



# Islamic Educational Institutions in the VUCA Era: Quality Challenges and Adaptive Responses

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## Article Information:

Received February 10, 2026

Revised March 18, 2026

Accepted April 10, 2026

**Keywords:** *VUCA, educational quality, adaptive leadership, curriculum integration, digital literacy*

## Abstract

This study aims to analyze quality challenges and formulate adaptive responses of Islamic educational institutions in the VUCA era, characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design in an Islamic educational institution. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using an interactive model. The findings reveal that the main challenges include the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge, limited critical digital literacy, inadequate human resource readiness, and ambiguous quality standards. Adaptive responses are manifested through integrative curriculum transformation, adaptive and collaborative leadership, quality mentoring systems, and a digital-based spiritual reinforcement approach. This study contributes to the development of a VUCA-based educational quality framework that is adaptive and sustainable in Islamic education contexts.

## INTRODUCTION

In the VUCA era characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity Islamic educational institutions face increasingly dynamic and unpredictable challenges that directly affect educational quality (Susanti et al., 2025). Rapid changes in educational policies, the expansion of digital technologies, and shifting societal expectations require these institutions to continuously adapt. Stakeholders now expect not only the strengthening of Islamic values but also the development of global competencies and digital literacy. However, many Islamic educational institutions still lack flexible and adaptive quality management systems, resulting in a gap between external demands and institutional capacity (Nugraha et al., 2025).

This gap is further intensified by persistent uncertainty in educational governance and increasing institutional competition. In many cases, quality management practices remain reactive and short-term oriented, limiting the sustainability of quality improvement efforts (Khusniyah, 2025). At the same time, the growing complexity of educational management such as curriculum integration, teacher professionalism, and the adoption of digital technologies poses additional challenges (Mantara et al., 2022). These conditions are often compounded by limited managerial capacity and weak internal coordination, leading to fragmented and less effective quality policies (Xu, 2024).

## How to cite:

Damiri, A., Aimah, S. (2026). Islamic Educational Institutions in the VUCA Era: Quality Challenges and Adaptive Responses. *Ahlussunnah: Journal of Islamic Education*, 5(1), 44-52.

## E-ISSN:

2827-9573

## Published by:

The Institute for Research and Community Service

Another critical issue lies in the ambiguity surrounding the interpretation and implementation of educational quality standards. Islamic educational institutions must navigate multiple frameworks, including religious values, national standards, and global demands, which often create unclear benchmarks of success (Rahman, 2025). This ambiguity requires institutions to formulate adaptive strategies that can balance the preservation of Islamic identity with the need for innovation and global relevance.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of adaptive leadership, digital transformation, and institutional agility in responding to the challenges of the VUCA era (Al-Haviz et al., 2025). Other research emphasizes the role of collaboration, innovation, and competency development in strengthening institutional resilience (Syamsir et al., 2025). In addition, the integration of digital systems, human resource development, and cross-institutional collaboration has been identified as a key factor in ensuring educational quality in disruptive contexts (Htay et al., 2025; Jaafar et al., 2025). However, existing studies tend to address these aspects in a fragmented manner and have not systematically mapped quality challenges based on the four dimensions of VUCA.

Therefore, there is a need for a more integrative approach that links the VUCA framework with quality assurance systems in Islamic educational institutions. This study aims to analyze quality challenges and formulate adaptive responses of Islamic educational institutions in the VUCA era. It further proposes a conceptual framework that integrates Islamic values, modern quality management, and VUCA principles as a basis for sustainable educational development (Purwanto et al., 2023).

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the dynamics of educational quality challenges and adaptive responses of Islamic educational institutions in the VUCA era (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) (Bursal et al., 2025; Daulay & Hidayat, 2023; Engkizar et al., 2024). A case study is appropriate for understanding complex phenomena within their real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of organizational culture, leadership patterns, quality management practices, and adaptive strategies implemented by the institution (Chand, 2025; Raihan et al., 2025).

The study was conducted at an Islamic secondary educational institution operating within a *pesantren*-based environment while simultaneously adopting a formal education system. This institution was selected due to its unique characteristics in integrating strong Islamic traditions with modern educational practices (Engkizar et al., 2025; Kassymova et al., 2025; Mutiaramses et al., 2025). It represents a relevant case for examining how Islamic educational institutions maintain academic and religious quality amid digital transformation, policy changes, and increasing institutional competition (Rambe et al., 2025). The setting also provides a contextual basis for analyzing the integration of Islamic values with modern quality management systems.

This study utilized both primary and secondary data to ensure comprehensive understanding and data validity (Engkizar et al., 2024; Hafizah et al., 2025). Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and field observations involving key and supporting informants. Key informants included the principal and quality management personnel, while supporting informants consisted of vice principals, teachers, administrative staff, and students.

Secondary data were collected from institutional documents such as vision and mission statements, quality assurance reports, curriculum documents, and academic reports.

**Table 1. Research Informants**

No	Informants	Gender		Number
		Man	Woman	
1	Principal	1		1
2	Quality Management Staff	2		2
3	Vice Principals	1		1
4	Administrative Staff	5		5
5	Teachers	3	3	6
6	Students	5	5	10
<b>Total</b>				<b>25</b>

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to capture participants' perspectives, experiences, and strategies in responding to quality challenges in the VUCA context. Participant observation allowed the researcher to directly examine institutional practices, interaction patterns, and adaptive behaviors that may not be fully captured through interviews. Document analysis was used to examine formal institutional records, including policies, curriculum documents, and quality assurance reports, to validate and enrich the findings. The combination of these techniques enables methodological triangulation, enhancing data credibility and depth.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This model allows continuous and iterative analysis, enabling the researcher to interpret data dynamically as new findings emerge (Asipi et al., 2022; Nurohmah et al., 2025; Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). Given the complexity of the VUCA context, this approach is particularly relevant for organizing and synthesizing data from multiple sources systematically, leading to in-depth and valid conclusions regarding quality management and adaptive responses.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, this study employed triangulation techniques, including source triangulation, method triangulation, and investigator triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants, including school leaders, teachers, staff, and students. Method triangulation involved the use of interviews, observations, and document analysis to cross-verify data. Investigator triangulation was applied by involving multiple perspectives in the analysis process to minimize researcher bias. These strategies enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the research findings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Hybrid-Epistemological Curriculum Transformation: Integrating *Naqli* and *Aqli* Knowledge with Future Skills

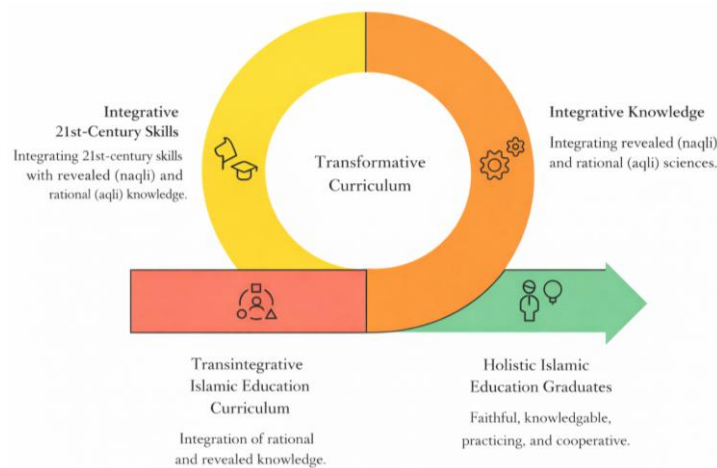
The transformation of a hybrid-epistemological curriculum has become an increasingly relevant phenomenon in Islamic education in response to evolving societal demands (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). Traditionally, Islamic education curricula tend to dichotomously separate *naqli* knowledge, which emphasizes normative-theological aspects, from *aqli* knowledge, which relates to science, technology, and social sciences. This condition creates a gap between the mastery of religious values and the competencies required for the future, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy.

The rapid development of technology, the dynamics of the labor market, and the complexity of global challenges require graduates of Islamic education not only to possess strong spiritual integrity but also professional and adaptive competencies. However, in practice, many Islamic educational institutions have not systematically

integrated future skills into their curricula, resulting in fragmented learning processes. Therefore, the transformation toward a hybrid-epistemological curriculum is a strategic necessity to harmoniously integrate *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge, enabling Islamic education to produce graduates who are faithful, knowledgeable, innovative, and globally competitive (Nurhayati et al., 2024).

This finding is supported by an interview with the school principal, who stated: *...So far, our curriculum still tends to separate religious subjects from general subjects. Naqli knowledge is strongly emphasized, but 21st-century skills such as digital literacy and critical thinking have not been systematically integrated. Meanwhile, future challenges require graduates who are both religious and adaptive to change.*

Based on the interview, it can be concluded that the current curriculum remains dichotomous, separating religious and general knowledge. Although *naqli* knowledge has been well developed, the integration of 21st-century skills such as digital literacy and critical thinking has not been systematically implemented. This indicates a gap between normative curriculum orientation and contemporary demands, highlighting the need for a more integrative curriculum transformation to produce graduates with both strong religiosity and adaptive capabilities (Ahwani et al., 2025).



**Fig 1. Hybrid-Epistemological Curriculum Transformation**

The figure illustrates the transformation process of a hybrid-epistemological curriculum in Islamic education as a continuous and systemic cycle. Initially, the curriculum is characterized by fragmentation, particularly the separation between *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge. The transformation process is driven by two main pillars: the integration of *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge and the incorporation of future skills into the curriculum (Nasir, 2024). This process is depicted as a circular model, emphasizing its ongoing and dynamic nature. The expected outcome is the development of holistic graduates who possess strong faith, scientific knowledge, innovative skills, and global competitiveness (Firdaus & Kuswinarno, 2024).

#### **“Kiai-Digital” Leadership and Agile-Collaborative Governance Model**

The dynamics of the VUCA era characterized by rapid change, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity have significantly affected the quality of Islamic educational institutions (Utia et al., 2024). Technological advancements, shifting educational policies, and increasing demands for 21st-century competencies place these institutions in unstable and challenging conditions. Many institutions still struggle to maintain quality consistency due to conventional management practices, fragmented curricula, and limited human resource capacity in utilizing digital technologies.

These challenges are reflected in the low adoption of digital-based learning, the mismatch between graduate competencies and labor market needs, and the weakness of quality assurance systems in responding to external changes. At the same time,

students' increasing exposure to global information flows requires more flexible and contextual educational approaches. These conditions highlight the need for Islamic educational institutions to develop adaptive responses through quality management innovation, strengthening visionary leadership, and integrating Islamic values with global competencies to remain relevant and competitive in the VUCA era (Rohmah et al., 2023).

An interview with a teacher revealed:

*...Policy changes and digital demands are happening very rapidly, while the readiness of teachers and our system is still gradual. This makes it difficult to maintain stable quality standards.*

This finding indicates that the acceleration of policy changes and digital demands has not been fully matched by the readiness of human resources and institutional systems. The gradual preparedness of teachers and limited systemic support create difficulties in maintaining consistent educational quality standards. This reflects an adaptation gap between external demands and internal capacity (Suryana, 2022).

No	Description	Outcomes
1	Mentoring on adapting to new education policies	Teachers and administrators understand policy changes more quickly and adjust institutional programs accordingly
2	Digital literacy mentoring for teachers	Improved teacher competence in utilizing learning technologies and digital platforms
3	Internal quality management mentoring	More measurable and consistent quality standards despite external changes
4	Integration mentoring of Islamic curriculum and 21st-century skills	Learning becomes more relevant, contextual, and aligned with students' needs
5	Adaptive and collaborative leadership mentoring	Decision-making becomes more responsive, visionary, and needs-based

The table illustrates strategic efforts undertaken by Islamic educational institutions to respond to quality challenges amid policy changes and digital demands (Susanti et al., 2025). Policy adaptation mentoring helps educators quickly understand regulatory changes, ensuring program alignment without disrupting quality stability. Digital literacy mentoring significantly improves teachers' technological competence, addressing a key barrier to adaptation. Strengthening internal quality management enhances measurable and consistent standards even under uncertain conditions. Furthermore, integrating Islamic curriculum with 21st-century competencies makes learning more relevant to global demands. Finally, adaptive and collaborative leadership mentoring strengthens decision-making capacity, enabling institutions to remain resilient and competitive in the VUCA era (Ramadhan et al., 2025).

### **Critical Digital Literacy Deficit and the Response through “Digital ‘Aqidah & Spiritual Safety’”**

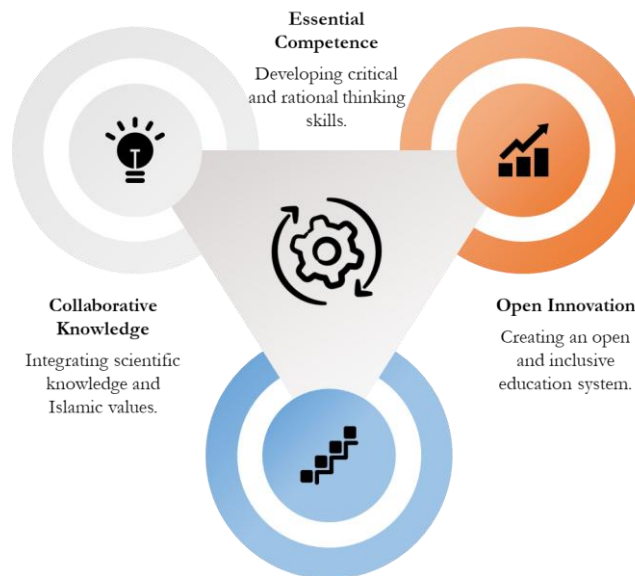
The phenomenon of critical digital literacy deficit among students and society has become increasingly evident alongside the rapid expansion of digital media usage (Wahyuni, 2021). The core issue lies in the limited ability to critically filter, analyze, and interpret digital information, particularly in relation to religious values. This condition is driven by the high exposure to unverified social media content, the lack of value-based digital literacy education, and weak spiritual guidance in digital spaces (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024).

Moreover, the limited integration of critical digital literacy with *aqidah* and spiritual development within Islamic education curricula further exacerbates the problem. This social reality highlights the need for a strategic response through the approach of Digital ‘Aqidah & Spiritual Safety’ as both a protective and educational framework. This approach aims to foster critical awareness, strengthen spiritual resilience, and promote moderate and ethical religious understanding in navigating complex and ambiguous digital environments.

An interview with an Islamic education teacher stated:

...Some students experience confusion in understanding religious teachings because of the abundance of conflicting content on the internet.

This finding indicates that exposure to diverse and contradictory digital religious content leads to confusion in students' understanding of religious teachings. It reflects weak critical digital literacy and insufficient integration of *aqidah* and spiritual guidance in digital engagement. As a result, the religious resilience of younger generations becomes vulnerable and requires structured educational reinforcement (Aminah et al., 2025).



**Fig 2. Digital 'aqidah & spiritual safety'**

The figure illustrates the fragmented condition of Islamic education curricula, which hinders students' readiness for future challenges. The disconnected gear imagery symbolizes an unintegrated educational system. Competency gaps are reflected in the limited development of critical thinking and digital literacy skills, which should be essential components of learning (Jannah & Atmojo, 2022). Additionally, limited integration is evident in the insufficient incorporation of 21st-century skills, resulting in learning that remains normative and less contextual. The dichotomy between religious and general knowledge further reinforces this fragmentation. Overall, the figure emphasizes the urgency of reconstructing Islamic education curricula into a holistic, integrative, and adaptive system to produce graduates who are religious, critical, and future-ready.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic educational institutions face significant quality challenges in the VUCA era, including the persistent dichotomy between *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge, limited critical digital literacy, inadequate human resource readiness, and ambiguity in quality standards. These challenges indicate a gap between traditional educational practices and the demands of a rapidly changing global environment. However, the findings also reveal that adaptive responses can be effectively developed through hybrid-epistemological curriculum transformation, which integrates Islamic values with 21st-century skills, as well as through adaptive and collaborative digital-based leadership. In addition, mentoring systems play a crucial role in maintaining quality consistency under conditions of uncertainty, while the concept of Digital 'Aqidah & Spiritual Safety' emerges as an innovative approach to addressing critical digital literacy deficits and strengthening students' spiritual resilience. This study contributes to the development of a holistic and integrative framework for managing educational quality in Islamic institutions within the VUCA

context. It emphasizes that sustainable quality improvement can be achieved when adaptive strategies are aligned with Islamic values, enabling institutions to remain relevant, competitive, and resilient in the face of global dynamics.

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