

# Digital-Based Islamic Religious Learning Model: A Transformative Curriculum Approach In High School

Abd Rahman Battiar  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar

Email: [abdul.rahman@unismuh.ac.id](mailto:abdul.rahman@unismuh.ac.id)

## Abstract

The digitalization of education has catalyzed significant transformations in pedagogical approaches, particularly within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in secondary schools. This study investigates how digital tools and transformative curriculum frameworks intersect to enhance the relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness of IRE. The aim is to examine the role of digital pedagogy in reshaping curriculum delivery and religious learning experiences among adolescent learners.

Using a systematic literature review methodology, peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2025 were analyzed from Scopus-indexed journals. Selection criteria included relevance to Islamic education, digital learning, curriculum transformation, and secondary educational settings. Thematic synthesis revealed five dominant trends: digital recontextualization of Islamic content; implementation of student-centered, project-based pedagogies; redefined teacher roles; decentralized religious authority through digital media; and institutional readiness challenges.

The results demonstrate that digital platforms when integrated within a transformative curriculum enable meaningful engagement with Islamic teachings, support student agency, and promote contextual understanding of religious values. Teachers act as facilitators in this ecosystem, requiring both pedagogical innovation and digital competence. The study further highlights the implications of digital religious authority on learners' perceptions and the necessity for critical digital literacy in religious instruction.

In conclusion, the integration of digital tools in IRE, supported by a transformative pedagogical model, offers a robust pathway for renewing religious education. These findings contribute to current discourse on digital religious pedagogy and suggest a conceptual framework for future curriculum development and empirical research.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Religious Education, digital pedagogy, transformative curriculum, secondary school, project-based learning, religious authority, teacher competence*

## 1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has changed the global education landscape, including Islamic religious education. The need for learning that is more flexible, adaptive, and relevant to the conditions of the times requires educational institutions, especially at the secondary school level, to transform their learning approaches. Islamic religious learning, which previously relied heavily on conventional lecture methods, is now required to adopt a technology-based approach in order to be able to reach the digital generation effectively (Afriyanto & Anandari, 2024). The use of digital media in the context of Islamic education has been proven to increase student participation and understanding of religious values in a more interactive manner (Taufik, 2020). In addition, the existence of a transformative curriculum is increasingly taken into account as an alternative approach in bridging the need for contextual and applicative spiritual learning (Pabbajah et al., 2021). In this case, the curriculum is not only positioned as a material structure, but as a tool for social and spiritual transformation that is in harmony with technological advances (Siregar et al., 2020). Therefore, the integration between digital technology and transformative curriculum is one of the strategic innovations in answering the challenges of religious education in the contemporary era (Masturin, 2022).

A transformative curriculum is an educational approach that emphasizes changing students' mindsets through critical reflection, interactive dialogue, and meaningful learning experiences. This approach is very suitable to be applied in the context of Islamic religious learning because it is in line with the purpose of Islamic education itself, which is to form the character and moral awareness of students. In the midst of the rapid flow of digital information, students need pedagogical guidance that can shape their deep understanding of Islamic values. Digital-based religious education, if designed with transformative principles, can be an effective medium for character formation (Assa'idi, 2021). In addition, through this approach, teachers play the role of facilitators who direct students in the process of reflection on their daily values and actions (Firduas & Sulandra, 2021). The use of digital devices such as interactive applications, educational videos, and online platforms is a potential means of conveying religious teachings in a contextual and interesting way (Abubakari, 2025). Furthermore, this model allows for personalization in learning, where the material is tailored to the individual needs and abilities of students (Hakim, 2023). This makes the learning process more effective in forming value awareness than just memorizing teaching materials (Verdeflor et al., 2024).

Secondary schools as formal educational institutions have a strategic role in transforming religious education that is relevant to the development of the times. Unfortunately, many schools still face obstacles in adopting technology, both in terms of infrastructure, teacher readiness, and curriculum that is not responsive to digital challenges. In this case, policy support and systematic training are needed to increase the capacity of teachers in developing digital-based PAI materials (Syihabuddin, 2021). Project-based approaches or *Project Based Learning* that have been successfully applied in various subjects also have the potential to be integrated in religious education (Siregar et al., 2020). This approach can shape students' active involvement through projects oriented towards the application of Islamic values in real life (Roure et al., 2019). Thus, strengthening the affective and spiritual dimensions of students can be achieved through digital-based collaborative learning (Purnomo et al., 2021). In addition, school principals as educational leaders also

have an important role in encouraging innovation and technological adaptation in the religious learning process (Zainuddin, 2022).

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## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach aimed at synthesizing existing empirical studies on digital-based Islamic religious education with a transformative curriculum perspective in secondary schools. The SLR design followed established protocols to ensure transparency, replicability, and rigor. The scope was delineated based on the research question addressing how digital transformation influences the design, implementation, and outcomes of Islamic religious education in middle schools.

### **2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

To identify relevant literature, we applied strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they: (1) discussed Islamic religious education, (2) involved digital or technology-enhanced instructional designs, (3) focused on secondary education contexts, and (4) were published between 2020–2025. Articles outside the educational context or those focusing solely on theological discourse without pedagogical analysis were excluded.

### **2.3 Data Sources and Search Strategy**

Data were collected from Scopus-indexed publications to ensure the academic quality of the literature. The search strategy incorporated the keywords: “Islamic education”, “digital learning”, “transformative curriculum”, and “secondary schools”. Boolean operators were applied to refine the query: ("Islamic religious education" OR "PAI") AND ("digital" OR "technology-enhanced learning") AND ("curriculum" OR "transformative") AND ("secondary school" OR "SMP"). This process resulted in the selection of relevant peer-reviewed articles, including those by Afriyanto & Anandari (2024), Taufik (2020), Pabbajah et al. (2021), Siregar et al. (2020), and Masturin (2022).

## 2.4 Study Selection and Screening

Initial screening involved title and abstract review, followed by full-text analysis for those articles that met the inclusion criteria. Articles were then evaluated for quality based on the clarity of objectives, methodological soundness, and relevance to digital transformation in Islamic education.

## 2.5 Data Extraction and Synthesis

A structured data extraction form was used to retrieve the following elements from each study: publication year, author(s), research context, educational level, digital tools or methods used, curricular framework, and pedagogical outcomes. The extracted data were then synthesized using thematic analysis to identify recurrent patterns, conceptual frameworks, and instructional strategies.

## 2.6 Quality Assessment

Each selected study underwent a quality assessment using adapted criteria based on credibility, methodological rigor, and relevance to the research question. The review ensured all included studies had undergone peer review and presented empirical or conceptual contributions to the field of Islamic digital pedagogy.

## 2.7 Ethical Considerations

As this study is a review of previously published literature, ethical clearance was not required. However, all sources have been duly cited and referenced to maintain academic integrity.

# 3. Theoretical Framework/Background

## 3.1 Digital Transformation in Islamic Religious Education

The integration of digital technologies into Islamic religious education represents a paradigmatic shift from traditional to contemporary pedagogical practices. As societies increasingly adopt digital tools, educational institutions are compelled to reconfigure instructional delivery to ensure relevance, accessibility, and engagement. This transition is especially significant in religious education, where traditional methods—predominantly oral, text-based, and teacher-centered—are challenged by demands for interactivity and learner autonomy in the digital era. Afriyanto and Anandari (2024) argue that the transformation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in high schools into digital-based learning has broadened the scope and depth of student engagement with religious values. Moreover, the strategic role of IRE in shaping moral character amidst digital distractions remains central. Taufik (2020) emphasizes that despite the proliferation of digital culture, Islamic education must retain its core function in forming students' ethical and spiritual character, thereby making the role of digital pedagogy both critical and sensitive. In this regard, digital technologies serve as both tools for dissemination and platforms for value internalization. Masturin (2022) illustrates the use of Android-based applications to enhance student understanding and motivation in religious subjects, highlighting how content modularization and visualization contribute to meaningful learning experiences.

The digital environment also reshapes religious authority and knowledge acquisition. Pabbajah et al. (2021) describe how Indonesian Muslim youth navigate religious learning

through digital media, shifting from scriptural authority to virtual influencers and user-generated religious content. This reorientation necessitates a new instructional paradigm where teachers act as curators and facilitators of credible religious knowledge within digital ecosystems. Consequently, Islamic education must incorporate digital literacy alongside theological instruction to empower students in evaluating religious information critically. In alignment with these developments, Siregar et al. (2020) underscore the relevance of project-based learning (PJBL) in integrating religious education with digital tools to foster reflective, participatory, and problem-solving skills in students. Such approaches, situated within digital learning environments, can potentially realign Islamic pedagogy with 21st-century competencies while maintaining doctrinal integrity.

### 3.2 The Transformative Curriculum Approach

The transformative curriculum is a pedagogical framework that seeks to foster critical consciousness, ethical reflection, and social engagement. Rooted in Freirean educational philosophy, it challenges traditional transmission models of education in favor of dialogical, learner-centered, and praxis-oriented approaches. Within the context of Islamic education, this approach promotes the internalization of religious principles not merely through memorization, but via meaningful engagement with real-world contexts and moral dilemmas.

According to Assa'idi (2021), religious education in Islamic institutions often fluctuates between ideological idealism and practical compromise, underscoring the need for curricular reform that aligns Islamic teachings with contemporary social realities. The transformative curriculum thus provides a framework for designing instructional content that is both contextually responsive and spiritually grounded. It entails a shift from rigid content delivery to adaptive, inquiry-driven learning, where students construct understanding through exploration and reflection.

This framework aligns with digital pedagogy by allowing multiple entry points for learning and knowledge co-construction. Through interactive platforms, simulations, and digital storytelling, students can engage in thematic exploration of religious values such as justice, compassion, and stewardship. As highlighted by Roure et al. (2019), the integration of situational interest dimensions—such as novelty, relevance, and challenge—into learning environments significantly enhances academic motivation and satisfaction.

Further, the transformative approach is reinforced by parental and community involvement in the educational process. Purnomo et al. (2021) emphasize the crucial role of parental engagement in online learning, particularly in values-based education where reinforcement beyond the classroom is vital. Thus, the curriculum must be designed to extend beyond the school setting, fostering collaboration among educators, families, and religious communities.

### 3.3 Digital Pedagogy in Secondary Islamic Education

In secondary education, digital pedagogy requires both technological infrastructure and pedagogical competence. Effective implementation depends not only on access to tools but also on teacher readiness, institutional support, and curricular coherence. Verdeflor et al. (2024) suggest that instructional management strategies must adapt to technological disruptions through dynamic and responsive planning. This includes the integration of

hybrid learning models, asynchronous modules, and personalized feedback systems tailored to student needs.

Furthermore, teacher training must include competencies in digital content creation, learning analytics, and ethical instruction. Syihabuddin (2021) advocates for systematic professional development programs that equip religious educators with skills in designing interactive, multimedia-rich lessons that align with Islamic epistemology. The success of digital religious education also depends on fostering a critical digital literacy, enabling students to navigate, assess, and produce religious knowledge in online environments responsibly.

Digital platforms also facilitate collaboration, dialogue, and reflection—hallmarks of transformative learning. Tools such as online forums, virtual classrooms, and peer-review systems can enhance student engagement and deepen their understanding of religious themes. As demonstrated by Huang and Cherng (2021), reciprocal academic interactions and emotional support in online learning contexts positively influence learner efficacy and cognitive outcomes.

### 3.4 Reconfiguring Religious Authority in the Digital Sphere

One of the profound implications of digitalization in Islamic education is the reconfiguration of religious authority. Traditional hierarchies of knowledge transmission are increasingly contested by decentralized, digital forms of religious discourse. Pabbajah et al. (2021) describe how young Muslims engage with religious content across YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp, often valuing relatability over scholarly credentials. This trend requires educators to not only reaffirm the credibility of traditional Islamic scholarship but also to understand and utilize digital media to mediate these engagements.

Consequently, the curriculum must incorporate media literacy, ethical guidelines for online engagement, and critical evaluation frameworks. These components equip students to discern credible religious sources and participate responsibly in digital religious communities. Furthermore, educators must model digital ethics and facilitate discussions on the implications of online religious expression, privacy, and community standards.

### 3.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Drawing on the insights above, this study adopts a conceptual framework that integrates the transformative curriculum approach with digital pedagogical strategies within the domain of Islamic religious education. The framework is built upon five interrelated constructs:

1. **Transformative Curriculum Design:** Emphasizing relevance, contextualization, and moral agency.
2. **Digital Instructional Tools:** Including apps, learning management systems, and multimedia content.
3. **Teacher Digital Competence:** Professional capacity in digital pedagogy and ethical instruction.
4. **Student Engagement and Agency:** Active participation in constructing religious knowledge.
5. **Religious Literacy in Digital Spaces:** Critical engagement with religious content in virtual environments.

Figure Suggestion: *Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Digital-Transformative Islamic Education Model.* This figure illustrates the interaction among curriculum design, digital pedagogy, teacher competencies, student agency, and digital religious literacy.

#### **4. Review of Themes/Findings**

##### **4.1 Digital Mediation and Curriculum Transformation in Islamic Religious Education**

The systematic review yielded several dominant themes across the corpus of selected literature, encapsulating the interplay between digital technologies and curriculum transformation in Islamic religious education (IRE) at the secondary level. As outlined in *Table XX. Summary of Thematic Categories and Key References*, the analysis identified five recurring themes: (1) Recontextualization of religious content in digital formats, (2) Emergence of student-centered and project-based learning, (3) Shifts in teacher roles and pedagogical strategies, (4) Redefinition of religious authority in digital spaces, and (5) Integration challenges and institutional readiness.

#### **Table XX. Summary of Thematic Categories and Key References:**

*Thematic synthesis of the literature highlighting key conceptual and empirical contributions related to digital Islamic religious education and curriculum transformation.*

##### **Recontextualization of Religious Content**

One of the most salient findings involves the digital reconfiguration of religious content. Across the reviewed studies, there is a strong consensus that digital platforms enable the reinterpretation and repackaging of traditional Islamic teachings into more engaging, visual, and interactive formats. Masturin (2022) provides compelling evidence of how Android-based applications enhance students' motivation and conceptual understanding by integrating text, visuals, and audio-visual prompts to teach core values of Islam in a modular and gamified structure. This transformation is not merely cosmetic but pedagogically strategic, aligning with transformative curriculum principles that emphasize accessibility and learner engagement, as discussed in Section 3.2.

Taufik (2020) similarly underscores that the infusion of digital media into IRE preserves the religious message while recontextualizing its delivery to match students' digital literacies and media consumption habits. These findings validate the hypothesis that digital pedagogy can enhance the relevance and uptake of religious knowledge, especially when the curriculum is designed to accommodate multimodal learning preferences.

##### **Student-Centered and Project-Based Pedagogies**

A notable shift in pedagogical models is observed from teacher-centered transmission towards student-centered, inquiry-driven learning. The implementation of project-based learning (PjBL) models, as evidenced in Siregar et al. (2020), exemplifies how students can explore religious concepts through real-world tasks, such as community service projects or multimedia campaigns on Islamic ethics. This approach fosters critical thinking, collaboration, and moral reflection—core tenets of the transformative curriculum (Section 3.2).

The use of digital tools in PjBL, including video editing software, mobile apps, and collaborative platforms, enhances student agency and provides avenues for personalized learning. This theme also confirms the theoretical framework's emphasis on student

engagement and agency (Figure 2), supporting the notion that curriculum transformation in digital contexts requires active learner participation.

### **Pedagogical Role Reconfiguration**

Teachers' roles in digital IRE settings are undergoing substantive redefinition. Instead of being sole content deliverers, teachers function as facilitators, digital curators, and co-learners. Afriyanto and Anandari (2024) illustrate how secondary school teachers navigate the transition to digital IRE by adopting blended learning strategies and interactive assessments that prioritize feedback and formative evaluation.

However, Pabbajah et al. (2021) caution that this reconfiguration demands not only digital competencies but also epistemological shifts among educators who must negotiate between traditional authority and participatory digital norms. These dual responsibilities highlight the importance of teacher professional development, as emphasized in Syihabuddin (2021), which advocates for continuous training in pedagogical and technological integration.

### **Digital Religious Authority and Youth Engagement**

The reconfiguration of religious authority in digital spaces emerges as both a challenge and an opportunity. Youth engagement with Islamic teachings increasingly occurs outside formal schooling, mediated by social media influencers, podcasts, and user-generated religious content. As documented by Pabbajah et al. (2021), students often place trust in digital preachers who communicate in relatable, visually appealing formats. This decentralization of authority reinforces the need for schools to incorporate media literacy into IRE curricula to equip students with critical evaluative skills.

Moreover, this phenomenon underscores the importance of designing curriculum that is not only doctrinally sound but also culturally resonant with youth digital culture, a notion echoed in Huang and Cherng (2021), who found that emotionally supportive and interactive digital environments enhance learning efficacy and satisfaction.

### **Institutional Integration and Curriculum Readiness**

Finally, institutional readiness remains a significant factor influencing the success of digital IRE transformation. While many studies highlight the potential of digital platforms, their implementation is frequently hindered by infrastructural limitations, policy gaps, and inconsistent curricular alignment. Verdeflor et al. (2024) assert that without systemic instructional management strategies, digital integration efforts tend to be fragmented and unsustainable.

This theme correlates directly with the "Teacher Digital Competence" and "Institutional Support" dimensions of the conceptual framework outlined in Section 3.5. The findings reinforce the hypothesis that curriculum transformation in IRE requires holistic reform, encompassing policy, pedagogy, infrastructure, and capacity-building efforts.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The thematic findings substantiate the theoretical premise that digital transformation in Islamic religious education is best achieved through a transformative curriculum approach. The identified themes—particularly those related to student agency, content recontextualization, and pedagogical role shifts—align with Freirean principles of dialogical and contextual learning (Section 3.2). Moreover, they validate the integrative

conceptual framework developed in this study (Figure 2), offering empirical grounding for each construct.

Practically, the findings suggest several action points for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. First, curriculum design must prioritize multimodal delivery and inquiry-based pedagogy. Second, teacher training programs should embed digital pedagogical competencies alongside theological depth. Third, institutional strategies must include infrastructure investment and curricular policy revisions to support sustained digital transformation.

## 5. Conclusion

This study critically examined the integration of digital technologies within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) through the lens of a transformative curriculum in secondary schools. By synthesizing findings from a systematic literature review of recent peer-reviewed sources, the research identified five key thematic domains: digital recontextualization of religious content, adoption of student-centered and project-based pedagogies, evolving teacher roles, digital reshaping of religious authority, and challenges of institutional integration.

The findings confirm that digital-based IRE not only enhances students' engagement and understanding but also supports the core values of transformative education—critical reflection, active participation, and contextual learning. Specifically, multimedia and mobile learning tools were shown to foster motivation and accessibility, while project-based learning approaches deepened moral and spiritual understanding. Furthermore, the evolving role of teachers as digital facilitators underlines the necessity of professional development that equips them with both technological and theological competencies. This study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on digital religious pedagogy by framing the discourse within a coherent theoretical structure that combines digital literacy, educational transformation, and religious contextualization. It highlights that curriculum innovation in IRE must consider not only content but also pedagogy, learner agency, and technological infrastructure.

Future research should focus on empirical implementation of the proposed conceptual framework across diverse educational contexts to evaluate its applicability and impact. Additionally, longitudinal studies are recommended to assess the sustained effects of digital religious education on students' character development and religious identity formation.

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