



Negotiating Tensions Between Islamic Religious Education and Social-Emotional Learning in Classroom Practice

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Abstract

The growing adoption of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has prompted renewed discussion regarding its compatibility with faith-based educational systems, particularly Islamic Religious Education (IRE), where moral and spiritual values constitute the primary foundation of learning. This study explores how tensions between IRE and SEL emerge and are negotiated within classroom practice. Employing an interpretive qualitative case study, the research was conducted at a private Islamic senior high school in Indonesia involving three Islamic Religious Education teachers, twelve students, and one vice principal selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis and were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the relationship between IRE and SEL is characterized by continuous epistemological and pedagogical negotiation rather than complete alignment. Religious values remain the dominant framework shaping emotional expression, classroom interaction, and instructional practices, positioning SEL as a complementary rather than autonomous educational approach. Institutional culture, transmissive pedagogy, and ritual-oriented instruction further constrain opportunities for reflective dialogue and authentic socio-emotional development. This study contributes to the literature by proposing the concepts of asymmetrical integration of IRE-SEL and regulated emotionality in religious pedagogy, demonstrating that the implementation of SEL is inherently shaped by religious and cultural contexts. The findings offer practical insights for developing context-sensitive educational policies, curriculum design, and teacher professional development within faith-based schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The growing emphasis on educating the whole child has transformed contemporary educational discourse beyond cognitive achievement toward the development of social, emotional, and ethical competencies. Within this paradigm, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as one of the most influential educational frameworks for fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, interpersonal competence, responsible decision-making, and psychological well-being (Tan & Chua, 2024). Numerous empirical studies conducted across diverse educational systems consistently demonstrate that well-implemented SEL programs improve academic performance, reduce behavioral problems, strengthen resilience, and promote positive school climates. These findings have encouraged governments, international organizations, and educational institutions to incorporate SEL into curriculum reform and teacher professional development (Cristóvão et al., 2023; Elkin et al., 2023; Storey, 2025). Consequently, SEL is increasingly regarded as a universal educational approach capable of addressing the complex developmental needs of learners in the twenty-first century (Nanda et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the rapid global diffusion of SEL has also generated important debates concerning its philosophical assumptions, cultural adaptability, and compatibility with educational traditions rooted in different religious and moral worldviews. As

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educational systems become increasingly diverse, questions regarding how socio-emotional competencies interact with locally embedded value systems have become more pressing than ever. This situation highlights the necessity of examining SEL beyond its demonstrated effectiveness by critically exploring how it operates within educational contexts shaped by distinctive epistemological and cultural foundations.

These debates become particularly significant when SEL is introduced into Islamic Religious Education (IRE), where educational objectives extend beyond psychological development toward the cultivation of moral integrity, spiritual consciousness, and obedience to divine guidance. Unlike SEL, which largely originates from developmental psychology and humanistic educational theories, IRE derives its philosophical orientation from Islamic epistemology, in which knowledge is inseparable from revelation, ethical responsibility, and religious commitment (Mahmudulhassan & Abuzar, 2024). Within this tradition, concepts such as *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, and *tazkiyah* emphasize that intellectual growth must always be accompanied by spiritual purification and moral refinement. Accordingly, values including patience, sincerity, humility, gratitude, and self-control are understood not merely as desirable personal characteristics but as religious obligations that shape believers' relationships with both God and society. While these values appear conceptually compatible with many socio-emotional competencies promoted in SEL, they emerge from fundamentally different philosophical premises regarding human nature, authority, and the purpose of education. This difference raises important educational questions concerning whether the integration of SEL into Islamic education represents genuine conceptual compatibility or merely superficial pedagogical adaptation (Mustaghfiroh et al., 2025; Rohman et al., 2025). Understanding this distinction is essential because educational reforms that overlook epistemological differences may unintentionally create tensions within classroom practice rather than producing meaningful educational innovation.

The practical implementation of Islamic Religious Education further illustrates the complexity of this issue. In many Islamic schools, classroom instruction continues to prioritize the transmission of normative religious knowledge through teacher-centered pedagogies, memorization, ritual practice, and moral instruction, whereas contemporary SEL encourages dialogic learning, reflective inquiry, emotional authenticity, and learner autonomy (Arda Tuncdemir, 2025). Teachers are therefore expected to balance two educational orientations that may not always converge seamlessly in everyday classroom interactions. On one hand, they are responsible for preserving the authority of religious teachings and ensuring students' adherence to established moral principles (Husaeni, 2023; Rifai et al., 2025). On the other hand, they are increasingly encouraged to facilitate emotional awareness, empathy, critical reflection, and collaborative problem-solving as promoted within SEL frameworks (Moore & Gregory, 2024; Yashenkova, 2025). This dual expectation often places teachers in complex pedagogical situations where decisions about emotional expression, classroom dialogue, and moral guidance require continuous negotiation rather than straightforward implementation. Consequently, classroom practices become sites where religious values, institutional expectations, pedagogical traditions, and students' socio-emotional experiences intersect in dynamic and sometimes contradictory ways (Mincu & Mills, 2026; Vassel et al., 2025). These realities indicate that investigating the relationship between IRE and SEL requires moving beyond normative assumptions of harmonious integration toward a deeper examination of how educational actors negotiate competing epistemological and pedagogical demands within authentic classroom contexts.

Recent theoretical developments have further intensified discussions concerning the relationship between socio-emotional development and value-based education. Social constructivist perspectives emphasize that meaningful learning emerges through interaction, dialogue, and collaborative knowledge construction rather than through one-way knowledge transmission (Baumgarten et al., 2026; Worku & Dereb, 2026). Likewise, transformative learning theory argues that reflection on personal experiences is fundamental to the reconstruction of beliefs, identities, and values (Sherman, 2021; Sweet, 2023). Contemporary educational psychology also highlights the importance of satisfying learners' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness to promote sustainable socio-emotional growth (Chim et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). These theoretical perspectives strongly support learner-centered pedagogies in which emotional experiences become valuable educational resources rather than distractions from instruction. By contrast, Islamic educational traditions have historically emphasized value internalization through

moral habituation, exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*), and disciplined religious practice (Said et al., 2025). Although both perspectives ultimately seek holistic human development, they differ substantially in the mechanisms through which educational transformation is expected to occur. This theoretical divergence suggests that integrating IRE and SEL cannot simply be viewed as combining complementary instructional strategies but should instead be understood as an encounter between distinct educational paradigms that may generate both opportunities and tensions.

Existing empirical research overwhelmingly supports the educational benefits of SEL across different educational settings. Meta-analyses consistently report positive effects on students' academic achievement, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being (Iuga & David, 2024; Kaya & Erdem, 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2022). More recent studies have demonstrated that SEL contributes to resilience, executive functioning, learning motivation, and school engagement among learners from diverse cultural backgrounds (Jagers et al., 2025a). Other investigations have emphasized the importance of teacher professional capacity, institutional support, and school climate in determining successful SEL implementation (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2022; Ulla & Poom-Valickis, 2023). Within inclusive and multicultural education, scholars have also explored SEL as a strategy for strengthening equity, intercultural understanding, and student well-being (Jagers et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies have established a strong evidence base supporting SEL as an effective educational innovation (Cipriano et al., 2023; Mahoney et al., 2021; Shi & Cheung, 2024). Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of this literature implicitly assumes that SEL represents a culturally transferable framework whose core principles remain equally applicable across different educational traditions. Consequently, limited attention has been devoted to examining how socio-emotional learning interacts with educational systems grounded in alternative epistemological and theological traditions, particularly within faith-based educational environments.

Despite the expanding body of SEL scholarship, several important limitations remain insufficiently addressed. First, previous studies predominantly conceptualize the relationship between SEL and religious education as naturally complementary, paying limited attention to possible epistemological tensions that arise when psychological and theological knowledge systems intersect (Captari et al., 2021; Goodman, 2024). Second, most investigations evaluate SEL primarily through measurable outcomes such as academic achievement, emotional competence, or behavioral improvement, while giving comparatively little attention to the complex processes through which educational values are interpreted, negotiated, and internalized within classroom interactions. Third, studies conducted in Islamic educational settings frequently emphasize character formation and moral development but rarely analyze how teachers reconcile normative religious authority with students' emotional autonomy during everyday pedagogical practice. Consequently, the existing literature remains dominated by an integration-oriented perspective that largely overlooks contradictions, negotiations, and asymmetrical power relations shaping classroom implementation (Kole, 2026). This omission leaves an important conceptual gap concerning the extent to which SEL can genuinely function as an autonomous educational framework within Islamic Religious Education rather than merely serving as an instrument for reinforcing predetermined moral objectives. Addressing this gap is essential because educational innovation cannot be adequately understood without examining the epistemological negotiations through which competing educational values are interpreted and enacted in authentic classroom practice.

Against this background, the present study seeks to critically examine how tensions between Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) are constructed, negotiated, and manifested within everyday classroom practices in an Indonesian Islamic secondary school. Rather than assuming that both educational frameworks can be integrated harmoniously, this research approaches their relationship as an ongoing process of epistemological negotiation shaped by religious authority, pedagogical decision-making, institutional culture, and students' lived socio-emotional experiences. By adopting an interpretive qualitative case study, the study aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which teachers and students interpret, accommodate, and sometimes contest the interaction between normative religious values and socio-emotional competencies (Mustafa, 2025). Theoretically, this research contributes to contemporary educational discourse by challenging the dominant universalistic assumptions that characterize much of the existing SEL literature and by demonstrating that socio-emotional learning is deeply influenced by

the epistemological context in which it is implemented (Alemdar & Aşıkcan, 2026; Goodman, 2024). Building upon empirical evidence from faith-based education, this study introduces the concepts of asymmetrical integration of IRE–SEL and regulated emotionality in religious pedagogy as analytical lenses for understanding how educational authority shapes the formation and expression of students' socio-emotional competencies. Practically, the findings are expected to inform teachers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers in designing more context-sensitive approaches that preserve the ethical foundations of Islamic education while creating meaningful opportunities for dialogue, emotional reflection, and learner agency. Ultimately, this study argues that successful integration between religious education and socio-emotional learning requires not merely pedagogical adaptation but a deeper reconsideration of the epistemological assumptions underpinning both educational traditions (Usiono et al., 2026). By positioning educational tension as an analytical resource rather than a pedagogical obstacle, this research offers a more nuanced framework for understanding the complexities of value formation and socio-emotional development within contemporary faith-based education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative interpretive case study design to investigate the epistemological and pedagogical tensions emerging from the integration of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) within classroom practices. A qualitative approach was selected because the phenomenon under investigation involves socially constructed meanings, subjective experiences, and context-dependent interactions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone. The case study strategy enabled an in-depth exploration of how teachers and students negotiate religious values, emotional experiences, and pedagogical practices within an authentic educational setting. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, this study aimed to generate a contextualized understanding of the interaction between theological authority and socio-emotional pedagogy in Islamic education. The interpretive paradigm guided the research by recognizing that educational reality is continuously constructed through participants' interpretations, institutional culture, and classroom interactions.

Research Site and Period

The research was conducted at Private Senior High School (PSHS) Al-Irsyad Purwokerto, Central Java, Indonesia, an Islamic secondary school recognized for integrating religious education with contemporary character development initiatives. The school was purposively selected because it provides an appropriate context in which Islamic Religious Education is implemented alongside educational reforms emphasizing twenty-first-century competencies and holistic student development. Data collection was undertaken between March and May 2026, allowing prolonged engagement with participants and classroom activities throughout one academic semester. This setting enabled the researchers to examine naturally occurring interactions between religious instruction, socio-emotional learning practices, and institutional culture.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique widely recommended for qualitative inquiry because it facilitates the selection of information-rich participants who possess direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. The inclusion criteria required participants to be actively involved in Islamic Religious Education learning and willing to participate voluntarily throughout the study. The participants consisted of three Islamic Religious Education teachers, twelve students representing diverse academic achievement levels and classroom participation patterns, and one vice principal responsible for curriculum implementation, resulting in a total of sixteen participants. Student participants were intentionally selected to represent both male and female students with varying learning experiences to obtain multiple perspectives regarding classroom interaction and socio-emotional development. Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, as indicated by the recurrence of similar themes and the absence of substantially new information during subsequent interviews.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument was the researchers themselves, supported by a semi-structured interview protocol, a non-participant classroom observation checklist, and a document analysis guide. The interview protocol was developed based on the theoretical framework of Islamic Religious Education and Social-Emotional Learning and covered four principal domains: (1) teachers' conceptual understanding of IRE and SEL, (2) pedagogical practices implemented in the classroom, (3) students' emotional experiences and value internalization, and (4) institutional and cultural influences on instructional practice. Classroom observations focused on teacher-student interaction, instructional strategies, emotional expression, classroom communication patterns, and manifestations of religious values throughout learning activities. Documentary evidence included lesson plans, curriculum documents, assessment records, school regulations, and instructional materials to triangulate findings obtained from interviews and observations.

Trustworthiness of the Instruments

Methodological rigor was established following the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Prior to field implementation, the interview guide and observation protocol underwent expert validation involving three specialists in Islamic education, qualitative methodology, and educational psychology. Their feedback was used to refine question clarity, conceptual alignment, and content relevance. A pilot interview involving one teacher and two students from another Islamic secondary school was subsequently conducted to evaluate the comprehensibility and flow of the interview questions. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement, triangulation of multiple data sources and collection techniques, member checking, and peer debriefing. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail documenting methodological decisions throughout the research process, while confirmability was enhanced through researcher reflexivity and independent review of coding decisions.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection followed a systematic and sequential procedure to ensure methodological rigor and the credibility of the findings. Prior to fieldwork, institutional permission was obtained from the school administration, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Preliminary classroom observations were conducted to familiarize the researchers with the learning environment, instructional routines, and school culture. Classroom observations were subsequently undertaken during Islamic Religious Education lessons to document authentic teacher-student interactions, pedagogical practices, and socio-emotional learning processes. A total of twelve classroom observations were completed, with each session lasting approximately 90 minutes. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted individually with teachers, students, and the vice principal. Each interview lasted approximately 45–70 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' permission, and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Finally, institutional documents, including lesson plans, curriculum documents, assessment records, and school regulations, were collected to triangulate observational and interview data. The overall research procedure implemented in this study is presented in Figure 1. The flowchart summarizes the sequential stages undertaken throughout the research, beginning with problem identification and concluding with the formulation of theoretical contributions. Presenting the methodological workflow visually enhances transparency and enables readers to understand how the study progressed from research planning through data collection, analysis, validation, interpretation, and conclusion.

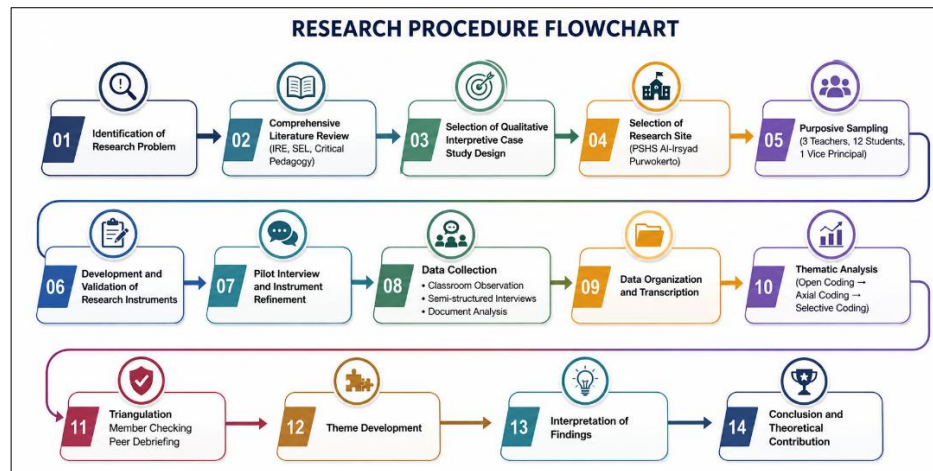


Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

As illustrated in Figure 1, the research was conducted through fourteen interconnected stages. The process began with identifying the research problem and conducting a comprehensive literature review to establish the theoretical foundation and research gap. Subsequently, an interpretive qualitative case study design was selected, followed by the determination of the research site, purposive participant selection, instrument development, expert validation, and pilot interviews. After completing the preparatory stages, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis before being organized and transcribed for analysis. The analytical process involved thematic analysis supported by triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. Finally, the refined themes were interpreted to generate conclusions and theoretical contributions regarding the epistemological and pedagogical tensions between Islamic Religious Education and Social-Emotional Learning.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following, supported by the interactive analytical framework proposed. Analysis commenced immediately after data collection through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents to achieve familiarity with the dataset. Initial coding was conducted inductively to identify meaningful units related to classroom interaction, value internalization, emotional expression, pedagogical practice, and institutional influence. Subsequently, related codes were organized into broader conceptual categories before being refined into overarching themes representing the epistemological and pedagogical tensions between Islamic Religious Education and Social-Emotional Learning. Coding and data management were facilitated using NVivo 14, enabling systematic organization, retrieval, comparison, and integration of multiple qualitative data sources. Throughout the analytical process, themes were continuously refined through constant comparison, researcher reflection, and iterative discussions until conceptual coherence was achieved. The final interpretation integrated empirical findings with theoretical perspectives from Islamic education, Social-Emotional Learning, critical pedagogy, and educational psychology to develop a comprehensive explanation of the asymmetrical integration between IRE and SEL identified in classroom practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Epistemological Tensions in Integrating IRE and SEL

Research findings indicate that integrating IRE and SEL in the classroom does not occur in a neutral epistemological space, but rather in a fundamental tension between two distinct knowledge frameworks. Teachers predominantly understand IRE as a normative-theological value system derived from revelation and possessing absolute truth. At the same time, SEL is positioned as a psychological approach that is contextual, reflective, and based on individual experience. This tension is evident not only at the conceptual level but also in how teachers interpret learning

objectives and the pedagogical strategies they employ. Based on in-depth interviews, most IRE teachers believe that socio-emotional aspects are inherent in Islamic teachings and therefore do not require an additional framework like SEL. One teacher stated: "In Islam, everything is complete. Morals, patience, empathy, all of it is already there. So, there is really no need for the term SEL, because that is just a Western term." (RT-1)

This statement demonstrates a reductionist tendency, treating SEL not as a pedagogical framework with its own theoretical basis but as a subset of the concept of morality in Islam. From this perspective, integration does not occur through epistemological dialogue but rather as a process of subsumption, namely, the absorption of one concept into a more dominant framework. As a result, the potential contribution of SEL to enrich learning practices is not fully explored. However, the findings also indicate ambivalence in teachers' understanding. On the one hand, they affirm the epistemological superiority of IRE; on the other, they acknowledge the need to develop a more responsive approach to students' emotional states. This is illustrated in the following informant's statement: "Sometimes we feel that students today are different. They are more sensitive, and they have more problems. So, a more emotional approach is needed, but it must still be within the framework of Islamic values." (RT. 2) This ambivalence reflects a space for epistemological negotiation that has not been systematically articulated. Teachers find themselves in a dilemma between upholding normative values and responding to the demands of contemporary pedagogy, which emphasizes students' emotional and psychological aspects. In this context, the integration of IRE and SEL does not constitute a complete synthesis but rather a pragmatic, situational practice.

Classroom observations reinforce this finding. In several learning sessions, teachers were seen using approaches that implicitly incorporate SEL elements, such as providing space for students to share experiences or express feelings. However, these practices were often not explicitly linked to the SEL framework, but instead reverted directly to the normative narrative of IRE. For example, in a discussion session on patience, the teacher asked students to recount experiences when they were angry, but then immediately redirected the discussion to the obligation to restrain emotions based on religious teachings, without further exploration of the process of emotional regulation itself. As noted in the observation, the teacher opened the space for emotional reflection but quickly closed it with normative affirmations, without delving into students' experiential processes. This practice suggests that, despite indications of adopting SEL elements, the integration remains superficial and has not yet addressed deeper epistemological dimensions. SEL is used as a tool to reinforce normative messages, rather than as a framework that allows for autonomous exploration of students' emotional experiences. In other words, there is a tension between approaches that emphasize emotional exploration and those oriented toward normative closure. Furthermore, this epistemological tension is also reflected in how teachers understand the authority of knowledge. In IRE, teachers are positioned as sources of truth who convey established values, whereas in SEL, teachers act as facilitators who accompany students in self-reflection. This difference creates complex dynamics in learning practices. One student explained:

"In religious studies, we usually listen and take notes. But sometimes the teacher also asks about our feelings, and then tells us what is true." (Student 3) This statement indicates that the space for reflection provided to students remains strictly limited, with the outcome still directed toward a single normative truth. This reinforces the argument that the integration of IRE and SEL remains in tension between dialogical and instructional approaches. Overall, these findings indicate that the epistemological tension in integrating IRE and SEL is not solely due to conceptual differences, but also to how educational actors interpret and position the two frameworks. The resulting integration tends to be asymmetrical, with IRE maintaining its epistemological dominance. At the same time, SEL plays a complementary role that has not yet been fully recognized as an equivalent knowledge framework. This situation results in ambivalent learning practices, on the one hand, attempting to be responsive to students' emotional needs, while on the other, remaining bound by rigid normative structures. These findings confirm that efforts to integrate IRE and SEL require not only pedagogical innovation but also a more reflective and dialogical epistemological reconstruction.

Negotiating Normative Values and Emotional Expression

Research findings indicate that one of the most obvious tensions in integrating IRE and SEL lies in the negotiation between instilling normative values and students' emotional expression. In

learning practices, IRE values such as patience (*ṣabr*), self-control, and etiquette are often taught within a framework of normative compliance. In contrast, SEL emphasizes recognizing, understanding, and authentically expressing emotions. This tension arises when teachers face situations in which students' emotional expressions do not always align with normative expectations. Interviews with teachers revealed a tendency to prioritize emotional regulation as "controlling" rather than "understanding" emotions. One teacher stated: "If a student is angry or upset, we direct them to be patient. We should not let them get used to expressing their emotions, because that is not good in Islam." (RT 3) This statement reflects a strong normative orientation, where the expression of emotions especially those deemed negative, is viewed as something that must be suppressed or controlled. From this perspective, learning success is measured by the extent to which students conform to established behavioral standards. However, this approach may neglect the reflective dimension at the heart of SEL, which helps students understand the sources of their emotions and develop more adaptive regulation strategies.

On the other hand, some teachers made efforts to create space for students' emotional expression, albeit within certain limits. This is evident in the following statement: "Sometimes, I allow students to talk about, for example, why they are upset or sad. But we still guide them so they do not overdo it and return to religious values." (RT. 1) This statement demonstrates a partial negotiation process. Teachers attempt to accommodate SEL principles by providing space for expression, while simultaneously maintaining strict normative boundaries. Thus, emotional expression is not fully recognized as a valid experience to be explored, but rather as something that must be quickly redirected back into a framework of values deemed correct. Classroom observations revealed this dynamic more concretely. During one learning session, a student expressed disappointment with a friend who was perceived as being unfair in group work. The teacher responded by giving the student space to speak, but then quickly closed the discussion by emphasizing the value of patience and the importance of forgiveness. As recorded in field notes, the student began to share his feelings openly, but the teacher immediately directed him toward normative solutions without delving deeper into his emotional experience. (Ob., 2026)

This practice suggests that space for emotional expression is present, but it is limited and instrumental. Students' emotions are not fully understood as part of the learning process but rather treated as a starting point to guide students toward predetermined normative conclusions. In this context, a normative framing of emotions emerges, in which emotions are assessed and categorized according to their alignment with religious values. Student perspectives reinforce this finding. Several students expressed the need to "filter" the emotions they wish to convey in class. One student stated: "In religion class, we have to be careful. If we are too honest about our feelings, we are afraid that it will be seen as inconsistent with good behavior." (ST. 5) This statement indicates the presence of normative self-control, in which students not only learn to manage their emotions but also to align their emotional expression with social and religious expectations. Meanwhile, another student stated: "Sometimes I want to share more deeply, but I am usually immediately directed to 'I have to be patient' or 'I have to be sincere,' so I do not continue." (ST. 2)

This suggests that the emotional reflection process, which is at the heart of SEL, has not been fully developed in IRE learning practices. Rather than being a space for open dialogue, the classroom tends to become a space of normative regulation that limits the exploration of emotional experiences. Overall, these findings reveal that the integration between IRE's normative values and students' emotional expression does not occur harmoniously, but rather through a complex, often unbalanced negotiation process. Religious values remain the dominant framework for defining the boundaries of emotional expression, while SEL principles are adopted selectively and pragmatically. As a result, ambivalent learning practices emerge, on the one hand, providing space for emotional expression, but on the other, restricting and directing that expression within a predetermined normative framework. These findings confirm that the primary challenge in integrating IRE and SEL is not merely technical implementation but rather balancing the authority of values and students' emotional autonomy. Without efforts to reconstruct this relationship in a more dialogic way, the integration that results may remain superficial and fail to fully develop students' social-emotional competencies.

Pedagogical Contradictions in Classroom Practice

The research findings reveal significant pedagogical contradictions in IRE teaching practices when confronted with SEL principles. These contradictions are particularly evident in the mismatch between the pedagogical approaches used by teachers, which tend to be instructional, teacher-centered, and normative, and the demands of SEL, which emphasize participatory, reflective, and student-centered learning. In many cases, SEL integration does not manifest as a pedagogical transformation but rather serves as a sporadic complement within a conventional learning framework. Interviews with teachers indicate that the lecture method remains the dominant teaching strategy in IRE. This is based on the assumption that direct delivery of material is considered the most effective way to ensure students' understanding of religious teachings. One teacher stated that in IRE, it still has to be explained clearly first. There cannot be too much discussion, or students will misunderstand (RT. 2). This statement reflects a pedagogical orientation that positions teachers as the primary authority in the production and transmission of knowledge. Within this framework, the space for dialogue and exploration, which are the core of SEL, is limited, as the learning process focuses more on the transmission of values considered final. As a result, the potential of learning as a space for negotiation of meaning and emotional reflection among students is not optimally developed. However, there are indications that teachers are adopting a more participatory approach, though not consistently. Several teachers mentioned using discussion or question-and-answer methods to engage students more actively. One informant explained: "Sometimes we hold group discussions to make students more active, but we still have to guide them so they do not stray from the material." (RT. 1)

This effort demonstrates awareness of the importance of student engagement, but also strict limitations in its implementation. Discussions do not become fully open spaces for the exploration of ideas and experiences, but remain controlled to fit within the predetermined material framework. Thus, the participatory approach envisioned in SEL tends to be domesticated in IRE learning practices. Classroom observations revealed a concrete manifestation of this pedagogical contradiction. In one learning session on honesty, the teacher began with a lengthy lecture on definitions and related propositions. Afterward, the teacher asked students questions about their experiences with honesty. Some students began sharing stories, but the interaction did not develop into a reflective discussion (Ob., 2026). This situation demonstrates that despite the interactive elements, the learning structure remained dominated by an initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) pattern, in which the teacher controlled the flow of communication and determined the validity of students' answers. In this pattern, students are not fully positioned as active subjects in constructing knowledge, but rather as recipients who must adapt their responses to the teacher's expectations.

"Student perspectives also indicate this contradiction. He said that sometimes teachers said they can express their opinions, but they usually correct us if they do not." (ST. 4) Furthermore, this pedagogical contradiction is also evident in the misalignment between learning objectives and the strategies used. Teachers often state that the goal of RE learning is to shape students' character and attitudes, including social-emotional aspects. However, the strategies used still focus on material delivery and cognitive assessment. One teacher stated that their goal is actually for students to have good morals, but the assessment is mostly based on written tests (RT.3). This demonstrates a misalignment between pedagogical objectives and practices, which ultimately hinders the substantial integration of SEL. The social-emotional dimension, which is expected to develop, is not given adequate space in the learning process. Overall, these findings confirm that the pedagogical contradiction in integrating IRE and SEL extends beyond methodological choices to the underlying learning paradigm. As long as learning remains dominated by a transmissive and teacher-centered approach, efforts to integrate SEL will tend to be superficial. Therefore, a more fundamental pedagogical transformation is needed, moving from simply conveying values to facilitating a dialogic, reflective, and experience-centered learning process for students. Without this shift, the integration of IRE and SEL will continue to experience unresolved tensions in classroom practice.

From Ritual Compliance to Emotional Internalization

Research findings indicate a significant tension between the practice of formal religious rituals or ritual compliance and the process of internalizing values that touch on students' socio-emotional dimensions. In the context of IRE learning, ritual practices such as congregational prayer, group prayer, and other forms of worship are integral to school culture. However, field findings indicate

that these practices often emphasize obedience and regularity over the development of emotional awareness and reflection on the meaning of these ritual activities.

Interviews with teachers indicate that rituals are viewed as a primary means of shaping students' character. One teacher stated that whether children were accustomed to congregational prayer and discipline, their morals would naturally develop (RT. 1). This statement reflects the pedagogical assumption that the repetition of ritual practices will automatically lead to the internalization of values. Within this framework, rituals are positioned as a habituation mechanism believed to shape character without requiring in-depth reflective exploration. However, this approach tends to ignore the complexity of the process of internalizing values, which involves not only external actions but also individual emotional involvement and awareness. On the other hand, some teachers are beginning to recognize that ritual observance does not always directly correlate with understanding and internalizing values. One informant stated: "Children indeed participate in prayer, but they do not necessarily understand its meaning. Sometimes it is just out of obligation." (RT. 2)

This statement demonstrates a critical awareness of the limitations of a solely ritual-based approach. Teachers acknowledge that routine religious practices do not necessarily lead to internal transformation, particularly in socio-emotional domains such as empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. Field observations reinforce this finding. During congregational prayer activities, most students participated in an orderly, procedurally correct manner. However, after the activity concluded, students' social interactions did not always reflect the expected values. The observation noted that students participated in congregational prayer in an orderly manner. However, after the prayer ended, some students were seen joking excessively and showing a lack of empathy toward their peers (Ob., 2026). This phenomenon indicates a disconnect between ritual practices and students' social-emotional behavior. Rituals become activities separate from everyday life, so the values they contain are not fully internalized in real-life behavior.

Furthermore, in the context of classroom learning, teachers often link material to ritual practices, but do not systematically foster students' emotional reflection. For example, in a lesson on sincerity, the teacher explained the importance of intention in worship but did not provide sufficient time for students to reflect on their personal experiences with sincerity. This practice indicates that learning still focuses on the transfer of normative knowledge, without accompanying an internalization process that involves students' emotional dimensions. From an SEL perspective, the process of internalizing values should involve self-reflection, emotional awareness, and connecting with students' personal experiences. However, these elements have not yet become an integral part of IRE learning practices. Student perspectives also reveal a gap between ritual practices and their emotional experiences. One student stated: "We pray regularly at school, but sometimes we do not really think about the meaning. The important thing is to follow along. When asked about feelings during prayer, it is rarely discussed in class. Usually, we go straight to the material." (ST. 6) This statement indicates that students have not been fully encouraged to connect ritual practices with their emotional experiences. As a result, rituals are understood more as formal obligations than as a means of holistic self-development.

Overall, these findings confirm that there is an incomplete shift from ritual compliance to emotional internalization in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning practices. While rituals continue to play a crucial role as a foundation for character formation, without integration with approaches that encourage reflection and emotional awareness, the process of internalizing values tends to be shallow and unsustainable. This tension suggests that integrating Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and SEL requires a pedagogical reorientation, in which ritual practices are understood not only as obligations to be adhered to but also as experiences to be reflected on and emotionally interpreted. Thus, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning can shift from merely shaping external behavior to developing deeper, more authentic internal awareness.

Institutional Constraints and Cultural Dynamics

Research findings indicate that the tension between IRE and SEL stems not only from epistemological and pedagogical aspects but is also reinforced by institutional structural constraints and school cultural dynamics. The integration of SEL into IRE learning occurs within an educational system that still emphasizes curriculum standards, administrative burdens, and a school culture that

tends to be normative and hierarchical. In this context, integration practices are not entirely determined by teachers' pedagogical preferences, but also by the institutional constraints that shape their scope of action.

Interviews with teachers revealed that curriculum pressures are a major factor limiting the development of SEL approaches. One teacher stated that they have to meet the curriculum's material targets. If there are too many reflection activities or discussions, we will not be able to cover the material." (RT. 1). This statement demonstrates a focus on material coverage that indirectly reduces the space for students' social-emotional exploration. In a system that emphasizes curriculum outcomes, activities that do not directly contribute to cognitive achievement tend to be viewed as add-ons, rather than as an integral part of learning. As a result, SEL integration is marginalized in daily practice. Furthermore, teachers' administrative burdens are also a significant obstacle. Teachers are expected to develop various learning tools and evaluation reports, most of which are oriented toward cognitive aspects. One informant stated: "We have quite a lot of administration, from lesson plans to assessments to reports. So the focus is more on things that can be reported clearly, like test scores." (RT. 3)

This situation demonstrates that the education accountability system remains dominated by easily measurable indicators, leaving more complex, context-dependent social-emotional dimensions underserved. Thus, institutional barriers are not only technical but also reflect broader evaluation paradigms within the education system. From a cultural perspective, findings indicate that a school culture that emphasizes discipline, obedience, and hierarchy influences the integration of IRE and SEL. In this culture, the relationship between teachers and students tends to be vertical, with teachers positioned as authorities who must be respected and followed. It means that a culture of compliance can limit students' space for dialogue and self-expression, which are essential to SEL. In this context, efforts to encourage student reflection and emotional expression often clash with cultural norms that emphasize politeness and self-control.

Observations in the school environment reinforce this finding. In various activities, including learning and religious activities, there is a strong emphasis on order and adherence to rules. One of the students said that they participate in activities in an orderly and disciplined manner. However, interactions tend to be one-way, with little room for open dialogue or spontaneous expression (Ob., 2026). This culture, while positive in maintaining order, can indirectly limit the development of social-emotional competencies that require space for exploration, dialogue, and reflection. Thus, the school's cultural dynamics are a significant factor in shaping how Islamic Religious Education and SEL are integrated. However, the findings also indicate that teachers are making adaptive efforts to navigate these institutional and cultural constraints. Some teachers attempt to integrate SEL elements implicitly into their teaching practices without explicitly changing existing structures. This effort showed micro-level agency, in which teachers strive to create space for innovation within existing boundaries. However, this practice remains individual and has not been systematically institutionalized in school policy.

Overall, these findings confirm that the integration of PAI and SEL cannot be understood solely as a pedagogical issue but also as a phenomenon influenced by the school's institutional structure and culture. Curriculum constraints, administrative burdens, and a culture of compliance create boundaries that limit the space for pedagogical innovation. Meanwhile, cultural dynamics that emphasize hierarchy and social control create additional challenges in developing a dialogical and reflective learning approach. Therefore, efforts to integrate PAI and SEL require a more systemic approach, focusing not only on classroom practices but also on transforming the policies and culture of educational institutions.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the relationship between Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) cannot be adequately understood as a straightforward process of curricular integration but rather as a continuous negotiation between two educational paradigms founded on different epistemological assumptions. The study reveals that Islamic values remain the dominant interpretive framework through which socio-emotional competencies are defined, practiced, and evaluated, thereby positioning SEL as a complementary pedagogical instrument instead of an autonomous educational framework. This finding challenges the widespread

assumption in mainstream SEL literature that socio-emotional competencies represent universally transferable constructs that can be implemented independently of cultural and philosophical contexts (Mahoney et al., 2021; Cipriano et al., 2023; Goodman, 2024). Instead, the findings suggest that educational innovations are always mediated by locally embedded systems of knowledge, authority, and moral legitimacy. From the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, this pattern is understandable because concepts such as *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, and *tazkiyah* conceptualize emotional development as inseparable from spiritual purification and moral responsibility rather than individual psychological growth alone (Mahmudulhassan & Abuzar, 2024; Said et al., 2025). Consequently, the present study extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that successful implementation of SEL in faith-based education depends less on technical adaptation than on epistemological compatibility. Rather than viewing the interaction between IRE and SEL as either harmonious or contradictory, this research proposes that educational practice is better understood as a dynamic process of negotiated coexistence in which religious epistemology continuously reshapes the meaning and application of socio-emotional learning.

The first major finding concerning epistemological tension further illustrates how teachers negotiate competing conceptions of knowledge, authority, and educational purpose. Participants consistently perceived Islamic Religious Education as a divinely grounded and normatively authoritative system, whereas SEL was interpreted as a psychological framework whose legitimacy depended upon its compatibility with Islamic values. This asymmetrical relationship supports previous studies reporting that Islamic education prioritizes revealed knowledge as the primary source of moral truth while remaining cautious toward externally developed educational frameworks (Husaeni, 2023; Mustaghfiroh et al., 2025; Rohman et al., 2025). However, the present findings move beyond earlier research by showing that teachers neither reject SEL outright nor fully embrace it; instead, they selectively appropriate socio-emotional practices that reinforce existing religious objectives while excluding elements perceived to challenge theological authority. Such selective appropriation reflects what social constructivist theory describes as the contextual reconstruction of educational meaning, whereby pedagogical innovations are reinterpreted through prevailing cultural and institutional belief systems rather than adopted in their original conceptual form (Baumgarten et al., 2026; Worku & Dereb, 2026). This finding also partially contrasts with universalist perspectives suggesting that SEL competencies possess culturally neutral characteristics applicable across educational contexts (Tan & Chua, 2024; Nanda et al., 2025). Instead, the evidence indicates that socio-emotional competencies acquire different meanings depending on the epistemological environment in which they are enacted. Accordingly, this study advances the concept of asymmetrical integration of IRE–SEL, arguing that integration in faith-based schools is characterized by unequal epistemic authority rather than reciprocal synthesis. This conceptual contribution enriches global discussions on culturally responsive SEL by demonstrating that educational transfer is fundamentally shaped by negotiations of legitimacy, authority, and worldview rather than by pedagogical effectiveness alone.

The second major finding demonstrates that the negotiation between normative religious values and students' emotional expression remains inherently asymmetrical, with emotional experiences being acknowledged only insofar as they reinforce predetermined moral expectations. Although teachers occasionally encouraged students to express personal feelings, these expressions were consistently redirected toward religious prescriptions such as patience (*ṣabr*), sincerity (*ikhhlās*), and self-restraint rather than becoming opportunities for critical emotional exploration. This pattern suggests that emotional regulation within Islamic Religious Education is primarily interpreted as moral discipline rather than psychological self-understanding, reflecting a conception of emotion that emphasizes ethical accountability over individual authenticity. Such findings partially support Islamic educational perspectives that regard emotional control as an essential component of spiritual formation (Mahmudulhassan & Abuzar, 2024; Said et al., 2025), while simultaneously diverging from mainstream SEL frameworks that conceptualize emotional awareness as a prerequisite for healthy self-regulation and interpersonal competence (Tan & Chua, 2024; Shi & Cheung, 2024). Furthermore, these findings resonate with Goodman's (2024) critique that dominant SEL discourse often assumes a universal understanding of emotions without adequately recognizing the influence of culturally embedded moral epistemologies. Rather than indicating resistance to socio-emotional learning, the findings reveal that emotional expression is

continuously evaluated through theological and ethical standards that determine which emotions are considered educationally legitimate. Consequently, this study introduces the notion of regulated emotionality in religious pedagogy, emphasizing that emotional competence in faith-based education is not defined solely by psychological adaptability but also by conformity to collectively endorsed moral ideals. This conceptual refinement expands existing SEL literature by illustrating how emotional development is reconstructed through religious norms, thereby offering a culturally grounded perspective on socio-emotional education that has received limited attention in international scholarship.

The third finding further reveals that the pedagogical integration of IRE and SEL remains constrained by a persistent contradiction between transmissive instructional traditions and learner-centered educational principles. Although teachers recognized the value of discussion, participation, and student engagement, classroom interaction continued to be dominated by teacher authority, normative explanation, and evaluative feedback that positioned students primarily as recipients rather than co-constructors of knowledge. From the perspective of social constructivism, meaningful socio-emotional development depends upon sustained dialogue, collaborative reflection, and shared meaning-making, all of which require classrooms that encourage students to negotiate ideas rather than merely reproduce accepted truths (Baumgarten et al., 2026; Worku & Dereb, 2026). Likewise, Transformative Learning Theory argues that genuine personal development emerges through critical reflection on lived experiences rather than through passive acceptance of externally prescribed values (Sherman, 2021; Sweet, 2023). The present findings indicate that such transformative processes remain limited because classroom dialogue frequently culminates in normative closure, thereby restricting opportunities for students to reinterpret experiences independently. These results correspond with previous studies reporting that effective SEL implementation depends on participatory pedagogy, teacher facilitation, and reflective classroom culture rather than isolated instructional activities (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Ulla & Poom-Valickis, 2023; Storey, 2025). However, unlike earlier research conducted predominantly in secular educational contexts, this study demonstrates that the persistence of transmissive pedagogy within Islamic Religious Education is closely associated with the perceived obligation to preserve doctrinal authority and theological certainty. Accordingly, the findings suggest that integrating SEL into faith-based education requires a deeper pedagogical transformation that redefines teacher authority—not by diminishing religious values, but by repositioning teachers as facilitators who guide students in critically internalizing those values through reflective dialogue. This argument extends contemporary discussions on culturally responsive pedagogy by highlighting that meaningful educational innovation must reconcile pedagogical participation with religious legitimacy rather than treating the two as mutually exclusive.

The fourth finding highlights that the transition from ritual compliance to meaningful emotional internalization remains incomplete, revealing an important pedagogical limitation in the current implementation of Islamic Religious Education. Although religious rituals such as congregational prayer, collective supplication, and routine worship were consistently practiced, these activities primarily emphasized behavioral discipline and procedural correctness rather than reflective engagement with students' emotional experiences. This finding suggests that ritual participation alone does not automatically facilitate socio-emotional development, as internalization requires learners to actively connect religious practices with personal meaning, emotional awareness, and moral reasoning. From the perspective of Transformative Learning Theory, authentic value formation occurs when individuals critically reinterpret their experiences and integrate them into evolving personal belief systems rather than merely reproducing externally prescribed behaviors (Sherman, 2021; Sweet, 2023). Similarly, Self-Determination Theory argues that sustainable internalization depends on satisfying learners' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, conditions that enable externally introduced values to become personally endorsed commitments (Chim et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). The present findings indicate that these psychological processes were only partially supported, as classroom instruction tended to privilege ritual performance over reflective dialogue concerning the emotional significance of religious practice. This observation differs from studies suggesting that habitual religious practices naturally promote socio-emotional competencies through repeated moral engagement (Mustaghfiroh et al., 2025; Said et al., 2025). Instead, the evidence demonstrates that ritual repetition without structured

reflection may encourage outward conformity while leaving deeper emotional understanding underdeveloped. Therefore, this study argues that the educational value of religious rituals should not be evaluated solely by the consistency of students' participation but also by their capacity to foster self-awareness, empathy, and reflective moral agency. Such an interpretation extends existing discussions on faith-based pedagogy by emphasizing that emotional internalization represents an active interpretive process rather than an automatic consequence of religious habituation.

The fifth finding demonstrates that institutional structures and school culture substantially shape the extent to which IRE and SEL can be meaningfully integrated, indicating that pedagogical innovation cannot be understood independently of its organizational context. Curriculum demands, administrative accountability, hierarchical authority, and a culture emphasizing discipline collectively constrained teachers' opportunities to implement dialogic and reflective socio-emotional practices. These findings reinforce previous research showing that successful SEL implementation depends not only on teachers' competencies but also on institutional readiness, supportive leadership, and organizational commitment to holistic education (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2022; Ulla & Poom-Valickis, 2023). However, the present study provides a more nuanced explanation by demonstrating that institutional constraints in faith-based schools extend beyond technical limitations to include deeply embedded cultural expectations concerning obedience, religious authority, and normative order. Such conditions explain why individual teachers who attempted to introduce reflective activities frequently did so in isolated and implicit ways rather than through systematic pedagogical reform. This finding aligns with culturally responsive educational perspectives arguing that educational reforms are always mediated by institutional norms and community values rather than implemented as universally applicable models (Alemdar & Aşıkcan, 2026; Kole, 2026). At the same time, the evidence illustrates that institutional culture should not be viewed merely as a barrier but as an influential context within which pedagogical innovation must be negotiated. Consequently, effective integration of IRE and SEL requires systemic rather than classroom-level intervention, encompassing curriculum redesign, assessment reform, school leadership, and sustained professional development that equips teachers to facilitate socio-emotional learning without compromising the ethical foundations of Islamic education. This broader perspective positions educational change as an organizational and cultural transformation rather than simply the adoption of new instructional techniques, thereby extending contemporary discussions on educational reform in religious schooling to a more comprehensive institutional level.

The findings collectively contribute to a growing body of international scholarship questioning the assumption that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) represents a universally transferable educational framework that can be implemented independently of cultural, religious, and epistemological contexts. While previous studies have primarily focused on measuring the effectiveness of SEL through indicators such as academic achievement, emotional competence, resilience, and school climate (Mahoney et al., 2021; Cipriano et al., 2023; Shi & Cheung, 2024; Jagers et al., 2025), considerably less attention has been devoted to examining how socio-emotional competencies are reconstructed when they encounter alternative systems of knowledge and moral authority. The present study addresses this gap by demonstrating that socio-emotional learning within Islamic Religious Education is mediated through continuous negotiations involving theological legitimacy, institutional culture, pedagogical authority, and religious identity rather than through the direct transfer of educational practices. Consequently, this research advances the conceptual understanding of culturally responsive SEL by proposing that socio-emotional competencies should not be interpreted as universally standardized psychological constructs but as contextually negotiated educational practices whose meanings emerge from specific philosophical and cultural traditions. In this regard, the concepts of asymmetrical integration of IRE-SEL and regulated emotionality in religious pedagogy provide new analytical lenses for explaining why similar SEL principles may produce different educational practices across faith-based and secular educational environments. Unlike previous integration-oriented studies that generally portray Islamic values and SEL as naturally complementary (Rohman et al., 2025; Mustaghfiroh et al., 2025), the present findings reveal that integration is characterized by unequal epistemological authority in which religious knowledge continuously defines the boundaries of acceptable socio-emotional development. This theoretical refinement therefore extends contemporary educational discourse beyond debates concerning compatibility toward a more comprehensive understanding of how

educational paradigms negotiate legitimacy, authority, and meaning within culturally diverse learning environments. Such a perspective positions the study within the broader international discussion on educational pluralism, demonstrating that meaningful innovation requires sensitivity not only to pedagogical effectiveness but also to the epistemological foundations that shape educational practice.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the findings also generate important practical implications for educational policy, curriculum development, and teacher professional learning in faith-based schools. The evidence suggests that strengthening the integration of IRE and SEL cannot be achieved merely by introducing additional socio-emotional activities into existing curricula because the primary challenge lies in reconciling differing assumptions regarding the purpose of education, the authority of knowledge, and the nature of emotional development. Therefore, curriculum developers should design context-sensitive learning frameworks that explicitly connect Islamic ethical principles with reflective socio-emotional pedagogies rather than treating the two as parallel or competing domains. Likewise, teacher professional development should emphasize dialogic instructional strategies, reflective facilitation, and culturally responsive emotional literacy that enable teachers to preserve the theological integrity of Islamic education while simultaneously creating meaningful opportunities for student agency and critical reflection. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted in light of several contextual considerations. As an interpretive qualitative case study conducted within a single Islamic secondary school, the conclusions are intended to provide analytical rather than statistical generalization, and educational practices may vary across different Islamic educational traditions, institutional cultures, and national contexts. Future studies should therefore examine the proposed concepts across diverse faith-based educational settings using comparative, longitudinal, or mixed-methods approaches to explore how socio-emotional competencies evolve under different theological, cultural, and organizational conditions. Such investigations would contribute to refining a globally relevant yet contextually grounded theory of socio-emotional learning that acknowledges cultural diversity without abandoning the pursuit of educational quality. Ultimately, this study argues that the future of SEL in religious education depends not on replacing existing educational traditions but on fostering meaningful epistemological dialogue capable of integrating psychological development with spiritual, moral, and cultural dimensions of human flourishing.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the relationship between Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is characterized not by seamless compatibility but by continuous epistemological and pedagogical negotiation within classroom practice. The findings reveal that the normative authority of Islamic education remains the dominant framework shaping instructional decisions, emotional expression, and value internalization, resulting in an asymmetrical pattern of integration in which socio-emotional learning functions primarily as a complementary rather than an autonomous educational paradigm. Such conditions encourage regulated emotionality that prioritizes moral conformity over reflective emotional exploration, while transmissive pedagogical practices, ritual-centered learning, and institutional constraints further restrict opportunities for dialogic engagement and authentic socio-emotional development. These findings extend contemporary SEL scholarship by demonstrating that the implementation of socio-emotional learning is inherently influenced by the epistemological, cultural, and religious contexts in which it is situated, thereby challenging assumptions regarding its universal applicability across educational systems. Accordingly, this study introduces the concepts of asymmetrical integration of IRE-SEL and regulated emotionality in religious pedagogy as conceptual contributions that enrich discussions on faith-based education and context-sensitive educational innovation. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that strengthening the integration of IRE and SEL requires not only pedagogical refinement but also institutional support, curriculum development, and teacher professional learning that create

greater opportunities for reflective dialogue while preserving the ethical and spiritual foundations of Islamic education. Future studies are encouraged to examine similar dynamics across diverse Islamic educational settings and through longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to further understand how socio-emotional competencies and religious values evolve within different sociocultural contexts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Sudiro conceived the research idea, designed the study, developed the research methodology, conducted the fieldwork, collected the data through classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis, performed data coding and thematic analysis, interpreted the findings, prepared the original manuscript draft, and revised the manuscript based on critical feedback. Irfan Musonif contributed to the conceptual refinement of the study, supervised the overall research process, validated the methodological design and data interpretation, provided theoretical guidance, critically reviewed and edited the manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Both authors discussed the findings, contributed to the interpretation of the results, approved the final manuscript, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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