

INTEGRATING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TO STRENGTHEN STUDENTS' PROSOCIAL CHARACTER: AN INTEGRATIVE COMPARATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW OF INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 09 03, 2026

Revised 09 19, 2026

Accepted 10 02, 2026

Keywords:

Islamic Religious Education
Experiential Learning
Prosocial Character
Character Education
Indonesia–Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is expected to develop not only religious knowledge but also students' moral and social dispositions. However, a persistent gap remains between understanding religious values and translating them into prosocial action. This study examines how experiential learning can strengthen students' prosocial character through IRE from Indonesian and Malaysian perspectives. Using an integrative comparative literature review, peer-reviewed studies and relevant scholarly sources on Islamic education, experiential learning, character education, and prosocial behaviour were purposively selected, with priority given to recent literature and comparative studies from both countries. The sources were analysed through thematic content analysis and interpretative comparison. The synthesis indicates that experiential learning can function as a mechanism of value internalization by connecting Islamic moral principles with concrete social experience, reflection, meaning-making, and action. The literature also shows that Indonesia and Malaysia share a strong orientation toward religious and character formation, although curriculum structures, institutional arrangements, and pedagogical practices differ. The study proposes an integrative framework: Islamic Values → Social Experience → Reflective Meaning-Making → Prosocial Action. This framework positions empathy, helping, cooperation, solidarity, and social responsibility as observable outcomes of experiential IRE. The study contributes a comparative conceptual model for more socially transformative Islamic education and recommends empirical testing across schools in Indonesia and Malaysia.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) has a strategic role in developing students' religious understanding, moral judgement, and social responsibility. Its educational success therefore cannot be reduced to cognitive mastery of doctrines and rituals, because Islamic values are expected to appear in everyday conduct, including empathy, cooperation, helping, honesty, and responsibility. Recent studies in Indonesia similarly emphasize that IRE contributes to character formation when moral values are integrated into learning practices and school culture rather than delivered only as normative knowledge (Krishnawati et al., 2023; Maulana & Purba, 2024). The central pedagogical problem is thus the gap between knowing religious values and consistently enacting them in social life.

Experiential learning offers a relevant pathway for addressing this gap. Kolb (1984) conceptualizes learning as the transformation of experience through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Evidence beyond religious education also supports this mechanism: a systematic review and meta-analysis found that experiential learning programmes were more effective than non-experiential programmes in improving adolescent empathy, although effects on prosocial behaviour varied across interventions (Chan et al., 2021). Within Islamic education, experience-based religious learning has been implemented in Indonesian and Malaysian secondary schools, but teachers' conceptual understanding and pedagogical readiness remain uneven (Kistoro et al., 2022). Subsequent research further confirms that experiential learning can be adapted to IRE, while its success depends on teacher competence, topic complexity, and students' readiness to use personal experience as a learning resource (Kistoro et al., 2023).

Prosocial character in this study refers to relatively stable moral-social dispositions that orient students toward empathy, helping, sharing, cooperation, solidarity, and social responsibility. Prosocial behaviour refers to the observable enactment of these dispositions in particular situations, while prosocial orientation denotes the broader tendency toward such actions. To maintain conceptual consistency, this article uses prosocial character as the overarching construct and prosocial behaviour as its observable manifestation. These outcomes correspond closely to Islamic moral principles such as *rahmah* (compassion), *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), *ithar* (altruistic preference for others), *sadaqah* (voluntary giving), and social responsibility. Research on philanthropic-based Islamic education indicates that learning which deliberately incorporates care, empathy, helping, and social solidarity can strengthen students' prosocial orientation (Wantini et al., 2026).

Indonesia and Malaysia provide a productive comparative context because both place Islamic education within formal educational structures while operating through different curriculum and institutional arrangements. Comparative studies have identified similarities in Islamic education learning management as well as differences in curriculum philosophy and governance (Munastiwi & Marfuah, 2019; Ismail et al., 2024). Studies of religious moderation and experiential religious learning also show shared concerns regarding teacher competence, curriculum support, and the practical translation of religious values into student behaviour (Kistoro et al., 2022; Muslih et al., 2024). Yet existing research tends to examine Islamic education, experiential learning, and character outcomes separately. An integrative explanation of how experiential processes mediate the movement from Islamic moral knowledge to prosocial action across Indonesian and Malaysian contexts remains underdeveloped.

Accordingly, this study analyses the integration of Islamic Religious Education and experiential learning in strengthening students' prosocial character from Indonesian and Malaysian perspectives. The research gap is not simply the absence of studies on any one of these themes, but the fragmentation of the existing literature. Prior studies have examined experiential religious learning in Indonesia and Malaysia (Kistoro et al., 2022), experiential learning within IRE (Kistoro et al., 2023), prosocial outcomes of philanthropic Islamic education (Wantini et al., 2022), and comparative curriculum or learning management (Munastiwi & Marfuah, 2019; Ismail et al., 2024). However, these strands have rarely been synthesized into a single explanatory model linking Islamic moral values, experiential processes, cross-national educational context, and observable prosocial action. The present review addresses this gap by developing and comparatively interpreting an integrative framework in which Islamic values provide the ethical foundation, experiential learning functions as the pedagogical mechanism, and prosocial character constitutes the dispositional outcome expressed through behaviour.

Table 1. Mapping of Previous Studies and the Research Gap

Study	IRE/ Islamic values	Experiential learning	Prosocial outcome	Indonesia- Malaysia comparison	Remaining gap
Kistoro et al., (2022)	Yes	Yes	Indirect	Yes	Does not develop a prosocial-character framework
Kistoro et al., (2023)	Yes	Yes	Indirect	No	Focuses on experiential IRE, not cross-national prosocial synthesis
Wantini et al., (2026)	Yes	Indirect	Yes	No	Prosocial focus without experiential-comparative framework
Munastiwi & Marfuah (2019); Ismail et al., (2024)	Yes	No	No	Yes	Comparative structure/curriculum without experiential- prosocial mechanism
Present review	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Integrates ethical foundation, learning mechanism, context, and prosocial outcome

METHOD

This study employed an integrative comparative literature review to examine relationships among Islamic Religious Education (IRE), experiential learning, and students' prosocial character in Indonesia and Malaysia. The integrative approach was retained because it permits theoretical, empirical, and comparative evidence to be combined into a coherent conceptual explanation rather than merely summarized descriptively (Snyder, 2019). Methodological reporting was strengthened by following the logic of integrative-review transparency described by Whitemore and Knafl (2005), particularly explicit specification of the review purpose, source selection, data evaluation, analysis, and synthesis.

The evidence base was constructed through purposive scholarly searching and backward reference checking. Sources were retrieved from Google Scholar, Scopus, and regional open-access indexes (DOAJ, Garuda, and Sinta) to capture both internationally indexed and Indonesian/Malaysian national journals relevant to Islamic education, using

combinations of the terms 'Islamic Religious Education', 'experiential learning', 'experience-based religious learning', 'prosocial behaviour', 'prosocial character', 'character education', 'Indonesia', and 'Malaysia'. The revised manuscript also verified bibliographic and DOI information through scholarly search and publisher/Crossref records. Priority was given to peer-reviewed publications from 2019–2026, while older sources were retained only when they provided foundational theory (Kolb, 1984), established prosocial-development concepts, or directly relevant comparative evidence. Inclusion criteria were: (1) peer-reviewed empirical, theoretical, or comparative scholarship; (2) direct relevance to IRE/Islamic education, experiential learning, prosocial or character outcomes, or Indonesia-Malaysia comparison; (3) sufficient bibliographic information to verify the source; and (4) substantive relevance to the conceptual synthesis. Sources were excluded when they were duplicates, non-scholarly commentary, tangential to the review questions, or lacked sufficient information for analytical use. A retrospective audit of the manuscript identified 19 sources in the analytical and theoretical evidence base, including empirical/comparative studies and foundational methodological or theoretical works. Consistent with Whitemore and Knafl's (2005) integrative-review methodology, which synthesises diverse source types interpretatively rather than through a preregistered systematic protocol, this review reports transparently on the final evidence base, the databases searched, and the inclusion/exclusion criteria applied, rather than presenting a PRISMA-style numerical flow diagram. Because the original search was conducted as an integrative rather than a preregistered systematic review, the initial retrieval log recording gross identification and exclusion counts at each stage was not preserved, and those counts are therefore not retrospectively invented. This is reported here as an explicit methodological limitation, and future validation work is encouraged to use a prospectively logged, PRISMA-compatible systematic search so that identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion counts can be reported in full.

The selected literature was analysed through thematic content analysis and interpretative comparison. Analysis proceeded through five stages: (1) extracting each source's educational context, theoretical focus, experiential mechanism, and reported character/prosocial implications; (2) coding recurring themes; (3) comparing similarities and differences between Indonesian and Malaysian educational contexts; (4) mapping experiential processes onto Kolb's learning cycle and Islamic moral constructs; and (5) synthesizing the relationships into an integrative conceptual framework. Particular attention was given to concrete experience, reflection, value internalization, empathy, helping, cooperation, solidarity, and social responsibility. Following the reporting logic of PRISMA 2020, the review distinguishes source identification, eligibility, and inclusion conceptually; however, it does not claim PRISMA-complete systematic-review status because complete initial retrieval counts were unavailable (Page et al., 2021).

RESULTS

A. Experiential Learning as a Mechanism of Islamic Value Internalization

The literature synthesis shows that the principal contribution of experiential learning to IRE lies in its capacity to connect moral knowledge with lived experience. In Kolb's experiential cycle, learners encounter a concrete situation, reflect on it, form or revise conceptual understanding, and test that understanding through subsequent action (Kolb, 1984). Applied to IRE, the cycle changes the pedagogical question from whether students can explain a moral value to whether they can recognize its relevance, interpret a social situation through that value, and act accordingly. This interpretation is consistent with research in Indonesian and Malaysian senior high

schools showing that experience-based religious learning can increase student participation, although implementation is constrained by uneven teacher understanding and the absence of sufficiently standardized pedagogical support (Kistoro et al., 2022). More recent work also identifies independence, problem solving, and experience as a learning resource as measurable components of experiential-based Islamic learning (Kistoro et al., 2025).

From an Islamic educational perspective, experiential learning becomes pedagogically distinctive when social activities are explicitly interpreted through Islamic ethical constructs. *Ta'awun* (mutual assistance) can be operationalized through structured peer-support or community-service tasks; *sadaqah* and *infaq* can be learned through student-managed philanthropic projects in which learners plan, distribute, and evaluate assistance; *rahmah* can be cultivated through service activities centred on compassion for vulnerable groups; and *ithar* can be explored through situations requiring students to place legitimate collective needs above personal convenience. Crucially, experience is followed by *muhasabah*, understood here as guided moral reflection in which students examine motives, consequences, emotions, and responsibilities in relation to Islamic teachings. Thus, community service or collaborative projects are not treated as generically 'experiential'; they become Islamic experiential learning when action, reflection, and moral interpretation are deliberately connected. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that experiential programmes can strengthen empathy (Chan et al., 2021) and that philanthropic-based Islamic education contributes to care, helping behaviour, and social solidarity (Wantini et al., 2026). The synthesis of the literature suggests the following relationship (summarised in Table 2):

Table 2. Islamic Values, Experiential Processes, and Expected Prosocial Outcomes

<i>Educational Component</i>	<i>Experiential Process</i>	<i>Expected Prosocial Outcome</i>
<i>Islamic moral values</i>	Concrete social experience	Empathy
<i>Religious reflection</i>	Reflective observation	Social awareness
<i>Moral understanding</i>	Conceptualization	Responsibility
<i>Social practice</i>	Active experimentation	Helping and cooperation
<i>Continuous habituation</i>	Reflection and repeated action	Prosocial character

Taken together, the evidence supports viewing experiential learning not merely as an instructional technique but as a mechanism of value internalization. Cognitive understanding provides moral vocabulary, concrete experience creates an encounter with social reality, reflection links the experience with Islamic ethical principles, and repeated action strengthens behavioural disposition. This sequence also helps explain why character education based only on habituation or verbal instruction may produce uneven outcomes: students require opportunities to interpret why an action matters and to reconstruct moral understanding through experience (Kistoro et al., 2023; Maulana & Purba, 2024).

B. Comparative Findings: Indonesia and Malaysia

Indonesia and Malaysia share a formal commitment to connecting Islamic knowledge with moral and character development, but the institutional routes through which experiential IRE can be enacted are not identical. Existing comparative studies identify similarities in planning, implementation, and evaluation while also noting differences in curriculum philosophy, governance, programme structure, and academic requirements (Munastiwi & Marfuah, 2019; Ismail et al., 2024; Shobahiya et al., 2026).

In Indonesia, the current Kurikulum Merdeka grants schools and teachers greater contextual autonomy; in madrasah, this is operationalised through the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Profil Pelajar Rahmatan lil Alamin (P5-PPRA), a co-curricular project structure requiring students to plan, carry out, and reflect on themed social or religious projects such as peer support, environmental service, or philanthropic activity (Sari & Mardianto, 2024). This creates institutionalised pedagogical space for the concrete social experience and guided reflection that the proposed framework requires, although implementation still depends strongly on teacher beliefs, guidance, and institutional support. In Malaysia, Pendidikan Islam at the secondary level is organised through the Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM), with its Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP) specifying learning standards for knowledge, practice, appreciation, and cultivation of Islamic values; at primary level, a comparable standards-based role is played by what was formerly the Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) and is now reorganised as KSSR. This provides a more centrally structured basis for experiential moral learning than in Indonesia, but local enactment remains shaped by teacher competence, timetable, assessment expectations, and school context (Shobahiya et al., 2026). The comparison therefore concerns not whether either system values character, but how curricular flexibility (Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka and P5-PPRA) versus curricular standardisation (Malaysia's KSSM/DSKP, building on the earlier KBSR/KSSR primary framework) condition the form, timing, and institutional support of experiential IRE.

Across both contexts, the common pedagogical challenge is translating normative religious content into socially observable practice. Evidence from Indonesian and Malaysian secondary schools shows comparable interest in experience-based religious learning alongside limitations in teachers' conceptual understanding and pedagogical readiness (Kistoro et al., 2022). Research on religious moderation likewise shows that teachers mediate religious values through contextual classroom practice (Muslih et al., 2024). The comparative synthesis therefore suggests a differentiated implementation principle: Indonesian settings may use curricular flexibility to design locally responsive social projects and reflection, whereas Malaysian settings may embed comparable experiential cycles within the more explicitly standardized KSSM/DSKP learning outcomes. In both systems, teacher competence is the pivotal mediator. The framework proposed in this review should consequently be understood as a common pedagogical process whose activities, assessment, and institutional organization must be adapted to each curriculum context rather than imposed as a uniform teaching formula.

Table 3. Comparative Implications for Experiential IRE in Indonesia and Malaysia

Dimension	Indonesia	Malaysia	Implication for experiential IRE
Curriculum orientation	Greater contextual flexibility under Kurikulum Merdeka, including the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Profil Pelajar Rahmatan lil Alamin (P5-PPRA) in madrasah settings (Sari & Mardianto, 2024)	National Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) Pendidikan Islam, guided by the Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP); the earlier primary-level KBSR framework has since been reorganised as	Activities must fit different degrees of curricular discretion

Dimension	Indonesia	Malaysia	Implication for experiential IRE
		KSSR	
Teacher role	Teacher as contextual designer/facilitator	Teacher as facilitator within explicit standards	Teacher competence remains central in both contexts
Experiential opportunity	Local projects, community engagement, and P5-PPRA project-based tasks	Practice, appreciation, cultivation, and school/community activities aligned to KSSM/DSKP learning standards	Social experience should be explicitly linked to Islamic values
Main implementation risk	Uneven interpretation of autonomy and support	Over-formalization or assessment-driven implementation	Guided reflection and institutional support are needed in both contexts

DISCUSSION

The framework is theoretically anchored in Kolb's experiential learning cycle but is reinterpreted through Islamic moral pedagogy. Islamic values function as the ethical orientation that precedes and permeates the cycle. Kolb's concrete experience corresponds to Social Experience, in which students encounter morally significant situations. Reflective observation is transformed into Reflective Meaning-Making through guided reflection and muhasabah. Abstract conceptualization becomes Value Internalization, as learners connect experience with Islamic concepts such as rahmah, ta'awun, ithar, justice, generosity, and responsibility. Active experimentation is expressed as Prosocial Action, in which learners enact the reconstructed moral understanding through helping, cooperation, solidarity, and responsible participation. The framework therefore does not replace Kolb's stages; it translates them into an Islamic moral-educational sequence and specifies the ethical content and behavioural outcomes that a general experiential model leaves open.

Table 4. Transformation of Kolb's Cycle into the Integrative IRE Framework

Kolb stage	Integrative IRE stage	Islamic pedagogical interpretation	Expected manifestation
Concrete Experience	Social Experience	Encounter with ethically meaningful social situations	Participation and sensitivity to others
Reflective Observation	Reflective Meaning-Making	Muhasabah and guided moral reflection	Awareness of motives, needs, and consequences
Abstract Conceptualization	Value Internalization	Connecting experience with rahmah, ta'awun, ithar, justice, and responsibility	Reconstructed moral understanding
Active Experimentation	Prosocial Action	Repeated enactment of internalized values	Helping, cooperation, solidarity, social responsibility

The framework can be illustrated as follows:



The contribution of this framework is threefold. Theoretically, it specifies experiential learning as a mediating mechanism between Islamic moral content and prosocial character rather than assuming that religious knowledge automatically becomes behaviour. This position is consistent with evidence from Indonesian Islamic schools showing that prosocial behaviour is shaped not only by religious values but also by classroom learning practices and the broader school environment (Hady et al., 2025). Comparatively, it identifies a common learning sequence across Indonesia and Malaysia while explaining why implementation must differ according to curricular flexibility, standardization, teacher autonomy, and institutional support. Pedagogically, it suggests that IRE lessons should deliberately combine value-oriented content with authentic social tasks, guided muhasabah, conceptual reconstruction, and opportunities for repeated prosocial action. Prosocial character is therefore treated as a relatively stable disposition, while prosocial behaviour is its observable manifestation in concrete social situations.

Pedagogical Implications

For classroom practice, the framework implies that teachers should design learning sequences rather than isolated activities. A lesson on ta'awun, for example, can begin with a peer-support or community task, continue with structured muhasabah, connect students' reflections to Qur'anic and ethical concepts, and culminate in a subsequent action in which students apply the reconstructed value. Similarly, infaq and sadaqah can be approached through student-managed philanthropic projects that require planning, accountability, reflection on beneficiaries' needs, and evaluation of motives and consequences. Assessment should therefore include not only conceptual knowledge but also reflective quality, participation, cooperation, and evidence of responsible action. Evidence from Islamic boarding school contexts also indicates that service-learning can strengthen students' prosocial behaviour, suggesting that experiential activities are more meaningful when they are intentionally connected to learning processes and social responsibility (Sabiq et al., 2024). Institutional support is needed so that experiential IRE is not reduced to occasional extracurricular charity but becomes a planned pedagogical process linked to curriculum outcomes.

The study nevertheless has limitations. First, it is an integrative comparative review rather than a preregistered systematic review, and the original search log did not preserve complete gross retrieval and exclusion counts; therefore, the present revision reports the evidence base transparently but does not fabricate a numerical PRISMA flow. Second, the framework is conceptually grounded in heterogeneous literature rather than validated

through a common field protocol. Third, differences in school type, age group, curriculum, and measurement of prosocial behaviour limit direct cross-national comparison. Future research should prospectively document database searches and screening, test the framework through comparative classroom studies or mixed-method/quasi-experimental designs, and assess both immediate outcomes and the durability of prosocial character over time.

CONCLUSION

This integrative comparative review yields five conclusions. First, the reviewed literature indicates that experiential learning strengthens the educational potential of IRE when Islamic moral knowledge is connected to concrete social experience, guided reflection, meaning-making, and repeated action. Second, the theoretical contribution lies in positioning experiential learning as the mediating process between Islamic moral values and prosocial character, with prosocial behaviour treated as the observable manifestation of that character. Third, the comparative contribution is the identification of a shared pedagogical challenge in Indonesia and Malaysia—bridging religious cognition and social action—alongside different curricular and institutional conditions that shape implementation. Fourth, the pedagogical implication is that IRE should combine authentic social tasks, Islamic ethical interpretation, muhasabah, and opportunities for subsequent action rather than rely primarily on verbal transmission or habituation. Fifth, important questions remain unresolved: the framework has not yet been empirically validated across comparable schools, the durability of prosocial change is uncertain, and future reviews should use prospectively logged database searches and screening procedures. The resulting model—Islamic Values → Social Experience → Reflective Meaning-Making → Prosocial Action—should therefore be regarded as a theoretically grounded and comparatively informed framework for empirical testing, not as a universally validated causal model.

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