



A Critical Analysis of the Integration of Humanistic Philosophical Values in Islamic Education: Between the Ethics of Empathy and the Rigidity of Dogma

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Abstract: A Critical Analysis of the Integration of Humanistic Philosophical Values in Islamic Education: Between the Ethics of Empathy and the Rigidity of Dogma

Objective: This study critically examines the integration of humanistic philosophical values into Islamic education by highlighting the tension between the ethics of empathy and the rigidity of dogmatic instruction. **Method:** This research method uses critical-hermeneutic analysis, data collection using literature documents (textbooks), data analysis with hermeneutic interpretation, and ideological evaluation. **Results:** Although universal humanistic values align with Islamic teachings (*ihsan* and *'adl*), the religious education curriculum remains normative and formal, and has not yet optimally integrated the empathetic dimension. **Conclusion:** There is a dichotomy between the cognitive-formal approach to Islamic education in madrasahs and the social-empathetic approach in pesantren, reflecting the difference between academic aspects and character building and social empathy. **Contribution:** This study reinforces the paradigm of Islamic education that is transformative, contextual, civilized and relevant to the challenges of religious education in a pluralistic and complex society.

Keyword: Humanistic philosophy; Islamic education; Ethics of empathy; Rigidity of dogma

Abstrak: Analisis Kritis Integrasi Nilai-nilai Pemikiran Filsafat Humanistik dalam Pendidikan Islam: Antara Etika Empati dan Keteguhan Dogma

Tujuan: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara kritis integrasi nilai-nilai filsafat humanistik dalam pendidikan Islam dengan menyoroti ketegangan antara etika empati dan keteguhan dogma. **Metode:** Metode penelitian ini menggunakan analisis kritis-hermeneutik, pengumpulan data menggunakan dokumen literatur (buku teks), analisis data dengan interpretasi hermeneutis dan evaluasi ideologis. **Hasil:** Meskipun nilai humanistik universal sejalan dengan ajaran Islam (*ihsan* dan *'adl*), kurikulum pendidikan agama masih normatif-formal dan belum mengintegrasikan dimensi empatik secara optimal. **Kesimpulan:** Terdapat dikotomi antara pendekatan pendidikan Islam kognitif-formal di madrasah dan sosial-empatik di pesantren, yang mencerminkan perbedaan antara aspek akademik dan pembentukan karakter serta empati sosial. **Kontribusi:** Penelitian ini memperkuat paradigma pendidikan Islam yang transformatif, kontekstual, dan berkeadaban, serta relevan untuk tantangan pendidikan agama di masyarakat plural dan kompleks.

Kata Kunci: Filsafat humanistik; Pendidikan islam; Etika empati; Keteguhan dogma

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A. INTRODUCTION

The world of education, particularly Islamic education, is currently facing increasingly complex multidimensional challenges in the era of globalization, digitalization, and value pluralism (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020). One of the crucial issues that continues to surface is the tension between humanistic values, which emphasize empathy, freedom of thought, and universal humanity, and religious values that are normative, theocentric, and dogmatic (Karimullah & Mahbubi, 2023). Ideally, religious education should shape the holistic personality of individuals, however, it often becomes trapped in textual, formalistic, and indoctrinative approaches, hindering epistemological and pedagogical dialogue with the humanistic values that are rapidly developing in the modern world (Preda, 2021). This approach runs the risk of producing learners who understand religious dogma cognitively but lack sensitivity to social realities and transformative ethical values.

The crisis of empathy and intolerance has become a serious challenge in contemporary socio-religious life, particularly within the context of Islamic education. The World Values Survey Abdullah (2022) reports a decline in the social tolerance index in Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia, as reflected in the rising resistance to religious, ideological, and moral diversity. One contributing factor to this phenomenon is the normative and dogmatic tendency of religious education, which emphasizes memorization and literal obedience without providing space for dialogue or value reflection. This weakens students' ability to respond empathetically and constructively to diversity (Usman et al., 2017). Research by Afriyanto & Anandari (2024) further supports these findings, showing that an exclusive religious education curriculum with minimal humanistic approaches significantly contributes to the emergence of intolerant attitudes among students.

The epistemological tension between the values of humanistic philosophy, such as empathy, equality, and respect for human dignity, and rigid religious approaches constitutes a fundamental issue in Islamic pedagogy (Shalihin & Sholihin, 2022). If not addressed seriously, Islamic education risks losing its relevance in forming holistic human beings, individuals who are not only spiritually devout but also ethically and dialogically capable of coexisting in a pluralistic society. However, Islam inherently possesses a strong normative foundation that affirms humanitarian values. As stated in the Qur'an: "*O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing and All-Aware*" (Qur'an, Al-Hujurat: 13). This verse emphasizes the principle of equality among human beings, regardless of race and ethnicity. Similarly, *Surah Al-Ma'un* positions social empathy as an essential manifestation of faith. Thus, the integration of humanistic philosophical values into Islamic education is not a form of secularization but rather an effort to recontextualize the transcendental values of Islam so they may be more grounded and relevant in modern life (Abdullah, 2022; Suhendi et al., 2020).

This integrative effort also serves as a response to critiques of religious education models that are exclusive, textualist, and reproductive in nature. While prior studies have indeed highlighted the importance of multicultural education and tolerance from an Islamic perspective (Arfanaldy & Pamuncak, 2025; Sulaiman et al., 2023), few have explicitly analyzed the dialectic between the ethics of empathy and the rigidity of dogma within the framework of Islamic educational philosophy. This represents a research gap that needs to be addressed by constructing a new paradigm of Islamic education that is humanistic and transformative. Such an approach will not only enrich theoretical discourse but also directly impact the reconstruction of curriculum design, teacher pedagogy, and the development of student character to become both religious and inclusive individuals.

Within the framework of humanism, humans are viewed as beings who possess dignity, rationality, and ethical capacity to act based on empathy and social responsibility (Poole, 2019). This perspective challenges educational models that emphasize singular authority and

blind obedience to doctrine. On the other hand, religious education has historically been positioned as the guardian of values and doctrines derived from divine revelation. When these two approaches meet in the classroom and within formal education curricula, epistemological dichotomies and paradigmatic conflicts often emerge between humanistic openness and the rigidity of religious dogma.

In the Indonesian context, characterized by both multiculturalism and religiosity, and amid the rise of intolerance, extremism, and global humanitarian crises, the need to design a religious education approach that not only strengthens spiritual dimensions but also fosters social ethics and empathy has become increasingly urgent. The report *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (UNESCO, 2021) calls for a transformation of education toward a more inclusive, humane, and human-centered direction. This aligns with the ideas of Aloni's (2011), who emphasizes that education must substantially integrate humanitarian ethics into the structure of moral and religious education.

Global curriculum trends have shown a shift from instructional and dogmatic approaches toward dialogical, reflective, and humanistic approaches. However, to date, there have been few conceptual and practical approaches capable of fully bridging this duality within the field of religious education, particularly in the contexts of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and local beliefs in Indonesia and Southeast Asia (Tan & Ibrahim, 2017). This situation creates both a practical and methodological challenge in developing a religious education system that can harmoniously accommodate theological values and humanistic principles.

Several studies have attempted to address this issue. Karimullah & Mahbubi (2023) highlighted efforts to build a bridge between Islamic values and universal humanistic values, but they also noted resistance from conservative groups toward this approach. Poole (2019) emphasized the importance of empathetic ethics in interpreting religion progressively, while Preda (2021) proposed a new model of religiosity rooted in Mircea Eliade's humanism to overcome dogmatism that hinders the development of contextual and humane spirituality. Tan & Ibrahim (2017) offered a hybrid approach in Islamic and Confucian education aimed at integrating humanistic values, but their study did not address resistance from religious institutions and authorities in the Southeast Asian context.

This article aims to critically examine the integration of humanistic philosophical values in Islamic education by highlighting the tension between ethical principles and doctrinal rigidity. Through a critical philosophical approach and in-depth literature review, this study seeks to contribute theoretically to the development of contemporary Islamic educational philosophy and practically to the reformulation of Islamic education systems that are more inclusive, reflective, and oriented toward the formation of holistic human beings.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using critical analysis methods focused on reflective and argumentative evaluation of humanistic philosophical thought and its implications in religious education. A critical analysis approach was chosen for its capacity to uncover power relations, ideological assumptions, and hidden epistemological structures behind religious education practices and discourses, which tend to be normative and dogmatic. Through this approach, the study not only describes problems in a descriptive manner but also explores latent dimensions that influence policy directions, teaching practices, and religious education curricula.

This research was conducted in 2025. The data for this study were obtained from a document-based literature review, including academic journals, books on the philosophy of education, religious education policy documents, and both national and international curriculum documents relevant to humanistic values and spirituality. Additionally, secondary sources were used, such as writings by Islamic education scholars and Western philosophers that served as conceptual foundations for the analysis process. The literature was selected purpo-

sively based on thematic relevance and its contribution to the discourse of contemporary religious education.

In the data analysis process, the study used three main approaches: hermeneutic interpretation, ideological evaluation, and theoretical synthesis. Hermeneutic interpretation was conducted by reading and interpreting texts in depth to extract philosophical meanings and ethical values contained within them, especially those related to the concepts of *ihsan*, empathy, and dogma. Ideological evaluation was used to critique hegemonic narratives in religious education and assess the potential for repression of reflective, inclusive, and humanistic values. Theoretical synthesis aimed to construct new thinking capable of bridging spiritual principles in religion with humanistic approaches in a contextual and systemic manner.

The validity of the data was strengthened through triangulation of literature sources and dialogue among theoretical frameworks, both from Islamic thought traditions, such as al-Ghazali and the value of *ihsan*, and from Western educational philosophers, including the works of Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers, and Nel Noddings. With this approach, the study aims to provide a critical, in-depth, and solution-oriented reading of the problems in religious education, particularly in developing a more humanistic, reflective, and transformative educational paradigm.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on the critical analysis of the values of humanistic philosophical thought in Islamic education, the findings are schematically presented as follows:

1. Textual Structure (Values of Humanistic Philosophical Thought in Islamic Education)

The integration of humanistic philosophical values in Islamic education, based on the structure of the text contained therein (between the ethics of empathy and the rigidity of dogma), is presented in the following table:

No	Aspect Analyzed	Description	Key Figures	Implications for Islamic Education
1	The Concept of Humanism in Education	The humanistic perspective emphasizes respect for human dignity, freedom, and the fulfillment of basic human needs in the educational context.	John Dewey, Mortimer Adler	Formulating and organizing a more inclusive and humane education system that considers human well-being.
2	Similarities between Humanism and Islam	Aligning humanistic values with Islamic principles, such as respect for human rights and justice.	The Qur'an, Hadith, Humanistic Philosophy	Integrating humanistic values to strengthen Islamic values in education.
3	Humanity-Based Education	Education based on humanity involves the intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of the individual.	Paulo Freire, Syed Naquib al-Attas	Developing an educational system that emphasizes the balance between knowledge and morality.
4	The Relationship between Religion and Humanism	Discussing the relationship between Islamic teachings and humanistic principles that prioritize justice and well-being.	Islamic Educational Philosophy, Al-Ghazali	Emphasizing character development based on religious and humanistic values.
5	Holistic Approach in Education	Education that prioritizes the development of the whole individual:	Muhammad Iqbal, Ki Hajar Dewantara	Enhancing individual well-being through a more comprehensive and humane approach.

No	Aspect Analyzed	Description	Key Figures	Implications for Islamic Education
6	Challenges in Humanistic Integration	intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual. Identifying difficulties in integrating humanistic values into Islamic education systems, such as differences in understanding.	Case Studies in Islamic Educational Institutions	Addressing challenges through curriculum reform and teacher training.
7	Solutions for Effective Humanistic Integration	Proposing solutions for integrating humanistic values into Islamic education, including curriculum development and educator training.	Contemporary Islamic Educational Philosophy	Improving education quality by developing a curriculum based on human values.

2. The Concept of Humanism in Education

The philosophy of humanism in education emphasizes human dignity, individual freedom, and the fulfillment of basic human needs. This principle focuses on the holistic development of human potential. By understanding the concept of humanism, Islamic education can better respect the basic needs of individuals, such as the right to education and the freedom to develop personal potential. This approach can enhance awareness of the importance of education that is not only knowledge-based but also attentive to the human aspects of the individual.

3. Similarities between the Concepts of Humanism and Islam

Although humanism is often regarded as a secular perspective, its core values, such as the respect for human rights, are aligned with Islamic principles that value human dignity and individual freedom. Integrating humanistic values with Islamic teachings can strengthen the message of respect for human rights, reinforce the principle of justice, and uphold human dignity within the Islamic education system. This contributes to the creation of a more inclusive education system focused on human well-being.

4. Humanity-Based Education

Humanity-based education focuses on fulfilling the social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of individuals. From a humanistic perspective, learning should respect individual freedom and provide opportunities for learners to fully explore their potential. Islamic education based on humanistic principles can create a more humane learning environment, where individuals are not merely seen as passive recipients of knowledge, but as individuals with the right to determine their path in life and reach their fullest potential.

5. The Relationship between Religion and Humanism

In the context of Islamic education, religious values are compatible with humanistic principles that emphasize humanity, well-being, and freedom. This is evident in Islamic teachings that value the dignity of every individual. Incorporating humanistic values into Islamic education can strengthen individual character, foster compassion for others, and support the development of a more just and civilized society. This also demonstrates that religion and humanistic values are not necessarily in conflict but can be mutually complementary.

6. Challenges in Humanistic Integration

Although the idea of integrating humanistic values into Islamic education brings many benefits, several challenges must be addressed, such as differences in understanding the concept of humanism and difficulties in implementing these values into the existing curriculum.

These challenges indicate that achieving effective integration requires reform in curriculum design, teacher training, and pedagogical approaches. In addition, a deep and critical understanding of humanistic values within Islamic education is required.

The analysis indicates that the integration of humanistic philosophical values into Islamic education is theoretically well-grounded, both in Islamic teachings and in national curriculum documents. The concept of humanism in education, which emphasizes on the recognition of individual dignity, potential, and freedom, is essentially aligned with Islamic educational principles such as the development of human nature (*fitrah*) (QS. Ar-Rum: 30), the honoring of human dignity (*karāmah insāniyyah*), and the cultivation of character (*akhlāq*) (Qur'an, Al-Qalam: 4). This perspective is reinforced by Maslow's idea that self-actualization is unattainable without space for the expression of empathetic values and inner human experiences (Jailani & Huda, 2024). However, in practice, Islamic education often remains tied to cognitive-doctrinal approaches that prioritize memorization and the reproduction of normative discourse, which limits the development of students' humanistic dimensions.

There are also essential similarities between humanistic values and Islamic teachings. Values such as empathy (*rahmah*), justice (*'adl*), and equality (*musāwāh*) are central to Islam and are emphasized in many verses of the Qur'an. Qur'an, Al-Hujurat:13 affirms the principle of human equality, while Qur'an *surah* Al-Ma'un links social concern with true faith. In traditional *pesantren* practice, these values are reflected in forms such as humility (*tawadhu'*), service (*khidmah*), and mutual assistance (*ta'āwun*), as shown in the research of Siswanto & Mukaffan (2024), who states that theocentric humanistic character has long been the spirit of classical Islamic education.

Nonetheless, when examining formal documents such as KMA 183 of 2019, it appears that the value of *ihsan*, intended as the spiritual foundation of Islamic education, has not yet been fully developed into contextual and practical learning models. In Islamic Education (PAI) textbooks at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI, equivalent to elementary school) level, for example, empathy is mentioned as a moral goal, but there is no explicit pedagogical strategy provided to cultivate such experiences in students' social lives. Sopian & Hidayatulloh (2024) observe that Islamic education textbooks still tend to focus on legal norms of *sharī'ah* and worship obligations, without creating space for students' reflective and affective engagement with their surrounding reality.

This reveals an epistemological tension between humanistic values and rigid religious approaches. Islamic education tends to fall into a dichotomy between normative-dogmatic instruction in *madrasahs* and social-empathetic habituation in *pesantrens*. Ali (2020) observes that curriculum integration between the *madrasah* and *pesantren* systems has not yet achieved harmony in shaping a personality that is both religious and humanistic. On the contrary, *pesantrens* are still more effective in internalizing social values through practices such as *halaqah* discussions, orphan care, and daily social engagement. This is supported through a study by Rosidin et al. (2024), which emphasizes the need for a moderate approach based on the humanities to contextualized *sharī'ah* values within a multicultural and pluralistic world.

The major challenges in integrating humanistic values into Islamic education can be classified into three main dimensions. First, the limitations of formal curricula, which still focus on cognitive achievement without explicitly including affective and social indicators. Second, ideological resistance from certain groups who suspect that the humanistic approach represents a liberalization of Islamic education. Third, the gap between theory and practice in the field, where empathy is taught as a moral concept rather than a concrete experience. A case study from *Pesantren Al-Falah* in Pamekasan (Siswanto & Mukaffan, 2024) shows that the practice of *ngaji bandongan* accompanied by social mentoring for orphans serves as a tangible example of empathy integration, which is not found in the *madrasah* system that remains focuses more on exams and cognitive achievement.

Nevertheless, this study is limited in scope due to its descriptive approach and has not yet reached the stage of quantitatively measuring the effectiveness of the empathetic approach in comprehensively shaping students' character. Therefore, further research is needed using longitudinal methods and ethnographic approaches within Islamic educational institutions. In addition, the development of an integrative module based on KMA 183, which combines the principles of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* and *ihsan* values, needs to be systematically advanced. Finally, training programs for Islamic education teachers should be directed toward promoting reflective pedagogy, enabling students to directly experience values such as empathy and social responsibility as part of a meaningful and liberating learning process.

Discussion

1. Evaluation of Epistemological Differences between Humanism and Islam

The epistemological differences between humanistic thought and Islamic religion represent a significant source of tension in contemporary religious education. Recent studies show that the root of this divergence lies in how each framework obtains and justifies knowledge. Humanism relies on a rational-empathetic epistemology, which emphasizes human experience, critical reasoning, and the capacity for empathy as sources of ethical truth (Horsthemke, 2018). In contrast, religion, particularly in the form of normative religious education, is based on an authoritative-dogmatic epistemology, where truth is regarded as absolute, derived from sacred texts and religious authority, and taught through mechanisms of obedience (Jakovljević & Jakovljević, 2021).

This difference produces a pedagogical dilemma in religious education practice. On the one hand, the humanistic approach encourages learners to think reflectively and make autonomous moral judgments based on empathy. On the other hand, traditional religion often demands unquestioning acceptance of doctrine. As a result, a crucial question arises: how is it possible to foster empathy and moral autonomy within a system that structurally demands total compliance with dogma?

The implications are quite profound. Sahin (2021) notes that religious education that overemphasizes obedience may suppress students' potential to develop a love of knowledge and a search for truth that is both humanistic and transcendent. In the long term, such an approach risks producing a generation that is formally religious but not ethically humanistic, individuals who are ritually devout but lacking in social concern and moral sensitivity. Meanwhile, transformative approaches, such as those proposed by Al-Kassimi (2023) and Nixon (2012), attempt to bridge this gap through the concept of epistemic decentering, which refers to an awareness of epistemological plurality and the rejection of the supremacy of any single knowledge system. In this context, dogma is no longer positioned as the sole truth, but is instead interpreted contextually through empathy and social dialogue.

The successful integration of humanistic and religious values in education is strongly influenced by several supporting factors. These include a curriculum that balances dogmatic teaching with reflective ethics, teachers who not only master religious content but also possess pedagogical competence and philosophical reflection, and a learning environment that allows space for dialogue, critical discussion, and diverse perspectives. However, there are also major challenges that hinder this integration process. One of the most serious obstacles is the resistance from conservative religious authorities, who often view the humanistic approach with suspicion, perceiving it as a form of moral relativism that threatens doctrinal purity (Alak, 2023). In addition, the lack of theoretical understanding of interdisciplinary epistemology and fears of losing religious authority in the public sphere also serve as significant barriers.

Although these issues have been widely discussed in conceptual literature, this study is limited by a lack of empirical data based on case studies within formal educational institutions, particularly in Muslim-majority countries and conservative religious communities. Studies such as those by Jakovljević & Jakovljević (2021) remain normative in nature and do

not yet offer an in-depth explanation of how these epistemological dynamics unfold in everyday teaching practices. Therefore, further research is highly recommended using educational ethnography to directly understand the interaction between empathy and obedience in classroom settings. Additionally, the development of evaluation instruments to measure the success of integrating empathy and dogma, as well as interfaith studies to enrich pluralistic perspectives, is also necessary.

Overall, the epistemological tension between empathy and obedience should not be seen as an unbridgeable obstacle, but rather as an opportunity to reconstruct a more reflective, inclusive, and civilized paradigm of religious education. Religious education that integrates spiritual values with a humanistic spirit holds great potential to produce a generation that is not only ritually religious but also socially humanistic in practice. This paradigm creates new space for religious education to become a transformative vehicle that brings together revelation and reason, obedience and empathy, doctrine and dialogue.

2. A Critique of Rigid Dogmatic Implementation: Its Impact on Learning and Student Character

The rigid implementation of religious dogma in education has long been a focus of concern among educational and philosophical thinkers. Various studies have shown that learning systems that overly emphasize absolute obedience without space for reflection or critical dialogue can have negative effects on students' intellectual and moral development. Dogma that is imposed as absolute truth, without undergoing a dialogical internalization process, risks turning religion into a tool for behavioural control rather than a space for spiritual growth and authentic morality (Malicse, n.d.-b). As a result, students are shaped within a cognitive structure that limits their moral autonomy and distances religion from reflective and contextual life.

One of the fundamental consequences of an education system built on rigid dogmatic foundations is the development of a dichotomous mindset that recognizes only right or wrong, black or white, while overlooking the ethical complexity of real life (Malicse, n.d.-c). In such a context, students not only lose the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills but are also at risk of becoming exclusive individuals who are resistant to difference. Values such as empathy, openness, and inclusivity, which should be integral to moral education, are instead stifled by rigid learning structures that are defensive against intellectual inquiry.

This condition is further exacerbated by authoritarian structures that still dominate many religious educational institutions, where the teacher is positioned as the sole authority of truth and students as passive recipients. Educational traditions based on memorization, the legitimization of the teacher's authority as a symbolic representative of the religious institution, and fears of the rise of moral relativism continue to reproduce rigid dogmatic approaches. Conversely, the growing global awareness of the importance of character education based on empathy and dialogue, supported by findings from educational psychology research confirming the positive correlation between value reflection and moral development, serve as balancing forces that demand reform in pedagogical approaches (Malicse, n.d.-a).

Although critiques of rigid dogma are relevant and necessary, it is equally important to note that not all forms of normative teaching have negative effects. Many religious values, such as compassion, justice, and forgiveness, can serve as strong ethical foundations when delivered within a participatory and contextual pedagogical framework. In this regard, the limitations of research that remain normative and lack field observation must be addressed through empirical studies grounded in actual practices across various religious educational institutions. Ethnographic observation, longitudinal research, and pedagogical intervention studies based on humanistic values are important to bridge theoretical critique and practical transformation.

Therefore, the critique of rigid dogma should not be interpreted as a rejection of religion itself, but rather it reflects a commitment to promoting a more reflective, dialogical, and con-

textual understanding of spirituality. Religious education must be restructured so that it does not merely become a space for reproducing symbolic obedience, but truly serves as a vehicle for deep moral character formation a place where belief, empathy, and freedom of thought do not negate one another but instead mutually reinforce the development of a generation that is both religious and humane.

3. The Constructive Potential of Humanistic Values in Religious Education: Convergence of *Ihsan*, Empathy, and Morality

Humanistic values such as empathy, compassion, and respect for human dignity are not only compatible with religious teachings but also complement and strengthen spiritual values, particularly in the context of Islamic education. Recent studies show that core concepts in Islam, such as *ihsan* and *akhlaq*, share deep commonalities with the empathetic ethics in Western moral philosophy. *Ihsan*, which refers to acting with benevolence and excellence, is not merely a ritualistic aspect but requires an inner dimension of spiritual awareness and empathetic relationships with others (Abuzar & Khondoker, 2024). In this sense, *ihsan* functions as an epistemological bridge between divine values and social awareness and can thus be viewed as a form of virtue ethics within the Islam.

Findings from the study by Ismail et al. (2024) in the *pesantren* education context demonstrate that practices such as *halaqah* and *talaqqi* are not only traditional teaching methods but also essential mediums for developing compassion, civility (*adab*), and spiritual growth. This form of learning, which are deeply personal and spiritual in nature, foster greater emotional maturity and moral integrity in students. This indicates that humanistic values are not only compatible with religious education but have long the essence of authentic religious education practices, which are not merely cognitively oriented.

The integration of *ihsan* and empathy can offer a promising foundation for developing a more transformative and grounded religious education curriculum. Ibrahim et al. (2024) affirm that empathy-based religious learning fosters a more flexible and resilient moral awareness, particularly within pluralistic and diverse societies. Through this approach, students are not only taught to understand doctrine textually but also to reflect on it in real-life contexts filled with diverse values and complex social realities. This encourages the development of individuals who are religious in a substantive rather than merely ritualistic sense, possess a heightened social sensitivity to justice, tolerance, and social responsibility.

This convergence carries broad implications, not only for the aims of religious education but also for teaching methods and teacher orientations. An approach that emphasizes inner transformation over external behavior fosters a learning environment that promotes reflection, dialogue, and openness (Munawarsyah, 2023). The Sufi tradition, which emphasizes *adab* and inner purification, also serves as a strong supporting factor for reinforcing humanistic values in religious education, aligning with global awareness of the importance of participatory and relational character education. A transformative educational model that frames ethics as a dynamic and intersubjective process is particularly relevant for contemporary religious education curricula.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Religious education models that are still heavily text-based and overly focused on cognitive aspects often neglect the affective and social dimensions of learning. Concerns over the “liberalization” of values and resistance from conservative groups toward humanistic approaches present further barriers. Furthermore, the limited pedagogical capacity of teachers to implement reflective and empathy-based approaches also hinders the effectiveness of this integration.

Despite these obstacles, the potential contribution of this approach is highly promising. Unfortunately, most studies are still limited to the Southeast Asian context and have yet to explore interfaith and cross-national dimensions extensively. Moreover, curriculum development that explicitly combines the values of *ihsan* and empathy has not been thoroughly stu-

died through comprehensive empirical approaches. Therefore, future efforts should include cross-national comparative studies, experimental research on the effectiveness of *ihsan*-humanistic integrated curricula, and the design of teacher training programs rooted in spirituality and transcendent humanism.

Overall, the humanistic approach in religious education not only enriches the discourse on spirituality but also broadens the function of religious education itself. By placing *ihsan* at the center of ethics and empathy as a pedagogical instrument, religious education can serve as a platform for shaping whole human beings which are spiritually devout, socially engaged, and morally aware. The convergence of religious and humanistic values is not only possible but also essential to addressing the educational challenges of the twenty-first century, which demand a deep synthesis between faith and humanity.

4. Critical Implications for Curriculum and Teaching Practices: An Analysis of Policy and Instructional Approaches

The integration of humanistic values such as *ihsan* and empathy in religious education cannot be separated from curriculum design and the quality of classroom teaching practices. Recent studies have shown that the paradigm shift in religious education from dogmatic models to transformative approaches largely depends on how teachers manage values, construct meaning, and students' learning experiences. [Muttaqin & Ali \(2024\)](#) found that Islamic education teachers who act not merely serve as conveyors of dogma but as facilitators of values are more capable in developing students' social and moral skills. This kind of approach provides a strong foundation for aligning religious education with the complex and culturally diverse spiritual needs of society.

This finding is supported by [Inayah \(2025\)](#) who highlights the teaching model of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as an exemplary model in combining normative firmness with empathetic gentleness. This prophetic approach demonstrates that spirituality and humanity need not be opposed to each other, but can coexist harmoniously within a pedagogy of compassion, relevance, and contextual sensitivity. In terms of curriculum development, [Abuzar & Khondoker \(2024\)](#) emphasize that core values such as '*adl* (justice), *ihsan* (excellence in virtue), and *amanah* (responsibility) are epistemological elements that must be embodied within the structure of religious curricula to avoid being trapped in formalism lacking moral substance. In this way, religious education has the potential to serve as a medium for both spiritual and social transformation, provided it is designed on the basis of prophetic ethics and profound universal values.

The contribution of this approach to religious education reform is highly significant. It shifts the orientation from merely transmitting doctrine to achieving inner and social transformation. [Jalaldeen & Al-Hidabi \(2025\)](#), in their analysis of Al-Ghazali's thought, highlight the importance of sincerity and empathy as key professional competencies for religious education teachers. Teachers are not only expected to possess content mastery but also serve as moral exemplars who internalize spiritual values and transform them into inspiring pedagogical actions. As a result, the teacher's role transcends technical instruction and become existential, shaping students' character through the embodiment of values and the authenticity of relationships.

However, this transformation faces several challenges. On one hand, there is strong support from religious narratives rich in values of compassion and justice, as well as from educational reform initiatives such as the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides space for pedagogical innovation. Progressive teacher communities also play a crucial role in promoting reflective and empathy-based approaches. On the other hand, challenges arise from the educational policy structure for religious education, which remains largely administrative and normative. Teachers are often constrained by evaluation standards that focus solely on cognitive achievement and memorization, while the affective and character dimensions of students are frequently neglected. In addition, the lack of in-depth training on reflective and transforma-

tive pedagogy leaves many teachers unprepared to transition from traditional teaching patterns to more dialogic and empathetic models.

Although existing research has demonstrated the significant potential of this approach, several limitations still need to be addressed. For example, there is a lack of long-term quantitative data assessing the impact of integrating empathy into religious education, and only few studies have developed systematic models for teacher training based on experiential learning and compassion-based pedagogy. Furthermore, the overwhelming focus on classical texts often neglects the urgency of developing contextual curricula that are responsive to students' actual needs and current social dynamics.

Looking ahead, strategic steps are needed to develop teacher training modules grounded in prophetic values and reflective practice. The development of character evaluation indicators based on *ihsan* and empathy is also essential so that the affective and spiritual dimensions of religious education are not merely rhetorical, but instead become a benchmark of educational success. With this approach, religious education can shape individuals who are not only religiously devoted to Islamic principles but also morally empowered, socially inclusive, and prepared to contribute to a more peaceful and humane civilization.

D. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Research Implications

This study has important implications at theoretical, practical, and policy levels in the development of Islamic education. Theoretically, integrating values from humanistic philosophy (such as empathy, moral responsibility, and respect for human dignity) into Islamic education expands the epistemological framework of Islamic pedagogy. Traditionally, this field has been dominated by textual and normative approaches. However, the findings suggest that religious and humanistic values are not contradictory. Instead, they can be synthesized into a holistic and transformative pedagogical framework (Abdullah, 2022; Aloni, 2011). In this view, Islamic education is not merely an instrument for reproducing doctrine, but can also serve as a platform for forming ethical character that is contextual and inclusive.

At the practical level, the results encourage educators, particularly Islamic studies teachers, to move beyond simply delivering normative teachings. They should act as facilitators of values and spiritual mentors who help students internalize Islamic teachings through reflective and empathetic methods. Religious education curricula should be redesigned to become more dialogical and grounded in students' real-life experiences. This direction aligns with compassion-based pedagogy and affective character education, as proposed in contemporary Islamic education approaches (Munawarsyah, 2023; Sahin, 2021).

At the policy level, the findings highlight the need for reformulating the direction of national Islamic education policies. Curricula that are overly administrative or norm-focused should begin shifting toward more flexible, contextual, and adaptive models that meet the demands of the modern era. Humanistic values that align with Islamic teachings, such as *adl* (justice), *ihsan* (excellence and benevolence), and *rahmah* (compassion), should be more fully incorporated into curriculum design and teacher training programs. In this regard, policy documents such as KMA 183 of 2019 can be reconstructed to serve as a value-based curriculum foundation that emphasize students' experiences.

2. Research Contribution

The main contributions of this research can be found within academic, social, and interdisciplinary dimensions. Academically, the study offers a conceptual synthesis between humanistic principles and core Islamic values, particularly the concept of *ihsan*, as a model for transformative education. This perspective enriches the field of Islamic educational philosophy by positioning religion not solely as a set of doctrinal imperatives but as a moral compass that should be lived reflectively and contextually (Al-Kassimi, 2023; Poole, 2019).

From a social standpoint, this study addresses critical contemporary issues, such as the empathy gap, social polarization, and the rise of intolerance in religious communities. By advocating for an Islamic education based on empathic ethics and spiritual awareness, the study supports a direction in education that fosters not just symbolic faith but also deep moral awareness and a sense of humanity. In this way, the approach contributes to educational models that promote civility, social justice, and peace, in alignment with UNESCO's global education agenda (UNESCO, 2021).

Interdisciplinarily, this study serves as a bridge between multiple fields, including philosophy, education, theology, and moral psychology. It integrates concepts such as prophetic pedagogy, empathic ethics, and transcendent spirituality, offering a more open, contextual, and human-centered vision for Islamic education. This contribution is essential for advancing research that engages diverse perspectives and cultural contexts, especially in response to the increasingly complex and pluralistic challenges of global education.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As a follow-up to the findings and limitations of this study, several strategic directions are recommended for future research development. First, there is a critical need for field-based educational ethnography in Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs, pesantren, and modern Islamic schools. Such research would provide empirical insights into how the integration of empathy and spirituality takes place in the learning process and to observe how the dynamics among teachers, students, and the curriculum unfold in real settings (Ismail et al., 2024).

Second, the development of a curriculum model based on *ihsan* and empathy is urgently needed. Experimental studies should be conducted to design and assess the effectiveness of a religious education curriculum that incorporates the principles of *ihsan*, *adl*, and empathy throughout all aspects of learning outcomes, instructional strategies, and assessments. This is essential to empirically demonstrate that such an approach is not only theoretically sound but also significantly impactful in shaping students' character (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Third, innovations are required in the design of Islamic education teacher training. Training modules that integrate prophetic pedagogy, compassion-based pedagogy, and experiential learning should be developed to strengthen teachers' capacity to nurture students both spiritually and emotionally. These training programs will empower teachers to become educators who are not only academically competent but also empathetic and reflective in their practice (Jalaldeen & Al-Hidabi, 2025; Muttaqin & Ali, 2024).

Fourth, to broaden plural and global perspectives, it is recommended to conduct cross-religious and cross-national studies on the application of humanistic values in religious education. Comparative studies among Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist educational practices regarding the internalization of compassion and moral values could offer richer insights for building peaceful and inclusive religious education.

Fifth, there is an urgent need to develop evaluation indicators that reflect moral and empathetic dimensions in Islamic education. Future research should design assessment instruments for religious education that not only measure cognitive achievement but also capture transformations in attitudes and character, such as social sensitivity, responsibility, and openness to diversity. These assessments will serve as key benchmarks for evaluating the success of Islamic education in forming individuals who are not only devout but also deeply humane.

F. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the perceived tension between humanistic values, such as empathy, freedom of thought, and human dignity, and the normative, dogmatic values of religion is not an absolute contradiction. Instead, it represents an epistemological and pedagogical dynamic that can be bridged through reflective engagement. The humanistic philo-

sophical approach does not conflict with the core teachings of religion; rather, it offers constructive potential for revitalizing religious education to become more contextual, empathetic, and transformative.

The integration of humanistic philosophical values into Islamic education should not be viewed as a dichotomy between faith and humanity. Instead, it represents an opportunity to establish an educational paradigm that is more reflective, contextual, and grounded in human dignity. Through the analysis of religious texts, curriculum documents, and educational practices in madrasahs and pesantren, this study identifies concepts such as *ihsan*, *rahmah*, and *adl* as substantial points of convergence between Islamic teachings and humanistic values, particularly in promoting empathy and moral awareness among students.

However, the current practice of Islamic education still tends to emphasize formalistic and cognitive approaches, with limited space for the development of applied empathetic values. The prevailing dichotomy between text-centered methods used in madrasahs and the social approaches practiced in pesantren indicates that the integration of humanistic values into Islamic education remains partial and unsystematic.

Therefore, it is essential to reformulate Islamic education curricula based on values that combine spirituality and humanity. Strengthening teacher competence through training in reflective pedagogy and compassion-based learning is also necessary. Furthermore, the development of affective evaluation systems capable of measuring holistic learning outcomes is crucial. This article contributes to the discourse on Islamic educational philosophy by offering a conceptual foundation for shaping a generation that is not only religious but also empathetic, inclusive, and committed to building a peaceful and humane civilization.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript. HJ: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft. ILU: Conceptualization. YA: Conceptualization.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest financial, professional, or personal that could have influenced the results or interpretation of this research."

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