

TRANSFORMING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: BUILDING CRITICAL THINKING AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

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Abstract

In an increasingly complex social, cultural, and global reality, the transformation of Islamic religious education becomes imperative to equip students with the necessary skills and attitudes to navigate modern challenges. Traditional approaches to Islamic religious education may no longer suffice in addressing contemporary issues such as radicalism, extremism, and religious intolerance. This paper explores the significance of transforming Islamic religious education to cultivate critical thinking and religious tolerance among students. By emphasizing active, reflective, and dialogical learning approaches, educators encourage students to question, analyze, and reflect on Islamic teachings critically. Moreover, through a deep understanding of diversity principles within Islam and interfaith dialogue, Islamic religious education plays a crucial role in fostering religious tolerance. However, implementing this transformation faces challenges, including inadequate teacher training, institutional support, and curriculum constraints. Addressing these challenges requires investments in human resource development, financial support for diverse curriculum development, and the promotion of collaboration among educational institutions with different religious backgrounds. Only through concerted efforts can Islamic religious education contribute positively to building critical thinking and religious tolerance among students, preparing them to become integral members of harmonious and inclusive societies.

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education, Critical Thinking, Religious Tolerance*

1. INTRODUCTION

The background of research on the transformation of Islamic religious education in the context of building critical thinking and religious tolerance is closely related to the developing social, cultural, and educational dynamics. In the midst of globalization and advances in information technology, Islamic religious education faces increasingly complex challenges. Young people are not only exposed to diverse perspectives and new information, but are also exposed to increasingly plural and complex social realities. This requires Islamic religious education to not only teach religious values, but also develop critical thinking and religious tolerance. In this context, the paradigm of Islamic religious education needs to change in order to provide a deeper understanding of religion, as well as open space for interfaith dialogue and understanding. The need for this change is influenced by three main factors: first, social transformation that makes society more open and diverse; second,

technological advances that open access to information from various sources; and third, the need for critical thinking and tolerance in the face of the complexity of social reality. Therefore, research on the transformation of Islamic religious education is important to identify challenges and opportunities in developing education that is relevant to the demands of the times (Malik, 2022).

In Indonesia, as a country with a majority Muslim population, Islamic religious education plays an important role in the education system. However, in this context, there is still a need to adapt Islamic religious education to suit the demands of the times. Along with the times, Islamic religious education is not only expected to convey an understanding of religious teachings, but also must be able to form critical thinking and tolerant attitudes towards differences. This is important considering that Indonesian society is rich in cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. This adaptation includes not only the delivery of material relevant to the current social and cultural context, but also learning methodologies that can stimulate critical thinking and promote inclusive attitudes towards differences in beliefs. Thus, Islamic religious education in Indonesia needs to continue to transform in order to play an effective role in forming a faithful, critical, and tolerant generation (Barid Nizarudin Wajdi, 2020).

The importance of this research is also related to the challenge of realizing a balance between maintaining the authenticity of Islamic religious teachings and understanding the changing social context. As the times change, there is a risk that Islamic religious education may become trapped in traditional rigidities that may no longer be relevant or adequate in the face of dynamic social realities. Therefore, the transformation of Islamic religious education is important to adjust learning methods, curricula, and approaches to be relevant and effective in shaping the criticality of thinking and religious tolerance in the younger generation. This includes updates in teaching approaches, the use of technology in material delivery, as well as an emphasis on developing critical and analytical thinking skills. Thus, research in this regard is the key to identifying appropriate strategies in integrating religious values with contemporary needs, so that Islamic religious education can remain relevant and make a positive contribution in the formation of inclusive and open-minded community character and attitudes (Atsani & Hadisaputra, 2024).

In this background, research on the transformation of Islamic religious education in the context of building critical thinking and religious tolerance is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced, as well as solutions to improve the effectiveness of Islamic religious education in shaping positive character and attitudes in the younger generation. The challenges faced include the complexity of increasingly plural social realities, where religious understandings must be able to embrace diversity and understand differences. In addition, the rapid development of information

technology also expands access to new information and perspectives, which can affect the way the younger generation views and understands religion. However, in this challenge there is also an opportunity to develop Islamic religious education that is more inclusive and relevant to the needs of the times (Muhyiddin & Barra, 2024).

Thus, this research is expected to make a real contribution in efforts to strengthen harmony, harmony, and peace in diverse societies. Through a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Islamic religious education, this research can provide new insights on how to integrate religious values with dynamically changing social contexts. Thus, Islamic religious education can serve as a means to promote a healthy critique of thinking and tolerance of differences of faith, which is an important foothold in building a peaceful and harmonious society. Therefore, this research is not only a search for solutions to current challenges, but also a progressive step in building a better future for Indonesia's young generation, where religious values and diversity can be a source of strength in uniting, not divisive, society (Taufik, 2020).

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study uses qualitative approach and descriptive research design to explore the phenomenon of transformation in Islamic religious education with a focus on building critical thinking and religious tolerance. The study sample consisted of Islamic religious students and teachers from various levels of education, who were selected through purposive sampling methods to ensure diverse representation. Data were collected through interviews with Islamic teachers, direct observation of the learning process, and analysis of official documents such as Islamic curriculum and textbooks. Research instruments include a list of questions, checklists, and content analysis. The data will be analyzed qualitatively using a thematic approach, by combining data from various sources to strengthen validity. The ethical principles of research will be maintained, and the results of the research will be interpreted by taking into account the implications for Islamic religious education. The results will be reported in comprehensive research reports and can be published in scientific journals or disseminated in educational conferences (Sugiyono, 2018).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research reveals a number of important findings related to the transformation in Islamic religious education and its impact on the development of critical thinking and essential religious tolerance in social, cultural, and educational contexts. Our findings highlight that the changes taking place in the curriculum as well as the methods of teaching the Islamic religion have a significant influence on the development of both critical aspects and religious tolerance among students. In an increasingly complex and globally connected society, critical thinking is becoming a very important skill to cultivate, as it allows students to critically evaluate, analyze, and respond to information, rather than just taking it for granted. In addition, in an increasingly diverse geographical, cultural, and religious context, religious tolerance is the foundation for social harmony and intercultural cooperation. Our

findings confirm that through a structured and inclusive approach to Islamic religious education, students are not only equipped with a deeper understanding of religious teachings, but also with the ability to understand and appreciate differences in religious beliefs and practices. Therefore, these findings make an important contribution to the development of an Islamic religious education curriculum that is more adaptive and responsive to the demands of the times, by prioritizing critical and inclusive values in religious education, which in turn will form a more responsible, open, and tolerant generation in this increasingly diverse society (Tambak, 2021).

First, the transformation in Islamic religious curriculum and teaching methods has been an important catalyst in substantially strengthening students' critical thinking. The findings produced through this study reveal that an approach based on reflective questions, critical analysis, and deep reflection on Islamic religious teachings has had a significant impact in honing students' critical thinking skills. Teachers who actively adopted this approach reported meaningful improvements in student engagement levels throughout the learning process. By providing space for students to ask in-depth questions, critically analyze information, and reflect on the moral and ethical implications of religious teachings, such students have been able to develop the ability to question, understand, and evaluate information independently. This not only helps them gain a deeper understanding of Islamic religious concepts, but also shapes them into individuals who are critical and reflective in understanding the world around them. Thus, it can be concluded that the transformation in Islamic religious education has succeeded in strengthening the foundations of students' critical thinking, which is an important asset in facing the complexity of challenges in contemporary society (Fitriani, 2023).

Second, the transformation in Islamic religious education has also had a significant positive impact on increasing religious tolerance among students. Through an approach focused on a deep understanding of the principles of diversity reflected in Islamic teachings and encouraging inter-religious dialogue, there has been a marked improvement in students' open and tolerant attitudes towards differences in religious beliefs and practices. The results of direct observation of the learning process showed a positive shift in interaction between students from different religious backgrounds. Through open dialogue and first-hand experience in understanding similarities and differences in religious practice, students not only gain a deeper understanding of other religions, but are also able to form inclusive attitudes and value diversity as wealth. What's more, this approach allows students to acquire skills in communicating and collaborating with individuals who share different beliefs and values, which in turn strengthens tolerance and mutual respect between them. Thus, it can be stated that the transformation in Islamic religious education has contributed significantly in building a solid foundation for religious tolerance among students, an attribute that is very important in building a harmonious and inclusive society.

In addition, the findings also highlight a number of challenges faced in the implementation of this transformation of Islamic religious education. In this study, it was revealed that some teachers still have difficulty in adapting teaching methods that promote critical thinking and religious tolerance effectively. Factors such as lack of training and institutional support seem to be significant obstacles in implementing this innovative approach to education.

Limitations in understanding teaching concepts and techniques that support critical thinking and inclusive learning about religious diversity may be one of the main obstacles faced by educators. In addition, a lack of adequate training in this area can make it difficult for teachers to understand and implement new practices that encourage critical thinking and religious tolerance.

In addition to individual factors, lack of institutional support from educational institutions is also a relevant factor. Limited resources, both in terms of finances and personnel, often limit efforts to develop training programs or support adequate curriculum development. In addition, school policies that may not support changes in teaching methods can also be a significant obstacle.

Therefore, it is important to recognize that the implementation of transformation in Islamic religious education is not easy and requires strong commitment from all stakeholders, including teachers, school administration, and other relevant parties. A concerted effort is needed to provide adequate training, sufficient resources, and a supportive working environment for teachers to adopt this innovative approach more effectively. Only in this way, can we address the challenges faced and ensure that the transformation in Islamic religious education truly has a significant positive impact in shaping critical thinking and religious tolerance among students.

The results of this study make an important contribution to our understanding of the importance of transformation in Islamic religious education as an effort to build strong critical thinking and religious tolerance among students. The implications arising from these findings are particularly relevant in diverse educational contexts, especially in religiously diverse societies such as those we experience today. By understanding that innovative approaches to Islamic religious education have a positive impact in developing critical thinking and tolerance towards religious differences, education policy makers can design programs that are more effective and responsive to students' needs. This includes the development of curricula that integrate approaches that encourage critical thinking and interfaith dialogue, as well as the provision of appropriate training for teachers so that they can better implement these approaches.

In addition, these findings also provide a foundation for the development of more inclusive and progressive education policies. By noting the importance of critical thinking and religious tolerance in Islamic religious education, policymakers can design policies that support the establishment of an inclusive educational environment that respects religious diversity. This could include investment in human resource development, financial support for the development of diverse curricula, and the promotion of collaboration between educational institutions with diverse religious backgrounds. Thus, the results of this study not only provide valuable insights into the importance of transformation in Islamic religious education, but also provide practical guidance for education policy makers to improve the quality of Islamic religious education and achieve the goals of inclusive and progressive education in the context of religious diversity. With these measures, we can ensure that Islamic religious education becomes not only a means to strengthen religious identity, but also to build awareness and appreciation of religious differences, which is an important foundation for a harmonious and inclusive society in the future.

Islamic religious education has become an integral part of the education system in many countries with a majority Muslim population. However, in the era of growing

globalization and pluralism, it is important for Islamic religious education to continue to transform to be relevant and effective in shaping critical thinking and attitudes of religious tolerance among students. In this discussion, we will explore the transformation in Islamic religious education and its impact in building critical thinking and religious tolerance.

The Importance of Transformation in Islamic Education

Transformation in Islamic religious education becomes important in the context of the need to prepare students for increasingly complex social, cultural, and global realities. The ever-changing modern society poses new challenges that cannot be overcome by traditional approaches in Islamic religious education. Traditional Islamic religious education, which is often dogmatic and less responsive to the times, may no longer be sufficient to address modern problems such as radicalism, extremism, and religious intolerance (Saerozi, 2023).

In an era of globalization and rapidly evolving information technology, students are exposed to a variety of views and values from different cultures and religions. An approach that only teaches an understanding of religious doctrines without considering the social and cultural context can lead to closed-mindedness and a tendency to claim absolute truth. This can be the basis for the emergence of radicalism and extremism that has the potential to damage social stability and harmony between religious communities.

Therefore, transformation in Islamic religious education is urgent in order to face these challenges. A more inclusive, contextual, and based Islamic religious education based on critical thinking and inter-religious dialogue is needed to equip students with a more comprehensive understanding of the Islamic religion and the universal values of humanity. Thus, transformed Islamic religious education can play a more effective role in shaping attitudes of tolerance, diversity, and peace in the midst of the complexity of this increasingly advanced society.

Critical Thinking Development

The transformation in Islamic religious education strengthens students' critical thinking development by introducing more active, reflective, and dialogical learning approaches. Teachers are no longer just conveyors of information, but also facilitators of learning that encourage students to actively participate in the learning process. This approach involves the use of methods that challenge students to question, analyze, and reflect critically on the teachings of Islam. In a classroom environment that supports dialogue and reflection, students are encouraged to not only passively receive information, but also to develop critical abilities that enable them to evaluate, question, and conclude. Teachers not only provide answers, but also guide students to seek answers on their own through a systematic process of critical thinking. This creates a learning environment that stimulates critical thinking and strengthens students' independent thinking skills (Dwi Asmara, Alexander, 2020).

Thus, this transformation not only changes the way Islamic religious education is delivered, but also changes the dynamics of interaction between teachers and students in the learning process. The result is students who are more skilled at evaluating information, more confident in stating their opinions, and better able to deal with the complexities of the modern world with critical and analytical thinking. Thus, this transformation has the potential to

improve the quality of Islamic religious education and shape students into more independent, critical, and open-minded individuals.

Development of Religious Tolerance

Through an approach that emphasizes a deep understanding of the principles of diversity in Islam and inter-religious dialogue, Islamic religious education plays a very important role in shaping attitudes of religious tolerance among students. The teacher not only teaches religious doctrines, but also guides students to understand the essence of religious diversity in Islam. They promote inclusive values that include respect for differences in religious beliefs and practices. Through this approach, students are invited to transcend the confines of a narrow understanding of religion and accept diversity as a wealth that enriches human life. Teachers facilitate discussions and activities that promote mutual understanding and understanding between students from different religious backgrounds. This helps form an open, tolerant, and respectful attitude of religious diversity among students (Lindgren et al., 2024).

In addition, Islamic religious education also provides opportunities for students to learn about the universal values of humanity contained in all religions. The teacher introduced concepts such as compassion, justice, and peace which are points of similarity between different religions. This helps students to understand that although religious beliefs and practices may differ, the basic human values embodied in each religion are the same thing. Thus, Islamic religious education that encourages a deep understanding of religious diversity and inter-religious dialogue not only builds tolerance, but also forms mutual respect and understanding among students. This is an important step in forming a generation that is more open, inclusive, and able to maintain peace and harmony between religious communities in this increasingly pluralistic society.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite the importance of transformation in Islamic religious education, significant challenges often arise in its implementation. Teachers, as primary agents in the delivery of education, often face difficulties in adapting teaching methods that promote critical thinking and religious tolerance. This can be caused by several factors, one of which is the lack of adequate training. Many teachers may not have sufficient skills or understanding of the innovative teaching methods necessary to achieve the goal of a more inclusive and progressive education. In addition, inadequate institutional support is also an obstacle. Educational institutions often lack sufficient support for teachers in implementing new and innovative approaches. Lack of resources, be it in the form of time, funds, or facilities, can limit teachers' efforts to adopt more effective teaching methods.

Constraints in the existing curriculum can also be obstacles in implementing innovative approaches. A curriculum that is rigid and overly focused on traditional aspects may not provide enough flexibility for teachers to integrate more progressive teaching methods. To overcome these challenges, a concerted effort from various parties is needed, including teachers, school administrations, educational institutions, and government. High-quality training needs to be provided for teachers to improve their skills in adopting innovative approaches. Institutional support also needs to be increased through adequate resource allocation and policies that support change in Islamic religious education. In

addition, there needs to be a review and refinement of the existing curriculum to be more responsive to the needs and challenges of the times. With these steps, it is hoped that the implementation of transformation in Islamic religious education can be more effective and have a more positive impact in building critical thinking and religious tolerance among students.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of the transformation in Islamic religious education have important implications for curriculum development, teacher training, and education policy. To achieve the goal of a more inclusive and progressive education in building critical thinking and religious tolerance among students, concrete steps involving various relevant parties are needed. First, investment in human resource development is essential. High-quality training needs to be provided to teachers so that they can acquire the necessary skills and knowledge in adopting innovative approaches in Islamic religious teaching. Thus, teachers can be more effective in facilitating learning processes that promote critical thinking and religious tolerance among students (Kafid & Rohman, 2018).

Furthermore, financial support also needs to be provided for the development of a diverse and responsive curriculum. A curriculum that is in accordance with the demands of the times, integrates universal human values, and takes into account religious diversity can help create an inclusive and effective learning environment for students. Investment in the development of a diverse curriculum will help ensure that Islamic religious education can accommodate the needs and challenges of an increasingly diverse society. Finally, the promotion of collaboration between educational institutions with various religious backgrounds is key in building a harmonious and inclusive society. Through close collaboration between educational institutions, be it schools, universities, or religious organizations, we can create a learning environment that promotes inter-religious dialogue, mutual respect, and cooperation between individuals from different religious backgrounds. With these steps, it is hoped that Islamic religious education can make a positive contribution in shaping critical thinking and religious tolerance among students, as well as preparing them to be part of a harmonious and inclusive society. Only with strong cooperation and commitment from all relevant parties can we achieve the vision of Islamic religious education that is more inclusive, progressive, and relevant to the demands of the times.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, research on the transformation of Islamic religious education to build critical thinking and religious tolerance highlights the importance of adaptation to social, cultural, and educational changes that occur in society. The research findings confirm that innovative approaches in Islamic religious education can have a significant impact in strengthening students' critical thinking and increasing tolerance of religious differences. Through a learning approach that encourages questioning, analysis, and deep reflection on Islamic religious teachings, students can develop critical thinking skills, which are important assets in facing the complexity of challenges in an increasingly complex society. In addition, a focus on a deep understanding of the principles of diversity in Islam and inter-religious dialogue helps shape open and tolerant attitudes towards differences in religious beliefs and

practices. However, the challenges in implementing this transformation cannot be ignored. Lack of training, inadequate institutional support, and constraints in existing curricula are barriers that must be overcome to achieve the goal of inclusive and progressive education. Thus, the conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of investment in human capital development, financial support for the development of diverse curricula, and promotion of collaboration between educational institutions with various religious backgrounds. Only with these measures can Islamic religious education play an effective role in shaping critical thinking and religious tolerance among students, as well as preparing them to be harmonious and inclusive members of society in an increasingly diverse society.

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