

HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT AND SCOPE OF CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM: A CRITICAL REVIEW TOWARDS RELIGIOUS MODERATION AND DIGITAL ADAPTATION

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Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is a fundamental pillar in the national education system that aims not only to transfer theoretical knowledge, but also to shape the character, morals, and spirituality of students. However, the contemporary era, marked by technological disruption, globalization, and increasing social challenges such as intolerance and extremism, demands significant adaptation of the IRE curriculum philosophy. 1 This transformation is crucial to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of PAI in the 21st century. This study aims to analyze the conceptual foundations of the PAI curriculum, identify the dynamics of its development factors, and formulate a holistic, adaptive, and wasathiyah (religious moderation)-based framework for PAI. The method used was a Systematic Literature Review with a Qualitative approach. This qualitative research was inductive, interpretative, and contextual, with secondary data collection (scientific journals and education policies) focusing on publications from 2015 to 2025 to ensure the analysis was up to date. Key findings indicate that the PAI curriculum faces significant tension between the ideal concepts planned at the center and actual implementation in the field, exacerbated by rapid policy changes (Amalina, 2024). Furthermore, the transmission of ethics and values, particularly moderation, is largely determined by the role of the Hidden Curriculum. Therefore, the scope of contemporary PAI must explicitly integrate Religious Moderation as the core of the Akhlak dimension and adapt Al-Qur'an/Hadith digital literacy to respond to the challenges of Society 5.0 (Putra, 2019). This article offers a model for developing PAI that integrates theological foundations (Al-Qur'an/Sunnah) with contemporary philosophical foundations (Humanistic/Existentialism), providing constructive guidelines for curriculum designers and education practitioners.

Keywords: Islamic Education Curriculum, Religious Moderation, Curriculum Development, Hidden Curriculum, Digital Adaptation

Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a vital role in the Indonesian education system. As a fundamental subject, PAI aims not only to transfer theoretical knowledge about Islamic teachings, but also to shape the character, morals, and spirituality of students. PAI must be able to produce graduates who are faithful, pious, and have noble character. It is this balance between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects that makes PAI a pillar of identity formation.

The contemporary era demands that the education system, including PAI, undergo rapid transformation (Wijaya et al., 2016). PAI is faced with technological disruption, globalization, and increasingly complex social challenges, including increased exposure to various potentially deviant

ideologies. In this context, conventional PAI, which tends to focus rigidly and separately on fiqh and aqidah, often fails to address contemporary ethical issues such as extremism, intolerance, environmental issues, and moral challenges in the digital world.

If PAI is unable to address these challenges, its relevance as a character-building subject will fade. When formal and rigid PAI content is not contextual, students will seek answers to contemporary challenges from outside sources, particularly social media and the internet, which unfortunately can increase the risk of exposure to extremist or radical ideologies. Therefore, innovation and holistic development of the scope of PAI is needed, including the integration of Islamic values with general knowledge, the strengthening of character education based on moderation (*wasathiyyah*), and an emphasis on relevant problem solving.

Etymological analysis shows that the word curriculum comes from the Latin term *curere*, which means “place of running” or distance to be covered. In the traditional view, the curriculum is narrowly defined as a set of subjects that must be completed to obtain a diploma, resulting in a passive and knowledge-transmission-focused learning model.

However, as times have changed, the meaning of curriculum has shifted towards a more progressive direction. In the modern view, curriculum is seen as all potential experiences and activities that are scientifically organized, both inside and outside of school, with the aim of achieving educational goals. Education expert Hilda Taba defines curriculum as “a plan for learning.” This paradigm shift is not only semantic, but reflects a fundamental philosophical change from a content-centered model to an experience- and student-centered model.

This philosophical change has causally encouraged the adoption of more interactive, creative, and problem-solving-oriented learning methodologies. The PAI curriculum must internalize this modern view. The curriculum functions as a dynamic instrument, playing a conservative role (preserving cultural values), a critical-evaluative role (assessing inherited values), and a creative role (creating new activities). Especially in this era of disruption, PAI must increase its critical-evaluative role in guiding students to filter the flow of digital information.

Based on the urgent need for adaptive and relevant PAI development, this study aims to: (1) Analyze the conceptual foundations of the curriculum and the philosophical shifts that influence it, (2) Identify internal and external factors that influence the development of the contemporary PAI curriculum, and (3) Formulate a holistic PAI scope framework by integrating the values of Religious Moderation and digital adaptation.

This article has substantial academic significance, providing constructive contributions to the formulation of PAI that is not only oriented towards ritual aspects but also capable of producing a generation of Muslims who are faithful, have noble character, are knowledgeable, and contribute positively to society.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach that focuses on interpreting meanings, concepts, and ideas contained within contemporary literature on Islamic Religious Education (IRE). The research was conducted through an extensive review of scientific publications, policy documents, and academic discussions published between 2015 and 2025. These sources were selected to ensure that the analysis reflects the most recent developments, especially those related to digital transformation, religious moderation, and curriculum reform.

The literature reviewed was examined inductively, allowing themes, patterns, and conceptual tensions to emerge naturally from the data. Instead of testing predefined hypotheses, the researchers interpreted the materials to understand how the philosophical foundations, curriculum components, and implementation realities of IRE interact within the modern educational context. The process

involved identifying key issues such as the gap between ideal curriculum design and its practical application, the influence of technological disruption, and the significant role of the hidden curriculum in shaping students' character.

Throughout the analysis, the researchers relied on a theoretical perspective that views curriculum as a dynamic and evolving entity. This interpretive stance enabled the study to reveal deeper meanings embedded in the literature and to synthesize them into a holistic understanding of how IRE should adapt to contemporary challenges. The descriptive method used in this study ultimately provides a coherent narrative of curriculum development, offering insights that are grounded in documented evidence and reflective interpretation rather than statistical measurement.

Results

Conceptual Reorientation of the Curriculum

A fundamental shift in the conceptualization of the curriculum, from a narrow traditional view to a modern view as “a plan for learning,” has critical implications for PAI. The modern view, which is flexible and experience-centered, strongly supports PAI in achieving its holistic goal of balancing character and knowledge. The curriculum should focus on developing thinking and problem-solving skills, not just the transmission of theoretical knowledge and memorization.

The curriculum must perform three roles: conservative, critical-evaluative, and creative. In PAI, this means that the curriculum must preserve Islamic values (conservative), but at the same time must have the ability to assess and select relevant values to be passed on, as well as create new activities that are adaptive to social change (critical-evaluative and creative). Enhancing this critical-evaluative role is crucial in the digital age, where students need to be equipped with the right way of thinking to select information.

The PAI Curriculum in Three Dimensions: Ideal, Actual, and Hidden

The concepts of the Ideal curriculum (written plan) and the Actual Curriculum (real implementation) often experience significant tension. The contemporary ideal PAI curriculum, as embodied in the Merdeka Curriculum, adopts a Humanistic/Existentialist approach that demands student-centered and progressive learning. However, actual implementation is hampered by administrative burdens and a lack of professional readiness among PAI teachers. Teachers experience difficulties in developing comprehensive lesson plans (RPP), choosing appropriate strategies, and implementing authentic assessments. This misalignment shows that the bureaucratic curriculum initiated by government policy is often an inhibiting factor, creating a vicious cycle in which the demands of adaptation are hampered by the administrative complexity of implementation. Efforts to overcome this must focus on enhancing teachers' creativity and skills as well as collaboration among teachers.

Another crucial dimension is the Hidden Curriculum (HC). HC encompasses everything that influences students at school, such as norms, values, and beliefs conveyed outside the formal curriculum, often through teacher-student interactions or school culture (Kelly, 2009). In the context of PAI, HC plays a very decisive role in shaping character and discipline. Because affective learning and character building are difficult to measure through formal tests, the transmission of these values is highly dependent on non-formal interactions. Therefore, the success of PAI in instilling noble values is highly dependent on the role of PAI teachers as role models (Digugu Lan Ditiru) (Adib, 2022). This emphasizes that investment in school culture and the personal qualities of teachers is central to the development of PAI, even more important than simply improving formal curriculum documents.

Contemporary Islamic Education Philosophy as a Foundation for Development

The development of the PAI curriculum must be based on a strong philosophy. Although Pancasila is the national philosophical foundation, PAI needs to synthesize Islamic educational philosophy in a more specific way. An integration is needed between Essentialism/Perennialism, which preserves the eternal heritage of Islam (Achadah, 2018), and progressive schools of thought such as Humanism and Social Reconstruction.

Existentialism, which resonates with the Merdeka Curriculum, offers the perspective that education should be centered on students and their ability to determine learning objectives and think critically. This synthesis allows PAI to maintain its theological principles (such as the integrity of Aqidah) while encouraging students to think critically, reject indoctrination, and make schools agents of social change. A curriculum based explicitly on the Qur'an and Sunnah demonstrates an effective strategy for producing a generation that is faithful, knowledgeable, and adaptable to changing times.

Dynamics of Factors Affecting the Scope of PAI

The scope and components of the PAI curriculum are an interrelated system: Objectives, Content/Materials, Strategies, and Evaluation. The balance of PAI objectives, which includes *hablumminallah* and *hablumminannas* relationships, must be the guide in determining all other components (Mawardi, 2017).

Curriculum development is influenced by external and internal factors. External factors include government policies, which often trigger curriculum changes in response to national challenges. In addition, PAI must be designed to be compatible with the socio-cultural dynamics of the surrounding community. Another crucial factor is science and technology, which encourages curriculum adaptation to face the challenges of Society 5.0 (Amalina, 2024).

Internally, psychological foundations (understanding learning theories and student development) and philosophical foundations determine effective materials and methods. Implementation barriers in the field, such as teachers' difficulties with student-centered learning strategies, show that internal factors (teacher readiness and facilities) are often weak points that hinder the achievement of an ideal curriculum (Lestari, D., & Kurniawan, 2020).

Expansion of the Scope of the PAI Curriculum: Integration of Moderation and Global Ethics

The scope of the PAI curriculum traditionally covers the Qur'an/Hadith, Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, and Tarikh. Holistic development requires the expansion of these dimensions to keep PAI relevant. Analysis shows that Religious Moderation is a core value (*wasathiyyah*) that must be a main pillar in contemporary PAI. Moderation is an important instrument for creating harmony in Indonesia and countering the potential for extremism (Arsyad, n.d.). Strategies for instilling this value must be integrated into PAI material, particularly in the aspects of Aqidah (to counter radicalization) and Akhlak (to instill tolerance). The use of technology must also be directed to support moderation education (Hanafi, 2013).

Islamic Religious Education is designed to develop a balance between four types of relationships: with Allah, fellow human beings, oneself, and nature (Lase, 2015). In the digital age, this scope must include digital ethics and contextual Al-Qur'an/Hadith literacy. PAI must become a socially relevant subject, where the dimension of Akhlak is expanded to include global ethics and Fiqh is expanded to include environmental issues (Environmental Fiqh). This ensures that PAI is able to produce graduates who are not only domestically virtuous, but also responsible as global citizens (Herlina, 2024).

The scope of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum traditionally consists of five core dimensions: Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, and Islamic History and Civilization. Each dimension carries its own essential competencies, yet the demands of the contemporary era

require these components to be expanded and reinterpreted to remain relevant to the challenges of 21st-century education.

The Qur'an and Hadith dimension, which has conventionally focused on understanding Islam's primary sources as life guidance, now needs to incorporate digital literacy. This includes the ability to use technological tools for accessing Qur'anic and Hadith materials, engaging with contextual interpretations, and exploring digital platforms that support deeper and more interactive learning experiences.

The Aqidah dimension, concerned with fundamental beliefs and principles of ushuluddin, must also be strengthened through the explicit integration of Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*). In the modern context, Aqidah education should not only develop cognitive understanding but also equip students to counter extremism, intolerance, and radical ideologies that frequently circulate through digital spaces.

The Akhlak dimension, centered on moral development and ethical behavior, requires expansion into digital ethics, multicultural awareness, and interreligious tolerance. Since character formation is strongly influenced by the Hidden Curriculum, the transmission of Akhlak values depends heavily on teacher exemplification, school culture, and the informal learning environment that shapes students' emotional and social maturity.

The Fiqh dimension, which covers Islamic legal rulings related to worship and social interactions, also demands contextual reorientation. Contemporary issues such as environmental ethics, digital transactions, and online interactions must be integrated into Fiqh learning so that students can relate Islamic jurisprudence to real-life societal challenges in the digital age.

Finally, the Islamic History and Civilization dimension should shift from a memorization-based approach toward a more reflective and analytical understanding. Islamic history must serve as a source of *ibrah* (moral lessons), fostering students' capacity to innovate, adapt, and appreciate the dynamic evolution of Islamic civilization in relation to present-day social transformation

Conclusion

The PAI curriculum is a dynamic system that must continue to evolve from a content-centric paradigm towards a holistic, humanistic, and adaptive experience model. This transformation is crucial to address the challenges of digital disruption and the rise of intolerance in the 21st century. The scope of contemporary PAI must be rearticulated to make *Wasathiyah* (Religious Moderation) a core value integrated into all pillars, especially in the dimensions of Akhlak and Aqidah. This expansion includes digital ethics and technology-based pedagogical adaptation.

Although the ideal PAI curriculum (which demands a progressive and student-centered approach) has a strong philosophical foundation, its effective implementation is hampered by administrative burdens and a lack of professional readiness among teachers. The tension between the ideal curriculum and the actual curriculum is a systemic challenge that often arises as a result of rapid policy changes. The effective transmission of PAI values is highly dependent on the Hidden Curriculum, which requires conscious attention to school culture and the role of teachers as role models.

As a key recommendation, it is suggested that curriculum developers and the government prioritize the provision of adequate professional support and training (e.g., through MGMP) to minimize implementation gaps and administrative complexity for PAI teachers. In addition, educational institutions must consciously design and monitor the Hidden Curriculum as the main mechanism for instilling character and values of moderation.

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