



The Dialectics of Islamic Religious Education Values in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Ecosystem: An Analysis of Learning Transformation among Generation Z (A Study of University Students in Pohuwato Regency)

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the dialectic of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) values within the ecosystem of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its impact on the transformation of learning among Generation Z students in Pohuwato Regency. Using a qualitative field research approach, the study involved 15 students selected through purposive sampling based on their active use of AI in religious learning. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using an interactive model combined with thematic analysis. The findings indicate that AI has become a dominant source of learning, leading to a shift from traditional *thalab al-'ilm* practices toward instant and technology-based learning patterns. This transformation also affects the authority of knowledge, where AI is increasingly perceived as an alternative reference, often used without adequate verification. While AI enhances learning effectiveness and supports self-directed learning, it also contributes to the reduction and fragmentation of religious understanding due to its concise and decontextualized responses. Furthermore, the study reveals a value dialectic among students between the convenience of AI and the need for the validity of knowledge. The study concludes that AI has an ambivalent role, offering both opportunities and challenges. Therefore, integrating Islamic values with digital literacy is essential to ensure that AI functions as a supportive tool (*wasilah*) rather than a primary epistemic authority in Islamic education.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 has brought significant changes across various sectors of life, including education. One of the most transformative innovations is the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which functions not only as a

supporting tool but has evolved into a system capable of producing, recommending, and even mediating knowledge (Hoeruman, Kuswanto, Subha, Dewi, & Khoirunnisa, 2025). In the context of education, AI shifts the learning paradigm from a conventional teacher-centered model to one that is more adaptive, personalized, and data-driven (Habsi, Hefniy, & Munawaroh, 2025). This transformation directly affects how learners access, understand, and validate information, including in the learning of Islamic Religious Education (Judijanto et al., 2025).

From an epistemological perspective, this change does not merely affect the technical aspects of learning but also reshapes the fundamental structure of knowledge itself. The Islamic intellectual tradition places the sources of knowledge in the authority of revelation (the Qur'an and Hadith), scholars, and the system of sanad (chain of transmission), which ensures the validity of knowledge. However, within the AI-based digital ecosystem, this authority is beginning to undergo deconstruction (Laisaan & Husni, 2025). Generation Z, who grow up in a digital environment, tend to rely on AI-based platforms as primary references for obtaining religious information instantly. This phenomenon indicates a shift from sanad-based scholarly authority to algorithmic authority, which potentially raises serious concerns regarding the validity and depth of religious understanding (Al-Hafifi, Santoso, Nizami, Sari, & Fadhil, 2025).

On the other hand, AI offers significant opportunities for the development of Islamic Religious Education. Its ability to provide broad access to information, personalized learning experiences, and responsive interactions enables increased learning effectiveness (Jambholkar, 2024; Joseph & Olalekan, 2024; Tasnim, Ahmed, & Rahman, 2024). However, this convenience also brings consequences, such as the simplification of religious teachings, fragmentation of knowledge, and the potential emergence of incomplete religious understanding (Harahap et al., 2024; Taslim, Putra, Daulay, & Bulut, 2025; Ully Muzakir, 2013). In such conditions, religious learning risks being reduced from a process of cultivating spiritual awareness into merely the consumption of digital information (Mahani, Ariyani, & Mukmin, 2025). This issue becomes more complex when linked to the fundamental objectives of Islamic Religious Education, which are to form individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, and possess noble character. The thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphasizes that Islamic education must be oriented toward the formation of the *insan adabi*, a person who is able to place knowledge properly within the framework of tawhid. In this context, the dominance of AI in learning has the potential to create epistemological disorientation if it is not balanced with a strong value framework (Hana, 2025).

Several previous studies have examined the use of AI in education, including in religious learning (Bagdžiūnienė, Žukauskaitė, & Bulotaitė, 2025;

Hasanah, Mustofa, & Surakarta, 2024; Mahdiyini, 2025). However, most of these studies still focus on technical and pedagogical aspects, such as the effectiveness of AI usage, the development of digital learning media, or the improvement of learning outcomes. Such approaches tend to position AI as a neutral instrument that can be optimized without considering its deeper epistemological and ethical implications (Rosi, 2020; Rumina, 2025; Xu, Leferink, & Wijnia, 2025). Furthermore, research that specifically examines the relationship between AI and the values of Islamic Religious Education in the context of learning transformation among Generation Z remains relatively limited, especially in local contexts such as Pohuwato Regency (Afandi, 2025; Solikhin, Sihono, & Sari, 2025).

Based on this, there is a significant research gap, namely the absence of comprehensive studies analyzing how the presence of AI not only influences the methods of Islamic Religious Education but also shifts the epistemological structure of learning itself, particularly in the context of Generation Z as digital natives (Han, 2024; Safi'i, 2020). In addition, the lack of empirically based research at the local level results in limited contextual understanding of how university students, as part of Generation Z, utilize AI in religious learning (Faruq et al., 2024; Jamil & Fadhilah, 2025).

In response to this gap, this study offers novelty in two main aspects. First, it examines AI not merely as an educational technology tool, but as an epistemological phenomenon that influences how religious knowledge is produced, accessed, and validated (Domenici, 2025; HUDAIFAH, 2023). Second, this study employs a dialectical approach to analyze the tension between the values of Islamic Religious Education and the algorithmic logic within the AI ecosystem, which is then connected to empirical realities among university students in Pohuwato Regency. Therefore, this study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of technology-based Islamic Religious Education studies, as well as practical contributions in formulating learning models that are adaptive to technological developments without losing their value orientation. Specifically, this study aims to analyze the dialectics between the values of Islamic Religious Education and the Artificial Intelligence ecosystem in shaping the learning transformation of Generation Z, as well as its implications for the direction of Islamic educational epistemology in the digital era.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a field research design to analyze the dialectics of Islamic Religious Education values within the Artificial Intelligence ecosystem among Generation Z (Maros, Tambunan, Eliter, & Koto,

2016). The research was conducted in Pohuwato Regency, involving 15 university students as informants selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: being actively enrolled as students and having experience using AI in learning, particularly in religious-related materials. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. The data were analyzed using the interactive model (Huberman & Miles, 1992) which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, and were further strengthened by thematic analysis to identify patterns of learning transformation and epistemological shifts (Musthofa, Anggara, Al-Azhari, & Hakim, 2026). The validity of the data was ensured through source and technique triangulation, as well as member checking, in order to establish the credibility and validity of the research findings (Arianto, 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Shift in Students' Learning Sources

The research findings indicate that Artificial Intelligence has become the dominant reference for students in acquiring religious knowledge. Students tend to access AI as their primary source due to its convenience, speed, and flexibility compared to conventional sources such as classical texts, books, and lecturers. *"If I have an Islamic Education assignment, I immediately ask AI because it's faster than searching in books."* (Informant M-03, 4th Semester Student). *"I usually use AI to look up explanations of religious terms because it provides answers that are easy to understand."* (Informant M-07, active AI user).

Table 1. Shift in Learning Sources

Aspect	Field Findings	Islamic Education Analysis
Main Source	AI is more dominant	Shift from text-based <i>ta'lim</i> to digital learning
Access to Knowledge	Fast and instant	Strengthens instant learning culture
Learning Pattern	Unstructured	Reduces the <i>tadarruj</i> (gradual learning) process

Shift in Scientific Authority

The findings show that students are beginning to consider AI as an alternative authority in understanding religious teachings, in some cases even more trusted than lecturers. *"Sometimes I trust AI answers more because the explanations are clearer and more complete."* (Informant M-05, 6th Semester Student). *"If you ask a lecturer, you have to wait, but AI responds instantly, so it's more practical."* (Informant M-11, digitally active student).

Table 2. Shift in Scientific Authority

Aspect	Field Findings	Islamic Education Analysis
Authority of Knowledge	AI as reference	Shift from <i>'ulama</i> to AI
Validation	Rarely verified	Weakening of <i>tabayyun</i> (verification)
Trust	Based on speed	Neglect of knowledge transmission (<i>sanad</i>)

Effectiveness and Learning Independence

AI has proven to contribute positively to learning effectiveness and students' independence. "AI is very helpful, especially when I don't understand the material—it explains it in simple language." (Informant M-01, 2nd Semester Student). "I've become more independent in learning and don't always have to wait for the lecturer's explanation." (Informant M-09, independent learner)

Table 3. Learning Effectiveness

Aspect	Field Findings	Islamic Education Analysis
Understanding	Faster	Facilitates knowledge transfer
Independence	Increased	Aligned with the concept of <i>ijtihad</i> in learning
Access	Flexible	Opens opportunities for digital da'wah

Reduction and Fragmentation of Religious Understanding

The study also found that AI has limitations in providing comprehensive understanding.

"Sometimes the answers are too brief, so we don't get deep explanations." (Informant M-04, 3rd Semester Student).

"I once got different answers, so I was confused about which one was correct." (Informant M-12, 5th Semester Student)

Table 4. Reduction of Understanding

Aspect	Field Findings	Islamic Education Analysis
Depth	Superficial	Does not fulfill the principle of <i>tafakkur</i>
Consistency	Varied	Confuses <i>aqidah</i> understanding
Context	Limited	Neglects <i>ushul fiqh</i> principles

Dialectics of Values: Between Convenience and Knowledge Validity

The findings reveal that students possess critical awareness of AI's limitations, resulting in a dialectic between technological convenience and the need for knowledge validity. "AI is helpful, but we still need to verify it with more reliable sources." (Informant M-02, reflective student). "In my opinion, AI cannot

replace lecturers because their explanations are more in-depth.”(Informant M-14, final-year student)

Table 8. Dialectics of Values

Aspect	Field Findings	Islamic Education Analysis
Benefit	Facilitates learning	Supports digital da'wah
Risk	Digitalized understanding	Threatens knowledge authenticity
Student Attitude	Ambivalent	Requires integration of Islamic values

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought fundamental changes to students' learning patterns, particularly in the context of Islamic Religious Education. These changes are not merely technical in nature but also affect epistemological dimensions, the authority of knowledge, and the way students understand religious teachings.

First, regarding the shift in learning sources, the dominance of AI as the primary reference for students reflects a transformation from the traditional *thalab al-'ilm* model based on direct interaction with teachers toward a technology based learning approach that is instant and flexible. Sociologically, this phenomenon aligns with the characteristics of the digital generation, which prioritizes speed and efficiency. However, from the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, the process of acquiring knowledge is not solely outcome oriented but also emphasizes gradual learning (*tadarruj*) and ethical conduct. The Islamic scholarly tradition places teacher student interaction as a crucial element in transmitting not only knowledge but also values, ethics, and spirituality. Therefore, this shift has the potential to diminish the dimension of the blessing (*barakah*) of knowledge if it is not balanced with the cultivation of proper learning ethics.

Second, the shift in the authority of knowledge emerges as a significant finding. Students increasingly position AI as a more practical and responsive source compared to lecturers. This indicates a transformation in the standard of authority from one based on depth of knowledge and scholarly transmission (*sanad*) to one based on speed and accessibility. In Islamic epistemology, the authority of knowledge is closely tied to the validity of sources and accountable processes of transmission. The principle of *tabayyun*(verification) requires individuals to critically examine information before accepting it as truth. When AI is used without verification, the risk of distortion in understanding religious teachings becomes increasingly significant. Thus, this phenomenon reflects a tendency toward an epistemological crisis in religious learning in the digital era.

Third, in terms of effectiveness and learning autonomy, AI has demonstrated positive contributions. Students are able to understand materials

more quickly and enjoy greater flexibility in independent learning. This aligns with the concept of self-directed learning, which, within Islamic Religious Education, can be associated with the spirit of *ijtihad* in seeking knowledge. In this context, AI serves as a tool that expands access to knowledge and opens opportunities for the development of digital da'wah. However, learning autonomy without a strong methodological framework may lead to misunderstandings, especially in complex and multidisciplinary Islamic studies. Therefore, the role of lecturers remains essential as guides who ensure that the learning process stays within proper scholarly boundaries.

Fourth, the study also reveals a tendency toward reduction and fragmentation in students' understanding of religious teachings due to the use of AI. The responses generated by AI are often concise, partial, and lack methodological foundations such as *ushul fiqh* or the diversity of scholarly opinions. This may lead to an oversimplification of religious teachings that should be understood comprehensively. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, understanding is not limited to textual interpretation but also involves contextual and methodological approaches. When these dimensions are absent, the resulting understanding tends to be superficial and prone to misinterpretation. This condition confirms that AI has not yet been able to replace the role of scholars or educators in providing comprehensive and in-depth understanding.

Fifth, the findings indicate the presence of a value dialectic among students between the convenience offered by AI and the need for the validity of knowledge. Students begin to realize that although AI is helpful, the information obtained still needs to be verified. This awareness represents an early stage in the development of critical digital literacy. From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, technology should be positioned as a *wasilah* (means) that supports the achievement of educational goals, rather than as the primary authority. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate digital literacy with Islamic values so that the use of AI remains aligned with the principles of Islamic epistemology, such as academic integrity, intellectual responsibility, and proper ethics in seeking knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed the learning patterns of Islamic Religious Education among Generation Z, particularly in terms of learning sources, knowledge authority, and understanding of religious teachings. While AI enhances accessibility, effectiveness, and learner autonomy, it also poses challenges such as the shift of authority, weak verification practices, and the reduction of religious understanding. Therefore, it is essential to integrate Islamic values with digital

literacy to ensure that AI functions as a supportive tool (*wasilah*) without undermining the epistemological principles of Islamic education.

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