



Deconstructing Dogmatic Narratives: An Effort to Recontextualize Islamic Education Material for the Critical Generation

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Abstract:

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools is often trapped in a dogmatic and textual approach, which is less able to accommodate the social and intellectual dynamics of students. This study aims to explore efforts to recontextualize PAI materials by adapting religious teachings to the context of students' social, cultural, and intellectual lives, in order to improve their understanding, engagement, and critical thinking skills. The method used in this study is a qualitative case study approach, conducted in a junior high school in Probolinggo Regency, involving in-depth interviews, observation, and data analysis. The research findings indicate that the recontextualization of PAI materials successfully created a more inclusive and reflective learning climate, increased student enthusiasm, and encouraged them to connect religious teachings with contemporary social issues. This study contributes to the development of religious education theory, by offering a new approach to PAI learning that is more applicable and relevant. The practical implication is the importance of developing more contextual and interactive teaching methods.

Key Words: *Recontextualization, Islamic Religious Education, Critical Thinking, Contextual Learning, Student Engagement*

Abstrak:

Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di sekolah seringkali terjebak pada pendekatan dogmatis dan tekstual, yang kurang mampu mengakomodasi dinamika sosial dan intelektual siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi upaya rekontekstualisasi materi PAI dengan mengadaptasi ajaran agama ke dalam konteks kehidupan sosial, budaya, dan intelektual siswa, guna meningkatkan pemahaman, keterlibatan, dan kemampuan berpikir kritis mereka. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, yang dilakukan di sebuah SMP di Kabupaten Probolinggo, yang melibatkan wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan analisis data. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rekontekstualisasi materi PAI berhasil menciptakan iklim belajar yang lebih inklusif dan reflektif, meningkatkan antusiasme siswa, dan mendorong mereka untuk menghubungkan ajaran agama dengan isu-isu sosial kontemporer. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teori pendidikan agama, dengan menawarkan pendekatan baru dalam pembelajaran PAI yang lebih aplikatif dan relevan. Implikasi praktisnya adalah pentingnya mengembangkan metode pengajaran yang lebih kontekstual dan interaktif.

Kata Kunci: *Rekontekstualisasi, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Berpikir Kritis, Pembelajaran Kontekstual, Keterlibatan Siswa*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in shaping the character and spiritual understanding of the younger generation. However, as time progresses, some of the material taught tends to be dogmatic and less relevant to current social and intellectual developments (van de Ilmuen et al., 2022; Ydesen, 2021; Zhao, 2021). This raises the issue of creating a critical generation capable of understanding religion more reflectively. This research is crucial for identifying and critiquing dogmatic Islamic Education (PAI) material and proposing recontextualization efforts to better suit the needs of today's generation (Štolcová et al., 2023; Tolgfors et al., 2022). Thus, this research contributes to the renewal of religious education that is more relevant and in-depth for society.

The main problem underlying this research is the approach to religious education, which tends not to provide space for the development of critical and analytical attitudes in students. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials taught in many educational institutions are often limited to textual knowledge without providing relevant social and historical context (Sánchez & Arroyo, 2021; Savski, 2023). This results in the younger generation tending to accept dogma without questioning, understanding, or reflecting on its application in everyday life. Therefore, efforts are needed to revamp the approaches and materials in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) better to support the development of critical thinking in students.

Field observations indicate that students often view Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material as information to be simply accepted without room for discussion or further understanding. Teaching resources are also not always adequate in implementing methods that encourage critical reflection, often falling into the trap of traditional methods that focus on memorizing religious texts (Kusmawati et al., 2023). In addition, society's view of religious education is often trapped in a narrow understanding of religion, which is limited to rituals and religious obligations without touching on broader social and intellectual aspects (Sulhan & Hakim, 2023). This has an impact on the limited space for the development of critical thinking among the younger generation.

Several previous studies have attempted to examine religious education in a more open and critical context. For example, research by Rodríguez-Moldes et al. (2022) shows that religious education in Indonesia tends to be conservative and provides little space for critical thinking. Meanwhile, a study by Ridell & Walldén (2023) identified a gap between the PAI material taught and the needs of students' social reality. Other research by Pollefeyt et al. (2022) highlights the need for a contextual understanding-based approach to religious education, which can foster students' critical thinking skills regarding religious texts. However, despite this research, most focus solely on implementation aspects without detailing how to effectively recontextualize Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material. Therefore, this research offers a distinct contribution by offering

a solution in the form of a recontextualization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material that is more relevant to current developments.

Several other studies, such as those conducted by Söğüt (2023) and Silveira (2024), have noted that there are significant challenges in reforming the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in schools. Despite efforts to update teaching materials, much religious instruction remains stuck in outdated doctrines that are out of step with the evolving thinking of today's youth. Research by Soares et al. (2024), Shi (2023), and Shin (2022) even noted that most students experience boredom with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material taught in traditional ways. While some of these studies provide insight into the challenges and efforts undertaken, few offer concrete solutions regarding recontextualization that can address these issues. This research aims to fill this gap by providing alternative, more interactive teaching methods and encouraging students' critical thinking.

This study presents a novel approach and method for recontextualizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material, emphasizing the development of critical thinking. In this study, the author attempts to formulate a new approach to teaching Islamic Religious Education that integrates contextual, historical, and socially relevant elements. This aims to create a space for students to not only accept religious texts dogmatically but also to examine and reflect on the application of religious values in their daily lives. Given the importance of developing a generation that is not only ritually devout but also intelligent in understanding and applying religious teachings in a modern context, this research is crucial.

The main problem this research aims to address is how to deconstruct the dogmatic narrative in Islamic religious education in schools, so that the material taught can be more relevant to current developments and support the development of a critical generation. By focusing on the recontextualization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material, this research will attempt to provide concrete alternatives for educators to adapt teaching materials to suit the needs and challenges faced by students in the modern era. This research will also demonstrate that religious education that prioritizes contextual and critical understanding will equip students with a more open, inclusive, and responsible attitude towards social and societal development. Through this approach, it is hoped that students will not only become passive recipients of religious teachings but also actors capable of applying religious values in broader and more relevant life contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative research design with a case study approach (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). The choice of this design is based on the need to deeply understand the process of recontextualizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials in a specific context, namely, in school teaching. Case studies were chosen because they can provide a more detailed picture of the

phenomena that occur in a particular context, so that the results of this study can provide sharper insights into the application of PAI material recontextualization efforts at a practical and applicable level. The focus of this research is to understand how the recontextualization process is carried out by educators and how it impacts the development of students' critical attitudes.

This research was conducted in several junior high schools that offer diverse Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching and are open to changes in curriculum and learning approaches, particularly in Probolinggo Regency. These locations were chosen because these schools are known for their commitment to educational innovation and the challenges they face in implementing more contextual and contemporary PAI materials. These locations also provide an opportunity to observe firsthand how religious instruction is implemented in a modern educational context and provide a concrete picture of the challenges faced by teachers and students in the learning process.

The data collection techniques used in this study were in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and document analysis (Huberman & Miles, 2023). In-depth interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers, the principal, and several students to obtain information related to their views on the importance of recontextualizing Islamic Religious Education materials, as well as the challenges and solutions faced in its implementation. Non-participatory observations were conducted during the Islamic Religious Education learning process to identify the methods used by teachers in teaching and students' responses to the materials presented. Document analysis was conducted by analyzing the existing curriculum and teaching materials used in the school to understand the extent to which the materials reflect the desired changes.

Data analysis is carried out in four stages: first, data condensation or data reduction, which involves the process of sorting and filtering data that is relevant to the research focus (Nurhayati et al., 2024). Irrelevant data will be removed, while more important data will be retained for further analysis. Second, data display, which presents data in the form of tables, matrices, or descriptions, makes it easier for researchers to analyze the relationships between existing variables. Third, data verification, which is carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documents to ensure the consistency and appropriateness of data obtained from various sources.

To ensure the credibility of the data, this study uses triangulation techniques, namely by comparing the results of interviews with observations and document analysis (Husnullail, et al., 2024). This is done to verify the consistency of data obtained from various sources. Furthermore, researchers will conduct member checking, which involves asking informants to review their preliminary findings to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the data aligns with the informants' understanding. This technique is crucial for maintaining the objectivity and credibility of research results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Recontextualization of Contemporary Islamic Education Material

Recontextualization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials in this context is defined as the process of adapting and re-understanding religious teaching materials, which were previously more dogmatic and textual, to become more relevant and contextual to students' social, cultural, and intellectual conditions. This aims to ensure that students go beyond memorizing religious texts and reflect on and relate them to their daily lives. In this context, PAI materials are not only focused on the teachings written in the scriptures but are also processed to foster critical, reflective attitudes and implement them in a modern context.

Interviews with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers indicate that changes in the delivery of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials have occurred since the implementation of the recontextualization approach. A PAI teacher, who had previously taught using the traditional lecture method, stated, "I began inviting students to see religious teachings in their social context, for example, relating the value of honesty to everyday life, such as what they encounter at school or home." This demonstrates an effort to adapt teaching materials to situations that are relevant to students, so they can more easily connect religious teachings to practical life.

Furthermore, an interview with the Principal also revealed a similar view, "We realize that today's young generation needs more applicable religious materials, which not only teach theory, but also how they can bring religious teachings into their daily actions. So, we encourage teachers to develop more interactive learning methods that are based on real-life contexts." This statement underscores the importance of integrating social context and students' needs in Islamic Religious Education learning, which has so far been considered less relevant to their world.

Classroom observations indicate that students are now more actively involved in discussions linking religious material to current social issues, such as religious tolerance and social justice. In one learning session, students were asked to discuss how religious principles can be applied in social life, such as maintaining unity amidst diversity. Observations indicate that students are more interested in participating and expressing their opinions in discussions, a trend that was previously absent in the one-way Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. The researchers' interpretation of these results indicates that the recontextualization of PAI material has successfully created a more inclusive learning climate and provided space for students to think critically.

The patterns found in the data above indicate a significant shift in the way Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is taught and learned. Previously, learning focused more on memorizing texts and more normative teachings. However, after implementing recontextualization, religious teaching materials have been

adapted to students' social lives, facilitating their connection to real-life experiences. These results indicate that this approach is effective in making religious learning more lively and relevant, as well as increasing student engagement in the learning process. Students are not simply studying religion as a separate subject, but as an integral part of their lives.

Changes in Students' Attitudes towards Religious Material

Changes in student attitudes toward Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material in the field refer to changes in students' mindsets, engagement, and responses to the material being taught. Previously, PAI material tended to be passively received, but after recontextualization, there was an increase in students' enthusiasm, awareness, and interest in better understanding and relating religious teachings to their lives. Students' more active and reflective attitudes toward religious teachings indicate that the recontextualization process has successfully influenced how students view PAI as relevant and applicable to everyday life.

Table 1. Observation Results on Changes in Student Attitudes		
Observation	Indicator	Percentage
Students ask critical questions more often during Islamic Education learning.	Active Involvement	80%
Students show enthusiasm when discussing the application of religious teachings.	Interest and Enthusiasm	75%
Students begin to relate religious principles to social issues around them.	Contextual Understanding	70%
Students are more appreciative of different religious views in class discussions.	Tolerance and Openness	65%

The recontextualization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material has had a positive impact on changing student attitudes. Active student engagement during Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning increased significantly, with 80% of students more frequently asking critical questions related to the material being taught. This indicates that students are not merely passively receiving the material but are also processing it with deeper thought. Furthermore, student interest and enthusiasm for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning increased by 75%, indicating they feel more drawn to discussing religious teachings in a more applicable and relevant way to everyday life.

Improved contextual understanding was evident in 70% of students who began to relate religious principles to social issues around them. This indicates that they can see the connection between religious teachings and the social challenges they face, and are more sensitive to the relevance of religious teachings in social life. Meanwhile, although there was an increase in tolerance and openness to different religious views, with a percentage of 65%, this indicates that the recontextualization of Islamic Religious Education material not only

changes students' perspectives on religion but also strengthens inclusive social values.

The pattern evident in the data above is a significant increase in student engagement and awareness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials. The data shows that the more opportunities students are given to engage in contextual and relevant learning, the greater their interest and enthusiasm for religious teachings. Furthermore, students are becoming more open to various religious perspectives, reflecting their deepening and more critical understanding. This indicates that recontextualizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials not only serves as a tool for enhancing religious understanding but also plays a role in fostering more tolerant and open social attitudes.

Improving Students' Critical and Reflective Thinking Skills

Improving students' critical and reflective thinking skills in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) refers to students' ability to not only accept religious teachings textually, but also to analyze, question, and connect them to their real lives. In this study, critical thinking skills are defined as students' ability to explore the deeper meaning of religious teachings and assess their relevance to their social context, while reflective thinking leads to students' self-awareness and ability to evaluate their understanding of religion in everyday life. Both of these abilities are crucial for creating a generation that is not only ritually religious but also has a depth of thought and understanding of the religious teachings they receive.

The implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) recontextualization approach in schools aims to develop critical and reflective thinking skills among students. This process begins by changing the way religious material is presented, from being textual and normative to being more open to discussion and in-depth reflection. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers use methods such as case studies, debates, and personal reflection to stimulate critical thinking in students. In each session, students are allowed to evaluate religious teachings and reflect on how religious principles can be applied to current social issues. This flow demonstrates how these steps provide space for students to develop more complex and critical thinking skills.

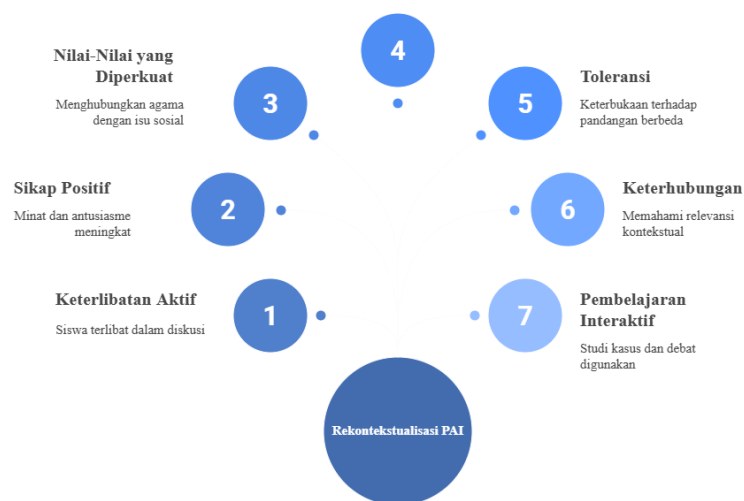


Figure 1. Improving Students' Critical and Reflective Thinking Skills

Students demonstrated significant improvement in their critical thinking skills. Students appeared more open to asking in-depth questions about religious teachings and were more engaged in class discussions. They no longer simply accepted religious material but began to question and critique its application in everyday life. For example, in a discussion on religious tolerance, many students expressed more nuanced views and related them to their personal experiences in society. The researchers' interpretation of this data is that the application of the recontextualization approach successfully stimulated students' critical thinking, encouraging them to move beyond passively accepting religious teachings and to process them with a more open mind.

The improvement in students' critical and reflective thinking skills is reflected in the changes in how they respond to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials. Observational data show that students now provide more in-depth and reflective responses to learning materials. They can connect religious teachings to existing social issues and have a greater awareness of whether religious values are still relevant to their own lives. For example, in learning about social justice, students are able to critique injustices occurring in society and relate them to Islamic principles. This demonstrates that the process of recontextualizing Islamic Religious Education materials not only impacts a deeper understanding of religion but also fosters more analytical and critical thinking among students.

The patterns emerging from the data above indicate a profound shift in students' thinking about religious material. Before the recontextualization, religious instruction was more instructive and normative, with students simply receiving information without much questioning or critical thinking. However, after the recontextualization, students began to question, analyze, and connect religious principles to situations they face in their social lives. The data shows that by implementing more interactive, discussion-based methods, students not

only developed a deeper understanding of religion but also sharpened critical and reflective thinking skills. This demonstrates that a more contextualized learning process based on real-life experiences can significantly stimulate students' thinking skills.

Discussion

The application of recontextualization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material in learning has been proven to have a significant impact on changing students' perspectives and attitudes toward religious teachings. The results of this study align with the constructivist theory proposed by Oliveira-Dri & Pulido-Montes (2021), which emphasizes the importance of real-life experiences in shaping students' understanding. Students' engagement in discussions and their ability to relate religious teachings to their social and cultural situations reflect the application of constructivist principles, which prioritize experience and social interaction in the learning process. The resulting changes in attitudes, where students became more active and critical, indicate that recontextualizing Islamic Religious Education material can foster a more meaningful and relevant learning experience for students. This aligns with previous findings in the literature that suggest that context-based approaches and active participation can improve the quality of religious learning (Nisa' & R, 2024; O'Sullivan, 2023; Justi, 2024).

However, despite similarities with constructivist theory, there are differences from traditional approaches to religious instruction, which tend to be more normative and textual. More applied and contextual religious instruction not only helps students understand religious teachings but also allows them to relate them to their personal and social experiences (Abdullah, 2024; Munawwaroh, 2024). This difference demonstrates that recontextualization provides students with the opportunity to develop broader understandings, beyond texts and memorization. Practical implications: Islamic Religious Education teachers can adopt more interactive, discussion-based learning methods and real-life applications to increase student engagement and reduce monologue-based or one-way learning.

Theoretically, recontextualization of Islamic Education material also supports the development of students' critical and reflective thinking skills (Jali, 2025; Wideasari & Zahro, 2024). Observational data show that students more frequently ask critical questions related to religious material and are more open to various religious perspectives. This aligns with the thinking of Paulo Freire, who emphasized the importance of dialogue-based education to build critical awareness among students. With this approach, students not only absorb information but also engage in the process of evaluating and assessing religious teachings, allowing them to become active subjects in learning. Therefore, the recontextualization of Islamic Religious Education can be seen as an effective tool

for fostering critical thinking in students (Chiang et al., 2023; CRA De Oliveira & Mello, 2024).

The practical implication is that teachers need to be empowered to master learning techniques based on discussion, reflection, and case studies. Developing teaching materials relevant to social challenges and student needs is crucial to prevent religious instruction from appearing rigid and disconnected from students' real lives (Altinyelken, 2021; Arvidsson & Elmersjö, 2021; Carvalho et al., 2021). Therefore, training Islamic Education teachers in using the recontextualization approach is an important step to improve the quality of religious teaching in schools (Krause et al., 2021; Mathou, 2022). This approach also requires support from the school in creating an open, inclusive learning climate that focuses on developing students' critical thinking skills.

The findings of this study indicate that recontextualizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material has significant potential to improve the quality of religious learning, both in terms of students' understanding, attitudes, and critical thinking skills. Students not only gain a better understanding of religious teachings but also become more able to see the relevance of these teachings to their lives. A more lively and relevant learning process, which connects theory with practice, has a positive impact on shaping a more critical, reflective, and tolerant generation. Therefore, the application of recontextualization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material must continue to be encouraged, both at the curriculum level and in daily teaching practices in schools.

CONCLUSION

This research successfully demonstrated that recontextualizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material had a significant impact on changing students' attitudes, engagement, and understanding. One key finding was an increase in students' ability to connect religious teachings to their social and cultural lives, which encouraged them to think more critically and reflectively. Furthermore, students also showed greater interest in religious learning, which previously tended to be passively received. This recontextualization process opened up space for students to explore and connect religious values to current social challenges, making it more relevant and applicable. Learning based on discussion, reflection, and real-life experiences has proven effective in developing a generation that is more critical and open to diverse religious views.

The main strength of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the importance of a contextual approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. This research demonstrates how this approach can transform students' perspectives on religion, making them more open, critical, and reflective. However, this study has limitations, such as its limited scope to a single school and a limited subject area. Therefore, further research could expand this study to include schools with diverse backgrounds and explore more deeply how different social and cultural factors influence the recontextualization process.

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