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Reconstruction of Islamic Education Research Methodology: Integrating Normative, Empirical, and Transformative Approaches

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Abstract
Islamic education plays a strategic role in developing human potential; however, research in this field still faces a methodological gap between normative orientation, empirical verification, and the agenda of educational transformation. Studies that rely heavily on textual sources may inadequately capture educational realities, while empirical research detached from Islamic values may result in technical analyses that lack an orientation toward the public good. This study aims to reconstruct the methodology of Islamic education research by integrating normative, empirical, and transformative approaches at both the conceptual and operational levels. The study employs a qualitative approach through library research enriched by a systematic literature review. Relevant sources were selected purposively and analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which involved data reduction, coding, categorization, cross-source comparison, interpretation, and conceptual synthesis. The findings indicate that the normative approach serves as a value and ethical orientation, the empirical approach functions as a basis for verifying educational realities, and the transformative approach directs research findings toward collaborative action and continuous improvement. The integration of these three approaches produces a methodological model that is dialogical, participatory, applicable, and oriented toward the public good. Future research is recommended to test this model through case studies or *Participatory Action Research* across various Islamic educational institutions to assess its effectiveness, implementation barriers, indicators of success, and impacts on educational quality and equity.

Keywords: Research Methodology, Islamic Education, Normative Approach, Empirical Approach, Transformative Approach

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education plays a strategic role in human capital development because it reaches millions of students through a vast network of madrasahs and educational institutions across Indonesia (Suhernawati & Chanifudin, 2025). This reach indicates that any improvement in the quality of learning, the strengthening of literacy, and the enhancement of institutional governance has the potential to generate significant and sustainable social impacts (Khayru et

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al., 2024). The availability of data on learning outcomes, the learning process, the equitable distribution of services, and the quality of educational management provides an objective basis for researchers to map educational needs more accurately (Lintong et al., 2025). The integration of normative, empirical, and transformative approaches also enables Islamic values to be translated into evidence-based analysis and contextually relevant improvement programs for madrasahs, Islamic schools, and pesantren (Chandra & Ulum, 2025). Reconstructing the methodology of Islamic education research is essential to ensure that research not only enriches academic discourse but also supports tangible, meaningful improvements in educational quality that are responsive to the needs of society.

Although Islamic education has a broad institutional and social reach, research in this field still faces methodological gaps between normative orientations, empirical evidence, and the agenda for educational reform. A number of studies tend to use verses from the Qur'an, hadith, and the ideas of prominent figures in Islamic education as the primary basis for analysis, but do not always connect them in depth with data on learning outcomes, the learning process, institutional governance, and disparities in educational services (Ali, 2020). On the other hand, research using surveys, observations, interviews, or statistical analysis often emphasizes problem mapping without developing a robust interpretation grounded in the goals, ethics, and values of Islamic education (F. M. A. Akbar, 2024). The availability of educational evaluation data such as literacy and numeracy achievements, the quality of learning, and the management of educational institutions has also not yet been fully utilized as a foundation for participatory research that involves teachers, students, institutional administrators, and the community in designing solutions (Mustari, 2022). This gap highlights the need to reconstruct the methodology of Islamic education research so that the relationship between normative values, empirical evidence, and transformative actions can be systematically established.

Research on Islamic education should be developed through an integrative methodology that links Islamic normative foundations, an empirical analysis of educational realities, and an orientation toward pedagogical and social change (Wachid, 2025). A normative approach is necessary to formulate the direction, objectives, ethical principles, and indicators of educational benefit based on the Qur'an, hadith, maqāṣid al-syarī'ah, and the body of Islamic thought (Hartono et al., 2026). The empirical approach must collect and analyze evidence regarding learning outcomes, teaching practices, teacher competencies, institutional governance, access to services, and students' experiences in a contextual manner. A transformative approach must involve teachers, students, madrasah principals, parents, and the community as partners in problem formulation, implementation of interventions, reflection on outcomes, and the development of continuous improvements (Anwar et al., 2026). The integration of these three approaches will result in Islamic educational research that is scientifically valid, rooted in Islamic values, and capable of making a tangible contribution to improving the quality of education.

A review of the literature indicates that the development of Islamic educational methodology is shifting toward the integration of revelatory sources of knowledge, rationality, empirical experience, and ethical-spiritual dimensions to foster a more holistic understanding of education (Chandra & Ulum, 2025). Islamic epistemological studies position the *bayani* paradigm as a textual-normative foundation, *the burhani paradigm* as an empirical-rational basis, and *the irfani paradigm* as a reinforcement of spiritual awareness, which conceptually can broaden the orientation of learning and research in Islamic education (Jannah et al., 2025). A number of studies have also shown that transformative-participatory research approaches and *Participatory Action Research* can involve educators and stakeholders in the cycle of problem diagnosis, action planning, program implementation, and continuous reflection (Hayat & Sesmiarni, 2025) . However, most studies still focus on conceptual explanations, application within a single institutional context, or the separate integration of the two dimensions of the approach, consequently, there has been little research formulating an operational

methodological framework to unify the normative, empirical validation, and transformative action dimensions within a single Islamic education research design (M. Amin Abdullah, 2016). This gap underscores the need for new studies that systematically reconstruct the methodology of Islamic education research so that it can serve as a scientific guide for understanding, evaluating, and improving Islamic educational practices.

This research is urgently needed because the reconstruction of Islamic education research methodology is not sufficiently understood as a technical combination of several methods, but rather as an effort to build a scientific framework that holistically connects revelatory values, educational realities, and the agenda for change. A normative approach is necessary to ensure that the research questions, objectives, success indicators, and educational recommendations remain grounded in the values of tawhid, akhlak, justice, the public good, and the development of human potential. An empirical approach is necessary so that researchers can verify the alignment between the ideals of Islamic education and actual conditions in the areas of learning, literacy, educator competencies, institutional governance, and student experiences. The transformative approach serves as the key distinguishing factor because it positions research findings not merely as descriptions or evaluations, but as the foundation for collaborative action to address educational challenges together with teachers, students, institutional administrators, families, and the community (Hamim et al., 2026). This research is expected to produce a methodological model that is more distinctive, practical, and responsive to the development of Islamic education grounded in values, evidence, and pedagogical social change.

Thus, this study offers a novel contribution in the form of a model for reconstructing the methodology of Islamic education research that integrates normative, empirical, and transformative approaches into a single, interconnected research framework. The normative approach is used to formulate the ontological foundation, objectives, ethical values, and principles of public interest derived from the Qur'an, hadith, maqāṣid al-syarī'ah, and Islamic educational thought. The empirical approach is used to identify problems, collect data, analyze factual conditions, and test the relevance of findings in the contexts of madrasahs, pesantren, Islamic schools, and society. The transformative approach is used to channel research findings into action planning, stakeholder engagement, critical reflection, and the evaluation of continuous educational improvement. This model is expected to produce Islamic educational research that is not only conceptually robust and empirically sound but also capable of bringing about educational changes that are relevant, participatory, and oriented toward the common good.

In other words, this paper specifically aims to formulate a framework for reconstructing the methodology of Islamic education research that integrates normative, empirical, and transformative approaches both conceptually and operationally. This paper identifies the limitations of current trends in Islamic education research, which still separate the study of Islamic values from the analysis of data, institutional conditions, and the real-life experiences of educational subjects. This paper also explains the role, function, and stages of applying the normative approach to establish value orientation, the empirical approach to examine educational realities, and the transformative approach to channel research findings into participatory improvement actions. Furthermore, this paper proposes a framework for the interrelationship among these three approaches as a guide for researchers in formulating research questions, collecting data, interpreting findings, and developing recommendations for Islamic education. Through these objectives, this paper aims to distinguish itself from previous studies by presenting a methodological model that is more integrative, practical, and oriented toward improving the quality of Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of *library research*, enriched through a systematic literature review, to reconstruct the methodology of Islamic education

research. The scope of the research problem includes the disconnect between the normative approach which is grounded in revelation, values, and Islamic heritage and the empirical approach which focuses on educational facts as well as the limitations of a transformative orientation in bringing about improvements in educational practice. The participants in this study are not field respondents but rather scholarly documents serving as units of analysis, including national and international journal articles, research methodology books, works on Islamic epistemology, educational policy documents, and relevant publications on participatory and transformative research (Aisyah et al., 2025). Sources were selected purposefully based on thematic relevance, publisher credibility, relevance to Islamic education, methodological clarity, and conceptual contributions to the integration of normative, empirical, and transformative dimensions (Widodo, 2025). A systematic literature review was used because it allows researchers to identify, examine, evaluate, and interpret the findings of previous studies through a directed and transparent procedure (Sari et al., 2025).

The research instrument consists of a document analysis matrix designed to record the source's identity, the focus of the issue, the research paradigm or approach, the Islamic normative framework used, the type of empirical data, data collection and analysis techniques, the nature of subject involvement, and the orientation of change produced by each study. The research procedure begins with formulating the research focus and questions, determining search keywords, conducting a literature search in scientific databases and reputable repositories, screening titles and abstracts, assessing the suitability of full-text articles, and finalizing the sources according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria at . Inclusion criteria encompassed publications discussing research methodology, the epistemology of Islamic education, the integration of Islamic values with empirical data, or transformative-participatory research approaches, while sources lacking direct relevance, being duplicates, or failing to provide adequate methodological explanations were excluded from the analysis.

Data analysis was conducted through qualitative content analysis, involving the stages of data reduction, coding, categorization, cross-source comparison, interpretation, and conceptual synthesis (Pattipeiluhu et al., 2026). Normative data were analyzed to identify the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and ethical principles of Islamic education, while empirical data were analyzed to identify problem types, institutional contexts, patterns of research practice, and the need for evidence-based validation in Islamic education. Data on transformative research were analyzed to map the elements of participation, critical reflection, action planning, implementation, evaluation, and the sustainability of change. The results of the analysis were then synthesized into a model for reconstructing the methodology of Islamic education research, which positions the normative approach as a value orientation, the empirical approach as the basis for verifying reality, and the transformative approach as the direction for educational improvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Landscape and Challenges of Islamic Education Research Methodology

The results of the literature review indicate that the methodology of Islamic education research remains within a diverse landscape but has not yet been fully integrated between value orientation, factual verification, and the agenda for practical change. This diversity is evident in the use of normative-textual, empirical, philosophical, historical, literature review, and participatory research approaches, each of which has its own distinct functions and limitations. Epistemologically, Islamic education fundamentally positions revelation as the source of values and knowledge, supported by reason, intuition, and empirical experience in understanding the reality of life and education (Qomar, 2005). However, research practices do not always reflect the complementary relationship between these sources of knowledge (Mubarokah et al., 2026). Some studies reinforce normative arguments without delving into

field data, while some empirical studies tend to adopt social science procedures without making Islamic educational values a substantive analytical tool.

The Dominance of the Normative-Textual Approach

The normative-textual approach remains a strong trend in Islamic education research, particularly in studies addressing educational goals, the concept of the ideal human being, ethics, curriculum, the role of educators, character education, and the thought of figures such as . This approach commonly uses the Qur'an, hadith, tafsir, the works of classical scholars, classical Islamic texts, and the thought of Muslim intellectuals as primary sources of analysis. The strength of the normative approach lies in its ability to preserve the scholarly identity of Islamic education, as research remains grounded in the principles of tawhid, adab, amanah, justice, rahmah, intellectual development, and the public good (Anwar et al., 2026). In Islamic education research, the normative approach plays a crucial role in addressing questions regarding the fundamental values and ideal direction of education. Researchers can use this approach to examine the concept of holistic human education, the obligation to seek knowledge, the moral responsibility of educators, the relationship between teachers and students, and the goal of cultivating *the "insān kāmil"* (Anas & Aziz, 2025). Studies in the philosophy of Islamic education affirm that revelation can serve as a source of values that provides moral and ontological orientation, while reason serves to understand, interpret, and operationalize the message of revelation within the context of educational life (Musthofa et al., 2025).

Problems arise when a normative approach is used in isolation and stops at repeating or describing the text. Research may produce theoretically sound analyses, but it does not sufficiently explain how these values are applied in daily learning, what the barriers to their application are, which groups are most affected, or what forms of intervention can be implemented (Anas & Aziz, 2025). For example, research on moral education often succeeds in explaining moral principles in the Qur'an and hadith, but does not necessarily reveal the actual conditions of student character development, the effectiveness of teachers' strategies, the influence of the digital environment, family involvement, or the cultural dynamics of schools or madrasahs. These limitations indicate that normative validity must be combined with empirical verification so that ideas in Islamic education do not remain merely at the level of ideals.

The Dominance of Empirical and Literature Reviews

In addition to normative studies, research on Islamic education also shows a trend toward the use of empirical approaches. This approach focuses on observable facts, such as student learning outcomes, teachers' instructional strategies, educators' competencies, madrasah management, school climate, the use of technology, literacy culture, parental involvement, or access to educational services (Syadzili, 2020). Data can be collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, documentation, tests, surveys, case studies, and educational data analysis. The empirical approach is important because it provides a factual basis for researchers to understand educational conditions as they occur in madrasahs, pesantren, Islamic schools, and Islamic religious universities (Nurhaidah, 2026).

Nevertheless, empirical research also has limitations if it focuses solely on measuring variables, testing statistical relationships, or identifying problems. Data may indicate low literacy rates, disparities in facilities, weak teacher competencies, or suboptimal learning management, but numbers alone do not automatically explain the educational significance of these issues (Haro et al., 2026) . Empirical research that is detached from the Islamic value framework risks treating education as a purely technical-administrative issue, whereas Islamic education encompasses spiritual, ethical, social, and humanitarian dimensions. The

epistemological literature on Islamic education emphasizes that revelation, reason, and empirical experience should work synergistically, rather than being positioned as competing sources of knowledge (Mubasyiroh, 2026) .

Literature reviews also occupy a dominant position in Islamic education research, particularly in the areas of the philosophy of education, epistemology, educational interpretation, the thought of key figures, the history of Islamic education, and curriculum concept development (Suryadi, 2024) . The strength of literature reviews lies in their ability to explore ideas in depth, compare different schools of thought, map the development of discourse, and construct a conceptual synthesis from various primary and secondary sources (Syarif et al., 2025) . However, the dominance of literature reviews can limit a study's relevance to current issues if the analysis does not extend to contextual testing, an examination of subjects' experiences, or the utilization of available educational data (Zakaria et al., 2026) .

On that basis, the problem with the methodology of Islamic education research lies not in the absence of values or data, but rather in the suboptimal integration of the two to bring about educational change. A normative approach is needed to provide ethical guidance and ideal goals; an empirical approach is necessary to analyze factual conditions and test hypotheses; while a transformative approach is required to use research findings as the basis for corrective action. It is important to reconstruct the methodology of Islamic education research so that research can move from conceptual affirmation to empirical validation, and then proceed to the design of educational transformation that is contextual, participatory, and oriented toward the public good.

2. Analysis of the Normative Approach in Islamic Education Research

The results of the study indicate that the normative approach serves as a crucial foundation in Islamic education research because it positions the values, objectives, and principles of Islamic teachings as the primary orientation for scientific analysis (Alsi, 2025) . This approach is not merely used to cite textual evidence but to examine the meanings, principles, objectives, and educational implications contained within the sources of Islamic teachings. Within the epistemological framework of Islamic education, revelation occupies a central position as a source of normative values, while reason serves to interpret, construct arguments, and contextualize these values within educational issues (Suratin & Munawarsyah, 2025) . Empirical experience retains an important role as a space for testing and applying these values within the social reality of education. The normative approach is relevant because Islamic education is characterized not only by a focus on academic achievement but also on the formation of faith, the development of reason, the cultivation of moral character, the protection of human dignity, and the promotion of the common good in the lives of individuals and society (Razali & Asrul, 2024) .

Value Basis of the Normative Approach

The Qur'an serves as the primary source in the normative approach because it contains fundamental principles regarding humanity, knowledge, learning, responsibility, justice, deliberation, ethics, and the purpose of life (A. Fadly et al., 2025) . In Islamic education research, verses from the Qur'an can be used to examine Islamic perspectives on the obligation to seek knowledge, the value of reason, character development, the relationship between educators and students, and the social responsibility of educational institutions (Wachid, 2025) . Values such as *iqra'*, *ta'līm*, *tarbiyah*, *ta'dīb*, *hikmah*, *amanah*, *'adl*, and *rahmah* can serve as a conceptual framework for understanding the educational process in a more substantive way.

Hadith serves as a secondary normative source that enriches our understanding of the educational practices of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Hadith contains pedagogical examples related to the methods of dialogue, setting examples, habit formation,

motivation, character building, respect for differences in ability, and learning that takes into account the psychological conditions of learners (Budi & Mulyanah, 2026) . The use of hadith in Islamic education research allows researchers not only to formulate ideal educational goals but also to examine the principles of teaching practice and humane educational relationships (Sobah et al., 2026) . In this context, hadith can serve as an ethical foundation for assessing whether teaching practices respect the dignity of students, address diverse learning needs, and foster an educational environment that supports the development of both intellect and character.

Maqāṣid al-syarī'ah complements a normative interpretation by providing a goal-oriented or public-interest perspective. This perspective views Sharia as fundamentally aimed at realizing public benefit and preventing harm in human life (Rayyan & Frijatuluah, 2026) . The five primary protections, known as *al-ḍarūriyyāt al-khamsah*, include the preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), reason (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), lineage or honor (*ḥifẓ al-nasl/al-'irḍ*), and property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). In education, these principles can be translated into strengthening a moderate understanding of religion, creating schools free from violence, developing critical thinking and literacy skills, protecting the dignity and rights of students, and managing educational resources responsibly (Shofa & Hafidzi, 2026) .

Functions of the Normative Approach

The normative approach serves primarily to define the research objectives. The objectives of Islamic education research are not only aimed at identifying relationships between variables, describing phenomena, or measuring program effectiveness, but also at assessing the extent to which a particular educational practice supports the development of individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, virtuous, independent, critical, and responsible (Widodo, 2025) . The maqāṣid perspective emphasizes that the goals of education must be situated within a framework of public welfare, protection, and the development of human potential. Studies on maqāṣid in education indicate that this framework can be used to develop an education that balances spiritual and material aspects while encouraging students to contribute to social welfare (Nursiyo, 2026) .

The second function is as a foundation for formulating ethical principles in research. In Islamic education research, ethics extend beyond merely obtaining respondent consent, ensuring data confidentiality, or avoiding the manipulation of findings although these aspects remain mandatory. Normative principles extend research ethics to include the values of trustworthiness, scientific integrity, fairness in selecting and treating participants, respect for human dignity, responsibility for the impact of research, and a commitment to preventing harm (M. F. Fadly & Rangkuti, 2025) . The third function is to formulate indicators of public benefit. In Islamic education research, success indicators cannot be adequately measured solely through test scores, graduation rates, attendance, or management efficiency. These indicators need to be expanded to include the quality of religious experience, students' psychosocial safety and well-being, the development of critical thinking, respect for diversity, family involvement, equitable access, independence, and social responsibility (Ramansyah, 2025) . The fourth function is to serve as a lens for interpreting empirical findings. Data regarding low literacy, weak numeracy skills, high student absenteeism, disparities in facilities, verbal abuse, or low parental involvement should be interpreted not merely as technical issues (Manalu & Setyasih, 2025) . The normative perspective helps researchers understand these issues as matters of intellectual development, the protection of the soul, educational justice, social responsibility, and respect for the humanity of students.

3. Analysis of Empirical and Transformative Approaches

The findings indicate that the empirical and transformative approaches are two key components in the reconstruction of Islamic education research methodology. The empirical approach enables researchers to view Islamic education as a living, changing social reality

influenced by institutional conditions, learning culture, educator competencies, learner characteristics, family support, policies, and the availability of resources (Samsu, 2025) . The transformative approach complements this understanding by directing research toward empowerment, quality improvement, strengthening participation, and collaborative problem-solving (Rofiq & Sonia, 2026) . The relationship between the two is crucial because research on Islamic education must not stop at merely describing ideal conditions or mapping out problems; rather, it must generate knowledge that can be used to tangibly improve educational practices.

In the context of Islamic education, the realities under study are very broad. Research may focus on the quality of Qur'anic instruction, character education, literacy and numeracy skills, madrasah management, pesantren culture, teacher professionalism, the use of educational technology, inclusive education, parental involvement, student well-being, or the effectiveness of educational policies (F. H. Akbar & Risad, n.d.) . Each of these themes has factual dimensions that cannot be understood solely through the reading of normative texts. Researchers need to know what is actually happening in the classroom, how teachers deliver instruction, how students experience the learning process, what factors hinder the achievement of educational goals, and what forms of support are needed by educational institutions (Fitrah, 2018) .

The empirical approach treats field data as a crucial foundation for understanding educational phenomena contextually. Such data may take the form of behavior, experiences, perceptions, learning outcomes, patterns of social relations, institutional documents, assessment data, or policy records (Tampa, 2026) . The use of empirical data is not intended to replace Islamic values but to strengthen the capacity of Islamic education research to explain the gap between normative ideals and actual practices (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2008) . Islamic values provide direction regarding quality education, while empirical data reveal current conditions, contributing factors, and the improvement needs that must be prioritized.

The Role of Transformative Research

Transformative research is grounded in the perspective that research not only serves to explain the world of education but also plays a role in rectifying conditions that are unjust, ineffective, or fail to optimally support student development (Syamsi et al., 2025) . This orientation aligns with the goals of Islamic education, which emphasize the development of individuals who are knowledgeable, virtuous, independent, responsible, and capable of bringing about the common good. Transformative research does not treat members of the educational community merely as objects or sources of data, but rather as subjects who possess experiences, local knowledge, needs, and the ability to participate in change (Susanto et al., 2025) .

Empowerment in transformative research means strengthening the capacity of individuals and educational communities to understand issues, make decisions, and implement improvements independently. Teachers are not merely positioned as respondents asked to answer research questions, but as partners involved in identifying learning problems, developing solutions, implementing actions, and evaluating results (Zaini & Hermawan, 2026) . Students can be involved in sharing their learning experiences, proposing improvements to the classroom environment, and reflecting on the impact of the implemented programs. Parents can play a role in strengthening a culture of learning at home, monitoring their children's development, and fostering healthy communication with educational institutions (Darmawan & Wijayanti, 2026) .

Transformative research also broadens the meaning of educational quality. Quality is not only measured by improvements in academic scores but also by the changes experienced by members of the educational community (Aziz & Wahyudi, 2026) . These changes can take the

form of increased student engagement in learning, improved communication between teachers and parents, more organized learning administration, the creation of safer spaces for students, the growth of a reading culture, or improved teachers' ability to evaluate learning (Nafis et al., 2026) . This perspective frames educational improvement as a social process that requires collaboration, reflection, and long-term commitment.

Relevance of Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is relevant to research in Islamic education because it bridges the gap between problem diagnosis and collaborative action. PAR integrates the elements of research, participation, action, and reflection into a single, iterative process (Siswadi & Syaifuddin, 2024) . Unlike conventional research, which often culminates in reports and recommendations, PAR positions change as an integral part of the research process (Budiyanti, 2025) . The stages of PAR include participatory problem mapping and diagnosis. At this stage, the researcher does not unilaterally define the problem but rather invites members of the educational community to identify priority needs (Nafi, 2025) . The next stage is action planning. A diagnosis that involves multiple stakeholders yields a more comprehensive understanding than assumptions based solely on external observations (Tsaqila, 2025) .

The implementation of interventions must be followed by systematic observation and documentation. Researchers can record student attendance rates, engagement in learning, changes in assessment results, parental feedback, the quality of program implementation, and any remaining challenges (Fahmi et al., 2024) . This data serves as the basis for determining whether the interventions have been carried out in accordance with their objectives or need to be refined. Reflection is conducted openly so that all parties can evaluate their experiences, identify successes, discuss obstacles, and determine next steps (Andiyani et al., 2026) . This cycle ensures that change is adaptive rather than a one-time program.

Overall, empirical and transformative approaches strengthen Islamic education research so that it can move from analyzing reality toward corrective action. The empirical approach provides the data needed to accurately understand problems through observation, interviews, surveys, documentation, assessments, and the use of educational data. The transformative approach ensures that this data does not remain merely as academic findings but is developed into a process of empowerment, collaboration, and quality improvement involving the educational community. PAR is one of the most relevant models because it links diagnosis, action, observation, reflection, and continuous improvement within a participatory framework that aligns with the values of deliberation, cooperation, trustworthiness, and the common good in Islamic education.

4. Model Integrating Normative, Empirical, and Transformative Approaches

Research findings indicate that the reconstruction of Islamic education research methodology must be built through a model that integrates normative, empirical, and transformative approaches. This model positions Islamic values as the fundamental orientation, field data as the basis for evidence, and action for change as the ultimate goal of research (Wachid, 2025) . These three elements are not separate from one another but rather form a single, mutually reinforcing methodological unity. The normative approach provides answers regarding which values should be upheld in education; the empirical approach explains the current state of education and its underlying causes; while the transformative approach channels research findings into relevant, measurable, and sustainable improvements.

This integrative model emerged from the need to address two trends that have long been evident in Islamic education research. The first trend involves studies that rely heavily on texts and normative concepts but fail to examine the realities of education in depth (M. Amin Abdullah, 2016) . The second tendency involves research that is rich in empirical data but does not always connect its findings to Islamic values, the public good, and the goal of human

development. Both of these tendencies can result in partial studies (Egza et al., 2026) . Normative research that is not tested against field data risks producing ideal recommendations that are difficult to implement, while empirical research lacking a value-oriented approach can devolve into technical analysis that fails to provide ethical guidance for educational improvement (Firmanto et al., 2024) .

Islamic education requires a methodology capable of addressing three fundamental questions simultaneously. First, what values and goals should be realized through Islamic education? Second, how does this education actually unfold in the context of educational institutions, the learning process, and the lives of students? Third, what actions can be taken to bridge the gap between the ideal and the reality observed? Normative, empirical, and transformative integration answers these three questions sequentially and reciprocally. Islamic values provide the initial direction, field data test their relevance, and transformative actions demonstrate the ability of those values to function within the reality of educational life.

Stages of Methodological Integration

The integrative model can be applied through seven main stages. The first stage is problem formulation. Researchers identify problems based on the gap between Islamic educational values and educational realities. Problems may stem from assessment data, initial observations, complaints from the educational community, institutional documents, or policy issues. At this stage, normative values serve to determine why the problem is important, while preliminary data help illustrate its nature and level of urgency (Hakim, 2020) . The second stage is the establishment of research objectives. Objectives must include elements of understanding, evaluation, and change. Research is not only intended to describe low literacy levels or analyze the factors causing them, but also to design or evaluate interventions that can improve these conditions (Laksana et al., 2025) . The formulation of research objectives must link empirical findings to values such as the common good, justice, intellectual development, the protection of life, or the strengthening of moral character.

The third stage is data collection. Researchers use a combination of techniques appropriate to the issue at hand, such as observation to examine learning practices, interviews to explore the experiences of members of the education community, surveys to map perceptions, documentation to examine policies and program outcomes, and assessments to measure changes in learning outcomes. The use of multiple data sources allows for triangulation and enhances the credibility of findings (Soelistianto et al., 2024) . The fourth stage is data analysis. Empirical data is analyzed to identify patterns of problems, causal factors, priority needs, resources, and opportunities for change. Analysis can be conducted through thematic categorization, cross-source comparisons, achievement measurements, or tracing relationships between factors. At this stage, researchers must refrain from jumping to conclusions and ensure that interpretations are based on sufficient evidence. The fifth stage is normative interpretation. The sixth stage is the formulation of recommendations and action (Sihotang, n.d.) . Recommendations are formulated in operational terms, including the nature of activities, responsible parties, resources, timelines, success indicators, and monitoring mechanisms. Recommendations must take into account the institution’s capacity so they can be realistically implemented. The involvement of members of the educational community is necessary to select the most appropriate actions and foster a sense of ownership regarding the improvement program. The seventh stage is evaluation and reflection**.** Evaluation is conducted to assess the effectiveness of actions, implementation challenges, changes that have occurred, and the need for further improvements. Reflection helps researchers and stakeholders understand whether the actions taken have truly brought educational practices closer to the established ideal values (Mandasari et al., 2025) . Evaluation is not a concluding step but rather serves as new data to initiate the next cycle of research and transformation.

Implications, Novelty, and Methodological Contributions

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of normative, empirical, and transformative approaches has broad methodological implications for the development of Islamic education research. These implications primarily lie in a shift in how researchers view research not merely as a process for producing conceptual descriptions or data findings, but as a scientific activity that connects Islamic values, educational facts, and efforts toward socio-pedagogical improvement (Mandasari et al., 2025) . In this model, Islamic values serve as the ethical compass and educational goals, empirical data serve as the basis for verifying real-world conditions, while the transformative approach serves to convert research knowledge into actionable improvements. This framework is important because Islamic education faces complex issues, such as the quality of learning, service disparities, literacy, numeracy, educator professionalism, character development, students' psychosocial well-being, institutional governance, and adaptation to digital technology (Hasan et al., 2026) .

Methodologically, the integrative model offers a shift from linear research to dialogic and cyclical research. In linear research, researchers tend to start with theory, collect data, analyze findings, and then conclude the research with conclusions and recommendations (Ambarawadi & Fitri, 2026) . The integrative model views this process as a continuous cycle. Islamic values are used to select research problems and determine the direction of the research; field data are used to examine the gap between ideal values and actual conditions; the results of the analysis are used to formulate corrective actions; and the evaluation of these actions generates new data for reflection and program refinement (Jakandar & Wuriyanto, 2026) . This pattern makes Islamic education research more responsive to the changing needs of institutions and society.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study indicates that methodological issues in Islamic education research are not caused by a lack of Islamic values or a scarcity of educational data, but rather by the separation of these two elements in the research design. Normative studies often focus on reiterating Islamic principles, concepts, and the ideas of prominent figures without testing their application in actual teaching practices. Conversely, empirical research frequently identifies issues such as low literacy rates, teacher competence, institutional governance, and service disparities, but does not always use Islamic values as the basis for interpretation. This situation indicates that Islamic education which should be holistic is still frequently studied in a fragmented manner. The integration of normative, empirical, and transformative approaches offers a significant shift, as research does not stop at describing problems but moves toward sustainable educational improvement.

The concept of normative, empirical, and transformative integration is capable of addressing both conceptual and empirical issues. The normative approach provides a foundation of values, a direction for goals, and ethical guidelines through the principles of tawhid, justice, trustworthiness, compassion, the development of reason, and the common good. The empirical approach serves to examine the gap between ideal values and the actual state of education through observation, interviews, surveys, documentation, and assessment. The transformative approach channels these findings into collaborative action involving teachers, students, parents, and school administrators. The relevance of this model is further strengthened by Participatory Action Research, which links problem diagnosis, planning, implementation of actions, observation, reflection, and program refinement. This framework makes the research more relevant because it explains the educational values that must be realized, the realities faced by the institution, and the strategies for change that can be implemented.

The limitations of this study lie in its reliance on a literature review and a systematic literature review; consequently, the methodological model formulated remains conceptual and

has not yet been directly tested in specific educational institutions. Differences in the conditions of madrasahs, pesantren, Islamic schools, and religious universities such as resources, organizational culture, teacher capacity, family support, technology, and local policies may result in variations in the model's application. Further research should test the model through case studies or participatory action research to assess its effectiveness, barriers, indicators of success, and its impact on the quality of learning and equity in educational services.

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