



Contemporary Islamic Education Paradigm: A Rational Cultural Transformative Synthesis

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Islamic education is confronted with rapid digitalization, cultural pluralism, and changing socio-educational expectations in Muslim societies. While previous studies have examined rational, cultural, and transformative dimensions of Islamic education, these perspectives have largely been addressed in isolation, producing a fragmented discourse and leaving the field without a coherent theoretical framework capable of responding to 21st-century demands. This study aims to develop an integrative conceptual paradigm that synthesizes these three dimensions. To achieve this, a qualitative conceptual research design was employed using a structured library-based approach. Academic books, journal articles, and scholarly documents published between 2019 and 2025 were selected based on thematic relevance and academic significance. The sources were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify conceptual patterns, followed by theoretical synthesis to formulate an integrative framework. The results show, first, that Islamic education discourse has shifted from a textual-normative orientation to a more reflective and socially responsive model. Second, the review identifies three prominent dimensions: rational, cultural, and transformative, each offering distinct conceptual contributions. Third, a theoretical gap is confirmed, as no prior research offers a unified paradigm that systematically connects these dimensions. The study contributes to contemporary Islamic education literature by proposing a holistic paradigm that reconciles tradition and modernity while positioning Islamic education as both value transmission and social agency formation. This framework opens opportunities for future empirical testing and curricular development examination and curricular development.

Keywords: *Contemporary Islamic Education, Paradigm, Rational Cultural*

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid social changes caused by globalization, digitalization, and shifting cultural values have placed Islamic education at an important intersection between tradition and the demands of modernity. Islamic education, which from the beginning aimed to form spiritual and moral character, is now faced with the reality of an increasingly complex and heterogeneous society (Nasution, 1992; Mahmud, 2025). In many Muslim countries, including Indonesia, Muslim communities are not only grappling with economic and political issues, but also with issues of gender equality, cultural pluralism, and the need to think critically in facing the demands of the times (Husni, 2025). Phenomena such as the increasing demand for digital literacy among Muslim students, the global pressure on the value of pluralism, and the demands of 21st-century work suggest that Islamic educational institutions need to transform in order to respond to the actual needs of contemporary society (Lubis, 2025; Al Hadi, 2025). This transformation includes changes in the curriculum, pedagogical models, and orientation of educational goals that not only emphasize textual understanding of religion but also social responsiveness, inclusivity, and integration of contemporary science (Wartoyo, 2023; Wahyuni, 2022).

In academic studies, there has been a lot of literature that discusses various paradigms of Islamic education, especially regarding the need to develop a more integrative and contextual approach. Traditional Islamic education is often focused on the dogmatic transmission of classical teachings, which is less able to respond to the needs of the modern era and the challenges of globalization (Chapra, 1992; Badran, 2009). Cross-contextual studies show that Islamic education in Indonesia and Africa each requires a pedagogical approach that not only preserves traditions, but is also able to open up space for dialogue between local values and global demands (Mahmud, 2025). Other research shows a significant shift in contemporary Islamic education from a purely traditional approach to a more gender-inclusive, culturally integrative approach, as well as relevant to current social dynamics (Lubis, 2025; Hussain & Rahman, 2021). In addition, the study of modern Islamic education also highlights the need to integrate digital technology in learning practices in response to the rapid development of information technology (Faza & Mufid, 2024). However, most of these studies are still fragmented and have not been able to formulate an Islamic education model that simultaneously integrates the rationality of science, cultural awareness, and social transformation holistically.

This gap in literature shows that there is still an important conceptual research gap. Most studies of Islamic education focus on only one dimension—such as gender interpretation in religious curricula as well as traditional versus modern pedagogy—without offering a holistic theoretical framework that bridges rationality, cultural awareness, and social transformation simultaneously (Saepullah, 2023; Illouz, 2019). For example, studies on gender-inclusive pedagogy in Islamic education have been widely conducted, but have not been deeply linked to a dialogical approach to

contemporary science and broader social change (Al Hadi, 2025; Lubis, 2025). Some studies have also mapped the need for Islamic education for the integration of technology and ICT, but it still does not explain the linkage between moral-ethical learning and current global value challenges (Faza & Mufid, 2024; Wartoyo, 2023). Therefore, this article needs a more systematic conceptual foundation to combine these three approaches so that it can comprehensively respond to the demands of the times.

Therefore, this article comes with a mission to expand the discourse of contemporary Islamic education by introducing a conceptual framework that integrates three dimensions at once: educational rationality, cultural awareness, and transformative orientation. This approach not only considers the importance of developing critical thinking skills and openness to new science, but also appreciates diverse socio-cultural contexts and the role of education in inclusive and progressive social change (Fraser, 2013; Wartoyo, 2023). The focus of this paper is to answer the urgent need for a holistic, interdisciplinary, and responsive Islamic education paradigm to the challenges of the times, including globalization, pluralism, digitalization, and gender gaps (Illouz, 2019; Saepullah, 2023; Al Hadi, 2025). The proposed framework is not just a reinterpretation of tradition, but an attempt to narrow the research gap in the current Islamic educational literature, by affirming the importance of education that is not only conservative or reformative, but also transformative in the dimensions of values, epistemology, and pedagogical practice.

Based on this description, this article departs from the hypothesis that Islamic education that is able to answer contemporary challenges is an integrative education: combining the rationality of science, cultural awareness of the social context of society, and orientation towards just and humane social change. This kind of education is believed to bridge the dualism between tradition and modernity in Islamic education, as well as offer a conceptual alternative to educational practices that are responsive to global demands but still rooted in Islamic values (Chapra, 1992; Badran, 2009; Fraser, 2013). This hypothesis opens up opportunities for further research in the form of theoretical and empirical studies, so that Islamic education can play a significant role as an instrument of inclusive, progressive, and gender-equitable social development in the contemporary era.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative research with a library research design. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research does not rest on empirical field data, but on a conceptual exploration of contemporary Islamic education that involves mapping academic ideas, theories, and discourses and the relationships between them. This research aims to critically read relevant literature to formulate a conceptual framework of Islamic education with a rational, cultural, and transformative pattern as formulated in the introduction. Thus, this research relies on textual and discourse analysis as the main instrument in the development of scientific arguments.

The material object of this research is the discourse of contemporary Islamic education which is built through the interaction between three styles of approaches, namely a rational approach that emphasizes the integration of knowledge and critical thinking skills, a cultural approach that emphasizes the social context and internalization of values through culture, and a transformative approach that views education as an instrument of social change. The three styles were chosen because the literature shows that they are often discussed separately in previous research, but have not been formulated into a complete educational paradigm that is responsive to the challenges of modernity, digitalization, and value pluralism.

The sources of information in this study are in the form of secondary data from books, national and international journal articles, proceedings, dissertations, and other academic documents relevant to the research theme. Digital literacy and scientific repositories are used to access academic sources, including reputable journals and the latest scientific publications in the 2019–2025 range. The selected literature was selected based on thematic relevance, academic significance, and its contribution in explaining the epistemological problems of contemporary Islamic education. This selection stage is necessary to ensure that the resulting conceptual framework has an adequate theoretical foundation and is in accordance with the latest developments in the study of Islamic education.

The data collection process is carried out through systematic tracing using document tracing methods and content searching of available literature in both print and digital form. The search was carried out through academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Sinta, Dimensions, and various scientific journals relevant to the themes of Islamic education, religious studies, and socio-cultural studies. Each literature is then classified based on topic categories such as rationalization of Islamic education, culture-based education, transformative education, digitalization of education, gender issues in education, and contemporary Islamic studies. This thematic coding process is carried out to facilitate the preparation of arguments and literature synthesis.

The data analysis in this study was carried out through content analysis and theoretical synthesis. Content analysis is used to examine motives, ideas, and argumentation structures in the literature so as to allow researchers to identify the epistemic assumptions of each educational style. Meanwhile, theoretical synthesis is used to integrate three approaches to Islamic education into one coherent conceptual framework. In addition, a hermeneutical-critical approach is used in reading classical and modern literature to formulate answers to the research gaps that have been identified in the introduction. Thus, this method is not only descriptive, but also constructive in producing a theoretical model that has an academic contribution to the study of contemporary Islamic education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This research resulted in three main conceptual findings regarding Islamic education in the context of contemporary society.

First, the study found that the discourse of Islamic education has shifted from a textual-normative pattern to an educational pattern that is more reflective, inclusive, and responsive to social change. This shift can be seen in literature that emphasizes the importance of integrating religious values with the demands of globalization, digitalization, and value pluralism in the world of education (Husni, 2025; Lubis, 2025). However, the implementation of this responsive educational pattern in Islamic educational institutions is still partial and has not touched on cultural and social aspects comprehensively, especially in the context of Muslim countries such as Indonesia (Mahmud, 2025).

Second, this study finds that contemporary Islamic education patterns that are relevant to the needs of society can be grouped into three main dimensions: rational, cultural, and transformative. The rational dimension emphasizes the integration of religion with science and the development of critical thinking skills, as proposed in the idea of modern Islamic education (Nasution, 1992; Al Hadi, 2025). The cultural dimension emphasizes the importance of the process of internalizing values through the social and cultural context of students, which shows that Islamic education cannot be separated from the social experience and cultural identity of the community (Wartoyo, 2023; Wahyuni, 2022). Meanwhile, the transformative dimension places education as an instrument of social change oriented towards equality, humanity, and liberation, as widely discussed in the critical education literature (Fraser, 2013; Saepullah, 2023).

Third, the research found a research gap in the Islamic education literature, namely the absence of a conceptual formulation that integrates the three dimensions in a coherent educational paradigm. Some literature only focuses on the aspect of rationality in education (Al Hadi, 2025), others on the aspect of culture and identity (Wartoyo, 2023), and some on the transformative aspect as an instrument of social change (Saepullah, 2023; Faza & Mufid, 2024). This fragmentation shows that the discourse of contemporary Islamic education is still sectoral and has not provided a framework that is able to respond to the challenges of the 21st century as a whole, especially in the context of globalization, digitalization, and social inequality. Thus, this study emphasizes the need to integrate these three dimensions as an answer to the challenges of contemporary Islamic education.

Discussion

The results of the study show that contemporary Islamic education is moving from a textual-normative paradigm to a paradigm that is more reflective, inclusive, and adaptive to social change. This shift can be read as a response to the increasingly complex development of Muslim society, both in the social, cultural, and technological fields. In the perspective of critical education theory, the transformation marks a shift in

the function of education from simply the transmission of norms towards the formation of subjects who are able to read reality and intervene productively. Thus, Islamic education can no longer be placed only in the framework of value reproduction, but also in the framework of knowledge production and social consciousness. These findings are consistent with the literature that shows that Islamic education has begun to touch on issues of digitalization, cultural pluralism, and scientific integration in recent years (Husni, 2025; Lubis, 2025).

Furthermore, the findings on the three dimensions of Islamic education – rational, cultural, and transformative – open up new reading space for the epistemological position of Islamic education in contemporary society. The rational dimension affirms the importance of the integration of religion with science and critical reason. This approach is in line with the tradition of modernist thought in Islam which emphasizes the actualization of reason as an instrument of understanding text and reality (Nasution, 1992; Al Hadi, 2025). The cultural dimension shows that education does not take place in a sterile social space, but is always intertwined with community habitus, family structure, and cultural identity (Wartoyo, 2023; Wahyuni, 2022). While the transformative dimension suggests that Islamic education has the ethical potential to bring about more just and humane social change, in line with the ideas of social piety and liberation in critical education (Fraser, 2013; Saepullah, 2023). The integration of these three dimensions makes Islamic education not only a space for internalizing values, but also an arena for the production of social agency.

The findings regarding the research gap in the Islamic education literature show that the discourse on Islamic education has been fragmented and sectoral. Some studies only emphasize rationality in the context of modern Islamic education, without paying attention to cultural context and social-transformational orientation (Al Hadi, 2025), while other studies raise cultural and identity issues, but less touch on the need for knowledge integration and the formation of critical agency (Wartoyo, 2023). Others discuss Islamic education as an instrument of social change, but do not offer a solid epistemic foundation to explain how such changes can occur at the pedagogical and curricular levels (Faza & Mufid, 2024). Thus, this research offers an integrative conceptual framework that is able to bridge the epistemic, cultural, and social sectors in Islamic education. This theoretical contribution is what makes this study different from previous studies.

Conceptually, the novelty of this research lies in the effort to formulate an integrative-holistic Islamic education paradigm that is able to answer the demands of the 21st century in three layers at once: (1) strengthening the rationality of students, (2) the meaning of values in the cultural space, and (3) the orientation of social change. This integrative framework is needed so that Islamic education not only repeats normative patterns that are doctrinal, but also opens up space for dialogue between religion and reality. If previous studies have discussed these three dimensions separately, this study confirms that they must be understood as interconnected as an epistemological prerequisite for the revitalization of contemporary Islamic education. Thus, this research

not only improves the understanding of Islamic education, but also expands its theoretical horizons as a transformative instrument in modern Muslim society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that contemporary Islamic education is in an important phase towards epistemological transformation as social complexity, digitalization, and pluralism of values in Muslim societies increase. The discourse of Islamic education is no longer adequate if it is understood solely as a process of transmitting normative teachings, but must be seen as an arena for dialogue between religion, culture, and science. This finding answers the problem in the introduction related to the urgent need for an Islamic education paradigm that is able to respond to global dynamics and 21st century competency needs.

This research also found that there are three main dimensions in Islamic education that are relevant to the needs of contemporary society, namely rational, cultural, and transformative dimensions. These three dimensions each have different conceptual contributions: the rational dimension strengthens critical reasoning and the integration of knowledge, the cultural dimension strengthens the process of internalizing values in the socio-cultural context of students, and the transformative dimension strengthens the function of education as an instrument of social change. Thus, this research answers the preliminary question of how Islamic education can constructively bridge the tension between tradition and modernity.

In addition, the results of the study show that there is an important research gap in the literature, namely the absence of a conceptual formulation that integrates these three dimensions in a complete educational framework. Previous literature has tended to address each dimension separately and sectorally so that it has not been able to offer comprehensive solutions to the challenges of contemporary Islamic education. This research makes a conceptual contribution by proposing an integrative-holistic approach as a new paradigm in Islamic education, which emphasizes not only individual piety but also social piety as well as readiness to face global challenges.

Thus, it can be concluded that Islamic education that is responsive to the social context and challenges of the times is a rational education in epistemology, cultural in a pedagogical approach, and transformative in social orientation. This paradigm is not only relevant for the development of Islamic education theory, but also has practical implications for curriculum development, learning design, and Islamic education policies in the contemporary era. This research opens up opportunities to be continued in the form of curriculum analysis, field research, and cross-border comparative studies to test how this integrative paradigm can be implemented in different institutional and societal contexts.

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