
ANALYSIS OF INNOVATION IN THE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM TO FOSTER STUDENTS' REFLECTIVE RELIGIOUS THINKING AT MTSN 1 SLEMAN

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini berangkat dari kebutuhan untuk menghadirkan inovasi dalam kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI), terutama agar tetap relevan dengan tuntutan pembelajaran di era digital sekaligus mampu mendorong berkembangnya kemampuan berpikir reflektif keagamaan siswa. Fokus utama kajian ini adalah melihat bagaimana inovasi kurikulum PAI tersebut dijalankan dalam konteks pembelajaran di MTsN 1 Sleman. Pendekatan yang digunakan bersifat kualitatif dengan jenis fenomenologi, sehingga peneliti berupaya memahami pengalaman dan praktik yang terjadi secara langsung. Subjek penelitian melibatkan guru PAI dan siswa yang dipilih secara purposive. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam serta dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian, hingga penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa inovasi kurikulum PAI diwujudkan melalui pembelajaran yang lebih kontekstual dan dialogis, serta didukung oleh penggunaan media digital dan beragam metode. Pola ini memberi ruang bagi siswa untuk tidak hanya memahami ajaran agama, tetapi juga merefleksikannya dan mengaitkannya dengan kehidupan sehari-hari. Dari situ, kemampuan berpikir reflektif keagamaan berkembang lebih dalam dan tidak sekadar menjadi formalitas. Meski begitu, dalam praktiknya masih ada beberapa kendala yang muncul, terutama terkait keterbatasan sarana teknologi dan pengaruh lingkungan di sekitarnya.

Kata kunci: Akidah Akhlak, Inovasi Kurikulum, Reflektif keagamaan

Abstract

This research stems from the need to introduce innovation into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, particularly to ensure its relevance to the demands of learning in the digital era and to foster students' reflective religious thinking skills. The primary focus of this study is to examine how the innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is implemented in the learning context at MTsN 1 Sleman. The approach used is qualitative and phenomenological, enabling researchers to understand firsthand experiences and practices. The research subjects included purposively selected Islamic Religious Education teachers and students. Data

collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and documentation, followed by analysis through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The research findings indicate that innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is achieved through more contextual and dialogical learning, supported by digital media and diverse methods. This pattern provides space for students not only to understand religious teachings but also to reflect on them and relate them to everyday life. From there, reflective religious thinking skills develop more deeply and are not merely a formality. However, in practice, several obstacles still arise, primarily due to limited technological resources and environmental influences.

Keywords: Moral Faith, Curriculum Innovation, Religious Reflection

A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (abbreviated in Bahasa as PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, morality, and spirituality amid increasingly diverse and complex social changes. In the era of globalization and digitalization, education is moving away from traditional approaches focused on knowledge transfer and is increasingly emphasizing value formation and relevant competencies for the 21st century. In this framework, the PAI curriculum is expected to continue innovating to address the challenges of the times, including technological developments, cultural changes, and moral crises among the younger generation. (Hayati & Herawati, 2022). The literature shows that PAI learning not only focuses on the cognitive aspect but also on developing critical and creative thinking skills and strengthening contextual Islamic values. Therefore, the dynamics of innovation become an urgent necessity to ensure the relevance of religious education with the realities of students' current lives. (Khairunnida et al., 2026a).

The realities in the practice of Islamic education, learning, and curriculum innovation in schools exhibit diverse dynamics. On one hand, there are efforts to integrate technology, implement differentiated learning, and strengthen character values through an adaptive curriculum. However, there are still various obstacles, such as the imposition of restrictions, the dominance of a top-down approach, and a lack of integration of values with students' real-life contexts (Maharani, 2024). This condition indicates that the implementation of the Islamic Education curriculum innovation still requires more contextual and participatory development in teaching practices.

In this context, Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 1 Sleman has become one of the educational institutions demonstrating efforts to develop a more adaptive and contextual Islamic Religious Education curriculum. Located in a strategic environment with adequate access to learning resources, this school has begun integrating technology into the PAI learning process, not only as a learning medium but also as a means to explore religious values through digital activities relevant to students' lives. Additionally, differentiated learning development has begun by considering students' learning needs, and efforts are underway to connect PAI material to everyday life realities through reflective and contextual approaches. Although their implementation still faces various challenges, these practices demonstrate efforts to transform

PAI learning that are not only focused on meeting curriculum standards but also on strengthening students' learning experiences in more meaningful ways.

Several studies indicate that the innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum has not yet fully addressed the challenges of the digital era, and there is even a tendency toward a decline in students' understanding and practice of religious values. (Salim et al., 2025). In addition, the Islamic Religious Education curriculum structure in educational institutions remains fragmented and not yet thematically integrated, hindering the achievement of holistic learning objectives. (Hadi et al., 2025). This phenomenon indicates a gap between the concept of innovation and its actual implementation in the field. Various studies have examined the innovation of Islamic Religious Education curriculum from different perspectives, such as diffusion processes, dissemination, and complex decision-making. (Bula et al., 2025), The importance of a contextual and integrative approach (Ambiani et al., 2025), integration of local wisdom values (Syafudin & Mutmainnah, 2025), and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes differentiated learning (Nurlaili et al., 2024). However, most of these studies still focus on the contextual, implementation, and evaluative aspects and have not extensively explored educators' subjective experiences in interpreting these innovations.

On the other hand, the curriculum innovation of Islamic Religious Education, especially in the subject of Faith and Morality, has significant potential to improve the quality of learning across the cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains of students. A contextual, dialogic, and reflective approach helps students connect Islamic values to real-life situations, thereby encouraging critical thinking and strengthening non-dogmatic religious awareness. (Khairunnida et al., 2026b). However, studies that specifically highlight the contributions of these innovations to the development of students' religious reflective thinking remain limited. Additionally, the lack of research exploring the life experiences of educational actors results in a limited understanding of the internalization process of values in daily religious practices. In fact, the reflective dimension in the teaching of Aqidah Akhlak is not only related to cognitive aspects but also involves processes of contemplation, interpretation, and transformation of values in students' lives.

Based on the background above, this study aims to analyze the innovation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in schools through a case study approach. Specifically, this research aims to: (1) describe the experiences and meanings given by teachers and students regarding the innovation of the PAI curriculum, (2) identify the forms and practices of PAI curriculum innovation implemented in schools to develop students' reflective thinking skills, and (3) analyze the dynamics and challenges faced in the implementation of PAI curriculum innovation.

This research is expected to contribute theoretically, practically, and in policy terms. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on curriculum innovation in Islamic Religious Education by presenting a contextual understanding grounded on case studies of the development of students' religious reflective thinking, particularly in the subjects of creed and morals. Practically, the findings of this research can serve as a reference for teachers in designing and implementing more contextual, reflective, and relevant PAI learning that aligns with students' lives. Additionally, from a policy perspective, the research findings are hoped to

inform school authorities and stakeholders in developing more adaptive and responsive curriculum policies that meet learners' needs.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study design. This approach is utilized to examine in depth the implementation of innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at MTsN 1 Sleman within its real-life school context. The case study method enables the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by considering various contextual aspects, including instructional practices, teacher–student interactions, and school policies.

The research subjects consist of one teacher of the Aqidah Akhlak course and two students purposively selected for their active involvement in the learning process. The selection of this number of participants is grounded in data richness, as case study research emphasizes depth of information rather than the number of respondents. The use of a qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the focus on the activities and efforts of the two students is sufficient to capture variations in learning experiences and to provide in-depth data on reflective thinking processes in Islamic Religious Education.

Data collection in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured format. While the researcher relied on an interview guide as a reference, the process remained flexible to allow for broader exploration so that the data obtained genuinely reflect the participants' experiences. Additionally, documentation served as a complementary data source, particularly regarding the implementation of the learning process.

Furthermore, data collection involved in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies. The data obtained were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis was conducted continuously, starting from the data collection phase until the completion of the study. Data validity was ensured through triangulation techniques, including both source and method triangulation (Sugiyono, 2013).

The trustworthiness of the data was maintained through several validation techniques. Triangulation was applied by comparing data from different sources and methods, namely by matching information obtained from the teacher and students through interviews, observations, and documentation. The researcher also conducted member checking by reconfirming interview results and data interpretations with the informants to ensure that the meanings derived accurately reflected their intentions. An audit trail was maintained to ensure systematic documentation of the research process, from data collection to analysis, allowing all stages of the research to be clearly traceable. Observations were conducted in a thorough, sustained manner to achieve a more holistic understanding while maintaining data consistency in the field. Through these measures, the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings are expected to be well established.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with the Islamic Religious Education teacher and students at MTsN 1 Sleman, it was found that innovation in the PAI curriculum is not

merely understood as administrative changes or revisions to instructional documents, but rather as a lived experience that is perceived and interpreted differently by each educational subject. The teacher perceives innovation as necessary for adapting to technological advancements and the increasingly dynamic nature of students. Meanwhile, students experience this innovation through more engaging, varied, and contextual learning activities.

These experiences indicate that PAI curriculum innovation is embedded in everyday instructional practices, shaping classroom interactions, teaching strategies, and the ways in which students understand and practice religious values. Therefore, these findings provide a basis for further exploration of how teachers and students experience and interpret PAI curriculum innovation as a lived phenomenon within the educational context.

1. Experiences and Interpretations of Teachers and Students toward the Innovation of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

Based on in-depth interviews with PAI teachers and students at MTsN 1 Sleman, the innovation in the PAI curriculum is no longer understood as merely administrative changes or the preparation of learning documents, but as a living pedagogical reality embedded in daily practice. Innovation appears as an experience that is felt, experienced, and interpreted differently by each educational subject. For teachers, innovation is a response to the demands of modern development marked by technological advances and increasingly dynamic student characteristics. Meanwhile, for students, innovation manifests in more engaging, varied learning experiences that are closer to their lives. Thus, curriculum innovation is not only at the conceptual level but also manifests in practices that shape interaction patterns, learning strategies, and students' understanding and practice of religious values.

Contextually, the emergence of curriculum innovation at MTsN 1 Sleman cannot be separated from the pressures of changing times that demand transformation across various aspects of education, including the use of learning media to adapt to students' characteristics in the digital era. (Ambiani et al., 2025). Teachers no longer see the curriculum as static but as a dynamic practice that must be continually negotiated with classroom realities. This awareness is evident from the teacher's statement: "Now students are already accustomed to technology, so if learning is still like before, they get bored quickly. That's why I try to adapt by using digital media to make it more relevant." (Guru Akidah Akhlak, 2026). This statement indicates an epistemological shift in perspectives on the curriculum—from merely a normative reference to a space for practice that demands continuous creativity and reflection.

Interestingly, the innovation process does not occur in a one-way manner but emerges from reciprocal interactions between teachers and students. Students with higher levels of digital literacy indirectly become catalysts for change, encouraging teachers to keep learning and adapting. In this case, curriculum innovation is not only driven by structural factors or policies but also by relational dynamics within the classroom. This is reflected in students' experiences: "Using videos or discussions makes it easier to understand because we can directly see examples from the material, which gives us a better idea of how to do it." (Siswa 1, 2026). This experience demonstrates that the use of digital media is not merely a tool, but a medium that bridges abstract understanding to concrete experience. Therefore, curriculum innovation

also represents a shift in teachers' perspectives on learning as an adaptive, contextual process focused on students' learning experiences. (Faizah & Supratno, 2022).

Furthermore, this finding confirms that innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is driven not solely by external factors such as technological developments but also by teachers' internal reflections on their teaching experiences. This means that, in this context, innovation has a strong reflective dimension—teachers not only adapt but also actively reinterpret their pedagogical practices. This reflective dimension is a crucial key to ensuring that innovation does not stop at technical aspects but develops into a continuous pedagogical awareness.

From the students' perspective, curriculum innovation is understood as a more lively, interactive, and meaningful learning experience. Learning is no longer dominated by lectures but rather involves discussions, digital media, worship practices, and religious social activities. This is reflected in a student's statement: 'Learning now is more fun, there are videos, discussions, so the learning isn't boring and is easier to understand, easier to remember too.' (Siswa 2, 2026). This experience shows that curriculum innovation contributes to the creation of emotional and intellectual engagement of students in learning. Its impact extends not only to cognitive understanding but also to affective and spiritual aspects, as reinforced by previous findings that contextual and digitally based approaches can enhance both students' motivation and religious understanding (Sulastri, 2024). However, this research expands on those findings by emphasizing that innovation also shapes a holistic learning experience, including the internalization of values.

The change in learning experience also marks a shift in the learning paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered. Teachers are beginning to act as facilitators who create space for dialogue and exploration of meaning, as expressed: "I now give students more room for discussion and to find their own understanding, not just lecturing like before." (Guru Akidah Akhlak, 2026). Meanwhile, the students feel that the learning experience becomes more relevant to their lives: "Now, learning is more enjoyable because we are encouraged to discuss and relate it to everyday life." (Siswa 1, 2026). This change shows that curriculum innovation not only alters methods but also transforms the pedagogical relationship between teachers and students, making it more participatory and dialogic. This aligns with the concept of an innovative curriculum that is contextual, integrative, and focused on learners' needs. (Bula et al., 2025). However, this research adds that the transformation occurs at the level of subjective experience.

On the other hand, curriculum innovation at MTsN 1 Sleman also reflects a collective process involving various stakeholders, including the school principal, teachers, administrative staff, and technology experts. This shows that innovation cannot be understood as an individual effort but rather as a shared awareness for transforming education. (Rochim et al., 2026). Nevertheless, implementing innovation is not without its challenges. One of the main obstacles is the diversity of students' abilities, which makes it difficult for educators to design learning experiences that meet all students' needs. As expressed by an educator: "Not all students have the same abilities, so sometimes it's difficult to adjust the methods so that all students can follow the learning process well on that day." (Guru Akidah Akhlak, 2026).

This finding indicates that curriculum innovation is a complex phenomenon, influenced not only by technical factors but also by pedagogical, psychological, and social dimensions of students. The obstacles faced are not only related to the use of technology but also to students' contextual conditions, such as family background and differences in learning abilities, which affect the effectiveness of implementation. (Rahmi et al., 2025; Hadi et al., 2025). Thus, the innovation of the Islamic Education curriculum in this context can be understood as a dynamic and layered transformation process—not only touching on structural aspects but also shaping meaningful learning experiences. These innovations are embedded in daily classroom interactions, changing how teachers teach and students learn, and opening space for the internalization of religious values in a more reflective and contextual manner.

2. Forms and Practices of PAI Curriculum Innovation Implemented in Schools in Developing Students' Religious Reflective Thinking

Research results show that the innovation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at MTsN 1 Sleman is realized through the transformation of learning practices that are increasingly contextual, adaptive, and oriented toward students' learning experiences. Learning is no longer centered on delivering textbook-based material but rather on relating it to students' everyday realities. Teachers consciously construct learning that is close to students' experiences so that it is easier to understand and meaningful, as expressed: “Usually, when explaining the material, I try to relate it to examples that are close to students' lives so they can understand more easily. Because usually, when related to their own experiences, the learning becomes more meaningful to the students.” (Guru Akidah Akhlak, 2026). This practice shows that curriculum innovation occurs not only at the level of methods but also in the construction of meaning in learning.

The expansion of learning resources is an important characteristic of the implemented innovation. The surrounding environment is utilized as a learning laboratory through observation activities and simple practices related to Islamic values. Thus, religious values are not only understood conceptually but also experienced directly within students' lived contexts. This finding reinforces the view that a contextual approach is a crucial foundation in the innovation of Islamic Education curriculum (Bula et al., 2025). At the same time, it emphasizes that the success of its implementation is highly determined by teachers' sensitivity to the local context and the pedagogical initiatives they develop.

In addition, curriculum innovation is implemented through the use of media and technology in the Islamic Religious Education learning process. Teachers have started using digital media such as interactive presentations and educational videos, and have adopted digital Qur'ans as supporting learning resources in the classroom. The teacher stated, “Children nowadays are more interested in whether there are videos or visual displays, so I try to use digital media so they can focus more and understand the material easily. Coincidentally, yesterday the principal just approved the implementation of digital Qur'ans at the school.” (Guru Akidah Akhlak, 2026)

The findings of this study indicate that the use of technology in Islamic Religious Education is not merely a medium for delivering of content but also a means to increasing student engagement and interest in learning. The presence of technology in the learning process

also creates a more interactive learning experience that better reflects students' real-life contexts. These results align with previous research indicating that the use of digital technology in PAI learning can enhance instructional effectiveness while deepening students' understanding of religious material. This study also highlights another point: the success of technology integration does not depend solely on the availability of digital media but is heavily influenced by teachers' ability to manage the learning process and to connect the use of technology with students' needs and learning experiences in the classroom (Sulastri, 2024).

Curriculum innovation is also realized through the integration of character values and religious practices into the learning process. Teachers not only deliver religious teachings theoretically but also emphasize habituation through direct experience. The teacher emphasizes: "Learning is not enough just to explain the material, but students also need to be accustomed through practice so that the religious values are truly applied," and "Religious values are not enough just to be explained, but must be habituated through daily practice so that students truly understand and implement them." (Guru Akidah Akhlak, 2026). This implementation is evident in various activities, such as congregational prayers, regular Quran reading, and religious social activities, such as distributing iftar snacks. Students interpret these experiences as part of the learning process, as expressed: 'Participating in activities like distributing iftar snacks helps me understand more about sharing and helping others,' and 'Through the activity of sharing iftar snacks, I learn about caring and the importance of sharing with others.' (Siswa 2, 2026).

This finding indicates that the innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is not only aimed at strengthening cognitive aspects but also at shaping religious character through direct learning experiences. Thus, the internalization process of religious values occurs not only through the delivery of material but also through habituation and real practice in school life. Furthermore, this finding reinforces prior research emphasizing the importance of integrating character values into the PAI curriculum as a key strategy for shaping students' religious attitudes and behaviors (Tatagno & Sa'dijah, 2017; Hayati & Herawati, 2022). However, this research confirms that the effectiveness of character development depends not only on the material taught but also on students' involvement in participatory, contextual religious experiences.

Next, innovation in teaching practices is reflected through the use of various methods, such as group discussions, presentations, interactive lectures, and hands-on activities. Teachers provide opportunities for students to actively participate in the learning process in the classroom, thereby creating a more dialogic learning atmosphere that is not entirely teacher-centered. This indicates a paradigm shift toward a student-centered learning model. These findings are supported by various studies showing that active student involvement can enhance their engagement and understanding of Islamic Religious Education material. (Ambiani et al., 2025).

In addition, curriculum innovation is also evident in the integration between subjects and school activities. Islamic Education learning does not stand alone but is connected to other scientific contexts and school activities that reinforce religious values. This practice shows that the PAI curriculum is developed in an integrated manner to create a holistic learning experience. This aligns with research indicating that an integrated curriculum can enhance the relevance of learning and strengthen connections across different fields of knowledge. (Afifa, 2025)

However, the implementation of the curriculum innovation still faces several challenges, such as differences in students' abilities, limitations in technology adaptation, and the influence of the family environment on character development. These obstacles indicate that curriculum innovation does not always proceed optimally and requires ongoing adjustments. This aligns with research findings indicating that implementing the Islamic Religious Education curriculum innovation in the modern era still faces various obstacles, particularly in integrating technology and strengthening religious values. (Hadi et al., 2025)

The implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning at MTsN 1 Sleman aims to develop students' reflective religious thinking skills, which are a crucial part of curriculum renewal. By reflective thinking here, it is not just about understanding religious teachings textually, but also about internalizing them, asking questions, and consciously and critically relating them to everyday life experiences. (Gustian & Rahmat, 2025). A learning model that provides space for reflection like this encourages students to develop an internal awareness of Islamic values. So, religion doesn't stop at the memorization level but also helps shape how they interpret themselves and the reality around them. (Dea & Latipah, 2017). Several studies also indicate that a reflective approach in religious education is associated with increased spiritual awareness, the development of critical thinking skills, and the formation of a more open and contextual attitude toward understanding religious teachings. (Ramli et al., 2025).

The findings of this study reinforce previous research stating that the innovation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum needs to be developed contextually and adaptively to students' development and the demands of the times. However, this study shows that curriculum innovation is not only about using more varied teaching methods or media but also entails a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, which encourages active student engagement in the learning process. Additionally, this research emphasizes that dialogic, contextual, and practice-based learning experiences play an important role in helping students internalize religious values more reflectively and meaningfully in their daily lives. (Lewis & Bader, 2026).

The development of an Islamic Religious Education curriculum that integrates a contextual, dialogic, and experiential approach has great potential to enhance students' reflective religious thinking skills. Through activities such as open discussions, religious case analyses, and reflections on personal experiences, students have opportunities to actively construct their own understanding of their faith rather than passively accept it.

This approach aligns with the direction of 21st-century learning, which places students as active participants in the learning process. Recent research findings also support this, indicating that reflection-based learning strategies can help students better connect religious values with the social realities they face, including issues of diversity, moral dilemmas, and everyday life dynamics. (Gustian & Rahmat, 2025).

Thus, the innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum not only updates teaching methods and media but also serves as a strategic means to shape a more reflective, critical, and meaningful religious mindset. This process positions students as active interpreters of religious teachings, so they are expected to develop a religious attitude that is not rigid, more humane, and relevant to the dynamics of modern life.

3. Dynamics and Challenges in the Implementation of PAI Curriculum Innovation

Research results show that the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum innovation in educational institutions is dynamic and closely linked to various adjustment processes. Teachers experience a change in role from merely delivering material to becoming facilitators, motivators, and guides in the learning process. Teachers stated: 'Now teachers not only explain the material, but also must be able to guide students to be more active and capable of thinking independently.' (Guru Akidah Akhlak, 2026)

These dynamics emerge alongside the demands to integrate technology, strengthen character values, and apply contextual approaches in PAI learning. Based on observational findings, the learning process demonstrates continuous adjustments made by teachers, whether in the selection of instructional methods, the use of media, or the management of classroom interactions to better align with students' needs. This process does not occur in a linear manner; rather, it unfolds through stages of adaptation, reflection, and ongoing evaluation within everyday teaching practices.

These findings indicate that the implementation of PAI curriculum innovation is not merely the introduction of new programs, but rather a process of pedagogical transformation that requires teachers' readiness to adjust instructional strategies in response to student development and contemporary demands. Accordingly, curriculum innovation is understood as an evolving process that requires continuous reflection during implementation. Furthermore, these findings reinforce previous studies suggesting that implementing PAI curriculum innovation involves stages of diffusion and dissemination, as well as complex decision-making processes within educational practice. However, this study adds further emphasis by highlighting that the dynamics of implementation occur not only at the level of policy or formal curriculum change but also in the transformation of teachers' roles and perspectives in managing classroom learning processes (Ambiani et al., 2025)

Additionally, the dynamics of implementation can also be seen from teachers' efforts to adapt their teaching to the development of digital technology. Teachers are beginning to use digital media, but they still face limitations in mastering these technologies. This situation creates a gap between the demands for innovation and the readiness of human resources in schools. These findings are in line with research stating that one of the main challenges in innovating the Islamic Education curriculum is teachers' limited digital skills and resistance to using technology in teaching. (Hadi et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the challenges in implementing the innovation curriculum are also related to limitations in supporting learning facilities and infrastructure. Teachers stated that the utilization of technology in Islamic Religious Education learning has not been fully optimal due to limited facilities and access to supporting devices at school. Teachers expressed: "Sometimes the use of digital media is still limited because the facilities do not fully support it, so we have to adjust to the existing conditions." (Guru Akidah Akhlak, 2026)

In addition, teachers also face challenges in developing innovative teaching competencies, especially in integrating technology and approaches that meet students' needs. They stated: "Training on innovative learning or the use of technology is still not very frequent, so teachers sometimes learn on their own to adapt." (Guru Akidah Akhlak, 2026)

These findings indicate that the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum innovation is influenced not only by teachers' pedagogical readiness but also by adequate infrastructure support and professional development. Therefore, the success of curriculum innovation cannot be separated from the school's preparedness to provide facilities and support ongoing teacher training. Furthermore, these findings reinforce previous research stating that limited access to technology and a lack of teacher training are barriers to integrating the PAI curriculum with 21st-century skills. However, this study also notes that these obstacles affect not only the technical aspects of using learning media but also teachers' confidence and flexibility in developing innovative, context-specific classroom teaching practices. (Alpata et al., 2024)

On the other hand, challenges also arise from students' characteristics and social and environmental factors. Research results indicate that family background and students' environment also influence the success of curriculum implementation, especially in shaping religious character. Teachers face difficulties when the values taught at school are not fully supported by students' family environments. This is in line with studies indicating that implementing the Islamic Religious Education curriculum for character strengthening still faces obstacles due to external factors beyond the school's control. (Ar'Rasyid et al., 2025)

In addition, the dynamics of its implementation are also influenced by top-down and bottom-up policy approaches. On the one hand, schools must follow government policies; on the other hand, teachers must also innovate to meet local needs. The tension between these two approaches often presents challenges in field implementation. This is supported by research indicating that innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum often lies between institutional policies and the school's contextual needs. (Ar'Rasyid et al., 2025)

The findings of this study align with previous research indicating that the development of Islamic Education curriculum innovation needs to be contextual, adaptive, and tailored to students' needs. This study also shows that the success of curriculum innovation is determined not only by the use of diverse teaching methods and media but also by a paradigm shift in learning that provides more space for active student engagement during the learning process. The results emphasize that dialogic, contextual, and practice-based learning experiences play an important role in helping students internalize religious values more reflectively and meaningfully in their daily lives. (Hidayat, 2019).

Therefore, the dynamics and challenges in implementing PAI curriculum innovation indicate that the success of such innovation depends not only on curriculum design but also on teachers' readiness, the availability of supporting facilities and infrastructure, and students' social conditions during the learning process. These findings underscore that curriculum implementation is a complex and evolving process, requiring adaptive and collaborative strategies to ensure that the designed innovations are implemented effectively and sustainably. Accordingly, this study contributes to broadening the understanding of the importance of the interconnection between pedagogical aspects, technology, and social context in the development of the PAI curriculum. It also serves as a practical reference for teachers and schools in designing learning processes that are more contextual, participatory, and relevant to students' needs in the digital era.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at MTsN 1 Sleman is manifested through contextual learning, the use of digital media, varied instructional methods, and the integration of character values and religious practices into learning activities. The implementation of this innovation indicates a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, encouraging students' active involvement in the educational process.

This study also reveals that PAI curriculum innovation plays a significant role in developing students' religious reflective thinking through dialogical, contextual, and experience-based learning. Students not only understand religious material cognitively but also relate Islamic values to their everyday lives. However, the implementation of this curriculum innovation still faces challenges, including limited supporting facilities, teachers' technological proficiency, and differences in students' characteristics.

Therefore, this study highlights that the success of PAI curriculum innovation is determined not solely by curriculum design but also by teachers' pedagogical readiness, school environmental support, and students' engagement in meaningful learning experiences. These findings help strengthen the development of PAI instruction that is more contextual, participatory, and relevant to students' needs in the digital era.

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