



Integrating National Vocational Curriculum and Pesantren-Based Character Education: An Integrated Curriculum Model in Islamic Vocational Secondary Schools

Ali Mukhammad Abrori^{1*}, Muhammad Amir Mahmud²

¹Al-Qolam University Malang, Indonesia

²Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia

Email: aliabrori@alqolam.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to examine how a pesantren-based vocational secondary school integrates the national vocational curriculum with Islamic character education and to formulate a conceptual model of hybrid curriculum development. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research was conducted at SMK Asy-Syafi'iyah Kebonagung, Pakisaji, Malang. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and analyzed thematically to identify patterns of curricular integration and institutional practice. The findings reveal that the school develops a hybrid curriculum model that integrates the National Vocational Curriculum, oriented toward technical competence, with pesantren-based character education encompassing adab, discipline, spirituality, tahfidz, and habituated worship. Rather than operating in parallel, both curricula mutually reinforce one another through school culture, productive learning practices, disciplinary management, and student work ethos. This model is conceptualized as a Pesantren-Infused Vocational Curriculum Model embedded within an Institutionalized Moral Vocational Ecosystem. The ecosystem facilitates moral internalization through daily discipline, religious supervision, and role modeling. The integration manifests structurally, pedagogically, and culturally, resulting in nationally standardized technical competence alongside moral resilience and character-based professional soft skills.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary societies, vocational education is increasingly positioned as a strategic instrument for enhancing youth employability and national economic competitiveness. However, the dominance of skill oriented training has raised concerns regarding the erosion of moral integrity, work ethics, and character formation among vocational graduates (Bisri et al., 2026; Muzedi, Hesim, 2026). This issue is particularly significant in developing contexts, where technical proficiency

without ethical grounding often results in workforce indiscipline, low professional responsibility, and social vulnerability (Maqfiroh et al., 2025; Zuyyina Linda Sari, Kudsiyeh, Sholi Asrori, 2026). Empirical evidence from labor market reports and educational evaluations indicates that employers increasingly demand not only technical competence but also moral reliability, discipline, and integrity (Azizah et al., 2026). Consequently, education systems are challenged to reconcile economic imperatives with moral and cultural responsibilities. In Muslim-majority societies, this challenge becomes more complex as education is expected to transmit religious values alongside market oriented skills (Husen et al., 2026; Lailatul Mufarrohah, 2026). Therefore, investigating curriculum models that integrate vocational competence with Islamic character education is socially urgent, as it offers a holistic response to the growing disjunction between skills development and moral formation in modern education systems (Hikmah et al., 2026).

Despite the strategic importance of vocational secondary education, many vocational institutions struggle to balance national curriculum demands with character education imperatives. The national vocational curriculum is predominantly oriented toward measurable technical outcomes, standardized competencies, and productivity targets, often leaving limited institutional space for systematic moral education (Husen et al., 2026; Zaironi, 2026). As a result, character education is frequently treated as an auxiliary program rather than an integral curricular foundation (Azaim & Latif, Abdul, 2025). This fragmentation produces graduates who are technically skilled yet lack ethical resilience, discipline, and spiritual grounding. In Islamic educational contexts, this problem is further intensified by the marginalization of pesantren traditions within formal vocational schooling (Lailatur Rohanita, Husnul Hilar, 2026; Rahmania et al., 2026). Pesantren values such as adab, spiritual discipline, and moral habituation are often disconnected from vocational learning processes (Subairi, Muhammad Husni, 2025). This structural separation has generated a persistent educational dilemma: how to align nationally mandated vocational standards with the moral and spiritual aspirations of Islamic communities (Ishmah Syafiulloh, Aisyah Nindi Antika, 2026). Addressing this

problem requires a reconceptualization of curriculum integration beyond additive or parallel models (Fakhridana et al., 2026).

Field observations in pesantren-based vocational schools reveal a distinctive educational phenomenon that diverges from mainstream vocational practices. Rather than separating religious instruction from technical training, some institutions intentionally embed pesantren values into everyday vocational learning environments. At SMK Asy-Syafi'iyah Kebonagung, vocational workshops, classroom instruction, and student discipline systems are infused with religious supervision, moral guidance, and spiritual routines. Students engage in productive learning while simultaneously observing prayer schedules, ethical codes, and collective religious practices. Discipline is enforced not merely through administrative sanctions but through moral reasoning and religious accountability. Teachers function not only as technical instructors but also as moral role models within a structured institutional culture (Madiyan, 2024; Mandulangi et al., 2025). This phenomenon suggests the emergence of an integrated educational ecosystem where vocational competence and Islamic character formation are mutually reinforcing, challenging conventional assumptions about the incompatibility of skill training and moral education.

Previous studies on vocational education have largely emphasized competency-based curriculum development, industry alignment, and employability outcomes (Hao, 2024; Maya Ortiz, 2025). Research in Islamic education, on the other hand, has extensively explored character education, pesantren pedagogy, and moral socialization (Mujahid, 2021; Sarwadi & Raihan, 2025). Several scholars have examined Islamic character education within general secondary schools, highlighting the role of school culture, religious habituation, and teacher modeling (Ismail et al., 2025; Nursobah et al., 2025). Similarly, studies on pesantren-based schools have documented the effectiveness of moral discipline and spiritual mentoring in shaping student character (Bahri et al., 2026). However, these bodies of literature tend to operate in isolation. Vocational education research rarely incorporates religious or moral frameworks, while Islamic education studies often overlook technical and vocational dimensions. As a result, existing scholarship provides limited insight into

how vocational curricula and pesantren-based character education can be structurally and pedagogically integrated within a single institutional model.

More recent attempts to integrate character education into vocational settings often adopt supplementary or extracurricular approaches, positioning moral education as an add-on rather than a core curricular principle (Mau, 2024). These models tend to lack conceptual coherence and institutional sustainability. Moreover, existing studies frequently focus on normative ideals without adequately analyzing institutional mechanisms, curricular structures, or cultural ecosystems that enable integration. The research gap, therefore, lies in the absence of empirically grounded models that explain how national vocational curricula can be systematically infused with pesantren-based character education. There is also limited exploration of how moral internalization occurs through daily vocational practices, disciplinary management, and institutional culture. Addressing this gap is crucial, as fragmented integration risks producing symbolic compliance rather than meaningful character formation. A comprehensive model that captures structural, pedagogical, and cultural dimensions remains underdeveloped in the literature.

This study offers a state-of-the-art contribution by conceptualizing a Pesantren Infused Vocational Curriculum Model situated within an Institutionalized Moral Vocational Ecosystem. Unlike previous models that treat vocational and religious curricula as parallel systems, this approach emphasizes mutual reinforcement and systemic integration. The novelty lies in its ecological perspective, where moral values are internalized through daily routines, disciplinary structures, productive learning, and role modeling embedded within vocational education. This model advances current scholarship by demonstrating that character education can function as an organizing principle of vocational learning rather than a supplementary component. It also responds to contemporary educational demands for graduates who possess both technical excellence and moral resilience, making it highly relevant for Islamic vocational education reform.

Based on the identified gaps and field phenomena, this study addresses the central research problem: how can a national vocational curriculum be integratively developed with pesantren based character education within an Islamic vocational

secondary school? The study argues that effective integration is achievable through an institutionalized ecosystem that aligns curriculum structure, pedagogy, and school culture. The provisional argument advanced is that vocational competence and Islamic character formation are not contradictory but complementary when mediated through disciplined institutional practices. By articulating a hybrid curriculum model grounded in empirical evidence, this research contributes theoretically to curriculum integration discourse and practically to the development of morally grounded vocational education. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, school leaders, and curriculum developers seeking sustainable models of Islamic vocational education that respond to both national standards and moral imperatives.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing a case study (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018; Rashid et al., 2019) approach to explore the complex process of integrating the national vocational curriculum with pesantren based character education. A qualitative case study is particularly appropriate because the research seeks to understand meanings, practices, and institutional dynamics that cannot be captured through quantitative measurement. Curriculum integration, moral internalization, and institutional culture are context-bound phenomena shaped by values, traditions, and daily interactions. The case study design enables an in-depth, holistic examination of how curricular structures, pedagogical strategies, and cultural mechanisms interact within a single institutional setting. This approach allows the researcher to capture participants' perspectives, observe lived practices, and analyze policy implementation in real contexts. Furthermore, the case study method supports analytical generalization by generating conceptual insights rather than statistical generalizations. By focusing on one pesantren-based vocational school, the study provides a rich empirical foundation for developing a conceptual hybrid curriculum model that can inform broader discussions on Islamic vocational education and curriculum integration.

The research was conducted at SMK Asy-Syafi'iyyah Kebonagung, an Islamic vocational secondary school located within a pesantren environment in Malang,

Indonesia. This site was purposively selected based on several strategic considerations. First, the school formally implements the national vocational curriculum while simultaneously institutionalizing pesantren based character education, making it a relevant and information-rich case. Second, the school operates within a boarding school ecosystem where religious discipline, moral supervision, and vocational training coexist in daily practice. This setting provides a unique opportunity to observe curriculum integration not only at the policy level but also at the cultural and pedagogical levels. Third, the school has a stable institutional structure, experienced educators, and documented curricular practices, ensuring data accessibility and credibility. The selection of this site aligns with the study's objective to formulate a conceptual model grounded in authentic institutional practices rather than abstract theoretical assumptions.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and triangulation (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). In depth semi structured interviews were conducted with school leaders, vocational teachers, religious instructors, and selected students to capture diverse perspectives on curriculum integration and character formation. Participant observation was employed to examine daily school routines, vocational learning activities, disciplinary practices, and religious habituation within classrooms, workshops, and dormitory settings. This method enabled the researcher to document actual practices rather than relying solely on reported accounts. In addition, document analysis was conducted on curriculum documents, school regulations, lesson plans, student activity schedules, and institutional reports. These documents provided insight into the formal structure and ideological orientation of the integrated curriculum. The combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis allowed the researcher to identify patterns of integration across structural, pedagogical, and cultural dimensions (Kumpulainen et al., 2019). Data collection was conducted iteratively, allowing emerging findings to guide subsequent data gathering.

Data analysis followed an interactive thematic procedure consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Naeem et al., 2023; Richards & Hemphill, 2018). During data condensation, interview transcripts,

observation notes, and documents were systematically coded to identify meaningful units related to curriculum integration, character education, and institutional culture. Irrelevant data were reduced while preserving analytical depth. Data were then organized into thematic matrices and visual displays to facilitate pattern recognition and relational analysis. The verification stage involved continuous comparison across data sources to ensure analytical consistency. To enhance trustworthiness, several strategies were employed, including source triangulation, method triangulation, and prolonged engagement in the field. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with key participants to confirm interpretive accuracy. Additionally, an audit trail documenting analytical decisions was maintained to ensure dependability. These procedures strengthen the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the findings, ensuring that the proposed curriculum model is empirically grounded and methodologically robust.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Integrating National Vocational Curriculum and Pesantren-Based Character Education

Integrating National Vocational Curriculum and Pesantren-Based Character Education is operationally defined as a systematic process through which nationally mandated vocational competencies are structurally, pedagogically, and culturally infused with pesantren-derived moral values. In the field, this integration does not manifest as parallel curricular tracks but as a hybrid instructional ecosystem in which technical learning, religious discipline, and moral habituation mutually reinforce one another. Vocational subjects are delivered alongside embedded values such as adab, discipline, spiritual awareness, work ethics, and responsibility. Character education is not limited to religious subjects but is enacted through workshop routines, time management, teacher–student interactions, and institutional regulations. This sub-finding emphasizes that curriculum integration functions as an institutional practice rather than a textual curriculum design alone. The pesantren tradition serves as a moral framework that shapes how vocational competencies are taught, assessed, and

internalized. Consequently, students develop technical proficiency while simultaneously cultivating character-based professional identities, reflecting a holistic vocational education model grounded in Islamic moral epistemology.

Table 1. Interview Data

Interview Excerpt	Indicator	Informant
"Vocational skills here are inseparable from moral discipline and worship routines."	Integration of skill training and religious discipline	School Principal
"Students are trained to work accurately while maintaining adab and responsibility."	Character-based vocational pedagogy	Vocational Teacher
"Daily worship shapes our work ethic and discipline in workshops."	Moral internalization through routine	Student
"Pesantren values guide how we enforce rules and evaluate behavior."	Institutional moral governance	Boarding Supervisor

Empirical evidence of curriculum integration is reflected in participants' narratives, as summarized in Table 1. The table presents representative interview excerpts, corresponding indicators, and informant roles to demonstrate how integration is perceived and enacted institutionally.

The interview data illustrate that curriculum integration operates through a moralized understanding of vocational competence. Informants consistently framed technical skills as ethically situated practices rather than value-neutral competencies. The principal's statement highlights an institutional vision where vocational training is inseparable from religious discipline, suggesting a paradigmatic shift from instrumental skill acquisition toward moral professionalism. Teachers' narratives further reveal that pedagogical strategies intentionally combine accuracy, responsibility, and ethical conduct, positioning character education as an embedded learning outcome. Students' reflections indicate that moral values are internalized experientially through repetitive routines rather than formal instruction alone. This suggests that integration is sustained through habituation mechanisms characteristic of pesantren education. Collectively, the data challenge dominant vocational education models that prioritize productivity over moral formation. Instead, they demonstrate an alternative epistemology in which technical excellence and spiritual discipline are mutually constitutive. This finding contributes to curriculum theory by illustrating how values can function as organizing principles within vocational instruction.

A deeper reading of the data reveals that integration is facilitated by institutional authority structures and moral leadership. The role of boarding supervisors and school leaders is pivotal in aligning disciplinary practices with curricular objectives. Rather than relying on punitive mechanisms, moral governance is exercised through religious supervision, advice, and exemplification. This approach fosters voluntary compliance and internal moral regulation among students. The data also suggest that integration is reinforced through consistency across learning spaces, including classrooms, workshops, and dormitories. Such coherence minimizes cognitive dissonance between technical learning and moral expectations. Importantly, this model departs from symbolic character education initiatives that are often disconnected from core learning processes. Instead, it demonstrates an institutionalized moral ecosystem in which curriculum, discipline, and culture converge. This reinforces the argument that sustainable character education in vocational contexts requires systemic alignment rather than fragmented interventions.

Observational data corroborate interview findings by revealing consistent patterns of integrated practice. During vocational workshops, students were observed beginning activities after collective prayers and adhering to strict time discipline framed as religious responsibility. Teachers routinely linked technical mistakes to ethical reflections on responsibility and honesty. Institutional rules were displayed alongside moral aphorisms, reinforcing the pesantren ethos within vocational spaces. The researcher observed that moral reminders were embedded naturally within instructional discourse rather than delivered as separate moral lessons. This indicates that character education operates implicitly through institutional routines and symbolic practices. The convergence of observation and interview data strengthens the validity of the sub-finding by demonstrating alignment between espoused values and enacted practices. The researcher interprets this as evidence of a deeply institutionalized integration model, where moral values shape not only student behavior but also pedagogical logic and organizational norms.

In summary, the data reveal a clear pattern of curriculum integration characterized by structural alignment, pedagogical infusion, and cultural coherence. National vocational competencies are delivered within a pesantren-based moral

framework that emphasizes discipline, spirituality, and ethical professionalism. Character education functions as a lived experience embedded in daily routines rather than an isolated curricular component. The recurring pattern across interviews and observations indicates that integration is sustained through consistent institutional practices, role modeling, and religious habituation. This restatement clarifies that the essence of the sub-finding lies in the transformation of vocational education into a moral ecosystem. Students are not only trained to be skilled workers but also formed as morally accountable individuals. The pattern underscores that effective integration requires institutional commitment, cultural consistency, and pedagogical intentionality.

Table 2. Ideal Influence of Leadership and Institutional Roles

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal	"Our vision is producing skilled graduates with strong Islamic character."	Vision-driven curriculum integration
Vocational Teacher	"Technical mastery must reflect discipline and responsibility."	Ethical vocational pedagogy
Boarding Supervisor	"Character is shaped through consistent supervision and example."	Moral leadership and habituation

The table demonstrates that ideal influence emerges from hierarchical coherence between leadership vision and daily pedagogical practice. Principals articulate integration at the policy level, teachers translate it into instructional strategies, and boarding supervisors ensure moral continuity beyond classrooms. This alignment creates an ideal institutional influence where character education is reinforced across authority levels.

Furthermore, the pattern indicates that moral integration is not dependent on individual charisma but on institutionalized roles. Each position contributes uniquely yet coherently, producing a stable moral ecosystem. This finding highlights leadership synergy as a critical determinant of successful curriculum integration in Islamic vocational education.



Picture 1. Moral integration in vocational education

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study resonate with and extend existing literature on vocational education and Islamic character education, while also revealing notable divergences. Prior studies on vocational curricula predominantly emphasize competency based training, employability, and industry alignment, often treating character education as an auxiliary or extracurricular component (Chen et al., 2024; Huang, 2025). In contrast, Islamic education literature highlights moral habituation, spiritual discipline, and role modeling as central to character formation, yet frequently marginalizes vocational competence (Allison, 2024; Jamil, 2024). This study bridges these domains by demonstrating that vocational skills and pesantren based character education can be integratively embedded within a single curricular ecosystem (Albar et al., 2024; Manaf et al., 2025). Unlike additive models reported in earlier research, the findings reveal a hybrid curriculum in which moral values function as organizing principles of vocational learning. This alignment supports scholarship arguing that values-based education is most effective when institutionalized rather than symbolically implemented (Syafika & Marwa, 2024; Zafer, 2025). However, the study departs from literature that assumes inherent tension between productivity oriented

vocational training and moral education, instead showing their practical compatibility within a pesantren based institutional context.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to curriculum integration theory by advancing an ecological model of vocational education. Existing frameworks often conceptualize integration at the curricular or pedagogical level alone, whereas this study highlights the significance of institutional culture, moral governance, and habituated practice (Arslan & Alqatan, 2020; Nakpodia et al., 2023). The notion of an Institutionalized Moral Vocational Ecosystem expands current theoretical understandings by positioning character education as a systemic condition rather than an instructional outcome. This perspective aligns with socio cultural learning theories that emphasize the role of environment and routine in shaping learner dispositions (Daramola et al., 2024; Grageda et al., 2022). At the same time, the findings challenge linear curriculum models that separate cognitive, technical, and moral domains. Theoretically, this study suggests that vocational competence and moral identity are co-constructed through sustained institutional practices (Bouw et al., 2021; Nkambule et al., 2025). Such an approach invites scholars to reconceptualize vocational curricula not merely as skill-delivery mechanisms but as moral-social systems that shape professional subjectivities.

The findings also corroborate empirical studies emphasizing the role of school culture and leadership in successful character education. Consistent with prior research on pesantren based schooling, this study confirms that moral internalization is facilitated through discipline, supervision, and role modeling (Nejati & Shafaei, 2018; Rijal et al., 2023). However, it extends this literature by demonstrating how these mechanisms operate within vocational workshops and productive learning environments. Whereas previous studies often locate character education in religious subjects or extracurricular activities, this research illustrates its integration into core vocational practices (Nufa, 2025; Zarkasyi et al., 2020). This distinction is critical, as it addresses longstanding critiques that character education lacks sustainability when detached from primary learning activities. The study thus refines existing models by showing that moral values can be enacted through technical instruction, assessment,

and work routines. This insight adds empirical depth to discussions on holistic education in Islamic schooling contexts.

In terms of practical implications, the findings offer a viable model for Islamic vocational secondary schools seeking to reconcile national curriculum demands with religious and moral aspirations. For policymakers, the study suggests that character education need not be treated as an additional curricular burden but can be embedded within existing vocational frameworks. School leaders may draw on the findings to design institutional policies that align discipline systems, learning schedules, and evaluation criteria with moral objectives. For teachers, the study highlights the pedagogical potential of integrating ethical reflection into technical instruction without compromising competency standards. Importantly, the model provides a practical response to industry demands for graduates who possess not only technical expertise but also integrity, discipline, and professional ethics. Thus, the integration demonstrated in this study has direct relevance for workforce development and educational reform in Muslim majority contexts.

Finally, the study contributes to broader debates on the future of vocational education in value-oriented societies. By evidencing that pesantren traditions can coexist productively with national vocational standards, the findings challenge dichotomous views that separate religious education from modern skill formation. This has implications beyond Islamic schooling, as it illustrates how culturally grounded moral systems can enhance rather than hinder vocational effectiveness. The discussion underscores that sustainable educational reform requires attention to institutional ecosystems rather than isolated curricular changes. Overall, this study affirms that integrating national vocational curricula with pesantren-based character education is not only feasible but theoretically robust and practically advantageous, offering a replicable framework for developing morally grounded vocational education in diverse socio-cultural settings.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is that the integration of the national vocational curriculum and pesantren-based character education is not only feasible

but pedagogically synergistic when institutionalized as a unified ecosystem. The research demonstrates that vocational competence and Islamic moral formation are not contradictory domains; rather, they mutually reinforce one another through disciplined routines, role modeling, and culturally grounded pedagogy. The core lesson derived from this study is that character education becomes effective when it is embedded in daily vocational practices rather than positioned as a supplementary or symbolic program. At SMK Asy-Syafi'iyah Kebonagung, moral values such as adab, discipline, spirituality, and work ethics are internalized through consistent institutional practices, shaping students' professional identities alongside technical skills. This finding underscores the importance of holistic educational design, where moral education operates as an organizing principle of learning rather than an isolated curricular objective.

The principal strength of this study lies in its conceptual and empirical contribution to curriculum integration scholarship, particularly within Islamic vocational education. The study advances existing literature by introducing the concept of a Pesantren-Infused Vocational Curriculum embedded within an Institutionalized Moral Vocational Ecosystem. This framework extends beyond additive or parallel models of integration by demonstrating how curriculum structure, pedagogy, and institutional culture operate coherently. Theoretically, the study enriches curriculum theory by adopting an ecological perspective that situates moral education as a systemic condition rather than a discrete outcome. Empirically, it provides thick description and grounded analysis of how integration functions in practice, addressing a significant gap in prior research that often remains normative or fragmented. By bridging vocational education and pesantren traditions, this study contributes a novel lens for understanding value-based vocational learning in culturally and religiously grounded educational contexts.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that open avenues for future research. First, the research is based on a single case study, which limits statistical generalizability, although it allows for analytical depth and conceptual insight. Future studies could employ multiple case designs across different regions to examine the transferability of the proposed model. Second, this study relies primarily

on qualitative data; subsequent research may integrate mixed-method approaches to assess the impact of integrated curricula on measurable student outcomes, such as employability, ethical behavior, and workplace performance. Third, the focus on institutional processes leaves unexplored the long-term trajectories of graduates in professional settings. Longitudinal studies could investigate how pesantren-infused vocational education influences graduates' career ethics and social contributions. Addressing these limitations would strengthen the empirical foundation of integrated vocational and character education models

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