemporary educational systems, which often prioritize cognitive achievement over the development of character. Instead of compartmentalizing education into academic subjects on one hand and ethical teachings on the other, Gontor seeks to weave them together into a cohesive framework where both intellect and morality grow side by side²⁸.

The educator's role is central to shaping the character of students²⁹. They emphasize that education should not only focus on intellectual achievement but also play an integral role in the cultivation of character.³⁰ The educators at Gontor are not

²⁴ Fitria Lafifa et al., "Development of STEM Animation Learning Media with Feedback to Facilitate Students' Critical Thinking Ability on Global Warming Materials," in *Proceedings of the Eighth Southeast Asia Design Research (SEADR) & the Second Science, Technology, Education, Arts, Culture, and Humanity (STEACH) International Conference (SEADR-STEACH 2021, 2022, 8–15.*

²⁵ Sue Ledger, Lesley Vidovich, and Tom O'Donoghue, "International and Remote Schooling: Global to Local Curriculum Policy Dynamics in Indonesia," *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher* 24, no. 4 (2015): 695–703, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-014-0222-1>.

²⁶ Alhamuddin, "Pendidikan Islam Modern Ala Trimurti Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor."

²⁷ Alhamuddin.

²⁸ Miller, J.P & Seller, *Curriculum; Perspectives and Practices*.

²⁹ Wekke and Riswandi, "The Gontor Way: Bringing Islamic Education.... The Gontor Way: Bringing Islamic Education to Sulawesi."

³⁰ Zarkasyi, "Imam Zarkasyi's Modernization of Pesantren in Indonesia: (A Case Study of Darussalam Gontor)"

just teaching academic subjects but also acting as moral mentors, guiding students in their personal development³¹. This dual focus on intellectual and moral growth can produce well-rounded individuals who are equipped to face the ethical challenges of an increasingly complex world³². Furthermore, this integrated model reflects a deeper understanding of education as a transformative process that shapes not only the minds of students but also their hearts and spirits, preparing them to make meaningful contributions to society³³. By integrating intellectual competence with moral wisdom, Gontor's approach provides a valuable critique of the current trends in global education that often separate knowledge from ethical considerations. It calls for a more holistic view of education that prepares students not only for professional success but also for responsible citizenship in a diverse and interconnected world³⁴.

Holistic Curriculum

The *Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islamiyyah* (KMI) curriculum at Gontor serves as a foundational pillar of its holistic educational philosophy, reflecting a deeply integrated approach that combines both traditional Islamic sciences (*al-'ulūm al-dīniyyah*) and modern general knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-'asriyyah*). Far from treating these domains as mutually exclusive, the KMI curriculum fosters epistemological harmony between them, recognizing that religious and secular knowledge can complement and enrich one another in shaping a complete human being (*insān kāmil*)³⁵. This stands in stark contrast to the dualistic structure of many conventional education systems—particularly in post-colonial Muslim societies—where religious education is often confined to the private or moral sphere³⁶, while secular sciences dominate formal schooling and are perceived as value-neutral³⁷.

At Gontor, subjects like mathematics, biology, and world history are taught alongside Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), and Arabic language, with an intentional pedagogical effort to show the unity of all knowledge under the divine. This integrated approach is rooted in the belief that all branches of knowledge ultimately originate from and lead back to Allah, reinforcing both intellectual rigor and spiritual consciousness. As emphasized by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi, "Semua ilmu itu

³¹ Alhamuddin and Hamdani, "Hidden Curriculum: Polarisasi Pesantren Dalam Upaya Membentuk Kesalehan Individu Dan Sosial (Case Study Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo)."

³² Musthofa, Yamin, and Badarussyamsi, "Implementation of the Kulliyat Al-Mu'allimīn Al-Islāmīyah Curriculum in Improving the Quality of Graduates in Islamic Boarding School," May 12, 2024.

³³ Zarkasyi, "Imam Zarkasyi's Modernization of Pesantren in Indonesia: (A Case Study of Darussalam Gontor)."

³⁴ Kurniawan Dwi Saputra and Krismono Krismono, "The Reconstruction of Aligarh and Santiniketan Educational Philosophy: The Creative Ijtihad of Trimurti in Developing Islamic Education in Indonesia," *TSAQAFAH* 17, no. 2 (December 18, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v17i2.6879>.

³⁵ Alhamuddin Alhamuddin, "Abd Shamad Al-Falimbanī's Islamic Education Concept: Analysis of *Kitab Hidayah al-Sālikin Fi Suluk Māsālāk Lil Muttāqīn*," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018): 89–102, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijs.v6i1.3717>.

³⁶ Robert W. Hefner, "Islam and Institutional Religious Freedom in Indonesia," *Religions* 12, no. 6 (June 1, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060415>.

³⁷ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ullama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

bersumber dari Allah dan harus digunakan untuk berkhidmat kepada-Nya" all knowledge comes from God and must be used in service to Him³⁸. This principal guide Gontor's curriculum design, ensuring that students do not perceive religious and secular subjects as separate or conflicting, but as harmonious components of a unified worldview. This approach aligns with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's³⁹ notion of *ta'dib*, the holistic process of education that nurtures both intellect and adab (discipline, ethics, and worldview), suggesting that knowledge divorced from morality is incomplete and potentially dangerous. By embedding ethical values within the structure of all disciplines, the KMI system aims to cultivate graduates who are not only academically competent but also spiritually aware and socially responsible⁴⁰.

The KMI curriculum challenges the hegemony of Western secular paradigms in education that often prioritize measurable academic outcomes while neglecting the moral and spiritual dimensions of learning⁴¹. Instead, it proposes an integrative model that prepares learners for both worldly success and eternal accountability. Studies have shown that this model produces alumni who demonstrate leadership, adaptability, and ethical consistency across a range of professions—from religious scholarship to business and diplomacy⁴². Thus, Gontor's curriculum offers a powerful example of how Islamic boarding schools can serve as transformative institutions, not only preserving religious identity but also equipping students to engage meaningfully in a pluralistic, globalized world⁴³.

The integration of religious and secular knowledge in Gontor's curriculum is particularly crucial amid the prevailing global trend of knowledge compartmentalization. In many contemporary education systems, especially in secularized contexts, academic disciplines are taught in isolation, often devoid of ethical, moral, or spiritual foundations. Gontor challenges this fragmented model by offering a holistic framework where knowledge is interconnected and value-laden. As stated by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi, "*Pendidikan bukan sekadar pemindahan ilmu, tetapi pembinaan kepribadian secara utuh*", meaning that education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but the cultivation of a whole and balanced personality. This underscores Gontor's commitment to educating not only the mind but also the soul, ensuring that students perceive knowledge as a means to build character and contribute meaningfully to society. Religious subjects, if included at all, are frequently

³⁸ Risti Ajarwati, "Konsep Pendidikan Islam Dalam Perspektif K.H. Imam Zarkasyi" (Skripsi, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim, 2012).

³⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1999); S. M. N Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

⁴⁰ Alhamuddin, "Pendidikan Islam Modern Ala Trimurti Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor."

⁴¹ Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*.

⁴² Ahmad Choirul Rofiq et al., "The Moderation of Islam in The Modern Islamic Boarding School of Gontor," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 19, no. 2 (2019): 227–50, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v19i2.5235>.

⁴³ Jusubaidi et al., "A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia."

marginalized or treated as non-essential. This disjunction not only limits students' holistic intellectual growth but also creates a dichotomy between 'useful' scientific knowledge and 'private' religious values, undermining the formation of integrated worldviews. Gontor's curriculum disrupts this trend by cultivating a model that is epistemologically unified—rooted in the Islamic principle of *tawhid*, which views all knowledge as interconnected and ultimately directed toward understanding and serving God. By combining classical Islamic sciences (*ulumuddin*) with modern subjects like mathematics, languages, and social sciences, KMI curriculum aims to produce students who are both spiritually rooted and intellectually capable⁴⁴. This fusion allows learners to navigate both the religious and secular worlds without internal conflict, positioning them to make ethical decisions in diverse contexts. Hashim⁴⁵ reinforces this perspective by asserting that the Islamization of knowledge is essential in postcolonial Muslim societies, not merely as a theoretical project, but as a practical necessity for character and leadership development. Furthermore, Gontor's pedagogical ethos—which emphasizes discipline, community life, and leadership training—ensures that integration occurs not just in content, but also in lived experience⁴⁶.

This model presents an alternative to global education systems that remain largely fragmented, technocratic, and outcomes-driven. Gert Biesta⁴⁷ warns that such systems risk reducing education to mere economic productivity, sidelining the development of responsible, ethical citizens. In contrast, Gontor's integrative model challenges the utilitarian view of education, proposing a more meaningful approach that aligns learning with purpose, responsibility, and ethical maturity⁴⁸. Thus, Gontor is not only responding to the challenges of Muslim societies but offering insights with broader relevance for rethinking education in a global context increasingly characterized by moral dislocation and identity crises⁴⁹.

Pedagogical Practices

One of the most distinctive features of Gontor's educational model is its pedagogical approach, where teachers are not merely knowledge transmitters but also moral exemplars who play a central role in shaping students' character and spiritual development. In contrast to modern education systems that often emphasize standardized instruction and cognitive outcomes, Gontor prioritizes personal interaction, ethical modeling, and spiritual mentoring. As one of Gontor's founders,

⁴⁴ Alhamuddin, "Pendidikan Islam Modern Ala Trimurti Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor."

⁴⁵ Hashim Rosnani, *Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁴⁶ Jusubaidi et al., "A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia."

⁴⁷ Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*.

⁴⁸ Jusubaidi et al., "A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia."

⁴⁹ Rofiq et al., "The Moderation of Islam In The Modern Islamic Boarding School of Gontor."

KH. Imam Zarkasyi, wisely stated, “*Apa yang dilihat santri setiap hari adalah pelajaran; apa yang didengar santri setiap hari adalah pelajaran; dan apa yang dirasakan santri setiap hari adalah pelajaran*” what students see, hear, and feel each day becomes their lifelong education. This philosophy underscores the belief that a teacher’s presence and integrity are among the most powerful tools in shaping the moral compass of students., Gontor promotes a teacher-student relationship based on mentorship, trust, and character formation⁵⁰. Teachers live on campus with the students, fostering a communal learning environment that enables continuous interaction, supervision, and moral guidance. This immersive approach creates a culture where values are lived rather than merely taught⁵¹.

The effectiveness of this model is supported by Alhamuddin⁵², who found that students’ moral development is closely linked to the values embodied and modeled by their educators. In Gontor, the teacher (*ustadz*) is expected to uphold the highest ethical standards both inside and outside the classroom, becoming a living example of the values of sincerity (*ikhlas*), discipline (*tartib*), and responsibility (*mas’uliyyah*). This model recalls the classical Islamic tradition of *ta’dib*, as articulated by Al-Attas⁵³, which defines education as the process of instilling discipline, justice, and wisdom in the soul. By embodying the very virtues they teach, Gontor’s educators contribute to an educational experience that is not merely academic but transformative⁵⁴. Moreover, the institution’s pedagogy resists the trend of depersonalized, test-centered education that has come to dominate many global schooling systems. As Palmer⁵⁵ argues, good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher, not just from instructional technique. Gontor’s emphasis on teacher character reflects this ethos and reaffirms the Islamic educational principle that personal example is among the most powerful tools in moral cultivation. In this light, Gontor’s pedagogical model offers a compelling response to the contemporary educational crisis of meaning, where the erosion of values and teacher authority has often undermined character education initiatives.

This focus on teachers as moral exemplars creates a learning environment where students’ character is shaped by daily interactions, rituals, and communal living. Unlike many traditional educational settings, where moral and spiritual development are often treated as supplementary to academic instruction, Gontor integrates these elements into the everyday experience of students. As Alhamuddin⁵⁶ explains,

⁵⁰ Ka Rahman et al., “Education Management of Modern Pesantren Gontor 10 Sabak,” *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 4 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v12i04.4602>.

⁵¹ Mukri et al., “Concept and Making of Aqidah Learning Curriculum at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor.”

⁵² Alhamuddin and Hamdani, “Hidden Curriculum: Polarisasi Pesantren Dalam Upaya Membentuk Kesalehan Individu Dan Sosial (Case Study Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo).”

⁵³ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*.

⁵⁴ Jusubaidi et al., “A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia.”

⁵⁵ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*.

⁵⁶ Alhamuddin, “Pendidikan Islam Modern Ala Trimurti Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor.”

teachers' behavior profoundly influences students' growth, and Gontor's approach ensures that education is not limited to intellectual development but also promotes holistic personal growth⁵⁷. This contrasts sharply with many contemporary educational systems⁵⁸, where moral and ethical growth is often overlooked in favor of academic success alone⁵⁹.

Character Education as Core

Character education at Gontor is not a separate or optional part of the curriculum; rather, it serves as the very foundation of the educational process⁶⁰. This integrated approach ensures that the development of moral and ethical qualities is as central to students' lives as their academic achievements⁶¹. Unlike conventional education systems, where character development is often relegated to extracurricular activities or specific subjects, Gontor embeds character-building practices into daily routines. From the way students interact with their peers and teachers to their involvement in religious and social activities, character education is an ongoing, holistic process that permeates all aspects of student life. The values emphasized at Gontor—such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and empathy—are not merely taught in isolation but are consistently reinforced through lived experiences. For example, the strict routines of daily prayers, communal study sessions, and regular social service activities help to cultivate a sense of responsibility and self-discipline in students. These experiences not only shape students' ethical outlook but also prepare them for leadership roles in society, where such traits are critical. This model stands in contrast to many conventional systems that view character education as an add-on rather than an essential component of the educational process⁶².

Gontor's focus on integrating character development with academic learning emphasizes that effective character education requires creating an environment where moral values are embedded in every aspect of school life. At Gontor, character formation is not treated as a separate subject but is interwoven into daily routines, interactions, and learning processes. This holistic approach is rooted in the pesantren tradition and reinforced by the vision of its founders. As KH. Imam Zarkasyi once stated, "*Pendidikan adalah pembinaan kepribadian secara menyeluruh, bukan sekadar pemindahan ilmu pengetahuan*"—education is the formation of the whole

⁵⁷ Jusubaidi et al., "A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia."

⁵⁸ Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*.

⁵⁹ Nel, ed Noddings, *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness* (Teachers College Press, 2005).

⁶⁰ M Arif Musthofa, Martinis Yamin, and Badarussyamsi Badarussyamsi, "Implementation of the Kulliyat Al-Mu'allimīn Al-Islāmīyah Curriculum in Improving the Quality of Graduates in Islamic Boarding School," *Journal of Educational Research* 2, no. 2 (May 12, 2024): 365–76, <https://doi.org/10.56436/jer.v2i2.280>.

⁶¹ Yasin, "Implementation of Wasathiyatul Islam in the Curriculum of Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor (Study of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's Thought.)."

⁶² Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*.

personality, not merely the transfer of knowledge⁶³. This ethos ensures that every experience at Gontor becomes part of the student's moral and spiritual formation.⁶⁴ Similarly, Nucci⁶⁵ highlights that the best way to teach character is to model it in real-world contexts, a strategy Gontor adopts through its emphasis on role models—teachers who demonstrate the values they wish to impart. By treating character development as an inseparable part of the curriculum, Gontor challenges the prevalent view that moral education should be treated separately from academic instruction, offering a powerful model for other educational institutions to emulate⁶⁶.

This approach sharply contrasts with educational systems that separate academic learning from moral and ethical development. In many contemporary educational settings, character education is often viewed as secondary to academic performance⁶⁷. Educational priorities are commonly centered around measurable outcomes such as grades and standardized test scores, with moral and social development being relegated to supplementary or extracurricular programs. In contrast, Gontor's holistic educational model places equal emphasis on both academic achievement and character development, recognizing that the two are inseparable and mutually reinforcing⁶⁸. By prioritizing both aspects, Gontor ensures that students grow into well-rounded individuals who are not only academically proficient but also socially responsible, ethically grounded, and prepared for leadership roles in society.

This integration of moral education within the academic curriculum is central to Gontor's mission of producing graduates who embody the principles of integrity, discipline, and social responsibility. The core of education at Gontor is not just academic success, but the formation of character⁶⁹, which is equally essential in developing responsible global citizens. This model presents a stark challenge to conventional educational systems, which often operate in a fragmented manner, focusing narrowly on intellectual development while neglecting the broader, more holistic needs of the student. Gontor's commitment to blending intellectual and moral growth reflects the belief that education should foster not only intellectual abilities but also the moral and social capacities necessary for effective participation in society⁷⁰. By positioning character education as an integral part of the academic experience, Gontor's model offers a holistic framework that can serve as an alternative to the

⁶³ Suhami et al., "Konsep Pendidikan Islam Menurut KH. Imam Zarkasyi Dan Relevansinya Terhadap Pendidikan Islam," *JIIP (Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan)* 8, no. 2 (2025).

⁶⁴ Zarkasyi, "Imam Zarkasyi's Modernization of Pesantren in Indonesia: (A Case Study of Darussalam Gontor)."

⁶⁵ Larry Nucci, *Domain-Based Moral Education Promoting Moral Wellness and the Capacity for Social Justice* (Routledge, 2024).

⁶⁶ Alhamuddin, "Pendidikan Islam Modern Ala Trimurti Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor."

⁶⁷ Putri and Daughter, "KH Imam Zarkasyi's Educational Thoughts."

⁶⁸ Mukri et al., "Concept and Making of Aqidah Learning Curriculum at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor."

⁶⁹ Alhamuddin and Hamdani, "Hidden Curriculum: Polarisasi Pesantren Dalam Upaya Membentuk Kesalehan Individu Dan Sosial (Case Study Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo)."

⁷⁰ Rofiq et al., "The Moderation of Islam In The Modern Islamic Boarding School of Gontor."

conventional approach⁷¹, where character formation is often seen as an afterthought or secondary goal. This holistic model emphasizes that true success in education requires more than just academic achievement it demands the cultivation of the whole person⁷².

Global Relevance of Gontor's Model

The findings suggest that Gontor's holistic education and character-based curriculum have significant implications for educational systems worldwide. As education systems across the globe contend with ethical decline, student disengagement, and the fragmentation of knowledge, Gontor's integrated approach offers a promising solution. The model emphasizes the importance of producing graduates who are not only intellectually capable but also morally responsible, socially aware, and spiritually conscious. This approach challenges the prevalent tendency in many modern education systems to prioritize academic achievement at the expense of character formation and ethical development. As KH. Imam Zarkasyi profoundly emphasized, "*Tujuan pendidikan bukan hanya mencerdaskan otak, tetapi juga membentuk watak dan kepribadian,*" meaning "The purpose of education is not only to enlighten the mind but also to shape character and personality." This vision positions Gontor as a model for cultivating complete individuals prepared to contribute meaningfully to society.

In the context of an increasingly globalized world, where the focus on economic growth often takes precedence over ethical and moral values, Gontor's holistic approach remains highly relevant. In many contemporary educational systems, there is a tendency to view education as a means to secure individual success through measurable outcomes, often ignoring the broader social and ethical dimensions. Gontor, however, challenges this narrow view by integrating academic and character education within a unified framework. The emphasis on moral development and social responsibility alongside intellectual achievement ensures that students not only excel in their studies but also grow into responsible global citizens, who are aware of their ethical duties in an interconnected world.

This model can serve as a valuable alternative to fragmented education systems that fail to address the complex, interconnected nature of knowledge and its application in real-world scenarios⁷³. It offers a response to the ethical challenges faced by modern education, particularly in contexts where moral values are increasingly overlooked. Gontor's focus on the ethical development of students⁷⁴, demonstrates that an integrated approach to education can foster not just academic excellence but

⁷¹ Jusubaidi et al., "A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia."

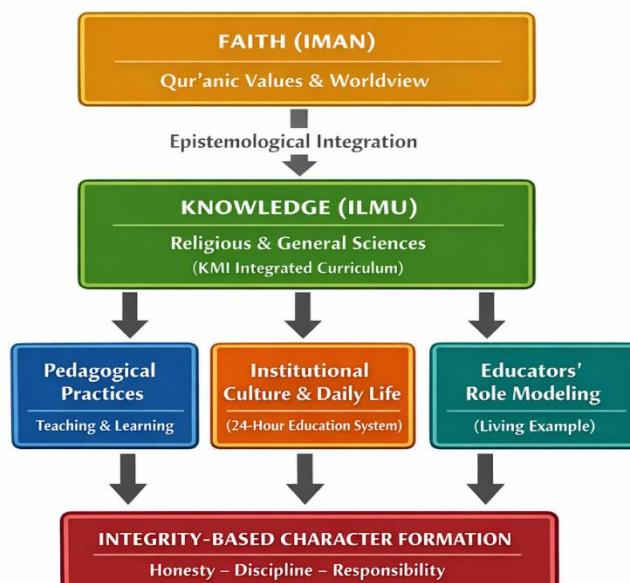
⁷² Rahman et al., "Education Management of Modern Pesantren Gontor 10 Sabak."

⁷³ Alhamuddin Alhamuddin, Eko Surbiantoro, and Revan Dwi Erlangga, "Character Education in Islamic Perspective," in *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, (London: Atlantis Press, 2022).

⁷⁴ Alhamuddin, "Pendidikan Islam Modern Ala Trimurti Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor."

also the development of individuals⁷⁵ who are capable of making morally responsible decisions in both personal and societal contexts⁷⁶. By prioritizing ethical and character education alongside intellectual pursuits, Gontor's approach provides a comprehensive model for educational systems worldwide that seek to develop well-rounded individuals capable of contributing positively to the global community⁷⁷.

The success of Gontor in producing graduates who excel in a wide range of fields while maintaining strong moral and ethical principles demonstrates the potential of its model to address global educational challenges. By focusing on the integration of knowledge, values, and character, Gontor offers a compelling model that can serve as a reference for countries grappling with moral and ethical dilemmas in their education systems. The school's success highlights the possibility of an education system that does not prioritize academic achievement at the expense of ethical and character development but rather ensures that both are nurtured simultaneously.



Picture 1. Holistic Islamic Education Model for Integrity-Based Character Formation

This model is particularly pertinent in the current global context, where many educational systems are facing increasing concerns about ethical decline, student disillusionment, and the dehumanization of learning due to the growing emphasis on test scores and economic-driven educational policies. Gontor's ability to integrate moral development into its academic structure offers a sustainable solution to these

⁷⁵ Rofiq et al., "The Moderation of Islam In The Modern Islamic Boarding School of Gontor."

⁷⁶ Jusubaidi et al., "A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia."

⁷⁷ Wekke and Riswandi, "The Gontor Way: Bringing Islamic Education.... The Gontor Way: Bringing Islamic Education to Sulawesi."

challenges. The success of Gontor graduates in diverse fields—such as business, politics, and social work—demonstrates the effectiveness of a holistic approach that nurtures both intellectual and moral development⁷⁸. Moreover, Gontor's model is adaptable to various cultural and educational contexts, making it a valuable framework for countries around the world seeking to create more balanced and holistic educational systems. Its emphasis on character education, alongside academic development, addresses the needs of a globalized world where knowledge alone is insufficient for producing individuals who can navigate complex social and ethical issues⁷⁹. The model suggests that education systems must move beyond narrow, fragmented approaches to learning and instead embrace an integrated curriculum that fosters well-rounded individuals. The education should be an all-encompassing process that develops not only the intellect but also the moral and social capacities of individuals⁸⁰. Gontor's model, with its emphasis on the harmony of knowledge and values, presents a practical solution for educational systems⁸¹ worldwide that aim to address ethical⁸² concerns while preparing students for the complexities of modern life.⁸³

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that a holistic Islamic education model integrating academic knowledge, moral values, and character formation effectively addressed the fragmentation between intellectual achievement and ethical development commonly found in contemporary education systems. The findings indicated that the integration of religious and general knowledge, supported by consistent pedagogical practices and institutional culture, contributed to the development of intellectually capable, ethically grounded, and socially responsible graduates. Rather than prioritizing academic performance alone, this holistic approach emphasized the balanced cultivation of knowledge, values, and character.

The study also suggested that such a holistic educational framework may offer an alternative for education systems facing challenges related to ethical decline, student disengagement, and the separation of knowledge domains. However, this research was limited by its focus on a single *pesantren* context and its reliance on qualitative data, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings. Consequently, the conclusions should be interpreted within the specific

⁷⁸ Alhamuddin and Hamdani, "Hidden Curriculum: Polarisasi Pesantren Dalam Upaya Membentuk Kesalehan Individu Dan Sosial (Case Study Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo)."

⁷⁹ Yasin, "Implementation of Wasathiyatul Islam in the Curriculum of Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor (Study of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's Thought.)."

⁸⁰ Rosnani, *Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice*.

⁸¹ Yousif A Alshumaimeri, "Understanding Context: An Essential Factor for Educational Change Success," *Contemporary Educational Researches Journal* 13, no. 1 (February 27, 2023): 11–19, <https://doi.org/10.18844/cerj.v13i1.8457>.

⁸² L.R. & Peter Airasian Gay, *Educational Research, Competencies for Analysis and Application*, Sixth Edition (America: Prentice Hall, 2000).

⁸³ Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*.

institutional and cultural context examined. Future research is encouraged to explore the adaptation of holistic Islamic education models in diverse cultural and educational contexts, particularly in environments where moral and character education receive limited emphasis. Longitudinal studies examining graduates' long-term social and professional contributions would further enhance understanding of the sustainability and broader impact of integrity-based character formation in Islamic education.

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