

# STRENGTHENING CRITICAL RELIGIOUS LITERACY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Edi Junaidi Ds<sup>1</sup>, Dian Annisa<sup>2</sup>, Ghozali<sup>3</sup>, Sholihah Fatimatuz Zahro<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Universitas Islam Negri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang  
Email: [itsdianns.collage24@gmail.com](mailto:itsdianns.collage24@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has reshaped the production and dissemination of religious knowledge in Islamic education. While AI enhances access to religious learning, it also raises challenges such as misinformation, methodological reductionism, and the shift from scholarly sanad to algorithmic authority. This study aims to formulate a conceptual framework for strengthening critical religious literacy in the AI era. Employing a qualitative library research design with thematic analysis of recent studies on AI, digital literacy, and Islamic epistemology, the findings reveal that the core challenge lies not in the technology itself, but in students' limited capacity to critically verify and contextualize digital religious content. Islamic epistemological principles offer a normative basis for cultivating critical religious reasoning. The study concludes that integrating digital literacy with Islamic epistemology in curriculum and pedagogy is crucial for fostering intellectually mature and epistemically resilient learners.*

**Keywords:** *Artificial Intelligence (AI); Islamic Epistemology; Critical Religious Literacy*

## Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital era, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionized education by providing instant and personalized access to vast religious information through social media platforms and generative tools. This transformation has reshaped how students acquire Islamic knowledge, shifting from traditional academic sources to algorithm-driven content that is easily accessible yet often lacking depth, thereby requiring a comprehensive pedagogical response to preserve authentic learning. (Sitthipon et al., 2022)

However, this abundance presents significant challenges. AI-generated religious content frequently lacks authentic scholarly authority, increasing the risk of misinformation, misinterpretation of sacred texts, and superficial understanding among students who often accept unverified information uncritically (Rohim et al., 2026). The algorithmic simplification of complex doctrines renders religious literacy vulnerable to bias and digital hoaxes, underscoring the urgent need for critical religious literacy to filter and discern truth amid the overwhelming flow of information. (Zhang et al., 2025)

Previous studies have largely framed digital literacy within general paradigms without systematically integrating classical Islamic epistemological principles as a foundation for developing critical religious literacy in the AI era. Although the integration of AI in education, including Islamic e-learning has been widely discussed, limited attention has been given to the specific role of Islamic Education in addressing AI-driven religious misinformation through the reinforcement of critical religious literacy. This gap indicates a significant conceptual deficiency, particularly in formulating an epistemological framework capable of fostering students' intellectual resilience against algorithmic distortion and bias in digital spaces.

## Literature Review

### Artificial Intelligence and Knowledge Production in Education

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has revolutionized learning by providing personalized content access and real-time feedback, enabling students to learn adaptively without geographical limitations. Social media and AI facilitate access to religious information, transforming the way students acquire religious knowledge from traditional sources into instant, interactive digital content. This transformation is universal in nature, offering efficiency while simultaneously demanding prudent pedagogical approaches to maintain depth of understanding (Rahmawati & Inayati, 2024). Moreover, this technology is capable of generating human-like texts, including explanations of Islamic teachings, rulings in fiqh, Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), and responses to various questions in Islamic studies

### Digital Religious Content and the Risk of Misinformation

The proliferation of religious content across various digital platforms has disrupted the structure of traditional religious authority. In contrast to the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, grounded in sanad (chains of transmission), systematic interpretative methodologies, and contextual reasoning, religious content in digital spaces often circulates without adequate verification processes (Ashari & Walid, 2024). Such content may be generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI), shaped by algorithmic bias, or detached from its historical and social context, making it highly susceptible to misinformation.

This phenomenon is particularly significant in the context of educating young Muslim generations, as unverified religious knowledge may foster misconceptions, reduce analytical engagement, and encourage mechanical acceptance of information without critical reflection. Another vulnerability lies in AI's inability to accurately distinguish levels of authority within Islamic sources. In Islamic epistemology, knowledge is hierarchically structured, beginning with the Qur'an, followed by Hadith, and then scholarly opinions (ijtihad). However, AI systems may present these various sources without clearly differentiating their levels of authority, potentially leading users to accept less authoritative information as definitive truth. Therefore, the use of AI in religious contexts must be approached with caution, and the information it generates should be verified against authoritative sources, including qualified scholars and reliable religious literature. (Andok et al., 2025)

### Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking in Contemporary Education

Digital literacy generally enables individuals to use technology effectively; however, it does not automatically guarantee the ability to critically evaluate content (Rifaldi, 2025). Therefore, digital literacy must evolve into critical digital literacy, which encompasses the ability to assess source credibility, identify bias, and understand the influence of algorithms in the presentation and distribution of information.

Critical thinking is widely recognized as an essential element in achieving optimal educational outcomes (Ramdhani & Hakiman, 2025). In the religious context, critical literacy encompasses not only analytical skills but also epistemological awareness. Namely, an understanding of how meaning and authority are constructed within sacred texts and theological discourse.

### Critical Reasoning in Islamic Epistemological Tradition

The Islamic intellectual tradition has historically encouraged critical engagement with texts and concepts. Core epistemological principles such as tabayyun (verification), tafakkur (deep reflection), tadabbur (contextual textual reflection), and ijtihad (independent legal

reasoning) affirm the integral role of analytical reasoning within the Muslim scholarly heritage (Ramadhan & Arsyad, 2025).

These concepts demonstrate that critical literacy is not foreign to Islamic education; rather, it has been embedded in classical interpretative practices. Therefore, contemporary Islamic education can draw upon and actualize these principles to formulate a conceptual framework capable of responding to epistemic challenges in the digital era.

### **The Role of Islamic Education in Strengthening Critical Religious Literacy**

Islamic education has traditionally aimed to develop holistic learners by integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions in a balanced manner (Sintia, 2025). In the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI), this role has expanded: educators are required not only to equip students with the ability to access information, but also with the skills to evaluate its reliability, interpret its meaning contextually, and align it with sound theological reasoning.

Various studies in Islamic educational practice emphasize the importance of a curriculum that integrates digital literacy with religious epistemology to cultivate critical religious literacy, a competency framework that enables students to examine sources, assess authority, and understand how algorithms mediate and shape religious content in digital spaces (Sumarno & Alawiyah, 2025).

### **Method**

This study employs a qualitative approach using a conceptual library research design to examine the epistemic challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Islamic education, particularly in relation to religious misinformation and critical religious literacy. The research is based on a systematic review of peer-reviewed journal articles and academic publications published between 2023 and 2026. Sources were selected through structured searches in academic databases using keywords such as AI in education, digital religious content, misinformation, algorithmic bias, critical thinking, and Islamic education. Only recent and thematically relevant works were included to ensure analytical coherence and contemporary relevance. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis by identifying recurring patterns across the literature, including the transformation of religious authority in digital spaces, the risks of AI-generated misinformation, automation bias, and the limitations of functional digital literacy. These themes were then synthesized to develop a conceptual framework that positions Islamic education as a pedagogical response to AI-mediated religious knowledge. Through this analytical synthesis, the study seeks to articulate how Islamic education can strengthen students' critical reasoning and epistemic awareness in navigating digitally generated religious information.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **AI-Generated religious content and the risk of misinformation**

The fundamental transformation of the information landscape in the digital era, marked by massive internet penetration and the pervasiveness of social media platforms, has significantly altered how individuals access, produce, and disseminate knowledge, including in the religious domain. Whereas formal religious authorities such as ulama, Islamic educational institutions, and fatwa councils previously dominated the transmission of religious knowledge, today anyone with digital access can become both a producer and consumer of religious content. While this democratization of information production expands access to knowledge, it simultaneously raises serious concerns regarding the validity, accuracy, and legitimacy of religious interpretation (Elihami, 2025).

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly Large Language Models (LLMs), has accelerated this transformation. AI systems are capable of generating Qur'anic exegesis, concise fatwas, sermon materials, and theological responses instantly and in coherent language. However, AI-generated content is synthetic in nature, constructed from statistical data patterns, rather than derived from epistemic authority or scholarly methodology grounded in sanad (chains of transmission), interpretive tradition, and academic accountability. AI lacks niyyah (intentionality), normative consciousness, and moral responsibility for the consequences of its interpretations. This issue becomes particularly significant considering findings from a 2024 study by the Indonesian Ministry of Education reporting that 68% of students use AI-based tools for religious assignments (Fauzan et al., 2025).

Empirical research further indicates that generative AI not only has the potential to produce misinformation but may also generate "hallucinations," including fabricated references, scriptural citations, or quotations that appear convincing yet are factually inaccurate (Susnjak, 2023). Other studies reveal that many university students do not perceive the use of AI for academic writing as unethical, suggesting a shift in epistemological norms within educational contexts (Egunjobi, 2025). These findings are particularly relevant to religious education, where the convenience of instant answers may diminish processes of verification (tabayyun), textual depth, and critical dialogue with authoritative scholars or primary sources.

Moreover, technologies such as deepfakes and synthetic media increasingly blur the boundary between authenticity and manipulation. This phenomenon produces what is termed the "liar's dividend," a condition in which any content can easily be questioned in terms of authenticity. In religious contexts, this is especially problematic because traditional religious authority has historically rested on three primary dimensions: scholarly competence (mastery of texts and methodology), charismatic integrity (moral credibility), and judicial competence (legal reasoning and *ijtihad*) (Fauzan et al., 2025). In Indonesia, the legitimacy of *ulama* is often reinforced by sanad continuity and historical connectedness to classical scholarly traditions. AI, which lacks genealogical linkage and social accountability, risks shifting perceptions of authority from human scholars to anonymous algorithmic systems.

Field studies across various educational settings show that students tend to use AI to obtain quick answers without cross-verifying primary sources or scholarly references (Lu et al., 2022). Research in Islamic educational contexts also suggests that students' digital religious literacy remains largely at a functional level, the ability to use technology, rather than reaching a critical level that includes evaluating authority and identifying informational bias. This reinforces the argument that the risk of misinformation is not merely a technological issue, but fundamentally an epistemological capacity issue among users.

Beyond informational inaccuracies, AI may also contribute to the reduction of spiritual experience into mere data consumption. When doctrine is simplified into instant responses or sermons are constructed algorithmically without existential engagement, religion risks undergoing dehumanization. The emotional, transcendent, and relational dimensions of religious practice may be reduced to informational text. In this sense, AI challenges not only the accuracy of knowledge but also the depth of meaning and authenticity of religious experience.

Despite these epistemic risks, AI also offers constructive opportunities for Islamic education. It can support the digitization of classical manuscripts, comparative analysis of exegetical literature, multilingual access to Islamic scholarship, and personalized learning pathways for students. Therefore, the core issue lies not in the existence of AI itself, but in the absence of a structured pedagogical framework that guides its ethical and epistemologically

sound use. A balanced approach positions AI as a tool to be critically mediated rather than categorically rejected.

In conclusion, AI-generated religious content presents a paradox: it expands access to knowledge while simultaneously increasing the risks of misinformation and the erosion of epistemic authority. The comparison between conceptual analysis and empirical findings reveals a gap between technological sophistication and users' critical literacy readiness. Thus, the central problem is not the presence of AI per se, but the absence of a pedagogical framework capable of equipping learners with verification skills, source evaluation competence, and epistemological awareness in navigating digital religious content.

### **Critical Religious Literacy in Islamic Pedagogical Tradition**

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the landscape of religious knowledge production and distribution. In the Islamic context, AI-based religious content refers to normative information, legal responses, and explanatory materials, whether in textual, audio, visual, or video form, generated through systems trained on previously learned data patterns. In practice, such content frequently appears in formats such as fiqh question-and-answer responses, summaries of Islamic teachings, Qur'anic exegesis, and explanations of contemporary issues. This situation positions AI as a new epistemic medium that is rapid, responsive, and easily accessible. However, the emergence of algorithmic authority raises fundamental questions concerning methodological validity, source hierarchy, and normative legitimacy within the Islamic scholarly tradition. (Armstrong, 2025)

Epistemologically, AI possesses neither consciousness, intentionality, nor the capacity for *ijtihad*. It operates through statistical prediction mechanisms based on training data corpora. Consequently, its outputs do not result from a process of legal derivation (*istinbath*) that requires mastery of *usul al-fiqh*, contextual understanding, and consideration of *maqashid al-shari'ah*. In this regard, the statement of Kiai Cholil from the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) holds theoretical significance. He emphasized that while AI may provide answers or suggestions regarding legal matters, it lacks the human consciousness that constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for issuing fatwas. This assertion implicitly underscores the distinction between linguistic simulation and normative authority, positioning AI as an auxiliary instrument rather than an epistemic subject. It highlights the differentiation between epistemic authority and computational authority. (Online, 2025)

The vulnerabilities of AI in religious matters may be analyzed across three dimensions. First, technically, generative systems are prone to hallucinations, outputs that are linguistically coherent but factually inaccurate. In Islamic legal discourse, which relies heavily on the precision of textual evidence, the validity of *sanad*, and rigorous methodological argumentation, such inaccuracies may result in problematic generalizations or misattributed scriptural references. (Kahfi et al., 2025)

Second, epistemologically, AI lacks the inherent capacity to distinguish hierarchical authority among Islamic sources ranging from the Qur'an and Hadith to diverse scholarly opinions across legal schools. The system tends to present information in rhetorically equivalent formats without clarifying the epistemic weight of each source. As a result, the complexity of *ikhtilaf* (scholarly disagreement), traditionally regarded as a methodological richness within Islamic jurisprudence, may be reduced to overly simplistic and singular responses.

Third, psychologically, automation bias reinforces users' tendency to accept automated outputs without critical verification. The systematic, rapid, and persuasive language generated by

AI may create an illusion of authority, particularly among users with limited digital and religious literacy.

The urgency of these concerns is reinforced by field research conducted by Sundari et al. (2025). in five schools in Central Bengkulu. The study found that students' religious literacy levels vary significantly, with a considerable proportion struggling to distinguish valid religious information in digital spaces. Identified challenges include excessive exposure to unverified information, vulnerability to religious misinformation and hoaxes, limited digital literacy and critical thinking skills, and the influence of filter bubbles. Analytically, these findings indicate a gap between abundant information access and the epistemic capacity required to evaluate it critically.

In this context, the concept of critical religious literacy becomes strategically relevant. In modern educational theory, critical thinking is understood as a deliberate and self-regulated process of evaluating evidence, context, methodology, and implications of claims. It involves analytical, synthetic, and evaluative skills that distinguish between strong and weak arguments. However, this dimension is not external to Islam. The Qur'an consistently encourages tafakkur (intellectual reflection) and tadabbur (deep contemplation), while the tradition of ijtihad in Islamic jurisprudence represents the apex of rigorous methodological reasoning and analytical courage (Nurfazri & Irwansyah, 2024).

One strategic response to the AI era is the integration model of AI-Aware Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills, as proposed by Septian and Ihsan (2026) This model positions AI as a supportive learning tool rather than a substitute for human cognitive processes. Its core principle asserts that AI should function as an enhancer, strengthening rather than replacing activities such as reading, analysis, and evaluation.

Therefore, strengthening critical religious literacy in the AI era constitutes not only a pedagogical necessity but also a revitalization of Islamic epistemological principles. Technical challenges such as hallucinations, hierarchical source ambiguity, and automation bias must be addressed through the internalization of verification values (tabayyun), reinforcement of analytical capacity, and habituation of source validation against legitimate authority (Ikhsan et al., 2026).

Based on this conceptual analysis and supported by empirical findings, AI in religious contexts should be positioned proportionally as a pedagogical tool. Validation through authoritative sources, engagement with qualified scholars, and the integration of digital literacy grounded in Islamic epistemology become fundamental prerequisites. Within this framework, Islamic education assumes a strategic role as a space of articulation between classical intellectual tradition and contemporary algorithmic challenges, thereby cultivating learners who are not only technologically adaptive but also epistemically mature and critically grounded in navigating AI-generated religious knowledge.

### **Islamic Education as a Framework for Developing Critical Religious Religious Reasoning**

In the era of digital globalization and the expansion of artificial intelligence, Islamic education faces significant shifts in the landscape of authority and the production of religious knowledge. Instant access through social media, search engines, and AI-based systems broadens the spectrum of religious references available to learners, yet at the same time blurs the hierarchy of sources and methodological legitimacy (Hajar & Bone, 2024). This situation requires Islamic education to move beyond its normative transmission function toward a more strategic epistemological role. Namely, to cultivate critical religious reasoning as an analytical, reflective, and contextual capacity in understanding Islamic teachings.

Philosophically, Islamic education aims to shape an integral human being through the integration of faith (iman), knowledge ('ilm), and character (akhlak). In the contemporary context, this integration needs to be expanded into a synthesis between revelation, reason, and digital literacy. Critical religious reasoning within this framework is not skepticism toward religious teachings, but rather a methodological commitment to verification (tabayyun), understanding historical context, and distinguishing between foundational principles (ushul) and subsidiary matters (furu') (Ethical, 2025). In this way, learners develop epistemic resilience against doctrinal simplification, algorithmic bias, and provocative narratives in the digital sphere.

Islamic tradition itself provides a theoretical foundation for this construction. The complementary relationship between reason and revelation affirms that rationality is not in opposition to faith, but rather an instrument to deepen it. Therefore, strengthening critical religious reasoning represents a revitalization of Islam's epistemological heritage, not the adoption of an external concept (Bhat & Bisati, 2025).

Operationally, the development of this framework requires curriculum reconstruction that integrates digital literacy with Islamic epistemological foundations, the application of dialogical and case-based methods grounded in contemporary issues, the repositioning of teachers as epistemic facilitators, and the creation of an educational ecosystem that encourages clarification and intellectual responsibility. Through this approach, Islamic education becomes not only responsive to the challenges of AI, but also contributive in cultivating a generation of Muslims who are intellectually mature, moderate in attitude, and epistemically resilient in navigating technology-based religious knowledge production (Dhomiri, 2023).

Analytically, the shift from sanad-based authority to algorithm-based authority creates a transformation in how learners perceive the legitimacy of knowledge. In the classical tradition, scholarly validity was determined by methodological depth, continuity of transmission, and the personal integrity of scholars. In the digital ecosystem, however, credibility is often measured by visibility, popularity, and speed of response (Rois, 2026). This shift in the indicators of authority contributes to the formation of a more instant and pragmatic pattern of religiosity. In this context, Islamic education functions as a corrective mechanism that reorients learners' epistemic orientation from mere information consumption toward processes of clarification, source comparison, and argumentative evaluation (Sabir-el-rayess, 2020). Thus, the development of critical religious reasoning not only strengthens cognitive capacity, but also reconstructs epistemological awareness, enabling learners to distinguish between ease of access and depth of authority in understanding Islamic teachings.

## Conclusion

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the production and dissemination of religious knowledge presents significant epistemic implications for Islamic education. This study confirms that the central challenge does not lie in AI technology itself, but in learners' limited capacity to critically assess, verify, and contextualize digitally mediated religious information. The shift from sanad-based scholarly authority to algorithm-driven visibility necessitates a strategic reorientation of educational priorities. This research contributes a conceptual framework that integrates digital literacy with Islamic epistemological principles as a foundation for strengthening critical religious literacy. Such integration positions Islamic education not merely as a transmitter of doctrine, but as an epistemic regulator in the AI era. Therefore, curriculum reform and dialogical pedagogy grounded in epistemic awareness are essential to cultivate intellectually responsible, moderate, and resilient learners capable of navigating the evolving AI-driven knowledge landscape.

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