

Reconstructing the Concept of Holistic Education at Gontor: A Literature Review on Its Relevance to Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract: Holistic education views students as a unified whole encompassing intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions. Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is widely recognized as an Islamic boarding school that consistently applies this approach through its Panca Jiwa philosophy, a 24-hour boarding system, and the Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islamiyah (KMI) curriculum, which balances religious and general knowledge. This article aims to reconstruct the concept of holistic education at Gontor and to analyze its relevance to the development of contemporary Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The study used a qualitative library research design, tracing and synthesizing 25 selected academic sources published between 2015 and 2026, together with classic theoretical works. The findings show that the Panca Jiwa values of sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom provide a philosophical foundation that fosters four domains of intelligence simultaneously: intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and kinesthetic. The KMI curriculum, which does not separate religious from general knowledge, offers a model of knowledge integration relevant to PAI curricula in formal schools and madrasas. The study recommends that the principles of value integration, a total educational environment, and multi-intelligence training be adopted optionally in PAI learning design, with attention to institutional differences between boarding and formal schools. The findings are limited by the reliance on qualitative evidence from a single Gontor campus.

Keywords: holistic education, Panca Jiwa, KMI curriculum, Pondok Modern Gontor, Islamic religious education

Abstrak: Pendidikan holistik memandang peserta didik sebagai satu kesatuan utuh yang mencakup dimensi intelektual, spiritual, emosional, dan fisik. Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor dikenal luas sebagai pesantren yang secara konsisten menerapkan pendekatan ini melalui filosofi Panca Jiwa, sistem asrama dua puluh empat jam, dan kurikulum Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islamiyah (KMI) yang memadukan ilmu agama dan ilmu umum secara seimbang. Artikel ini bertujuan merekonstruksi konsep pendidikan holistik di Gontor dan menganalisis relevansinya bagi pengembangan Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi pustaka kualitatif dengan menelusuri dan menyintesis 25 sumber akademik terpilih yang terbit pada tahun 2015 hingga 2026, ditambah karya teoretis klasik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai Panca Jiwa, yaitu keikhlasan, kesederhanaan, berdikari, ukhuwah Islamiyah, dan kebebasan, menjadi landasan filosofis yang menumbuhkan empat ranah kecerdasan sekaligus: intelektual, spiritual, emosional, dan kinestetik. Kurikulum KMI yang tidak memisahkan ilmu agama dari ilmu umum menjadi model integrasi keilmuan yang relevan bagi pengembangan kurikulum PAI di sekolah dan madrasah formal. Kajian ini merekomendasikan agar prinsip integrasi nilai, lingkungan pendidikan total, dan pelatihan multikecerdasan diadopsi secara opsional dalam desain pembelajaran PAI,

dengan memperhatikan perbedaan konteks kelembagaan antara pesantren berasrama dan sekolah formal. Temuan ini dibatasi oleh bukti kualitatif yang bersumber dari satu kampus Gontor.

Kata Kunci: pendidikan holistik, Panca Jiwa, kurikulum KMI, Pondok Modern Gontor, pendidikan agama Islam

Introduction

The debate between religious and general education has long shaped Indonesian educational discourse. This dichotomy often produces graduates who are spiritually and morally strong but limited in facing contemporary challenges, or, conversely, graduates who are intellectually competent but lack spirituality and morality (Daulay & Salminawati, 2022; Permadi et al., 2025). Such a categorization is inconsistent with the Islamic view of knowledge, which holds that religious and general knowledge both originate from God and cannot be separated in their purpose (Zanki & Suharto, 2026). To avoid this categorization, an educational paradigm is needed that shapes students into whole human beings rather than individuals with separate competencies.

Holistic education provides such a paradigm. The holistic approach generally describes education as a whole that integrates the emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and aesthetic aspects of humankind, rather than relying solely on cognitive achievement (Bayhaqi et al., 2025; Musfah, 2012; Syahid, 2024). This aligns closely with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which holds that human potential cannot be reduced to a single intelligence (Gardner, 2011). Educational institutions are therefore responsible for fostering various intelligences holistically (Mahmud et al., 2024). Daniel Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence complements this view by addressing the affective and social dimensions that conventional curricula often overlook (Goleman, 2006).

This discussion places Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in a unique position. As the oldest indigenous Islamic educational institutions, pesantren have historically integrated religious knowledge with communal life and moral formation (Permadi, Dhuha, et al., 2026). Many examples of the integration of religious and general knowledge are also found in pesantren (Ma'arif & Rusydi, 2020). Among them, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor stands out because it embeds a holistic concept in its institutional design. Founded by three brothers known as the Trimurti, Gontor formally established the Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islamiyah (KMI) system in 1936 and has since become a reference for many Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia (Muslim, 2017). At the core of Gontor's education are five principles: sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom. These principles are embedded not only in the curriculum but also in dormitory life, which runs 24 hours a day and in which students, teachers, and educational administrators contribute to and sustain one another (Muslih et al., 2021; Zarkasyi, 2021). The KMI curriculum, in turn, avoids separating religious and general subjects and treats both as essential components of integrated education (Hasan et al., 2024).

Empirical studies at Gontor have examined how this model is implemented. A qualitative case study at Gontor Campus 7, Kalianda, found that the pesantren fosters kinesthetic, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual intelligence through organizations, sports clubs, language programs, and speech training (Naufal et al., 2024). Similarly, Zarkasyi (2021) analyzed the emotional intelligence of students at the Gontor headquarters and identified self-management, empathy, and social skills. Although these studies provide a useful empirical foundation, their scope is limited to a single campus. In addition, they do not examine holistic education in line with the broader academic literature, and they do not relate the concept to Islamic Religious Education (Hamidalloh et al., 2026).

Given these gaps, the novelty of this study lies in three contributions. First, rather than repeating the fieldwork, it synthesizes empirical and theoretical sources to reconstruct the holistic

education practiced at Gontor as a single, coherent concept. Second, it connects the Panca Jiwa philosophy, the KMI curriculum, and the four domains of intelligence in one conceptual framework. Third, it explicitly analyzes the relevance of this reconstruction to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in formal, non-boarding schools in Indonesia, a link that previous studies have not made. This study therefore aims to reconstruct the concept of holistic education at Gontor and to analyze its relevance to the development of PAI. It addresses three research questions: (1) how the concept of holistic education is formulated in the literature; (2) how Gontor operationalizes the Panca Jiwa philosophy and the KMI curriculum; and (3) how formal non-boarding schools can adapt and develop Gontor-like concepts to make PAI learning relevant.

Method

This study employed a qualitative library research design (Choiriyah et al., 2026). The approach did not collect new field data. Instead, it explored, synthesized, and analyzed literature from existing journals (Yakup & Bustan, 2024). A literature-based design was appropriate because this study examines how holistic education at Gontor has been constructed, and this concept has been systematically defined, operationalized, and documented in various independent sources.

The literature search was conducted through Google Scholar, the Science and Technology Index (SINTA) portal, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Garuda, and Publish or Perish. The keywords were “Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor,” “KMI Curriculum,” “Holistic Education,” and “Islamic Religious Education.” The search was limited to publications from 2015 to 2026, with exceptions for classic theoretical works fundamental to this research, namely Goleman’s theory of emotional intelligence and Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences.

The sources were selected based on three criteria. First, works had to be published within the specified period, except for classic theoretical works. Second, works had to appear in reputable peer-reviewed journals, while sources providing institutional and historical information about Gontor were required to be factual and reliable. Third, sources discussing holistic education without a specific connection to Islamic boarding schools, or mentioning Gontor only briefly, were excluded.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the initial search identified 86 records. After titles and abstracts were screened for topic relevance and full texts were assessed, 54 records were retained. Of these, 34 records that met the eligibility criteria described above were read and analyzed in depth, and 25 were ultimately included in the thematic synthesis.

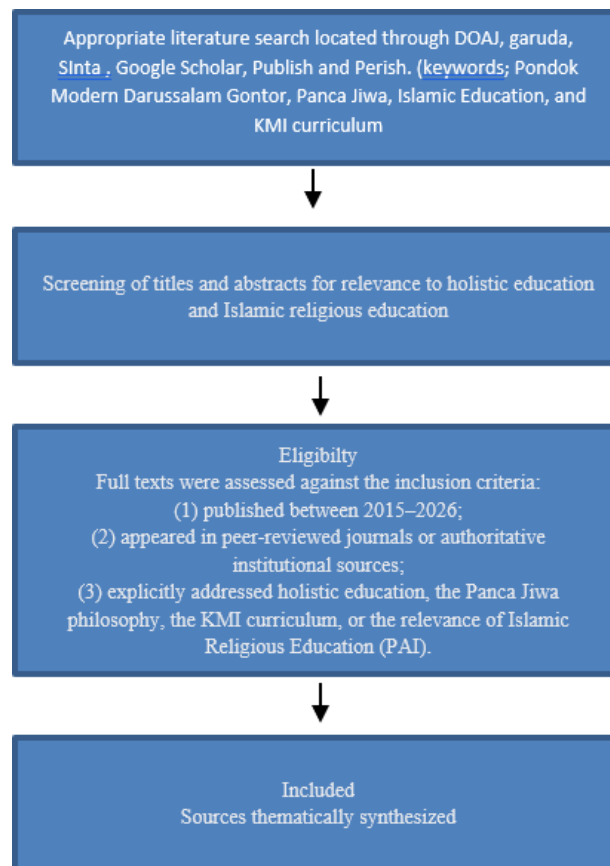


Figure 1. Procedure for Searching and Screening Literature Sources

The data were analyzed through academic synthesis in three iterative stages:

Open coding is the initial stage of qualitative data analysis. Each recurring concept, term, or idea was coded and labeled after reading each source in detail. The aim was to obtain as many basic categories as possible without imposing a predetermined structure. Terms and concepts of holistic education at Gontor were identified at this stage.

Axial coding connects and groups the codes collected in the previous stage. Broader patterns, themes, and relationships were sought so that the previously fragmented findings formed a clearer conceptual structure. Axial coding was linked to the Panca Jiwa and character formation, the integration of the KMI curriculum, the domains of multiple (holistic) intelligences, the 24-hour boarding system as a total educational environment (three educational centers), and the relevance of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum.

Selective synthesis is the final stage. The main themes most relevant to the research questions were selected, and the relationships among them were mapped conceptually and organized into a theoretical framework and narrative that answered the research objectives. To strengthen the analysis, the empirical studies conducted on a single campus (Naufal et al., 2024; Zarkasyi, 2021) were cross-checked against institutional publications from several independent sources on Gontor's philosophy and curriculum, which reduced dependence on a single source.

Results and Discussion

The Concept of Holistic Education: Theoretical Foundation

The reviewed literature shows that humans possess interrelated dimensions of potential that formal education must address simultaneously rather than sequentially or separately (Miller, 2005; Musfah, 2012). Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences strongly supports this premise. The theory identifies eight to nine intelligences, among them linguistic, logical-mathematical,

spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic, and it challenges the assumption that a single measure of cognitive ability can capture human potential (Gardner, 2011). In Islamic education studies, this theory has been widely adopted as a framework for understanding how religious environments can nurture multiple intelligences simultaneously (Mahmud et al., 2024). These findings indicate that holistic education rests on a simple but demanding premise: if human potential is plural, an institution cannot assign one dimension to the classroom and leave the others to chance. The unit of analysis for holistic education is therefore the whole learning environment, not the individual subject.

Goleman (2006) complements this view by highlighting that self-awareness, motivation, empathy, self-regulation, and social skills are competencies as important as cognitive ability. Several studies have used this theory to examine character formation in pesantren explicitly. They argue that the organized communal life of pesantren provides fertile ground for emotional competencies that formal schools rarely replicate (Kistoro et al., 2023; Zarkasyi, 2021). Read together, the two theories explain why this review treats emotional and social competencies as part of human intelligence rather than as by-products of instruction. Both locate these competencies in lived experience, which is precisely what a boarding environment organizes.

Holistic education in the Islamic tradition rejects the separation of religious knowledge from general knowledge (Daulay & Salminawati, 2022; Zanki & Suharto, 2026). This view argues that, because all knowledge comes from God, the artificial separation between religious and secular subjects reflects an institutional legacy of colonial times rather than the authenticity of Islamic epistemology (Jamil et al., 2025). The theories converge on a definition of holistic education as an integrated effort to achieve social responsibility, emotional maturity, intellectual development, spiritual depth, and physical ability through education that treats these dimensions as mutually reinforcing rather than competing (Aisyi et al., 2025; Husnah, 2017). This convergence provides the analytical lens for the following subsections, which examine whether Gontor's practices integrate these dimensions in a single system.

Panca Jiwa: The Philosophical Core of Gontor's Holistic Education Model

The reviewed literature consistently identifies the Panca Jiwa of Gontor as the source of integrity of its educational system (Nujhan, 2019). Across sources, Panca Jiwa appears as a lived ethical code that governs the lives of teachers and students and shapes their daily routines. It also serves as an institutional criterion for evaluating practice, rather than functioning as an abstract statement of institutional values (Elyunusi et al., 2022; Nujhan, 2019). Table 1 synthesizes how each value can be mapped to an intelligence domain and to a relevant PAI competency area.

Table 1. Mapping of Panca Jiwa Values to Intelligence Domains and Relevant Islamic Religious Education Competencies

Panca Jiwa Value	Core Meaning	Intelligence Domain	Relevant PAI Competency
Sincerity	Acting solely for the sake of Allah SWT without expecting anything in return.	Spiritual intelligence	Cultivates sincere intentions in learning and worship (fiqh and worship).
Simplicity	A sense of material sufficiency, neither excessive nor lacking.	Emotional intelligence	Self-regulation and gratitude in moral education.
Self-reliance	Independence in managing personal and institutional	Intellectual intelligence	Critical thinking and initiative in reasoning about faith and morals

	affairs.		(aqidah and akhlak).
Islamic brotherhood	Solidarity and mutual respect among Muslims.	Social and emotional intelligence	Cooperative learning in Islamic Religious Education classrooms and social competence.
Freedom	Freedom of thought and in choosing one's future path.	Spiritual and intellectual intelligence	Encouraging a moderate understanding of religion in Islamic Religious Education.

The mapping shows that Panca Jiwa is more than a set of moral recommendations. Because it forms a structured philosophical framework, each value can be translated into a competency that can be taught in Islamic Religious Education. Moreover, a single value can engage more than one dominant intelligence at once. Freedom, for example, links spiritual and intellectual intelligence, and Islamic brotherhood links social and emotional intelligence. This overlap reinforces the holistic premise that character cannot be formed by training a single competency. It is also consistent with the character education perspective that [Elyunusi et al. \(2022\)](#) applied to Gontor, in which values are practiced through the routines of daily life rather than only taught.

Integrative Model of Religious and General Sciences in the KMI Curriculum

The second recurring theme in the literature is the KMI curriculum, which some sources describe as “100 percent religious and 100 percent general knowledge” ([Hasan et al., 2024](#)). This formulation rejects the notion that increasing religious study hours necessarily reduces general study hours, or vice versa. Instead, the KMI curriculum treats the two domains as complementary. It includes general subjects such as biology, physics, and mathematics alongside religious subjects such as tafsir (Quranic exegesis), hadith, grammar (nahwu and shorof), and Arabic linguistics ([Naufal et al., 2024](#)). The “100 percent” formula can be read as a statement about status rather than time: neither domain is subordinate to the other, so a student's day is not divided into a religious half and a secular half. This reading corresponds to the Islamic epistemological view, discussed above, that all knowledge originates from God ([Jamil et al., 2025](#)).

This integrative approach can be traced historically to the influence of KH Imam Zarkasyi, one of the founders of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, who drew on the educational thinking of his teacher, Mahmud Yunus, at the Islamic Normal School in Padang Panjang before establishing the KMI system in 1936 ([Muslim, 2017](#)). Studies of the KMI remain relevant today because many Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia have adopted concepts similar to it ([Hasan et al., 2024](#)). This dissemination suggests that the KMI is not merely a curriculum integration or a characteristic of one institution but a transferable model that has been applied in various educational contexts.

Four Domains of Intelligence Fostered through a Total Educational Environment

A review of the empirical literature shows that Gontor fosters four main domains of intelligence: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and kinesthetic. Rather than using separate programs for each domain, Gontor relies on a total educational environment, a 24-hour setting in which students are educated and their intelligences are developed across all four aspects ([Naufal et al., 2024](#); [Zarkasyi, 2021](#)). Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework connecting Panca Jiwa, the four intelligence domains, and their relevance to PAI. In this framework, intellectual intelligence corresponds to aqidah and morals, spiritual intelligence to fiqh and worship, emotional intelligence to the Qur'an and Hadith as spiritual literacy, and kinesthetic

intelligence to social and public competence.

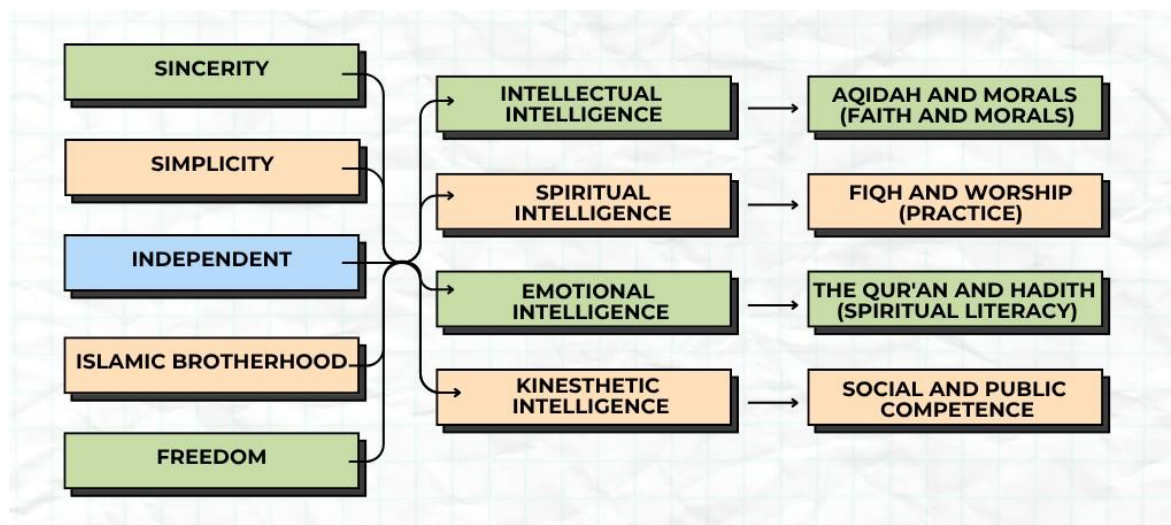


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework Connecting Panca Jiwa, Holistic Intelligence Domains, and the Relevance of Islamic Religious Education

Intellectual intelligence is developed through organizational responsibility, speech training, and structured Arabic and English language learning (Naufal et al., 2024). Spiritual intelligence is fostered through repeated religious instruction (tausiyah diniyah), improved Quran recitation through the tahsinul qiraah program, and congregational worship. Emotional intelligence is developed in line with the concepts of self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management proposed by Goleman (2006). It is cultivated through leadership assignments in student organizations that require students to resolve intrapersonal conflicts and manage diverse personalities in a shared environment (Saifulloh et al., 2020; Zarkasyi, 2021). Finally, kinesthetic intelligence is developed through sports clubs and annual events, such as stage performances and arena dramas, that require students to coordinate physical movement, creativity, and collaborative planning. These four domains develop simultaneously rather than separately. In speech training, for example, students develop not only intellectual skills, such as mastering the material, but also emotional and social skills, such as managing nervousness and coordinating with colleagues. Because these domains are united in a single experience, character development at Gontor is holistic and cannot be compartmentalized into separate domain programs (Naufal et al., 2024; Permadi, Dhuha, et al., 2026; Permadi, Hamidalloh, et al., 2026). This finding supports the multiple-intelligences view that development in one domain is rarely isolated from development in another (Gardner, 2011). It also shows that Gontor's contribution lies less in any single activity than in how organizations, language programs, worship, and sport are arranged so that every activity trains several domains at once.

Thematic Distribution of Reviewed Literature

To provide a transparent overview of the evidence base for each theme, Figure 3 shows the distribution of the 25 reviewed sources across five thematic categories identified through axial coding.

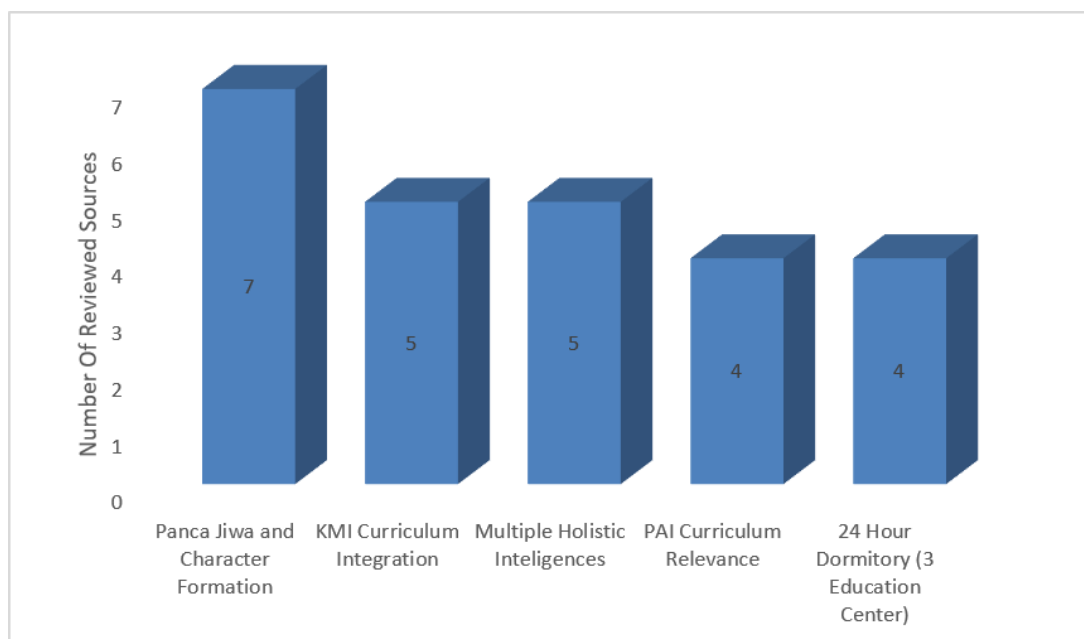


Figure 3. Thematic Distribution of Reviewed Literature

Figure 3 shows that the Panca Jiwa and character formation theme has the highest representation (seven sources). It is followed by KMI curriculum integration and multiple holistic intelligences (five sources each), and by PAI curriculum relevance and the 24-hour dormitory as a total educational environment (four sources each). The literature is therefore imbalanced in two ways. First, Gontor's philosophy and curriculum have been studied often by previous researchers. Second, concrete evidence that pesantren foster specific intelligences, such as emotional and intellectual intelligence, remains scarce. This imbalance indicates that the claims about intelligence domains discussed above rest on a thinner evidence base than the claims about philosophy and curriculum, and it shows where further empirical research is most needed. The authors hope that this gap encourages researchers to examine the topic further.

Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Development

The primary contribution of this study is to translate Gontor's holistic model into implications for Islamic Religious Education curriculum development outside the pesantren context. Three implications emerge from this synthesis. First, the integrative logic of Gontor's KMI curriculum can be applied to Islamic Religious Education in public and non-boarding schools. By integrating religious and general knowledge, as Gontor does, Islamic Religious Education teaching need not revolve solely around religious topics. It can also link religious knowledge with broader topics such as science and social studies. This approach rests on the premise that all knowledge originates from one source, namely Allah SWT, or revelation (Jamil et al., 2025; Zanki & Suharto, 2026). It also responds directly to the dichotomy problem raised in the Introduction (Permadi et al., 2025).

Second, the Panca Jiwa framework can serve as a foundation for character education in Islamic Religious Education that does not simply teach morals as a rote lesson about right and wrong. Instead, values such as sincerity and self-reliance are instilled through learning experiences, not through memorizing material. For example, students are trained to make their own decisions (self-reliance) and to work together and take responsibility within a group (brotherhood and cooperation). In essence, character is not taught through memorization or theory but lived through an ongoing process (Kistoro et al., 2023; Mardiah, 2021; Permadi, Muhid, & Rofiq, 2026). Table 1 suggests concrete entry points for such adaptation: cooperative learning for Islamic brotherhood, tasks that require independent decisions for self-reliance, and

discussion of diverse viewpoints to encourage a moderate understanding of religion for freedom.

Third, although formal schools cannot replicate Gontor's 24-hour education, its fundamental character education can be implemented throughout the school day through a consistent environment. According to [Batula et al. \(2026\)](#), learning approaches that can be adapted from pesantren to formal education include project-based and experiential learning rather than theory alone, and engaging multiple intelligences simultaneously, including intellectual, social, emotional, and kinesthetic intelligence, instead of relying solely on rote or verbal intelligence. They also include reducing dependence on lecture methods. These recommendations are consistent with the findings above, because both identify experience, rather than the transmission of content, as the carrier of values.

Limitations and Contextual Considerations

This synthesis needs to be interpreted in light of the limited institutional transferability of the model. Gontor's boarding system allows 24-hour supervision of students, which regular formal schools cannot easily replicate without fundamental institutional changes ([Jamil et al., 2025](#)). This review therefore does not recommend a complete transfer of the Gontor model. It recommends a more adaptive approach to its core concepts: the integration of general and religious knowledge, values-based teaching, and learning that involves all domains of intelligence. Furthermore, all existing evidence on the four intelligence domains comes from qualitative studies at a single Gontor campus ([Zarkasyi, 2021](#)). Generalizing these findings to other Gontor campuses and affiliated Islamic boarding schools therefore requires further empirical study. Future research could also test the adapted principles in formal school settings, for example through classroom action research or comparative case studies.

Conclusion

This study reconstructed the concept of holistic education at Gontor and analyzed its relevance to contemporary Islamic Religious Education (PAI). First, holistic education is the development of the whole student, covering intellect, faith and spirituality, physical ability, and emotion, and it rests on the view that religious and general knowledge both originate from Allah SWT and cannot be separated. Second, Gontor embodies this idea through two mutually reinforcing elements: Panca Jiwa as the basic values, and the KMI curriculum as the unifier of religious and general knowledge, which treats the two as partners rather than competitors. Third, empirical studies show that this structure fosters four domains of intelligence, namely spiritual, intellectual, kinesthetic, and emotional, because Gontor applies a total educational system in which classroom lessons, dormitory life, and extracurricular activities are interconnected. Theoretically, these findings connect Islamic epistemology with multiple-intelligence and emotional-intelligence theories in a single framework.

Practically, Gontor's model cannot simply be replicated in formal schools because boarding and non-boarding institutions differ. Its core values nevertheless remain relevant: the unification of religious and general knowledge, teaching that instills values rather than merely delivering material, and learning that engages all four intelligences simultaneously. These principles can serve as a concrete direction for developing PAI curricula in formal schools in Indonesia. The conclusions are limited by their reliance on literature and, for the intelligence domains, on qualitative evidence from a single campus. Future studies should test the adapted model empirically in formal schools and examine other Gontor campuses and affiliated pesantren.

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