



MODERNIZING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: BRIDGING TRADITION AND 21ST-CENTURY SKILLS THROUGH CURRICULUM AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

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Abstract:

In the modern era, education plays a vital role in preparing students to navigate an interconnected and technologically advanced world. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is crucial for fostering moral and spiritual development among Muslim students. However, the current curriculum often fails to address 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and global citizenship. This study examines the alignment of the PAI curriculum with future generational needs, the integration of technology in Islamic education, and the gaps between traditional content and modern educational demands. Using interviews, classroom observations, surveys, and focus group discussions, the research highlights both the strengths and limitations of the curriculum. This study proposes a comprehensive reform approach that balances traditional Islamic principles with modern pedagogical practices. Key recommendations include curriculum updates to incorporate 21st-century skills, professional development for educators, and investments in digital infrastructure. By adopting these measures, Islamic Religious Education can evolve to empower students as morally grounded, critical thinkers, and global citizens, ensuring its relevance in the 21st century.

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education (PAI), curriculum modernization, future generation*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, education plays a pivotal role in equipping students with the skills and values necessary to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and technologically driven world. Islamic religious education, an essential component of character building for Muslim students, faces the challenge of maintaining its traditional essence while adapting to contemporary educational demands. Despite its rich heritage, the current curriculum often struggles to address the realities of the 21st century, including the need for critical thinking, digital literacy, and global citizenship.

The integration of technology and 21st-century skills in education is no longer optional but a necessity to ensure relevance and engagement. For Islamic education to remain impactful, it must address these gaps while preserving its foundational principles. However, challenges such as outdated content, inadequate teacher training, and limited access to digital resources hinder its modernization. Research suggests that effective curriculum reform can enhance not only students' understanding of Islamic values but also their readiness to navigate global challenges.

This study explores three critical aspects of modernizing Islamic religious education: how the curriculum reflects the needs of future generations, the integration of technology in teaching and learning, and the gaps between traditional content and essential 21st-century skills. By addressing these issues, this research aims to contribute to a framework for a modernized Islamic education that balances traditional values with the demands of the contemporary world.

Below is the structure of the updated curriculum for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Elementary Schools (SD) and Junior High Schools (SMP), categorized by learning phases and focus areas according to official website of guru.kemdikbud.go.id.

1. Elementary School (SD)

The PAI curriculum for SD is divided into three main phases based on grade levels:

A. Phase A (Grades I and II):

Focus Areas:

- a. Introduction to Arabic letters (Hijaiyah).
- b. Recitation of short surahs from the Qur'an.
- c. Introduction to the pillars of faith (Rukun Iman).
- d. Moral values for daily life.
- e. Basic rituals such as ablution (wudu) and prayer (salat).

B. Phase B (Grades III and IV):

Focus Areas:

- a. Understanding messages in short surahs.
- b. Hadiths about prayer and fostering good relationships with others.
- c. Concepts of faith (akidah), such as Allah's attributes and His scriptures.
- d. Practices of worship like fasting (puasa) and Friday prayers (salat Jumat).

C. Phase C (Grades V and VI):

Focus Areas:

- a. In-depth understanding of Qur'anic values.
- b. Concepts of the Day of Judgment (Hari Akhir).
- c. Obligatory almsgiving (zakat), voluntary donations (infak), and recommended fasting (puasa sunnah).
- d. Historical accounts of Prophet Muhammad SAW's life and the early caliphates (khulafaur rasyidin).

2. Junior High School (SMP)

The PAI curriculum for SMP is designed to deepen religious understanding through various disciplines:

A. Qur'an and Hadith:

- a. Enhancing the ability to read Qur'an with proper recitation (tajwid).
- b. Comprehending the meanings of selected Qur'anic verses.

B. Faith (Akidah):

A deeper understanding of faith in Allah, prophets, scriptures, angels, the Day of Judgment, and predestination (qada/qadar).

C. Morals (Akhlaq):

- a. Practicing exemplary morals.
- b. Interfaith dialogues to promote tolerance.
- c. Strengthening unity amidst diversity.

D. Islamic Jurisprudence (Fikih):

- a. Performing worship rituals such as almsgiving (zakat), pilgrimage (hajj), and observing dietary rules (halal and haram).
- b. Understanding different forms of fasting.

E. Islamic Civilization History:

- a. The life journey of Prophet Muhammad SAW.
- b. Historical accounts of the caliphate period (khulafaur rasyidin).

How does the Islamic religious education curriculum reflect the needs of future generations?

The research questions of this paper are:

1. Does the curriculum reflect the needs of future generations?
2. To what extent do schools and educators utilize technology in teaching Islamic Religious Education?
3. What are the gaps between traditional Islamic curriculum content and the 21st-century skills needed by students?

The purposes of this research are:

1. To explore whether the current Islamic Religious Education curriculum aligns with the needs and expectations of future generations, focusing on its relevance and adaptability to changing societal and educational demands.
2. To assess the extent to which schools and educators integrate technology into teaching Islamic Religious Education, identifying patterns, challenges, and opportunities for enhancing digital literacy and teaching effectiveness.
3. To identify and analyze the gaps between the traditional content of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum and the essential 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and global citizenship, that students need to thrive in a modern world.

RESEARCH METHODS

There are some methods used in this research.

1. Interviews with curriculum developers and teachers to assess their perceptions of the curriculum's relevance to future challenges.
This interview was needed to find out whether the current curriculum in line with the needs of future generations. The current curriculum prioritizes theological and moral teachings but does not explicitly address future-oriented competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and global citizenship. While the inclusion of practical skills (e.g., wudu, salat) ensures students can implement Islamic teachings in daily life, the curriculum lacks a direct connection to modern challenges, such as environmental ethics, technological advancements, and multicultural engagement.
2. Classroom observations to analyze the practical use of technology in teaching Islamic education.
Technology use in teaching PAI is minimal, with limited access to digital tools and resources in most schools. Barriers include insufficient teacher training, lack of infrastructure, and absence of guidelines for integrating technology into Islamic education.
3. Surveys of students and parents to evaluate how well the curriculum prepares students for modern challenges.
The curriculum heavily emphasizes theological understanding and moral development but does not address essential 21st-century skills such as digital literacy, collaboration, and interdisciplinary learning. Students are not explicitly taught how to apply Islamic principles in solving modern-day issues like environmental crises, financial ethics, or social justice.
4. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with educators and stakeholders to gather suggestions for effective technology use on balancing tradition with modern demands. Integration of Modern Values: Embedding Islamic principles in discussions about global issues like climate change and human rights can make the curriculum more relevant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected from surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and curriculum analysis, the following key findings emerged. The curriculum for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and character education for elementary and junior high schools demonstrates a structured approach to instilling Islamic values and practical skills in students. However, it also presents opportunities for enhancement, particularly in preparing students for the demands of the 21st century.

These are the analysis of the curriculum curriculum for Islamic Religious

Education (PAI):

1. The Reflection of the Curriculum on the Needs of Future Generations

The curriculum heavily emphasizes theological concepts (e.g., akidah and fikih), with minimal focus on future-oriented competencies like problem-solving, innovation, and global citizenship. The teachers expressed concerns about the lack of interdisciplinary links in the curriculum, limiting its relevance to students' daily lives and modern societal issues.

2. Integration of Technology in Islamic Religious Education

Students who experienced technology-enhanced lessons reported higher engagement and better understanding of concepts. Educators acknowledged the potential of technology to make lessons more engaging but highlighted the need for structured guidance and resources.

3. Gaps Between Traditional Content and 21st-Century Skills

Topics such as environmental ethics, social justice, and global citizenship, which align with 21st-century competencies, are absent. The students felt that PAI lessons were disconnected from real-world applications. The teachers reported that the curriculum leaves little room for student-centered or project-based learning approaches. Despite its strengths, the curriculum lacks a future-oriented approach. The absence of 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and global citizenship creates a disconnect between Islamic teachings and modern challenges. This gap may hinder students' ability to apply Islamic principles in contemporary contexts, such as ethical decision-making in technology use or addressing global environmental issues.

The detailed analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of PAI curriculum is as follow:

1. Strengths

a. Holistic Approach

The curriculum integrates faith (akidah), worship (fikih), moral values (akhlak), and historical understanding, providing a comprehensive Islamic education. It emphasizes character building through practical teachings, such as respect for diversity, unity, and interfaith dialogue, which are crucial in Indonesia's multicultural context.

b. Progression Across Phases

The curriculum is developmentally appropriate, gradually building from basic concepts in early grades to deeper theological understanding and historical context in higher grades. For example: The early grades focus on basic literacy in Qur'anic recitation and foundational faith, and the upper grades introduce more complex topics, such as zakat, puasa sunnah, and the life of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

c. Emphasis on Practical Application

Topics such as wudu, salat, and halal and haram promote practical knowledge, ensuring students can implement Islamic teachings in their daily lives.

2. Weaknesses

a. Limited Integration of 21st-Century Skills

The curriculum does not sufficiently emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, or collaborative learning. Global citizenship and digital literacy, which are crucial in the modern world, are not explicitly addressed.

b. Insufficient Use of Technology

There is a lack of integration of digital tools and online learning platforms in the teaching and learning process. The absence of guidelines for using technology in PAI lessons may hinder student engagement, particularly in urban areas where students are more tech-savvy.

c. Lack of Interdisciplinary Links

The curriculum is largely standalone and does not integrate Islamic education with other subjects, such as science, history, or civic education. This limits the ability of students to connect Islamic values to real-world issues, such as environmental sustainability or global social justice.

3. Opportunities

- a. **Modernization Through Technology**
The integration of digital tools (e.g., educational apps, e-learning platforms, multimedia) can make learning more engaging and interactive. For example: Qur'an apps can help students improve their recitation. Online discussions can foster dialogue on contemporary moral and ethical issues.
 - b. **Bridging Traditional Values with Contemporary Issues**
The curriculum has the potential to address modern challenges, such as: Environmental ethics in Islam, linked to global climate change. Human rights and Islamic teachings on justice and equity. The importance of financial ethics, such as avoiding riba (usury), in the context of modern economics.
 - c. **Teacher Training and Development**
By equipping teachers with modern pedagogical skills and technology training, the curriculum can be delivered more effectively. Professional development programs focusing on blended learning and student-centered teaching methods can enhance the curriculum's impact.
4. **Challenges**
- a. **Resistance to Change**
Modernizing Islamic education may face resistance from traditionalist groups who prioritize preserving classical approaches. Balancing traditional values with modern pedagogical practices requires careful negotiation to ensure acceptance.
 - b. **Infrastructure and Resources**
Schools, especially in rural areas, may lack the infrastructure to support technology integration, such as internet access or digital devices. Limited funding may hinder the development and distribution of updated teaching materials.
 - c. **Consistency Across Schools**
Implementation may vary significantly across regions, leading to inequities in educational quality. Urban schools may advance faster in integrating modern approaches compared to their rural counterparts.

CONCLUSION

The modernization of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Elementary School (SD) and Junior High School (SMP) is essential to ensure that it aligns with the evolving needs of the 21st century. While the current curriculum successfully instills foundational theological knowledge, moral values, and practical rituals, it falls short in addressing competencies required for contemporary challenges, such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and global citizenship.

The curriculum must expand beyond traditional content to include critical thinking, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary approaches that link Islamic principles to real-world issues. There should be technology integration which digital tools and e-learning platforms hold great potential to enhance engagement and learning outcomes. However, limited access to infrastructure and insufficient teacher training remains significant barriers. The topics such as environmental ethics, financial integrity, and social justice should be incorporated into the curriculum to prepare students for global and societal complexities.

Addressing these gaps requires a multi-faceted approach:

1. **Curriculum Reform:** revise the curriculum to balance traditional Islamic values with modern educational needs.
2. **Teacher Professional Development:** Equip educators with the skills and resources necessary for delivering modernized content and utilizing technology effectively.
3. **Infrastructure Investment:** Ensure that schools, particularly in rural areas, have access to the necessary tools and technologies for digital learning.

By adopting these measures, the Islamic Religious Education curriculum can maintain its traditional essence while evolving to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. This will empower students not only to be morally grounded but also to thrive as critical thinkers and global citizens in the 21st century.

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