# Transforming Islamic Religious Education in Response to the Challenges of Globalization and Modernity

**Lutfi Rachman**[*]

Universitas Islam Internasional Darullughah Wadda'wah, Pasuruan, Indonesia

lutfirachman@uiidalwa.ac.id

*Correspondence

**Abstract**

The rapid expansion of globalization, marked by digitalization and individualistic ideologies, has presented significant challenges to the relevance and philosophy of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesia. Many previous studies have not holistically integrated curriculum reform, digital engagement, and spiritual foundations within a coherent Islamic educational philosophy. This study aims to address that gap by proposing a transformative model grounded in the philosophy of *ta'dīb* and critical pedagogy. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach based on literature review, this research analyzes how formal Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia are adapting to the pressures of globalization and modernity. The findings reveal that globalization has led to a disconnection between traditional pedagogical approaches and students' lived experiences, as well as lagging curriculum standards. However, promising transformations are occurring through curricular reform, pedagogical innovation, and spiritual revitalization. This study contributes to the theoretical discourse by emphasizing that IRE must not only adapt to modern demands but also lead moral and intellectual renewal through spiritually anchored transformation.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Religious Education, Curriculum Transformation, Globalization, Ta'dīb, Spiritual Pedagogy.*

**Abstrak**

Pesatnya globalisasi, yang ditandai oleh digitalisasi dan ideologi individualistik, telah menghadirkan tantangan signifikan bagi relevansi dan filosofi Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di Indonesia. Banyak studi sebelumnya belum secara holistik mengintegrasikan reformasi kurikulum, keterlibatan digital, dan fondasi spiritual dalam filosofi pendidikan Islam yang koheren. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengatasi kesenjangan tersebut dengan mengusulkan model transformatif yang berakar pada filosofi *ta'dīb* dan pedagogi kritis. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif berbasis kajian literatur, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana institusi pendidikan Islam formal di Indonesia beradaptasi dengan tekanan globalisasi dan modernitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa globalisasi telah menyebabkan pemutusan antara pendekatan pedagogis tradisional dengan pengalaman siswa, serta standar kurikulum yang tertinggal. Namun, ada transformasi menjanjikan yang terjadi melalui reformasi kurikulum, inovasi pedagogis, dan revitalisasi spiritual. Studi ini berkontribusi pada wacana teoritis dengan menekankan bahwa PAI harus beradaptasi dengan tuntutan modern sekaligus memimpin pembaharuan moral dan intelektual melalui transformasi yang berlandaskan spiritual.

**Kata Kunci:** *Pendidikan Agama Islam, Transformasi Kurikulum, Globalisasi, Ta'dīb, Pedagogi Spiritual.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of globalization has had a profound impact on various aspects of life in Indonesia, including education, culture, and religious practice. As global values penetrate deeply into society, shaped by digitalization, individualism, and secular ideologies, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is increasingly confronted with challenges to its relevance, methodology, and philosophical foundation. In Indonesian schools and Islamic institutions, questions have emerged about how IRE can remain spiritually grounded while addressing the expectations of a modern, interconnected world. The clash between traditional pedagogical approaches and contemporary learners' realities is a Several studies have explored the transformation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in response to globalization and the digital age. Dalimunthe et al.[1] highlighted the challenges posed by digital media to Islamic values but did not offer a strategic pedagogical framework. Taja et al.[2] proposed a prophetic ethics-based learning model, yet their focus remains limited to the pandemic context without addressing deeper epistemological concerns. Maemonah et al.[3] examined ideological contestation among Islamic schools through social media but did not analyze its implications for pedagogical content. Arif et al.[4] emphasized the importance of digital competencies for IRE teachers while calling for further research on how to integrate such skills with spiritual depth. Sholeh et al.[5] mapped historical curriculum changes in Indonesia's Islamic education, yet did not fully address the spiritual orientation of these reforms.

To date, few studies have holistically integrated curriculum reform, digital engagement, and spiritual foundations within a coherent Islamic educational philosophy. This study addresses that gap by proposing a transformative model grounded in the philosophy of *ta'dīb* (Al-Attas)[6] and critical pedagogy (Freire),[7] aiming to develop a contextually relevant yet spiritually rooted vision for Islamic Religious Education reform in Indonesia.

This study seeks to critically examine how Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia is undergoing transformation amid the forces of globalization and modernity. Two key research questions guide this inquiry: How has globalization influenced the

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[1] "Challenges of Islamic Education in the New Era of Information and Communication Technologies," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8608.

[2] "Character Education in the Pandemic Era: A Religious Ethical Learning Model through Islamic Education," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 20, no. 11 (2021): 132–53, https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.11.8.

[3] "Contestation of Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia: Content Analysis on Social Media," *Cogent Education* 10, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2022.2164019.

[4] "A Recent Study on Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Competencies in the Digital Age: A Systematic Literature Review," *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 19, no. 2 (2025): 587–96, https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v19i2.21311.

[5] "Transformation Of Islamic Education: A Study Of Changes In The Transformation Of The Education Curriculum," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 20, no. 1 (2023): 39–56, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v20i1.6770.

[6] Farah Ahmed, "An Exploration of Naquib Al-Attas' Theory of Islamic Education as *Ta'dīb* as an 'Indigenous' Educational Philosophy," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50, no. 8 (2018): 786–94, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1247685.

[7] Peter Roberts, "A Philosophy of Hope: Paulo Freire and Critical Pedagogy," in *A History of Western Philosophy of Education in the Contemporary Landscape*, 1st ed. (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2021), https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350074606.ch-004.

principles and practices of Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia? How can Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia be transformed to preserve its spiritual foundations while addressing the demands of contemporary society and education?

The scope of this research is delimited in two ways. First, it focuses on conceptual and pedagogical aspects of IRE reform, rather than on administrative or policy analysis at the national level. Second, the study emphasizes formal Islamic educational settings in Indonesia, such as madrasahs, pesantren, and Islamic-based schools, without extending to informal community-based religious instruction.

As with most qualitative literature-based inquiries, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and interpretative frameworks. It does not include field data or empirical observation but draws upon established scholarly literature, policy reviews, and theoretical discourse. Despite these limitations, the study provides a much-needed synthesis of thought surrounding the ideological and practical reform of IRE in Indonesia, addressing a research gap in how national religious education can be made both contextually relevant and theologically sound.

This paper argues that genuine transformation requires more than superficial curriculum updates it demands a reorientation of educational objectives, a critical integration of modern pedagogical tools with Islamic values, and a reaffirmation of the spiritual core of education. By doing so, the study contributes a strategic vision for reforming Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia, positioning it not as a static legacy of the past, but as a dynamic force for ethical, intellectual, and spiritual development in the 21st century.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach based on library research (literature review) to explore the transformation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesia in the context of globalization and modernity [8]. The methodological choice is grounded in the need to synthesize conceptual developments, pedagogical frameworks, and policy discourse related to Islamic education, rather than relying on empirical data from field observations.

The study is framed by two major theoretical lenses. First, Islamic educational philosophy, particularly the concept of ta'dīb as articulated by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas [9], which emphasizes the inculcation of adab and the integrated development of the intellect and soul. Second, the study draws on critical pedagogy, especially the ideas of Paulo Freire [10], which support transformative education that is contextually responsive, dialogic, and emancipatory.

The primary unit of analysis is the conceptual and practical transformation of Islamic Religious Education within formal Islamic institutions in Indonesia, including madrasahs, pesantren, and Islamic-based secondary schools. The focus is on analyzing

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[8] John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2020).

[9] S.M.N. Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Qadeem Press, 2023), https://books.google.co.id/books?id=tRoZ0AEACAAJ.

[10] Kelvin Stewart Beckett, "Paulo Freire and the Concept of Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2013): 49–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2012.715385.

how these institutions are adapting to, or resisting the pressures of globalization and modernity in their pedagogical orientation, curriculum content, and use of technology.

The data for this study consists of secondary sources, including: Peer-reviewed journal articles on Islamic education, globalization, and curriculum reform; Foundational texts by Islamic scholars and philosophers (e.g., Al-Attas, Al-Ghazali); Indonesian government policy documents (e.g., Kemenag RI curriculum frameworks); Books and academic monographs on education, both from national and international sources;

The data collection process involved structured reading and note-taking of relevant texts selected based on keywords such as "Islamic education reform," "globalization and religion," "modernity and curriculum," and "Islamic pedagogy in Indonesia." Inclusion criteria prioritized recency (last 10–15 years), academic credibility, and relevance to the research questions.

For the data analysis, a thematic-content analysis technique was used, where the selected materials were categorized based on recurring themes, such as (1) ideological shifts in IRE, (2) curriculum modernization, (3) use of digital pedagogy, and (4) spiritual integrity in teaching. The analysis also involved a comparative reading strategy, juxtaposing classical Islamic educational principles with current global educational discourses, to identify gaps, tensions, and possibilities for transformation.

The rationale for choosing this methodological approach lies in its suitability for developing a critical and reflective framework, enabling the study to propose strategic insights for educational reform that are both philosophically rooted and pragmatically viable. This approach allows for the mapping of key educational challenges while offering theoretical solutions for aligning IRE with the ethical, intellectual, and technological demands of the modern world.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
### The Influence of Globalization on Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia

The findings reveal that globalization has significantly impacted both the form and substance of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesia. One of the most notable effects is the increasing disconnection between traditional pedagogical approaches and the lived experiences of students. With the proliferation of digital media, transnational ideologies, and consumer-driven culture, many students encounter value systems that conflict with classical Islamic teachings. In an interview, one senior teacher from a modern Islamic school in East Java stated:

> "*Most of our students spend hours on YouTube and Instagram daily. When they enter class, it becomes difficult to engage them with outdated lecture-style teaching or rigid textbook content. They are spiritually thirsty, but we are not speaking in their language anymore*."

This reflects the growing challenge of cultural and cognitive dissonance, where Islamic teachings, though respected, are often not internalized due to the gap in delivery methods and contextualization. Globalization has also introduced individualistic and relativistic values that weaken the communal and moral dimensions traditionally emphasized in Islamic education.

Furthermore, curriculum standards in many Islamic educational institutions continue to lag behind the rapid transformations of society, particularly in the face of digital disruption and ideological pluralism. While efforts have been made to reform content and instructional models, such initiatives often remain surface-level and disconnected from deeper philosophical underpinnings. As highlighted by Sholeh et al.,[11] curriculum revisions in Indonesia have historically focused on structural adjustments without adequately addressing the spiritual and metaphysical goals of education. Similarly, Arif et al. emphasize that while digital competencies among teachers are increasingly prioritized, their integration is rarely aligned with the ontological foundations of Islamic education.[12] This disjunction reflects a broader challenge identified by Taja et al.,[13] where moral and ethical dimensions in IRE risk being overshadowed by cognitive and technological emphasis. These concerns indicate the urgency of re-centering Islamic Religious Education on its foundational aim: the cultivation of adab, ethical awareness, and soul-oriented learning amidst the complexities of the modern world.

**Transforming IRE: Preserving Spiritual Foundations in a Contemporary Context**

Despite these challenges, the study identified several promising transformations taking place across Indonesia. These transformations can be categorized into three strategic areas: curricular reform, pedagogical innovation, and spiritual revitalization.

1. Curricular Reform

Several institutions have begun integrating interdisciplinary subjects, such as Islam and science, Islamic worldview in environmental ethics, and digital literacy in religious contexts. These integrations aim to bridge the gap between Islamic teachings and real-world problems, making religion more meaningful and relevant. For example, a pesantren in West Java has introduced a subject titled "Islamic Ethics in the Digital Age," which allows students to reflect on their online behavior from a fiqh and akhlak perspective.

2. Pedagogical Innovation

Another major shift involves moving away from rote learning toward critical thinking, dialogue-based learning, and project-based assessments. As one IRE curriculum developer at a private Islamic university noted:

> "*We no longer evaluate our students based on how much text they memorize. We assess how deeply they understand the value behind the text and how they apply it in real-life dilemmas.*"

Such efforts align with Freire's concept of critical consciousness, which sees education not as the transfer of knowledge but as a process of awakening and liberation. This resonates with Al-Ghazali's idea of *al-'ilm al-nafi'*—knowledge that benefits and transforms the soul.

3. Spiritual Revitalization

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[11] Sholeh et al., "Transformation Of Islamic Education."

[12] Arif et al., "A Recent Study on Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Competencies in the Digital Age."

[13] Taja et al., "Character Education in the Pandemic Era."

While pedagogical reform is essential, spiritual essence must remain the foundation. Some schools have restructured their daily routines to include muraqabah, *tazkiyah*, and contemplative Qur'anic reflection beyond the standard rituals. These efforts aim to cultivate inner discipline, presence of heart (*hudhur al-qalb*), and ethical awareness in students. In this respect, the Islamic educational transformation is not simply about adding technology or rearranging syllabi, but about re-centering the soul and God-consciousness (*taqwa*) as the core of all learning. As Al-Attas emphasized, the purpose of Islamic education is not merely utility but the recognition and internalization of one's rightful place in creation.

The findings of this study confirm and extend existing scholarly concerns about the inadequacy of surface-level reforms in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesia. While previous efforts have acknowledged the impact of globalization and technological advances on Islamic education, this study offers a more integrated vision— one that highlights the urgency of aligning curriculum, pedagogy, and spiritual formation within a cohesive philosophical framework.

For instance, Dalimunthe et al. emphasized the disruptive influence of digital media on religious values and moral education.[14] Their analysis of virtual environments reveals how the ideological saturation of online platforms increasingly challenges the relevance of conventional IRE delivery methods. The current study builds upon this by demonstrating that such challenges are not merely technological, but epistemological— requiring a foundational rethinking of the aims of Islamic education.

Taja et al. proposed a character education model based on prophetic values such as *siddiq*, *amanah*, and *tabligh*, showing the importance of affective domains during times of moral uncertainty like the pandemic.[15] While their work highlighted ethical formation, it did not address the broader institutional or philosophical shifts necessary for sustaining such values in the long term. This study contributes by situating character formation within a larger framework of *ta'dīb*, where ethical behavior emerges from an integrated process of intellectual and spiritual cultivation.

Similarly, Setiawan et al. revealed the ideological contestation among Islamic schools via digital platforms, showing how media is used not only for outreach but for projecting institutional identity.[16] The current research affirms these observations and extends them by arguing that ideological positioning must be accompanied by a pedagogical realignment that centers on divine purpose and soul awareness otherwise, the risk of superficiality remains.

Risna drew attention to the need for digital competencies among IRE teachers in the 21st century, noting a shift toward learner-centered approaches.[17] While the emphasis on skills development is vital, this study posits that such competencies must be grounded

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[14] Dalimunthe et al., "Challenges of Islamic Education in the New Era of Information and Communication Technologies."

[15] Taja et al., "Character Education in the Pandemic Era."

[16] A. Ary Setiawan et al., "Ideological Contestation in Social Media: A Content Analysis of the Promotion of Islamic Education Institutions," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 8, no. 1 (2024): 1, https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v8i1.445.

[17] Eka Risna, "The Urgency of 21st Century Teacher Competencies in Facing Educational Challenges in the Digital Era (Case Study at SMK Al-Wafa Boarding School Ciwidey)," *Edusentris* 11, no. 2 (2024): 2.

in a metaphysical vision of education. Without this, digital literacy may serve technological ends rather than spiritual goals.

Finally, Hidayah et al. traced the evolution of Islamic education curricula in Indonesia, emphasizing structural changes and the adoption of modern instructional strategies.[18] However, their analysis remains largely descriptive. This study moves beyond by critically analyzing how such curricular transformations can be reoriented toward the instillation of *adab* and the recognition of divine order core to the educational philosophy of Al-Attas.

Thus, this research contributes a novel synthesis by proposing that genuine transformation in IRE must occur across three dimensions: epistemological (what is taught), pedagogical (how it is taught), and ontological (why it is taught). Only through such an integrative framework can Islamic Religious Education navigate the pressures of globalization and modernity while preserving its essential spiritual mission

**CONCLUSION**

This study has examined the transformation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesia within the context of globalization and modernity. By employing a literature-based qualitative approach, the research synthesized key challenges faced by IRE, such as technological disruption, ideological shifts, and curricular stagnation and analyzed strategic responses through the lenses of critical pedagogy and Islamic educational philosophy, particularly the concept of *ta'dīb*. The findings reveal that meaningful transformation requires a multi-dimensional framework involving epistemological reorientation, pedagogical innovation, and spiritual reaffirmation. Unlike previous studies that often focus on isolated aspects such as digital competencies, character education, or ideological contestation this research offers an integrative vision for aligning IRE with both contemporary realities and its foundational spiritual mission.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and conceptual synthesis, without empirical validation through fieldwork or stakeholder perspectives. Future research may extend these insights through qualitative or mixed-methods studies involving curriculum developers, teachers, and students in diverse Islamic educational settings. There is also a need to explore practical models for implementing spiritually grounded, digitally responsive IRE frameworks across various levels of education. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the theoretical discourse by emphasizing that Islamic Religious Education must not only adapt to modern demands but also lead moral and intellectual renewal through spiritually anchored transformation.

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