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Implementation of an Integrated Curriculum to Strengthen Students' Character at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perencanaan, implementasi, dan evaluasi Kurikulum Operasional di SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan. Secara khusus, penelitian ini mengkaji pengintegrasian Kurikulum Merdeka dengan kurikulum pesantren, penerapan Pembelajaran Mendalam (*Deep Learning*) berbasis kerangka 3M (Memahami, Mengaplikasi, Merefleksi) terintegrasi TIK, pembentukan karakter melalui sistem *boarding school* 24 jam, serta efektivitas kemitraan strategis multipihak. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif pasif, wawancara mendalam, dan studi dokumentasi yang dilaksanakan dalam 6 sesi pertemuan. Informan penelitian ditentukan secara *purposive sampling*, yang meliputi Kepala Sekolah, Wakil Kepala Sekolah Bidang Kurikulum, guru mata pelajaran, pengasuh asrama/musyrif, peserta didik, serta perwakilan mitra strategis. Keabsahan data diuji menggunakan teknik triangulasi sumber dan teknik, sedangkan analisis data dilakukan secara interaktif melalui tahap pengumpulan, reduksi, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengintegrasian Kurikulum Merdeka dan kurikulum khas pesantren berbasis sanad Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Prenduan berhasil diselaraskan secara holistik dalam struktur kegiatan 24 jam, penerapan *Deep Learning* berbasis kerangka 3M dan TIK efektif meningkatkan kemampuan berpikir tingkat tinggi (*HOTS*) serta kesadaran metakognitif siswa, pembiasaan ibadah dan pengasuhan asrama 24 jam secara konsisten memperkuat ketercapaian 8 Dimensi Profil Lulusan dan kemitraan strategis dengan Ponpes Al-Amien Prenduan, TNI, dan Puskesmas Teritip memberikan kontribusi nyata terhadap mutu keilmuan agama, kedisiplinan, serta jaminan kesehatan santri.
Kata kunci: *Boarding School, Kemitraan Strategis, Kurikulum Terpadu, Pembelajaran Mendalam (Deep Learning), Penguatan Karakter.*

Abstract : This study aims to analyze the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the Operational Curriculum at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan. Specifically, it examines the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with the Islamic boarding school curriculum, the implementation of Deep Learning based on the 3M framework (Understanding, Applying, and Reflecting) supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), character development through a 24-hour boarding school system, and the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder strategic partnerships. This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through passive participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis conducted over six sessions. Research informants were selected through purposive sampling and included the principal, vice principal for curriculum affairs, subject teachers, dormitory supervisors (musyrif), students, and representatives of strategic partners. Data trustworthiness was ensured through source and methodological triangulation, while data were analyzed interactively through data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Islamic boarding school curriculum, rooted in the scholarly tradition (sanad) of Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School, was successfully harmonized within a holistic 24-hour educational system. Furthermore, the implementation of ICT-supported Deep Learning based on the 3M framework was found to enhance students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) and metacognitive awareness. Consistent religious practices and continuous dormitory supervision strengthened the achievement of the eight dimensions of the Graduate Profile. Additionally, strategic partnerships with Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and Teritip Community Health Center contributed significantly to the quality of Islamic education, student discipline, and students' health and well-being.
Keywords: boarding school; strategic partnerships; integrated curriculum; deep learning; character development.

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Introduction

Junior high school education plays a strategic role in establishing the foundations of students' character, mindset, and potential during the transitional stage of adolescence. In an era of rapidly advancing digital transformation and globalization, educational challenges extend beyond the mastery of academic knowledge to include the strengthening of religious values, morality, and twenty-first-century skills. This is consistent with the national legal framework governing Indonesia's education system, as stipulated in Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003. Within the historical context and dynamics of Islamic education in Indonesia, Islamic educational institutions have continuously adapted to changing societal demands and developments (Daulay, 2021). In responding to modernization and the challenges of the new millennium, Islamic education must undergo continuous reform while preserving its valuable traditions and fundamental principles (Azra, 2019). SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School seeks to address these challenges by implementing an integrated educational system that holistically combines the national curriculum (Merdeka Curriculum) with the Islamic boarding school (pesantren) educational system within a comprehensive 24-hour learning environment (Ja'far, 2021).

As a modern Islamic educational institution located in Balikpapan, SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School is committed to realizing its primary vision: "Developing an Intelligent, Faithful, and Character-Building Generation with Global Competitiveness." To achieve this vision, the school implements a Deep Learning approach through the 3M framework (Understanding, Applying, and Reflecting) (Fullan et al., 2018). This approach emphasizes student-centered learning to develop critical thinking skills, higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), creativity, and reflective awareness. Through meaningful and contextual learning experiences, students are encouraged to construct knowledge actively, apply their understanding to real-life situations, and reflect critically on their learning processes (Rahayu et al., 2022).

The Operational Curriculum of SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School for the 2026/2027 academic year was contextually developed to provide clear direction, practical guidance, and quality assurance standards for educational services (SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan, 2026). Its development refers to government regulations concerning the National Education Standards (Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 4 of 2022), Educational Process Standards (Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Number 16 of 2022), and the learning outcomes established under the Merdeka Curriculum (Decree of the Head of the Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency Number 033/H/KR/2022). Technically, the development and alignment of the school curriculum follow the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024; Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024). This curriculum integrates various educational components, including intracurricular activities, cocurricular programs aimed at strengthening the eight dimensions of the Graduate Profile, religious education programs such as Tahfidz (Qur'an memorization), Tahsin (improvement of Qur'anic recitation), and Kitab Kuning (classical Islamic text studies), as well as extracurricular activities and strategic partnerships. These integrated programs are designed to develop graduates who are independent, knowledgeable, morally upright, and prepared to contribute positively to society.

Character education constitutes a fundamental foundation for developing students' personalities, particularly at the junior high school level in the context of globalization. Within an Islamic boarding school environment, character formation cannot be achieved solely through the transmission of theoretical knowledge in classrooms. Instead, it requires a comprehensive 24-hour educational and mentoring ecosystem that integrates habituation, exemplary behavior, and discipline into students' daily lives. Such an environment provides continuous opportunities for students to internalize moral and social values through structured religious practices, interpersonal interactions, and responsible participation in school and dormitory activities. In accordance with the focus of this study, character development emphasizes the internalization of essential values, including tolerance, responsibility, discipline, social awareness, respect for diversity, and active participation in communal life. These values are expected to become integral components of students' attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes, both within the boarding school environment and in broader society.

This study aims to analyze the planning and implementation strategies of an integrated curriculum, particularly the alignment between the national Merdeka Curriculum and the Islamic boarding school curriculum within the Operational Curriculum of SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan. Furthermore, it seeks to describe the implementation of the Deep Learning approach based on the 3M framework, supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), in enhancing students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) and creativity in classroom learning. The study also evaluates character development practices and the effectiveness of strategic partnerships, focusing

on continuous religious habituation within the 24-hour boarding school environment, the achievement of the eight dimensions of the Graduate Profile, and the contributions of multiple institutional partners, including Islamic boarding schools, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and healthcare institutions. Additionally, this research identifies supporting factors, implementation challenges, and potential solutions associated with the integrated curriculum. Through these objectives, the study is expected to provide insights into the implementation of holistic Islamic education that integrates academic excellence, religious values, character development, and institutional collaboration within a modern boarding school system.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study research design. The qualitative approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex phenomena associated with the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the integrated Operational Curriculum at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan. The case study design enabled the researchers to comprehensively explore the integration of formal academic instruction and the 24-hour Islamic boarding school supervision system within a real-life educational context.

Research Design and Setting

The research was conducted at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School, located on Mulawarman Street, Teritip Subdistrict, East Balikpapan District, Balikpapan City, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The study took place during the first semester of the 2026/2027 academic year. Field data collection was conducted through six sessions of observation, interviews, and document analysis between August 12 and October 3, 2026.

Table 1. Research Schedule and Data Collection Activities

Session	Date	Time (WITA)	Main Research Activities
1	August 12, 2026	09:00–10:00	Initial orientation, review of the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP), and observation of school facilities
2	August 13, 2026	09:00–10:00	Structured interviews with the principal and vice principal for curriculum affairs
3	September 2, 2026	09:00–10:00	Observation of ICT-supported Deep Learning activities based on the 3M framework
4	September 3, 2026	10:00–11:00	Interviews with subject teachers and documentation of character development and HOTS-related programs

5	September 16, 2026	09:30–10:20; 17:00–18:40	Observation of boarding school activities and interviews with dormitory supervisors (musyrif)
6	October 3, 2026	10:00–11:15	Evaluation of strategic partnership programs, final monitoring, and data verification through triangulation

Three primary techniques were employed to obtain comprehensive research data: passive participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis.

Passive Participant Observation. The researchers directly observed the implementation of Deep Learning in classroom activities, religious habituation practices within the boarding school environment, and disciplinary programs. Observations included congregational prayers, Tahajjud and Dhuha prayers, Qur'anic memorization and recitation improvement (Tahfidz and Tahsin), classical Islamic text studies (Kitab Kuning), and collaboration activities involving external institutions.

In-Depth Interviews. Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with school administrators, teachers, dormitory supervisors, and representatives of institutional partners. The interviews explored curriculum integration strategies, implementation challenges, institutional collaboration, and solutions adopted to support educational quality and character development.

Document Analysis. Relevant institutional documents were examined, including the School Operational Curriculum for the 2026/2027 academic year, lesson plans and teaching modules, students' daily religious activity records (mutaba'ah), Qur'anic memorization records, and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with strategic partners.

Participants, Sample, and Data Sources

Research participants were selected through purposive sampling, which involved identifying individuals with direct knowledge of and involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the school's integrated curriculum. The participants included the principal, vice principal for curriculum affairs, administrative personnel, subject teachers, dormitory supervisors, students, and a representative of a healthcare partner.

Table 2. Research Informants and Their Institutional Roles

No.	Name	Position
1	Muhammad Zainul Muttaqien, S.H.	Principal
2	Budiman, S.Pd.	Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs
3	Aina Ghina Al Mardiah	Administrative Staff
4	Siti Sunnatil Mahmudah, S.Pd.	Islamic Religious Education Teacher
5	Yuhin Rosyidah, S.Pd.	Islamic Religious Education Teacher

6	Nita Yunita Sari, S.Pd.	Pancasila and Civic Education Teacher
7	Merry, S.Pd.	Informatics Teacher
8	Ustadz Maulana	Dormitory Supervisor (Musyrif)
9	Ustadz Aldi	Dormitory Supervisor (Musyrif)
10	Ustadz Faisal	Dormitory Supervisor (Musyrif)
11	Dr. Maman	Community Health Center Representative
12	Betara Indra	Grade IX-B Student
13	Muhammad Fauzan Al Hamizi	Grade IX-A Student
14	Abi Samudra Pranomo	Grade VIII-A Student
15	Muhammad Zainal	Grade VIII-A Student
16	Muh. Azzam Qurtuby	Grade VII-A Student

Instruments and Measures

Data trustworthiness was established through source and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from different informants, including the principal, teachers, dormitory supervisors, and students. Methodological triangulation was conducted by cross-checking findings from field observations, in-depth interviews, and institutional documents. These procedures were intended to improve the credibility and consistency of the qualitative findings.

Research Procedures

The research procedures involved collecting, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data related to three major areas: Deep Learning implementation, character development through the 24-hour boarding school system, and strategic institutional partnerships.

The first area examined the implementation of the 3M framework (Understanding, Applying, and Reflecting) across classroom instruction and interdisciplinary cocurricular projects. These activities included waste management projects for Grade VII, tolerance and school culture projects for Grade VIII, and democracy and leadership simulations for Grade IX. Particular attention was given to the development of higher-order thinking skills, digital literacy, and the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), including the use of the Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM).

The second area focused on character development through the 24-hour boarding school system. The researchers examined daily religious practices, dormitory supervision, foreign language habituation, and activities designed to foster independence, discipline, and moral responsibility. Students' routines included waking at 04:00 WITA, performing congregational prayers, engaging in Qur'anic recitation and memorization, participating in Islamic studies, practicing Arabic and English, and undertaking communal cleanliness activities.

The third area investigated strategic partnerships involving Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School in Madura, Teritip Community Health Center, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), parents, and the wider community. These partnerships were examined in relation to religious education quality, health services, discipline,

leadership development, and institutional communication.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using an interactive analytical process consisting of four interconnected stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

First, data were collected from observations, interviews, and document analysis. Second, data reduction was conducted by selecting, organizing, and categorizing information according to the main research themes, including the 3M learning framework, 24-hour character habituation, and institutional partnerships. Third, the organized data were presented through descriptive narratives, matrices, and tables to facilitate systematic interpretation. Finally, conclusions were developed by identifying recurring patterns, comparing evidence from multiple sources, and validating interpretations through triangulation.

The analysis focused on three interconnected dimensions: the implementation of Deep Learning, the integration of formal education and Islamic boarding school character development, and the contribution of strategic partnerships to educational quality.

Implementation of the 3M Learning Framework

The integrated curriculum incorporated interdisciplinary cocurricular projects designed to connect conceptual understanding with practical application and reflective learning.

Table 3. Implementation Matrix of the 3M Framework in Cocurricular Learning

Grade	Cocurricular Project	3M Learning Activities	Related Subjects	Time Allocation
VII	Waste Management	Understanding: Environmental cleanliness concepts. Applying: Waste sorting and recycling. Reflecting: Environmental awareness campaigns	Science, Pancasila Education, Indonesian Language, Islamic Religious Education, Arts and Crafts	72 lesson periods
VIII	Tolerance and School Culture	Understanding: Cultural and social diversity. Applying: Practicing tolerance. Reflecting: Evaluating social experiences	Civic Education, Islamic Religious Education	108 lesson periods
IX	Democracy and Leaders	Understanding: Democrati	Pancasila Educatio	216 lesson period

	hip Simulation	c systems. Applying: Direct election simulations. Reflecting: Evaluating election outcomes and leadership experiences	n, Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, Islamic Religious Education	s (72 + 144)

Character Development Through the 24-Hour Boarding School System

The school implemented an integrated daily schedule combining academic instruction, religious activities, character habituation, and dormitory supervision. This structure was intended to promote independence, discipline, religious commitment, and responsible behavior through continuous guidance from teachers and dormitory supervisors.

Table 4. Daily Character Development Schedule in the Boarding School

Time (WITA)	Daily Activities
04:00	Waking up, Tahajjud prayer, and preparation for Fajr prayer
04:30–06:00	Congregational Fajr prayer, dhikr, Qur'anic recitation, and memorization
06:00–08:00	Morning exercise, personal hygiene, Dhuha prayer, morning assembly, and breakfast
08:00–15:30	Intracurricular and cocurricular learning activities
15:30–21:30	Congregational Asr, Maghrib, and Isha prayers, classical Islamic text studies, and foreign language activities
21:30–04:00	Nighttime rest under the supervision of dormitory supervisors (musyrif/musyrifah)

Through these integrated procedures, the study examined how curriculum planning, classroom learning, religious habituation, and external partnerships collectively contributed to strengthening students' character within the Islamic boarding school environment.

Results and Discussion

Results

1. Integration of the National Curriculum and Islamic Boarding School Curriculum

The findings revealed that the integration of formal academic education and the Islamic boarding school curriculum at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan was systematically organized to ensure that the strengthening of religious values occurred alongside the achievement of national educational competency standards. The school implemented an integrated curriculum combining the Merdeka Curriculum with the Islamic religious education curriculum (diniyah) within a comprehensive 24-hour educational environment. This integration enabled students to develop academic competencies while simultaneously strengthening their religious knowledge, moral values, independence, and discipline.

Formal intracurricular learning activities, generally conducted between 07:30 and 15:00 Central Indonesia Time (WITA), incorporated a Deep Learning approach

supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Meanwhile, religious education and character development continued beyond formal classroom hours through structured boarding school activities. This arrangement allowed academic instruction and Islamic education to complement each other without compromising national educational standards.

The Islamic religious education curriculum was developed in accordance with the scholarly tradition (sanad) of Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School in Madura. Students participated in classical Islamic literature studies through Kitab Kuning, Qur'anic recitation improvement (Tahsin), and Qur'anic memorization (Tahfidz) programs with established learning targets. These activities were designed to strengthen students' understanding of Islamic teachings while promoting the practical application of religious values in everyday life.

Furthermore, the school implemented foreign language habituation programs to enhance students' communication skills and global competitiveness. Based on field observations, Arabic was designated as the primary language for communication outside classrooms from Monday to Wednesday, while English was used from Thursday to Saturday. This structured language environment provided students with opportunities to practice foreign languages through authentic daily interactions.

The findings indicate that the integration of academic and religious curricula was reflected not only in curriculum documents and learning schedules but also in the continuity of educational experiences between classrooms and dormitories. The school established an educational environment in which academic knowledge, Islamic values, and character development were mutually reinforced through structured learning and daily habituation.

2. Implementation of Deep Learning Through the 3M Framework and ICT Integration

The findings demonstrated that SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School implemented a Deep Learning approach in intracurricular activities to encourage meaningful learning experiences and the development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). The instructional process incorporated the 3M framework of Understanding, Applying, and Reflecting, supported by the principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning.

Based on interviews with subject teachers, classroom instruction emphasized conceptual understanding rather than memorization of formulas, definitions, or theoretical information. Teachers facilitated students in actively constructing knowledge through explanations, discussions, contextual examples, and interactive learning activities. The use of ICT-based instructional resources, including interactive presentations, digital learning modules, computer laboratories, and language laboratories, supported students in understanding abstract concepts and engaging with learning materials.

In the understanding stage, students were encouraged to explore fundamental concepts and establish connections between academic knowledge and Islamic values. Teachers provided explanations and learning resources that helped students develop a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This process emphasized active participation and encouraged students to ask questions, analyze information, and identify relationships among concepts.

During the application stage, students were guided to transfer their knowledge into practical and contextual situations. For example, in Science and ICT subjects, students developed simulations and digital projects related to everyday activities and the boarding school environment. These activities provided opportunities for students to apply theoretical concepts, solve problems, and develop creativity through meaningful learning experiences.

The reflection stage involved metacognitive activities conducted at the end of learning sessions. Students were encouraged to evaluate their understanding, identify learning difficulties, and reflect on the relevance of academic knowledge to their daily lives. Teachers also guided students in connecting scientific and technological concepts with Islamic principles derived from the Qur'an

and Hadith. Field observations indicated that reflective activities were incorporated into classroom instruction to promote students' awareness of their learning processes.

In addition to academic instruction, teachers consistently provided moral guidance and motivational support to encourage students to maintain appropriate behavior and demonstrate Islamic ethical values in their daily activities. This integration of academic instruction and moral guidance reflected the school's commitment to developing students' intellectual and personal qualities simultaneously.

Overall, the findings suggest that the implementation of Deep Learning supported by ICT facilitated student-centered instructional practices, contextual knowledge application, and reflective learning. The observed activities provided opportunities for students to practice critical thinking, creativity, and metacognitive reflection within an integrated Islamic educational environment.

3. Character Development Through the 24-Hour Boarding School System

The findings further revealed that the implementation of the 24-hour boarding school system established a structured educational environment supporting the continuous development of students' religious, moral, and social character. Character education was not limited to formal classroom instruction but was integrated into students' daily routines through religious habituation, exemplary behavior, discipline, and supervision by dormitory mentors (musyrif and musyrifah).

Religious habituation activities were systematically organized throughout the day. Students participated in congregational Tahajjud prayers, Fajr prayers, dhikr, Dhuha prayers, and the five obligatory daily prayers. These activities were complemented by Qur'anic recitation, memorization, and classical Islamic text studies. Qur'anic learning was conducted under the guidance of religious teachers, with established memorization targets and regular supervision.

The boarding school environment also emphasized personal independence, cleanliness, responsibility, and compliance with institutional regulations. Students were encouraged to manage their personal belongings, maintain dormitory cleanliness, follow daily schedules, and demonstrate responsible behavior in communal activities. Continuous supervision and guidance provided opportunities for students to develop self-discipline and internalize positive behavioral habits.

Field observations identified several examples of students' respectful and courteous behavior. Students frequently initiated greetings when encountering teachers, visitors, or other members of the school community. When interacting with external visitors, students generally used polite Indonesian expressions, while communication with teachers and educational staff often involved Arabic or English in accordance with the school's language habituation program.

Another observed example involved students' behavior when assisting visitors. When guests entered the school environment, students demonstrated respectful attitudes by standing appropriately, offering greetings, and providing directions politely. When indicating the location of school offices, students commonly used their right thumb while slightly inclining their bodies as a gesture of respect. These behaviors reflected the integration of Islamic manners, cultural etiquette, and character habituation within everyday school interactions.

The findings also showed that the school's character development programs emphasized values associated with the Pancasila Student Profile and the eight dimensions of the Graduate Profile. These values included faith and devotion to God, noble character, independence, critical reasoning, creativity, cooperation, respect for diversity, and leadership. Through the integration of formal education and boarding school activities, students were provided with continuous opportunities to practice these values in authentic social situations.

The implementation of the 24-hour educational system therefore provided an institutional framework for reinforcing religious commitment, discipline,

independence, and respectful interpersonal behavior. Observations suggested that the continuity between classroom instruction and dormitory supervision contributed to a consistent environment for character development.

4. Strategic Institutional Partnerships Supporting Educational Quality and Student Development

The findings from observations and document analysis indicated that SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan established strategic partnerships with external institutions to support the implementation of its integrated curriculum and character development programs. These partnerships involved Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School in Madura, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and Teritip Community Health Center.

The partnership with Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School focused on strengthening Islamic educational quality through the standardization of the diniyah curriculum, alignment of classical Islamic teaching methods, and preservation of the scholarly transmission tradition. This collaboration supported the development of religious knowledge, Qur'anic memorization, and the quality of Islamic instructional practices.

Cooperation with the Indonesian National Armed Forces emphasized discipline, leadership, physical development, and national awareness. Activities included marching drills, character-building exercises, and programs designed to strengthen students' understanding of civic responsibility and nationalism.

Meanwhile, collaboration with Teritip Community Health Center supported students' physical health and well-being through periodic medical examinations, nutritional education, environmental sanitation programs, and student health services. These activities contributed to the maintenance of a healthy boarding school environment.

Table 5. Strategic Institutional Partnerships and Their Contributions to Student Development

Partner Institution	Forms of Collaboration and Contributions	Contributions to Student Development
Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School, Madura	Standardization of the diniyah curriculum, alignment of Kitab Kuning teaching methods, and quality assurance of Islamic scholarly traditions	Strengthening Islamic religious knowledge and improving the quality of Qur'anic memorization
Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI)	Marching drills, national awareness education, discipline training, and leadership development	Strengthening physical and mental discipline, leadership, and nationalism
Teritip Community Health Center	Periodic health examinations, nutritional counseling, dormitory sanitation programs, and student health services	Supporting students' physical health and maintaining cleanliness within the boarding school environment

The findings suggest that these partnerships supported the implementation of the school's educational programs by providing expertise and services beyond the institution's internal resources. Religious education partnerships strengthened curriculum implementation, military collaboration reinforced discipline and leadership, and healthcare cooperation supported students' health and well-being.

5. Supporting Factors, Implementation Challenges, and Institutional Responses

The findings identified several factors supporting the implementation of the integrated curriculum at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan. These included institutional support from the school foundation, the availability of ICT-based learning facilities, the commitment of teachers and dormitory supervisors, and collaboration with external institutional partners.

The school foundation's support contributed to the provision of educational facilities and the implementation of academic and religious programs. ICT infrastructure, including computer laboratories, language laboratories, interactive learning resources, and digital instructional materials, facilitated the implementation of technology-supported learning activities.

The commitment of teachers and dormitory supervisors was another important supporting factor. Their continuous involvement in academic instruction, religious guidance, character habituation, and student supervision enabled educational activities to be implemented throughout the day. Coordination between classroom teachers and dormitory supervisors also supported the continuity of learning and character development across different educational settings.

Despite these supporting conditions, the study identified several implementation challenges. One challenge involved the adjustment of newly enrolled students to the structured daily routines of the boarding school environment. Students entering the institution had to adapt to early morning activities, religious obligations, academic schedules, dormitory regulations, and communal living arrangements.

Another challenge concerned differences in students' initial abilities, particularly in Qur'anic recitation and foreign language proficiency. Students entered the school with varying levels of competence in reading the Qur'an, Arabic communication, and English communication. These differences required additional instructional support to ensure that students could participate effectively in the integrated curriculum.

To address these challenges, the school implemented matriculation programs and additional guidance in Qur'anic recitation improvement (Tahsin) and foreign language learning. Teachers and dormitory supervisors provided supplementary assistance based on students' learning needs. The institution also strengthened coordination between academic teachers and boarding school supervisors to monitor students' adjustment, learning progress, and character development.

These institutional responses demonstrated the school's efforts to maintain the continuity of integrated educational programs while accommodating differences in students' backgrounds and learning readiness.

Overall, the findings revealed that the integrated curriculum at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan was implemented through the systematic alignment of national academic education, Islamic religious instruction, ICT-supported Deep Learning, 24-hour character habituation, and strategic institutional partnerships. The observed practices illustrated how academic learning and Islamic boarding school education could operate within a unified educational environment. The findings also highlighted the importance of institutional support, teacher commitment, dormitory supervision, and targeted assistance in addressing implementation challenges and sustaining students' academic, religious, and character development.



Figure 1. Scientific research interview session conducted by Harjono (left) with Mr. M. Zainul

M. (Principal of SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School) and Ms. Aina (Administrative Staff).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of the national curriculum and the Islamic boarding school curriculum at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan has established a harmonious relationship between academic competency development and the strengthening of students' religious character. This finding supports the perspective of Setyoningsih and Ridwan (2025), who emphasized the compatibility of integrating national and Islamic boarding school curricula within a modern educational ecosystem. The systematic alignment of intracurricular learning activities, conducted between 07:30 and 15:00 Central Indonesia Time (WITA), with structured Islamic religious education programs demonstrates that strengthening Islamic faith and religious knowledge can be implemented alongside national educational competency standards. This integration reflects the school's commitment to providing holistic education that combines intellectual development, spiritual growth, moral values, and practical life skills. Rather than treating academic instruction and religious education as separate components, the integrated curriculum establishes a continuous educational process in which both dimensions complement and reinforce each other.

The implementation of the Deep Learning approach through the 3M framework, supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), was found to facilitate a transformation toward more student-centered learning practices. In line with Fullan et al. (2018) and Rahayu et al. (2022), the implementation of the 3M learning stages—Understanding, Applying, and Reflecting—encourages students to develop conceptual understanding rather than relying solely on memorization. The principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning further support students' active engagement in the learning process. Through this approach, teachers facilitate learning experiences that encourage students to explore concepts, apply knowledge in authentic contexts, and evaluate their learning achievements through reflection.

The Understanding and Applying stages were implemented through Project-Based Learning activities, including waste management projects in Grade VII, cultural tolerance projects in Grade VIII, and democracy and leadership simulations in Grade IX. These interdisciplinary projects provided opportunities for students to develop higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), critical reasoning, problem-solving abilities, and creativity through contextual learning experiences. Furthermore, the integration of metacognitive reflection at the end of instructional sessions encouraged students to evaluate their understanding, identify learning challenges, and connect scientific and technological knowledge with Islamic principles derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. These practices illustrate how academic learning and spiritual values can be integrated to promote students' intellectual and reflective development.

Another important finding concerns the role of the 24-hour boarding school environment in strengthening students' character. Consistent with Ridwan et al. (2022) and Hilmi and Hasanah (2026), character education during adolescence requires more than theoretical instruction in classrooms. It also involves continuous habituation, exemplary behavior, supervision, and meaningful social interactions. The boarding school environment provides opportunities for these educational processes to occur throughout students' daily lives. Through structured religious practices, including Tahajjud and Dhuha prayers, congregational obligatory prayers, Qur'anic memorization and recitation improvement (Tahfidz and Tahsin), and classical Islamic text studies (Kitab Kuning), students are continuously encouraged to internalize religious and moral values.

The intensive guidance provided by dormitory supervisors (musyrif and musyrifah) also plays an important role in supporting the internalization of the eight dimensions of the Graduate Profile. The findings suggest that character development is reflected in students' everyday behaviors, including politeness, independence, compliance with school regulations, respect for others, and appropriate manners when welcoming visitors. These behaviors indicate that the school's character education practices extend beyond formal instruction and are reinforced through daily

experiences within the boarding school environment.

Additional evidence of character development was obtained from parents' accounts during their visits to the school. Several parents reported positive behavioral changes in their children after enrolling at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School. For example, parents observed that their children had developed the habit of waking up early to perform the Fajr prayer, cleaning their homes without being instructed, and voluntarily assisting with household responsibilities during school holidays. These reported changes suggest that the values and habits developed within the boarding school environment may also be reflected in students' behavior outside the institution. Such observations highlight the potential contribution of continuous religious habituation and character supervision to the development of independence, responsibility, and self-discipline.

The implementation of the integrated Operational Curriculum was also supported by strategic partnerships involving multiple external institutions. Collaboration with Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School in Madura contributed to the standardization of Islamic religious education, the alignment of diniyah instructional practices, and the preservation of Islamic scholarly traditions. Information obtained from teachers and educational personnel associated with Al-Amien Prenduan indicated that approximately two to three teachers were assigned annually to SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan. These teachers periodically replaced personnel who had previously served at the institution. This arrangement supported the continuity of Islamic educational programs and strengthened the quality of religious instruction through the exchange of qualified teaching personnel.

Furthermore, collaboration with the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) contributed to the development of students' discipline, physical resilience, leadership, and national awareness. Through marching exercises, discipline training, and civic education activities, students were encouraged to develop responsibility, patriotism, and respect for national values consistent with Pancasila. These activities complemented the school's Islamic character education programs by strengthening students' understanding of their responsibilities as members of Indonesian society.

The partnership with Teritip Community Health Center also played an important role in maintaining students' health, nutritional awareness, and dormitory sanitation. Field observations indicated that healthcare personnel conducted scheduled health services and educational activities related to nutrition, personal hygiene, physical health, and youth first aid. The school also established a student health team responsible for assisting students who experienced health problems. Under the supervision of dormitory mentors and homeroom teachers, members of this team helped identify students requiring medical attention and supported initial assistance within the school's health procedures. Students experiencing prolonged illness or emergency medical conditions were referred to the community health center for further examination and treatment.

These healthcare-related activities not only supported students' physical well-being but also provided opportunities to develop responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and solidarity among students and educational personnel. The involvement of students in health-related activities demonstrated how institutional partnerships could contribute to character development through practical experiences involving care for others and collective responsibility.

Despite these positive findings, several challenges were identified in implementing the integrated curriculum. One significant challenge involved differences in students' initial competencies, particularly in Qur'anic recitation and foreign language proficiency. Newly enrolled students also required time to adjust to the structured routines and expectations of the boarding school environment. These differences created a need for additional instructional support and individualized guidance to ensure that students could participate effectively in both academic and religious programs.

To address these challenges, the school implemented matriculation programs, specialized guidance in Qur'anic recitation improvement (Tahsin) and foreign language learning, and strengthened coordination

between classroom teachers and dormitory supervisors. These strategies were intended to accommodate students' diverse learning needs while maintaining consistency in the implementation of the integrated curriculum. Continuous communication among teachers, dormitory supervisors, and school administrators also supported the monitoring of students' academic progress, behavioral development, and adjustment to boarding school life.

Overall, the findings suggest that the implementation of the integrated curriculum at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan provides a holistic educational framework combining national academic standards, Islamic religious education, ICT-supported Deep Learning, continuous character habituation, and strategic institutional collaboration. The integration of these components creates opportunities for students to develop academic competencies, religious commitment, moral responsibility, independence, leadership, and social awareness within a unified educational environment. The study also highlights the importance of institutional commitment, continuous supervision, and responsive educational strategies in supporting the implementation of integrated Islamic education.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Islamic boarding school curriculum at SMP IT Al Azhar Boarding School Balikpapan was systematically implemented through a comprehensive 24-hour educational framework. The integration of national academic standards with the diniyah curriculum, rooted in the scholarly tradition of Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School, enabled academic instruction and Islamic religious education to operate in a complementary manner. Furthermore, the implementation of ICT-supported Deep Learning through the 3M framework, incorporating the principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning, provided opportunities for students to develop higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), critical reasoning, creativity, and metacognitive awareness through contextual and reflective learning activities.

The study also concludes that the 24-hour boarding school environment plays an important role in strengthening students' religious character, independence, discipline, and moral behavior through structured religious habituation and continuous guidance from dormitory supervisors (musyrif and musyrifah). In addition, strategic partnerships with Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and Teritip Community Health Center contributed to the quality of Islamic religious education, student discipline, leadership development, and health services. Although challenges related to students' initial competencies and adjustment to boarding school routines were identified, the implementation of matriculation programs, specialized guidance, and coordination between teachers and dormitory supervisors provided practical responses to these challenges. These findings highlight the potential of an integrated curriculum as a holistic educational approach for strengthening students' academic, spiritual, moral, and social development in Islamic boarding schools.

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