

RETHINKING THE ISLAMIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM: A SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

This study examines the sociological foundations and transformative imperatives of the Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI*) curriculum in Indonesia. Using a systematic literature review of theoretical and empirical sources, this study explores how sociological principles, including culture, social structure, and community needs, shape curriculum design and implementation amid rapid social, technological, and cultural change. The analysis identifies Industry 4.0, digital disruption, and the persistent dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge as major drivers of curriculum renewal, while national reforms such as the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) and emerging models such as the Love-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta/KBC*) provide strategic opportunities for transformation. The findings indicate that a sociologically informed PAI curriculum can strengthen epistemological integration, *wasathiyah* moderation, and contextualized character education by connecting religious texts with contemporary social issues, promoting community engagement, and embedding ICT and digital literacy. However, implementation remains constrained by uneven educator digital competence, infrastructure disparities, and limited integration of Islamic values into digital learning content. This study concludes that PAI curriculum transformation should prioritize interdisciplinary thematic instruction, authentic assessment,

and partnerships among schools, families, and communities to produce graduates who are ethically grounded, socially responsible, and technologically competent. The study contributes to the discourse on Islamic education reform by proposing a dynamic and integrative PAI curriculum that reconciles tradition and modernity, enhances educational relevance, strengthens social cohesion, and supports the formation of moral and civic-minded citizens capable of addressing twenty-first-century challenges.

Keywords: Islamic Education Curriculum; Sociological Foundations; Curriculum Transformation; Social Change; Character Education

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is a central component of the education system because it determines the objectives, content, methods, and evaluation of learning; the quality of the curriculum implemented greatly influences the success or failure of education. In the context of Islamic education, the urgency of the curriculum becomes even more crucial due to the need to align religious values with rapidly changing social, economic, and technological demands (Zamzama et al., 2025). The Industry 4.0 era and digital disruption present new challenges that demand curriculum innovation, namely the ability to systematically integrate Islamic values with modern science and technology to enable students to think critically and adaptively. This curriculum transformation involves not only subject matter but also changes in governance, infrastructure, and improvements in educator competency (Ali Ma'sum & Khuriyah, 2025; Azzahra et al., 2025).

One of the structural issues driving renewal is the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge. This fragmentation of knowledge makes it difficult for graduates to apply Quranic values to modern contexts and necessitates a curriculum design that emphasizes the principle of the unity of knowledge (Bahtiyar et al., 2022; Ichsan & Fathurrahman, 2019). A curriculum that prioritizes epistemological integration can help students see the connection between divine values and contemporary knowledge. At the national policy level, the introduction of the Independent Curriculum (*Curriculum Merdeka*) opens up opportunities for reforming Islamic education in Indonesia, as its contextual and student-centered learning principles support the integration of religious values with local needs (Ichsan et al., 2023). Initial evaluations of its implementation indicate improved learning interactions and several aspects of character development relevant to the goals of Islamic education.

In addition to the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*), the emergence of innovative approaches such as the Love-Based Curriculum marks a paradigm shift toward a more humanistic and affective Islamic education. This curriculum places love, empathy, and compassion at the center of student character development (Rohman et al., 2026). This approach has the potential to strengthen the moral and social dimensions that have been relatively under-accommodated by conventional curricula. Social dynamics and technological developments contribute to contemporary challenges for Islamic education; a younger generation exposed to social media and global culture requires curriculum guidance that can guide digital literacy while upholding ethical and religious values. Therefore, integrating digital literacy into the Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI*) curriculum is a crucial aspect of the renewal strategy (Ali Ma'sum & Khuriyah, 2025).

However, the implementation of technology in Islamic education faces real obstacles, such as low digital literacy among educators, disparities in technology access, and the lack of integration of Islamic values into digital materials. These issues require policy interventions and professional training to ensure technology becomes a tool for transformation, not just access. In addition to technological challenges, the emerging character crisis and the threat of intolerance demand that Islamic education curricula explicitly incorporate the values of moderation, tolerance, and humanity. Strengthening contextual and evidence-based character education can be a preventative tool against radicalism and exclusivism in educational settings.

The combined pressures of tradition and modernization demand an adaptive and integrative curriculum model as the socio-religious context continues to change rapidly. On the one hand, tradition demands the maintenance of textual values, worship practices, and community practices that constitute the identity of the *ummah*. On the other hand, modernization brings demands for critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and interdisciplinary understanding necessary for participation in a global society (Joynes et al., 2019). This tension is not simply a choice between old and new, but rather the need to design a flexible curriculum—internalizing the historical and theological heritage of Islam while being open to contemporary pedagogical methods, competency-based assessments, and materials relevant to 21st-century challenges such as technology ethics, social entrepreneurship, and cultural diversity. Therefore, an urgent need is to develop a curriculum capable of bridging the spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions so that Islamic Education graduates become competitive and ethical agents of change. Such a curriculum must reconcile faith learning

and moral practice with the acquisition of 21st-century skills through integrative strategies: thematic instruction that links texts to contemporary contexts, community-based projects that cultivate leadership and social responsibility, and authentic assessments that measure both values and practical capabilities (Jannah et al., 2025). With this holistic approach, graduates will not only have a deep understanding of religious doctrine but also be able to translate Islamic ethical principles into productive and contextual actions that contribute to community advancement and a just social order.

Research on the Islamic education curriculum from a sociological perspective has shown that the curriculum not only functions as a medium for transmitting religious values, but also as a space for the formation of social relations, power dynamics, and community identity (Musyarrof & Kinabalu, 2026). Saharuddin and Suhardi (2024) emphasized that the Islamic education curriculum is strongly influenced by local values, traditions, and social demands, thus potentially giving rise to issues of inclusion and exclusion of certain groups, as well as shaping students' religious identities that can strengthen or even obscure their position in society. In the Indonesian context, Zahrani (2024) suggests that sociological concepts such as justice, compassion, and tolerance need to be the main learning sources in the construction of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, while an interaction-based learning approach between students, teachers, and the community is treated as an important strategy to make the curriculum more responsive to social realities. Abas (2018) through research at Madrasah Aliyah Husnul Khotimah Kuningan found that the design of Islamic education curriculum development based on educational sociology can be realized through an organism paradigm with a social reconstruction approach, which is implemented in *tarbiyah halaqah* activities, PDPM, *munasharah*, and *rihlah*, so that a reciprocal relationship occurs between educational institutions and society. Historical-sociological empirics by Ananda and Fatonah (2022) also confirms that changes in the Islamic religious education curriculum in Indonesia from 1947 to 2013 were greatly influenced by sociological factors such as customs, beliefs, values, language, religion, and social institutions, which shows that the Islamic education curriculum is always the result of a complex interaction between religious teachings and socio-cultural structures. These five studies together strengthen the hypothesis that the sociological approach is an important critical foundation for critiquing, reconstructing, and developing an Islamic education curriculum that is more holistic, integrative, and relevant to contemporary social dynamics.

Based on the literature review above, this study focuses more on the concept of sociological foundations in Islamic education curriculum development and analyzes various perspectives on community-oriented curriculum design. Furthermore, the researchers also explain the urgency of implementing sociological principles in the Islamic education curriculum amidst the diversity of Indonesian society.

METHODS

This research is a qualitative one. It was chosen because it aimed to obtain an in-depth overview of the research object, namely a sociological review of the Islamic Education curriculum. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand phenomena holistically and contextually, as well as to explore the meanings contained in the various literature sources reviewed. In accordance with the type of library research used in this article, the data collection technique was a documentation study. Documentation study is a data collection technique that involves collecting, reviewing, and analyzing various written documents relevant to the research theme (Adlini et al., 2022; Safrudin et al., 2023). In the context of this article on a sociological review of the Islamic Education curriculum, the documents referred to include books, scientific journals, articles, and other library sources related to the focus of the study.

The literature review begins with identifying the research problem to determine the focus and research questions, followed by collecting and organizing relevant sources. Next, a thematic analysis is conducted: reading the data thoroughly to gain a general understanding, coding the data with relevant labels, grouping codes into broader themes, reviewing the themes to ensure coherence and relevance, and organizing them into a structured narrative. This is followed by a synthesis that summarizes the main findings and relationships among studies, and concludes with a critical analysis that identifies the main arguments and underlying assumptions, evaluates the evidence supporting those arguments, highlights biases or methodological weaknesses, and develops a structured critique (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018; Moleong, 2018; Sugiyono, 2020).

RESULTS

Sociological Foundations in the Development of Islamic Education Curriculum

1. The Nature of the Sociological Foundation of the Curriculum

The development of the Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) curriculum cannot be done haphazardly without a strong foundation, because the quality of educational output is largely determined by the strength of the curriculum's foundation. A sociological foundation is one of the main principles in developing the PAI curriculum, alongside theological, philosophical, psychological, and scientific and technological principles (Mayasari, 2025).

Conceptually, a sociological foundation is the assumptions derived from sociology that serve as the starting point for curriculum development. Education is understood as a process of socialization through human interaction toward becoming a cultured human being. This process is the transmission of culture from one generation to the next in an effort to enhance human dignity, both as individuals, community groups, and within the broader context of national culture (Alwi et al., 2021).

From a sociological perspective, curriculum development should consider and address future needs, social needs, demands, expectations, challenges, problems, and social change faced by society. It is because the curriculum has a very strong and intimate relationship and correlation with the dynamics of social life (Ariandy, 2019). The curriculum is viewed as a social consensus, as argued by prominent figures in social reconstruction education such as John Dewey, Franklin Bobbitt, George Counts, Ivan Illich, and Emile Durkheim.

2. Sociological Principles in the Curriculum Development Framework

Experts have formulated sociological principles as an important foundation in curriculum development. H. Horne stated that sociological principles are used to determine the legitimate demands of society for education. Meanwhile, S. Nasution proposed four principles in curriculum development, one of which is the sociological principle related to the state of society, its development and changes, human culture, and the results of human work in the form of knowledge (Nasution, 2022). Furthermore, the social foundations of the Islamic education curriculum provide a reflection of the characteristics of Islamic society and its culture, encompassing knowledge, ideal values, ways of thinking, customs, and the arts. The curriculum must be rooted in society and its development and changes (Nasution, 2022).

In terms of substance, sociological factors as the basis for curriculum development can be examined from two perspectives (Zahrani, 2024): First, the cultural and curriculum perspective. Culture encompasses habits, values, attitudes, information, and skills learned through a person's contact with the cultural environment, family, surrounding community, and educational institutions such as schools. The curriculum in any civilization is a reflection of the way of thinking, feelings, goals, and customs of the community. Three dimensions of culture that need to be considered are: (a) abstract ideas, concepts, values, norms, and rules; (b) patterned human activities or actions called social systems; and (c) tangible objects produced by humans.

Second, the societal and curriculum aspects. Every civilization has a unique culture, and it is this culture that differentiates societies. The goal of school education is to prepare individuals to live with dignity and integrate into society. In this context, the curriculum serves as a means to achieve educational goals by providing broad cultural content such as values, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and activities.

The educational curriculum must be adapted to current societal conditions and even prepared to anticipate future conditions. Educating children well is only possible if we understand the society in which they live; therefore, every curriculum developer must continually study the conditions, developments, activities, and aspirations of the community (Halil & Alfiyatin, 2021).

Curriculum Transformation in Response to Social Change

1. The Urgency of Curriculum Transformation

Amidst the rapid pace of change, Islamic education faces a variety of challenges that demand strategic and visionary responses. Globalization, shifting social values, and economic dynamics have made the educational environment increasingly complex; it's not just about the transfer of religious knowledge, but also how education can equip students to face the uncertainties of the future. In this context, Islamic educational institutions need to reevaluate their learning objectives, methods, and norms to remain relevant to the needs of contemporary society without sacrificing Islamic principles (Ningsih & Zalisman, 2024).

Transforming the Islamic education curriculum is an urgent need to ensure it can effectively function as a vehicle for developing 21st-century skills. A curriculum that solely emphasizes memorization and the transmission of texts will be inadequate to address modern issues such as technology ethics, digital literacy, and critical thinking skills in the face of an

abundance of information (Widia et al., 2026). Therefore, curriculum reform must integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies—including analytical skills, problem-solving, creativity, and technological mastery—so that graduates are able to translate Islamic values into contextual and meaningful practices.

Advanced technology and the massive flow of information demand that students no longer be positioned as mere passive recipients, but rather as critical, creative, and responsive learning agents facing humanity's challenges (Murdianto, 2022). An adaptive curriculum must encourage active learning, the use of credible digital learning resources, and an interdisciplinary approach that connects religious texts with contemporary issues—for example, the environment, human rights, the digital economy, and cyber ethics. In this way, Islamic education can play a dual role: maintaining the authenticity of teachings while producing individuals capable of contributing solutions in modern society.

2. Aspects of Curriculum Transformation

Based on sociological studies, the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum encompasses several important aspects (Murdianto, 2022): First, the integration of character education into every subject. Values such as honesty, justice, and social awareness can be taught not only in religious education but also in science and mathematics. Thus, students will not only become academically intelligent but also possess strong morals. Second, the teaching of information and communication technology (ICT). In a digital world, the ability to use technology is essential. By including ICT subjects, students can learn to use technology for good purposes, such as spreading da'wah through social media or developing applications that benefit society.

Third, an interdisciplinary approach. Connecting religious knowledge and general knowledge allows students to see the connection between the two. In this way, they not only learn to understand religious teachings but also how to apply them in everyday life. Fourth, parental and community involvement. A good curriculum should reflect local values and involve parents in the educational process. By establishing partnerships between schools, parents, and the community, Islamic education will be more easily implemented and accepted (Murdianto, 2022).

3. Islamic Education and Social Change

The sociological perspective examines how Islamic education responds to and contributes to social change. Some key areas of focus include: First, the role of Islamic education in community development and nation-building. Islamic education teaches values

such as honesty, responsibility, and social awareness, which are essential for creating individuals with integrity and social awareness. In a pluralistic society, Islamic education can serve as a bridge to strengthen unity. Second, Islamic education responds to contemporary issues. Regarding democracy, Islamic education teaches the principles of deliberation and justice and equips students with political and social awareness. Regarding human rights, students learn that every individual has a dignity that must be respected based on Islamic teachings. Regarding the environment, students are encouraged to understand the importance of preserving the environment as part of God's mandate and the concept of the caliphate, which emphasizes human responsibility as stewards of the earth (Idi, 2015).

DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Sociological Approach in the Islamic Education Curriculum

1. Love-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*/KBC) as a Sociological Approach Model

One current implementation of the sociological approach is KBC, which is implemented in various Islamic educational institutions. Research at Az-Zahrah Islamic High School in Palembang shows that the KBC effectively establishes mahabbah (love) as the spiritual foundation of education, transforming the role of educators and learning strategies toward an affective-spiritual orientation (Sari et al., 2025).

The implementation of KBC creates egalitarian teacher-student relationships, strengthens social cohesion through joint projects, and enhances school-parent partnerships. This analysis asserts that philosophy provides normative depth (what should be achieved), while sociology provides empirical evidence regarding changes in a religious, cohesive, and adaptive school culture.

2. Sociological Approach in Islamic Education Learning

PAI is not simply the transfer of religious knowledge; it is also an arena for dynamic social interactions between students, educators, and the educational environment. At the individual level, individual psychology, teacher influence, and personal factors play a crucial role in shaping the understanding and acceptance of religious values. Social groups such as family and peers also have a significant impact on students' religious identity. Meanwhile, social structures, including educational institutions and social norms, play a central role in shaping the context of Islamic education (Sari et al., 2025).

The implementation of a sociological approach in PAI learning is directed at developing students' social behavior based on Islamic values. PAI learning should not be understood solely as a transfer of knowledge or material delivery, but rather as an effort to foster character and social behavior. The reality on the ground shows that PAI learning is still often practiced using a normative-instructive approach, emphasizing cognitive aspects such as memorizing verses, hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, or Islamic historical narratives, thus under-emphasizing students' affective and psychomotor dimensions (Winarko et al., 2025).

3. Wasathiyah in the Integrated Islamic Education Curriculum

A sociological approach is also applied in the internalization of wasathiyah (religious moderation) values in the integrated Islamic Education curriculum. Research at Bina Anak Sholeh Elementary School in Tuban shows that wasathiyah values such as *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tasamuh* (tolerance) are not only taught cognitively but also experienced in real life through learning and social relations, creating harmony between spirituality and rationality in everyday life (Hakim & Miftahuddin, 2025).

Phenomenological and sociological approaches are used to understand the subjective experiences of students and teachers in internalizing wasathiyah values as part of daily life practices, not merely religious memorization. An integrative curriculum is seen as a form of social transformation that makes *wasathiyah* values such as *shura* (deliberation), *ishlah* (improvement), and *muwathabah* (citizenship) part of the dynamics of modern society, forming inclusive and dialogical interaction patterns (Yudhyarta et al., 2025).

Sociological Implications of Islamic Education Curriculum Development

1. Impact on the Quality of Education and Student Character

The strategic implementation of the principles of Islamic sociology of education in educational institutions has a positive impact on the quality of education and the development of students' character, which is characterized by integrity and moderation. The integration of the principles of symbolic interaction, social equality, and Islamic values through the development of a values-based curriculum creates a dynamic of harmonious social interaction among the academic community. Research on the development of PAI curriculum with a sociological foundation confirms that a curriculum designed in accordance with the demands and needs of the local community, culture, and technological developments will be more effective in shaping personality and mindsets aligned with religious values (Azizah et al., 2025).

2. Formation of a Perfect Human Being (*Insan Kami*)

The ultimate goal of Islamic education lies in the formation of a perfect human being—a perfect human being who is not only cognitively competent but also spiritually, morally, and socially mature. The concept of a perfect human being demands the integration of the dimensions of monotheism, worship, morals, and knowledge so that individuals are able to embody divine values in their daily actions. Within this framework, educational success is measured not solely by academic achievement, but by character transformation: spiritual maturity, social responsibility, moral fortitude, and the ability to think critically and reflectively in harmony with the principles of sharia and maqasid al-sharia (Asyrofy, 2025).

Social and cultural interaction is positioned as an integral element in the learning process of Islamic education because the social context determines how religious values are practiced and tested. Culturally responsive learning enables students to understand Islamic teachings within local realities—connecting classical texts with contemporary issues, making religion relevant and applicable (Syarifah et al., 2025). Through a socio-cultural learning approach, Islamic education fosters tolerance, empathy, and intercultural competence, while strengthening religious fervor through collective practices such as religious study groups, da'wah activities, and community service projects that foster religious habits and civic responsibility.

The curriculum, which combines intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities, serves as a systemic mechanism for holistically developing students' full potential. This integrated curriculum designs a multi-layered religious program: short-term goals to build basic religious knowledge and practices; medium-term goals to deepen theoretical understanding and social skills; and long-term goals to develop noble character (*akhlakul karimah*) and moral leadership capacity. With a structured learning design—combining formal learning, character building through organizational activities, and community service experiences—educational institutions are able to produce graduates who are knowledgeable, ethical, and able to contribute to the common good.

3. Relevance of Curriculum to Social Reality

The Islamic Education (PAI) curriculum, developed on a sociological basis, places social interaction and cultural context at the center of the learning process. This approach views students not as isolated entities but as part of a network of relationships within families, communities, and social institutions that shape their religious experiences and meanings. Therefore, materials, methods, and assessments are designed to be relevant to local social

practices—for example, local rituals, moral traditions, communication patterns, and power and economic dynamics—so that PAI learning is contextual, responsive, and effective in real life (Fitrianto & Farisi, 2025).

Furthermore, the sociological PAI curriculum is adaptive and dynamic; it is expected to evolve with changes in the socio-cultural environment and the needs of new generations. This approach supports the idea of education as a cultural process that actively fosters and develops students' creativity, initiative, and aesthetic and ethical concerns toward a broader and more enriched civilization. By integrating local values and critical and creative thinking skills, the curriculum not only transmits religious knowledge but also forms agents of social change who are able to interpret and apply religious teachings in a contemporary context (Halil & Alfiyatin, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on this study, a sociological foundation occupies a fundamental position in the development of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum because it ensures that the curriculum reflects the needs, expectations, and social dynamics—from the local to the global level—and serves as a social consensus that responds to contemporary challenges; therefore, an effective curriculum must be adaptive and transformative by integrating character education, ICT skills, interdisciplinary approaches, and parental and community involvement, while upholding humanitarian values such as democracy, human rights, and environmental concerns; the implementation of models such as the Love-Based Curriculum demonstrates how normative orientation (philosophy) and empirical evidence (sociology) can synergize to form an educational relationship that is egalitarian, cohesive, and responsive to humanitarian crises; in conclusion, the development of an Islamic Religious Education curriculum rooted in a sociological foundation not only strengthens the goals of religious education but also plays a strategic role in community development and nation-building by producing individuals with integrity, usefulness, and commitment to the common good.

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