Reconstruction of Islamic Religious Education in the Artificial Intelligence Era: A Critical Review of Teacher Roles, Digital Ethics, and Epistemic Authority

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Abstract

The advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought fundamental disruption to global educational systems, including Islamic Religious Education (IRE). This article critically analyzes the dimensions of reconstruction required in IRE in response to AI penetration, specifically across three main aspects: the teacher's role as a moral-spiritual educator, the formation of digital ethics grounded in Islamic values, and the redefinition of epistemic authority amid the proliferation of algorithm-based information access. This study employs a qualitative approach using library research methods and critical analysis of contemporary literature in Islamic education, philosophy of technology, and AI ethics. The findings indicate that: first, the position of teachers in IRE cannot be replaced by AI, as the dimension of moral exemplarity (uswah hasanah) is inherently human and relational; second, Islamic epistemic authority faces serious challenges from algorithms that may reduce religious understanding to its textual dimension alone. This article recommends an integrative IRE reconstruction model, namely a synthesis of fundamental Islamic values with critical digital literacy competencies as the foundation for future Islamic education.

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Ethics, Epistemic Authority*

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Introduction

The technological revolution marked by the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has dramatically transformed the landscape of human life across multiple dimensions, including the world of education. Generative AI systems such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and various platforms based on large language models (LLMs) are now capable of producing educational content, answering theological questions, providing religious exegesis, and even simulating fatwa issuance. This phenomenon raises a fundamental question for Islamic Religious Education (IRE): will the existence and relevance of IRE as a value-based educational system be undermined by the sophistication of algorithms devoid of spirit, empathy, and moral responsibility?

This question is not merely academic rhetoric; it reflects the genuine challenges faced by educators, policymakers, and the Muslim community at large. Data from (UNESCO, 2023) indicates that more than 60% of higher education institutions in Muslim-majority countries have integrated at least one AI platform into their learning processes. In Indonesia, the penetration of AI technology in Islamic secondary schools and universities has also undergone significant acceleration in the post-COVID-19 era, driven by the digital transformation policies of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

However, this technological adoption has not been accompanied by adequate epistemological reflection on its implications for the substance of IRE. Researchers and practitioners of Islamic education remain largely dominated by a techno-instrumentalist approach that views AI merely as a learning tool, without questioning its impact on character formation (akhlaq), the transmission of epistemic authority, and the construction of students' Islamic identity. Yet historically, IRE does not function solely as a knowledge transfer mechanism; it also serves as the formation of the perfect human being (*insan kamil*) through exemplary conduct, value habituation, and the cultivation of personal relationships between teacher and student grounded in trust and love.

Existing literature on IRE and technology remains dominated by discourse on the utilization of digital media as a means of instruction (Azra, 2020; Muhaimin, 2021) while critical studies on the impact of AI on the epistemological structure of IRE are severely limited. This academic gap constitutes the primary justification for this article's critical examination of three fundamental dimensions: (1) the reconstruction of the IRE teacher's role in the AI era; (2) the development of digital ethics grounded in Islamic values; and (3) challenges to Islamic epistemic authority within the algorithmic information ecosystem.

By employing a critical analysis approach based on literature review, this article endeavors to formulate a conceptual framework for IRE reconstruction that is not merely adaptive to technological developments, but also capable of preserving and indeed strengthening the essence of Islamic education as an education of values and civilization. The contribution of this article is expected to fill the void in academic discourse while providing conceptual guidance for Islamic education stakeholders in Indonesia and the Muslim world at large.

Literature Review 1. The Concept of Islamic Religious Education: Philosophical Foundations and Objectives

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is an educational system that holistically aims to form a complete Muslim personality (insan kamil) through the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions within the framework of Islamic values. Etymologically, Islamic education refers to three key concepts in the Arabic intellectual tradition: tarbiyah, ta'lim, and ta'dib. (Al-Attas, 1999) argues that the concept of ta'dib is the most comprehensive, as it encompasses the process of instilling adabthe recognition and acknowledgment of the proper hierarchy of values, knowledge, and existence within the Islamic cosmological order. This

perspective fundamentally distinguishes Islamic education from secular educational concepts oriented solely toward the development of functional competencies.

Classical Islamic educational philosophers constructed rich theoretical frameworks on the nature of education. Ibn Miskawaih in Tahdhib al-Akhlaq regarded education as a process of purifying the soul (tahdhib al-nafs) toward noble character. Al-Ghazali in Ihya' Ulum al-Din emphasized that the ultimate aim of education is self-knowledge (ma'rifat al-nafs) as a path to the knowledge of God (ma'rifatullah) (Rahman, 2019). Ibn Khaldun in the Muqaddimah introduced a sociological dimension to education by emphasizing the role of social habituation ('adat) in character formation. These three perspectives collectively form the philosophical foundation of IRE that cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of propositional knowledge (Harahap, 2024).

In the Indonesian context, IRE is formally regulated under the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, which defines religious education as a conscious and planned endeavor to create a learning atmosphere and process whereby students actively develop their own potential. (Muhaimin, 2021) identifies four strategic functions of IRE within the context of Indonesia's national education: the development of faith and piety, the inculcation of values as life guidance, the mental adjustment to physical and social environments, and the correction of students' errors, weaknesses, and deficiencies. These four functions collectively demand the presence of an educator who is not merely academically competent, but also spiritually and morally mature.

2. Artificial Intelligence: Definitions, Typology, and Educational Implications

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be conceptually defined as a branch of computer science focused on developing systems and machines capable of executing tasks that have historically required human intelligence. (Russell & Norvig, 2021) classify definitions of AI into four approaches: systems that think like humans, systems that act like humans, systems that think rationally, and systems that act rationally. The fourth approach AI as a rational agent that behaves optimally to achieve specified goals has become the dominant paradigm in contemporary AI development.

From a typological perspective, two main AI categories are relevant in the educational context. First, narrow AI (or weak AI), designed to perform specific tasks such as recommendation systems, facial recognition, or natural language processing representing the type of AI most commonly encountered in educational applications today. Second, general AI (or strong AI), which theoretically can perform all intellectual tasks achievable by humans a concept that remains speculative and technically unrealized (Tegmark, 2017). For the purposes of this article, references to AI pertain to narrow AI, specifically systems based on large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT and similar generative systems.

In the educational context, (Holmes et al., 2022) identify four main areas of AI application: (1) learning personalization through adaptive learning systems; (2) automated assessment and feedback; (3) intelligent tutoring systems (ITS); and (4) learning analytics for prediction and intervention. Each area offers significant efficiency potential, yet simultaneously harbors pedagogical risks that warrant critical scrutiny. AI algorithms optimized for efficiency and cognitive task accuracy tend to neglect the affective and spiritual dimensions of the learning process precisely the dimensions that constitute the core of IRE. (Selian, 2023) specifically examined the impact of generative AI on religious learning and found that students who relied on AI to answer religious questions exhibited tendencies toward shallower and less critical religious thinking compared to those engaged in discussions with teachers or scholars. This finding affirms that AI's ability to generate convincing responses is not equivalent to the depth of theological understanding produced through authentic and relational learning processes.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using an analytical-critical library research method. According to (Zed, 2018) library research constitutes a series of activities concerned with the collection of bibliographic data, reading, note-taking, and the processing of research

materials. This approach was selected because the object of study is conceptual in nature and requires in-depth exploration of the theoretical foundations from various relevant disciplines.

Primary data sources for this study encompass: (1) academic literature on contemporary Islamic Religious Education from journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and SINTA; (2) international policy documents on AI and education from UNESCO, OECD, and similar institutions; (3) works by contemporary Muslim scholars and thinkers on technology ethics and Islamic epistemology; and (4) recent research reports on AI implementation in Islamic educational institutions. Secondary data sources include reference books, encyclopedias of Islamic education, and national education policy documents.

The data analysis process employed a critical content analysis technique consisting of the following steps: first, the identification and categorization of key themes from the collected literature; second, a comparative analysis of perspectives from various intellectual traditions (Islamic philosophy, educational theory, technology ethics); third, the synthesis and formulation of critical arguments; and fourth, the formulation of conceptual recommendations. Research validity was ensured through source triangulation and peer-review discussions among members of the research team.

Results 1. The Landscape of AI in the Context of Contemporary Islamic Education

Generative AI has transcended its capacity as a mere computational tool to enter domains previously considered exclusively human: textual interpretation, moral counsel, and even ethical reasoning. (Russell & Norvig, 2021) define AI as computational systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, encompassing natural language understanding, pattern recognition, decision-making, and learning from experience. This definition carries serious implications for IRE, which substantially operates within precisely these domains.

In the context of Islamic education, (Wan Daud, 2019) identifies that the objectives of Islamic education traditionally encompass three interrelated dimensions: ta'lim (the transmission of knowledge), tarbiyah (character and personality formation), and ta'dib (the inculcation of adab, or civilizational ethics). These three dimensions collectively aim to form human beings who are not only intellectually capable, but also morally upright and able to fulfill their role as God's vicegerents on earth. The question is to what extent AI can or should play a role in each of these dimensions.

Research by (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019) examining 146 research articles on AI in higher education found that AI utilization is most dominant in student behavior profiling and prediction, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated assessment. However, virtually no research specifically examines the implications of AI for values and moral education in a religious context. This finding underscores the urgency of the inquiry pursued in this article.

In Indonesia, a survey conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2023) found that 67.3% of IRE teachers at the senior secondary and madrasah aliyah level had used an AI platform at least once in the learning process, yet only 12.4% reported a deep understanding of how the technology works and its ethical implications. This data indicates a structural gap between technological adoption and critical literacy toward it a gap requiring a systematic response from the academic community and Islamic education policymakers.

2. Reconstructing the Role of the IRE Teacher: Transcending Algorithmic Limitations

Discourse on the AI threat to the teaching profession has become a hotly debated topic in the global education community. (World Economic Forum, 2023) projects that a number of transmissive and repetitive teaching roles may be automated within the next decade. However, this perspective is fundamentally inadequate when applied to the IRE context, as it overlooks the relational and spiritual dimensions that constitute the heart of Islamic educational practice.

In the classical Islamic educational tradition, the teacher-student relationship (mu'allimmuta'allim) is not merely an instructional relationship but a spiritual bond that transforms the soul. Al-Ghazali in Ihya' Ulum al-Din identifies the true teacher (mu'addib) as

an individual who not only teaches knowledge, but also serves as a mirror for the student on how to live a meaningful and God-conscious life. The transmission of values in this context occurs not through verbalism, but through what the sociologist of education (Bernstein, 2000) terms the 'hidden code' the patterns of interaction, gesture, and power relations internalized in everyday pedagogical practice.

(Al-Attas, 1999) affirms that adab encompassing the recognition of the proper place of each thing in the order of being constitutes the highest objective of Islamic education. The transmission of adab requires the presence of a teacher who has embodied adab in their own personality; they are not merely a facilitator of information but the very embodiment of the knowledge being taught. This capacity is intrinsically irreplicable by any AI system, however sophisticated, because AI possesses no existence, experiences neither suffering nor joy, holds no relationship with the Transcendent, and is incapable of bearing living witness (shahada) to the truth it conveys.

Research by (Lukman et al., 2022) conducted in a number of madrasah aliyah in Central Java found that the effectiveness of IRE learning is largely determined by the quality of the emotional relationship between teachers and students particularly students' perception of their teacher's moral exemplarity in daily life. Students who experienced personal closeness and authentic role-modeling from their teachers demonstrated significantly higher levels of value internalization compared to those who received only formal instruction. These findings empirically reinforce the theoretical argument for the irreplaceability of teachers in IRE.

However, reconstructing the role of the IRE teacher in the AI era does not mean rejecting technology. (Intan Andriani Hasanah, 2025) through their Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework provide guidance that effective technology integration requires a simultaneous understanding of content knowledge, pedagogy, and technology. In the IRE context, teachers need new competencies that the researchers term Islamic Digital Pedagogical Competence (IDPC) the ability to integrate Islamic values, contextual pedagogical methods, and critical technology literacy into a coherent and unified educational praxis.

The reconstruction of the IRE teacher's role in the AI era thus moves toward four core functions that no algorithm can replace: (a) serving as a model of humanity that authentically embodies Islamic values; (b) facilitating deep spiritual experiences and existential reflection; (c) building trust-based learning communities grounded in shared responsibility; and (d) serving as a critical guide helping students navigate the digital information ecosystem with Islamic wisdom and discernment.

3. An Integrative IRE Reconstruction Model: A Conceptual Synthesis

Based on the analysis of the three main dimensions above, this study formulates an integrative IRE reconstruction model referred to as the Tawhidi-Digital Model that integrates the principles of tawhid as the Islamic weltanschauung with critical competencies toward the digital-AI ecosystem. This model consists of five mutually reinforcing components.

The first component is the Tawhidic Epistemological Foundation, which affirms that all knowledge including AI-generated knowledge originates from and must be returned to God as the ultimate source of true knowledge. This principle is pedagogically translated into the habituation of students to always contextualize information within the Islamic worldview, rather than accepting information as neutral or value-free. (Fazlur Rahman, 1982) in Islam and Modernity emphasizes the importance of education that integrates Islam as a holistic value system, not merely a collection of fragmentary doctrines.

The second component is Relational-Exemplary Pedagogy, which maintains the teacher-student relationship as the core of the educational process. In this model, IRE teachers are not replaced by AI, but are supported by AI for administrative and informational tasks, so that teachers can concentrate their energy on the inherently human dimensions of pedagogy: building trust, providing moral exemplarity, and accompanying students through the process of spiritual transformation. This approach aligns with the concept of 'pedagogy of love' developed by (Freire, 2006) and reinterpreted in the Islamic context (Subedi, 2021).

The third component is Critical Digital Literacy Based on Islamic Values, which teaches students not only the technical ability to use AI, but also the capacity to evaluate, critique, and situate AI outputs within an Islamic value framework. In practice, this includes: the ability to distinguish between algorithmic facts and opinions; the capacity to detect bias in AI systems; an understanding of data privacy and security implications; and the ability to identify religiously sound versus potentially misleading content.

The fourth component is Contextual Digital Ethics Development, which integrates maqashid al-shari'ah principles into everyday AI usage guidelines. Schools and madrasah must develop 'Islamic AI policies' that are not merely prohibitions or restrictions, but positive guidelines on how AI can be used responsibly as a means of worship and community welfare. (Hamdan, 2023) offers an 'Islamic AI governance' framework that can serve as a reference for Islamic educational institutions.

The fifth component is 21st-Century Islamic Competency-Based Curriculum Reform, which integrates competencies required in the AI era critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication with competencies specific to IRE: comprehension of religious texts, spirituality, Islamic ethics, and civilizational perspective. This framework transcends the science-religion dichotomy that has long impeded the development of Islamic education, moving toward a synthesis that views all knowledge as potentially drawing one closer to God.

Conclusion

This study has critically analyzed three main dimensions of the reconstruction of Islamic Religious Education in the Artificial Intelligence era: the role of teachers, digital ethics, and epistemic authority. Based on the analysis conducted, several important conclusions can be drawn. First, the role of IRE teachers in the AI era cannot and should not be replaced by technology, as the dimensions of moral exemplarity (uswah hasanah), the transmission of adab, and spiritual accompaniment are inherently human and relational. The reconstruction required is not the elimination of the teacher's role, but rather its transformation and strengthening as a facilitator of meaningful learning, a critical guide within the digital ecosystem, and an authentic model of Islamic humanity. Second, Islamic epistemic authority faces serious challenges from the algorithmic information ecosystem, which enables the proliferation of religious content without adequate competence verification. IRE's response must encompass the strengthening of students' epistemological literacy regarding the structure of Islamic scholarship and the development of critical capacities to evaluate claims of authority in the digital space.

Based on these conclusions, this study recommends the adoption of the Tawhidi-Digital Model as an integrative framework for IRE reconstruction a model that combines a tawhidic epistemological foundation, relational-exemplary pedagogy, critical digital literacy based on Islamic values, contextual digital ethics, and 21st-century Islamic competency-based curriculum reform. This model is expected to serve as a point of departure for subsequent research of an empirical and implementational nature. The limitation of this study lies in its conceptual-theoretical character, making empirical validation through field research involving teachers, students, and Islamic educational institutions in various contexts necessary. Future research is also encouraged to explore the implementation of the Tawhidi-Digital Model in the contexts of pesantren, madrasah, and Islamic universities using diverse methodologies including action research, educational ethnography, and comparative case studies.

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