

## FROM TRADITION TO TRANSFORMATION: REIMAGINING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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### Abstract

The transformation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in higher education has become an urgent need to face the challenges of the digital era characterized by rapid technological advancement, globalization, and value disruption. This study aims to analyze the forms, challenges, and implementation strategies of IRE transformation in universities. Using a qualitative descriptive method through a library research approach, this study finds that IRE transformation involves three main dimensions: (1) innovation in technology-based teaching methods, (2) curriculum renewal emphasizing competency and character development, and (3) enhancement of digital literacy among lecturers and students. The integration of technologies such as e-learning, social media, and digital learning platforms contributes to expanding access and improving the quality of religious education. However, challenges



such as infrastructure inequality, limited digital literacy, and the potential erosion of spiritual values persist. Therefore, IRE transformation in higher education should combine technological innovation with the strengthening of spiritual, moral, and Islamic character values. Such an approach is essential to develop a generation of Muslim intellectuals who are both adaptive to change and rooted in moderate Islamic principles.

**Keywords:** *Curriculum; Digital Era; Digital Transformation; Islamic Religious Education.*

### **Abstrak**

*Transformasi Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di perguruan tinggi menjadi kebutuhan mendesak dalam menghadapi tantangan era digital yang sarat dengan kemajuan teknologi, globalisasi, dan disrupsi nilai. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk, tantangan, serta strategi implementasi transformasi pendidikan agama Islam di perguruan tinggi. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan studi pustaka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa transformasi PAI mencakup tiga aspek utama: (1) inovasi metode pembelajaran berbasis teknologi, (2) pembaruan kurikulum berbasis kompetensi dan karakter, serta (3) peningkatan kompetensi digital dosen dan mahasiswa. Integrasi teknologi seperti e-learning, media sosial, dan platform pembelajaran digital berkontribusi dalam memperluas akses dan meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran agama. Namun, hambatan seperti keterbatasan infrastruktur, rendahnya literasi digital, serta risiko degradasi nilai spiritual masih menjadi tantangan utama. Oleh karena itu, transformasi pendidikan agama Islam di perguruan tinggi harus diarahkan untuk menggabungkan inovasi teknologi dengan penguatan nilai-nilai spiritual, moral, dan karakter islami. Pendekatan ini diyakini dapat melahirkan generasi intelektual muslim yang adaptif terhadap perubahan, namun tetap berakar pada nilai-nilai keislaman yang moderat dan kontekstual.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Kurikulum; Era Digital; Transformasi Digital; Pendidikan Agama Islam;*

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, morality, and personality. As an institution of higher learning, a university is expected not only to produce academically competent graduates but also individuals with strong moral integrity grounded in Islamic values. In today's digital era, the rapid advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) has transformed nearly every aspect of life, including education. This shift from conventional learning toward digital-based approaches, such as interactive media, e-learning, and unlimited access to information, presents both opportunities and challenges for the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

According to the study about challenges of Islamic religious education learning in the digital era, the main challenges include low digital literacy among teachers, unequal access to technology, and the need for continuously updated learning materials to maintain their relevance and effectiveness (Farissa & Haryanto, 2025). Meanwhile, the other study states that the transformation of Islamic education requires a comprehensive approach to digital literacy, technology integration in learning, and a paradigm shift in education (Hajri, 2023). This transformation should not only emphasize aspects of religiosity, but also the ability to adapt to technological advancements.

Several studies also indicate that the PAI curriculum in some universities and Islamic educational institutions has not been fully responsive to the developments of the digital era. For example, the adaptation of technology-based teaching methods and the use of digital media are still uneven. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen digital literacy, both among educators and students (Manshur & Isroani, 2023).

In addition, other frequently emerging challenges include the uncontrolled use of technology, the potential spread of invalid religious content, and the possible loss of direct interaction between educators and students. For instance, learning motivation can increase when digital media are utilized. However, the study also revealed several issues, such as low technological literacy among teachers and unequal access to digital resources (Robbi & Syafi'uddin, 2025).

The transformation of Islamic education is not limited to teaching methods and technology, but also involves developing a competency-based curriculum that aligns with the relevance of contemporary times. Competency-based curriculum utilizing digital platforms can enrich students' interaction with learning materials, provide access to online Islamic studies, and enhance students' digital skills. However, challenges in implementation still exist, particularly concerning the availability of facilities and the lecturers' ability to manage digital learning effectively (Sapruddin, 2025).

The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, also encourages lecturers at Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) to enhance their academic qualifications and innovate in digital learning in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century. This initiative indicates that the transformation of Islamic education has become part of the national agenda (*Kemenag 25 April 2025, t.t.*).

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that the transformation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher education is highly necessary so that Islamic education not only preserves its essence but also remains relevant to the demands of the digital age. This transformation encompasses aspects such as learning methods, competency-based curricula, digital literacy for lecturers and students, and the balanced use of technology. Thus, Islamic education in higher education can produce graduates who possess not only religious knowledge, but also digital adaptability,

moral integrity, and an Islamic character that is moderate and tolerant.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using the library research method. This method was chosen because the focus of the research is to analyze the transformation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher education in addressing the challenges of the digital era through theoretical reviews and previous research findings. The descriptive qualitative approach is considered appropriate to comprehensively describe the phenomenon based on the available literature data (Creswell & Creswell, t.t.).

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include books, journal articles, and scientific proceedings that directly discuss Islamic education, digital learning innovation, and curriculum development in higher education. The secondary sources comprise research reports, news articles, and official publications from relevant government and educational institutions. The selection of sources was carried out selectively, focusing on literature published within the last five years (2019–2024) to ensure alignment with current developments.

The data collection procedure was conducted by searching academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Garuda. The literature obtained was then classified based on themes, such as the transformation of Islamic education, challenges of the digital era, students' digital literacy, and learning innovation. Following this, a review process was carried out to understand the interconnection among ideas and to identify patterns of thought from various authors.

The data analysis in this study employed the content analysis technique. The collected data were reduced according to the research focus, then presented in a descriptive-analytical form,

and interpreted to uncover meanings relevant to the research problems (Krippendorff, 20). The entire analysis process was carried out systematically to ensure that the research results provide a valid and comprehensive picture of the urgency and implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) transformation in higher education in facing the challenges of the digital era. Through this method, the study is expected to present a comprehensive synthesis of ideas and provide a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic education that is responsive to technological advancements.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Challenges of Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Era*

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the digital era faces significant challenges that require adjustments in both methods and approaches. The rapid development of information technology has transformed the way students access knowledge and interact with religious materials. The main challenge lies in integrating Islamic values into digital platforms without diminishing the essence of the teachings. Islamic education in the Society 5.0 era still encounters issues related to infrastructure and the digital skills of educators, which hinder the optimal progress of educational transformation (Istiqomah, 2023). The tendency of the younger generation to prefer digital technology over traditional teaching methods also presents a distinct challenge. The limited face-to-face interaction can reduce the effectiveness of internalizing religious values. The quality and reliability of information obtained from the internet are often questionable, and the ethical and spiritual aspects of religious learning are at risk of being weakened (Yahya, 2025).

In addition, another challenge lies in the limited digital literacy among both educators and students. Digital literacy is an essential skill that enables students to distinguish valid religious information from misleading sources. There remains a gap in

technology access and digital competence among educators, resulting in less-than-optimal online learning processes in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) (Pratiwi dkk., 2024). The phenomenon of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic also revealed the weaknesses of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the digital space. Character, moral, and spiritual values, which are supposed to be internalized, were often not fully conveyed. Online learning tends to fail to replace the crucial role of direct teacher–student interaction in shaping students’ character (Islamy, 2021).

To address these challenges, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) needs to develop new strategies by utilizing interactive digital media. It is important to implement learning transformation, for example through visual, auditory and kinesthetic modalities which can effectively attract the interest of the digital generation (Ghufron dkk., 2023). Through this approach, subjects such as tafsir, hadith, and fiqh can be studied using educational applications equipped with interactive features that are more engaging for students.

Another equally important challenge is the rapid spread of hoaxes and religious misinformation on social media. Islamic education is therefore required to play a strategic role in equipping students with critical religious literacy. PAI must function as a filter against false information so that students are not easily trapped in deviant or misleading understandings.

Thus, the transformation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher education in the digital era does not rely solely on technology, but also on the strengthening of digital literacy, the enhancement of educators’ competencies, and collaboration among educational institutions and the government. Through these efforts, PAI can remain relevant while continuing to serve as a means of character and moral development for the nation amid the currents of digital globalization.

### *Opportunities for the Integration of Technology in Islamic Religious Education*

In today's digital era, the integration of technology in education is increasingly widespread in various sectors, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which has been influenced by technological advances. Technology not only facilitates access to learning but also opens opportunities to create more interactive, efficient, and accessible teaching methods for students. The process of digitalization in Islamic education can expand the understanding, teaching, and application of religious values in daily life. The use of e-learning, mobile applications, and digital platforms can enhance the quality of religious learning by broadening access and enriching the learning materials (Khosyidin dkk., 2024)

Furthermore, digital technology represents a strategic opportunity to revitalize Islamic Religious Education (PAI), ensuring its relevance in the era of digitalization while nurturing a generation with strong moral values and character (Syauqi Musfirah, 2024). This aligns with the findings, which reveal that digital media, such as educational videos and online learning platforms, can enhance student engagement and deepen their understanding of PAI learning materials (Ichsan, 2024). In this context, the integration of digital technology into PAI is not merely an adaptation to technological change, but a transformative effort to strengthen the spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions of students through more interactive and contextual learning experiences.

Technological innovation has created broader opportunities for the dissemination and development of Islamic knowledge. The use of digital-based learning media and participatory methods can expand access to Islamic education and enhance the quality of learning in universities and Islamic educational institutions (Purwanto, 2023). Similarly, digital technologies, such as online learning platforms and digital educational content, offer flexibility



that aligns with the learning characteristics of the digital generation (Yusuf & Faridi, 2024). Nevertheless, their study also highlights significant challenges, including the limited digital competence of educators and disparities in technological infrastructure across regions. Therefore, the integration of digital technology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) should not be viewed merely as a technical innovation, but as a strategic endeavor to ensure educational relevance, improve learning quality, and strengthen the internalization of Islamic values amid the ongoing digital transformation.

### *Benefits of Integrating Technology in IRE*

One of the main benefits of integrating technology into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is its ability to enhance educational accessibility. Through various digital platforms, religious lessons can reach students in remote or isolated areas, effectively overcoming limitations of distance and time. Purwanto demonstrates that the digitalization of Islamic education plays a significant role in expanding access and improving the quality of learning through the use of digital-based media (Purwanto, 2023). With broader access, learners can obtain quality religious education from diverse sources without being restricted by physical location.

In addition, technology enables more innovative and creative teaching methods. For example, the use of Android-based applications, educational videos, and interactive games has been proven to increase students' motivation and comprehension in learning Islamic subjects (Fauzan, 2024);(Abdillah dkk., 2025). Implementation of interactive multimedia in Islamic Religious Education not only enriches the learning experience but also encourages students to become more active and deeply engaged in the process. These innovations make Islamic education more relevant to the needs of the digital generation, while offering enjoyable, effective, and future-oriented learning strategies.

### *The Use of Technology in Teaching IRE*

The use of technology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching is not limited to learning media but also extends to the pedagogical approach itself. For instance, the use of online learning platforms such as Google Classroom allows teachers to deliver materials in a more structured and accessible way (Rahmanto & Bunyamin, 2020). This technology-based learning approach provides flexibility, enabling students to access materials anytime and anywhere, while fostering independent learning and deeper comprehension.

Furthermore, technology facilitates the integration of diverse learning resources. Through the internet, students can access literature, articles, and videos from various sources that enrich the teaching material. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this is particularly important since an in-depth understanding of religious texts, tafsir, and hadith requires diverse references. For example, implementing e-learning in PAI enhances students' learning autonomy, broadens access to educational resources, and promotes more dynamic teacher–student interactions (Arifin dkk., 2024). Similarly, e-learning management at Billfath University involves the design of digital course materials and dedicated accounts for lecturers and students (Hadi dkk., 2022). This system allows structured access to content and assessments through the digital platform, thereby improving efficiency and engagement in Islamic education.

### *The Role of Social Media in IRE*

Social media plays a crucial role in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) today. Platforms such as YouTube and Instagram are increasingly used for religious learning because they can disseminate materials more quickly and efficiently. For example, the use of YouTube and Instagram at *MTsN 10 Banyuwangi* significantly improved students' learning outcomes in PAI subjects (H. R. Putri & Ulya, 2024). Similarly, da'wah content on YouTube

serves as an innovative learning resource, although it also presents challenges such as value distortion and low religious literacy among some audiences (Said Aqil Hasan & Hakim, 2025).

Furthermore, interactive YouTube videos have proven effective in teaching *Islamic Cultural History (SKI)*, as students showed increased learning interest when lessons were visualized using audiovisual media (Zainal dkk., 2024). Platforms like YouTube and TikTok provide flexibility in time and space for learning while enriching PAI teaching methods through engaging and relevant digital content (Rizkiyah & Shohib, 2024).

### ***Challenges in Integrating Technology in Islamic Religious Education (IRE)***

Although technology presents many opportunities, its implementation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) also faces numerous challenges. One of the major issues is the limited infrastructure and access to technology in certain areas. Many regions in Indonesia, especially rural and remote ones, still suffer from poor internet connectivity and inadequate digital devices, hindering the full integration of technology in religious education. Technological infrastructure limitations in rural areas as one of the main obstacles to implementing digital-based PAI learning (Yusuf & Faridi, 2024b).

Moreover, the use of technology in Islamic education must be accompanied by a wise and ethical approach. PAI is deeply rooted in moral and spiritual values, which must be taught carefully and responsibly. Religious educators should have a solid understanding of how to integrate technology without neglecting the core principles of Islamic teachings. The same study also noted that teachers' digital competence needs to be further enhanced to ensure that traditional values and spirituality are not lost amid the digitalization of education.

***Curriculum Transformation and Lecturer Competencies in Higher Education***

The transformation of higher education curricula has become increasingly essential to address the challenges of modern times and the evolving needs of society. Competency-based curricula are designed to meet the demands of the job market through the development of fundamental skills, critical thinking abilities, and students' personal qualities (Bari & Rosdiawan, 2025). However, significant challenges remain in ensuring relevance to technological developments, curriculum flexibility, and alignment with the demands of the Society 5.0 era.

An important element of curriculum transformation is the integration of theory and practice, where students are not only taught theoretical concepts but are also encouraged to apply their knowledge in real-life contexts. Competency-based curriculum policies have been aligned with the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), their implementation in the field remains suboptimal due to insufficient lecturer readiness and supporting infrastructure. Lecturer competence plays a crucial role in determining the success of curriculum transformation. This competence encompasses not only teaching ability but also the skill to design learning materials that align with technological advancements and scientific progress. For example, the study "TPACK Competence of Lecturers at Universitas Negeri Makassar" revealed that mastery of Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) varies among lecturers, some have achieved near-ideal proficiency, but many still require improvement, particularly in integrating technology into lesson planning and instructional practices (Ali et al., 2024).

In curriculum development, character education and moral values must also be integrated so that graduates are not only academically competent but also possess integrity and social responsibility. Competent lecturers focus not only on academic aspects but also on the development of soft skills including ethics,

character, and collaboration—as an integral part of higher education curricula relevant to the professional world (Juliastuti, 2024).

A paradigm shift in curriculum management is equally important in the era of digitalization and globalization. The effective curricula must be collaborative, adaptive, flexible, and technology-based (Hambali, 2025). Moreover, investment in educational technology and the enhancement of digital skills among lecturers and students are key components for achieving sustainable curriculum transformation.

### *The Impact of Transformation on Students*

The ongoing transformation of education in Indonesia has brought significant changes to the way students interact, think, and behave. These changes occur alongside technological advancements, globalization, and the dynamic demands of society. The impacts of this transformation span various aspects, including academic, social, and cultural contexts. This paper will discuss these impacts, focusing on students' educational, social, and psychological perspectives.

#### **1. Changes in Learning Approaches and Technology**

One of the most visible impacts of educational transformation on students is the change in their learning behavior. Information technology has significantly altered the learning paradigm in higher education. Classrooms are no longer confined to physical spaces but can now be accessed through various digital platforms, allowing students to study online. For instance, the online learning model provides flexibility in time and space for multicultural students in universities, enabling them to access learning materials anytime and anywhere (Idris dkk., 2023).

However, despite the many opportunities that technology brings, it also poses challenges. Some students struggle to

adapt to technology-based learning methods. They may find it difficult to engage in self-directed learning or may feel isolated without direct interaction with instructors and peers. Around 57% of students reported difficulties during online learning, including challenges related to managing digital learning environments and maintaining interaction among participants (Syathroh dkk., 2024).

Therefore, it is essential for higher education institutions to provide training programs that help students use technology effectively. Such training may include guidance on managing online platforms, utilizing digital materials, and maintaining meaningful engagement in virtual classrooms. This kind of support will not only enhance students' understanding of academic content but also develop their independent learning skills and digital professionalism, which are increasingly crucial in the modern education era.

## **2. Social Transformation and Its Impact on Student Interaction**

Beyond the academic sphere, educational transformation also influences social dynamics among students. Universities, as environments where students from diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds meet, play a vital role in shaping student identity. The expansion of globalization has made students more open to foreign cultures, influencing their perspectives on social norms and values. Social interactions among students from various cultural backgrounds have shifted—students became more open to intercultural discussions and interactions, yet communication challenges sometimes arose when differing cultural values clashed.

Nevertheless, exposure to foreign cultures can also lead to cultural friction among students. Those accustomed to local and traditional environments may feel confused or even alienated when confronted with differing cultural values. Conversely, students who are more adaptive to social change tend to develop a flexible mindset and greater acceptance of

diversity. This adaptability positively contributes to increased tolerance and inclusivity within the campus environment. Besides that, local values such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation) and simplicity continue to serve as strong foundations for students in maintaining their local identity while simultaneously helping them remain open to external influences (Kaloeti dkk., 2024).

### **3. Changes in Student Behavior in Facing Social Challenges**

The impact of transformation is also evident in students' behavior when facing social challenges. As students begin to explore the outside world through the internet and social media, they become more sensitive to social issues both domestically and internationally. This awareness motivates them to engage in various social and political activities such as protests, campaigns, or solidarity movements for marginalized groups. For instance, a study about the influence of social media on political participation of university students, found that social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp significantly influence students' political engagement at UINSU, including participation in campaigns, political discussions, and information sharing (Sari & Zulkarnain, 2024).

However, student involvement in social activities is often influenced by trends and public opinion circulating on social media. Many students focus on short-term impacts, such as joining viral campaigns or protests, but pay less attention to finding long-term solutions to underlying issues. Although students recognize the harmful nature of hoaxes, they frequently share unverified information merely to follow trends (Khairullah, 2022).

Furthermore, the spread of unreliable or misleading information (hoaxes) can affect students' critical thinking skills in evaluating social and political issues. Students with low digital literacy are more vulnerable to misinformation,

struggling to verify the authenticity of information they encounter (Y. K. Putri & Ardoni, 2025). This situation negatively impacts the quality of their social and political discourse.

#### **4. Impact on Students' Psychological Well-being**

The ongoing educational transformation also affects students' psychological well-being. Pressure from high academic demands, social expectations, and personal aspirations often contributes to students' psychological burdens. Several studies have shown a significant relationship between academic stress and mental health among university students. For example, academic stress is closely related to the mental health of students at UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi (N. Hayati & Meliyani, 2025) .

Nevertheless, psychological support on campus has increasingly been recognized as a vital approach to helping students manage stress. Interventions such as mindfulness have gained attention in higher education contexts. Students' mindfulness levels positively correlate with their psychological well-being, suggesting that mindfulness-based practices can enhance emotional stability and resilience (Boymau & Lao, 2025).

#### **5. Students as Agents of Social Change**

Beyond personal transformation, students also play a crucial role as agents of social change. In the context of social transformation, students often act as pioneers in responding to societal changes. They actively participate in various social movements aimed at improving social, political, and economic conditions in Indonesia. For instance, the study about student perceptions on developing an anti-corruption culture in higher education showed that students at UIN Sunan Kalijaga are highly aware of the importance of anti-corruption values and are eager to participate in campus initiatives promoting



integrity (K. N. Hayati dkk., 2025). University students have become active participants in anti-corruption campaigns, fair election initiatives, and environmental awareness movements. Students use social media creatively to raise anti-corruption awareness within campus communities, including through digital campaigns and advocacy actions (Hasoloan dkk., 2022).

Overall, the findings of this study reveal a strong correlation with various theories and previous research on the transformation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the digital era. The results align with the perspectives that the use of digital technology in religious education should primarily aim to strengthen students' spiritual and moral values, rather than merely serving as a technical medium for content delivery (Ridwan, 2022) (Saripudin & Robbani, 2024).

However, this study expands upon those findings by demonstrating that the transformation of Islamic education in higher education institutions cannot be limited to technological integration alone. It must also involve curriculum renewal and the enhancement of lecturers' digital competencies to ensure that the educational process remains aligned with the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings.

## CONCLUSION

The transformation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher education is an inevitable necessity in facing the complex challenges of the digital era. The rapid development of information and communication technology requires the Islamic education system to adapt in order to remain relevant to contemporary progress without losing its spiritual essence. The findings of this study indicate that the success of Islamic education transformation depends not only on the implementation of technology but also on a strong synergy among three key elements: digital innovation, curriculum renewal, and the enhancement of both lecturers' and students' competencies. These three components complement each

other in creating an effective, meaningful learning process that aligns with the characteristics of the digital generation.

The integration of technology in Islamic Religious Education should be directed toward strengthening moral, spiritual, and humanitarian values, rather than focusing solely on technical efficiency or methodological modernization. Curriculum renewal plays a crucial role in ensuring that religious education not only equips students with theological knowledge but also develops critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and the ability to navigate dynamic social changes. Meanwhile, lecturers' competencies must be continuously improved so they can effectively utilize digital technologies in the learning process while serving as role models in internalizing Islamic values.

Although there are challenges such as infrastructural disparities and low levels of digital literacy in some regions, adaptive, collaborative, and value-based educational strategies can serve as effective solutions. Therefore, Islamic universities need to develop innovative and contextual learning models rooted in the principles of moderate Islam and *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation). Through this approach, Islamic Religious Education in the digital era is expected to produce a generation of Muslim intellectuals who are excellent, morally upright, globally minded, and deeply committed to the universal values of Islam and humanity.

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