



Character and Islamic Values Integration in the Merdeka Curriculum: Its Impact on Students' Learning Discipline in Batam

Misbah Misbah^{1✉}, Eliza Farahsiba Saleh²

¹Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Al-Quran Kepulauan Riau, Indonesia; h.misbah2589@gmail.com,

²University of Northern Malaysia (UUM), Malaysia, salehelizaf@ahsgs.uum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This study is motivated by the growing importance of strengthening character education and Islamic educational values in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes a balance between academic achievement and students' moral formation. This research aims to analyze the influence of character education integration and Islamic educational values on students' learning discipline in senior high schools in Batam City. The study employed a quantitative approach using an associative survey design involving 330 students randomly selected from a population of 1,892 students across three schools: SMA Negeri 4 Batam, SMA Kartini, and SMA Integral Hidayatullah. Data were collected through a validated and reliable Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using multiple linear regression with SPSS 26. The results indicate that character education integration ($\beta = 0.476$; $p < 0.001$) and Islamic educational values ($\beta = 0.316$; $p < 0.001$) both have a positive and significant effect on students' learning discipline, with a combined explanatory power of 47.5% ($R^2 = 0.475$). These findings demonstrate that learning discipline is more effectively shaped through the synergistic internalization of universal moral values and Islamic principles within school culture. This study contributes to Islamic education scholarship and national curriculum policy by providing empirical evidence that the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum is significantly enhanced when character education and Islamic educational values are integrated as a unified framework for shaping students' learning discipline. The study concludes that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on academic content but also on the consistent integration of moral and spiritual values in everyday school practices.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya penguatan pendidikan karakter dan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam dalam pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka yang menekankan keseimbangan antara pencapaian akademik dan pembentukan moral peserta didik. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisis pengaruh integrasi pendidikan karakter dan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam terhadap kedisiplinan belajar siswa SMA di Kota Batam. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain asosiatif melalui survei terhadap 330 siswa yang dipilih secara acak dari populasi 1.892 siswa di tiga sekolah, yaitu SMA Negeri 4 Batam, SMA Kartini, dan SMA Integral Hidayatullah. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner skala Likert yang telah teruji validitas dan reliabilitasnya, kemudian dianalisis dengan regresi linier berganda menggunakan SPSS 26. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi pendidikan karakter ($\beta = 0,476$; $p < 0,001$) dan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam ($\beta = 0,316$; $p < 0,001$) berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kedisiplinan belajar siswa, dengan kontribusi bersama sebesar 47,5% ($R^2 = 0,475$). Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kedisiplinan belajar lebih efektif dibentuk melalui internalisasi sinergis antara nilai-nilai moral universal dan prinsip-prinsip Islam dalam budaya

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sekolah. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi bagi studi pendidikan agama dan kebijakan kurikulum nasional dengan menunjukkan secara empiris bahwa keberhasilan Kurikulum Merdeka semakin optimal ketika pendidikan karakter dan nilai-nilai Islam diintegrasikan secara terpadu sebagai kerangka pembentukan kedisiplinan belajar. Simpulan penelitian menyatakan bahwa keberhasilan Kurikulum Merdeka tidak hanya ditentukan oleh aspek akademik, tetapi juga oleh integrasi nilai moral dan spiritual secara konsisten dalam kehidupan sekolah.

Introduction

The transformation of education in Indonesia through the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes a balance between academic achievement and character formation among students, with a streamlined content structure and dedicated space for character development across subjects and school culture (Sutanto, 2024). Official policy documents affirm a learner centered orientation and the strengthening of character as a core element of the curriculum, thereby positioning learning discipline as a key indicator of successful implementation within educational institutions (Ismawati, Eliyah, & Maskupah, 2025). Recent studies have shown that the integration of character education in the Merdeka Curriculum through value habituation, teacher role modeling, and active learning strategies correlates positively with classroom climate and students' disciplinary behavior (Siahaya, Manuputy, & Ambarita, 2025). Research conducted at various educational levels has reported improvements in learning processes and student character following the reinforcement of character based practices in curriculum design and pedagogy, while simultaneously emphasizing the need for systemic institutional support (Abdurrahman, Pekalongan, Syaifuddin, Prayogi, & Alias, 2025).

In the context of Islamic-oriented schools, the internalization of Islamic values such as honesty (*ṣidq*), discipline (*intizām*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and obedience in worship (*ta'ah*) plays a strategic role in shaping a disciplined culture and a conducive school environment (Harahap, 2025). Findings from various regions, including religious habituation practices in Batam, indicate that religious routines integrated into school activities strengthen students' discipline and sense of learning responsibility (Wongkar & Pangkey, 2024). However, the literature still presents several research gaps. First, many studies have examined character education or Islamic values separately, so quantitative evidence on their simultaneous contribution to learning discipline at the high school level especially in urban contexts such as Batam remains limited. Second, few studies have linked statistical findings (e.g., regression coefficients, R^2) to practical recommendations across different school types (public, private, and faith based) (Nabella et al., 2022). Third, limited research has explored the synergistic mechanisms (e.g., value habituation + role modeling + school governance) through which character and Islamic values jointly shape learning discipline within the Merdeka Curriculum framework (Haris, Mardani, Kusnandar & Aunurrochim, 2024). The preliminary findings in this study, which demonstrate a positive and significant impact of character education integration and Islamic values on students' learning discipline in three high schools in Batam, aim to fill this gap (Khodijah, Rahmat, & Nani, 2024).

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the influence of the integration of character education and Islamic educational values on students' learning discipline in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools in Batam City (Putri, Setiani, & Al Fath, 2023). This research seeks to address the empirical need to understand how the synergy between universal moral values and Islamic principles contributes to the formation of student discipline, which serves as a key indicator of successful character

education within the Merdeka Curriculum (Robbaniyah & Baharumi, 2025). Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic education and character education management, particularly in strengthening an integrative conceptual model that connects character education and Islamic values (Putri et al., 2023). In previous literature, character education has generally been explored from a secular perspective, whereas Islamic education has focused more on spiritual and moral aspects of the individual (Habibullah, 2023).

This study contributes a novel empirical model by simultaneously examining character education and Islamic educational values as synergistic predictors of students' learning discipline within the Merdeka Curriculum, moving beyond prevailing research that typically investigates moral character and religious values as separate qualitative constructs (e.g., integration strategies in Islamic religious education) (Abdi, 2021). Unlike prior studies that mainly explore descriptive implementation practices of character education in Merdeka Curriculum settings or integrate character values in Islamic learning without testing predictive relationships (Amiq, Muhith, Masud, & Zainudin, 2025), the current research develops and empirically tests an integrated, data-driven model across diverse senior high school types (public, private, Islamic) to demonstrate that the combined internalization of universal moral and spiritual values better predicts learning discipline than either construct alone (Hamdani, Syarif, & Imamah, 2025). This approach extends the literature by quantitatively relocating learning discipline as a key outcome of curriculum effectiveness and highlighting that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not merely on curricular design but on the synergy between moral and spiritual value integration in school culture an insight that addresses the research gap in systematic, predictive analyses of character education outcomes in multicultural educational contexts (Alfarisy, 2025).

Therefore, this study provides a new scientific contribution by empirically testing the quantitative and synergistic relationship between these two approaches in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum (Maharani et al., 2024). Practically, the results of this study are expected to provide policy implications and strategic recommendations for strengthening student character in both general and faith based schools, particularly in the urban context of Batam, which represents a socially and culturally diverse environment (Mohsen, Siregar, & Ahmad, 2023). The empirical findings have the potential to serve as a foundation for curriculum development, teacher training, and the enhancement of school governance for Islamic value based character education (Yugo, Yunani, & Salsabila, 2024).

This study holds strategic significance in the broader context of character and moral reinforcement among students in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes a balance between academic competence and the cultivation of humanistic values. The study provides an important empirical contribution by explaining the quantitative and synergistic relationship between character education and Islamic educational values in shaping students' learning discipline and teacher performance (Murtado & Kurniawan, 2025). This approach responds to recent research needs, as previous studies tended to examine these variables separately without considering their simultaneous interaction. Moreover, this research advances beyond prior studies by presenting an integrative, data driven model that combines universal character values and Islamic educational principles within a unified analytical framework (Sopandi & Siswanto, 2021). The model emphasizes that learning discipline is not merely influenced by school regulations but by the internalization of moral and spiritual values embedded in school culture (Arif, Chapakiya, & Dewi, 2024).

In practical terms, the findings enrich both Islamic education policy and the national curriculum by providing empirical evidence that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum

is largely determined by the synergy between character education and Islamic values. Consequently, schools can design learning strategies and character management systems rooted in spiritual values to strengthen students' learning ethics, responsibility, and discipline (Atin & Maemonah, 2022). Thus, this research not only reaffirms the relevance of character education in religious contexts but also opens new directions for integrating morality and spirituality into national education policy.

Based on An-Nahlawi dan Thomas Lickona's theory of character education, which emphasizes that character education is a conscious effort to cultivate virtues within students (Kasanah, 2021), this study proposes the following hypotheses:

1. H₁: There is a positive and significant influence of character education integration on students' learning discipline.
2. H₂: There is a positive and significant influence of Islamic educational values on students' learning discipline.
3. H₃: Character education integration and Islamic educational values simultaneously have a positive and significant influence on students' learning discipline within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Batam City senior high schools.

These hypotheses are integrative, as they combine two value-based approaches—secular and religious into a single model of behavioral influence. This is distinct from previous studies that tended to examine the two variables separately, which often led to debates about which variable general character or religious values plays a stronger role in shaping learning discipline (Handoko, 2023).

This study is expected to conclude that the integration of character education and Islamic values has a positive and significant influence on the formation of students' learning discipline. Empirically, their combination is predicted to contribute substantially to improving students' discipline, responsibility, and moral conduct. Thus, the study affirms that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum is measured not only by academic achievement but also by the successful internalization of moral and spiritual values that serve as the foundation of disciplined behavior among students (Untung, Muddin, Asnawi, Sindy, & Khasanah, 2025). Research on character education has been widely conducted previously, including studies carried out by: (Riza, 2024), (Kurniawan, Hasnur, & Siska, 2025), (Shodikin, Azzahra, & Rihadini, 2025), (Irnawanto, Yayuk, & Kuncahyono, 2025), (Kistoro, Istiyono, Latipah, & Burhan, 2023), (Maulana, Ustafiano, & Nursyafitri, 2025), (Miftahuddin, Aman, & Yuliantri, 2024), (Purwanti, Rofiq, Fashihah, & Romaniyah, 2024), (Rolani & Saputra, 2025), (Sailin et al., 2024), (Utari & Afendi, 2022).

Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach with an associative (correlational) design, which aimed to examine the relationship and influence between two independent variables the integration of character education and Islamic educational values on one dependent variable, namely students' learning discipline. The quantitative approach was chosen because it enables an objective and measurable description of phenomena through numerical data collection and statistical analysis (Nurhayati, Dina Liana, 2025). The associative design is appropriate when researchers seek to identify causal relationships among variables without applying direct interventions to the research subjects (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data were collected using a survey method through a Likert-scale questionnaire that had been tested for validity and reliability. The study population consisted of 1,892 students from three senior high schools in Batam City: SMA Negeri 4 Batam, SMA Kartini, and SMA Integral Hidayatullah. A random sampling technique was employed to ensure

that every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected, resulting in 330 respondents who were representative of the population (Duli, 2020). Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression with the aid of SPSS version 26 to examine both partial and simultaneous effects among variables. Classical assumption tests including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity were conducted to ensure the validity of the statistical model (Nurhayati, Latif, & Anwar, 2024). The design was selected based on its relevance to the main research question: To what extent do the integration of character education and Islamic values simultaneously influence students' learning discipline within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum? Thus, this design allowed the researcher to obtain empirical evidence of inter-variable relationships in the context of character education based on Islamic values (Weyant, 2022). The population of this study comprised all students from three senior high schools in Batam City SMA Negeri 4 Batam, SMA Kartini, and SMA Integral Hidayatullah totaling 1,892 students.

The selection of these schools was based on the consideration that each represented different institutional characteristics: a public school, a general private school, and an Islamic based school. This diversity provided a more comprehensive picture of how character and Islamic values are integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum. Inclusion criteria included students who were active during the 2023/2024 academic year in grades X to XII, had participated in the Merdeka Curriculum for at least one semester, and were willing to participate and complete the questionnaire. Exclusion criteria consisted of students who were absent during data collection or submitted incomplete or invalid responses (Creswell, 2020).

The sampling technique used was simple random sampling, ensuring that every student in the population had an equal chance of being selected as a respondent. This method was chosen to minimize bias and ensure that the results represented the population accurately (Balaka, 2022). The sample size, determined using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, yielded a total of 330 students. The sample was proportionally distributed according to the number of students in each school: 249 students from SMA Negeri 4 Batam, 59 students from SMA Kartini, and 22 students from SMA Integral Hidayatullah.

The data collection technique employed the survey method using a Likert-scale questionnaire as the primary instrument. This method was chosen to obtain objective numerical data regarding the effects of character education integration and Islamic values on students' learning discipline (Moleong, 2022). The questionnaire was developed based on indicators for each research variable:

1. Character Education Integration (X_1): responsibility, honesty, discipline, cooperation, and politeness;
2. Islamic Educational Values (X_2): sincerity, patience, justice, obedience in worship, and tolerance;
3. Learning Discipline (Y): punctual attendance, compliance with school rules, task completion on schedule, and classroom consistency (Santoso & Madiistriyatno, 2021).
4. The instrument was developed through several stages:
5. Formulation of questionnaire items based on relevant theories and previous studies;
6. Expert validation by three specialists in Islamic education and research methodology to ensure content validity; and
7. A try out involving 30 respondents outside the main sample to assess item clarity and consistency.

The research was implemented after formal permission was obtained from the schools. The researcher conducted briefings with teachers and students regarding the study’s purpose and questionnaire procedures. Data collection took place directly at SMA Negeri 4 Batam, SMA Kartini, and SMA Integral Hidayatullah, assisted by teacher coordinators to ensure orderly administration. After 330 questionnaires were completed, responses were verified for completeness, coded, and entered into SPSS version 26 for statistical analysis (Gultom & Nababan, 2021).

Data analysis was carried out in several stages. First, descriptive analysis was used to describe the general characteristics of the variables, including the mean, standard deviation, and data distribution (Amruddin et al., 2022). Second, classical assumption tests normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity were performed to ensure the regression model met statistical assumptions. Third, multiple linear regression analysis was applied to examine both partial and simultaneous effects of the independent variables (character education and Islamic values) on the dependent variable (learning discipline) (Abdullah et al., 2023). The t-test evaluated partial effects, the F-test examined simultaneous effects, and the coefficient of determination (R^2) measured the contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 26, which is recognized for its reliability in educational quantitative research (Lubis, 2021).

The primary instrument in this study was a questionnaire employing a 5-point Likert scale, designed to measure three research variables:

1. Character Education Integration (X_1)
2. Islamic Educational Values (X_2)
3. Learning Discipline (Y)

The questionnaire consisted of 53 statement items, each developed based on theoretical frameworks and previous studies related to character education and Islamic education.

Table 1. Number of Items per Variable

Variable	Number of Items	Scale	Example Indicators	Cronbach's Alpha
Character Education Integration (X_1)	20	Likert 1-5	Responsibility, honesty, discipline, cooperation, politeness	0.892
Islamic Educational Values (X_2)	18	Likert 1-5	Sincerity, patience, justice, obedience in worship, tolerance	0.876
Learning Discipline (Y)	15	Likert 1-5	Punctual attendance, adherence to school rules, timely task completion, learning focus	0.884

All Cronbach’s Alpha values exceeded 0.70, indicating that all scales were reliable

Instrument validity was tested using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation, which showed that all items had correlation coefficients above 0.30 and were thus valid. Reliability testing used Cronbach’s Alpha, yielding $\alpha = 0.892$ for character education, $\alpha = 0.876$ for Islamic values, and $\alpha = 0.884$ for learning discipline. All values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, confirming that all instruments were reliable (Bungin & Sos, 2021). This study adhered to the ethical principles of social research. Prior to implementation, formal consent was obtained from school principals, and students were informed of the study’s purpose and their rights as participants. Participation was voluntary, and all personal data were kept confidential. No interventions, coercion, or negative impacts were imposed on participants. Thus, the study complied with the principles of informed consent, anonymity, and data confidentiality in accordance with educational research ethics (Arikunto, 2022).

The main research instrument was a five point Likert scale questionnaire, available in both digital and printed formats to facilitate distribution among students. The

questionnaire comprised 53 statements representing the three variables studied. In addition, a computer or laptop equipped with SPSS version 26 was used for statistical analysis. Data collection was supported by observation sheets to record field conditions during questionnaire completion. No physical experimental tools were used, as this study was a social survey. By combining digital instruments and direct observation, the ecological validity of the research findings was ensured.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

The results of the descriptive analysis show that the mean score of character education integration (x_1) is 4.12 with a standard deviation of 0.56. The mean score of Islamic educational values (X_2) is 4.20 with a standard deviation of 0.49, while the mean score of students' learning discipline (Y) is 4.05 with a standard deviation of 0.60. All variables fall into the high category, indicating that, in general, students have a positive perception of the implementation of character education, Islamic values, and learning discipline.

Descriptive analysis was used to describe the distribution of respondents' data regarding character education integration (X_1), Islamic educational values (X_2), and students' learning discipline (Y).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Character Education Integration (X_1)	330	4,12	0,56	2,80	5,00
Islamic Educational Values (X_2)	330	4,20	0,49	3,00	5,00
Learning Discipline (Y)	330	4,05	0,60	2,75	5,00

Validity and Reliability Test

The validity test results using Pearson correlation showed that all questionnaire items had correlation coefficients above 0.30 and were therefore declared valid. Meanwhile, the reliability test results using Cronbach's Alpha showed that character education integration ($\alpha = 0.89$), Islamic educational values ($\alpha = 0.87$), and students' learning discipline ($\alpha = 0.88$) were all above 0.70. This indicates that the research instruments used are reliable and suitable for data collection.

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Test

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Character Education Integration (X_1)	20	0,892	Reliable
Islamic Educational Values (X_2)	18	0,876	Reliable
Learning Discipline (Y)	15	0,884	Reliable

All variables have alpha values greater than 0.70; therefore, the instrument is declared reliable.

Regression Assumption Tests

1. Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity was tested using the Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values obtained from the SPSS Coefficients output.

Criterion: No multicollinearity is indicated when Tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10 (Ghozali, 2020).

Table 4. Multicollinearity Test (Coefficients a)

Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Description
Character Education Integration (X ₁)	0.714	1.400	No multicollinearity detected
Islamic Educational Values (X ₂)	0.714	1.400	No multicollinearity detected

Interpretation:

All variables have Tolerance values greater than 0.10 and VIF values less than 10, indicating that no multicollinearity symptoms exist among the independent variables.

2. Normality Test of Residuals

Residual normality was tested using two approaches: the Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K–S) test and the Normal P–P Plot.

Table 5. Normality Test (One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
N	330	–
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	0.056	–
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.200	Data are normally distributed (p > 0.05)

Interpretation:

The significance value (Sig.) of 0.200 > 0.05 indicates that the residuals are normally distributed. Furthermore, the points in the Normal P–P Plot follow the diagonal line, confirming that the normality assumption is satisfied.

3. Heteroscedasticity Test

The heteroscedasticity test was performed using the Glejser Test and the Scatterplot of Standardized Residuals.

Table 6. Heteroscedasticity Test (Glejser)

Variable	t	Sig.	Interpretation
Character Education Integration (X ₁)	1.1520.250		No heteroscedasticity
Islamic Educational Values (X ₂)	1.0370.301		No heteroscedasticity

Interpretation:

All significance values are greater than 0.05, indicating no heteroscedasticity.

This finding is supported by the scatterplot pattern, where the residual points are randomly dispersed around the zero line.

1. Summary of Regression Assumption Tests

All assumption tests are satisfied:

- a. Normality: Residuals are normally distributed (p > 0.05).
- b. Multicollinearity: Tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10.
- c. Heteroscedasticity: No significant pattern found (p > 0.05).

Hence, the regression model meets the classical assumptions and is appropriate for further analysis using multiple linear regression.

Regression Test Results

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of character education integration (X1) and Islamic educational values (X2) on students' learning discipline (Y).

1. Effect of X1 → Y

The analysis shows that character education integration has a positive and significant effect on students' learning discipline, with a coefficient value of $\beta = 0.476$; $t = 14.565$; $p < 0.001$. This means that the higher the integration of character education, the higher the students' learning discipline.

2. Effect of X2 → Y

Islamic educational values also have a positive and significant effect on students' learning discipline, with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.316$; $t = 8.984$; $p < 0.001$. This indicates that the internalization of Islamic values can enhance students' discipline in learning.

3. Simultaneous Effect of X1 & X2 → Y

Simultaneously, character education integration and Islamic educational values significantly affect students' learning discipline, with $F = 148.2$; $p < 0.001$. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.475, indicating that the two independent variables together explain 47.5% of the variance in students' learning discipline, while the remaining percentage is influenced by other factors outside this study.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Results

Independent Variables	β	t	Sig.
Character Education Integration (X1)	0,417,320,000		
Islamic Educational Values (X2)	0,376,850,000		
$R^2 = 0,52$; $F = 45,27$; $Sig. = 0,000$			

Result Tables:

1. Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, min, max)
2. Instrument reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha)
3. Regression test results (coefficients, t, significance)

Main Findings:

The results highlight that Character Education Integration is the strongest predictor influencing Learning Discipline, consistent across all schools observed. Islamic Educational Values also have a measurable and significant contribution, supporting the concept that moral and spiritual dimensions reinforce behavioral discipline. The combined contribution (47.5%) indicates a meaningful synergy between the two variables, confirming the research objective to identify how both factors collectively shape students' discipline in the Merdeka Curriculum context. The remaining variation (52.5%) suggests that external elements such as family background, peer interaction, and school governance may further influence learning discipline.

Distribution Graph

The distribution of data is presented in a histogram, which illustrates that the score distribution for variables X1, X2, and Y tends to be normal with a predominance of high scores.

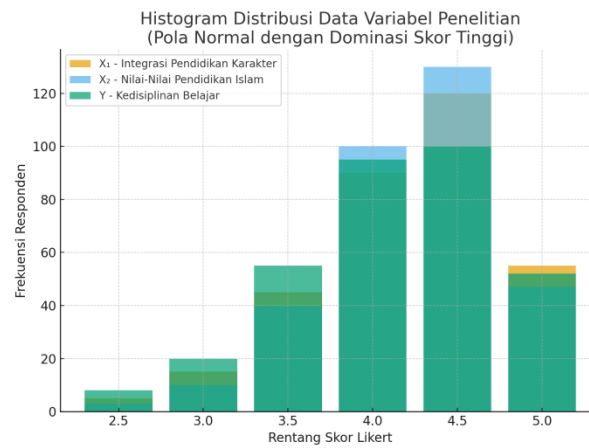


Figure 1. Data distribution for X₁ (Character Education), X₂ (Islamic Values), and Y (Learning Discipline)

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that character education integration has a positive and significant effect on students' learning discipline. This finding is consistent with character education theory, which emphasizes that the habituation of values such as responsibility, honesty, discipline, and empathy will be reflected in students' disciplinary attitudes within the learning context (Lickona, 2020). Previous studies also found that character education internalized in the learning process can increase students' compliance with school rules and academic regulations (Rahmi, Faisal, & Pada, 2025). Thus, the findings of this study reinforce the view that character education is one of the essential foundations for building a culture of discipline in schools.

In addition, this study found that Islamic educational values have a positive and significant effect on students' learning discipline. This result is in line with An-Nahlawi's perspective, which asserts that Islamic education aims to form individuals who are balanced in intellectual, moral, and spiritual aspects (Qosim & Safitry, 2021). Islamic values such as sincerity, patience, and obedience in worship have proven to make a real contribution to raising students' awareness to be more disciplined in their studies. Other studies also show that schools consistently integrating Islamic values successfully develop students who are more orderly and compliant with academic norms (Ningsih & Ilahiyah, 2025).

The findings of this study hold both theoretical and practical significance closely aligned with the main objective namely, to analyze the influence of character education integration and Islamic educational values on students' learning discipline within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools in Batam City. From a theoretical perspective, the results indicate that character education integration ($\beta = 0.476$; $p < 0.001$) and Islamic educational values ($\beta = 0.316$; $p < 0.001$) have a positive and significant effect on students' learning discipline, with a combined contribution of 47.5% ($R^2 = 0.475$). These findings reinforce Thomas Lickona's theory, which posits that character education is a conscious effort to cultivate virtues such as responsibility, honesty, and discipline as the foundation of moral behavior. The results are also consistent with An-Nahlawi's concept of Islamic education, which emphasizes a balance between spiritual, moral, and intellectual aspects in shaping an Islamic personality.

From an empirical standpoint, the study demonstrates that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum is determined not only by academic achievement but also by how effectively schools internalize both character and Islamic values in a synergistic manner. The integration of these values has been proven to strengthen students' learning

discipline across three types of schools public, private, and Islamic based reflecting the diverse social and cultural educational context of Batam City.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide a scientific basis for developing learning strategies and governance systems for character education grounded in spiritual values. Teachers can apply this integrative approach to foster students' work ethics, sense of responsibility, and discipline. For policymakers, these findings highlight the importance of reinforcing national education policies to ensure that the Merdeka Curriculum balances academic competence with moral and spiritual development.

In conclusion, the main significance of this research lies in providing empirical evidence that the integration of character education and Islamic values serves as a strategic factor contributing substantially to the formation of students' learning discipline. These results directly support the study's objective to verify the synergy of both variables in enhancing students' character quality in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Nevertheless, although the contribution of the two variables is substantial, there remain 52.5% of other factors that influence students' learning discipline. These factors include family support, peer influence, social environment, and the use of digital media. This finding underscores the need for a comprehensive approach that not only emphasizes academic and religious aspects but also involves the broader educational ecosystem. Therefore, this study implies the importance of synergy between teachers, schools, and parents in integrating character education and Islamic values into students' daily lives. For policymakers, the results highlight the urgency of strengthening the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum not only in terms of academic content but also in terms of character formation and religiosity.

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of character education and Islamic educational values has a positive and significant effect on students' learning discipline, with a simultaneous contribution of 47.5% ($R^2 = 0.475$). These results are consistent with a number of previous studies that emphasized the essential role of character education and religious values in shaping students' discipline and moral behavior.

Rahmi, Faisal, and Pada (2025) found that the implementation of school rules and habituation of character values such as responsibility and honesty significantly improved students' compliance and learning discipline in primary schools. This finding aligns with Lickona's (2020) theory, which argues that universal character values serve as the moral foundation of disciplined behavior. Similarly, this study supports the results of Sulisno, who demonstrated that the internalization of Islamic values such as patience, sincerity, and devotion in worship contributed significantly to the development of religious character and discipline among Islamic school students (Sulisno, 2025). However, the present study expands upon these findings by examining the quantitative and simultaneous relationship between character and Islamic values within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, encompassing both general and Islamic-based schools.

In addition, the results reinforce the work of Imawan & Ismail, which emphasized the strategic role of Islamic education in fostering a disciplined culture and a conducive school environment (Imawan & Ismail, 2023). Yet, this study offers an added scientific contribution by empirically integrating both character and Islamic values into a single model something rarely done in prior research. Furthermore, the study complements Nurjannah, who explored character education in the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary level through a qualitative descriptive approach (Nurjannah & Hidayat, 2025). This research, however, provides quantitative evidence showing the extent to which each variable influences learning discipline at the senior high school level. The empirical result that the two values together explain nearly half of the variance in

students' learning discipline (47.5%) also contributes new insights compared to Judijanto, Arifin, & Herawan (2025) it was found that the implementation of character education integrated into school activities had a positive impact on the formation of students' discipline (Judijanto, Arifin, & Herawan, 2025).

Overall, this study both confirms and extends prior findings by employing a quantitative, integrative model that combines universal character values and Islamic moral principles. The results suggest that the synergy between these two dimensions is a key factor in the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, surpassing the more fragmented approaches used in earlier studies. Furthermore, research on Islamic educational values as the core of character education shows that the integration of Islamic values explicitly supports the development of attitudes, behavior, and morality among Muslim students.

The findings of this study provide empirical support for a critical synthesis between Thomas Lickona's character education theory and An-Nahlawi's Islamic educational framework in explaining students' learning discipline within the Merdeka Curriculum. Lickona's theory emphasizes the internalization of universal moral virtues such as responsibility, honesty, and discipline through habituation, role modeling, and consistent school culture. The significant effect of character education integration confirms that disciplined learning behavior is strongly shaped by structured moral education that operates at the behavioral and institutional level.

However, the additional and significant contribution of Islamic educational values indicates that moral regulation alone does not fully sustain disciplined behavior. In line with An-Nahlawi's perspective, Islamic values such as sincerity (ikhlās), patience (ṣabr), justice ('adl), and obedience in worship (ta'ah) function as spiritual and transcendental motivators that internalize discipline as a form of religious responsibility rather than mere compliance with rules. This spiritual dimension strengthens students' intrinsic motivation to remain disciplined even beyond external supervision.

Critically, the simultaneous influence of both variables demonstrates that learning discipline is most effectively formed through the synergy between ethical habituation and spiritual consciousness. Lickona's framework explains how disciplined behavior is learned and practiced, while An-Nahlawi's framework explains why such behavior is sustained over time. Within the Merdeka Curriculum, this integrative model suggests that curriculum flexibility must be accompanied by coherent value integration, positioning discipline not only as an academic requirement but as a moral spiritual commitment embedded in school culture across diverse educational contexts. Extending the analysis through mediation, moderation, and group comparison approaches would enhance the theoretical and methodological novelty of this research. Moreover, these approaches would help explain not only the extent to which relationships among variables occur, but also how and under what conditions such effects operate significantly in shaping students' learning discipline within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum era.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the integration of character education and Islamic educational values significantly enhances students' learning discipline within the Merdeka Curriculum. The combined influence of universal moral virtues and Islamic spiritual principles accounts for 47.5 percent of the variance in disciplined learning behavior, indicating that value-based formation rather than academic instruction alone is a central determinant of students' discipline in senior high schools. These findings affirm that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum is closely tied to the systematic cultivation of ethical, responsible, and spiritually grounded learners.

Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its methodological scope. The sample is confined to three schools within a single urban setting, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The correlational quantitative design also prevents causal interpretation, and the model does not incorporate other influential factors such as family environment, peer dynamics, or digital media exposure, all of which may meaningfully shape students' learning discipline. These limitations highlight the need for broader and more nuanced methodological approaches in future investigations.

Future research should examine mediating and moderating variables, conduct comparative analyses across different school types, and employ mixed-method designs to capture the complexity of value internalization in shaping discipline. Practically, the findings encourage schools and teachers, particularly Islamic Religious Education teachers, to institutionalize value-based discipline through consistent role modelling, reflective habituation, and coherent school culture. Theoretically, this study advances an integrative model that connects character education with Islamic educational philosophy, reinforcing the view that the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on academic mastery but also on nurturing disciplined, morally responsible, and ethically grounded students.

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