The Digitalization of Islamic Education and Its Impact on Improving Students' Religious Literacy

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Abstract

The digitalization of learning has become inevitable in the technological era, including in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Islamic universities. This study aims to analyze the impact of the digitalization of PAI learning on improving students' religious literacy. The approach used was descriptive qualitative, using interviews, observation, and documentation techniques with lecturers and students at private Islamic universities. The results show that the digitalization of learning contributes positively to improving students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in understanding and practicing Islamic values. Students gain access to broader and more interactive materials, as well as flexible learning that adapts to their life contexts. This transformation also encourages changes in learning patterns, leading to more independent and reflective learning. PAI lecturers are also required to be able to adapt learning methods by utilizing digital technology creatively. However, several obstacles remain, such as limited devices, internet infrastructure, and low digital literacy among some students. Therefore, adaptive learning strategies, technology training for lecturers, and strengthening student learning motivation are needed so that the digitalization process truly supports the strengthening of religious literacy holistically and sustainably.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is a fundamental element in shaping the character and Islamic identity of students in higher education, particularly in Islamic campuses. As part of national education, PAI is not only intended to transfer religious knowledge but also to shape spiritual, moral, social, and cultural values based on Islamic teachings (Iqbal, 2022)

In the context of students, PAI courses are expected to be a medium for fostering Islamic faith, morals, and insight that are applicable in social life. However, the challenges of the times marked by advances in information technology and globalization require a transformation in learning approaches, so that PAI materials remain relevant and able to touch the realities of students' lives.(Maulida & Ratnasari, 2024;Huda et al., 2024). Today's digital generation has different mindsets, learning styles, and information needs than previous generations, so traditional approaches to religious learning are no longer effective if they are not adapted to the times. (Aldyandra & Sirozi, 2024; Aldyandra & Sirozi, 2024; Urba et al., 2024).

The digital era has fundamentally changed the way humans learn, communicate, and access knowledge. Students no longer rely solely on textbooks or lectures as their primary sources of information (Hasnida et al., 2024). Instead, they rely more heavily on digital media such as the internet, instructional videos, e-learning platforms, and social media as tools for learning and exploring religious understanding. This is where the digitalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning becomes crucial. Digitalization is not just about using technology as a tool, but also involves new approaches to delivering material, developing teaching strategies, and measuring understanding and practicing Islamic values. (Malika et al., 2024). Therefore, Islamic Religious Education lecturers in higher education are required to be more adaptive and innovative in integrating digital technology into the learning process to address these challenges.

The digital transformation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning opens up significant opportunities to broaden and deepen students' religious literacy. This religious literacy encompasses students' ability to critically, contextually, and applicably understand Islamic teachings, both at the personal and social levels. Through digital media, students can quickly access various Islamic scholarly resources, participate in online studies, engage in discussions in virtual religious forums, and even practice worship through accurate digital guidance (Saputra, 2024; Yemmardotillah et al., 2024). Thus, religious literacy extends beyond textual understanding to encompass skills in addressing contemporary issues related to Islamic values. This demonstrates that digital-based PAI learning has the potential to strengthen students' religiosity while enhancing their critical thinking on various community issues. (Sinta et al., 2024).

However, the digitalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in Islamic higher education also faces various challenges that cannot be ignored. Many lecturers and students still experience a digital literacy gap, limited technological infrastructure, and obstacles in developing learning content that aligns with Islamic pedagogical principles. (Siregar et al., 2024). Not all Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials are easily adapted into digital formats without experiencing a reduction in meaning, especially when it comes to internalizing spiritual and moral values. Furthermore, not all students have high learning motivation in an online environment, as digital learning demands greater independence, discipline, and active involvement than conventional face-to-face learning. Therefore, the digitalization process must be carried out systematically, directed, and based on the real needs of students and the capacity of lecturers. (Hakim et al., 2024).

This study aims to examine in depth how the digitalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning contributes to improving the religious literacy of students at Islamic universities. The main focus of this study is on the use of digital technology in the learning process, students' perceptions of digital-based learning, and its impact on the understanding and practice of Islamic teachings among students. This study also aims to describe lecturers' strategies in developing contextual and effective digital learning models. With this approach, it is hoped that a digital-based PAI learning pattern or model can be identified that can strengthen

students' religious understanding while addressing the challenges of the ever-evolving technological era. This research is relevant because digitalization has now become an inseparable part of students' academic and social lives. Campuses, as centers for the development of knowledge and character, need to be pioneers in the use of technology that is not only practical but also has ethical and spiritual dimensions. In this context, PAI learning can become a strategic space for instilling Islamic values through a communicative, participatory, and reflective digital approach. Religious literacy is no longer merely about memorizing Islamic texts or mastering Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), but rather a holistic understanding that shapes students' moral awareness and commitment as responsible Muslims.

Given this urgency, this research is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning that is more relevant to the needs of the times and the characteristics of digital-generation students. The results are important not only for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) academics and lecturers, but also for policymakers in Islamic higher education institutions in designing adaptive curricula and learning systems. Through appropriate digital integration, PAI learning is expected to continue to develop as a strategic instrument in shaping a generation of intelligent, moral, and technologically literate young Muslims. This research also opens the door to broader discussion about how religious education can remain relevant and contributing amidst the dynamics of the digital and fast-paced era.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with the aim of exploring in depth how the digitalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning contributes to improving students' religious literacy at Islamic universities (Engkizar et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2024; Engkizar et al., 2024). This approach was chosen because it is able to explain the phenomenon contextually and comprehensively based on the subjective experiences of informants, without using statistical analysis or hypothesis testing. The focus of the research is not only on the technical implementation of digital learning, but also on how students understand, respond to, and internalize Islamic values through digital media. The research location was selected purposively, namely at a private Islamic university in Indonesia that has implemented an online or hybrid learning system for PAI courses. The research subjects consisted of PAI lecturers and students actively participating in digital learning, as well as staff managing the digital learning system as additional informants. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore informants' views and experiences regarding digital learning practices; Observations were conducted to directly observe the implementation of online classes and interactions between lecturers and students; while documentation was used to supplement data through analysis of the syllabus, digital teaching materials, and learning platforms used (Aryanti et al., 2022).

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, with steps including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by sorting relevant information, simplifying raw data, and grouping them based on thematic categories that emerged during data collection. Furthermore, the data was presented in the form of descriptive narratives directly linked to quotes from informants, so that the meaning contained could be conveyed fully. Conclusions were drawn inductively based on consistent patterns from interviews, observations, and documents (Engkizar et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2024). To maintain data validity and reliability, this study used source and method triangulation techniques, and applied the validity criteria according to Lincoln and

Guba, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was maintained through member checking and repeated observations, while transferability was ensured through detailed context descriptions. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through systematic and reflective process documentation. This research was conducted over a three-month period, encompassing preparation, implementation, analysis, and report preparation. Using this method, the research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning that is adaptive to the digital era.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
The Contribution of Digital Learning to Three Domains of Student Competence

The research results show that digitalization of learning has significantly contributed to improving three key aspects of education: students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills. In the cognitive aspect, students gain a deeper understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material thanks to the diversity of digital learning resources such as e-books, video lectures, journal articles, and online lectures. These resources can be accessed flexibly and are not limited to a specific time, allowing students to learn at their own pace and style. Students' critical thinking skills also improve as they are required to compare various opinions of scholars, understand the context of verses or hadiths, and construct religious arguments based on reliable sources. (Irhamni et al., 2022). This shows that digital learning provides a more active, analytical, and in-depth learning environment compared to one-way lecture methods.

From an affective perspective, digitalization encourages students to be more aware of Islamic values in their daily lives. Many students stated that they are participating in online religious studies more frequently, sharing Islamic preaching content on social media, and forming virtual Islamic communities. These activities not only demonstrate increased religious awareness but also demonstrate that spiritual values can be translated into digital activities. Meanwhile, from a psychomotor perspective, students demonstrated behavioral changes in religious practices, such as more diligent Quran reading through apps, participating in digital Islamic preaching challenges, and even creating short Islamic video content. These three aspects—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor—complement each other and demonstrate that the digitalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning can have a positive, holistic impact.

Access to Extensive Materials that are Contextual to Student Life

The digitalization of learning provides a significant opportunity for students to access extensive and contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning materials. Through online platforms, students can access various types of materials, such as scientific articles, thematic lectures, infographics, and religious podcasts from within and outside the country. This access, unrestricted by space and time, makes the learning process more flexible and personalized. Students can choose the best time to study, review material as needed, and explore information from various perspectives. This flexibility offers significant advantages in terms of deepening the material and engaging emotionally with the learning content. Furthermore, students also more easily understand the relevance of Islamic teachings to their lives, both as individuals and as part of a digital society.

Furthermore, the contextual presentation of material, such as social media ethics, online transactions, and digital preaching, makes Islamic teachings feel more relevant and applicable. Students no longer perceive Islamic Religious Education

courses as merely covering classical doctrines and laws, but instead view them as practical guidance for facing the challenges of modern life. Online discussion forums, collaborative assignments based on actual case studies, and the use of social media as a means of religious education strengthen the internalization of Islamic values. Thus, digitalization not only expands access to learning but also strengthens the relevance of Islamic Religious Education in students' daily lives.

Changes in Learning Patterns: Independent, Reflective, and Open

One of the main implications of the digitalization of learning is the emergence of new learning patterns that are more independent, reflective, and open. Students are no longer entirely dependent on the presence of lecturers in class as the sole source of knowledge. They are encouraged to explore additional material from various digital sources, critically evaluate, and construct their own religious understanding. This habit fosters the intellectual independence that is so essential for 21st-century learning. Students also become more disciplined in managing their study time, utilizing the features of the LMS, and adapting learning to their lifestyles. They learn to be more active, not simply waiting for lecturers' directions, but proactively constructing understanding that aligns with their values and life contexts.

Reflective tendencies are also increasingly evident in digital learning. Students not only read the material but are also asked to write religious journals, create spiritual reflection vlogs, or compile personal portfolios depicting their worship practices. These activities encourage students to connect Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material to their own realities and to evaluate the Islamic values they have implemented. Openness to differences also increases as students become accustomed to discussing with peers from diverse schools of thought or understanding. They are better prepared to face differences and are better able to express their views in a polite manner and based on scientific argumentation. This shift in learning patterns demonstrates that digitalization not only transforms learning methods but also shapes the character of more mature and responsible learners.

Digital Competency Demands for Islamic Education Lecturers

The digitalization of learning requires Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lecturers to make significant adaptations, both in terms of technological mastery and delivery methods. Many lecturers feel the need to master various digital tools to reach students more effectively. They are becoming accustomed to using platforms like Google Classroom, Moodle, YouTube, Canva, and even TikTok to create engaging materials. This transformation requires specialized training and continuous innovation, as the success of digital learning is determined not only by the content but also by how it is presented. Lecturers are required to be more creative, able to package Islamic values in visual, interactive, and enjoyable forms without compromising the depth of their religious messages.

Furthermore, lecturers also have a responsibility to maintain spiritual relationships with students in the digital space. This can be done through online discussion forums, religious mentoring, and weekly reflections that encourage students to share their spiritual experiences. A humanistic and communicative approach is crucial in bridging the gap between lecturers and students. Some lecturers have even created online communities as a space for students to collectively grow in their religious understanding. Thus, lecturers' digital competencies encompass not only technical skills but also pedagogical and emotional abilities to build meaningful interactions in technology-based learning.

This transformation in the lecturer's role is key to the successful implementation of Islamic Religious Education digitalization in Islamic higher education.

Barriers to Implementation: Infrastructure and Digital Literacy

Despite the success of digitalization, significant obstacles remain, particularly in terms of infrastructure and digital literacy. Not all students have adequate devices, such as laptops or smartphones, to optimally support online learning. Some even experience unstable internet connections, particularly those living in remote areas. This problem creates unequal access to information, which directly impacts student participation and engagement in the learning process. Technical constraints such as these are a major obstacle to the implementation of equitable and inclusive digital Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning.

On the other hand, low digital literacy also poses a significant challenge, both for students and some lecturers. Students unfamiliar with using e-learning platforms, managing their own study schedules, or interacting in digital forums tend to be passive and not actively engaged in learning. Meanwhile, lecturers who lack the skills to manage digital media will struggle to deliver material effectively. Therefore, increasing technological capacity is a priority that cannot be ignored. Digital training, the provision of basic technological facilities, and technical assistance need to be systematically designed so that the digitalization process not only works but also truly improves the quality and reach of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in Islamic higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the digitalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in private Islamic universities has significantly contributed to improving student competency in three main domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Students gain access to extensive, contextual, and flexible materials, which encourages the development of more independent, reflective, and open learning patterns to differences. This transformation also requires PAI lecturers to improve their digital competency in delivering material creatively and interactively. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, technological devices, and low digital literacy among students and lecturers remain obstacles that need to be addressed immediately. Overall, the digitalization of PAI learning presents a strategic opportunity to shape a young generation of Muslims who are religious, adaptive, and technologically literate, provided it is supported by sustainable policies and training.

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