



INTEGRATING MULTICULTURAL BOARDING SCHOOL EDUCATION TO STRENGTHEN STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS AND ACADEMIC CHARACTER

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Abstract: This study examines how Islamic Religious Education in a multicultural boarding school integrates formal learning, mentoring in the dormitory, and character building in a religiously and culturally diverse environment. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving the madrasah principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, dormitory supervisors, students, and parents. Data were analyzed through condensation, display, and conclusion drawing, while triangulation of sources and techniques was used to strengthen credibility. The findings indicate an integrative, 24-hour educational system that links the madrasah curriculum with the dormitory program, congregational worship, Quran recitation and memorization, evening study, the role of educators as role models, discipline, and ongoing monitoring. Religious character is developed through greater consistency in worship, respectful behavior, tolerance, and social responsibility. Academic character is strengthened through learning discipline, time management, independence, task responsibility, academic honesty, and achievement motivation. The main mechanism is not only regulation alone, but also the interaction between habituation, modeling, mentoring, reflective explanations, educational rewards and punishments, and collaboration between the school, the dormitory, and the family. This study implies that multicultural Islamic boarding school education is most effective when religious identity, social tolerance, and academic self-regulation are fostered as a coherent educational ecology.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is expected to form learners who are intellectually capable, spiritually grounded, and ethically responsible. In practice, however, the instructional time available in ordinary schools often separates religious knowledge from the daily situations in which values are tested. Students may understand doctrines, rules, and moral concepts in the classroom, yet encounter a different cultural environment after school. This separation is particularly significant during adolescence, when peer relations, digital media, family patterns, and the wider social environment strongly influence behavior (Madakir et al., 2022; Fuadi & Shohib, 2024). An educational design that links knowledge, worship, social interaction, discipline, and reflective guidance is therefore needed to move IRE from the transmission of religious information toward the internalization of religious and academic character.

The boarding school model offers an educational ecology in which formal instruction and everyday life can be connected. Students learn, worship, interact, manage personal responsibilities, and receive supervision within a structured environment. The model provides repeated opportunities for value practice through congregational prayer, Qur'anic activities, study routines, communal responsibilities, and direct interaction with educators. Studies of Islamic boarding institutions have shown that such environments can strengthen religious moderation, self-control, independence, communication, motivation, and character when educational management is coherent and educators function as credible role models (Aijat Mau, 2024; Firdaus & Suwendi, 2025; Hadi & Prayogi, 2025). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of boarding education cannot be assumed merely from the existence of a dormitory. It depends on the integration of curriculum, mentoring, institutional culture, evaluation, and the quality of relationships among students, teachers, supervisors, and families.

The multicultural context adds another layer of complexity. MTs Muhammadiyah 2 Aimas is located in Sorong Regency, Southwest Papua, an area characterized by ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious plurality. In such a setting, Islamic education has a dual responsibility. It must strengthen students' Islamic identity and commitment while simultaneously nurturing the social virtues required for peaceful coexistence. Multicultural Islamic education should not be understood as theological relativism; rather, it is an educational orientation that connects firm religious identity with justice, respect, cooperation, empathy, and tolerance. Banks' dimensions of multicultural education—content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture—offer a useful lens for assessing whether an educational institution transforms diversity into a resource for learning rather than a source of distance or prejudice.

This responsibility is especially important for Muslim students who grow up as part of a plural social environment. Strong religious character cannot be reduced to ritual observance alone. It includes moral conduct, responsibility, respect for others, and the ability to practice faith without hostility toward

difference. Similarly, academic character is not synonymous with high grades. It refers to habits and dispositions that sustain learning: discipline, time management, independence, perseverance, responsibility for assignments, honesty, and motivation to achieve. When religious and academic character are treated separately, students may become ritually active but academically passive, or academically successful without ethical integrity. A holistic IRE model therefore needs to cultivate both dimensions simultaneously.

Previous research has documented several benefits of boarding education. Character formation in boarding institutions commonly occurs through habituation, religious routines, strict but educative discipline, mentoring, and integration of school and dormitory programs (Anhar et al., 2025; Erihadiana et al., 2026). Other studies have focused on curriculum integration, institutional quality, learning motivation, religious moderation, or specific character indicators such as honesty and independence (Setiawan & Maryam, 2024; Aswa et al., 2026). These studies provide important evidence, but three gaps remain. First, many studies examine religious character or general character without analyzing academic character as an equally important outcome. Second, multiculturalism is often treated as background information rather than as a substantive pedagogical condition. Third, the mechanisms linking curriculum integration, residential culture, educator strategies, and changes in students' character are not always explained as an interconnected system.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining IRE as a twenty-four-hour integrative system in a multicultural boarding context. The novelty lies in explaining how religious identity, tolerance, and academic self-regulation are cultivated through a single educational ecology rather than through isolated programs. The study combines the perspectives of curriculum integration, multicultural education, habituation, social learning, and character internalization. Beane's curriculum integration emphasizes connections among knowledge, experience, social issues, and action. Al-Ghazali's concept of habituation explains how repeated good actions become stable dispositions. Bandura's social learning theory highlights observation, imitation, modeling, and reciprocal interaction among personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Lickona's character framework clarifies the movement from moral knowing and feeling toward moral action. Together, these perspectives help explain why students' character develops when educational messages are repeatedly encountered through instruction, relationships, routines, and institutional expectations.

The research site also presents an institutionally distinctive case. MTs Muhammadiyah 2 Aimas collaborates with Ma'had Bilal bin Rabah of Universitas Pendidikan Muhammadiyah Sorong for residential guidance because the madrasah has not yet developed an independent dormitory. This arrangement requires coordination across institutional boundaries. The boarding program was initiated in response to concerns about weak religious habits, limited learning discipline, and the absence of a Muhammadiyah residential institution focused on Islamic studies in the local area. It therefore provides an

opportunity to study not only student outcomes, but also the organizational processes through which a madrasah and a residential institution construct a shared educational program.

Based on these considerations, this study asks how multicultural boarding school-based IRE is integrated at MTs Muhammadiyah 2 Aimas and how that integration shapes students' religious and academic character. It also examines the strategies used by educators, the mechanisms through which values are internalized, and the supporting and constraining conditions of implementation. The study aims to generate a contextual model for Islamic schools seeking to connect religious learning, multicultural social ethics, and academic character through coherent institutional design.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case-study design. The case-study strategy was selected because the research focused on a bounded educational system: the implementation of multicultural boarding school-based IRE at MTs Muhammadiyah 2 Aimas and its residential partner, Ma'had Bilal bin Rabah, in Aimas, Sorong Regency. The design enabled an in-depth analysis of institutional arrangements, daily routines, educator strategies, student experiences, and character outcomes within their natural context. Rather than testing causal effects statistically, the study sought to understand how participants interpreted and enacted the boarding system and how different program components interacted over time.

The primary data sources were the head of the madrasah, two IRE teachers, dormitory supervisors, five students who had lived in the dormitory for at least one year, and five parents. Students with a minimum of one year of residential experience were selected because they had participated in the complete cycle of daily, weekly, and semester activities and could reflect on changes in their behavior. The inclusion of institutional leaders, teachers, supervisors, students, and parents provided multiple perspectives on the same educational process. Secondary data consisted of institutional documents, memoranda of understanding, schedules, worship-control books, memorization records, photographs of activities, evaluation notes, and other school and dormitory archives.

Data collection used observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted directly in the dormitory and madrasah to examine the sequence of daily activities, interaction patterns, worship practices, evening study, cleanliness routines, supervision, and discipline. Interviews were guided by open-ended questions concerning curriculum integration, educational strategies, changes in religious and academic habits, multicultural interaction, monitoring, rewards and sanctions, family communication, supporting factors, and implementation challenges. Documentation was used both as a source of evidence and as a means of cross-checking participant statements. For example, claims about worship consistency were compared with attendance and control

records, while statements about structured supervision were checked against duty schedules.

Data analysis followed the interactive stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During condensation, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded according to the study's analytical domains: system integration, religious routines, academic routines, educator modeling, mentoring, multicultural values, evaluation, religious character, academic character, supporting factors, and constraints. The coded data were then organized in narrative matrices to identify relationships among program inputs, educational processes, and observed changes. Conclusions were developed iteratively and were reviewed against negative or contradictory evidence to avoid reducing the case to only its successful aspects (Lestari, 2024; Muis, 2026).

Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques. Statements from students were compared with those of teachers, supervisors, parents, and the head of the madrasah. Interview findings were checked through observation and documentation. The researcher also examined the consistency of reported change across different indicators for example, whether improved discipline in worship was accompanied by changes in punctuality, personal responsibility, and adherence to dormitory routines. This procedure enabled the study to distinguish isolated claims from recurrent patterns supported by several forms of evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

An Integrated Twenty-Four-Hour Educational System

The first finding is that boarding school-based IRE is implemented as an integrated educational system rather than as an additional religious program. Formal learning in the madrasah is connected with nonformal guidance in the dormitory. Students move through a daily cycle that combines classroom instruction, congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation and memorization, Islamic studies, personal and communal responsibilities, evening study, rest, and evaluation. The dormitory thus functions as an extension of the classroom, while classroom concepts are given practical expression in residential life.

The integration is visible at three levels. At the curricular level, Islamic subjects and general academic learning are reinforced through scheduled residential activities. At the organizational level, madrasah teachers and dormitory supervisors coordinate student guidance through meetings and routine reporting. At the cultural level, shared norms discipline, cleanliness, respect, worship, responsibility, and learning are embedded in repeated routines. This combination reduces the discontinuity between what students are taught and what they practice. Religious education is encountered not only as content but also as a pattern of life.

The residential program also integrates religious identity with multicultural social ethics. Students receive a strong foundation in tawhid and

Islamic worship while being guided to respect people of other ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Tolerance is framed as respectful coexistence and social responsibility rather than as the weakening of religious commitment. In the plural context of Sorong, this approach is significant because students need confidence in their own faith and the social competence to interact peacefully with difference.

Table 1. Core Components of the Integrated Boarding Education System

Component	Main Activities	Educational Mechanism	Character Orientation
Formal curriculum	IRE and general subjects in the madrasah	Knowledge formation and conceptual understanding	Religious knowledge and academic competence
Residential religious program	Congregational prayer, dhikr, recitation, tahfiz, halaqah	Habituation, mentoring, monitoring	Worship consistency, morality, spiritual discipline
Academic residential program	Evening study, assignment completion, memorization targets	Structured time, peer learning, guidance	Learning discipline, independence, achievement motivation
Communal life	Room duties, cleanliness, shared responsibilities, social interaction	Cooperation and direct experience	Responsibility, respect, tolerance, social care
Evaluation and coordination	Control books, attendance, meetings, parent reports	Continuous feedback and institutional collaboration	Consistency and accountability

Habituation, Modeling, Mentoring, and Supervision

The second finding concerns the mechanisms through which the integrated system shapes behavior. Habituation is the most visible mechanism. Students repeatedly perform congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation, memorization, room cleaning, punctual attendance, evening study, and other responsibilities. Repetition transforms activities that initially require external reminders into routines that students increasingly conduct with greater independence. Participants described a clear contrast between the early period of residence—when many students had to be reminded to pray, follow schedules, and manage personal needs—and later periods, when they demonstrated stronger discipline and self-direction.

Habituation is reinforced by educator modeling. Teachers and dormitory supervisors do not only instruct students; they participate in worship, maintain discipline, communicate respectfully, and demonstrate responsibility. Their credibility is essential because students observe how Islamic values are enacted in ordinary situations. The close residential relationship allows students to see educators in contexts that are not available in conventional classroom interaction. Modeling also occurs among peers. Students learn from roommates,

senior students, and peers who display stronger memorization habits, punctuality, or academic commitment.

Mentoring adds an interpersonal dimension to routine. Supervisors provide advice, encouragement, correction, and personal assistance. When students struggle with assignments, memorization, homesickness, or discipline, they receive direct support. This helps prevent the boarding system from becoming a merely regulatory environment. The data show that students responded more positively when rules were accompanied by explanations of their purpose and by practical guidance. Consequently, discipline was gradually interpreted as a means of self-development rather than as external control.

Supervision is organized through rotating duty schedules and direct checks in rooms, worship areas, and classrooms. Prayer attendance, memorization, and review activities are documented in control books. Cleanliness and room organization are also monitored. Academic supervision includes attention to classroom engagement and evening study. This continuous monitoring allows educators to identify changes and respond early to problems. It also creates consistency across religious, social, and academic domains.

"We usually communicate through routine meetings, monthly or by semester, with the boarding administrators and leaders. Dormitory supervisors also discuss students' development, and memorization progress is reported through the parents' group." (Dormitory educator)

"At the beginning many students were not accustomed to the rules. Prayer still had to be reminded and they were not independent. After following the dormitory activities and regulations, the changes became visible." (IRE teacher)

"The supervisors guide us through rules. When someone does not obey, there is an educational sanction." (Student)

Formation of Religious Character

Religious character developed through the combination of knowledge, practice, emotional support, and social reinforcement. The most evident change was greater consistency in worship. Students became more punctual in congregational prayer, more regular in Qur'an recitation and memorization, and more accustomed to dhikr and other religious activities. Control records and direct observation supported participant reports that repeated participation reduced dependence on reminders.

A second change involved moral conduct. Students were described as becoming more respectful toward teachers and peers, more responsible for communal duties, and more aware of cleanliness and order. Religious character therefore extended beyond ritual indicators. The program connected worship with everyday ethics by expecting students to demonstrate honesty, politeness, cooperation, and care for shared spaces. This connection is important because it prevents religious education from becoming a ritual checklist detached from social behavior.

A third dimension was tolerance. In a multicultural setting, students were guided to maintain Islamic practices while respecting others. The program

strengthened religious understanding so that students could interact with plural communities without insecurity or hostility. Tolerance appeared in respectful communication, willingness to cooperate, avoidance of derogatory attitudes, and acceptance of cultural differences among students. The finding suggests that a strong religious identity and social openness can be mutually reinforcing when educators clearly distinguish theological commitment from ethical relations in a diverse society.

A fourth dimension was social responsibility. Communal life required students to share tasks, help peers, maintain facilities, and accept the consequences of their behavior. These experiences transformed abstract values such as responsibility and brotherhood into daily action. Religious character emerged not from a single subject or activity but from the cumulative effect of repeated practices across the entire residential environment.

Formation of Academic Character

Academic character was formed through structured routines and gradual self-regulation. Evening study created a protected period for completing assignments, reviewing lessons, reading, and preparing for the next day. Because the time was scheduled and supervised, students had fewer opportunities to postpone academic responsibilities. Over time, they learned to plan tasks around worship, personal needs, and communal activities.

Time management was one of the most frequently observed changes. Students had to move between activities according to a fixed schedule, wake early, prepare for school, attend worship, complete duties, and participate in study. Initially, this structure operated as external regulation. With continuous guidance, it increasingly became an internal skill. Students learned that delays in one activity affected subsequent responsibilities, which helped them understand the relationship between discipline and achievement.

Independence also improved. Living away from parents required students to organize personal belongings, maintain cleanliness, prepare learning materials, and solve everyday problems. Academic independence was supported by peer study and educator assistance, but students remained responsible for their own assignments and memorization targets. This balance between support and responsibility is important: excessive control may produce compliance without autonomy, whereas complete freedom may overwhelm students who have not yet developed self-regulation.

The boarding system also strengthened motivation and academic honesty. Rewards were given for achievement, discipline, and memorization, including praise, public appreciation, gifts, or the trust to become an example for others. Educational sanctions were applied when students ignored assignments or violated rules. The sanctions were primarily corrective, such as cleaning duties, advice, or other constructive consequences. Students reported that these practices encouraged them to take school tasks more seriously. Academic responsibility was not limited to completing assignments; it also included

avoiding cheating and understanding that learning is part of religious accountability.

Table 2. Observed Changes in Religious and Academic Character

Character Dimension	Indicators Before Intensive Habituation	Observed Development
Religious discipline	Prayer and recitation often required reminders	Greater punctuality, consistency, and personal awareness
Moral-social conduct	Limited independence and uneven responsibility	Improved respect, cleanliness, cooperation, and accountability
Tolerance	Difference understood mainly as external social reality	More respectful interaction while maintaining religious identity
Learning discipline	Tasks and study time were inconsistently managed	More regular evening study and task completion
Time management	Dependence on adults and weak sequencing of activities	Better planning across worship, study, duties, and rest
Academic independence	High dependence on parents or teachers	Greater self-management and peer-supported learning
Achievement orientation	Motivation varied and was easily disrupted	Higher persistence, memorization targets, and willingness to compete

Institutional Collaboration, Rewards, and Educational Sanctions

The integration of the program depends on collaboration. Teachers, dormitory supervisors, institutional leaders, and parents exchange information through routine meetings, discussions, reports, and parent communication groups. Monthly memorization progress and other developments are reported so that families understand students' condition. Coordination meetings are also used to discuss problems and agree on responses. This collaborative structure reduces the risk that the school, dormitory, and home communicate contradictory expectations.

Evaluation combines academic and character indicators. Educators observe discipline, independence, worship, social behavior, learning responsibility, and memorization. Control books provide systematic records, while direct observation captures qualities that are difficult to quantify. Reward and punishment operate within this evaluation system. The most effective rewards are not merely material; recognition and trust communicate that positive behavior has social and moral value. Punishment is intended to be educational rather than humiliating. Its legitimacy depends on proportionality, explanation, and a clear connection between the violation and the corrective activity.

The study also identified constraints. The madrasah does not yet have its own dormitory, making sustained coordination with the partner institution essential. Educators must balance dense schedules with students' need for rest,

emotional support, and age-appropriate autonomy. Students enter the program with different family habits, levels of religious knowledge, learning motivation, and adaptability. Some initially experience resistance to rules or dependence on reminders. These constraints indicate that boarding education should not be romanticized. Its positive outcomes emerge when structure is accompanied by humane guidance, adequate communication, and continuous evaluation.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the primary strength of multicultural boarding school-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lies in the coherence between curriculum, residential life, supervision, and evaluation. Religious learning is not confined to classroom instruction but is continuously reinforced through worship, communal responsibilities, academic mentoring, and structured daily routines. This integrated system reflects Beane's concept of curriculum integration, in which knowledge, experience, and social practice operate as a unified educational process (Nasution, 2025; Saca Suhendi et al., 2026). Character formation is therefore achieved through the consistent interaction of religious values and academic responsibilities, creating an environment where spiritual growth and academic development reinforce rather than compete with one another. At the same time, the findings support Al-Ghazali's concept of habituation by demonstrating that repeated religious and academic practices gradually become internalized when accompanied by understanding, mentoring, and meaningful relationships rather than external supervision alone (Saepurokhman & Makhrus Ali, 2025; Sapitri et al., 2025).

The results further demonstrate that the effectiveness of character education is strengthened through social interaction and educational relationships within the boarding environment. Consistent with Bandura's social learning theory, students develop religious commitment, self-discipline, responsibility, and academic perseverance by observing teachers, supervisors, and peers who continuously model expected behaviours. The combination of habituation, modelling, monitoring, mentoring, and constructive reinforcement simultaneously develops both religious and academic character. Reward and educational punishment function effectively when applied fairly, consistently, and with pedagogical purposes that encourage reflection instead of fear (Khaerunnisa et al., 2025; Megawati & Sulisworo, 2025; Ridwan & Ritonga, 2026). Furthermore, collaboration between the madrasah, boarding institution, and parents creates an educational ecology that maintains continuity between school, dormitory, and family, ensuring that character development extends beyond institutional boundaries.

A distinctive contribution of this study is its emphasis on multicultural education as an inseparable component of boarding school-based IRE. Students are educated within culturally diverse environments where they learn tolerance, mutual respect, cooperation, and responsible participation while maintaining their Islamic identity. This finding corresponds with Banks' multicultural education framework, particularly regarding prejudice reduction and empowering school culture, although the integration of multicultural

perspectives into classroom learning remains open for further development. Multicultural competence can be strengthened through contextual learning, collaborative projects, local cultural studies, and reflective discussions rooted in Islamic ethical principles, enabling tolerance to become measurable through observable behaviours rather than remaining a general moral concept (Arif & Aziz, 2023; Irpan & Sain, 2024).

The findings also reveal that religious and academic character mutually reinforce one another through institutional design rather than through religious activities alone. Worship routines cultivate discipline and self-regulation, moral responsibility strengthens academic honesty, memorization develops perseverance, and collaborative learning enhances motivation and commitment toward academic achievement. Nevertheless, these positive outcomes emerge only when religious activities are balanced with academic support, adequate rest, mentoring, and realistic scheduling. Academic character is therefore understood not merely as technical learning skills but as an ethical expression of amanah, integrity, responsibility, and self-regulation. Simultaneously, educational practices should remain humane by recognising individual differences, providing counselling and academic support, and avoiding the tendency to interpret every learning difficulty as a moral failure (Anto et al., 2023; Fauziah et al., 2024; Fauzi & Anwar, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, this study proposes multicultural boarding school-based IRE as an educational ecology consisting of four interconnected dimensions: curricular integration, cultural habituation, relational modelling, and reflective evaluation. Character develops progressively through stages beginning with orientation and external supervision, followed by behavioural habituation, reflective understanding, and finally internalisation into responsible autonomy. The effectiveness of this ecological model depends on institutional coherence because weaknesses in any dimension reduce the overall quality of character formation (Inas et al., 2025; Sarbini et al., 2025; Tri Suryanto et al., 2025). Consequently, educators should implement differentiated mentoring according to students' developmental stages while maintaining alignment between curriculum, supervision, residential culture, and evaluation systems.

Practically, the study offers several implications for improving boarding education. Institutions should develop integrated curriculum mapping between classroom learning and residential activities, strengthen educators' competencies as mentors and multicultural facilitators, implement comprehensive evaluation involving observation, student reflection, institutional records, and parental feedback, and establish sustainable quality assurance through continuous planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Although derived from a boarding school context, these principles can also be adapted by non-boarding Islamic schools through structured mentoring, congregational worship, peer learning communities, extended-day programmes, and stronger school-family collaboration. Despite being limited to a single institutional case, the proposed ecological framework provides a transferable conceptual model for integrating

religious, multicultural, and academic character education and offers a foundation for future comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-methods research.

CONCLUSION

The multicultural boarding school-based Islamic religious education at MTs Muhammadiyah 2 Aimas operates as a coherent, 24-hour educational ecology, linking the formal curriculum, dormitory worship, academic routines, communal responsibility, educator role models, ongoing supervision, and family collaboration. The most important lesson is that character formation does not result solely from the dormitory or a busy schedule. Religious and academic character develop when students repeatedly practice values, observe credible role models, receive humane guidance, understand the purpose of rules, receive feedback, and gradually assume responsibility for their own behavior. This system reinforces consistent worship, moral behavior, tolerance, and social responsibility while developing learning discipline, time management, independence, academic honesty, and achievement motivation. Scientifically, this study provides an integrative framework consisting of curriculum integration, cultural familiarization, relational modeling, and reflective evaluation. Practically, this study offers guidance for Islamic educational institutions seeking to connect religious identity with multicultural citizenship and academic self-regulation. However, this case demonstrates that Islamic boarding schooling can be a constructive model for pluralistic societies when religious commitment, respect for differences, and academic responsibility are designed as mutually reinforcing educational goals.

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