

Date Received : January 2026
Date Revised : May 2026
Date Accepted : May 2026
Date Published : May 2026

INTEGRATING AL-QUR'AN TEXTS IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (IRE) LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A MULTI- SITE STUDY IN FIVE PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH BUTON REGENCY

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Keywords:

Islamic Religious Education; Al-Qur'an text; primary school; collective case study; religious literacy; religious character.

ABSTRACTS

This study examines the patterns of Al-Qur'an text use in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning in five public primary schools in South Buton Regency, the obstacles to its implementation; and its contribution to students' understanding of Islamic teachings, the formation of religious character, and religious literacy. The study employs a qualitative approach with a collective multi-site case study design in Grade V classes. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with IRE teachers and students in each school, and a review of learning documents. Data were analysed thematically through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing-verification (with explicit comparisons of patterns across sites. The findings reveal three main themes: (1) relatively consistent patterns of Al-Qur'an text use across the five schools—including devotional opening routines, selection of verses aligned with the lesson topic, and guided reading/tajwid practice—with variations in intensity and in the schools' religious programmes; (2) similar pedagogical and structural constraints, such as limited time allocation, diverse levels of Al-Qur'an reading ability, limited media and contextual resources, and difficulties in facilitating the applied understanding of verses, which are further shaped by differences in facilities and local religious ecosystems; and (3) contributions to the strengthening of conceptual understanding of IRE, the internalisation of values and religious habits, and the development of students' religious literacy, with comparatively more substantial outcomes in schools that have additional religious programmes and strong parental support. These findings underscore the importance of differentiated instruction in Al-Qur'an reading ability, the strengthening of learning media, and school-parent collaboration tailored to each school's context so that Al-Qur'an text use does not stop at recitation but leads to meaningful understanding and more measurable behavioural change.

A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the primary school plays a pivotal role in fostering students' foundational faith, piety, and morality from an early age (Tsani et al., 2024). At this stage, children are in a phase of cognitive and socio-emotional development that requires religious content to be presented in concrete, contextual ways that are close to their everyday experiences (Bryce & Blown, 2024). In line with the paradigm of character education, IRE is not merely a process of transferring knowledge about Islamic teachings, but a systematic effort to shape a holistic personality that integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions (Tsani et al., 2024). Thus, the success of IRE learning in primary schools is primarily determined by the extent to which religious values are internalised and manifest in students' attitudes and behaviour in school, family, and community settings (Aditia & Széll, 2025).

Within the framework of meaningful learning theory, students are viewed as active subjects who construct their own knowledge structures through interaction with the learning environment (Bryce & Blown, 2024). Religious texts, including the Qur'an, are not merely objects of memorisation, but sources of meaning that

need to be constructed through dialogue, reflection, and experience (Ubani, 2025). Social constructivist and dialogic perspectives emphasise the crucial role of teachers and peers in shaping understanding through interaction and negotiation of meaning (Hadjipanteli & Vrikki, 2023; Xie & Lin, 2025). In this context, IRE teachers ideally act as facilitators, helping students connect Al-Qur'an messages to their lived realities through guided dialogue and age-appropriate activities (Xie & Lin, 2025).

In public primary schools, however, these ideal conditions are often constrained by structural and pedagogical limitations. Curricular time constraints, large class sizes, and diversity in students' prior abilities can make it harder to accommodate individual differences in learning (Xie & Lin, 2025). Schools in unequal contexts may also face shortages of educational materials that affect learning opportunities (Aditia & Széll, 2025). In many cases, teachers are pushed to focus on achieving cognitive content targets, while the affective domain and the cultivation of religious habits receive less sustained attention (Tsani et al., 2024; Xie & Lin, 2025).

The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic teachings, has a dual pedagogical potential: on the one hand, it serves as a normative foundation legitimising the content and objectives of IRE; on the other hand, it can be utilised as a value-rich text to be developed in text-based learning activities (Tsani et al., 2024). Through such approaches, students are not only trained to recite and memorise verses, but are also invited to understand moral, social, and spiritual messages through deliberation and guided reflection (Abdul-Jabbar & Makki, 2024). Learning, therefore, does not stop at recitation and memorisation but moves towards comprehension and reflection (*tadabbur*) that is simplified according to the developmental stage of primary school children (Abdul-Jabbar & Makki, 2024).

The use of the Qur'an as a medium for value education requires carefully sequenced learning activities: from introducing letters and sounds, to grasping the global meaning of verses, to linking the meaning of verses with concrete situations encountered by children, such as honesty, mutual respect, cleanliness at school, and respect for parents and teachers (Xie & Lin, 2025). Religious literacy is therefore understood not only as the technical ability to read the Holy Book, but also as the ability to interpret, reflect on, and apply its values in everyday life (Ubani, 2025).

In classroom practice, several challenges arise when the Qur'an is positioned as the primary basis for IRE learning. First, students' Al-Qur'an reading and writing abilities are often uneven, reflecting differences in prior exposure and family support (Aditia & Széll, 2025). Second, teaching approaches may remain teacher-centred, leaving limited opportunities for students to ask questions, discuss, and connect verses with personal experiences; dialogic and student-centred methods require intentional design and teacher capacity (Hadjipanteli & Vrikki, 2023; Xie & Lin, 2025). Third, limited engaging media and learning resources can reduce contextualisation, making verses feel detached from children's world (Aditia & Széll, 2025). Recent innovations in Islamic religious

education, such as problem-based and flipped learning, illustrate the feasibility of shifting towards more active learning designs, but they still require contextual adaptation in schools (Nugraha et al., 2024).

In the South Buton Regency, many public primary schools operate in coastal and rural environments with varied resources. Schools that differ in their geographical settings and resource availability may exhibit distinct patterns of instructional practice and student opportunities (Aditia & Széll, 2025). The five schools in this study—SD Negeri 1 Burangasi, SD Negeri 1 Gaya Baru, SD Negeri 2 Burangasi, SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Makmur, and SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Kaindea—represent different geographical, social, and religious contexts. Some schools are in communities with strong religious traditions and parental support, while others operate with more limited facilities and less intensive religious programmes; such contextual differences are likely to influence how Al-Qur'an texts are integrated into IRE learning (Aditia & Széll, 2025; Xie & Lin, 2025).

Empirically, academic research on Qur'an-based IRE learning in public primary schools—particularly using a multi-site design in an archipelagic region—remains limited, and practice can vary substantially by context (Aditia & Széll, 2025). Research on dialogic pedagogy shows that implementation is sensitive to class size, curricular constraints, and teachers' practical expertise, which makes mapping classroom enactment across sites especially important (Xie & Lin, 2025). Similarly, research in religious education highlights the need for teachers' professional knowledge to support meaningful engagement with texts and dialogue in classrooms (Orchard & Bowen, 2024; Ubani, 2025). Therefore, a detailed empirical mapping of classroom practices is crucial to understand what happens in the field: how often Al-Qur'an verses are used, at which stages of the lesson, in what forms of activity, and how students respond in different school contexts (Xie & Lin, 2025).

Against this backdrop, this study aims to provide an in-depth empirical description of: (a) patterns of Al-Qur'an text use within IRE learning structures in Grade V classes in five public primary schools in South Buton Regency; (b) concrete obstacles faced by teachers and students in implementing Qur'an-based IRE learning in each school; and (c) perceived pedagogical contributions to students' conceptual understanding of IRE, the formation of religious character, and the strengthening of religious literacy. The main research questions are: What are the patterns of Al-Qur'an text use in Grade V IRE learning at SD Negeri 1 Burangasi, SD Negeri 1 Gaya Baru, SD Negeri 2 Burangasi, SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Makmur, and SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Kaindea? What obstacles are encountered in its implementation? And what contributions are perceived in students' learning processes at these five schools?

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a collective multi-site case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the integration of Al-Qur'an

texts in IRE learning in five public primary schools in South Buton Regency. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore common patterns and variations in practice across different school contexts (Fearon et al., 2021; Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

The research sites were SD Negeri 1 Burangasi, SD Negeri 1 Gaya Baru, SD Negeri 2 Burangasi, SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Makmur, and SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Kaindea in the 2025/2026 academic year, focusing on Grade V IRE classes. These schools were selected purposively because they represent diverse geographical conditions (coastal and rural), availability of school religious programmes, and socio-religious backgrounds of surrounding communities (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025).

Research participants comprised five IRE teachers, serving as key informants—one from each school—and approximately 100 Grade V students, serving as supporting informants. Teachers were selected for their central role in planning and implementing learning, while students were involved to capture their learning experiences and diverse levels of Al-Qur'an literacy, which influence the learning process (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025).

Data were collected using three main techniques. First, non-participant classroom observations were conducted over several IRE sessions in each school to document patterns of Al-Qur'an text use, the sequence of learning activities, teacher-student interactions, and students' responses. Field notes were structured around the lesson's stages (opening, core, and closing) (Cheek et al., 2024; Eldh et al., 2020). Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the five IRE teachers and several selected students from each school to explore pedagogical rationales, perceived obstacles, and their views of the contributions of Al-Qur'an text use to understanding, character, and religious literacy (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Third, document analysis was carried out on lesson plans or teaching modules, IRE textbooks, worksheets, and supporting documents for school religious programmes (such as schedules for regular Al-Qur'an recitation, religious routines, or extracurricular activities) (Kayesa & Shung-King, 2020).

Data analysis followed a thematic, iterative process comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents were coded to identify initial categories related to patterns of Al-Qur'an text use, implementation obstacles, and learning contributions. These categories were then clustered into broader themes based on their occurrence across the five research sites. During data display, the findings were organised in matrices and narrative descriptions that facilitated cross-school comparison. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions through repeated readings, checking the consistency of evidence, and limited member checking with teachers (Bingham, 2023; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Mtisi, 2022).

The trustworthiness of the data was enhanced through triangulation of techniques (observation, interviews, and documentation) and sources (teachers

and students from five schools), as well as through the maintenance of an audit trail during the analysis process (Ahmed, 2024; Bingham, 2023).

The study adhered to research ethics, including obtaining school consent, ensuring participants' confidentiality, and providing special protection for primary school-age students (Bodén, 2021; Kousholt & Juhl, 2023; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022).

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Patterns of Al-Qur'an text use in IRE learning in the five schools

The use of Al-Qur'an texts in Grade V IRE learning in the five schools shows a broadly similar pattern, albeit with variations in intensity and specific activities. Generally, the Qur'an appears in three main forms: (1) devotional routines at the beginning of lessons, (2) conceptual reinforcement through verses relevant to the topic, and (3) practice of reading and improving tajwid. This pattern positions the Qur'an not only as a ceremonial supplement but as a learning resource that directs lesson content, provides normative validation, and shapes students' understanding (Bowie, 2025; Bowie et al., 2022; Eaude, 2025).

During lesson openings, all five schools implement routines of reciting prayers and short surahs before the lesson begins. At SD Negeri 1 Burangasi and SD Negeri 1 Gaya Baru, the opening typically begins with the collective recitation of Surah Al-Fatiha, followed by a short verse from Surah Al-Hujurat that is sometimes linked to the theme of the day. At SD Negeri 2 Burangasi, SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Makmur, and SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Kaindea, similar routines are implemented. Still, the extent to which they are explicitly linked to lesson content varies across schools. In schools with stronger religious programmes, teachers more often provide brief explanations of the global meaning of the opening verses and link them to desired attitudes during learning, such as seriousness, discipline, and mutual respect. Studies on ritualised activities in schools highlight that routines become educationally meaningful when they are interpreted, adapted to children, and supported through adult modelling, while classroom dialogue can broaden students' discourses and perspectives (Bowie, 2025; Franzén Johnson et al., 2024; Larkins & Owen, 2025).

In the core phase of the lesson, teachers select verses that are relevant to the IRE topics being taught, such as faith, worship, and ethics. Most verses are drawn from the IRE textbook, although in some schools—especially those with stronger religious traditions—teachers add other verses they consider more contextual. Verse selection functions to anchor the concepts being taught in the primary sources of Islamic teachings, so that students understand that the values discussed are not merely social rules but religious injunctions. In practice, teachers usually read the verse first, then invite students to repeat the recitation either collectively or in turns, before explaining the global meaning and relating it to concrete everyday examples, such as honesty, performing prayers on time, maintaining cleanliness, and respecting parents and teachers. Work on sacred text education

and hermeneutical approaches suggests that value formation is strengthened when teachers treat texts as resources for guided interpretation and structured dialogue, rather than as objects of decontextualised repetition (Bowie, 2025; Bowie et al., 2022; Larkins & Owen, 2025).

Reading practice and tajwid improvement are defining features of the patterns observed in all five schools. At SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Makmur and SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Kaindea, for instance, teachers allocate segments of time in the middle or at the end of the lesson for turn-taking recitation, providing immediate correction of errors in articulation points (*makharij al-huruf*) and lengthening. At SD Negeri 1 Burangasi and SD Negeri 2 Burangasi, recitation practice is typically conducted collectively, with an emphasis on fluency and togetherness. At the same time, individual corrections are given as teachers move around the class. At SD Negeri 1 Gaya Baru, recitation practice is complemented by homework that pairs students with parents or older siblings as reading partners, though the extent of implementation varies among students. Empirical work in general classroom settings indicates that feedback and proximity are associated with engagement, and that effective feedback practices can support students' sense of identification with school and behavioural engagement; evidence from the evaluation of Qur'an-related digital learning tools also suggests opportunities to complement in-class practice where appropriate and feasible (Dong et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2022).

From a text-based learning perspective, these patterns show that teachers strive to make Al-Qur'an verses an anchor linking religious knowledge with classroom practice. Verses are used as starting points for explanations, as sources legitimising values, and as materials for religious literacy practice. This aligns with scholarship that argues for richer textual engagement through interpretation and dialogue, so that texts become resources for meaning-making rather than only objects of recitation. It also resonates with dialogic and student-centred pedagogies, which are associated with higher levels of participation and deeper learning when teachers use structured dialogue strategies and active learning opportunities (Bowie et al., 2022; Calcagni et al., 2023; Larkins & Owen, 2025; Woods & Copur-Gencturk, 2024).

Despite the commonalities, the findings also reveal cross-school variation in the depth of meaning-making and the extent of student engagement in discussion. In schools with stronger religious programmes and smaller class sizes, teachers are more able to engage students in dialogue about the content of verses, pose probing questions, and respond to students' experiences. In contrast, in larger classes with limited instructional time, Al-Qur'an text use tends to be confined to recitation and brief teacher explanations. These variations suggest that the ideal pattern of Al-Qur'an text use—as a tool for devotion, understanding, and character development—is powerfully shaped by structural conditions and institutional support in each school; this reinforces the importance of practices that make dialogue visible and sustainable, and of feedback that supports engagement and

belonging (Calcagni et al., 2023; Franzén Johnson et al., 2024; Monteiro et al., 2021; Woods & Copur-Gencturk, 2024).

2. Obstacles to the implementation of Qur'an-based learning

The implementation of Qur'an-based IRE learning in the five schools is constrained by structural, pedagogical, and cultural factors. Although each school has its specificities, the obstacles encountered by teachers and students reveal broadly similar patterns with varying degrees of severity (Creagh et al., 2023).

Limited instructional time for IRE is a major constraint in all schools. The restricted number of lesson hours forces teachers to balance curriculum coverage, verse recitation and practice, meaning-making, and assessment. In practice, teachers often make pragmatic choices: extended recitation practice reduces the time available for value exploration, while a focus on conceptual explanation and values leaves less time for reading practice. In schools with large classes and packed schedules, this trade-off is more acute, leading to a tendency towards easily measurable cognitive targets, such as test performance and memorisation of definitions (Creagh et al., 2023; Wedel, 2021).

Heterogeneity in students' Al-Qur'an reading abilities is another major challenge. Teachers report that within a single class, some students already read fluently with reasonably good tajwid, while others are still at the stage of recognising letters and syllables. In schools where local Al-Qur'an learning centres are active, the proportion of fluent readers is higher; in other schools with limited access to such institutions, the number of weak readers is relatively larger. Without adequate differentiation strategies, text-based learning risks being effective only for some students, leaving others behind and losing confidence (Creagh et al., 2023; Torppa et al., 2022).

The lack of contextually and engagingly delivered learning media further weakens the quality of verse comprehension. The IRE textbooks used in the five schools do include verses and their translations, but they are not fully supported by child-friendly pedagogical tools, such as situational illustrations, experience-based activity sheets, or attractive visual media. Some teachers try to overcome this by creating verse cards, writing key verses on the board, or using simple digital devices, but time, facility, and technological skill constraints limit these efforts. In schools with unstable electricity and internet connections, digital media are rarely used (Albakri & Wood-Harper, 2025; Furenes et al., 2021; van de Werfhorst et al., 2022).

Another challenge lies in transforming the meaning of verses into students' actual behaviour. Teachers recognise that the aim of IRE is not only to have students recite verses, but also to put the values into practice in everyday life. Linking verses to concrete situations and following up in the form of habituation requires time, consistency, and a supportive school ecosystem. In some schools, this is reinforced through structured religious routines such as congregational prayers, morning Al-Qur'an recitation, or character-building programmes during flag ceremonies. In others, such programmes are not yet consistently implemented

due to limited personnel, facilities, or policy support (Brown et al., 2023; Creagh et al., 2023).

The family ecosystem also has a significant influence. Teachers in all five schools observe that progress in students' Al-Qur'an literacy and religious attitudes is closely related to the nature of religious guidance at home. In families where parents actively teach and habituate Al-Qur'an reading, students tend to be more ready to participate in text-based learning at school. Conversely, in homes where parents have limited time or ability to read the Qur'an, practice relies almost entirely on the school. This disparity places a heavier burden on schools, especially because IRE lesson time is limited and teachers must handle large numbers of students simultaneously (Kim, 2022; Torppa et al., 2022).

Taken together, these constraints indicate that the success of Qur'an-based IRE learning cannot be placed solely on classroom teachers. Systemic support is needed in the form of school policies that provide space for sustainable religious programmes, the provision of more contextual and engaging learning media, and stronger partnerships with parents and local religious institutions. Without such support, Al-Qur'an text use risks remaining at the level of ritual recitation rather than becoming a profound and transformative educational process for students (Albakri & Wood-Harper, 2025; Kim, 2022; Smith et al., 2022).

3. Contributions of Al-Qur'an text use to understanding, character, and religious literacy

Despite the limitations, the use of Al-Qur'an texts in IRE learning in the five schools contributes to three main domains: religious understanding (cognitive), the formation of religious character (affective and behavioural), and the strengthening of religious literacy (reading skills and emotional closeness to the text). Although the degree of contribution varies across schools, the overall pattern suggests that integrating Al-Qur'an texts serves not only a normative but also a pedagogical function when intentionally managed (Bowie et al., 2022; Soules & del Nido, 2025; Ubani, 2025).

At the level of understanding, the presence of verses as primary references helps students link IRE concepts—such as faith, worship, and ethics—to clear sources of authority. Teachers use verses to explain why certain behaviours are considered good or bad, enabling students to understand not only "what should be done" but also "why it should be done". Student reports that they "understand better" when teachers show verses and explain their meaning aligns with research emphasising that productive engagement with sacred texts requires moving beyond proof-texting toward interpretive work that connects text, tradition, and learners' meaning-making (Bowie, 2025; Bowie et al., 2022; Lacey et al., 2022).

In terms of religious character, contributions are observed through habituation and value internalisation. Routines of reciting prayers and verses at the start of lessons, congregational prayers, and regular Al-Qur'an recitation in some schools can strengthen a school's religious climate that supports moral identity and prosocial orientations. When teachers connect verses with everyday

behaviours—such as honesty at school, respect for teachers and parents, or cleanliness—students are encouraged to see the link between text and action; however, sustaining behavioural change typically requires consistent reinforcement and a supportive learning environment (Aldridge & McLure, 2024; Lacey et al., 2022).

The most direct contribution is to religious literacy. Through repeated verse recitation with teacher feedback, many students demonstrate improved reading fluency and accuracy. This pattern is consistent with evidence that oral-reading feedback and practice support skill development as well as learner agency and reader identity—factors that can increase confidence to read publicly (Grønli et al., 2024). In addition, studies on Qur'an recitation and memorisation highlight the role of repetition/rote practice as a common technique for forming and maintaining recall (Che Wan Mohd Rozali et al., 2022).

Religious literacy here refers not only to technical reading skills but also to emotional and reflective engagement with the Qur'an. Conceptually, contemporary religious literacy frameworks stress that literacy involves meaning-making, reflection, and the ability to use knowledge in lived contexts—not merely decoding text (Schweitzer et al., 2023; Ubani, 2025). Empirical syntheses in Muslim contexts also report favourable associations between listening to/reciting/memorising the Qur'an and indicators related to emotional well-being and positive attitudes, suggesting that repeated, supportive interaction with the Holy Text may nurture closeness and appreciation over time (Che Wan Mohd Rozali et al., 2022; Kannan et al., 2022).

These findings suggest that the use of Al-Qur'an texts in IRE learning can serve as a multi-functional pedagogical tool: a source of normative legitimacy, a basis for meaningful learning, and a medium for developing religious literacy. To optimise and equalise these contributions across students and schools, learning should be deliberately designed to balance these three functions. Teachers might, for example, select one or two key verses for each topic, develop them into reflective, value-based activities through discussion and simple assignments, and, at the same time, use them as repeated reading practice—so students are not only reading and memorising, but also understanding, reflecting on, and attempting to practice the values contained in the verses in their everyday lives (Bowie, 2025; Schweitzer et al., 2023; Soules & del Nido, 2025).

D. CONCLUSION

This multi-site study concludes that the integration of Al-Qur'an texts in Grade V IRE learning at SD Negeri 1 Burangasi, SD Negeri 1 Gaya Baru, SD Negeri 2 Burangasi, SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Makmur, and SD Negeri 1 Lapandewa Kaindea has been implemented in relatively consistent ways through devotional opening routines, selection of verses relevant to lesson topics, and reading practice with tajwid improvement. These patterns position the Qur'an not merely as a symbolic

supplement but as a normative reference and a medium for strengthening religious literacy.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of implementation is shaped by limited instructional time, diverse levels of students' Al-Qur'an reading ability, inadequate contextual learning media, and the challenge of transforming verse meanings into students' actual behaviour. Differences in school religious programmes, facilities, and family ecosystems result in cross-school variation in outcomes, particularly in the depth of meaning-making and the consistency of value habituation.

Despite these obstacles, Al-Qur'an text use has demonstrable contributions to strengthening students' conceptual understanding of IRE, internalising values and religious habits, and developing religious literacy. Therefore, differentiated strategies for Al-Qur'an reading abilities, the development of more contextually and engagingly designed learning media, and the reinforcement of structured, collaborative religious programmes with parents are needed so that Qur'an-based learning in the five schools moves more clearly towards meaningful understanding and measurable behavioural change.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on only five public primary schools in one regency, and thus its findings are not intended to be statistically generalised to all primary schools in Indonesia. Second, data were collected within a specific time frame and therefore do not fully capture the long-term dynamics of changes in students' religious literacy and behaviour. Third, the study places greater emphasis on teachers' perspectives and classroom observations, while the voices of parents and other stakeholders are not explored in depth.

Considering these limitations, future research is recommended to involve a larger number of schools from different regions to enrich contextual variation and to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to more systematically measure the impact of Al-Qur'an text use on students' religious literacy and behaviour. In addition, studies that specifically examine school-parent collaboration and the role of local religious institutions would make significant contributions to developing more comprehensive and sustainable models of Qur'an-based IRE learning.

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