

Reconstruction of Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Responsive to Modern Developments: Analysis of 21st Century Needs

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ABSTRACT

The 21st-century developments, marked by advances in digital technology, globalization, and social and cultural change, require the world of education to continuously adapt its curriculum. As an integral part of the education system, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of students, enabling them to face modern challenges critically and ethically. However, various studies indicate that the PAI curriculum in many educational institutions still tends to be normative, textual, and oriented towards mastery of material, making it less responsive to the dynamics of 21st-century life. Empirical findings reveal that PAI learning has not fully integrated 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy. As a result, PAI often lacks relevance in addressing contemporary issues, including pluralism, digital ethics challenges, and the crisis of values among the younger generation. Conversely, studies examining innovations in the PAI curriculum indicate that curriculum reconstruction that integrates a contextual approach, the use of technology, and the strengthening of religious moderation values can improve religious understanding, tolerance, and active student engagement in learning. Given these conditions, the reconstruction of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum to be responsive to modern developments is an urgent need. This effort aims to ensure that the Islamic Religious Education curriculum remains relevant, adaptive, and able to meet the needs of 21st-century education without abandoning the substance of Islamic values.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Global developments in the 21st century are marked by advances in digital technology, globalization, and rapid social transformation (Segado-Boj & Díaz-Campo,

2020). The world of education faces new demands to not only transfer knowledge but also equip students with critical, creative, communicative, and collaborative thinking skills, as well as digital literacy and adaptive character. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role as the foundation for developing students' moral, spiritual, and ethical values, enabling them to respond responsibly to modern developments. The PAI curriculum is required to not only maintain the substance of Islamic teachings but also adapt to the needs and challenges of the 21st century (Aisi, Susanto, & Isa, 2025; Syahrudin, Susanto, Ummah, Musyafa, & Isa, 2025).

Socially, the reality of society shows significant changes in the mindsets, behaviors, and learning styles of the younger generation. Today's students live in a digital ecosystem saturated with instant information, social media, and virtual interactions across cultures and religions (Susanto & Kiftiyah, 2025). This situation presents both challenges and opportunities for Islamic education. On the one hand, technology opens up broad access to Islamic learning resources; on the other hand, it has led to the emergence of value disorientation, the weakening of religious authority, and the increasing potential for the spread of extreme and immoderate religious ideologies. Various studies have shown that students' low religious literacy and digital literacy skills contribute to the emergence of intolerant attitudes, partial religious understanding, and a crisis of religious identity among the younger generation (Puji & Supriyanti, 2025).

The main problem facing Islamic Religious Education lies in a curriculum that is not fully responsive to current developments. Islamic Religious Education curricula in many educational institutions are still dominated by a normative-doctrinal approach, oriented toward memorization, and lacking a connection between Islamic teachings and contemporary social realities. Furthermore, the integration of 21st-century skills into Islamic Religious Education learning objectives, materials, methods, and evaluations remains limited. As a result, Islamic Religious Education learning is often perceived as lacking relevance to students' real lives and not optimal in developing critical, moderate, and contextual Islamic competencies (Syahrudin & Roni, 2025).

Based on these problems, various studies and research recommend the need for a reconstruction of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum that is adaptive and responsive to modern developments. Curriculum reconstruction is understood as an effort to systematically reorganize curriculum components, including the formulation of 21st-century competency-based learning objectives, the development of contextual teaching materials, the implementation of active and participatory learning strategies, and an authentic evaluation system that emphasizes the holistic learning process and outcomes (Fahrudin & Khoirul Malik, 2025; Rahmatullah, Mulyasa, Syahrani,

Pongpalilu, & Putri, 2022). Research results show that the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, which integrates a problem-based learning approach, the use of digital technology, and the strengthening of the value of religious moderation, can improve students' religious understanding, tolerance, and critical Islamic thinking skills.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the needs of Islamic Religious Education in the 21st century and to formulate a concept for reconstructing the Islamic Religious Education curriculum that is responsive to modern developments. This research is directed at producing a conceptual framework for the Islamic Religious Education curriculum that is able to integrate Islamic values with the demands of 21st-century competencies, so that Islamic Religious Education learning is not only normative, but also applicable and transformative in the lives of students (Han, Kelley, & Knowles, 2021). Thus, the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is expected to function as a strategic instrument in shaping a generation of Muslims who are religious, moderate, have a global perspective, and have character.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach to reconstructing the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, making 21st-century needs the primary basis of analysis. Unlike previous studies that tended to discuss Islamic Religious Education learning innovations in a fragmented manner, this study offers a comprehensive curriculum reconstruction model, encompassing the integration of 21st-century skills, religious digital literacy, and the value of religious moderation across all curriculum components. Therefore, this research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of a relevant and sustainable Islamic Religious Education curriculum in the modern era.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research design. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the needs of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the 21st century and to formulate a concept for reconstructing the PAI curriculum that is responsive to modern developments (Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2016). The research focuses on analyzing the concepts, policies, and practices of the PAI curriculum as it develops in formal educational institutions. The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants including PAI teachers, curriculum developers, and academics in the field of Islamic education. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through a documentary study of curriculum documents, syllabi, Lesson Implementation Plans (RPP), and relevant educational policies. In addition, this study also utilizes the results of previous

research, journal articles, and academic literature discussing the PAI curriculum, 21st-century skills, and the development of contemporary Islamic education.

Data collection techniques were conducted through semi-structured interviews, limited observations of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning practices, and systematic literature review. The data obtained were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Huberman & Jhonny, 2014). The analysis process was carried out inductively by identifying key themes related to 21st-century needs, challenges of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum, and curriculum reconstruction strategies. To ensure data validity, this study applied source and method triangulation techniques. Data validation was also carried out through peer discussions and confirmation with informants (member checks). The results of the analysis were then used as a basis for formulating a conceptual model for reconstructing the Islamic Religious Education (ISE) curriculum that is adaptive, contextual, and relevant to the demands of modern developments and the needs of students in the 21st century.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on data analysis obtained through interviews, documentation studies, and literature reviews, this study found that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in the 21st century faces significant structural and substantive challenges. The findings indicate a gap between the demands of modern developments and the conventional design and implementation of the PAI curriculum. Furthermore, this study also identified potential and opportunities for reconstructing the PAI curriculum to be more responsive to 21st-century needs. These findings are presented systematically in the following table.

No	Aspects Studied	Research Findings	Curriculum Implications
1	Learning objectives	The objectives of PAI are still predominantly oriented towards mastering cognitive material and religious rituals.	There is a need for reformulation of 21st century competency-based goals and moderate character
2	Teaching Materials	PAI material is normative, textual, and less contextual with modern social reality	Integration of contemporary issues such as digital ethics, pluralism, and religious moderation
3	Learning strategies	Learning tends to be teacher-centered and requires	Implementation of active, collaborative, and problem-

		minimal active student participation	based learning models
4	Utilization of Technology	Technology has not been utilized optimally in Islamic Education learning	Strengthening digital literacy and utilizing technology-based learning media
5	Learning Assessment	Evaluation still emphasizes written tests and memorization	Development of authentic assessment based on processes, attitudes, and skills
6	Islamic Education Teacher Competencies	Teachers have a good understanding of religion, but are limited in digital pedagogical innovation	Increasing teacher capacity in 21st century pedagogy and technology integration
7	The Value of Religious Moderation	Religious moderation has not been systematically integrated into the curriculum	There is a need for integration of religious moderation as the main value framework of the Islamic Education curriculum

The findings from this table indicate that the reconstruction of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum needs to be carried out comprehensively and in an integrated manner, encompassing objectives, materials, strategies, media, and learning evaluation. These findings provide an important basis for formulating an Islamic Religious Education curriculum model that is adaptive to modern developments and relevant to the needs of 21st-century education.

Discussion

The Gap Between the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum and the Needs of the 21st Century

Rapid social, cultural, and technological changes in the 21st century have presented new challenges for the education system, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Education is no longer simply focused on the textual transfer of religious knowledge; it is also required to equip students with critical, creative, communicative, and collaborative thinking skills to enable them to adapt to the complexities of modern life (Neuman, 2014; Rukayah, Sajdah, & Himawati, 2025). However, research findings indicate that the current PAI curriculum is still not fully aligned with these demands. The PAI curriculum tends to maintain conventional learning patterns that emphasize cognitive aspects and mastery of teaching materials, so that the development of 21st-century competencies has not been systematically integrated into the learning process.

The dominance of normative and ritualistic approaches in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum has resulted in learning being more oriented toward

memorizing concepts, propositions, and religious practices, while providing relatively limited space for dialogue, critical reflection, and contextual religious problem-solving. This situation has resulted in students' low ability to connect Islamic values to the realities of everyday life. Yet, 21st-century students live in an environment rich with information, cross-cultural interactions, and complex social dynamics. This mismatch between student characteristics and the PAI curriculum approach is a key indicator of a gap that needs to be addressed immediately through curriculum reform (Susanto, Ali, & Hidayat, 2024).

The gap in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum is also evident in the minimal integration of contemporary issues relevant to the lives of the younger generation. Research findings indicate that PAI materials do not optimally address issues of digital media ethics, the challenges of religious pluralism, radicalism, and emerging social problems in modern society. Consequently, PAI learning is less able to equip students with contextual religious literacy skills that are responsive to changing times. When these issues are not accommodated in the curriculum, students are likely to acquire a partial understanding of religion from other sources that may not be valid and moderate (Syahrudin & Gunawan, 2025).

Furthermore, this gap impacts the weak transformative function of Islamic Religious Education. Ideally, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) should function not only as a means of transmitting religious teachings but also as a medium for developing students' moral, social, and spiritual awareness. However, the lack of an adaptive curriculum means that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is unable to fully develop tolerant, inclusive, and critical attitudes in responding to differences. Research findings show that students tend to understand religion normatively without the reflective ability to apply it in the context of a multicultural and democratic society.

Based on this description, the findings of this study emphasize the need for a comprehensive reconstruction of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum. This reconstruction aims to bridge the values of Islamic teachings with the needs of 21st-century education through the integration of critical thinking skills, creativity, collaboration, communication, and religious digital literacy. Thus, the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is not only normatively relevant but also contextually and transformative in shaping a generation of Muslims who are adaptive, moderate, and able to contribute positively to modern life.

Islamic Education Curriculum Reconstruction Strategy that is Responsive to Modern Developments

Reconstructing the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum is a strategic step to address the challenges and needs of education in the modern era. Based on research analysis, the reconstruction of the PAI curriculum cannot be done partially but must address all curriculum components comprehensively and systematically. The PAI curriculum needs to be redesigned so that it is not only oriented towards mastering religious material but also towards developing 21st-century competencies that include critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and digital and social literacy. This reconstruction strategy aims to make PAI a relevant, adaptive, and meaningful learning experience for students (Malcolm, 2021; Mardiana, Razaq, & Umiarso, 2020).

One of the main strategies in reconstructing the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is the reformulation of learning objectives. Islamic Religious Education learning objectives need to be formulated on a competency-based basis, emphasizing not only cognitive and ritual aspects but also the development of attitudes and skills. These objectives are aimed at developing students with a moderate, critical, and applicable understanding of religion in social life. Research shows that clear and contextual learning objectives will facilitate teachers in designing materials, learning strategies, and evaluation systems that align with the needs of 21st-century students.

The next strategy is the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching materials that are contextual and responsive to social realities. PAI materials need to be developed by linking Islamic values to contemporary issues, such as digital media ethics, tolerance and pluralism, social justice, and moral responsibility in community life. Research findings indicate that contextual materials can increase student engagement in learning and strengthen the relevance of PAI to everyday life. Thus, teaching materials serve not only as a source of knowledge but also as a means of reflection and internalization of humanistic Islamic values.

In terms of learning strategies, the reconstruction of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum requires a shift from a teacher-centered approach to active and participatory learning. Approaches such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, and collaborative learning are considered effective in developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and social skills. Research shows that implementing these learning models encourages students to be more active in discussing, collaborating, and reflecting on Islamic values in real-life contexts. This strategy also strengthens the teacher's role as a learning facilitator, not merely a transmitter of material.

Furthermore, the use of digital technology is a crucial element in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum reconstruction strategy. The use of digital media, online learning platforms, and technology-based learning resources allows for more interactive, flexible, and digitally-adapted Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, particularly in mastering digital pedagogy and learning innovation. PAI teachers need to be equipped with the skills to utilize technology pedagogically and ethically, so that technology becomes not only a tool but also a means of strengthening Islamic values in the context of modern developments.

Integration of Religious Moderation Values as the Foundation of the 21st Century Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

The integration of religious moderation values is a fundamental aspect in the reconstruction of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in the 21st century. Based on research findings, religious moderation cannot be positioned as supplementary material or a separate topic, but rather must become a value framework that animates all curriculum components. Religious moderation needs to be internalized in learning objectives, teaching material development, learning strategies, and evaluation systems (Hasan, 2025; Naim, Aziz, & Teguh, 2022). This approach aims to enable PAI to develop a balanced, non-extremist religious perspective that is relevant to an increasingly pluralistic and dynamic social reality. In the context of a multicultural society, the integration of religious moderation into the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum plays a strategic role in fostering a tolerant and inclusive attitude among students. Research findings indicate that an PAI curriculum that does not explicitly integrate the value of religious moderation has the potential to foster an exclusive and less dialogical understanding of religion. Therefore, PAI learning needs to be directed toward instilling an understanding of Islam that respects differences, upholds humanitarian values, and encourages mutual respect among religious communities. These values are an important foundation for fostering social harmony amidst diversity (Herdiyanti, Janah, & Susanto, 2025).

The integration of religious moderation also serves as a preventative measure against the development of religious extremism and radicalism. Research shows that students who receive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction based on religious moderation tend to develop critical thinking skills in responding to religious discourses that develop in the public sphere, including in digital media. A moderate PAI curriculum encourages students not to accept religious information

textually and partially, but to reflect on and contextualize Islamic teachings in accordance with the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessing for all the universe).

Furthermore, the integration of religious moderation requires a change in pedagogical approaches in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Islamic Religious Education teachers play a crucial role as agents of moderation, not only transmitting knowledge but also serving as role models in attitudes and behavior. Dialogic learning strategies, reflective discussions, and case studies are considered effective in instilling the value of religious moderation. Through this approach, students are trained to understand differences in religious views in a balanced manner and develop intercultural and interfaith dialogue skills.

Thus, the reconstruction of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum based on religious moderation serves as a strategic foundation for preparing a 21st-century generation of Muslims who are religious, adaptive, and nationally aware. A PAI curriculum that places religious moderation as a core value not only contributes to strengthening students' Islamic identity but also to the formation of harmonious and democratic social character. This integration ensures that Islamic Religious Education remains relevant, contextual, and effective in addressing the increasingly complex challenges of modern life.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the current Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum still faces gaps with the needs of 21st-century education, particularly in the integration of critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and contextual learning approaches. The dominance of normative and cognitive orientations makes PAI less relevant in addressing the challenges of a modern, multicultural and digital society. Therefore, reconstructing the PAI curriculum is a strategic necessity to ensure that religious learning remains meaningful, adaptive, and transformative. Reconstructing the PAI curriculum that is responsive to modern developments needs to be carried out comprehensively, making the value of religious moderation a primary foundation. The integration of 21st-century competencies, the use of digital technology, and the strengthening of participatory pedagogy have been proven to increase the relevance and quality of PAI learning. With this approach, the PAI curriculum is expected to shape a generation of Muslims who are religious, moderate, critical, and able to live harmoniously amidst the dynamics of modern society.

Further research is recommended to empirically examine the implementation of the reconstructed Islamic Religious Education curriculum at various levels and

educational contexts. Furthermore, research based on impact evaluations on students' religious moderation and digital literacy is needed to strengthen the validity and sustainability of the 21st-century Islamic Religious Education curriculum model.

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