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Transforming Islamic Education in the Digital Age: Methodological Analyses, Challenges and Opportunities Based on Current Research

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Abstract: Islamic religious education (PAI) in the digital age is undergoing significant changes, while facing complex challenges. This article analyses the current development of PAI (2017-2024) through a systematic literature review of 25 reliable sources. The results show three main findings: (1) learning innovation trends such as blended learning, gamification and the use of AI can increase student participation by 40% and personalise learning; (2) dominant challenges include the digital divide (only 25% of 3T schools have adequate access), teacher resistance (55% find it difficult to use digital tools) and religious misinformation on social media; (3) technology has a positive impact in terms of learning time efficiency, expanding access to education and strengthening monitoring and evaluation. This article recommends three strategic solutions: strengthening teachers' digital literacy, more contextualised curriculum reform, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to optimise the use of technology. These findings provide an important foundation for the development of adaptive PAI in the midst of rapid change, while maintaining Islamic values as the main foundation.

Keyword: Islamic Religious Formation, Digital Transformation, Learning Innovation, Educational Challenges, Digital Literacy

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is the most important foundation for shaping the morals, spirituality and religious understanding of the Muslim generation. However, in the midst of rapid technological development and social change, the PAI system is facing complex challenges that require methodological and curricular adjustments (Abdullah, 2020). These problems are not only theoretical, but also real, as evidenced by students' declining interest in learning and the gap between religious values and the realities of modern life (Nurdin, 2019). This article aims to analyse the causes of PAI problems in general and in practice, and to offer solutions based on current research. In general, PAI still faces classic problems such as monotonous learning methods, the dominance of the memorisation approach and the lack of contextualisation of materials (Ma'arif, 2018). In fact, the goal of PAI is not only to produce students who understand religious texts, but also to be able to apply Islamic values in everyday life (Al-Faruqi, 2021). A survey by Kemdikbud (2022) found that 60% of students felt that PAI materials were not relevant to contemporary issues such as social justice, the environment or digital ethics. This shows that there is a gap between the idealism of PAI and the needs of the times.

On the other hand, a real concern is the impact of globalisation and digitalisation on students' religious understanding. The rise of unfiltered religious content on social media has the potential to lead to misinterpretation of Islamic teachings (Hasan, 2022). A study by Rahman (2021) found that 45% of urban students learn about religion from YouTube more often than from teachers in school, which risks leading to a partial and incomplete understanding. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the lack of digital literacy among teachers, which makes it difficult for them to keep up with the flow of information consumed by students (Siregar, 2022). Another practical challenge is the gap in access and quality of PAI between urban and rural areas. Data from the BPS (2023) shows that only 30% of schools in deprived areas have adequate digital facilities for PAI learning. Meanwhile, in large cities, the problem lies in technological overexposure that reduces the depth of religious understanding (Yusuf, 2023). This condition requires a targeted approach to policy differentiation.

In addition, moral degradation among students, such as cases of bullying, intolerance and plagiarism, is evidence that PAI has not been fully successful in instilling the value of *akhlakul karimah* (Aminullah, 2023). Research by Wahid et al (2020) found that the focus of PAI to date has tended to be on cognitive aspects, while character development is often neglected. In fact, the essence of PAI lies in the formation of attitudes and behaviours in accordance with Islamic teachings (Zarkasyi, 2021). At the teacher

level, the main problem is resistance to pedagogical innovation. As many as 55% of PAI teachers in Indonesia still rely on the lecture method without media variations (Khalil, 2023). The lack of training and

infrastructure support is at the root of the slow adoption of technology in learning (Ibrahim, 2021). In fact, the Z and Alpha generations need a more interactive and participatory approach.

Institutionally, the PAI curriculum is also often criticised for failing to address global issues such as multiculturalism, gender equality and environmental sustainability (Nafis, 2020). In fact, Islam has a rich body of scholarship on these issues. There is an urgent need to integrate contemporary issues into the PAI curriculum so that students are able to respond to the challenges of the times (Rahman, 2021). Based on the above, this article discusses innovative solutions to common and real problems in PAI, such as strengthening teachers' digital literacy, developing contextualised curricula, and using technology for more effective learning. The analysis is conducted through a systematic review of recent research (2017-2024), to ensure that the recommendations are evidence-based.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with the systematic literature review (SLR) method to analyse the development, challenges and innovations of Islamic religious education (PAI) over the past seven years (2017-2024). SLR was chosen because of its ability to present a comprehensive evidence-based synthesis of various previous studies with a systematic and structured procedure (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). The research stages included: (1) formulation of research questions, (2) literature search, (3) selection of relevant studies, (4) data extraction and analysis, and (5) synthesis of findings. Inclusion criteria included Scopus/SINTA indexed articles, publications between 2017-2024, and a focus on the topic of PAI, educational technology, or pedagogical innovation.

Data collection was carried out by searching academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect and SINTA using the keywords: 'Islamic religious education', 'digitalisation of Islamic education', 'learning methodology of Islamic education', and 'challenges of Islamic education in the digital age'. The 25 selected articles were thematically analysed using NVivo 12 software to identify patterns, trends and research gaps. The extracted data included empirical findings, policy recommendations and best practices from different geographical contexts (urban vs. rural) and educational levels (primary to tertiary). Data validity was maintained through source triangulation by comparing analysis results between researchers and involving PAI experts for expert review.

Data analysis followed a meta-synthesis model adapted from Sandelowski & Barroso (2007) with three main stages: (1) open coding to categorise findings, (2) axial coding to link categories, and (3) selective coding to derive core themes. Examples of themes developed include: technology adaptation in PAI, teacher resistance and responsive curriculum. The limitations of this study lie in publication bias (the dominance of studies from urban contexts) and the dynamics of rapid technological development, so the findings may not fully represent current conditions. However, mitigating measures such as updating the literature to early 2024 and using rigorous selection criteria are expected to minimise these weaknesses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Trends In PAI Learning Innovation

The analysis of 25 selected articles shows that PAI learning innovations over the last seven years have been dominated by the integration of digital technology and a student-centred approach. As many as 65% of the studies (Wahid et al., 2020; Aminullah, 2023) revealed the use of interactive media such as animated videos, religious podcasts and e-learning platforms (Google Classroom, Moodle) to increase student engagement. For example, the gamification-based application 'Halaqoh' successfully increased students' learning motivation in understanding fiqh by 40% (Khalil, 2023). In addition, there is an emerging

trend of blended learning that combines face-to-face and online learning, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, where 70% of teachers reported increased flexibility in learning time (Yusuf, 2023). Another growing innovation is the Islamic value-based project approach, such as environmental campaigns linked to the concept of *khalifah fil ardh* (Zarkasyi, 2021).

Learning innovations in Islamic religious education (PAI) over the past seven years show a significant shift from conventional approaches to technology-based models. A study by Wahid et al. (2020) found that 65% of PAI teachers in urban areas had used animated video media to explain abstract concepts such as *akidah* and *fiqh*, with the result that student understanding increased by 30%. Interactive videos are considered effective because they visualise material in an interesting way and are in line with the learning style of Generation Z (Aminullah, 2023). In addition, e-learning platforms such as Google Classroom and

Moodle are being used extensively, especially during the pandemic, for material distribution, discussion and assessment (Yusuf, 2023). Blended learning is becoming a dominant trend, combining face-to-face and online learning. Siregar's (2022) research in 10 integrated Islamic schools shows that this model increases flexibility of learning time and student participation by up to 40%. However, its implementation is still

constrained by limited infrastructure in rural areas (Rahman, 2021). On the other hand, gamification through applications such as 'Halaqoh' (Khalil, 2023) has successfully increased learning motivation through quizzes, badges and leaderboards that integrate Islamic values.

Project-based learning (PjBL) methods are also used to link PAI to social issues. For example, students are asked to design a religious anti-hoax campaign or a digital alms-giving programme as part of their assessment (Hasan, 2022). This approach not only hones critical skills, but also reinforces the relevance of PAI to real life (Zarkasyi, 2021). In addition, podcasts and religious audio content are growing as learning alternatives among teenagers, with 35 per cent of students admitting to listening to lectures more often through Spotify (Amin, 2024). The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in PAI has begun to be tested, particularly for personalisation of learning. AI systems such as the 'Tafakkur' chatbot (Ibrahim, 2021) are able to provide material recommendations based on the student's level of understanding. However, this innovation is still limited to schools with adequate access to technology. Meanwhile, virtual reality (VR) to simulate the Hajj pilgrimage or Islamic history has been introduced in some leading madrasahs, although the cost of implementation is still high (Nafis, 2024).

The use of social media such as TikTok and Instagram as a means of educational dakwah has also become a new trend. PAI teachers who actively create short content on morality or tafsir have succeeded in reaching a wider audience (Hidayat, 2023). However, challenges arise from the proliferation of uncensored religious content, so digital literacy is needed to filter information (Ma'arif, 2024). At the university level, the flipped classroom method is used, using recorded lectures and online discussions. The results of Abdullah's research (2023) show that this method increases the depth of students' analysis of religious texts. In addition, inter-campus collaboration through international webinars on PAI and globalisation enriches learning perspectives (Al-Faruqi, 2024). Curriculum innovation also touches on aspects of inclusive education, such as PAI modules for people with disabilities (Kemdikbud, 2023). The use of sign language in learning videos and the design of Braille materials are important breakthroughs for equal access. Finally, the Islamised STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) approach is being developed, for example with a robotics project based on Sharia principles (Khalil, 2024).

Dominant Challenge

Despite the rapid growth of innovation, PAI faces serious challenges in terms of the digital divide. BPS data (2023) shows that only 25% of schools in 3T areas (frontier, outermost, underdeveloped) have stable internet access, as opposed to 85% in urban areas. This situation widens the gap in the quality of learning (Rahman, 2021). In addition, the lack of teacher training in the use of technology has led to suboptimal use of digital tools (Siregar, 2022). As many as 55% of PAI teachers admitted to having difficulty using applications such as Zoom or Canva (Kemdikbud, 2022). Another challenge is cultural resistance among teachers. Nurdin's study (2019) found that 40% of senior teachers tend to maintain the lecture method, as they perceive technology as reducing the depth of religious understanding. This perception is reinforced by the lack of incentives for innovative teachers (Aminullah, 2023). On the other hand, the heavy administrative burden deprives teachers of time to develop creative materials (Yusuf, 2023).

Religious misinformation on social media also threatens the authority of teachers. Hasan's research (2022) found that 60% of students trust the preaching content of 'viral ustad' more than school teachers, even though the content is often inaccurate. This phenomenon is exacerbated by students' low digital literacy in evaluating information sources (Zarkasyi, 2021). The rigid and less contextualised PAI curriculum is a structural problem. Materials such as fiqh muamalah are rarely linked to contemporary issues such as Islamic fintech or the environment (Al-Faruqi, 2021). As a result, students find it difficult to see the relevance of PAI to their daily lives (Wahid et al., 2020). Furthermore, the assessment of learning still relies on memorisation rather than analytical skills (Khalil, 2023).

Budget constraints hinder the adoption of technology. Madrasahs and pesantren often do not have the funds to purchase educational software licences or VR equipment (Nafis, 2024). On the other hand, government policies such as the digitalisation of schools have been unevenly implemented (Kemdikbud, 2023). Polarisation of religious understanding has also emerged. A survey by the Maarif Institute (2023) found that 20% of students were exposed to radicalism through school WhatsApp groups. Teachers find it difficult to identify this due to a lack of deradicalisation training (Ibrahim, 2021).

Finally, the lack of evidence-based research on the effectiveness of PAI innovations slows policy development. Only 15% of studies in the last 7 years have evaluated the long-term impact of technology on students' spiritual outcomes (Amin, 2024). The moral degradation of students in the digital world is a real challenge. Cases of cyberbullying in the name of religion and plagiarism of religious content increased by 30% after the pandemic (Hidayat, 2023). This shows that PAI has failed to build spiritual immunity in the digital space (Abdullah, 2024).

Positive Impact of Technology

Despite the challenges, technology has had a significant positive impact on PAI. Increased accessibility is the most prominent. Platforms such as YouTube and RuangGuru allow students in remote areas to access ulama lectures and quality PAI materials (Yusuf, 2023). A study by Kemdikbud (2022) found a 25% increase in learning participation in rural areas thanks to the 'PAI Digital' programme. Technology is also enriching learning methods. Apps such as 'Tajwid Master' (Khalil, 2023) use AI to correct Qur'anic readings, while augmented reality (AR) helps visualise the story of the Prophet through holograms (Nafis, 2024). These tools are not only interactive, but also cater to visual and auditory learning styles.

Time and cost efficiencies are achieved through digitisation. Teachers can provide instant feedback via Google Docs, reducing the need for manual correction by 50% (Siregar, 2022). Online learning also saves the transport budget for comparative studies to pesantren (Rahman, 2021). Student participation increases significantly with gamification. Aminullah's research (2023) showed that online quizzes such as Kahoot! increased student engagement by 40%. Digital leaderboards and reward mechanisms create healthy competitive motivation (Zarkasyi, 2021). Technology allows for differentiated learning. Adaptive systems such as 'SmartPAI' (Ibrahim, 2021) are able to adjust the difficulty of the material to suit individual abilities. As a result, both slow and fast learners can progress at their own pace (Hidayat, 2023).

Global cooperation between Muslim students is wide open. Virtual exchange programmes with students from Turkey and Morocco are broadening Islamic horizons (Al-Faruqi, 2024). What's more, da'wah content creators such as 'Guru Gembul' on TikTok have reached millions of young people (Amin, 2024). At the teacher level, technology extends professional networks. Communities such as 'Guru PAI Digital' on Facebook provide a platform for sharing innovative lesson plans (Abdullah, 2023). Online training also increases teacher capacity in a short period of time (Kemdikbud, 2022). Finally, technology strengthens assessment monitoring. Applications such as 'Islamic Attitude' (Wahid et al., 2020) allow teachers to track students' moral development through real-time reporting features. Data analysis also helps schools identify areas for curriculum improvement (Ma'arif, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of recent studies (2017-2024), it can be concluded that Islamic religious education (PAI) is undergoing a significant transformation through the integration of digital technologies such as blended learning, gamification, AI and social media, which has successfully increased accessibility, student participation and personalisation of learning, despite facing key challenges such as the digital divide, teacher resistance, religious misinformation and a decontextualised curriculum. To maximise this opportunity, a holistic policy that includes digital literacy training for teachers, adaptive curriculum development based on contemporary issues, and collaboration between stakeholders is needed to ensure that PAI remains relevant and effective in shaping a generation of moral and competent Muslims in the digital age.

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