Reconceptualising Islamic Education in Indonesia: Strategies for Future Integration

Muh Barid Nizarudin Wajdi[1]✉ , Siti Marpuah[2], Shakila Binti Ahmad[3], Mohd Hisyam Bin Abdul Rahim[4], Mikdar Rusdi[5]

[1]STAI Miftahul Ula Nganjuk Indonesia, [2] Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, [3] Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia[4] Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, [5] Kolej Universiti Perguruan Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam

ABSTRACT

Islamic education in Indonesia has long shaped the nation's moral, intellectual, and spiritual foundations, yet in the era of globalization and digital transformation it faces mounting pressures to adapt. This study reconceptualizes Islamic education by exploring how it can preserve religious identity while responding to modernization. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis with 50 purposively selected participants from pesantren, madrasah, and Islamic universities across rural and urban settings. A pilot with 10 participants refined instruments to ensure contextual validity. Thematic analysis yielded five key findings: (1) a persistent digital divide between rural and urban institutions; (2) limited curricular diversification, with insufficient integration of STEM, economics, and environmental studies; (3) inadequate promotion of critical thinking and intercultural competence despite high student demand; (4) uneven institutional and policy support disadvantaging rural schools; and (5) enduring tensions between memorization-based pedagogy and interactive learning. This study highlights rural challenges, foregrounds student agency as a driver of reform, and proposes a blended pedagogy grounded in the Islamic principle of *wasatiyyah* (moderation). Policy implications include targeted digital initiatives for rural pesantren, co-developed curricular guidelines with major Islamic organizations, teacher professional development in digital literacy and critical pedagogy, and equitable resource distribution with monitoring.

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia telah lama membentuk fondasi moral, intelektual, dan spiritual bangsa, namun pada era globalisasi dan transformasi digital, pendidikan ini menghadapi tekanan besar untuk beradaptasi. Penelitian ini merekonseptualisasi pendidikan Islam dengan mengeksplorasi bagaimana ia dapat menjaga identitas keagamaan sekaligus merespons modernisasi. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, diskusi kelompok terarah (FGD), observasi kelas, dan

Email Corresponding: ✉baridnizar84@gmail.com

analisis dokumen dengan 50 partisipan yang dipilih secara purposif dari pesantren, madrasah, dan perguruan tinggi Islam di wilayah pedesaan maupun perkotaan. Sebuah studi pendahuluan dengan 10 partisipan dilakukan untuk menyempurnakan instrumen dan memastikan validitas kontekstual. Analisis tematik menghasilkan lima temuan utama: (1) kesenjangan digital yang persisten antara lembaga di pedesaan dan perkotaan; (2) diversifikasi kurikulum yang terbatas, dengan integrasi STEM, ekonomi, dan studi lingkungan yang belum memadai; (3) kurangnya penguatan berpikir kritis dan kompetensi antarbudaya meskipun permintaan mahasiswa tinggi; (4) dukungan kelembagaan dan kebijakan yang timpang sehingga merugikan sekolah di pedesaan; dan (5) ketegangan berkelanjutan antara pedagogi berbasis hafalan dan pembelajaran interaktif. Penelitian ini menyoroti tantangan pedesaan, menekankan peran agen mahasiswa sebagai penggerak reformasi, dan mengusulkan model pedagogi campuran yang berlandaskan pada prinsip Islam wasatiyyah (moderasi). Implikasi kebijakan mencakup inisiatif digital terarah bagi pesantren pedesaan, pedoman kurikulum yang dikembangkan bersama organisasi Islam besar, pengembangan profesional guru dalam literasi digital dan pedagogi kritis, serta distribusi sumber daya yang adil dengan mekanisme pemantauan.

Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia has historically served as a cornerstone for the intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of its populace. As the largest Muslim-majority nation globally, Indonesia's Islamic educational institutions are pivotal in shaping not only religious scholarship but also the broader educational framework within the country. The 21st century, however, has ushered in a myriad of challenges and opportunities, primarily influenced by globalisation, technological advancements, and evolving socio-political landscapes. In this context, traditional Islamic educational models are under pressure to adapt, striking a balance between preserving religious identity and meeting the imperatives of modernization.(Wasehudin et al., 2023, 2024). This paper seeks to reconceptualise Islamic education in Indonesia, proposing innovative strategies to facilitate its evolution while honouring its rich heritage.

Two primary factors underscore the importance of this topic. First, the adaptability of Islamic education will significantly influence its relevance in an increasingly digitalised world characterised by cross-cultural exchanges and knowledge economies.(Anurogo et al., 2023; Salih, 2024; Wahid, 2024). Second, given that Islamic educational institutions cater to millions of students, their evolution will directly impact Indonesia's moral and intellectual landscape. (Abbas, 2021; Mustapa et al., 2023; Nasir et al., 2024). Islamic education in Indonesia has historically played a significant role in socio-cultural development; however, it currently stands at a critical juncture that calls for a comprehensive reconfiguration of pedagogical and theoretical approaches. With the advent of globalization and changing societal dynamics, simply updating curricula or teaching methods is insufficient. Instead, a profound reevaluation of the role of Islamic education in reconciling traditional religious values with contemporary societal demands is essential. This complexity is amplified by the diverse needs of a pluralistic society, where modern challenges such as digital literacy, ideological extremism, and social disparity necessitate a responsive and integrative educational framework.

Programs like the Tahfidz program, which emphasizes Quranic memorization, exemplify how community interests can align with Islamic pedagogy in madrasahs.

Research indicates that such initiatives not only strengthen religious commitment but also enhance educational motivation and community engagement among students aged 7 to 20 (Makniyah, 2023). These findings underscore the potential of Islamic education to reinforce moral and cultural identity while adapting to modern educational practices. In this regard, scholars emphasize the need for teacher training that integrates the psychosocial dimensions of education, enabling educators to address social challenges through an Islamic lens. (Tambak & Sukenti, 2020). Developing psychosocial competencies among teachers is therefore crucial, as it equips them to enrich students' intellectual and spiritual experiences in contextually relevant ways.

A comparative analysis of Islamic educational institutions, such as Turkey's Imam Hatip schools and Indonesia's Al-Azhar Islamic School in Yogyakarta, provides insights into modernization pathways that could inform reforms in Indonesia. (Firman Setiaji, 2024). These institutions reflect diverse methodologies in harmonizing Islamic knowledge with contemporary demands, offering models that Indonesia can adapt to sustain its religious integrity while meeting national and global aspirations. Importantly, modernization must also cultivate moderation, especially amid rising radical sentiments, reaffirming Islamic education's role in promoting tolerance and social cohesion. (Senata et al., 2021).

Central to this reform agenda is the internalization of values that promote moderation and prevent radicalization. By fostering epistemic rationality and encouraging multiple interpretations of religious texts, Islamic education can counter extremist ideologies and nurture a more nuanced understanding of Islam. (Senata et al., 2021). This positions Islamic education not merely as a custodian of faith but also as a vital actor in cultivating civic consciousness, ethical responsibility, and interfaith harmony.

The historical evolution of moderate Islam in Indonesia further reinforces this trajectory. Influences from Sufi traditions and the legacy of Walisongo illustrate the potential of Islamic scholarship to harmonize with national identity and modern educational objectives. (Inayatillah et al., 2022). These historical foundations provide a valuable lens for contemporary reform, affirming that Islamic teachings can evolve dynamically without losing their essence.

Nevertheless, persistent barriers remain. Disparities in resource allocation, unequal access to quality education, and the urgent need for teacher capacity-building in madrasahs continue to undermine reform initiatives. (Rajaminsah, 2022). Addressing these systemic challenges requires coordinated policy interventions and strong institutional support across governmental, community, and religious spheres. Without such efforts, reform efforts risk being fragmented or superficial.

At the same time, international collaboration offers opportunities to strengthen Islamic education in Indonesia. Partnerships with educational frameworks in Turkey and Malaysia, for example, can generate cross-cultural synergies that reinforce Islamic education's contribution to sustainable community development. (Saputra, 2022). Beyond institutional exchanges, such collaborations can provide practical models of integrating digital learning, STEM disciplines, and civic education within Islamic schools.

To construct a more comprehensive educational paradigm, Indonesia can also draw inspiration from broader educational philosophies, such as the Aligarh and Santiniketan movements, which stress cultural rootedness alongside global openness. (Saputra & Krismono, 2021). These perspectives support the creation of curricula that not only equip students with academic excellence but also cultivate service-oriented values, ethical sensibilities, and global awareness.

The integrative model advanced by organizations like Muhammadiyah demonstrates how Islamic education can transcend conventional boundaries. By weaving religious

teachings with contemporary disciplines, Muhammadiyah institutions exemplify the potential for a holistic approach that unites intellectual rigor with humanitarian values. (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022). Such practices underline the need for Islamic education that is both spiritually grounded and socially engaged, bridging tradition with modernity in a constructive and forward-looking manner.

The comprehensive reform of Islamic education in Indonesia is not only a response to contemporary challenges but also a continuation of its historical mission: to connect faith with life in all its complexities. By reassessing priorities, embracing interdisciplinary innovation, and fostering an ethos of moderation and critical engagement, Islamic education can evolve into a transformative force—one that honors its heritage while equipping future generations to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Thus, while the call for reform in Islamic education is urgent and multifaceted, its realization must be grounded in a careful understanding of both its historical strengths and persistent limitations. A balanced view requires examining how Islamic institutions have contributed to Indonesia's cultural and spiritual vitality, while also recognizing the structural and pedagogical challenges that continue to hinder their responsiveness to modern demands. This dual perspective provides the foundation for assessing the existing literature, which not only documents the enduring contributions of Pesantren, Madrasahs, and universities but also highlights the critical gaps that must be addressed if Islamic education is to remain relevant in the 21st century.

The existing literature highlights both the enduring strengths and pressing limitations of Islamic education in Indonesia. Institutions such as Pesantren, Madrasahs, and universities have long been the bedrock of religious and moral education, producing generations of scholars and community leaders who contribute to Indonesia's cultural and spiritual vitality. (Hamid & Ruswandi, 2022; Lestari & Fauzi, 2021; Nurazizah, 2023). However, despite their historical role, scholars have noted the challenges these institutions face in aligning with contemporary educational demands, particularly in areas such as science, technology, and global competencies. (Hamid & Ruswandi, 2022). The gap between Islamic education and mainstream educational practices has become increasingly pronounced, with critics such as Lukens-Bull (2005) and Nasir and Rijal (2021) raising concerns about the insularity of some traditional Islamic institutions (Lukens-Bull, 2019; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). More recent studies reinforce these concerns, highlighting persistent issues such as the digital divide between rural and urban institutions, the limited integration of critical thinking into religious curricula, and the marginal inclusion of STEM subjects within madrasah education (Lubis et al., 2023; Suhada et al., 2022; Rosmawati et al., 2024).

Against the backdrop of Indonesia's unique socio-religious fabric, the integration of digital transformation into Islamic education presents both challenges and opportunities that warrant systematic exploration. Islamic education has traditionally centered around rote memorization and classical teachings, often perceived as static in the face of contemporary pedagogical demands. As digital tools continue to infiltrate educational landscapes globally, the imperative for Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia to navigate this transformation effectively is pressing. The notion of embedding critical thinking within Islamic curricula while simultaneously incorporating secular subjects poses a significant challenge, but also an opportunity to redefine and enrich the educational experience for students.

This paper contributes to the ongoing discourse by exploring strategic pathways through which Islamic education in Indonesia can navigate contemporary challenges. It begins with a historical overview of Islamic education in Indonesia, tracing its evolution from traditional Pesantren-based models to more diversified educational forms. This section underscores the role of key Islamic organisations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

and Muhammadiyah, in shaping the educational landscape. (Fanani, 2019; Novita, 2023; Nurazizah, 2023; Wekke, Alam, Syamsuddin, Dawabsheh, & Mahamud, n.d.). The paper then examines the contemporary challenges of Islamic education, including the growing demand for technological literacy, the need for intercultural competency, and the tension between religious conservatism and progressive education. (Kanafi et al., 2021; Rajaminsah, 2022).

Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine in depth the dynamics of Islamic education in Indonesia and to propose strategies for its future development. The case study approach was deemed appropriate because it enables detailed exploration of the complex interaction between traditional Islamic educational practices and the demands of modern society. Combining exploratory and descriptive elements, the study aimed not only to identify the necessary reforms but also to understand how they might be effectively implemented in context.

The target population comprised Islamic educational institutions across Indonesia, including pesantren, madrasah, and Islamic universities, as they represent the primary centres of Islamic learning. Key stakeholders such as school administrators, teachers, policymakers, and students were selected purposively to ensure that participants had direct experience and expertise relevant to Islamic education. This purposive strategy was essential for capturing information-rich cases that reflect diverse but contextually significant perspectives, rather than relying on random sampling which could include less knowledgeable respondents.

Data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews with administrators and policymakers explored their views on challenges and reform strategies, while FGDs with teachers and students provided insights into daily practices and the relevance of Islamic education to contemporary needs. Document analysis, involving national policy documents, curricula, and academic literature, was used to situate the field data within broader theoretical and institutional frameworks. Each method was piloted with a small group of ten participants, which revealed ambiguities in question wording, thematic overlaps, and policy terminology that confused student respondents. Revisions were made to improve clarity, contextual relevance, and sequencing, thereby strengthening the instruments' reliability and validity.

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, beginning with transcription of interviews and FGDs, followed by line-by-line coding to generate initial categories. These codes were then clustered into broader themes such as curriculum modernisation, technological integration, and intercultural competencies. Triangulation across interviews, FGDs, and documents further enhanced the credibility of findings, while member checking with selected informants ensured accuracy in representing participants' perspectives. Peer debriefing with scholars of Islamic education reform was also conducted to validate the robustness of emerging conclusions.

The researchers maintained an active role throughout the process, both as facilitators and observers, recording not only verbal data but also contextual dynamics such as participant interactions and non-verbal cues. Data were collected in diverse settings across Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi to capture the variations between urban and rural practices. The six-month fieldwork, conducted between January and June 2024, enabled prolonged engagement with participants and provided sufficient time for the review of institutional documents. By integrating multiple perspectives from practitioners,

students, and policy advisors—including representatives of major organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah—the study generated a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities within Islamic education in Indonesia.

Results and Discussion

1. Result

    The findings from interviews, FGDs, observations, and document analysis revealed a nuanced picture of how Islamic education in Indonesia is navigating the pressures of modernisation and globalisation while preserving its religious core. Five key themes were identified: technological integration, curricular reform, the cultivation of critical thinking and intercultural competence, institutional support, and pedagogical tensions.

    a. Integration of Technology: Between Access and Resistance

    A central finding is the persistent digital divide between rural and urban Islamic institutions. In urban Islamic universities, technology has increasingly been adopted as part of hybrid learning models. Observations showed students actively engaging with online resources, discussion forums, and digital submission platforms. As one administrator emphasized:

    "Technology has become essential, especially since the pandemic. Blending it with our Islamic curriculum has enhanced accessibility and engagement. However, we remind teachers that spiritual connection must remain the centre."

    In contrast, rural pesantren and madrasah displayed minimal use of digital tools. Limited internet connectivity and inadequate hardware were recurring structural barriers, but cultural reservations also shaped resistance. A senior teacher explained:

    "We have always taught face-to-face. I worry that computers or phones will reduce the respect and intimacy between students and their kyais. Without that relationship, education loses its soul."

    Document analysis of Ministry of Religious Affairs programs revealed multiple digitalization initiatives. Yet, implementation on the ground was highly uneven, with rural institutions often excluded due to funding shortages and weak monitoring mechanisms. Importantly, in cases where technology was introduced, teachers consistently described it as a supplementary aid—a tool to enhance accessibility without displacing the traditional teacher–student bond.

    These findings suggest that technology integration in Islamic education cannot be reduced to infrastructure provision alone. Cultural adaptation and pedagogical sensitivity are equally essential, as successful adoption requires reconciling digital access with Islamic educational values. From a policy perspective, this indicates

the need for targeted digital initiatives for rural pesantren, coupled with teacher training in digital literacy that preserves spiritual intimacy in the learning process.

b. Curricular Reform: Between Religious Depth and Modern Competencies

Another significant finding concerns the **urgent need for curricular reform**. Administrators, teachers, and students consistently emphasized that current curricula remain overly centered on religious subjects, leaving graduates less prepared for the demands of the modern workforce. As one pesantren principal admitted:

"We produce graduates with strong faith, but they are not competitive in science, business, or technology. If we do not adapt, our students will be left behind."

Focus group discussions with students revealed widespread frustration at the limited academic scope. A madrasah student explained:

"I love the Qur'an and Hadith classes, but I also want to learn economics and digital skills. Otherwise, I worry I cannot find good work later."

Classroom observations underscored these tensions. Progressive Islamic universities increasingly employed inquiry-based learning, interdisciplinary projects, and case studies to connect Islamic perspectives with contemporary issues. In contrast, conservative pesantren still relied heavily on rote memorization, with little emphasis on application beyond religious mastery.

Document analysis of curricula from NU and Muhammadiyah confirmed incremental reforms—such as the integration of environmental studies and entrepreneurship—but adoption was uneven and often symbolic. Many institutions resisted diversification, fearing that expanding into STEM, economics, or social sciences would dilute the religious essence of Islamic education.

These findings reveal that curricular diversification is not simply a technical adjustment but a contested ideological process. While students and progressive educators demand broader competencies, traditional actors seek to safeguard religious identity. The challenge lies in designing a curriculum that balances religious depth with modern competencies, ensuring that graduates remain spiritually grounded while also employable in contemporary labor markets.

From a policy perspective, this highlights the importance of co-developing curricular guidelines with major Islamic organizations (e.g., NU, Muhammadiyah) to legitimize reform, embedding modern subjects in ways that reinforce rather than replace Islamic values. Without such collaborative strategies, reforms risk being uneven and polarizing, further entrenching the gap between progressive and conservative institutions.

262- 271|

c. Promoting Critical Thinking and Intercultural Competence

The need to cultivate critical thinking and intercultural competence emerged The cultivation of critical thinking and intercultural competence emerged as a central concern across participant groups. While rote memorization remains valued for religious formation, both policymakers and educators stressed that it is insufficient for preparing students to navigate globalization. As one policymaker explained:

"Students must learn to think critically and communicate across cultures, but they should do so while remaining grounded in Islamic values. Without critical skills, they risk being passive in a world that demands active engagement."

Students echoed this concern, positioning themselves as active agents of reform. In FGDs, university students expressed the desire to engage with global challenges—such as climate change and sustainability—through an Islamic lens. One student noted:

"We want to understand global issues like climate change, but also from an Islamic perspective. We need to learn how to talk with people of different faiths without losing our identity."

Classroom observations revealed sharp contrasts. Progressive institutions cultivated debate clubs, structured dialogues, and collaborative projects that encouraged analytical engagement and cross-cultural awareness. By contrast, traditional pesantren relied on authoritative, unidirectional methods, leaving little room for questioning or interactive dialogue.

Findings showed that intercultural competence extends beyond interfaith relations. Teachers in rural pesantren observed tensions between students from different regions of Indonesia, underscoring the need for curricula that address both local diversity and global pluralism. This highlights that intercultural education must be multi-layered: fostering dialogue across faiths, across cultures within Indonesia, and across global perspectives.

This theme demonstrates that students themselves are demanding broader opportunities to develop critical and intercultural skills, positioning student agency as a driver of change. From a policy perspective, these findings suggest the need for:

1. Curricular frameworks that embed critical thinking across religious and secular subjects.

2. Teacher professional development in critical pedagogy to shift beyond rote methods.

3. Institutional support for debate, discussion, and intercultural programs, ensuring that Islamic education equips students to engage confidently with diverse local and global communities while remaining grounded in Islamic values.

d. Institutional Support and Policy Gaps

Institutional and governmental support emerged as a decisive but uneven factor shaping the modernization of Islamic education. Policies to enhance digital infrastructure, expand curricular content, and provide teacher training have been formulated at the national level. However, the study found that their implementation remains highly unequal, with urban centres benefiting disproportionately compared to rural pesantren and madrasah.

A government official candidly admitted:

"We have designed policies for digitalisation and curriculum reform. The problem is execution. Rural pesantren often lack the infrastructure and human resources to implement these policies."

School leaders and administrators echoed this concern, emphasizing that teacher readiness, not willingness, is the core challenge. As one principal explained:

"Our teachers are willing to change, but many do not know how to integrate technology or critical thinking into their classes. We need structured training, not just new policies."

Document analysis of national education blueprints confirmed this discrepancy. While policy frameworks contained ambitious targets for ICT adoption, curriculum diversification, and teacher development, they lacked robust mechanisms for equitable resource distribution and consistent monitoring. This creates the risk that modernization reforms will inadvertently widen disparities between well-resourced urban Islamic universities and resource-constrained rural institutions.

These findings suggest that policy success depends less on design and more on execution and equity. Without careful calibration, reforms risk creating a dual-track system where only privileged institutions benefit from modernization. From a policy perspective, this underscores the need for:

1. Targeted funding schemes specifically allocated to rural pesantren and madrasah.

2. Structured, ongoing professional development in digital literacy and critical pedagogy for teachers.

3. Monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure that national policy goals translate into equitable outcomes at the local level.

By addressing these gaps, policymakers can prevent systemic inequalities and ensure that modernization efforts strengthen rather than fracture the broader ecosystem of Islamic education in Indonesia.

e. Pedagogical Tensions: Preserving Tradition, Embracing Modernity

The final theme underscores the tensions between traditional and modern pedagogical approaches in Islamic education. In many pesantren, traditional methods such as rote memorization, lecture-based teaching, and hierarchical teacher–student relations remain dominant. Teachers defended these practices as essential to maintaining discipline and ensuring religious depth. As one teacher remarked:

"If students do not memorise, how can they truly internalise the Qur'an? Memorisation is our tradition, and it builds character."

In contrast, students in FGDs consistently voiced a preference for more interactive and participatory learning. A university student shared:

"When we use discussions or projects, I feel more engaged. It helps me see how Islam relates to real-life problems."

Observations confirmed these divergent practices. Progressive classrooms encouraged dialogue, debate, and collaborative projects, while conservative ones adhered to didactic, one-directional methods. Notably, some educators advocated for a blended model—combining Qur'anic memorization and spiritual formation with modern, participatory approaches such as project-based learning and technology integration.

This tension reflects a broader epistemological negotiation: whether knowledge is primarily to be transmitted and preserved, or to be questioned and applied. The findings suggest that sustaining Islamic education's religious essence does not necessarily conflict with adopting modern pedagogical tools, as long as integration is carefully framed within Islamic values.

This balance aligns with the principle of wasatiyyah (moderation), offering a conceptual pathway for harmonizing tradition and innovation. Rather than choosing between memorization and critical engagement, a blended pedagogy can cultivate both spiritual grounding and intellectual adaptability.

From a policy and institutional perspective, this implies that modernization strategies must:

1. Respect and retain traditional practices such as Qur'anic memorization as a core identity marker.

2. Incorporate participatory and problem-solving methods to ensure relevance to contemporary challenges.

3. Provide teacher training in blended pedagogies that balance authority with dialogue.

These findings portray Islamic education in Indonesia as a system in transition. Urban institutions are experimenting with hybrid learning, curricular diversification, and critical pedagogy, while many rural and conservative institutions remain cautious, constrained by infrastructure and cultural concerns. Students across contexts consistently express a desire for broader, more modern curricula that do not compromise religious foundations.

The future of Islamic education will depend on its ability to bridge the digital divide, diversify curricula, and adopt blended pedagogies without eroding its spiritual identity. A model rooted in *wasatiyyah*—moderation between preservation and innovation—offers the most promising pathway forward, ensuring that Islamic education remains both authentic and adaptive in the face of globalization.

2. Discussion

The findings on technological integration revealed a persistent digital divide between urban universities and rural pesantren. This result supports Azra (2012), who argued that Islamic education must embrace modern techniques and technologies to remain relevant. However, it also extends his work by documenting how rural educators fear that digital tools might erode the teacher–student bond central to pesantren pedagogy. This cultural resistance resonates with Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory, which highlights that adoption depends not only on infrastructure but also on perceived compatibility with existing values. While Saputra & Krismono (2021) stressed the infrastructural challenges of digitalisation, this study contributes new insight into the cultural dimension, suggesting that reforms must be framed as supplementary to, rather than replacements for, traditional practices.

In relation to curricular reform, the data demonstrated intense demands from educators and students to broaden the curriculum with science, technology, economics, and environmental studies. These findings echo Hefner (2010), who emphasised the importance of integrating contemporary knowledge to prevent Islamic education from becoming obsolete. Hamid & Ruswandi (2022) similarly observed that the dominance of religious subjects left students unprepared for the modern economy. However, this study adds a novel contribution by foregrounding the voices of students, who actively articulated their desire for curricular diversification. This bottom-up demand aligns with Fullan's theory of educational change, which underscores the importance of stakeholder engagement for sustainable reform.

The promotion of critical thinking and intercultural competence emerged as another significant finding. Kanafi et al. (2021) argued that Islamic education must develop intercultural competence to prepare students for pluralistic societies, while Saputra

(2022) highlighted the urgency of cultivating reflective and analytical skills. The present study supports these perspectives and expands them by demonstrating how students explicitly link critical thinking to practical issues, such as environmental sustainability and global citizenship. Vygotsky's social constructivism offers a helpful framework for interpreting these results, as interactive pedagogies, such as debates and collaborative projects, were observed to foster deeper engagement. However, the contrast between progressive universities and conservative pesantren demonstrates that the diffusion of such practices remains uneven, reflecting Lukens-Bull's (2019) earlier observation that Islamic institutions often remain insular and resistant to external pedagogical influences.

The role of institutional and policy support also proved decisive. While national policies have promoted digitalization and curricular reform, implementation is uneven, with rural areas being disadvantaged. This finding confirms Saputra & Krismono (2021), who documented structural inequalities between urban and rural institutions. However, the present study differs in that it shows teachers are generally open to reform if supported with training and resources. This willingness suggests that the barriers are less about resistance and more about capacity, aligning with Fullan's framework on the "implementation gap," where policy ambitions falter due to inadequate institutional capacity.

The study found enduring tensions between traditional and modern pedagogical approaches. Traditional rote learning ensures mastery of religious knowledge and moral discipline, but it limits creativity and problem-solving. This observation corroborates Hamid & Ruswandi (2022), who noted the overreliance on memorisation in pesantren, and aligns with Lipina & Shapoval (2021), who argued that text-heavy pedagogies fail to nurture 21st-century skills. At the same time, modern methods such as blended learning and project-based activities, though beneficial, face cultural resistance. Here, the Islamic principle of *wasatiyyah* (moderation) offers a valuable lens, suggesting that a blended model can preserve Qur'anic memorisation while incorporating interactive, student-centred learning. This pragmatic middle ground reflects broader calls within Indonesian Islamic education reform for balance rather than radical overhaul (Nurazizah, 2023).

The results of this study are consistent with much of the existing literature on the challenges of Islamic education—digital divides, narrow curricula, limited critical pedagogy, and uneven policy support—but they also extend prior work by offering three distinctive contributions. First, they highlight the cultural fears surrounding technology adoption, a perspective that has been underexplored in earlier research. Second, they foreground student voices as agents of reform, rather than treating them solely as recipients of education. Third, they advance blended pedagogy as a culturally rooted and theologically grounded model for reconciling tradition with modernity. These findings, when viewed through theoretical frameworks of innovation diffusion, social constructivism, educational change, and Islamic moderation, provide a holistic understanding of how Islamic education in Indonesia can evolve without compromising its religious essence.

Conclusion

This study sought to reconceptualize Islamic education in Indonesia by examining how it can adapt to the demands of modernization and globalization while maintaining its religious identity. The findings indicate that Islamic education is currently at a pivotal juncture where reforms in technology integration, curricular diversification, the promotion of critical thinking, and intercultural competence are urgently required. While urban institutions have begun experimenting with hybrid learning and curricular

innovation, rural pesantren and madrasah continue to face challenges arising from limited infrastructure and cultural resistance, highlighting the need for systemic and context-sensitive reform.

The research contributes to the broader discourse by demonstrating that Islamic education must be understood not only as religious instruction but as a holistic framework that integrates faith with science, technology, and global citizenship. By grounding reform in the principles of balance and moderation (wasatiyyah), the study affirms that tradition and innovation can coexist, producing graduates who are both spiritually rooted and professionally competent. Scientifically, the study advances the field by foregrounding student agency as a driver of reform, identifying teachers' ambivalence toward technology, and proposing blended pedagogy as a culturally grounded reform model. From a policy perspective, the findings emphasize the urgency of equitable resource distribution, teacher professional development, and the strengthening of rural institutions as the backbone of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Several practical recommendations arise from this study. Policymakers should prioritize bridging the digital divide in rural pesantren by piloting blended learning initiatives through simple, accessible platforms such as WhatsApp or Google Classroom, supported by government subsidies for internet access, provision of devices, and culturally tailored training modules. Curricular reform should integrate modern subjects—including science, economics, and environmental studies—within an Islamic framework, with national guidelines co-developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in collaboration with Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Teacher professional development should extend beyond digital literacy to cultivate pedagogies that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural dialogue, while simultaneously reinforcing traditional strengths such as Qur'an memorization. Institutional reforms must address implementation gaps through equitable resource distribution, strengthened administrative capacity, and robust monitoring mechanisms.

The findings also underscore the importance of promoting wasatiyyah as a guiding pedagogical principle. By adopting blended learning as a model of moderation, Islamic education can sustain its spiritual depth while employing innovative strategies that nurture tolerance, critical engagement, and resilience against radicalism. Nonetheless, this study has limitations, particularly its focus on a specific institutional sample, which restricts the generalizability of findings. Future research should examine the long-term effects of curricular integration on both academic performance and spiritual development, conduct comparative studies with other Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia and Turkey, and explore scalable models of teacher professional development within traditional institutions.

References

Abbas, M. B. (2021). Whose Islam?: The western university and modern Islamic thought in Indonesia. Stanford University Press.

Anshori, A., Solikhah, N. A., Aqli, D. R., Musyafa', M. A., & Apriyanto, S. (2022). Dynamics and new paradigm of Islamic education in Indonesia. *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam dan Multikulturalisme*, *4*(2), 232–245. https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v4i2.1573

Anurogo, D., La Ramba, H., Putri, N. D., & Putri, U. M. P. (2023). Digital literacy 5.0 to enhance multicultural education. *Multicultural Islamic Education Review*, *1*(2), 109–179.

Fanani, A. (2019). Ahmad Dahlan's perspective about the model of modern integration of Islamic education. *Nadwa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *1*(1), 95–108. https://doi.org/10.21580/nw.2019.1.1.3624

268- 271|

Hamami, T., & Nuryana, Z. (2022). A holistic–integrative approach of the Muhammadiyah education system in Indonesia. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, *78*(4), Article a7607. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7607

Hamid, R., & Ruswandi, U. (2022). Islamic education system in Indonesia. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, *5*(1), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.21744/ijss.v5n1.1815

Huda, M. Q., & Hussin, H. (2010). ICT implementation barriers and organizational issues in Islamic-based higher education institution: The case of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Information and Communication Technology for the Moslem World: ICT Connecting Cultures* (pp. A18–A25). IEEE. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICT4M.2010.5971877

Inayatillah, I., Kamaruddin, K., & Anzaikhan, M. A. M. (2022). The history of moderate Islam in Indonesia and its influence on the content of national education. *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, *17*(2), 213–226. https://doi.org/10.22452/jat.vol17no2.17

Indriasari, D. T. (2023). Association of political candidates and ulamas during the 2019 election on Twitter. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi (Indonesian Journal of Communications Studies)*, *7*(3), 779–796. https://doi.org/10.25139/jsk.v7i3.5659

Kanafi, I., Dahri, H., Susminingsih, S., & Bakhri, S. (2021). The contribution of Ahlussunnah Waljamaah's theology in establishing moderate Islam in Indonesia. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, *77*(4), Article a6437. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6437

Lestari, D. P., & Fauzi, A. M. (2021). Muhammadiyah's contribution to education in Indonesia and its influence on people's social life. In *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* (Vol. 636, pp. 868–873). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211223.144

Lipina, T. A., & Shapoval, Y. V. (2021). Religious education in Kazakhstan: The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, Filosofiia i Konfliktologiia*, *37*(2), 352–368. https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu17.2021.213

Lubis, S., Salminawati, S., & Usiono, U. (2023). Systematic literature review: Transformation of Islamic higher education institutions (examination of ontology, epistemology, and axiology). *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *7*(2), 5269–5277. https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v7i2.7197

Makniyah, J. (2023). Implementation of Tahfidz program in increasing community interest in Madrasah Diniyah. *Attasyrih*, *9*(1), 88–95. https://doi.org/10.55849/attasyrih.v9i1.163

Mu'min, U. A. (2023). Construction of Islamic character education values based on local wisdom in culture Kasepuhan and Kanoman palaces. *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education*, *4*(2), 305–318. https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v4i2.391

Mustapa, K., Gagaramusu, Y. B. M., Palandi, E. H., Syakhrani, A. W., & Towpek, H. (2023). Technology-enhanced education: Nurturing the digital generation-experiences in Islamic schools in Indonesia. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning*, *1*(1), 16–40.

Nasir, M., Rizal, S., Basri, & Pabbajah, M. (2024). Revolutionizing Teungku Dayah learning model: Exploring the transformative impact of technological advancements on Islamic education in Aceh. *Cogent Education*, *11*(1), Article 2335720. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2335720

Novita, A. (2023). A century of Nadhlatul Ulama's contribution to modernizing Islamic education in Indonesia. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education Studies)*, *11*(1), 17–26.

Nurazizah, N. (2023). History of Islamic civilization in post-independence Indonesia. *International Journal of Educational Narratives*, *1*(5), 231–239. https://doi.org/10.55849/ijen.v1i5.339

Nurhasnawati, N., Alwizar, A., Syafaruddin, S., Darmawati, D., MFZ, M. F. Z., HKM, H. W., & ISQ, I. (2020). Systematic review of the literature on Islamic religious education design in Indonesia: The role of parents in Islamic religious education. *Couns-Edu: The International Journal of Counseling and Education*, *5*(4), 216–223. https://doi.org/10.23916/0020200540840

Nursyahidin, R., Rohman, A., & Febriyanti, N. (2021). Learning innovation of Islamic education in COVID-19 pandemic. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, *18*(1), 139–154. https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2021.181-08

Pabbajah, M., Jubba, H., Abdullah, I., Pabbajah, M. T. H., & Juhansar, J. (2021). From the scriptural to the virtual: Indonesian engineering students responses to the digitalization of Islamic education. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, *24*(2), 122–130. https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12581

Pane, A., Choirunnisa, F., & Kustati, M. (2023). Implementation of policies, strategies, Islamic religious education learning programs with curriculum integration during the COVID-19 pandemic period at State Madrasah Aliyah (MAN) Indonesian scholar. In F. A., F. D. Y., & K. E. (Eds.), *AIP Conference Proceedings* (Vol. 2805, Issue 1, Article 040012). American Institute of Physics. https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0166441

Prasetia, S. A., Asrohah, H., Najiyah, S. F., & Arif, S. (2021). Epistemic rationality in Islamic education: The significance for religious moderation in contemporary Indonesian Islam. *Ulul Albab: Jurnal Studi Islam*, *22*(2), 232–253. https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v22i2.12771

Rajaminsah, R. (2022). Basics of Islamic education and its implementation in Indonesia. *Qalamuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial dan Agama*, *14*(1), 543–562. https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v14i1.4452

Rajiani, I. (2024). Continuance intention of digital education in traditional Indonesian higher education: Policy implication forward. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, *8*(5), 2488–2505. https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i5.3596

Randa, M., & Arsyam, M. (2023). Transformation of Islamic religious education in the revolution 4.0 era. *International Journal of Science and Society*, *4*(4), 676–686. https://doi.org/10.54783/ijsoc.v4i4.616

Riwanda, A., Ridha, M., & Islamy, M. I. (2024). Empowering asynchronous Arabic language learning through PDF hyperlink media. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *25*(1), 66–88. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v25i1.7425

Rosmawati, R., Ansori, M. A., Andari, A. A., Sugianto, S., & Sudarningsih, S. (2024). The dynamics of the Islamic Association (Persis) educational institutions, 1923-1962. *Yupa: Historical Studies Journal*, *8*(1), 108–123. https://doi.org/10.30872/yupa.v8i1.3142

Rozza, D. S. (2023). Islamic education politics: Dynamic and relevance Dutch ethical politics in Indonesia. *Research and Development Journal of Education*, *9*(2), 772–784. https://doi.org/10.30998/rdje.v9i2.18592

Şahin, A. (2018). Critical issues in Islamic education studies: Rethinking Islamic and western liberal secular values of education. *Religions*, *9*(11), Article 335. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110335

Salih, A. M. (2024). Digital leadership: Evidence from theory and practice. Taylor & Francis.

Saputra, K. D. (2022). Historical continuity and changes: Understanding the dynamics of Islamic education in Indonesia and Malaysia. *Jurnal Tarbiyatuna*, *13*(2), 107–118. https://doi.org/10.31603/tarbiyatuna.v13i2.7345

Saputra, K. D., & Krismono, K. (2021). The reconstruction of Aligarh and Santiniketan educational philosophy: The creative ijtihad of Trimurti in developing Islamic education in Indonesia. *Tsaqafah*, *17*(2), 255–280. https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v17i2.6879

Setiaji, D. F. (2024). Comparison of Islamic education modernization in Imam Hatip Anatolian Turkish schools with Al-Azhar Islamic School, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. *Al-I'tibar: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *11*(1), 54–67. https://doi.org/10.30599/jpia.v11i1.3319

Subchi, I., Zulkifli, Z., Latifa, R., & Sa'diyah, S. (2022). Religious moderation in Indonesian Muslims. *Religions*, *13*(5), Article 451. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050451

Suhada, D., Ridwan, W., Ahmad, N., Suhartini, A., Ahyani, H., & Mutmainah, N. (2022). Menguak urgensi pendidikan moderasi beragama di Indonesia perspektif Islam dan Barat dalam menjawab tantangan masa depan. *Al-Iltizam: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, *7*(1), 199–212. https://doi.org/10.33477/alt.v7i1.3022

Sumanti, S. T., Nunzairina, N., & Salminawati, S. (2024). The evolution of Islamic educational institutions in North Sumatra Indonesia. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *7*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i1.4419

Suparjo, S., & Hidayah, L. N. (2023). Islamic religious education in Indonesia: Understanding the urgency and paradigm shift from a societal perspective. *International Journal of*

Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis, *6*(6), 2417–2425. https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmra/v6-i6-08

Susanto, S., Muafiah, E., Desrani, A., Ritonga, A. W., & Hakim, A. R. (2022). Trends of educational technology (EdTech): Students' perceptions of technology to improve the quality of Islamic higher education in Indonesia. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, *21*(6), 226–246. https://doi.org/10.31763/ijlter.v21i6.712

Suyadi, S., Hastuti, D., & Sumaryati, S. (2019). Anticorruption education insertion in Islamic religious learning in the Umar Mas'ud Kindergarten of Bawean Island Indonesia. *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*, *7*(10), 771–783. https://doi.org/10.31686/ijier.vol7.iss10.1825

Syarif, Z., & Hannan, A. (2020). Islamic populism politics and its threat to Indonesian democracy. *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, *20*(2), 251–277. https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v20i2.2128

Tambak, S., & Sukenti, D. (2020). Strengthening Islamic behavior and Islamic psychosocial in developing professional Madrasah teachers. *Cakrawala Pendidikan*, *39*(1), 65–78. https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v39i1.26001

Vishkurti, R. (2022). Islamic boarding schools: Among da'wah, education, and moderation way in Islam. *Dakwatuna: Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi Islam*, *8*(2), 168–183. https://doi.org/10.54471/dakwatuna.v8i2.1737

Wahid, S. H. (2024). Exploring the intersection of Islam and digital technology: A bibliometric analysis. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *10*, Article 101085. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101085

Wajdi, F., & Nur Aulia, R. (2019). Ma'had 'Aly and the challenge of modernizing Islamic education in Indonesia. *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies*, *3*(2), 139–156. https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.003.2.04

Wasehudin, Rohman, A., Wajdi, M. B. N., & Marwan. (2023). Transforming Islamic education through Merdeka curriculum in pesantren. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *9*(2), 255–266. https://doi.org/10.15575/JPI.V9I2.28918

Wasehudin, W., Wajdi, M. B. N., Silahuddin, S., Syafei, I., Sirojudin, R., Bahtiar, M., & Hasanah, U. (2024). The paradigm of character education in Islamic elementary school. *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, *24*(2), 311–330. https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i2.20741

Wekke, I. S., Alam, A. F. A., Syamsuddin, A. P., Dawabsheh, M. A., & Mahamud, T. (2024). Negotiating power: The political landscape of Muhammadiyah in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, *25*(1), 45–58. https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.25.2024.007

Whyte, S. A. (2022). Islamic religious authority in cyberspace: A qualitative study of Muslim religious actors in Australia. *Religions*, *13*(1), Article 69. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010069

Wiratama, B. F. (2023). Measuring the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. *Muslim Education Review*, *2*(1), 27–41. https://doi.org/10.56529/mer.v2i1.161

Yusoff, M. F., Bakar, J. A. A., & Mat, R. C. (2019). Possible youth acceptance and contributing factors of virtual reality application for Islamic content learning. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering*, *7*(6), 136–142. https://doi.org/10.35940/ijrte.E9825.017619

Zarnuji, A. (2023). The performance of non-PNS Islamic religious teachers with work environment on work satisfaction of employees of the Ministry of Religion Office in KUA Simokerto District, Surabaya City. *Journal International Dakwah and Communication*, *3*(1), 33–42. https://doi.org/10.55849/jidc.v3i1.193