

Revitalizing Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Era: Integrating Islamic Epistemology and Manhaj Al-Mahabbah

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Abstract

This library research examines the revitalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the digital era through the framework of Islamic epistemology and Love-Based Curriculum (Manhaj Al-Mahabbah). Employing a systematic literature review of primary sources, including the works of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and contemporary Islamic education literature indexed in Scopus, WOS, and Sinta, this study identifies three principal crises in PAI: an epistemological crisis (disconnection between knowledge and lived experience), a methodological crisis (dominance of cognitive-memorization approaches), and an ecosystem crisis (fragmentation between formal, non-formal, and informal digital Islamic education). Based on these findings, this study proposes an integrated revitalization formula that synergizes the pesantren principle of al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-salih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadid al-aslah, Al-Attas' concept of ta'dib, and Manhaj Al-Mahabbah as the transformative driving force. Implications include reorienting PAI objectives from cognitive transfer toward the formation of digital insan adabi, transforming the PAI teacher's role into that of a digital adab mentor (murabbi adab digital), and building an integrated digital PAI ecosystem.

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education; Digital Education; Ta'dib; Manhaj Al-Mahabbah; Islamic Epistemology*

A. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia confronts an unprecedented paradox. On one hand, contemporary Muslim generations enjoy unprecedented access to Islamic sources—the Qur'an, hadith, and classical literature—through digital platforms. On the other hand, empirical evidence indicates that this ease of access does not translate proportionally into a deeper internalization of Islamic values in students' daily lives (Hamim et al., 2026). This phenomenon reflects what may be termed an epistemological crisis in PAI: a condition in which the educational system produces individuals who possess substantial knowledge about Islam, yet do not experience Islam as a transformative way of life. The crisis is further compounded by digital disruption, which has fundamentally altered how younger generations acquire, process, and internalize knowledge (Muqoyyidin & Widiyaningsih, 2021; Anwar, 2026).

Prior research has identified the urgency of transforming PAI in the digital era. Hendrawati (2025) asserts that technology-based curriculum transformation constitutes a strategic necessity rather than a mere methodological option. Nevertheless, the majority of existing studies remain limited to the instrumentation dimension—how to integrate digital media into PAI instruction—without addressing its epistemological roots—specifically, which worldview should serve as the foundation of such integration. This conceptual gap constitutes the point of departure for the

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present study. Rather than offering purely technological solutions, this research poses a more fundamental question: How can Islamic epistemology—particularly through Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' concept of *ta'dib* and the *pesantren* principle of *al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-salih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadid al-aslah*—serve as the foundational framework for an authentic yet digitally responsive revitalization of PAI?

Specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify and analyze the epistemological, methodological, and ecosystem crises of PAI in the digital era; (2) examine the conceptual foundations of PAI revitalization grounded in Islamic epistemology and the Love-Based Curriculum (*Manhaj Al-Mahabbah*); and (3) formulate an integrated and operationalizable PAI revitalization formula applicable to the Indonesian Islamic education context.

The study offers dual contributions: a theoretical synthesis that bridges classical Islamic epistemological traditions and contemporary pedagogical frameworks, and a practical blueprint for operationalizing PAI revitalization. The findings are intended to serve as a scholarly reference for policymakers, academics, and Islamic education practitioners in responding critically and constructively to the challenges of the digital era.

B. Methods

This study adopts a library research approach employing the systematic literature review (SLR) methodology. This method was selected given the conceptual-epistemological nature of the research questions, for which extracting meaning from primary and secondary literature corpora is more appropriate than collecting empirical field data (Mann, 2015; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2023). Snyder (2019) defines the literature review as a legitimate research methodology for constructing new conceptual frameworks, integrating dispersed findings, and identifying gaps in existing literature. In the present study, SLR was specifically employed to map the conceptual landscape of digital PAI revitalization and to synthesize perspectives from multiple intellectual traditions—classical Islam, contemporary Islamic philosophy of education, and modern digital pedagogy.

The data sources encompass two categories. First, primary sources include: (a) the authoritative works of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, principally *The Concept of Education in Islam* (1980) and *Islam and Secularism* (1986); (b) relevant classical *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh* literature; and (c) Islamic education curriculum policy documents in Indonesia. Second, secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed articles from reputable journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science (WOS), Sinta, and Google Scholar, published between 2015 and 2025. The literature search was conducted through Google Scholar, Scopus, and EBSCO using the following keywords: Islamic education digital transformation, PAI revitalization, Islamic epistemology curriculum, *ta'dib* Al-Attas, love-based curriculum, and their Indonesian-language equivalents.

Data analysis proceeded through three stages. The first stage involved identification and selection: from the identified articles, those meeting the inclusion criteria (topical relevance, journal reputation, and full-text availability) were selected. The second stage comprised extraction and categorization: findings were mapped into three analytical categories—PAI crises, epistemological foundations, and revitalization strategies. The third stage entailed interpretive synthesis: integrating findings from multiple sources to construct a coherent revitalization formula (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2023). Analytical validity was ensured through source triangulation—comparing findings across distinct intellectual traditions (classical Islam, modern Islam, and Western pedagogy)—and informal member checking, which incorporated the perspectives of Islamic education scholars into the interpretive process.

C. Results and Discussion

The Epistemological, Methodological, and Ecosystem Crises of Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Era

The Epistemological Crisis

The literature review reveals that the most fundamental challenge confronting Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the digital era is not a deficit of instructional technology, but rather an epistemological crisis: a fundamental disconnection between the acquisition of Islamic knowledge (knowing Islam) and its internalization and practice (living Islam). In practice, PAI instruction remains predominantly oriented toward the transmission of religious information rather than toward the cultivation of students' spiritual consciousness, moral character, and adab (ethical refinement). Consequently, educational achievement is often assessed through cognitive outcomes, while the affective and spiritual dimensions—which constitute the primary objectives of Islamic education—receive insufficient attention.

This phenomenon resonates with the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, who argues that the central crisis of modern Islamic education lies not in an insufficiency of knowledge but in the loss of adab. According to Al-Attas, this loss of adab generates a misunderstanding of the nature of knowledge, causing human beings to misplace knowledge, technology, and themselves within the correct order of things. Islamic education, therefore, must not merely transfer knowledge; it must cultivate human beings capable of recognizing and situating all things within the hierarchical order of values established by God (Allah SWT). This perspective constitutes a vital epistemological foundation for the revitalization of PAI in the digital era.

This perspective is reinforced by J. Mark Halstead (2004), who argues that Islamic education is distinguished from secular educational paradigms by its insistence on the unity of knowledge: Islamic education regards knowledge as inseparable from its moral, spiritual, and theocentric dimensions. The educational process is therefore directed not only toward intellectual development but also toward the formation of moral character, social responsibility, and spiritual proximity to God. When educational orientation reduces learning to mere information acquisition, a fundamental reductionism occurs, distorting the very nature of Islamic education.

The epistemological crisis assumes additional complexity within the digital ecosystem. The rapid velocity of information flows, social media algorithms, and the culture of instant information consumption condition students to access fragmented knowledge rather than engage in reflective, deep learning. Religious information is frequently received in the form of short-form videos, quotations, or decontextualized sermon excerpts, resulting in a partial and insufficiently contextualized understanding of religion. This environment risks undermining students' critical-thinking capacities and diminishing the internalization of Islamic values.

Scholarship in educational technology demonstrates that the effective use of digital technology cannot rest on the sophistication of devices alone but must be built upon an appropriate epistemological framework. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework developed by Punya Mishra (2013) and Matthew J. Koehler (2006) emphasizes that technology integration must attend holistically to the interrelationships among content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge. Technology is not an end in itself but an instructional instrument that must be directed toward strengthening meaningful learning processes.

In the PAI context, these findings indicate that the root of the problem is not low digital media use but the absence of an epistemological paradigm capable of harmoniously integrating knowledge, adab, and technology. Revitalization of PAI, therefore, cannot be accomplished through digitizing instructional materials or deploying online learning platforms alone; it must begin with the reconstruction of an Islamic educational epistemology that positions technology as a means of forming the insan adabi rather than merely producing students with high digital literacy. Accordingly, digital transformation within PAI must remain oriented toward the primary objective of Islamic education: the formation of human beings who are learned, ethically refined, and God-conscious (*muttaqin*).

The Methodological Crisis

The literature review demonstrates that the principal challenge facing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the digital era extends beyond infrastructural limitations to encompass the continued dominance of knowledge-transmission paradigms over transformative learning approaches. In many schools and madrasas, PAI instruction remains dominated by lecture-based delivery, rote memorization, and written-examination-based assessment that prioritize cognitive achievement, while the development of critical thinking, spiritual reflection, collaboration, creativity, and authentic problem-solving receives inadequate attention. Consequently, digital technology is more frequently deployed as a medium for content delivery than as an instrument for constructing learning experiences that transform knowledge into religious consciousness, attitudes, and behavior.

This situation aligns with the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework developed by Mishra and Koehler (2006). According to this framework, the success of technology integration is determined not by proficiency with digital devices alone, but by the teacher's capacity to integrate content, pedagogical, and technological knowledge synergistically. Koehler, Mishra, and Cain (2013) further argue that technology will enhance the quality of learning only when selected based on pedagogical objectives and content characteristics, rather than merely following technological trends or substituting conventional instructional media. Accordingly, the effectiveness of digital learning is contingent upon the quality of pedagogical design, not on the sophistication of the technology deployed.

International research corroborates these findings. The OECD Digital Education Outlook (2025) affirms that investment in digital devices does not automatically improve learning outcomes without enhanced teacher professional competence and a paradigm shift in pedagogy. Similarly, the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (ICT-CFT) Version 3 (2011) emphasizes that teachers' digital competence must encompass not only technical proficiency but also the ability to design student-centered learning, develop digital learning resources, implement authentic assessment, build collaborative learning communities, and guide students toward critical, ethical, and responsible technology use. Digital transformation is, in essence, a pedagogical transformation that positions technology as a means of enriching the learning process, not as an educational end in itself.

Empirical evidence on the centrality of digital pedagogical competence is provided by Tzafilkou, Perifanou, and Economides (2023), who developed a teacher digital competence measurement instrument across six dimensions: teaching preparation, teaching delivery, teaching evaluation, professional development, school development, and innovating education. Their findings reveal that while most teachers have mastered basic technology skills, they encounter significant difficulties in leveraging technology to create instructional innovation, enhance assessment quality, and drive institutional transformation. This confirms that the digitalization of education cannot be measured by the rate of technology adoption alone but must

be evaluated by technology's capacity to improve the quality of learning processes and to construct meaningful learning experiences.

In the PAI context, these challenges take on additional complexity because the learning process aims not merely to develop academic competencies but to form students' personality, moral character, and spirituality. Research on TPACK implementation in Islamic education indicates that technology use in madrasas and Islamic schools remains predominantly confined to digitizing instructional materials and administrative management, while pedagogical transformation integrating Islamic values into digital learning experiences remains comparatively limited. Consequently, technology is frequently employed to accelerate the delivery of religious information without accompanying processes of value internalization, adab formation, or the strengthening of students' spiritual consciousness.

These findings suggest that the TPACK framework, although it provides a robust foundation for integrating technology into instruction, does not fully address the epistemological characteristics of Islamic Religious Education. TPACK was developed within a general education paradigm that does not explicitly incorporate the dimensions of tawhid (divine unity), adab, and the Islamic worldview as bases for pedagogical decision-making. Yet within Islamic education, the selection of technology, instructional strategies, and forms of digital interaction is not epistemologically neutral; all must be directed by Islamic educational objectives—namely, the formation of human beings who are faithful, knowledgeable, ethically refined, and responsible.

Based on this synthesis, the present study proposes developing Islamic Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (I-TPACK) as a conceptual extension of the TPACK model. Unlike TPACK, which emphasizes the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content, I-TPACK adds a dimension of Islamic Worldview Knowledge (IWK) as an epistemological foundation directing the entire learning process. This dimension ensures that every decision regarding technology use, method selection, and curriculum design remains attentive to the principles of tawhid, adab, maqasid al-shari'ah, and the objective of forming the insan adabi. Technology is thereby repositioned not as the primary driver of education but as an instrument supporting the process of ta'dib and the internalization of Islamic values.

This conceptualization of I-TPACK simultaneously reconceptualizes the paradigm of the PAI educator in the digital era. The teacher is no longer positioned merely as a technology user but as a *murabbi digital*—an educator capable of integrating pedagogical competence, digital literacy, depth of Islamic scholarship, and spiritual exemplification into a unified educational praxis. This paradigm affirms that the success of PAI revitalization is determined not by the capacity to adopt new technologies but, above all, by the capacity to direct technology toward the formation of students who are knowledgeable, ethically refined, and capable of responsibly actualizing Islamic values in digital life.

The Ecosystem Crisis

The literature review reveals that the third crisis confronting Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the digital era is the fragmentation of the educational ecosystem. PAI no longer occurs exclusively within classroom settings but within a broader ecosystem involving families, schools, *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), communities, mass media, and diverse digital platforms. However, these various elements continue to operate in relative isolation, without integration into a mutually reinforcing educational system. As a result, students frequently receive divergent—even contradictory—messages, values, and orientations from formal educational environments, family settings, and the digital spaces they inhabit daily (Bo, 2025).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) explains that individual development is the outcome of dynamic interaction among multiple environmental systems, ranging from the family (microsystem) to schools, communities, and the broader social environment (macrosystem). In the digital education context, these interactions have become increasingly complex as digital media have become integral to students' learning environments. Accordingly, the success of Islamic Religious Education can no longer be determined solely by the quality of instruction in schools or madrasas but is equally dependent on the quality of relationships and synergies among all elements within the total educational ecosystem. Contemporary scholarship suggests that the digital environment may now be understood as an extension of the interactive space shaping students' development and identity formation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

This perspective is reinforced by the OECD Digital Education Outlook 2023, which introduces the concept of the digital education ecosystem—an educational ecosystem that integrates policy, school leadership, teacher competence, digital infrastructure, curriculum, students, families, and communities in support of educational transformation. The OECD affirms that the digitalization of education will not produce sustainable change if each component operates in isolation; rather, the success of transformation depends critically on multi-stakeholder collaboration, effective governance, and a shared vision for cultivating a culture of lifelong learning.

In the PAI context, these challenges take on additional dimensions of complexity because the internalization of Islamic values occurs not only through formal instruction but also through family role models, community life, pesantren traditions, and students' interactions in digital spaces. The proliferation of social media, video-sharing platforms, artificial intelligence, and virtual communities has fundamentally altered patterns of religious authority. Students now obtain religious knowledge from diverse digital sources that do not necessarily possess recognized scholarly credentials or traceable chains of transmission (*sanad*). This opens pathways for religious disinformation, the oversimplification of Islamic teachings, the polarization of religious understanding, and the dissemination of extremist and intolerant narratives through digital media—demonstrating that the digital space has become a new arena of religious authority contestation that demands the systematic strengthening of religious digital literacy (Azra, 2019; Campbell, 2013).

Azyumardi Azra's scholarship on the transformation of Islamic education demonstrates that pesantren possess distinctive strengths: the tradition of *talaqqī* (direct transmission of knowledge), character formation, the exemplarity of the *kiai* (senior religious scholar), and continuous chains of scholarly transmission that preserve the authority and authenticity of Islamic knowledge. These characteristics constitute advantages that digital platforms are largely incapable of replicating, as platforms generally facilitate information transfer without cultivating deep educational relationships between teachers and students. Digital transformation within PAI should therefore not erase the distinctive character of the pesantren but should extend pesantren values through the strategic deployment of digital technology (Azra, 2019; Dhofier, 2011).

These findings indicate that the primary challenge facing PAI in the digital era is not merely limited access to technology but the absence of an integrated Islamic digital education ecosystem. Formal schooling, pesantren, families, religious organizations, communities, and digital media continue to operate in relative isolation, such that students' character formation proceeds without synchronization. This fragmentation means that the internalization of Islamic values frequently loses ground to digital information flows characterized by their immediacy, personalization, and algorithmic control. These conditions signal that PAI revitalization requires a systemic approach that connects all educational actors within a single values-based learning ecosystem.

On the basis of this synthesis, the present study argues that PAI revitalization requires the construction of an Islamic Digital Learning Ecosystem: an educational ecosystem that integrates formal schooling in schools and madrasas, non-formal education in pesantren and study circles (majelis taklim), informal education within families, and digital learning spaces—all within a unified value framework grounded in tawhid, adab, and the Islamic worldview. Within this ecosystem, technology is not positioned as the center of education but as a medium that strengthens connectivity among institutions, broadens access to learning, and facilitates collaboration among all stakeholders. This concept extends the OECD's digital education ecosystem by incorporating the epistemological and axiological dimensions of Islamic education as the integrative foundation of all ecosystem components.

Revitalization Framework for Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Era

Al-Muhafazhah: The Methodological Foundation of Transformation

A review of pesantren literature, *usul al-fiqh* scholarship, and Islamic educational renewal demonstrates that the principle of *al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-salih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadid al-aslah* (preserving sound traditions while adopting superior innovations) constitutes a methodological paradigm of enduring relevance for responding to the digital transformation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This principle does not merely reflect a moderate stance toward change; it represents a principle of *tajdid* (renewal) that maintains continuity between the authenticity of Islamic tradition and the demands of contemporary development (Azka et al., 2025; Azra, 2019). Within the pesantren tradition, this principle has served as the foundation of institutional adaptation, enabling pesantren to preserve their scholarly identity while accommodating innovation in educational systems, curricula, and instructional technology.

Epistemologically, this principle is firmly rooted in the *usul al-fiqh* tradition, particularly in the permissibility of changing jurisprudential rulings in accordance with changes in time, place, conditions, and the public interest (*taghayyur al-fatwa bi taghayyur al-azminah wa al-amkinah wa al-ahwal*). This principle is comprehensively articulated by Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in*, which affirms that flexibility in instrumental matters does not entail the alteration of permanent Shari'a principles (*thawābit*) but constitutes a form of *ijtihad* aimed at realizing the public interest (*maslahah*) in evolving contexts (al-Mubarak, 2017).

In the context of digital PAI transformation, the principle of *al-muhafazhah* provides methodological legitimacy for the utilization of digital technology, artificial intelligence, online learning platforms, and interactive media as constituents of *al-jadid al-aslah*, provided that such innovations demonstrably enhance the quality of learning and do not contravene Islamic educational objectives. Simultaneously, the principle of *al-qadim al-salih* serves as a normative mechanism, ensuring that digitalization does not displace Islamic education's orientation—toward the cultivation of faith, adab, and moral character—in favor of mere technological mastery. Digital transformation is thus understood not as a process of replacing tradition with modernity but as the creative integration of pedagogical innovation with enduring Islamic values. This perspective aligns with Al-Attas' Islamization of knowledge project, which positions technology as an instrument that must be subordinated to the Islamic worldview rather than as a force determining the direction of education (Al-Attas, 1980).

The application of the *al-muhafazhah* principle to digital PAI should therefore not be construed as a pragmatic compromise or methodological eclecticism. Rather, it constitutes a framework of educational *ijtihad* that enables responsible innovation—one that clearly distinguishes between the normative and unchanging dimensions of Islamic education and its technically dynamic pedagogical dimensions. Through this framework, digital transformation may proceed adaptively without sacrificing epistemological identity or the primary objectives

of Islamic education: the formation of human beings who are learned, ethically refined, and God-conscious.

Ta'dib: The Epistemological Foundation of Islamic Education

A review of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' works reveals that the concept of ta'dib constitutes the most comprehensive epistemological foundation for the renewal of Islamic education in the digital era. Unlike tarbiyah, which emphasizes the nurturing and development of human potential, or ta'lim, which is oriented toward the transfer of knowledge, Al-Attas positions ta'dib as a concept of education that integrates the dimensions of knowledge ('ilm), praxis (amal), and moral refinement (adab) into a unified whole. Education thus aims not merely to produce intellectually capable individuals but to form human beings capable of recognizing and situating all things within the divinely ordained order of reality (Al-Attas, 1980; Daud, 1998).

According to Al-Attas (1980), adab is the recognition and acknowledgment of all things in their proper places according to the hierarchy of being and value within the Islamic worldview. The central crisis of modern Islamic education is therefore not a deficiency of knowledge but a loss of adab—the capacity to place knowledge, human beings, and technology in their proper relational order. This condition causes knowledge to lose its ethical and spiritual orientation, rendering it susceptible to secularization and to the reduction of education to a mere instrument for acquiring technical skills.

In the context of digital transformation, the concept of ta'dib offers a perspective that fundamentally diverges from the competency-based educational paradigm currently dominant in the discourse. The success of PAI cannot be assessed solely by students' levels of digital literacy or their capacity to access Islamic resources through technology. The more fundamental objective is the formation of the digital insan adabi: an individual capable of utilizing technology responsibly, grounded in tawhid, adab, and maqasid al-shari'ah. Within this perspective, technology is positioned as an instrument for strengthening worship, the pursuit of knowledge, da'wah (propagation of the faith), and social welfare—not as a force that shapes life orientations or determines standards of truth. The human relationship with technology thereby remains within the framework of servitude to God (Allah SWT).

The relevance of ta'dib to contemporary Islamic educational challenges is further affirmed by Zainuddin et al. (2025), who explain that Al-Attas' Islamization of knowledge project constitutes an epistemological response to the secularization of modern knowledge. They argue that ta'dib functions as a mechanism for integrating revelation, reason, and empirical experience, thereby ensuring that the development of knowledge and technology remains oriented by Islamic values. This perspective demonstrates that the adoption of digital technology is not epistemologically neutral but must be consistently guided by the Islamic worldview to prevent moral disorientation and identity crises among students.

Halstead (2004) similarly affirms that Islamic education possesses a distinctive character because it regards knowledge as a trust (amanah) always entailing moral and spiritual responsibility. Accordingly, digital transformation in PAI cannot be achieved through the mere digitization of instructional materials or the deployment of technology-based platforms; it must be accompanied by the reconstruction of educational epistemology that places adab at the center of all learning processes. Within this framework, technology is not the objective of education but rather a pedagogical instrument that supports the process of ta'dib.

On the basis of this synthesis, the present study argues that applying the ta'dib concept to digital PAI curriculum development constitutes an epistemological—not merely a methodological—response. Technology integration must proceed from an Islamic worldview

that situates knowledge, human beings, and technology within the correct hierarchy of values. PAI revitalization in the digital era is thus directed not merely toward producing digitally competent students but toward forming digital insan adabi capable of utilizing technology ethically, responsibly, and in pursuit of the public good (maslahah).

Manhaj Al-Mahabbah: The Spiritual Foundation of the Curriculum

The literature review reveals that Manhaj Al-Mahabbah fi al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah (the Love-Based Curriculum) constitutes an educational paradigm that places love (mahabbah) as the spiritual energy and pedagogical foundation of the learning process. Unlike approaches oriented solely toward knowledge transmission or competency attainment, Manhaj Al-Mahabbah conceives of education as a process of personality formation rooted in emotional and spiritual attachment among students, educators, knowledge, and God (Allah SWT). Learning is therefore understood not as a mechanistic academic activity but as a form of worship that unifies the intellectual, affective, and spiritual dimensions of the human person.

This finding resonates with the scholarship of Zuhdi, Sidik, and Sari (2025), which demonstrates that values-based and love-centered education within the pesantren tradition is more effective in internalizing Islamic values than approaches oriented solely toward rote memorization and content mastery. The pesantren tradition constructs educational relationships through exemplarity (uswah), compassion (rahmah), reverence for teachers (ta'zim), and emotional closeness between the kiai and santri (students). These relationships create a learning environment in which Islamic values are not only understood cognitively but are internalized and enacted in daily conduct. Educational success is thereby measured not solely by knowledge acquisition but by the formation of character, adab, and spiritual commitment.

The normative foundation of this approach is firmly anchored in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Fadlillah and Wahyuni, Gaffar et al. (2021) explain that the concept of mahabbatullah (love of God) constitutes an intrinsic motivating force that impels human beings to seek knowledge as an act of devotion to God. This principle aligns with Islamic education's objective of producing not merely intellectually capable individuals but human beings who are faithful, of noble character, and whose lives are oriented by tawhid. Contemporary educational psychology demonstrates that intrinsic motivation is more effective in fostering student engagement and lifelong learning than motivation anchored solely in external rewards or academic achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This reveals a convergence between the concept of mahabbah in Islamic education and contemporary motivation theory.

In the context of digital transformation, Manhaj Al-Mahabbah acquires heightened relevance. Digital learning ecosystems tend to produce impersonal interactions, prioritize rapid access to information, and frequently diminish the depth of the teacher-student relationship. Consequently, learning risks dehumanization: a condition in which technology becomes the center of the educational process while affective and spiritual dimensions are increasingly marginalized. The integration of technology in PAI must therefore be balanced by an approach that preserves the quality of educational relationships, fosters empathy, and strengthens spiritual bonds within the learning process. Within this framework, Manhaj Al-Mahabbah functions as the axiological foundation ensuring that the digitalization of education remains oriented toward character formation and adab.

Conceptually, Manhaj Al-Mahabbah is constructed upon four complementary pillars. The first is Mahabbatullah: positioning love of God as the primary motivation for seeking knowledge and performing righteous deeds. The second, Mahabbah al-'Ilm, regards knowledge as a trust and a means of drawing near to God, so that the learning process constitutes an act of worship. The third, Mahabbah al-Insan, emphasizes education that humanizes students through respect

for human dignity, compassion, dialogue, and exemplarity. The fourth, Mahabbah al-Watan, integrates love of the homeland with the responsibility of serving as God's vicegerent (khalifah) on earth, thereby forming citizens who are religiously devout, moderate, and socially concerned with the nation's welfare. All four pillars are firmly grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah and reflect the integrated relationships of human beings with God, with one another, with knowledge, and with social life.

On the basis of this synthesis, the present study holds that Manhaj Al-Mahabbah constitutes the spiritual foundation complementing the methodological dimension of al-muhafazhah and the epistemological dimension of ta'dib. If al-muhafazhah directs the strategy of change and ta'dib determines the orientation of knowledge, then Manhaj Al-Mahabbah provides the spiritual energy animating the entire educational process. PAI revitalization in the digital era thus does not merely produce technologically innovative learning but cultivates learning experiences that are meaningful, humanizing, and oriented toward forming an insan adabi who loves God, knowledge, fellow human beings, and the homeland.

Practical Implications for the Revitalization of Islamic Religious Education

Transforming PAI Educators: From Knowledge Transmitters to Murabbi Adab Digital

The research synthesis indicates that the success of PAI revitalization in the digital era depends critically on transforming the educator's role. PAI teachers can no longer function merely as knowledge transmitters but must transform into murabbi adab digital: educators capable of guiding students' intellectual, spiritual, and moral development within the digital ecosystem. This role demands integrating Islamic scholarly depth, pedagogical competence, digital literacy, and moral exemplification as the foundation of educational practice. Teachers must therefore not merely instruct students in how to use technology but guide them toward the critical, ethical, and responsible use of technology in accordance with Islamic values. This paradigm shift aligns with UNESCO's (2011) position that digital educational transformation positions teachers as facilitators, mentors, and guides for lifelong learning, rather than mere information deliverers.

In educational technology scholarship, the TPACK framework, developed by Mishra and Koehler (2006), provides a robust conceptual foundation for integrating technology into instruction. However, as this model was developed within a general education paradigm, it does not accommodate the Islamic epistemological dimension as a foundation for pedagogical decision-making. The present study, therefore, proposes developing Islamic Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (I-TPACK) as an extension of the TPACK model by adding a dimension of Islamic Worldview Knowledge (IWK). This dimension serves as a normative foundation, ensuring that the selection of content, instructional strategies, digital media, and assessment forms is consistently guided by the principles of tawhid, adab, maqasid al-shari'ah, and the objective of forming the insan adabi. Technology is thereby treated not as a neutral instrument but as an educational medium that must remain within the framework of Islamic values.

The practical implication of the I-TPACK model is the need to redesign professional development programs for PAI educators—programs oriented not merely toward enhancing digital skills but also toward strengthening epistemological and spiritual competencies. Teacher training programs should integrate digital literacy, innovative instructional design, Islamic digital ethics, and the capacity to cultivate humanizing and reflective learning cultures. Within this paradigm, PAI educators are expected to serve as transformative agents who position technology as a medium for strengthening the process of ta'dib, building students' character, and

cultivating awareness that the use of technology constitutes a dimension of responsibility as servants of God and vicegerents on earth.

Curriculum Redesign: From Cognitive Transmission to Transformative Learning Experience

The second implication of the revitalization formula is the need to redesign the PAI curriculum to shift the learning orientation from a dominance of cognitive achievement toward transformative learning experiences. The literature demonstrates that PAI instruction has tended to emphasize conceptual mastery, the memorization of religious proofs, and written examination-based evaluation, while dimensions of value internalization, critical reflection, and character formation have received insufficient attention (Koswara & Wigati, 2026; Rifdillah, 2025). The primary objective of Islamic education, however, is not merely to produce students with a conceptual understanding of Islamic teachings but to form individuals capable of internalizing, practicing, and actualizing Islamic values in lived reality (Al-Attas, 1980; Halstead, 2004). PAI curricula in the digital era, therefore, require design as learning experiences that integrate cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and spiritual dimensions holistically, thereby cultivating an insan adabi equipped to meet the challenges of the digital society.

Based on the literature synthesis, curriculum redesign encompasses three interrelated dimensions. First, the reorientation of learning objectives: shifting the focus from religious knowledge acquisition to the formation of a digital insan adabi capable of integrating faith, moral character, and digital literacy into daily life (Al-Attas, 1980). Second, the transformation of curriculum content through the strengthening of twenty-first century competencies grounded in Islamic values, including Islamic digital media literacy, adab-based digital ethics, critical thinking in evaluating religious information, and competencies for digital da'wah (Ju'subaidi et al., 2025). Third, the innovation of assessment systems that move beyond cognitive examinations to employ authentic assessment—incorporating digital moral portfolios, collaborative projects, spiritual reflection, and documentation of students' religious practice in digital environments.

The implementation of a transformative curriculum requires pedagogical models that integrate the strengths of face-to-face interaction with the flexibility of digital technology. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) demonstrate that blended learning produces more meaningful learning outcomes than either fully online or fully face-to-face instruction because it sustains interaction, reflection, and ongoing collaboration. In the PAI context, this model may be developed into an Islamic values-based community of inquiry in which students not only access religious content through digital media but also engage in critical discussion, connect knowledge to contemporary issues, and implement it through authentic social and religious projects. This approach aligns with the principle of transformative learning, which emphasizes critical reflection as a pathway to transforming students' perspectives and behavior (Mezirow, 1997).

Building an Integrated Islamic Digital PAI Ecosystem

The third implication of the revitalization formula is the construction of an integrated digital PAI ecosystem that connects formal, non-formal, and informal educational pathways within a mutually reinforcing system. Digital PAI transformation cannot be borne exclusively by schools or madrasas; it requires collaboration among families, pesantren, higher education institutions, religious communities, and digital spaces as complementary learning environments. This ecosystem approach aligns with the twenty-first-century educational paradigm, which positions learning as a lifelong process that occurs across spaces, times, and institutions (Anderson & Rainie, 2021; UNESCO, 2011). In the Indonesian context, strengthening this ecosystem is particularly critical, given that Islamic education has developed through a diverse institutional network whose constituent elements complement one another.

The construction of this ecosystem requires at least two foundational prerequisites. First, the development of digital PAI platforms built upon the Islamic worldview—platforms that not only provide religious content but also integrate the principles of tawhid, adab, and digital ethics into the design of learning experiences. Second, the development of a cyber pesantren model that preserves the distinctive characteristics of the pesantren—including the tradition of talaqqī, chains of scholarly transmission, moral formation, and the close relationship between kiai and santri—while leveraging digital technology to expand access, foster collaboration, and promote pedagogical innovation (Rochim et al., 2025; Wajdi et al., 2024). Digitalization is thereby understood not as a replacement of pesantren tradition but as a means of strengthening its capacity to address the needs of digital society.

Within this framework, pesantren occupy a strategic position as the value hub of the digital PAI ecosystem. Azra (2019) affirms that the distinctive strengths of the pesantren lie in the tradition of talaqqī, the exemplarity of the kiai, and educational relationships built upon mahabbah and the formation of adab—qualities that to date cannot be fully replicated by digital platforms. The ideal model of the digital PAI ecosystem, therefore, does not position technology as a replacement for the pesantren function but situates the pesantren as the gravitational center of values—connecting formal educational institutions, families, communities, and digital spaces within a collaborative network of Islamic learning. Within this model, technology serves to strengthen the Islamic educational network, while the pesantren remains the source of scholarly authority and character formation, and the custodian of the continuity of Islamic tradition amid digital transformation.

Limitations and Future Research Agenda

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered in interpreting its findings. First, as library research, all findings remain conceptual and theoretical in nature, having not yet been validated empirically through implementation in educational institutions. The revitalization formula offered constitutes a conceptual framework constructed by integrating literature on Islamic education, educational technology, and pesantren traditions; its effectiveness in improving the quality of PAI learning, therefore, awaits empirical testing. Second, this study focuses on the Indonesian Islamic education context, which possesses distinctive institutional, social, and cultural characteristics—particularly the presence of pesantren, Islamic educational institutions that play a central role in character formation. Accordingly, the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other Muslim-majority countries with different educational systems, cultures, and policies remains to be determined through further comparative research.

In light of these limitations, the study opens several avenues for future research that could strengthen both the theory and practice of Islamic Religious Education in the digital era. First, experimental or quasi-experimental research is needed to test the effectiveness of PAI curricula based on Manhaj Al-Mahabbah in enhancing students' spiritual competencies, character development, and digital literacy. Second, the development and validation of instruments to measure Islamic Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (I-TPACK) competencies among PAI educators are required to operationalize the proposed conceptual framework in empirical research. Third, comparative cross-national research among Muslim-majority countries is needed to identify diverse models of digital PAI ecosystems developing within varied social, cultural, and educational policy contexts. Fourth, participatory action research engaging PAI teachers, pesantren administrators, educational technology developers, and policymakers is required to generate implementation models that are adaptive, contextually sensitive, and sustainable.

Furthermore, the rapid development of digital technologies—particularly artificial intelligence, learning analytics, and adaptive learning—opens new research possibilities regarding how these technologies may be integrated into Islamic Religious Education without compromising the dimensions of adab, spirituality, and Islamic values. Future research is therefore expected not only to test the effectiveness of the proposed model but also to develop evaluative frameworks that comprehensively assess PAI transformation—encompassing cognitive, affective, spiritual, digital-ethical, and social impact dimensions. This would allow digital PAI development to proceed on an evidence-based, sustainable basis, consistently oriented toward the primary objective of Islamic education: the formation of an *insan adabi* capable of using technology responsibly in service of humanity's welfare.

D. Conclusion

This library-based study demonstrates that the challenges confronting Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the digital era extend well beyond issues of technology utilization to encompass epistemological, methodological, and ecosystem crises that affect the direction and objectives of Islamic education itself. PAI transformation, therefore, requires a comprehensive approach rather than the mere digitization of instructional processes. On the basis of a multidisciplinary literature synthesis, this study proposes a revitalization formula that integrates three principal components: the principle of *al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-salih wa al-akhdz bi al-jadid al-aslah* as the methodological foundation; Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' concept of *ta'dib* as the epistemological foundation; and Manhaj Al-Mahabbah as the spiritual foundation animating the educational process.

The principal contribution of this study lies in the formulation of a conceptual model for revitalizing digital PAI that integrates the methodological, epistemological, and spiritual dimensions of Islamic education into a unified framework. This synthesis yields a vision of digital PAI oriented toward the formation of the digital *insan adabi*: students who possess not only digital literacy competencies but are also capable of utilizing technology grounded in the values of *tawhid*, *adab*, and the pursuit of the public good. The practical implications of this model encompass: the transformation of the PAI educator's role into that of a *murabbi adab digital* through the development of Islamic Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (I-TPACK) competencies; the redesign of the curriculum toward transformative learning experiences; and the construction of an integrated digital PAI ecosystem that connects schools, *pesantren*, families, and communities within a collaborative educational network.

Nevertheless, the proposed model remains conceptual in nature and requires empirical validation through experimental research, the development of I-TPACK instruments, and implementation across diverse levels and contexts of Islamic education. Ultimately, the revitalization of PAI in the digital era is understood not as an endeavor to make Islam increasingly dependent on technology but to make technology increasingly oriented toward Islamic values. Digital transformation thereby becomes the means by which Islamic education's prophetic mission is strengthened: the formation of human beings who are faithful, knowledgeable, ethically refined, and capable of deploying technological advances ethically and responsibly, in service of the welfare of humanity.

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