



Critical Pedagogy as Counter-Hegemony: Reorienting Islamic Religious Education Against Digital Radicalism and Disinformation

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Abstract

The proliferation of digital disinformation and radical ideologies in cyberspace has triggered a crisis of critical thinking among Muslim youth, challenging the integrity of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a space for liberation and ethical formation. This study employs a critical literature review design, synthesizing theories from critical pedagogy (Freire, Giroux), digital media studies, and Islamic education scholarship to construct a transformative pedagogical framework. The research aims to analyze the mechanisms of digital hegemony in shaping religious consciousness and to propose the integration of critical pedagogy into PAI as a counter-hegemonic strategy. The analysis reveals that critical pedagogy enables a fundamental paradigm shift in PAI, from an indoctrinative model to an emancipatory one, fostering critical consciousness (conscientization), dialogical learning, and socio-ethical resilience against radical narratives. It is argued that a critically-oriented PAI is essential for cultivating a generation that is not only religiously observant but also critically aware, inclusive, and capable of navigating the complexities of the digital age. This requires curricular reorientation, teacher training as facilitators of critical awareness, and the development of contextualized teaching materials.

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Introduction

Information and communication technology over the past two decades has revolutionized patterns of social interaction, learning processes, and the ways in which humans understand religious dimensions (C.-C. Chen et al., 2022; Lomachinska & Hryshyna, 2024; Mansour, 2022; McClure, 2017). However, this digital dynamic does not always align with the fundamental values of Islamic education, which emphasize the exaltation of human dignity, the cultivation of noble character, the upholding of justice, and the liberation from ignorance and oppression (Astra et al., 2024; Muslim, 2024). Digital platforms, which were

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initially expected to serve as open and dialogical spaces for da'wah, have instead often transformed into arenas of ideological contestation marked by the spread of disinformation and radical views (Ahmed, 2025; Brig (R) Dr. Zeeshan Faisal Khan, 2025; Kundu & Nagariya, 2025). This phenomenon indicates that the digital sphere is not a neutral space but rather a field of hegemony, where discursive power subtly operates to shape the ways of thinking within the Muslim community (Al-Zaman, 2019; Fatmawati et al., 2018; Li & Zhang, 2022).

Through algorithms, religious symbols, and emotionally charged narratives, certain groups are able to manipulate public perception and steer the collective consciousness of the Muslim community toward narrow and intolerant interpretations (Aminulloh et al., 2022; Milla et al., 2019). On the other hand, the low level of critical literacy among the public regarding religious information makes both students and the wider community easily trapped by misleading religious rhetoric (Gallagher, 2009; Pabbajah, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). As a result, Islamic religious education often fails to serve as a space of liberation that fosters reflective thinking and social awareness. The process of learning religion frequently emphasizes memorization and obedience rather than cultivating critical consciousness toward the surrounding social and political realities (Khadijah et al., 2019; Saada, 2022). This situation reveals a serious gap between the emancipatory values of Islam and the educational practices still trapped in an indoctrinative paradigm. Consequently, Islamic education in the digital era faces a major challenge: how to confront the tide of hegemony and disinformation that threatens the critical reasoning and humanity of the Muslim community.

Studies on Islamic education in the digital era have thus far shown limitations in understanding hegemony and disinformation as ideological problems rather than merely technical ones. Most research focuses on methodological aspects or technology-based learning innovations, assuming technology to be a neutral and value-free medium. In reality, every technology carries its own logic, values, and power structures that shape patterns of thought and social behavior (Grabowski & Roberts, 2011; Orlikowski, 2000). The dominant approach in digital Islamic education studies remains instrumental and pragmatic, emphasizing how technology can facilitate learning, yet failing to examine how it shapes meaning and power relations within education. At least three main tendencies can be identified in previous studies. First, research focusing on innovations in digital and online religious learning (Kayi, 2024; Paudel, 2020; Zhang, 2024). Second, studies highlighting the negative impact of social media on the rise of intolerance and radical ideologies (Nuruzzaman et al., 2023; Shin & Jitkajornwanich, 2024; Yesilada & Lewandowsky, 2022). Third,

research emphasizing the importance of digital literacy in Islamic education to combat disinformation (Ade Nurpriatna et al., 2025; Hidayatulah et al., 2025; Putra & Ayyaisy, 2025). These three tendencies show attention to the phenomenological aspects but fail to address the ideological roots of the issue, namely, how the religious consciousness of Muslim communities is shaped by dominant digital discourses. Consequently, the critical and emancipatory dimensions of Islamic education remain neglected. Few studies have positioned Islamic education as a site of resistance against ideological hegemony and as a means of fostering critical consciousness, as envisioned by critical pedagogy. This gap calls for research oriented toward the transformation of awareness and liberation within the digital context.

This paper seeks to fill the gaps in previous studies by offering a critical analysis of how Islamic religious education can serve as a space of liberation from the hegemony of digital discourse and disinformation through the framework of critical pedagogy. In the context of a digital society, the issues of religious radicalism and disinformation should not be viewed merely as theological problems, but as ideological ones rooted in the structures of power that govern the production and distribution of knowledge (Kuo & Marwick, 2021; Nurish, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to reinterpret the practice of Islamic education, not only as the transmission of doctrine, but also as the cultivation of students' critical awareness toward the surrounding social and political realities. Accordingly, this study seeks to address three main questions: first, how does the hegemony of religious ideology operate within the digital sphere and influence students' perceptions of Islam and humanity? Second, how can critical pedagogy be integrated into Islamic education to foster critical awareness of religious discourses and the power structures embedded within them? Third, how can pedagogical strategies rooted in Islamic values, humanistic, dialogical, and inclusive, be designed to resist the tides of radicalism and disinformation? The answers to these questions are expected to strengthen the position of Islamic education not merely as a vehicle for religious instruction, but as a transformative space for developing critical reasoning and humanistic ethics. In doing so, Islamic religious education will be better equipped to confront the challenges of the digital age while remaining committed to the values of liberation and social justice.

This study is grounded in the conviction that Islamic religious education must be positioned as a space of liberation from the hegemony of oppressive religious discourse and the constraints of disinformation that limit critical thinking. The central argument is that the crises of radicalism and disinformation cannot be resolved merely by increasing moderate preaching content or

enhancing digital literacy; rather, they require a transformation of the educational paradigm itself. Critical pedagogy, as developed by Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux and contextualized by progressive Muslim thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman and Hasan Langgulung, provides a framework to awaken students' critical consciousness, enabling them to interpret the world reflectively (Fields et al., 2022; Pitcher & Browne, 2023; Wallace, 2020). In this approach, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but a transformative dialogue between teacher and student that uncovers hidden power relations within texts, symbols, and institutions (M.-K. Chen et al., 2025; Hammarén & Lunneblad, 2022).

Applying critical pedagogy in Islamic education allows students to understand Islam not just as a system of dogma, but as a liberating ethical framework that upholds justice, humanity, and equality (Biesta, 1998; "Implementing Critical Pedagogy into EFL Context to Reach Higher Order Level of Thinking by Bloom's Taxonomy," 2023). Through dialogical and reflective processes, students are encouraged to interpret reality contextually and to reject all forms of ideological domination cloaked in religious symbolism. Consequently, Islamic education gains strong social transformative potential, producing not only pious individuals, but also aware, critical citizens who are willing to challenge injustice. The success of Islamic education in confronting radicalism and disinformation depends on the courage to move beyond indoctrinative models toward critical-emancipatory approaches that foster independent thinking within the framework of Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative method with a library research design. This approach is chosen to gain an in-depth understanding and interpretation of concepts, theories, and empirical findings related to integrating critical pedagogy into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative data was gathered through a traditional literature review of various written documents, including scholarly journals, textbooks, dissertations, and other academic publications. Data collection was conducted systematically via academic database searches and meticulous note-taking. The literature review focused on the fields of Islamic education, critical pedagogy, digital media studies, and counter-radicalism.

Data analysis was performed interactively and iteratively using qualitative content analysis. This process involved: (1) data reduction by identifying and categorizing core themes; (2) data display in thematic narratives; and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions. For instance, Freire's concept of

“critical consciousness” (conscientização) (1970) was analyzed as a philosophical foundation for critiquing dogmatic PAI learning paradigms. Subsequently, the concepts of “digital hegemony” (Fuchs, 2017) and algorithmic “echo chambers” (Pariser, 2011) were analyzed as structural contexts that reinforce disinformation. Findings from diverse literature were then synthesized to construct theoretical propositions. Perspectives from Muslim scholars, such as Fazlur Rahman’s views on ethical reinterpretation (Niyozov & Memon, 2011), were critically dialogued with Giroux’s theory of “border pedagogy” (2011). Through this qualitative synthesis, the study develops a transformative pedagogical framework contextualized for PAI, aimed at fostering students’ ideological resilience in the digital age

Digital Hegemony and the Formation of Religious Consciousness in Virtual Spaces

The intersection of social media, ideological structures, and religious perceptions demonstrates how digital spaces have become symbolic arenas imbued with ideological power in shaping individual understanding of religion, particularly Islam. In the digital era, social media is not merely a communication channel but also a battleground of meaning, where narratives, morality, and ideology intertwine. In this space, religious ideas are no longer monopolized by institutional authorities such as scholars, religious institutions, or the state; rather, they are reproduced, disseminated, and negotiated by diverse social actors with differing ideological interests. Social media functions as a digital arena where moral rhetoric and ideological discourse converge, often enforcing adherence to dominant ideologies while marginalizing alternative voices that attempt to present more pluralistic perspectives.

One significant aspect of this phenomenon is the role of social media algorithms in shaping what is called the “discursive field” concerning Islam and religious issues. Algorithms do not operate neutrally; they are designed to maximize user engagement by presenting emotionally charged, provocative, or sensational content. In this context, algorithms create an information ecology that reinforces dominant narratives and minimizes divergent views. (Brady et al., 2021) show that social feedback can influence users’ expressions of moral anger over time, indicating that timeline algorithms can modify users’ moral behavior. This finding is supported by earlier studies emphasizing that the expression of moral emotions plays a key role in the dissemination of moral and political ideas on online social networks (Brady et al., 2017). Thus, social media indirectly promotes emotion-based morality, rather than rational reflection, thereby driving polarization in religious discussions.

In the context of Islam, algorithms amplify exposure to certain types of content that often represent Islam in extreme symbolic forms, whether puritanical or religiously liberal. Users repeatedly exposed to specific content internalize these narratives as forms of “moral truth.” Consequently, discussions about Islam become echo chambers that reinforce ideological biases while erasing diversity. In this arena, the presence of traditional religious authorities increasingly loses ground as new authority emerges through the logic of popularity and digital engagement. In addition to algorithms, the presence of pseudo-religious authorities in cyberspace further shifts interpretive authority over Islam.

Many social media users claim or are perceived to have religious authority without formal education or institutional legitimacy. This phenomenon illustrates the decentralization of religious authority, where legitimacy no longer originates from official institutions but from social credibility established through digital interaction. (Recuero, 2015) explains that social media has the capacity to reproduce and legitimize discourses of violence, highlighting how certain ideologies can perpetuate by leveraging online communication dynamics. In digital Islam, this is evident in how some users affirm pseudo-religious authority that disseminates exclusive, intolerant, or even extremist views aligned with their personal moral values. Thus, digital spaces have become a new battleground of discourse between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, between traditional and popular interpretations.

According to (Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2019), the mediatization of religion, the process of mediating religion through digital media, results in changes in religious practices and ways believers interact with texts, symbols, and authorities. They argue that social media is not merely a communication tool but actively reconstructs the religious experience itself. For example, preaching is no longer limited to mosques or prayer halls but also occurs on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, using visual formats and rhetorical styles tailored to algorithms and digital audience preferences. In this framework, religious practices become more performative and quantitatively measurable through the number of followers, likes, and comments. (Ferguson et al., 2021) add that public discourse dynamics on platforms like Twitter and Facebook enable complex negotiations of religious identity. On one hand, users can openly express their Islam; on the other, they are trapped in the platform logic that demands self-representation consistent with majority norms. As a result, religious identity in digital spaces becomes hybrid, fluid, and often ambiguous.

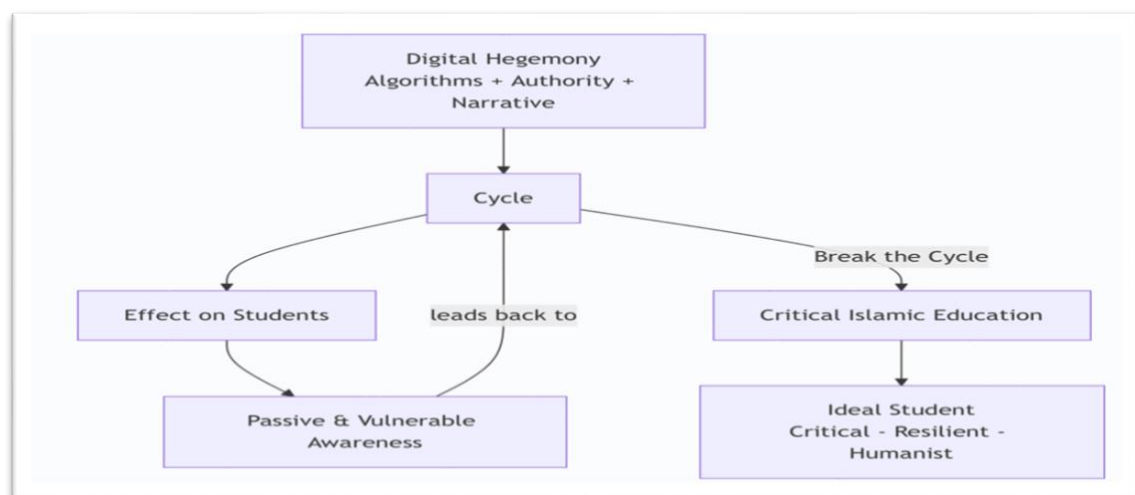
Another consequence of ideological interaction on social media is the emergence of increasingly sharp conflicts and polarization in religious discourse.

Phenomena such as trolling, hate speech, and cyber-attacks against individuals or groups perceived as deviating from certain religious norms reflect symbolic struggles in the moral domain. Women, in particular, are frequent targets of symbolic violence when challenging patriarchal or conservative interpretations of religion. (Siddiqua et al., 2023) show that online harassment against female journalists reflects a form of symbolic violence that forces individuals to conform to dominant cultural and religious norms. In this context, moral and religious symbols are instrumentalized as tools to enforce ideological hegemony and silence dissent. (Mooijman et al., 2017) explain that the process of moralization, when social issues are imbued with absolute moral significance, can trigger extreme reactions against individuals perceived to violate these moral values. When this process occurs within an algorithmically driven social media ecosystem, expressions of symbolic violence or even extremism may emerge as a result of continuous moral amplification. Therefore, moral and ideological conflicts in the digital world not only reflect theological differences but also constitute a power arena where moral values are contested, manipulated, and disseminated.

Schematically, the circular mechanism of digital hegemony in shaping religious consciousness, along with the strategic intervention points of critical education to disrupt it, can be visualized in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1

The Cyclical Mechanism of Digital Hegemony and the Critical Education Intervention Model in Islamic Education (PAI)



Source: Author's Conceptualization, 2025.

Figure 1 clearly illustrates that digital hegemony operates through a mutually reinforcing cycle between algorithms, authority, and narratives. Critical

education functions as a counter-hegemony by providing analytical frameworks and ethical filters at each level. Thus, a critical approach to Islamic Education (PAI) does not merely react to symptoms, but equips students with the ability to deconstruct and resist the hegemonic logic from within.

This phenomenon demonstrates that ideological power in digital spaces is diffuse, spread out and not centered on a single authority. It operates through symbols, algorithms, and emotions, forming what can be called a regime of digital moralities. In this regime, social media users are not only consumers of information but also producers of moral meaning. However, this meaning production often occurs within structures already dominated by platform logic and majority ideology. In other words, freedom of expression on social media is illusory, as it is structurally constrained by algorithms and social norms that determine what is considered right or wrong, moral or immoral.

Overall, this process illustrates how the interaction between social media algorithms, moral rhetoric, and symbolic religious authority creates a complex and layered ideological landscape. On one hand, social media has the potential to democratize religious interpretation, allowing broader participation in Islamic discourse. On the other hand, it also functions as a hegemonic instrument that reinforces dominant narratives and marginalizes diversity of views. Muslim social media users, particularly younger generations, now construct their religious identities through the logic of digital visibility rather than spiritual depth or traditional legitimacy. In this regard, social media is not just a communication medium but also a moral meaning-production machine that shapes collective Islamic consciousness.

Therefore, understanding Islam in the digital era cannot be separated from the dynamics of symbolic and ideological power operating through social media. Representations of Islam in cyberspace are the result of negotiations between global ideological structures, algorithmic technologies, and users' everyday practices. Critical studies of digital Islamic discourse are thus essential to understanding how power, morality, and religious identity are negotiated and contested in contemporary public spaces. Such analysis raises awareness that in every click, post, and comment, processes of ideologization influence how society perceives truth, morality, and religion itself.

Islamic Religious Education and the Crisis of Criticality: Between Indoctrination and Liberation

Internal challenges in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia are deeply marked by the persistence of an indoctrination paradigm that limits the development of critical consciousness among students. This paradigm positions

religious education as a means of transmitting dogma rather than as a space for dialogue and reflection on humanistic values. In this context, rigid teaching methods, hierarchical structures between teachers and students, and an excessive cognitive orientation have created a static educational model that is unresponsive to the socio-cultural dynamics of modern society. Such an indoctrinative model tends to cultivate obedience without deep understanding and produces ritualistic and normative religiosity rather than reflective religiosity rooted in moral awareness and social empathy (Anwar, 2023). Therefore, urgent reforms in PAI are required to create an emancipatory educational ecosystem that encourages critical dialogue, reflective thinking, and social sensitivity among learners.

A crucial aspect that requires attention is the content and pedagogical strategies in PAI, which have historically been rigid and more focused on information delivery than on meaning-making processes. Learning approaches that emphasize rote memorization and conceptual understanding place students in a passive position. They become mere recipients of information, rarely engaged in in-depth dialogue on the relevance of religious values to contemporary social life. In this context, Islamic religious education has not fully functioned as a medium for holistic moral, social, and spiritual awareness formation. (Naima et al., 2024) that religious education should not stop at the cognitive level but must also engage the affective and psychomotor dimensions of students through contextual and reflective learning. Thus, PAI should be understood as a process of cultural value formation, not merely a transfer of theological knowledge.

Overly normative and indoctrinative approaches often neglect the social, economic, and cultural diversity surrounding students. This issue is exacerbated by educational systems that position teachers as the sole authorities of knowledge and truth. Rigid hierarchical relationships reinforce authoritarian teaching styles that inhibit freedom of thought and stifle learning initiative. Students are seldom given the space to raise critical questions or interpret religious texts within their social contexts. Consequently, religious education risks producing a generation that is formally obedient but lacks reflective ability and social empathy. According to (Anwar, 2023), ideal religious education should develop interpersonal intelligence, dialogical skills, and sensitivity to diversity as the foundation for social character formation.

In the context of educational reform, the emergence of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) offers opportunities to advance PAI toward a more humanistic and participatory approach. This curriculum grants educators greater autonomy to adapt teaching methods to students' needs and

characteristics. (Sirait et al., 2024) argue that Kurikulum Merdeka can encourage project-based, reflective, and humanistic learning, enabling students not only to understand religious teachings textually but also to internalize them in real-life contexts. This approach aligns with Paulo Freire's concept of a pedagogy of liberation, where education is a process of humanization that empowers learners to understand their world critically and contribute to just social change.

Transforming Islamic religious education toward a liberatory paradigm requires integrating principles of critical pedagogy. This approach emphasizes that students are not mere objects of education but active subjects engaged in the construction of meaning. In critical pedagogy, learning does not end with information reception; it extends to reflection, dialogue, and social action (praxis). (Humenuk, 2023) asserts that education should empower students to think independently and make ethical decisions amid social and ideological complexities. Through open dialogue, students are encouraged to understand that religious truth is not static but the result of interpretative engagement that is always contextual. This is crucial for fostering tolerance and empathy toward differences.

Research indicates that reflective and dialogical pedagogical approaches significantly impact the development of social empathy. (Hardy et al., 2012) found that religious commitment cultivated through moral reflection-based learning positively correlates with increased empathy and prosocial behavior among adolescents. This finding reinforces the notion that religiosity grounded in ethical awareness and social understanding can encourage individuals to be more sensitive to suffering and injustice around them. Therefore, Islamic religious education has great potential to foster critical social awareness, provided that pedagogical strategies focus on reflective and dialogical learning rather than mere cognitive repetition.

Moreover, integrating interfaith dialogue and experiential learning in PAI can broaden students' horizons. Through interfaith dialogue, students are invited to understand diversity as part of divine will and a foundation for social ethics. This aligns with the findings of (Rifa'i & Choli, 2020), who argue that religious education should adapt to multicultural and pluralistic societal contexts. Experiential learning allows students to encounter religious values in real situations, such as through social activities, cross-cultural collaboration, and community service. In this way, PAI becomes not only a theoretical subject but also a practical space that cultivates empathy and social solidarity.

To realize this transformation, PAI reform should adopt an emancipatory educational framework that promotes critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and deep reflection. Teachers must be positioned not as sole authorities but as

facilitators guiding dialogue and exploration of meaning. This approach aligns with the constructivist paradigm, in which knowledge is considered the outcome of evolving social interaction. (Anwar, 2023) emphasizes that integrating moral values such as forgiveness, cooperation, social responsibility, and justice into the curriculum can strengthen students' moral dimensions while building balanced emotional and social intelligence. In this framework, Islamic religious education can function as a space for nurturing complete human beings, spiritually, morally, and socially, capable of living peacefully in diverse societies.

This paradigm shift also requires systemic support from educational institutions, government, and religious communities. Efforts include teacher training in reflective methodologies, curriculum revision based on humanistic values, and providing spaces for students to express their views openly. Additionally, classroom action research and value-based curriculum evaluation must be continuously conducted to ensure that PAI not only fulfills normative objectives but also contributes to the development of empathetic and critical national character. In today's digital society, online learning platforms can also serve as new participatory spaces to expand access to more open and dialogical religious discourse (Naima et al., 2024).

In conclusion, the indoctrination paradigm that has dominated PAI is inadequate for fostering critical consciousness and social empathy among students. Limitations arising from rigid teaching methods and hierarchical structures necessitate fundamental changes in the Islamic religious education system. PAI reform that centers on dialogue, critical reflection, and moral development will pave the way for more inclusive, tolerant, and socially responsible individuals. Islamic religious education, therefore, not only shapes formal religiosity but also becomes a means of reflective liberation and humanization. In an increasingly complex and plural society, transformative PAI is key to nurturing a Muslim generation that is spiritually obedient as well as intellectually and socially empowered.

Integration of Critical Pedagogy in Islamic Religious Education: From Theory to Emancipatory Practice

The role of teachers in the context of Islamic education, particularly in madrasahs and pesantrens, has undergone a significant transformation, from mere transmitters of doctrine to facilitators of social and spiritual consciousness. This shift emerges from the understanding that Islamic education is not solely intended to convey religious knowledge but also serves as an ethical space for engaging with social realities through the lens of Islamic values. In this framework, teachers act as catalysts for reflection, rather than mere

memorization of texts. Through a critical pedagogy approach combined with Islamic values, educators can cultivate students' critical thinking skills, social awareness, and moral responsibility toward their environment.

Traditional Islamic educational institutions, such as pesantrens, have a long history of integrating religious knowledge with practical skills. This integration aims not only to produce ritual-compliant students but also to nurture individuals who are productive and socially conscious. (Wahyu et al., 2023) found that zakat empowerment programs in pesantrens have a dual impact: enhancing religious understanding while also promoting community economic development through job creation and entrepreneurial initiatives. This approach demonstrates that Islamic education can serve as a catalyst for social empowerment, connecting religious values with contemporary economic challenges. Thus, pesantrens are not merely religious institutions but also agents of social change that remain relevant to modern societal needs.

Furthermore, (Rozza et al., 2024) highlight the adaptive capacity of pesantrens in preserving traditional values while responding to global dynamics. Such adaptability is crucial for ensuring that Islamic education remains relevant amidst globalization. From the perspective of critical pedagogy, this adaptation represents an active reflection on social changes, demanding methodological innovation without compromising the essence of Islamic values. In line with this, (Nurdin & Rasyid, 2022) emphasize the importance of ethical leadership within Islamic educational models. According to them, pesantrens and madrasahs have the potential to shape future leaders grounded in Islamic values while maintaining high social awareness. By balancing religious and general education, these institutions not only produce individuals knowledgeable in Islamic teachings but also capable of contributing constructively to social, economic, and political life.

The implementation of this pedagogical approach is evident in the integration of social capital concepts within pesantren curricula. (Wahono & Budimansyah, 2023) stress that pesantrens play a strategic role in fostering social capital, which is crucial for preparing students to face the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Social capital formed through practices of cooperation, mutual assistance, and social care positions Islamic education as a space for cultivating strong national character. This perspective aligns with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which views education as a process of liberation, helping students recognize their position within social structures and encouraging active engagement in social transformation. In the context of Islamic education, this entails linking teachings on tauhid (monotheism), social justice, and humanity with concrete contemporary societal challenges.

Moreover, pedagogical strategies employed in pesantrens and madrasahs are often deeply rooted in local cultural contexts. This makes Islamic education in Indonesia distinctive and contextual. (Sah & Fuad, 2024) demonstrate that pesantren curricula encourage the internalization of moderate religious values through experiential social learning and interaction among students. Values such as *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *ta'awun* (cooperation) are instilled through daily practice rather than mere textual memorization. This approach has proven effective in building a sense of identity and community among students (Rifa, 2023). In a global context prone to religious radicalism and polarization, this moderate approach is essential for strengthening social resilience and fostering cross-group harmony. Consequently, Islamic education serves as both a moral fortress and a space for civilizational dialogue.

One increasingly prominent innovation in modern Islamic education is the integration of entrepreneurial education with religious learning. (Muliana, Yahya, et al., 2024; S. Prabowo et al., 2015) indicate that this integration significantly empowers students economically. Through business training based on Islamic ethical principles, students acquire not only practical economic skills but also an understanding of responsible stewardship and collective welfare (*masalahah*). This aligns with Islamic teachings on productive work, self-reliance, and community empowerment. Such educational models harmoniously combine spiritual, intellectual, and pragmatic dimensions, positioning Islamic educational institutions as centers for cultivating *insan kamil*, exemplary individuals in all aspects of life.

In this context, teachers play a central role as agents of transformation. They are no longer viewed as the sole source of knowledge but as facilitators who encourage reflective and participatory learning. As (Wahyu et al., 2023) note, the success of empowerment programs in pesantrens depends on teachers' ability to guide students in understanding the social implications of Islamic teachings. Teachers oriented toward social consciousness strive to bridge theological instruction with empirical practice, making learning more contextual and meaningful. In this framework, student-centered learning and critical reflection become key to creating a liberating educational experience.

To translate the principles of critical pedagogy into actual practice in Islamic Education (PAI) classrooms, concrete operational strategies are required. The following Table 2 maps how the key principles of critical pedagogy can be contextualized into learning activities, along with the developmental goals to be achieved.

Table 1
Operational Strategies for Implementing Critical Pedagogy in the Context of Islamic Education (PAI)

Principles of Critical Pedagogy	Contextualization in Islamic Education (PAI)	Sample Learning Activities	Student Development Goals
Dialogic & Participatory	Teachers facilitate critical discussions on Qur'anic interpretations related to contemporary social issues.	<i>Fishbowl discussion</i> : Discuss the concepts of "jihad" or "khilafah" in the context of the Indonesian nation-state (NKRI) and the digital world.	Develop argumentation skills, listen to other perspectives, and appreciate differences.
Critical Consciousness (Conscientization)	Unpack biases and vested interests behind popular religious discourses on social media.	<i>Content analysis</i> : Compare sermons from various scholars on YouTube about the same topic, identifying bias, emotional appeal, and potential disinformation.	Enhance critical media literacy and resilience against radical or misleading narratives.
Reflection & Social Action (Praxis)	Connect Islamic values (justice, empathy) with concrete actions in society.	<i>Collaborative project</i> : Students create digital campaigns (Instagram/TikTok content) promoting tolerance or organize interfaith community service activities.	Develop social empathy, responsibility, and the ability to turn awareness into positive action.
Democratizing the Classroom	Break down rigid teacher-student hierarchies and provide space for students' experiences.	<i>Student-led learning</i> : Students take turns leading contextualized kitab study sessions, guided by the teacher.	Build confidence, independent thinking, and a sense of ownership over the learning process.

Source: Developed by the author based on literature synthesis, 2025.

As shown in Table 1, this integration is not a replacement of Islamic subject matter but a transformation of the learning approach. Through this model, Islamic Education (PAI) shifts from merely transmitting knowledge (the banking concept) to becoming a dialogical space that empowers students to become critical, empathetic subjects who are prepared to act within a complex society. Furthermore, implementing humanistic Islamic pedagogy requires teachers to understand students holistically, encompassing spiritual, emotional, social, and intellectual dimensions. This approach presumes that every individual possesses innate potential (*fitrah*) that should be nurtured through balanced learning between intellect and heart. This aligns with the concept of *tarbiyah* (character and moral formation), which emphasizes not only knowledge transfer but also

the cultivation of ethical awareness and character. When teachers position themselves as both spiritual and intellectual guides, education produces students who are not only academically competent but also empathetic and morally upright.

Thus, the transformation of teachers' roles in Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs and pesantrens provides a rich conceptual framework for bridging religious and social education. Through the integration of Islamic ethical values with critical pedagogy, teachers play a vital role in fostering reflective awareness, social responsibility, and moral sensitivity among students. This process creates a more democratic, participatory, and socially relevant educational environment. In conclusion, the evolution of teachers' roles in Islamic education reflects a paradigmatic shift from indoctrination-based education toward consciousness-based education. Teachers as facilitators of social and spiritual awareness become key drivers in building a reflective, inclusive, and adaptive Muslim society. When Islamic education is positioned as a dialogical space between religious values and social realities, it produces not only devout individuals but also capable and ethical citizens equipped to navigate the complexities of contemporary society.

Critical Islamic Education as a Strategy to Counter Radicalism and Digital Disinformation

Recent studies indicate that pesantrens in Indonesia have undergone significant transformations from traditional educational institutions into multifunctional entities playing strategic roles in the social, economic, and religious character development of society. This transformation reflects pesantrens' adaptation to the demands of an increasingly complex era of globalization and digitalization. In general, previous research can be categorized into four main areas: (1) strengthening pesantren management and entrepreneurship, (2) value-based education and leadership models, (3) adaptation to digitalization and globalization, and (4) internalization of moderation values and economic empowerment through zakat.

(Muliana, Aziz, et al., 2024) assert that pesantren management in Aceh demonstrates innovation in developing students' entrepreneurial spirit. Through spirituality- and independence-based managerial strategies, pesantrens successfully nurture santripreneurs who are not only profit-oriented but also grounded in Islamic ethical values. This model signifies a paradigm shift in pesantren management, from merely religious educational institutions to incubators of community-based economic initiatives. Effective management, community participation, and visionary leadership by kyai are key factors in

building a thriving pesantren entrepreneurship ecosystem. These findings align with research by (Wahyu et al., 2023), who developed a zakat-based empowerment model for pesantrens.

Their study shows that productive zakat management strengthens pesantrens' economic capacity while improving students' welfare. By using zakat as business capital, pesantrens act not only as religious institutions but also as economic drivers for the community. This model enhances institutional independence and reduces reliance on external aid. Additionally, (M. S. Prabowo et al., 2022) emphasize another critical dimension: digital literacy in developing santripreneurs. They found that kyai leadership is central to pesantrens' digitalization process. Utilizing digital technologies for learning, product promotion, and asset management enhances pesantrens' competitiveness. In other words, pesantrens that integrate digital literacy into economic and educational activities are more likely to achieve sustainable development. In the realm of education and character formation, (Nurdin & Rasyid, 2022) developed the Islamic Boarding School Education Model (IB-SEM), focusing on cultivating students' leadership integrity. Using NVivo 12 analysis, their research found that a value-based educational approach emphasizing integrity, social responsibility, and exemplary behavior produces young leaders with high moral awareness. This indicates that pesantrens remain vital social spaces for shaping ethical leadership in Islam. The correlation between leadership models and the kyai as an authoritative figure is further supported by (M. S. Prabowo et al., 2022) showing that kyai act as transformational leaders who influence students' mindset and entrepreneurial behavior. Consequently, pesantren education can be understood as an intergenerational process transmitting ethical values while developing practical skills to face modern challenges.

Another prominent transformation identified in research is pesantrens' adaptation to globalization. (Rozza et al., 2024) highlight the need for Islamic education policies in pesantrens to respond to global challenges. They argue that pesantrens should not remain confined to conventional education models but adopt curricula adaptive to contemporary issues such as digital literacy, global citizenship, and technological innovation. Modern pesantrens are expected to produce graduates who are not only spiritually pious but also intellectually and socially competent. This aligns with (Wahono & Budimansyah, 2023) findings on the role of social capital in Islamic educational institutions during the Fourth Industrial Revolution. They found that social networks among kyai, students, alumni, and communities are a major force supporting pesantrens' existence amid rapid social and technological change. Social capital functions not only as a moral resource but also as an adaptive mechanism facilitating collaboration and

innovation. Pesantrens with strong social networks are better positioned to adapt to technological disruption while maintaining social relevance. (Rifa, 2023) complements this perspective by showing that traditional salafiyah pesantrens selectively adapt to social changes without losing religious identity, demonstrating that tradition and modernity can synergize in sustaining educational values and methods.

Beyond economic and educational dimensions, several studies emphasize pesantrens' role in instilling religious moderation and social tolerance. Sah and (Sah & Fuad, 2024) show that pesantren education in Poso, Central Sulawesi, plays a significant role in cultivating moderate character among students. Through curricula emphasizing *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all creation), pesantrens contribute to preventing radicalism and promoting social harmony across religious communities. Pesantrens serve as effective social spaces for strengthening national values and expanding inclusive and peaceful Islamic perspectives. This research is highly relevant in Indonesia's diverse context. Pesantrens that cultivate moderation function not only as religious institutions but also as agents of peace and social reconciliation. The values imparted in pesantrens become cultural capital strengthening social cohesion locally and nationally. Thus, pesantrens play a dual role: as centers of Islamic education and as hubs for building pluralistic, tolerant civil society.

In conclusion, research findings indicate that pesantrens in Indonesia have evolved into multidimensional agents of social transformation. From a management perspective, pesantrens show high adaptive capacity by integrating spirituality and economics. From an educational perspective, they maintain traditional functions in shaping character and morality while embracing innovation through digital literacy and leadership capacity development. Socially, pesantrens strengthen networks and inter-institutional collaboration, enhancing community resilience to global disruption. Religiously, pesantrens are at the forefront of instilling moderation and tolerance, highly relevant to Indonesia's contemporary diversity challenges.

This transformation shows that pesantrens are not static entities but dynamic institutions continuously negotiating traditional values with modern demands. Their ability to balance spiritual, social, and economic dimensions demonstrates their potential as models of contextual and sustainable Islamic education. Therefore, the research underscores pesantrens' role not only in imparting religious knowledge but also in forming empowered individuals, spiritually, intellectually, and socially. In terms of national development, pesantrens hold great potential to contribute to building an independent, inclusive, and civically responsible society.

Conclusion

Based on the literature analysis conducted, this study concludes that the integration of critical pedagogy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not merely a methodological alternative but an urgent necessity to address the challenges of digital hegemony and disinformation. The most significant finding of this study reveals that the integration of critical pedagogy can transform PAI from an indoctrinative paradigm into a critical-emancipatory paradigm, equipping students with reflective consciousness, the ability to deconstruct ideological discourses, and resilience against radical narratives. This transformation not only responds to the “social fact” of the proliferation of disinformation and radicalism in digital spaces but also restores the essence of Islamic education as *rahmatan lil ‘alamin*, humanizing and liberating. The scholarly contribution of this research lies in its systematic effort to bridge critical pedagogy theories, particularly the ideas of Freire and Giroux, with the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. This study enriches the field of Islamic Studies by offering an integrative pedagogical framework that harmonizes Islamic spiritual values with critical consciousness, while also expanding the discourse on critical education, which has long been dominated by Western perspectives. This framework paves the way for the development of PAI learning models that are more participatory, dialogical, and responsive to the dynamics of digital society.

However, this study has limitations, as it is exploratory and relies primarily on literature analysis. The generalizability of the findings requires further testing through empirical research in the field, such as case studies in pesantrens, madrasahs, or general schools. Moreover, the complexity of integrating critical pedagogy into a standardized national curriculum presents challenges that this study has not fully addressed. Therefore, future research is highly recommended to test the effectiveness of this critical pedagogy model through action research within Islamic educational environments. Topics such as the role of teachers as agents of transformation, the development of teaching materials based on contemporary social issues, and strategies for embedding digital civic literacy into the PAI curriculum remain open for exploration. Additionally, questions regarding how to mitigate resistance from traditional religious authorities toward critical approaches also warrant further investigation.

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