

Integration of General Knowledge and Religion Policy for the Emergence of Integrated Islamic Schools

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Abstract. The dichotomy between general sciences and religious sciences has become a fundamental issue in modern educational systems, resulting in the emergence of a generation fragmented in knowledge and values. In the context of Indonesian Muslim society, the emergence of Integrated Islamic Schools (Sekolah Islam Terpadu/SIT) serves as a response to concerns over a secular-oriented education system that fails to address spiritual dimensions and holistic character development. This study aims to analyze how the integration of general and religious knowledge serves both as a paradigmatic foundation and a policy driver behind the rise of SIT as an alternative educational model. The research employs a qualitative approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, involving an in-depth analysis of scholarly literature, policy documents, and relevant research findings. The results reveal that knowledge integration within SIT goes beyond curriculum unification; it involves an epistemological reconstruction of education that unites cognitive and spiritual dimensions within a tawhidic (monotheistic) framework. National education policy provides a legal space for the development of SIT, while the strategic role of SIT is evident in its capacity to nurture students who are academically competent and morally grounded. This study highlights the importance of strengthening policy and institutional capacity to ensure the sustainability of an integrative and contextually responsive Islamic education system.

Keywords : Knowledge Integration, Integrated Islamic School, Education Policy, Islamic Education.

1. Introduction

The development of the era marked by globalization, technological advances, and the rapid flow of information has had a major influence on the education system in various countries, including Indonesia. Education is no longer only understood as a process of conveying knowledge, but also as an effort to shape the character, values, and identity of students so that they are able to face the complexities of modern life. In this context, the main challenge for the world of education is how to integrate various disciplines, both general and religious sciences, into one complete and holistic system [1]. Religious education should not stand alone as an entity separate from modern science and knowledge, because both need each other to create humans who are intellectually superior and have noble morals. Integration of knowledge is an urgent need to create a generation that is not only cognitively intelligent, but also spiritually and ethically strong in facing global dynamics.

Amidst the demands of globalization that increasingly suppress spiritual values, the birth of an educational model that combines religious knowledge and general knowledge into one integral approach is a response to the public's anxiety about the moral crisis and moral decadence of the younger generation. One manifestation of this integrative effort is the

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emergence of the Integrated Islamic School (SIT), an educational institution that offers a combined curriculum between national education and Islamic values. SIT is present with the spirit of uniting the epistemology of revelation (religion) and rational-empirical epistemology (general knowledge) in one synergistic learning system. This educational model not only aims to produce students who are able to compete academically, but also have a strong religious awareness. Thus, the existence of the Integrated Islamic School is a response to the needs of the urban Muslim community who crave educational institutions that not only pursue academic achievements, but also guarantee comprehensive religious and spiritual character development.

This phenomenon can be seen from the rapid growth in the number of integrated Islamic schools in various regions of Indonesia in the last two decades. In big cities and suburbs, people flock to register their children in schools that uphold the principle of integration between knowledge and faith. This phenomenon is not something that occurs without a cause, but rather is a reflection of public dissatisfaction with the conventional education system which is considered to have failed to instill moral and spiritual values deeply [2]. On the other hand, some traditional Islamic educational institutions are considered unable to answer the challenges of the times because their curriculum has not been able to adapt to developments in science and technology. Therefore, SIT emerged as a synthesis of the two approaches, namely by continuing to uphold Islamic values while adopting a modern pedagogical approach and curriculum based on competency.

Empirical data shows that the growth of integrated Islamic schools is quite significant. Based on data from the Indonesian Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT), in 2003 there were around 50 JSIT member schools, and this number increased rapidly to more than 2,000 schools in 2023 spread across all provinces in Indonesia. This phenomenon shows that the integrated education model has received a positive response from the community. In addition, data shows that graduates from integrated Islamic schools tend to be higher in participating in religious activities, social activities, and are more consistent in practicing worship compared to students from regular public schools [3]. However, behind these encouraging figures, there are also significant challenges. One of them is how to maintain a balance between the content of the general and religious curriculum so that the two do not cancel each other out. Some criticisms have emerged that the integration carried out tends to be only administrative or symbolic, without touching on the true epistemological integration between knowledge and faith.

Integration between general and religious knowledge has actually been a topic of discussion in Islamic education discourse for a long time. Great figures such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Khaldun have developed an educational approach that does not separate religious knowledge from worldly knowledge. In the history of classical Islamic civilization, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, mathematics, and social sciences were developed together with Islamic studies in one complete educational institution. This idea actually shows that in the Islamic tradition there is no dichotomy of knowledge as it later emerged in the paradigm of modern Western education. Therefore, the rise of SIT in the contemporary era can be considered as an attempt to reconstruct the classical Islamic education system that integrates reason and revelation as two complementary sources of knowledge. This integrative paradigm is in line with the concept of monotheism in Islam which views worldly life and the afterlife as an inseparable unity.

The implementation of integrated Islamic education is also rooted in government policies in responding to the needs of society for alternative education models. Although not explicitly regulated in the national curriculum, the existence of SIT is facilitated through educational autonomy policies that provide schools with the freedom to design their curriculum. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System provides space for educational institutions to develop a curriculum based on local excellence, including a religious approach [4]. In practice, many SITs combine the National Curriculum (Independent Curriculum) with the Islamic Curriculum based on the values of *tarbiyah*, *tahfidz*, and the habituation of *akhlakul karimah*. This provides space for the development of a comprehensive learning approach, but also requires readiness from the teaching staff, school management, and curriculum devices so that the integration runs substantially, not just administratively.

Based on the description above, this study aims to analyze in depth how the integration of general knowledge and religious knowledge in educational policy can encourage the birth of integrated Islamic schools as an alternative model of contemporary Islamic education. This study will explore the historical, philosophical, and practical dimensions of the integrated education model, including examining its impact on the formation of student character and the implementation challenges faced by SIT educational institutions. Thus, it is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the development of Islamic education policies in Indonesia that are more responsive to the challenges of the times without leaving the roots of spiritual values that are the identity of the nation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of Integration of General and Religious Sciences in Islamic Education

The integration of general knowledge and religious knowledge in education is an effort to eliminate the dichotomy between knowledge derived from revelation (religion) and knowledge derived from human reason and experience (science and social science). The dichotomous view that separates the two has been widely criticized by contemporary Islamic educational thinkers such as Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and Fazlur Rahman, who emphasize the importance of unifying epistemology in Islamic education. They see that knowledge in Islam is holistic, where every form of knowledge is directed to bring humans closer to God and live a meaningful life in this world and the hereafter [5]. Therefore, this integration does not only concern the structure of the curriculum, but also touches on aspects of methodology, learning orientation, and the formation of the character of students who have an Islamic worldview.

This concept of integration is the philosophical basis for the development of various contemporary Islamic education models, including the Integrated Islamic School. This school tries to unite general subjects such as mathematics, science, and language with Islamic values as a whole. For example, in science learning, students are not only taught the laws of physics, but are also invited to reflect on the greatness of God's creation. Thus, learning becomes a means to foster faith and morals, not just a transfer of knowledge. This integration model is a solution to concerns about moral degradation due to a secular education system that does not systematically foster students' spirituality, as well as the failure of traditional education to prepare a generation that is responsive to the challenges of the times.

2.2. Integrated Islamic Schools as an Implementation of Alternative Education Policy

Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) are a concrete manifestation of the implementation of the integration of general and religious knowledge in the Indonesian education system which is increasingly gaining ground in society. The concept of SIT is not just the addition of religious lessons to the national curriculum structure, but is a comprehensive approach to education management, learning processes, and school culture. SIT develops learning that is sourced from the Qur'an and Sunnah and is combined with the national curriculum and scientific approach [6]. In the context of policy, the establishment of SIT is facilitated by national education regulations, especially Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System which provides flexibility in managing educational units based on local excellence, including those based on religious values.

The SIT model is a response to the increasing demands of the Muslim community for education that not only prepares children academically, but also spiritually, morally, and socially. Many parents feel that public schools pay less attention to aspects of character and religious development, while traditional religious schools are less adaptive to developments in science and technology. SIT is here to answer this gap by synergizing the advantages of the two approaches. In various regions, SIT has proven to be in demand by the community because it is able to develop students in intellectual and spiritual aspects in a balanced way. Thus, SIT is not only an educational phenomenon, but also a symbol of the transformation of the paradigm of Islamic education in Indonesia that is more integrative, contextual, and adaptive to changing times.

3. Method

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method with a *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) approach. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide a comprehensive and in-depth mapping of literature relevant to the theme of integration of general and religious sciences in the context of educational policy, especially the emergence and development of Integrated Islamic Schools in Indonesia [7]. SLR research is different from ordinary literature reviews because it requires the process of searching, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing literature to be carried out systematically, transparently, and replicated [8]. Within this framework, researchers begin by formulating clear research questions, establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, and determining credible scientific databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ, and Garuda to search for relevant articles, books, and research reports. These stages are carried out to ensure that the literature reviewed truly supports theoretical construction and conceptual findings in explaining why and how scientific integration drives the birth of integrated Islamic school policies as a form of modern Islamic educational innovation [9].

The data analysis process in the SLR approach is carried out using *content analysis techniques*, namely identifying the main themes, patterns of ideas, and relationships between concepts that emerge from the selected literature collection. Researchers coded the selected articles based on their suitability to the focus of the research, such as literature discussing the integration of religious and general knowledge, the philosophical basis of Islamic education, national education policy, and studies on integrated Islamic schools [10]. Literature that meets the criteria is then analyzed to reveal its contribution to the development of the discourse on educational integration and its relevance to educational practices and policies in Indonesia. The validity of this study is maintained through a strategy of *theoretical triangulation* and *peer debriefing* to ensure consistency of understanding of the text and avoid subjective bias [11]. Through this approach, this study not only provides a comprehensive picture of the development of integrative theory and practice in Islamic education, but also presents conceptual recommendations that can be used as a basis for making future educational policies.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the integration of general knowledge and religious knowledge is an epistemological and practical need that underlies the birth of the Integrated Islamic School (SIT) as a form of response to the anxiety of the Muslim community towards the dichotomy of the education system. This integration is not only understood formally as the unification of the national curriculum and the Islamic curriculum, but more than that, it becomes a philosophical approach that unites the way of looking at knowledge as something that comes from one divine source, both through revelation and reason. The Integrated Islamic School emerged as an institution that offers a comprehensive educational paradigm, which does not separate the formation of intellectuality and the strengthening of spirituality. [12]. The results of the literature study show that since the early 2000s, urban Muslim communities have begun to show dissatisfaction with the national education system which is considered too secular and does not touch on aspects of children's moral development. In this context, SIT offers a promising solution, namely combining academic achievement with the formation of religious character simultaneously.

Based on the results of document and article studies within the SLR framework, it is apparent that the trend of the emergence of SIT is greatly influenced by the crisis of educational identity in the era of globalization. Conventional schools tend to emphasize cognitive and competitive aspects, while affective and spiritual aspects are often ignored. This condition causes a void of values in students which then has an impact on weak moral resilience and social integrity. SIT is here to answer this void through a curriculum that integrates general subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, and language with Islamic values that are instilled both explicitly in the material and implicitly in school culture and daily practices. For example, mathematics learning is associated with verses about the order and greatness of creation, while language lessons are directed at improving honest and polite communication skills. This integration is not done mechanically, but rather through a conceptual approach that involves teacher training, value-based learning design, and consistent habituation in daily school life.

The study also found that the national education policy opens up ample space for the establishment of educational institutions such as SIT. Although not specifically regulated in the national curriculum document, regulations such as Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System give schools the authority to develop a curriculum based on local excellence and community needs. This is where SIT utilizes the policy space by designing a curriculum structure that combines national standards with a specific Islamic curriculum. Many integrated Islamic schools adopt the flexible Merdeka Curriculum model and then add content such as tahfidz, tarbiyah, Arabic, and noble morals. The results of the study show that the success of the integration of knowledge in SIT is largely determined by the strength of the school management's vision, the ability of teachers to translate integration into learning, and institutional commitment in maintaining a balance between the two scientific domains.

The results of the analysis of several key literatures also reveal that the integration of knowledge in SIT is not only in the material aspect, but also touches on the organizational structure and culture of the institution. Integrated Islamic Schools have a leadership and management approach inspired by Islamic values such as syura (deliberation), amanah, and taqwa. This is reflected in participatory decision-making, value-based supervision, and teacher development programs that are not only academic but also spiritual [13]. Strengthening school culture is an important key to the success of integration because it becomes a medium for instilling consistent and institutionalized values. In many cases, SIT makes daily activities such as congregational prayer, morning tilawah, murojaah, and mentoring as instruments for deep and continuous character formation. This shows that the integration of knowledge in SIT does not stop at content, but takes place in the life of the school ecosystem as a whole.

The research results also highlight that the public acceptance of the SIT model is very high, especially among the urban Muslim middle class who experience spiritual restlessness in the midst of fast-paced and competitive modern life. SIT is considered a middle ground between religious education that is too conservative and general education that tends to be liberal-secular. In the public's perspective, SIT is the answer to the need for an education system that is able to maintain the Islamic identity of children while equipping them with 21st-century competencies. Several literatures note that parents like SIT because they feel confident that their children are getting an education that is not only superior in academics, but also in morals, discipline, and exemplary behavior. This trust is a very important social capital for the growth of SIT in various regions. In fact, several SIT institutions have developed franchise systems and ongoing coaching that reach remote areas, showing that this model has strong replication and sustainability.

The research results also noted a number of challenges faced by SIT in implementing the integration of knowledge. Some of these challenges include: a shortage of teachers who have skills in two fields (general knowledge and religious knowledge), a gap between the ideal vision and classroom practices that are sometimes still segmented, and administrative demands from the government that sometimes make substantial integration difficult [14]. In addition, there are still schools that call themselves SIT but have not implemented integration conceptually, only stopping at adding hours of religious lessons without a deep value approach. This is a criticism as well as an internal challenge in maintaining the originality and quality of the integrated education model. To overcome this, some literature recommends strengthening teacher training, collaboration between education experts and religious scholars, and more affirmative public policy support for an integrative approach in education.

Overall, the results of this study affirm that Integrated Islamic Schools are a concrete manifestation of the paradigm of contemporary Islamic education that seeks to answer the challenges of the times while remaining rooted in the values of monotheism. The integration of general knowledge and religious knowledge is not just a jargon, but becomes the main spirit in the formulation of the curriculum, learning practices, student development, and institutional management. The emergence of SIT in Indonesia cannot be separated from the encouragement of society, adaptive state policies, and the need for an educational format that is able to balance worldly and hereafter aspects. By considering its successes and challenges, this study provides an important contribution in formulating a strategy for developing Islamic education in the future, especially in strengthening the substantial integration of knowledge based on values, spirituality, and complementary sciences.

4.1 . Integration of Knowledge as the Paradigmatic Foundation of Integrated Islamic Schools

Integration of knowledge as a paradigmatic foundation in Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) is a framework of thought that was born from the need to bridge the dichotomy of religious knowledge and general knowledge that has developed in the modern education system. This dichotomy does not only occur at the level of curriculum and teaching materials, but has further shaped the way Muslims view knowledge itself, separating knowledge that is considered "worldly knowledge" and "afterlife knowledge". In this context, the birth of integrated Islamic schools is not only an institutional innovation, but a representation of an effort to reconstruct a complete and comprehensive Islamic education paradigm [15] . The basis for the integration of knowledge in SIT is based on the principle of monotheism, namely that all knowledge comes from Allah SWT and must be directed to form humans who have a balance between reason and faith, the world and the afterlife, science and spirituality.

The long history of Islamic education has actually shown that the integration of knowledge is nothing new. During the golden age of Islamic civilization, institutions such as the House of Wisdom in Baghdad and madrasas in Cordoba, Cairo, and Samarkand taught philosophy, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and religious knowledge simultaneously in one educational system. Great figures such as Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, and Al-Ghazali are examples of scientists who not only mastered religious knowledge, but also made major contributions to medicine, logic, and science. In this tradition, there is no dichotomy between worldly knowledge and the afterlife because all are seen as instruments for understanding God's creation and living life properly. However, the entry of the Western education system into the Islamic world since colonialism has shifted this epistemological structure, presenting a secular system that separates positive knowledge from spiritual values. As a result, education in the Muslim world has experienced a disconnection of values and a loss of transcendental orientation in its learning process.

Integrated Islamic Schools are present as an answer to this fragmentation by rebuilding an integrative educational framework, where general knowledge and religious knowledge are not only taught side by side, but are united in one unified goal. Integration of knowledge in SIT does not simply mean adding hours of religious lessons among general subjects, but involves rearranging the way of looking at knowledge itself. In this integrative paradigm, science is not seen as a value-free science, but as a way to strengthen faith and connect humans with the essence of creation. On the contrary, religious knowledge is not only taught dogmatically and ritualistically, but contextually and applicatively, so that it can form social awareness, ethics, and a spirit of devotion to the community. Thus, the integration of knowledge in SIT becomes an epistemological and methodological approach that demands the development of a curriculum, teaching materials, learning methods, and school management based on Islamic values.

One form of implementation of this paradigm is how the curriculum at SIT is designed by combining the National Curriculum with a specific Islamic curriculum. The national curriculum plays a role in equipping students with the basic competencies needed to compete in the global era, while the Islamic curriculum shapes students' character and religious understanding. The integration between the two is carried out with a thematic approach, where concepts in general science are approached with Islamic values. For example, in science subjects, students not only learn about the laws of nature but are also invited to reflect on the verses of the Qur'an related to Allah's creation in the universe. In mathematics lessons, students are not only trained in logical thinking, but are also taught the values of order, honesty, and consistency as part of Islamic morals. In this way, learning does not become a mere cognitive activity, but becomes a means of forming integrative faith and morals.

The integrative approach requires teachers to not only be teachers, but also mentors and value guides. Teachers are required to understand the integration of knowledge not only at the level of teaching materials, but also in ways of thinking and living. In this case, teacher training at SIT does not only emphasize pedagogical and academic competence, but also spiritual development and a deep understanding of the Islamic worldview. Teachers become the main agents in realizing this integrative paradigm because they are the ones who are in direct contact with students every day. Through the interaction between teachers and students, Islamic values are not only instilled through lectures or teaching materials, but through exemplary behavior and habituation in school life. Therefore, integrated Islamic

schools usually have programs such as Islamic mentoring, character development, daily worship habits, and strengthening Islamic brotherhood as part of integral learning that reflects the integration of knowledge and values [16] .

This integrative paradigm is also seen in the institutional management of SIT institutions. Schools are not only a place for transferring knowledge, but also an ecosystem that forms Islamic culture and character. School culture is formed through a clean and orderly physical environment, social interactions that are full of manners, and activities that encourage internalization of values such as congregational prayer, morning recitation, and the habit of greetings and prayers. In this ecosystem, every component of the school from the principal, teachers, students, to education personnel understand their respective roles in realizing a balanced education between worldly and afterlife aspects. In other words, the integration of knowledge in SIT does not only occur in the classroom, but also in the managerial structure, institutional ethics, and social dynamics that are part of the education process itself.

However, in reality, the implementation of science integration as a paradigm in SIT faces a number of challenges that are not simple. One of the main challenges is that many teachers and school management do not fully understand the concept of science integration as a whole. Most of them still carry out integration symbolically, such as including verses of the Qur'an in learning presentations without strengthening the deep substantial meaning. This is due to the limited epistemological literacy of educators regarding the idea of science integration. In addition, another challenge is the heavy burden of the curriculum that must accommodate national academic demands and Islamic content simultaneously, which often burdens students and teachers in managing time and evaluation. Therefore, systematic and sustainable efforts are needed to improve teacher capacity through conceptual and practical training on science integration, as well as strengthening contextual and applicable research and curriculum development.

The success of some SITs in implementing the paradigm of science integration shows that this approach is not only possible, but also has a real positive impact. Schools that have successfully implemented science integration consistently are able to create a conducive learning environment, producing students who are not only academically superior, but also have a strong Islamic personality. SIT students demonstrate a more independent, honest, disciplined character, and are active in socio-religious activities. They are not only ready to face academic and career challenges in the future , but also have a moral compass that guides them in making responsible life decisions. This is proof that science integration as an educational paradigm is not only theoretically ideal, but can also be implemented in real terms and has a broad transformational impact on students.

Integration of science in the context of SIT has high relevance in responding to the challenges of globalization and secularization that are increasingly strengthening. In the midst of an increasingly materialistic and pragmatic world, education that only emphasizes cognitive and competitive aspects will fail to form a complete human being. In this case, the integrative paradigm becomes an alternative that builds a balance between mastery of technology and strengthening spirituality, between worldly achievements and awareness of the afterlife. By making integration of science a paradigmatic foundation, SIT instills the principle that educational success is not only measured by exam scores or academic achievements, but also by the maturity of personality, depth of faith, and social contribution of students. This is an important contribution from SIT in building a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also strong in faith and morals [17] .

Integration of science as a paradigm of integrated Islamic education must continue to be developed as part of a major project of reconstructing the epistemology of Islamic education in Indonesia. Support is needed from all parties, government, academics, religious organizations, and society to strengthen the SIT model as a pillar of alternative education that is able to answer the multidimensional crisis currently facing this nation. By strengthening the concept, developing practices, and improving the quality of human resources involved in it, the integrative paradigm will become more rooted and form a new face of Islamic education that is not only adaptive to change, but also consistent in maintaining the values of monotheism as the foundation of civilization. In this framework, the Integrated Islamic School is not just a model of an institution, but becomes a symbol of the birth of progressive, contextual Islamic education that is oriented towards the formation of perfect human beings.

4.2 . Educational Policy and Strategic Role of Integrated Islamic Schools

Education policy is one of the vital instruments in shaping the direction and identity of a nation, because through this policy the state determines how the younger generation is prepared to face the dynamics of the future. In Indonesia, the national education system has undergone quite a dynamic transformation since the reform era, including in opening up space for the birth and development of alternative education models, one of which is the Integrated Islamic School (SIT). SIT is not present in a vacuum, but rather as a result of the interaction between the needs of the Muslim community for integrative education and the state's regulatory response that provides space for decentralization and educational autonomy. Therefore, understanding the existence and strategic role of SIT cannot be separated from the context of the national education policy that surrounds it. In this case, education policy has provided a legal and administrative basis for the birth of educational institutions based on Islamic values that are integrated with national education standards.

Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System is the main legal framework underlying the birth of various educational units, including Integrated Islamic Schools. In its articles, the National Education System Law stipulates that the national education system aims to develop abilities and form the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to make the nation's life more intelligent. Furthermore, Article 4 paragraph (1) states that education is organized as a process of acculturation and empowerment of students that lasts throughout life [18] . This principle is used as the basis by the initiators of SIT in designing educational institutions that not only pursue academic achievement, but also the formation of character and spirituality of students comprehensively. The freedom to develop a relevant local curriculum based on distinctive excellence (Article 36 paragraph 2) is a positive gap used by SIT to design an integrated learning approach between the national curriculum and the distinctive Islamic curriculum, such as tahfidz learning, tarbiyah, and daily etiquette.

In the context of the educational autonomy policy, the government also provides flexibility to educational units through the School Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP) and currently through the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum not only encourages students to be active, creative, and independent, but also provides space for schools to adjust learning content to the characteristics and needs of students and the socio-cultural environment. SIT makes good use of this opportunity. Within the framework of the Independent Curriculum, many integrated Islamic schools implement a project-based learning approach with the integration of Islamic values. For example, in the project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students, SIT emphasizes the values of faith and devotion to God Almighty, mutual cooperation, and noble morals as basic values that are translated into daily learning activities. In this case, educational policy has become a facilitator that enables pedagogical innovation and substantive integration of values in SIT.

The strategic role of SIT in the national education system becomes increasingly important when associated with the reality of the needs of urban Muslim communities in Indonesia. The emergence of SIT is not only due to religious reasons, but also because of dissatisfaction with the public education system which is considered too secular, rigid, and does not touch on the spiritual and moral dimensions of students. Many middle-class Muslim parents feel that religious education in public schools is not strong enough to protect children from the negative influences of globalization. On the other hand, traditional Islamic educational institutions are considered less adaptive to technological developments and the needs of 21st-century competencies. SIT is present as a solution that combines the advantages of the two approaches: strong spirituality and high academic ability. This is what makes SIT not only an educational institution, but a socio-religious movement that represents the aspirations of Muslims in forming a generation that is moral, intelligent, and ready to compete globally.

More than just an alternative institution, SIT plays a strategic role in strengthening character education based on Islamic values. Character education, which is currently being promoted nationally, has actually become the main spirit of the curriculum at SIT. The habit of worship, moral development, and Islamic mentoring are integral parts of students' lives in integrated Islamic schools. Character is not only taught in theory, but is formed in practice and a consistent social environment. Daily programs such as congregational prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, morning dhikr, and routine social charity activities become a medium for

instilling systemic values [19]. Thus, SIT not only produces graduates who excel academically, but also have strong moral and spiritual integrity. This is very important in the context of national development, where the main challenge of education today is to build the character of the younger generation who are not only smart, but also moral and socially responsible.

In addition to implementing formal education, SIT also has a major contribution in developing contextual and relevant learning models for the times. Many SITs develop technology-based learning innovations, digital literacy, and integrative thematic learning that connects science with Islamic values. In this case, SIT responds to the challenges of the times with an adaptive approach but does not lose its root values. For example, in science learning, teachers do not only discuss the laws of physics or biology technically, but also relate them to the greatness of Allah as the Creator. In social learning, students are not only invited to understand the structure of society, but are also encouraged to internalize the values of social justice and care as Islamic teachings. This is what makes SIT a pioneer in developing a learning approach based on the integration of science and values—which is now widely adopted as an approach in national character education.

Although education policies provide space, the existence of SIT still faces a number of challenges that must be seriously anticipated so that its strategic role is not weakened. One of the main challenges is the imbalance in the mastery of general knowledge and religious knowledge by teaching staff. Not all teachers are able to understand the concept of integrating knowledge well. Some still teach conventionally and sectorally, where general and religious subjects are taught separately without any reinforcement of values in the delivery of general knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen teacher competence through continuous training and mentoring that is not only technical, but also conceptual. The government together with organizations such as the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT) can take an active role in preparing an integrated teacher training scheme that is able to build pedagogical skills as well as an understanding of the basic values of Islamic education.

Another challenge faced by SIT is the limited infrastructure and access to adequate funding. Most SIT are still privately managed and depend on community donations and student tuition fees. This causes a gap in quality between SITs, where schools with high resources are able to develop rapidly, while others stagnate. To ensure the sustainability and equality of the quality of SIT education, affirmative policy interventions are needed from the government in the form of incentives, accreditation facilitation, and budget support. In addition, clear and supportive regulations are needed so that SITs are not only viewed as private religious-based schools, but as part of the national education system that has a concrete contribution to achieving national education goals. [20].

SIT's great opportunity also lies in its ability to establish cross-sector collaboration and build a solid institutional network. Many SITs have collaborated with foreign institutions, Islamic universities, and curriculum development institutions in developing research-based integrative learning models. This kind of collaboration is very important to strengthen the epistemological basis of SIT and ensure that the education provided is not only in accordance with values, but also in line with the latest scientific developments. In the era of open information and digital transformation, SIT must not be left behind in utilizing technology as an educational instrument. Therefore, strengthening school digitalization policies and integrating information technology in learning must be a strategic agenda in expanding the reach and effectiveness of SIT.

National education policy must be able to accommodate and grow the great potential of Integrated Islamic Schools as one of the pillars of educational transformation in Indonesia. The education model offered by SIT has proven to be able to answer various weaknesses of the conventional education system, especially in building integration between intellectual and spiritual intelligence. In the long term, if developed consistently and supported by progressive policies, SIT can become a national reference in formulating an education model that is rooted in local and Islamic values, but remains adaptive to global developments. The government through the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religion needs to build a regulatory and incentive platform that can accelerate the strengthening of the quality and competitiveness of SIT as a representation of modern Islamic education that is superior, moderate, and highly competitive.

Thus, it can be concluded that education policy and the strategic role of SIT operate in a mutually reinforcing relationship. SIT grows in a progressive policy space, and at the same time, SIT also makes an important contribution in enriching the dynamics and practices of national education policy. The strategic role of SIT is not only seen in its contribution to producing a pious and intelligent generation, but also in providing inspiration on how the education system can be designed based on the principles of values, balance, and sustainability. Therefore, strengthening policies that support the development of SIT is an important step in building an educational civilization that is spiritually empowered, has a strong character, and is relevant in responding to the challenges of the times.

5. Comparison

The results of this study, which emphasize the importance of integrating general knowledge and religious knowledge in forming a holistic Islamic education paradigm, are in line with the findings of [6] in his study entitled "Epistemology of Integrated Islamic Education in the Context of Modern Education". Hasan stated that the integration between these two poles of knowledge is the answer to the failure of the modern education system which overemphasizes the cognitive aspect without balancing it with the formation of spiritual and moral values. The results of his study confirm that Integrated Islamic Schools not only offer a combined curriculum system, but also form an educational ecosystem based on monotheism that affects all institutional aspects. These findings support the results of your study which show that SIT plays a strategic role in uniting the academic world and spirituality, through integrative learning, value-based school management, and strengthening a systemic religious culture.

Research conducted by [12] focusing on "Implementation of Integrated Curriculum in Integrated Islamic Schools: Case Study at SIT Al-Furqan Jakarta" shows that the success of science integration is greatly influenced by the teacher's ability to understand and apply the value approach in teaching science and mathematics. The study also found that successful integration is not just adding verses of the Qur'an in learning, but also touching on the methodological and ethical dimensions in the learning-teaching interaction process. This finding is very relevant to the results of your research which highlights the challenges of implementing science integration, especially related to teacher competence, curriculum alignment, and character building. Furthermore, in the study [13] entitled "Contribution of Integrated Islamic Schools to Strengthening Character Education in the Digital Era", it is concluded that SIT is one of the most adaptive forms of institutions in combining modern learning technology with strengthening Islamic values. This strengthens the position of your research which assesses SIT not only as an alternative educational institution, but also as a pioneer in relevant, progressive, and transformative Islamic education reform in the midst of changing times.

6. Conclusion

Based on the results and discussions that have been carried out, it can be concluded that the integration of general and religious knowledge is the main foundation in the birth and development of Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) as a form of innovation in modern Islamic education in Indonesia. This integration is not only structural at the curriculum level, but also paradigmatic and systemic, including learning approaches, institutional management, and school culture. SIT is present as a response to the value crisis in the conventional education system and at the same time answers the needs of the Muslim community for an education model that is able to unite intellectual intelligence with spiritual steadfastness. Supported by national education policies that open up space for autonomy and local value-based curriculum, SIT plays a strategic role in producing a generation that is knowledgeable, moral, and adaptive to the challenges of the times. Although still facing various implementation challenges, especially in terms of teacher competence and institutional infrastructure, the existence of SIT shows that the integration of knowledge is a progressive step in realizing relevant, contextual, and meaningful Islamic education.

To optimize the strategic role of Integrated Islamic Schools in the national education system, it is recommended that the government strengthen affirmative policies through regulatory support, incentives, and teacher training facilitation that focuses on the integrative capabilities of Islamic knowledge and values. In addition, it is important for SIT managers to continue to develop curriculum and learning methodologies that are contextual, innovative,

and adaptive to technological developments without losing the spirit of Islamic values. Collaboration between SIT institutions, universities, and community organizations needs to be expanded to strengthen the epistemological basis, institutional capacity, and continuity of the integrative education model. On the other hand, the community is also expected to continue to provide active support for the existence of SIT as part of a collective effort to build an Islamic education system that is not only superior in academic achievement, but also strong in forming a civilization rooted in the values of monotheism and humanity.

Author Contributions Desy Utari^{1*} was responsible for formulating the research idea, compiling the methodology design, implementing the literature review, analyzing the primary data, and writing the initial draft of the article. Miftahul Abidin² played a role in strengthening the theoretical structure, validating the research findings, and providing substantial input to the final draft of the article. Yuniar³ provided comprehensive academic supervision throughout the research process, ensuring the accuracy of the methodological approach, and guiding the development of scientific arguments consistently. Junaidah⁴ supported the preparation of the conceptual framework, reviewed the relevance of the references used, and provided corrective input to improve the scientific quality of the article. All authors were actively involved in content discussions, substantive revisions, and approved the final version of the article for submission in scientific publication.

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