Contemporary Islamic Sociology of Education: Integration of Social, Cultural, and Spiritual Values in Schools

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Abstract

This study examines how contemporary sociology of education can be used to understand the integration of social, cultural, and spiritual values in Islamic schooling. Using a qualitative library research design, the study analyzes theoretical and empirical literature published between 2020 and 2025, with classical sociological theory serving as background, and applies content analysis following Krippendorff. The results show three interrelated themes. First, the field has shifted from a functionalist view of schools as agents of socialization toward critical, multidimensional views of schools as arenas of cultural reproduction and identity negotiation. Second, four structural challenges confront schools: neoliberal commercialization, the digital divide, changing teacher–student relations, and cultural homogenization accompanied by a crisis of character. Third, the literature points toward justice-oriented education policy, character education rooted in local wisdom and spirituality, and collaboration among families, schools, and communities. The study concludes that integrating sociological perspectives into Islamic education can strengthen character formation, promote social harmony, and foster adaptive and civilized learning environments aligned with Islamic values.
Keywords: educational sociology; Islamic education; social values; character education; globalization.

Introduction

Education is one of the most dynamic social institutions in modern society. It functions not only as a medium for transferring knowledge but also as a system that shapes values, norms, and social structures that sustain collective life. Under conditions of globalization,

digitalization, and rapid cultural change, both the orientation and the social function of education have been transformed. Understanding education from a sociological perspective is therefore essential to explain how it acts both as an agent of change and as a site of social reproduction. According to Virdi et al. (2023), the sociology of education explains the interrelation between social structures and educational processes, as well as how social values are constructed and preserved through educational institutions.

Contemporary studies in the field are rooted in the classical thought of Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Karl Marx, and Pierre Bourdieu. Durkheim emphasized that education strengthens social solidarity, while Parsons viewed schools as mechanisms for selection and for the socialization of meritocratic values. Bourdieu, together with Bowles and Gintis, later criticized this functionalist view, arguing that education also reproduces social inequality through inherited cultural systems and symbolic capital. In more recent development, schools are no longer regarded merely as institutions of socialization but also as arenas for the negotiation of identity, power, and cultural capital amid complex social change (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

The relevance of this field has increased as educational systems face pressure from economic globalization, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and rapid digital advancement. These forces have reshaped modes of learning, social relationships within schools, and the moral values being internalized. As noted by Bagascary et al. (2025), contemporary sociology of education demands new approaches to understanding how education is linked to global labor markets, digital technologies, and cross-cultural social mobility.

For Islamic education, these changes carry a particular significance. Islamic schools and madrasahs are expected to transmit knowledge while also nurturing faith, moral character (akhlak), and social responsibility. Yet much of the sociological literature on contemporary schooling is written from a general, secular perspective, and the question of how its insights can be integrated with the social, cultural, and spiritual aims of Islamic education has received comparatively limited systematic treatment. This gap motivates the present study.

The study is guided by three research questions: (1) how is the nature and scope of sociology of education understood in contemporary literature; (2) what social and cultural challenges do schools face according to this literature; and (3) what directions and implications emerge for integrating social, cultural, and spiritual values in Islamic education? Accordingly, the study aims to trace the evolution of the field from classical theory toward critical and multidimensional analysis, and to offer a reflective conceptual foundation for adaptive educational policy and practice in response to global social change.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative library research design, which involves a critical and systematic review of scholarly literature. The design was chosen because the objective is to analyze the conceptual framework of educational sociology in contemporary society and to synthesize existing theoretical and empirical findings, rather than to collect primary field data (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The data consist of secondary sources: academic books, national and international journal articles, and previous studies relevant to the sociology of education, Islamic education, character education, globalization, and digitalization. Sources were selected using the following criteria:

1. Relevance: the source addresses the relationship between education and social structure, culture, values, or social change, including character and spiritual formation.
2. Currency: the primary corpus was published between 2020 and 2025, so that the analysis reflects contemporary conditions; classical theorists are used only as theoretical background.
3. Credibility: priority was given to books from academic publishers and to journal articles with identifiable authorship, volume, and DOI or equivalent bibliographic information.
4. Contextual fit: sources on the Indonesian context and on Islamic or religious-based education were included to anchor the global discussion in the setting of this study.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded in four steps: (1) identifying the topic and formulating keywords, such as sociology of education, cultural reproduction, digital divide, commercialization of education, and character education; (2) searching books and national and international journal databases; (3) screening sources against the criteria above by reading titles, abstracts, and, where necessary, full texts; and (4) recording bibliographic data and key arguments of each selected source in a literature matrix.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis as described by Krippendorff (2020). The analysis followed three stages. First, in the coding stage, relevant statements, concepts, and findings in each source were identified and labeled. Second, in the categorization stage, codes were grouped into categories according to the research questions, as shown in Table 1. Third, in the synthesis stage, categories were compared across sources to identify convergences, tensions, and gaps, and were then interpreted through the lens of Islamic educational values to formulate the conceptual conclusions.

Table 1. Analytical Framework for Content Analysis

Category	Focus of coding	Linked research question
Nature and scope	Definitions, theoretical lineage, and the scope of sociology of education	RQ1
Challenges	Globalization, neoliberalism, digitalization, teacher–student relations, cultural homogenization, character crisis	RQ2
Directions and implications	Social justice, policy, character education, roles of teachers, schools, and communities	RQ3

Trustworthiness

To strengthen the credibility of the analysis, the study triangulated across sources by comparing claims from different authors and publication types, relied primarily on peer-reviewed and academically published works, and kept a literature matrix as an audit trail so that

every analytical claim can be traced back to its source. The study acknowledges that, as a conceptual study, it does not test hypotheses empirically.

Results

The analysis produced three main themes, aligned with the research questions. Table 2 summarizes the themes and the principal sources supporting each; the sub-sections that follow present the findings in detail.

Table 2. Summary of Themes Identified in the Literature

Theme	Key findings	Principal sources
1. Nature and scope of contemporary sociology of education	Shift from functionalist integration and selection toward critical analysis of cultural reproduction, identity, power, and global influences on schooling	Lingard (2023); Giddens (2021); Kurniawan et al. (2024); Virdi et al. (2023)
2. Challenges for schools	Neoliberal commercialization; digital divide; changing teacher–student relations; cultural homogenization and character crisis	Apple (2021); Selwyn (2022); Rizvi & Lingard (2022); Hargreaves (2023); Yugo (2025); Peruzzo (2023)
3. Directions and implications	Socially just education and policy; character education grounded in social values and local wisdom; collaborative ecosystem of family, school, and community	Robertson & Dale (2021); Torres (2022); Lingard (2023); Helmi & Sofa (2024); Hargreaves (2023)

The Nature and Scope of Contemporary Sociology of Education

The literature defines the sociology of education as a branch of social science that studies the relationship between education and society, namely how educational institutions are formed and organized, and how they shape and are shaped by social structures, cultural values, and power relations. Lingard (2023) asserts that modern educational sociology must capture how education interacts with globalization, market economies, and digital technologies, and how the social structures within schools change over time.

Theoretically, the reviewed works show a movement from integrative to critical perspectives. Durkheim and Parsons treated schools as social systems that maintain integration and transmit normative values, with education as a subsystem preparing individuals for societal roles. Bourdieu, in contrast, positions education as a site of cultural reproduction in which social and symbolic capital is transmitted, so that social positions are inherited and reinforced through schooling; the concepts of cultural capital and habitus explain this process (Giddens, 2021). As a result, the scope of the field now extends to competition among individuals and groups, social mobility, and the transformation of values and culture, with schools understood as arenas of struggle for social and symbolic capital that shape life trajectories.

The literature further describes education as a continuous interaction between cultural values and social change. Norms from outside the school, including those of family, community, and market, enter the classroom, and schools respond to them. Digital culture, globalization, and commercial values, for example, influence educational orientation, moral frameworks, and teacher–student relationships (Giddens, 2021). Education therefore acts as a

mediator between tradition and modernity, local and global cultures, and mainstream and alternative value systems (Lingard, 2023).

Challenges for Schools from a Contemporary Sociological Perspective

Four categories of challenge were consistently identified across the sources.

Neoliberalism and commercialization. Apple (2021) argues that education operates within the vortex of neoliberalism, which emphasizes efficiency, competition, and market orientation and often marginalizes humanitarian and social justice values. Education, once regarded as a social right, is increasingly treated as a commodity; institutions compete for prestige, reinforcing social stratification, and education becomes a symbol of status rather than a vehicle for value and character formation. Rizvi and Lingard (2022) argue that commodification has shifted the moral orientation of education toward market logic, prioritizing performance and certification over personal development and social solidarity.

Digitalization and the digital divide. Digital transformation has moved learning beyond the physical classroom and requires new competencies from teachers and students. However, Selwyn (2022) notes that digitalization often deepens social inequality because of uneven economic resources, infrastructure, and digital literacy. The digital divide is thus not only a technical issue but also a social and moral challenge requiring equity and inclusivity.

Changing teacher–student relations. Teachers have moved from authoritative figures toward facilitators and learning partners, influenced by greater awareness of students' rights, technology, and democratic values. A more egalitarian relationship fosters creativity and openness but complicates discipline and character formation. Hargreaves (2023) highlights that young people are now more exposed to global cultures through social media than to the local values traditionally cultivated in schools, contributing to an identity crisis that affects behavior, motivation, and moral development.

Cultural homogenization and the crisis of character. Educational systems in many countries, including Indonesia, increasingly adopt international standards that can neglect local context and indigenous values. Yugo (2025) emphasizes that character education rooted in local wisdom and spirituality is essential for maintaining the moral integrity and social cohesion of the younger generation in an era of disruption. Without it, education risks producing individuals who are intellectually capable but lack empathy and social awareness. Drawing on Bourdieu, Peruzzo (2023) contends that educational institutions mirror the power relations operating in society, so their ability to navigate social and moral disruption depends on the critical consciousness of educational actors.

Directions and Implications

Three directions emerged from the reviewed literature. The first is socially just education. Robertson and Dale (2021) argue that twenty-first-century education must respond to the widening inequality produced by economic globalization and technological advancement, which means ensuring equal opportunity of access to quality education regardless of economic, cultural, or social status. This aligns with Freire's idea of liberating education, which fosters critical consciousness so that learners can understand and transform their social realities (Torres, 2022).

The second is the integration of sociological insight into education policy. Lingard (2023) emphasizes that effective policies are socially sensitive, reflecting community realities and

local needs. In the Indonesian context, a sociological perspective can inform curricula that promote cognitive competence while embedding mutual cooperation (gotong royong), social justice, and moral responsibility, so that policy becomes an instrument of social transformation and not merely an administrative tool.

The third is the strengthening of character education rooted in social values. Helmi and Sofa (2024) show that learning based on social and cultural values can nurture empathy, social responsibility, and collaborative skills. The literature assigns strategic roles to all actors: teachers as social facilitators who instill justice, tolerance, and equality; schools as inclusive learning communities open to change yet grounded in moral and cultural principles; and society as a participatory, character-strengthening environment. Hargreaves (2023) argues that a dignified education system requires collaboration among families, schools, and communities as mutually reinforcing social ecosystems.

Discussion

The results indicate that the central issue facing contemporary schools is the tension between market and technological rationality on the one hand, and humanistic and moral purposes on the other. For Islamic education, this tension is not new in principle, but it takes new forms under globalization and digitalization. This section interprets the findings through the lens of Islamic educational thought to show how social, cultural, and spiritual values can be integrated in schools.

Social Values: Justice and Social Harmony

The literature's call for socially just education and for attention to the digital divide corresponds to the Islamic emphasis on justice and on the right of every person to knowledge. The Qur'an declares that God raises in rank those who believe and those who are given knowledge (QS. Al-Mujadalah: 11), which frames access to education as both a social and a religious concern. Where commercialization turns schooling into a marker of status, Islamic education is called to resist that logic by treating education as a means of human dignity and social solidarity. This is consistent with Durkheim's emphasis on solidarity, but it is balanced by the critical insight of Bourdieu and Freire: Islamic schools should also examine whether their own practices reproduce inequality.

Cultural Values: Local Wisdom and Plurality

The finding that cultural homogenization erodes character formation supports approaches that root education in local wisdom. Yugo (2025) provides an example from Aswaja Nahdlatul Ulama-based character education, which draws on local religious tradition to respond to disruption. Islamic educational thought has long regarded culture as the setting in which education takes place; Ibn Khaldun, for example, analyzed education as part of the social life of human civilization (Ibn Khaldun, 2015). At the same time, the Qur'an recognizes human diversity as a basis for mutual acquaintance (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13), which supports pluralistic, tolerant schooling. Integrating local culture and Islamic values is therefore not a retreat from modernity but a way of mediating between tradition and modernity, as the reviewed literature recommends.

Spiritual Values: Adab and the Moral Compass of Technology

Findings on the moral transformation of young people in the digital era suggest that technical competence alone is insufficient. In the Islamic tradition, Al-Attas (1979) argues that the aim of education is the cultivation of adab, the right ordering of the person in relation to knowledge, society, and God, rather than the mere acquisition of information. Spiritual formation thus functions as the moral compass that guides how students use technology and engage with global culture. This also reframes the changing teacher–student relationship: the teacher remains a moral exemplar (murabbi) even as pedagogy becomes more participatory and dialogical.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Three implications follow. First, policymakers should design holistic education systems that evaluate not only academic achievement but also social and moral outcomes. Second, teachers should strengthen their roles as social facilitators and moral mentors, supported by training in digital literacy and character education. Third, communities and families should participate actively so that the school, home, and community reinforce the same values. Together, these measures can realize an adaptive and civilized educational ecosystem.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how contemporary sociology of education can inform the integration of social, cultural, and spiritual values in Islamic schooling. The results show that the field has moved from functionalist to critical, multidimensional analysis; that schools face challenges of commercialization, digital inequality, shifting teacher–student relations, and cultural homogenization with a character crisis; and that the literature directs education toward social justice, socially sensitive policy, and character education grounded in local wisdom and spirituality. The discussion shows that these directions are compatible with Islamic educational values of justice, plurality, and adab.

The study therefore concludes that Islamic education should develop through the integration of sociological perspectives that balance intellectual progress with moral and spiritual formation, serving not only as a medium of knowledge transmission but also as an instrument of social transformation that fosters justice, empathy, and integrity. Practically, this requires collaboration among teachers, policymakers, and communities. The study is limited by its conceptual, literature-based nature and by the scope of sources reviewed; further empirical research, such as case studies or field research in madrasahs and Islamic schools, is needed to examine how this integration is implemented in practice.

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