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# Curriculum Development Strategy in Higher Education: A Study on Islamic Education in the Digital Era

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#### Abstract

This research aims to analyze curriculum development strategies in Islamic universities in the digital era, focusing on case studies at STAI Darul Falah Cililin, West Bandung. The approach used is qualitative by using a descriptive analysis approach. The results of the study show that the curriculum development process at the institution still faces various challenges, ranging from the limitations of digital infrastructure, the lack of technology training for educators, to the lack of integration of digital-based critical thinking values in the curriculum. Nevertheless, there is optimism among academics about the potential of technology as a medium for da'wah and the enrichment of Islamic learning. Therefore, curriculum development strategies in the digital era need to be directed at strengthening institutional policies, integrating technology in learning, and intensive training for educators. With this strategy, Islamic education can be more adaptive, relevant, and able to produce graduates who think critically, creatively, and have digital competence.

Keywords: Curriculum; Islamic Education; Educational Technology

#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi pengembangan kurikulum pada perguruan tinggi Islam di era digital, dengan fokus pada studi kasus di STAI Darul Falah Cililin, Bandung Barat. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa proses pengembangan kurikulum di lembaga tersebut masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan, mulai dari keterbatasan infrastruktur digital, minimnya pelatihan teknologi bagi tenaga pendidik, hingga belum terintegrasinya nilai-nilai berpikir kritis berbasis digital dalam kurikulum. Meskipun demikian, terdapat optimisme di kalangan akademisi mengenai potensi teknologi sebagai media dakwah dan pengayaan pembelajaran Islam. Oleh karena itu, strategi pengembangan kurikulum di era digital perlu diarahkan pada penguatan kebijakan institusional, integrasi teknologi dalam pembelajaran, serta pelatihan intensif bagi tenaga pendidik. Dengan strategi tersebut, pendidikan Islam dapat lebih adaptif, relevan, dan mampu melahirkan lulusan yang berpikir kritis, kreatif, serta memiliki kompetensi digital.

Kata Kunci: Kurikulum; Pendidikan Islam; Teknologi Pendidikan

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the digital era, the landscape of higher education is evolving rapidly,<sup>1</sup> presenting increasingly complex challenges, particularly in shaping graduates who are competitive, critical thinkers, and adaptable to technological advancements.<sup>2</sup> Islamic higher education institutions are particularly affected by these transformations, as they must balance the demands of modernity with the need to uphold and integrate core Islamic values. As a result, the development of a curriculum that promotes critical thinking has become an essential strategy for crafting educational policies that are responsive to the dynamic changes in both society and technology.

However, despite the growing importance of such a curriculum, many Islamic higher education institutions still face substantial obstacles in its implementation.<sup>3</sup> These challenges are multifaceted and interrelated. Firstly, the adaptation of curricula to incorporate digital technology remains far from optimal. The majority of Islamic educational institutions continue to rely heavily on conventional teaching methods that are inadequate for addressing the rapid technological advancements of the modern world. A critical barrier to the integration of technology is the lack of sufficient digital infrastructure, which is compounded by limited technological literacy among both faculty members and students.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, restricted access to digital learning resources continues to hinder the development of a modernized and future-ready Islamic education system. Secondly, a pervasive issue in many Islamic higher education institutions is the low level of critical thinking skills among students.

<sup>4</sup> Inge Ayudia dkk., *Pengembangan Kurikulum*, ed. oleh Sarwandi, Pertama (Sumatera Utara: PT. Mifandi Mandiri Digital, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Endang Sugiarti, "The Impact of Tri Dharma Performance on Higher Education Performance Based on Monitoring Results," AKADEMIK: Jurnal Mahasiswa Humanis 2. no. 3 (2022): 120-26. https://doi.org/10.37481/jmh.v2i3.476; B George dan O Wooden, "Managing the strategic transformation of higher education through artificial intelligence," Administrative Sciences (mdpi.com, 2023); M. Amin Abdullah, "Islamic studies in higher education in Indonesia: Challenges, impact and prospects for the world community," Al-Jami'ah 55, no. 2 (2017): 391-426, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.391-426; D Kamińska dkk., "Augmented reality: Current and new trends in education," Electronics (mdpi.com, 2023); Miranda Hesti dan Valeria Markos, "Exploring the Efficacy of Student Community Service Programs (KKN) in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study in Indonesia," Különleges Bánásmód-Interdiszciplináris folyóirat 10, no. 2 (2024): 77-89. https://doi.org/10.18458/KB.2024.2.77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> J Olexa dkk., "Expanding educational frontiers in neurosurgery: current and future uses of augmented reality," ..., 2023; J P Hertel dan B Millis, *Using simulations to promote learning in higher education: An introduction* (taylorfrancis.com, 2023), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003448594; Sandra Featherman, *Higher education at risk: Strategies to improve outcomes, reduce tuition, and stay competitive in a disruptive environment* (Taylor & Francis, 2023); R Sajja dkk., "Artificial intelligence-enabled intelligent assistant for personalized and adaptive learning in higher education," *Information* (mdpi.com, 2024); A Aprilianto dkk., "Learning Plan of Moderate Islamic Religious Education in Higher Education," *Al-Mada: Jurnal ...*, 2023.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> D Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, "Contribution of Islamic religious education to intercultural values in pluralistic European cultures: Insights from Bosnia and Herzegovina," Religions (mdpi.com, 2023); Dev Raj Adhikari dan Prakash Shrestha, "Knowledge management initiatives for achieving sustainable development goal 4.7: higher education institutions' stakeholder perspectives," Journal of Knowledge Management 27, no. 4 (2023): 1109-39, https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-03-2022-0172; Gladys Merma-Molina dkk., "Future physical education teachers' perceptions of sustainability," Teaching and Teacher Education 132 (2023): 104254. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104254; M Mukhibat dkk., "Development and evaluation of religious moderation education curriculum at higher education in Indonesia," Cogent Education, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2302308; Joshua Kim dan Edward J Maloney, Learning innovation and the future of higher education (JHU Press, 2020).

The traditional education model often emphasizes rote memorization over analytical thinking, which results in students absorbing information passively rather than engaging with it critically.<sup>5</sup> In an era where information is rapidly disseminated through digital platforms, students who lack the ability to critically evaluate the information they encounter are increasingly vulnerable to misinformation, fake news, and unscientific propaganda.<sup>6</sup> This highlights the urgent need to shift towards a more inquiry-driven and analytical approach to education. Thirdly, the transition from conventional to digital learning methods has not been fully realized in many institutions. Although the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for the widespread adoption of online learning, in many cases, this transition merely translated traditional teaching methods into digital formats without introducing substantial pedagogical innovations. The digital divide remains a significant challenge, particularly in regions where infrastructure is underdeveloped, limiting equitable access to educational technology.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the full potential of digital learning remains untapped, and the benefits of technology-enhanced education have not been fully realized.<sup>8</sup>

Technology has played an important role in Islamic education <sup>9</sup>, especially in improving accessibility, the effectiveness of learning, and academic interaction through digital platforms.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Murharyana Murharyana dkk., "The Effects of Islamic Religious Education Learning on Students' Education (2024): Motivation," At-Tadzkir: Islamic Journal 3, no. 1 1 - 14.https://doi.org/10.59373/attadzkir.v3i1.44; Murharyana Murharyana dkk., "Behavior Change of Darul Falah Senior High School Students After Attending Tabligh Akbar," Dirasah International Journal of Islamic Studies 1, no. 2 (2023): 68-77, https://doi.org/10.59373/drs.v1i2.17; Murharyana Murharyana, Ibnu Imam Al Ayyubi, dan Rifqi Rohmatulloh, "Pendidikan Akhlak Anak Kepada Orang Tua Dalam Perspektif Al-Quran," Piwulang: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam 5, no. 2 (2023): 175-91, http://dx.doi.org/10.32478/piwulang.v5i2.1515; Ibnu Imam Al Ayyubi dkk., "Pengaruh Model Pembelajaran Kontekstual terhadap Hasil Belajar Siswa di Pondok Pesantren Roudlotul Ulum," Al-Wasathiyah: Journal of Islamic Studies 3, no. 1 (2024): 1–13, https://doi.org/10.56672/alwasathiyah.v3i1.198.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Masfi Sya'fiatul Ummah, "Evaluasi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (Studi di SMK Muhammadiyah 1 dan SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Kota Palemba," *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 11, no. 1 (2019): 1–14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ranbir Singh Malik, "Educational Challenges in 21St Century and Sustainable Development," Journal of Sustainable Development Education and Research 2, no. 1 (2018): 9, https://doi.org/10.17509/jsder.v2i1.12266; B Hof, "The turtle and the mouse: how constructivist learning theory shaped artificial intelligence and educational 1960s," the Education technology in History of 50. (2021): 93-111. no. 1 https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2020.1826053; S Sukanta, H Supiarza, dan I Sarbeni, "Symbolization Of Educational Messages On The Cianjuran Sundanese Song: A Study Of The Structure And Meaning Of Lyrics," Humaniora, 2023; Z A Reis dan S Ozdemir, "Using Geogebra as an information technology tool: Parabola teaching," procedia-social and behavioral sciences, 2010; Awan Setiawan dkk., "Utilization of Big Data in Educational Technology Research," International Journal Education and Computer Studies (IJECS) 4, no. 1 (2024): 10-20, https://doi.org/10.35870/ijecs.v4i1.2643.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Muh Ibnu Sholeh dkk., "Pengaruh Kinerja Guru dan Pengembangan Kurikulum Terhadap Prestasi Belajar Siswa di SDI Al-Badar Tulungagung," *Jurnal Karya Ilmiah Pendidik dan Praktisi SD&MI (JKIPP)* 3, no. 1 (2024): 47–64, https://doi.org/10.24260/jkipp.v3i1.2782.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ahmad Ghifari Tetambe dan Dirman Dirman, "Kreativitas Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Mengembangkan Media Pembelajaran Berbasis ICT," *Zawiyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 7, no. 1 (2021): 80–100, http://dx.doi.org/10.31332/zjpi.v7i1.2920; Le Liam, Huang Hui, dan Lewin Carsten, "Utilization of ICT in Learning the History of Islamic Culture," *Scientechno: Journal of Science and Technology* 2, no. 1 (2023): 64–79, https://doi.org/10.55849/scientechno.v2i1.49; Hyejin Park, Han Sung Kim, dan Han Woo Park, "A scientometric study of digital literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy, and media literacy," *Journal of Data and Information Science* 6, no. 2 (2021): 116–38, https://doi.org/10.2478/jdis-2021-0001; Hafid Setiyadi, Wiwi Isnaeni, dan Ellianawati Ellianawati, "ICT-Based Authentic Assessment System Development to Measure Students' Responsibility, Cognitive, and Teamwork Skill," *Journal of Primary Education* 10, no. 4 (2021): 497–512, https://doi.org/10.15294/JPE.V10I4.54382; Usup Romli dkk., "Pengembangan Media Pembelajaran Akidah Dengan

The integration of technology in Islamic education not only expands the reach of learning but also helps in disseminating religious knowledge more widely and accessibly. Ally (2008) argued that e-learning can enhance the accessibility of Islamic education to various regions, allowing anyone to access religious materials without geographic limitations. Hamzah B. Uno (2010) highlighted the importance of digital media in supporting more interactive and innovative Islamic learning. Meanwhile, research by <sup>10</sup> showed that e-learning helps improve religious understanding among students. <sup>11</sup> in his journal explained that the use of technology-based applications like Google Classroom and Moodle increases the effectiveness of Islamic education. A recent study by <sup>12</sup> found that digitalization of Islamic education helps students more easily access learning resources, thereby enriching their experience in understanding Islamic teachings.

Socio-cultural perspectives are also important in developing the Islamic education curriculum in the digital era. Students today live in an environment filled with digital information, including religious information that is not necessarily accurate. Therefore, the curriculum must equip them with critical thinking skills, Islamic moderation values, and multicultural awareness in order to respond wisely to the dynamics of the global society. Islamic education needs to be a fortress from digital radicalism as well as a space for dialogue and tolerance based on Islamic values. Economically, curriculum digitization does require a lot of initial investment, especially for technology infrastructure and human resource training. However, it can be an efficient and sustainable long-term investment. In addition, the Islamic education curriculum also needs to adapt to industry developments, such as Islamic education are not only spiritually and academically ready, but also relevant in the ever-changing job market.

From a policy perspective, curriculum development strategies should refer to national regulations such as the National Standards for Higher Education, but also encourage innovation in accordance with the characteristics of Islamic educational institutions. Government support is urgently needed, both in the form of flexible regulations and funding for the development of technology-based curriculum. On the other hand, the theological and philosophical dimensions should not be ruled out: Islamic education must maintain the essence of the values of revelation and direct technology as a means of getting closer to God, not just a pragmatic tool.

Konsep 'Qurani' Berbasis Ict Untuk Siswa Sekolah," Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pengajaran Guru Sekolah Dasar (JPPGuseda) 4, no. 1 (2021): 60–64, https://doi.org/10.55215/jppguseda.v4i1.3247.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Sainee Tamphu dkk., "Building bridges to the future of learning : Exploring artificial intelligence research using R- Studio assisted bibliometrics," *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2417623.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Hikma Apriyani, "INTEGRASI NILAI-NILAI HAK ANAK DALAM PAI: MEMBANGUN KARAKTER GENERASI BERBASIS AL-QUR'AN DAN HADIST," *Jurnal Studi Islam dan Sosial* 18, no. 02 (t.t.), https://doi.org/10.56997/almabsut.v18i2.1622.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ilham Kamaruddin dkk., "Penerapan model pembelajaran berbasis proyek dalam pendidikan: tinjauan literatur," *Jurnal Review Pendidikan dan pengajaran* 6 (2023): 2742–47.

Finally, there is an ongoing debate about the relevance of Islamic education in producing graduates who are competitive in the global labor market. As the demand for graduates equipped with not only specialized knowledge but also 21st-century skills such as digital literacy, global communication, and critical thinking grows, the risk of Islamic education falling behind in preparing students for these challenges becomes more evident. Without timely and comprehensive curriculum reforms, Islamic education may produce graduates who struggle to meet the evolving demands of the global workforce.

From a theoretical perspective, the importance of fostering critical consciousness in education is central to Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. This pedagogical framework emphasizes the need for students to not only understand educational content but to question and engage with it critically. In the context of Islamic education, this approach is especially significant as it encourages students to interpret Islamic teachings not just textually, but also within the context of contemporary challenges and societal needs <sup>13</sup>. Additionally, Vygotsky's constructivist theory highlights the importance of interactive, experience-based learning, which can be significantly enhanced through the use of digital technologies. By facilitating more engaging and participatory learning experiences, technology can play a vital role in fostering the type of critical and creative thinking needed in the digital age. Given these challenges and the theoretical underpinnings that inform them, the development of a critical academic curriculum in Islamic higher education should prioritize creating learning environments that are both dynamic and technologically adaptive. These environments should not only preserve and integrate Islamic values but also equip students with the critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy skills necessary to navigate and succeed in the complexities of the modern world. By embracing both technological advancements and Islamic pedagogical principles, such a curriculum can ensure that graduates are not only well-versed in their religious studies but are also prepared to thrive in a rapidly changing global landscape.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach using both library research and case study methods conducted at STAI Darul Falah Cililin, located in Cihampelas, West Bandung.<sup>14</sup> The qualitative approach was chosen because the research aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of curriculum development strategies based on academic critical thinking within Islamic education in the digital era. The primary focus of this study was to understand the policies, implementation processes, and challenges encountered in adapting the curriculum to remain relevant amid contemporary developments. The library research method was utilized to collect and analyze a range of relevant literature, including books, scholarly journals, academic articles, and educational policy documents related to critical thinking-based curricula, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> I Bagus Endrawan dkk., "Pengembangan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) Program StudiPendidikan Olahraga Strata Satu (S1) Fakultas Keguruan Ilmu Pendidikan dan Bahasa Universitas Bina Darma," *Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat Bina Darma* 1, no. 2 (2021): 180–86, https://doi.org/10.33557/pengabdian.v1i2.1488.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> John W Creswell, "Research Design: Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan Metode Campuran," Diterjemahkan oleh Achmad Fawaid, Edisi ke-3. Cet. ke-1. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Setia, 2010.

integration of technology in Islamic education, and the relevance of Islamic education in the digital age. This method aimed to provide a strong theoretical foundation and to compare prior research findings with the empirical conditions observed at STAI Darul Falah Cililin.

In addition, the study applied a case study method, focusing on the implementation of an academic critical thinking-based curriculum at STAI Darul Falah Cililin. This component of the research included an analysis of curriculum design, teaching methodologies, integration of technology in instructional practices, and the challenges faced during implementation. Data were collected through interviews with lecturers, academic administrators, and students to gain a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum's effectiveness. Classroom observations and the analysis of academic documents were also conducted to support and triangulate the research findings.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on interviews conducted with several educators and policymakers within Islamic educational institutions, it became evident that there is a significant gap in the implementation of digitalization as part of the learning strategies. One educator remarked, *we still use traditional teaching methods such as lectures and memorization. There is no specific policy that promotes the integration of technology to enhance students' critical thinking.* This statement underscores a critical issue the lack of both stimulus and concrete curricular policies aimed at fostering critical thinking through digital means. The traditional methods employed in many Islamic educational institutions remain focused on rote memorization and passive learning, which limits opportunities for students to engage with technology as a tool for deeper academic exploration. In light of Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, effective learning is most successful in interactive, experience-based environments.<sup>15</sup> However, in practice, most teaching methods in these institutions remain predominantly one-directional, with little integration of digital tools that could facilitate academic inquiry and critical thinking.

In another interview, a principal from one Islamic educational institution shared, we are aware that the digital world is advancing rapidly, but our curriculum does not yet include specific content on digital-based critical thinking. Our teachers also have not received adequate training in the use of technology for teaching. This statement reflects a significant gap between the rapid pace of technological advancements and the curriculum's response to these changes. According to Tyler's curriculum theory, curriculum development should be goal-oriented and responsive to the evolving needs of society and the time. However, the empirical data indicate that many Islamic educational institutions continue to rely heavily on traditional models of teaching, with limited innovation or adaptation to digital learning. This situation is aligned with Fullan's theory of educational change, which stresses that curriculum innovation must be supported by the readiness of educators to implement more dynamic, technology-driven teaching

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Baharuddin Nurhikmah, Yuspiani, "Analisis Kebijakan Pendidikan Full day sch ool dalam Pembentukan Karakter Anak," *takuana: Jurnal Pendidikan Sains dan Humaniora* 3, no. 2 (2024): 69–76, https://doi.org/10.56113/takuana.v3i2.97.

strategies.<sup>16</sup> Without sufficient training and professional development, many educators are illprepared to fully embrace and implement technology-enhanced pedagogies.

A student interview further highlights the challenges faced by learners in Islamic educational settings, we are often expected to think critically in certain courses, but the available learning resources are very limited. There is no digital platform we can access to support academic discussions and research. This observation resonates with Siemens' theory of Connectivism, which posits that learning occurs not only through formal classroom instruction but also through interactions with a variety of digital resources. The lack of access to digital platforms in many Islamic educational institutions hinders students' ability to engage with academic content and develop critical and analytical thinking skills.<sup>17</sup>

One school administrator also pointed out that access to technology remains a primary barrier to the successful implementation of digitalization.*Here, internet access is still limited, and the available technological devices are inadequate. Many teachers are not yet accustomed to using digital tools in their teaching.* This statement reflects the ongoing challenge of inadequate digital infrastructure, which, according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, plays a crucial role in shaping the academic experiences of students. A conducive learning environment, supported by adequate technological resources, is essential for facilitating optimal learning experiences. In the context of Islamic education, the absence of such infrastructure presents a significant obstacle to creating a technology-based learning system. As highlighted by the UNESCO report, disparities in access to technology remain one of the principal challenges facing digital education, particularly in regions with limited resources.<sup>18</sup>

Further interviews with students revealed that many of them are left to rely on personal devices to access digital learning resources, as the institutions themselves offer limited support, *if we want to look for digital references, we have to use our own laptops or phones. There is no digital library or online learning system that is easily accessible.* This scenario reflects the gap in institutional support for students' academic needs in the digital age. Despite these limitations, however, interviews with several academics indicated a positive outlook for the integration of technology within Islamic education. One academic shared, *digitalization does not mean eliminating Islamic values in education. On the contrary, through technology, we can expand the reach of dakwah and enrich research-based learning methods.* 

This sentiment highlights the potential of technology to enhance, rather than detract from, the core values of Islamic education. By leveraging digital tools, educators can expand their reach and create richer, more dynamic learning environments. In line with Bruner's constructivist theory, which emphasizes that learners should be given opportunities to construct their own understanding through exploration and direct experience, technology can support this process by providing interactive resources that encourage independent

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Tamphu dkk., "Building bridges to the future of learning : Exploring artificial intelligence research using R- Studio assisted bibliometrics."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Kartika Putri Sagala, Lamhot Naibaho, dan Djoys Anneke Rantung, "Tantangan Pendidikan karakter di era digital," *Jurnal Kridatama Sains Dan Teknologi* 6, no. 01 (2024): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.53863/kst.v6i01.1006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Rukimah Fernasari, Elnawati, dan Idra Zultiar, "Menggunakan Metode Muroja'ah Dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Hafalan Surat-Surat Pendek Untuk Usia 5-6 Tahun (Penelitian Tindakan Pada Siswa Di Ra Banu Ahyan 2 Cimaja Kecamatan Surade Kabupaten Sukabumi)," *Cendikia* 2, no. 4 (2024): 454–74.

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learning.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Dewey's Inquiry-Based Learning model suggests that when students are encouraged to engage in digital exploration, they become more active and creative in solving academic problems. An interview with a lecturer further affirmed this point, *students who are given the freedom to search for and analyze digital references are noticeably more critical than those who rely solely on printed textbooks.* 

This statement underlines the importance of incorporating digital tools into the learning process to foster critical thinking and active engagement among students. In conclusion, while there are significant barriers to the full integration of digital technologies within Islamic educational institutions, there is also a growing awareness of the potential benefits. The development of a curriculum that combines traditional Islamic values with digital tools and strategies has the potential to create more dynamic, interactive, and critical learning environments. With appropriate investment in digital infrastructure, faculty training, and curriculum innovation, Islamic education can better equip students to navigate the challenges of the digital era while remaining grounded in Islamic principles.

The findings of this study reveal that the integration of digitalization into the Islamic education curriculum, particularly at STAI Darul Falah Cililin, faces various structural, cultural, and pedagogical challenges. While the global landscape of education is rapidly shifting due to technological innovation, Islamic higher education institutions often lag behind in adopting these transformations holistically. Structurally, many institutions face limitations in terms of infrastructure, such as inadequate internet connectivity, lack of digital learning platforms, and minimal investment in technological tools. These barriers hinder the effective implementation of digital-based strategies and reduce the accessibility of educational resources for students and faculty members alike. Without sufficient institutional support, digital integration becomes fragmented and unsustainable.

Culturally, there exists a degree of resistance to change, especially when traditional pedagogical values are perceived to be at odds with modern technology. Some educators and stakeholders still view digital tools as a threat to the authenticity of Islamic knowledge transmission. This cultural gap creates tension between innovation and tradition, requiring a thoughtful approach to harmonize both aspects without compromising core religious principles. Pedagogically, the shift to digital-based learning demands new teaching methodologies, assessment models, and curriculum designs. However, many educators are not yet equipped with the necessary digital competencies to adapt their instructional approaches. This lack of preparedness results in superficial or inconsistent use of technology in classrooms, ultimately affecting the quality of learning outcomes. Despite these challenges, the study emphasizes that technological advancement alone is not enough to transform education. Curriculum transformation requires systemic changes that go beyond content updates. It involves revising educational policies to support innovation, building infrastructure that enables digital learning, and enhancing the digital literacy and pedagogical capacity of human

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Reggy Diki Maulansyah, Dila Febrianty, dan Masduki Asbari, "Peran Guru dalam Peningkatan Mutu Pendidikan: Penting dan Genting!," *Journal of Information Systems and Management (JISMA)* 2, no. 5 (2023): 31–35.

resources. Only through this comprehensive reform can institutions like STAI Darul Falah Cililin fully realize the potential of digitalization in Islamic education.

First, the weak integration of technology into the learning process reflects the lack of collective awareness and concrete institutional policies to make technology a tool for developing students' critical thinking skills. As emphasized in Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, effective learning requires a social environment that supports exploration, discussion, and active interaction. Unfortunately, most lecturers still rely on lecture and memorization methods, which are one-way and do not facilitate critical dialogue. Second, in the context of Tyler's curriculum theory, curriculum design should be based on the needs and challenges of the times. However, the curriculum applied in Islamic educational institutions remains trapped in conventional patterns that are not adaptive to the digital era<sup>20</sup>. This results in students being poorly prepared to face the dynamics of global social and technological change, which demand critical, creative, and digital literacy skills. Third, limited facilities and access to digital devices are major obstacles. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of education, which asserts that the learning environment greatly influences students' academic experiences. The lack of digital labs, online libraries, and technological training for lecturers has caused digitalization to remain a mere discourse without concrete implementation. Fourth, from the perspective of Siemens' connectivism theory, the learning process in the digital era must be based on connectivity between learning resources and information networks. When students lack access to digital learning platforms, the potential for building a global knowledge network is severely limited.<sup>21</sup> This also impacts students' ability to use technology for reflection, research, and collaboration.

However, it is important to note that Islamic education has significant potential to thrive in the digital ecosystem. Far from being a threat, digitalization can act as a transformative tool that expands the reach and relevance of Islamic teachings in the modern world. When approached strategically, digital tools can enrich the learning experience, facilitate access to classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship, and support more inclusive modes of dakwah (Islamic outreach) that transcend geographic and cultural boundaries. As one academician aptly noted, digitalization does not mean eliminating Islamic values; instead, it offers a broad and inclusive platform for communicating those values more effectively. Digital platforms, such as podcasts, YouTube lectures, interactive Qur'anic apps, and online halaqah (study circles), serve as new arenas for spreading Islamic knowledge while engaging with younger, tech-savvy audiences. In this way, digitalization can be harnessed to reinforce, not dilute, the moral and spiritual foundations of Islamic education.

This vision aligns with educational theories such as Bruner's (1960) constructivism, which emphasizes the role of learners in actively constructing knowledge through meaningful experiences, and Dewey's (1938) Inquiry-Based Learning, which encourages students to engage in exploration and problem-solving as central elements of the learning process. Both

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Nurhikmah Nurhikmah, "Character Education Islam From the Views of Imam Al-Ghazali," *Jurnal Al Burhan* 4, no. 1 (2024): 53–66, https://doi.org/10.58988/jab.v4i1.300.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Diki Maulansyah, Febrianty, dan Asbari, "Peran Guru dalam Peningkatan Mutu Pendidikan: Penting dan Genting!"

frameworks support the idea that education should move beyond rote memorization toward deeper understanding—an approach highly compatible with Islamic education's emphasis on tadabbur (reflection), ijtihad (independent reasoning), and tafaqquh (deep understanding).

Therefore, digital-based learning in Islamic education should be seen not merely as a response to technological trends, but as a deliberate pedagogical strategy. It has the potential to foster critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and independent inquiry—skills essential for nurturing a generation of Muslim scholars and professionals who are both rooted in their faith and capable of addressing contemporary challenges. Integrating digital pedagogy can also promote more student-centered learning, where learners take active roles in seeking knowledge and forming connections between religious teachings and real-world issues. To realize this potential, Islamic educational institutions must respond proactively by initiating curriculum reforms that incorporate digital literacy and media ethics, particularly from an Islamic perspective. Furthermore, improving the digital competence of lecturers through training and continuous professional development is crucial. Equally important is the provision of adequate infrastructure—such as reliable internet access, learning management systems (LMS), and digital libraries—that supports collaborative, research-based, and interactive learning environments. Only through these comprehensive efforts can Islamic education truly flourish in the digital era while remaining faithful to its core values.

A curriculum based on academic critical thinking focuses on developing reflective, analytical, and creative thinking in the learning process. This approach emphasizes problemsolving, logical thinking, and developing a broader perspective in understanding knowledge. Critical thinking-oriented education grants students the freedom to explore various viewpoints and trains them in independent thinking skills to tackle academic and real-life challenges. Freire (1970) stated that education should liberate individuals through critical thinking and dialogue, not just memorization of facts. Meanwhile, Brookfield (2012) emphasized that critical thinking-based education helps students understand various perspectives and develop analytical skills. Ennis (1987) added that critical thinking involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, and make decisions based on existing evidence, further supported by Paul & Elder (2006), who underscored the importance of critical thinking in making academic and daily life decisions. Henderson & Gornik (2007) in their research mentioned that curricula based on critical thinking allow students to become more independent and innovative in facing academic challenges.<sup>22</sup>

The need for critical thinking in higher education has increased alongside technological development and globalization, which require students to possess sharp analytical skills. According to Halpern (1998), critical thinking is essential in academia as it helps students evaluate information objectively and construct strong arguments. Kuhn (2005) added that critical thinking plays a role in enhancing the quality of learning through active student participation in scientific discussions. Furthermore, research by Facione (2011) showed that students with critical thinking skills are better prepared to face workplace challenges and adapt to rapid changes. In the context of Islamic education, critical thinking is also crucial in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Romi Mesra dkk., *Teknologi Pendidikan* (Sada Kurnia Pustaka, 2023).

understanding religious teachings in a deep and contextual manner, as Al-Attas (1993) emphasized the importance of integrating knowledge and Islamic values in higher education. Therefore, developing a curriculum based on academic critical thinking in higher education is a strategic step in preparing intellectuals who are intelligent, innovative, and have integrity.<sup>23</sup>

Islamic education must adapt to technological developments and social changes to remain relevant and address the challenges of the times. In facing the digital era, Islamic education needs to adjust its methods and curriculum to reach and meet the needs of students living in a digital world. Ziauddin Sardar (1993) emphasized that Islamic education must adapt to modernity without losing its essential teachings. Nasir & Rahim (2017) showed that digital-based Islamic learning is more preferred by the younger generation, so Islamic education needs to accommodate this change to remain relevant. Effendy (2019) explained that the curriculum must respond to the needs of the digital society to remain aligned with the demands of the times. Abdullah (2020) stressed that Islamic education must integrate digital skills to prepare graduates for global competition. Husna (2021) highlighted the importance of digital literacy in building students' competencies so that they do not lag behind in the times. Therefore, the relevance of Islamic education in the digital era lies in its ability to maintain Islamic values while adapting to technological developments and the needs of the times.

This recognition represents a promising starting point for the transformation of the curriculum at STAI Darul Falah Cililin. The integration of technology into the curriculum, if done appropriately, can help bridge the gap between traditional Islamic education and the demands of the digital age. It offers a path forward that maintains the institution's commitment to Islamic values while fostering the development of skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world. To address the current limitations and achieve meaningful curriculum transformation, it is essential to pursue systemic reforms that focus on three key areas: institutional policies, capacity building for educators, and the development of digital infrastructure. Institutional policies should be crafted to encourage the systematic incorporation of technology in teaching and learning processes, ensuring that technology is not seen as an optional addition, but as an essential component of the educational experience. Educators should be provided with comprehensive training and ongoing professional development to enhance their technological literacy, enabling them to effectively integrate digital tools into their teaching methods. Additionally, the development of digital infrastructure such as access to digital libraries, online learning platforms, and reliable internet connectivity will be essential to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to access the resources they need to succeed.

Ultimately, the strategy for developing Islamic education curricula in the digital era should be directed toward producing a generation of Muslim intellectuals who embody both spiritual depth and intellectual agility. These individuals must be grounded in their religious commitments—firm in their understanding of Islamic teachings and values—while simultaneously being capable of navigating and responding to the complex realities of a rapidly

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ashabul Kahfi, "Implementasi Profil Pelajar Pancasila Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Karakter Siswa Di Sekolah," *Dirasah: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Pendidikan Dasar Islam* 5, no. 2 (2022): 138–51, https://doi.org/10.51476/dirasah.v5i2.402.

changing world. This dual competency is essential for ensuring that Islamic education remains relevant and transformative in the 21st century. In today's interconnected and technologically driven society, it is no longer sufficient for students to possess only traditional religious knowledge. They must also be equipped with 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, and problem-solving abilities. These skills are crucial for addressing global challenges—including climate change, economic inequality, misinformation, and interfaith tensions—in a manner that is both solution-oriented and ethically responsible. The integration of these competencies into the Islamic education curriculum will not only enhance academic outcomes but also empower students to become agents of change in their respective communities.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the development of curricula in Islamic higher education institutions, particularly at STAI Darul Falah Cililin, faces significant challenges in effectively integrating digital technology into the learning strategy. The majority of educators at the institution continue to rely heavily on traditional teaching methods, such as lectures and rote memorization, with limited incorporation of technological tools and digital platforms into their teaching practices. This reliance on conventional teaching methods reflects a broader issue within the institution: a lack of institutional policies that clearly advocate for the transformation of learning toward a more critical, interactive, and digitally-driven approach. The findings indicate that one of the central challenges lies in the readiness of human resources, as both lecturers and educational staff exhibit limited proficiency in using technology for instructional purposes. The absence of structured training programs, the scarcity of digital resources, and inadequate infrastructure are key factors that hinder the effective development of a digital-based curriculum. These barriers prevent the educational institution from fully realizing the potential of digital technologies to foster critical thinking and innovative learning. Moreover, students also face significant obstacles in accessing digital learning resources, which restricts their ability to engage deeply with academic content and develop critical and analytical thinking skills. The lack of access to digital platforms and tools significantly hampers students' capacity to explore, analyze, and evaluate information effectively, a key component in fostering a more robust and dynamic educational experience. Despite these challenges, the interview results reveal an increasing awareness among academic staff that digitalization, rather than undermining Islamic values, can serve as an opportunity to expand the reach of dakwah (Islamic preaching) and enrich the learning process. Technology, when integrated thoughtfully, can become an effective medium to support the principles of constructivism and inquiry-based learning. These pedagogical approaches emphasize student independence, creativity, and critical thinking qualities that are essential for preparing students to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

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