

MODELS OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A SYSTEMATIC SYNTHESIS OF EXPERIENCE-BASED, LOCAL WISDOM AND TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

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Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in the 21st century faces existential challenges due to social, technological and cultural transformations occurring at an exponential rate, particularly in educating Generations Z and Alpha, who are digital natives. This study aims to develop a 21st-century PAI learning model through a systematic synthesis of three main approaches: experience-based approaches, local wisdom, and transformative pedagogy. The research method employed a literature review. The results indicate that the integration of these three approaches yields a holistic, contextual, and transformative PAI learning model. The experience-based approach provides a concrete medium for the internalisation of values through direct practice; local wisdom provides a sociocultural context that grounds universal Islamic values in local realities; and transformative pedagogy ensures that learning produces a profound and sustainable transformation of perspective through critical reflection and the reintegration of new perspectives. The 21st-century PAI learning model developed encompasses the integration of Project-Based Learning, Inquiry-Based Learning, the Flipped Classroom, and technology-based approaches, combined with the 'niteni, niroke, nambahi' strategies from Javanese local wisdom and Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning. The implementation of this model requires a paradigm shift for teachers from being knowledge transferors to becoming facilitators and designers of learning experiences, as well as a commitment from all stakeholders to realise Islamic Education that not only fosters cognitive development but also shapes character, spirituality and transformative social awareness.

Keywords: PAI learning model, 21st century, experience-based approach, local wisdom, transformative pedagogy, experiential learning, transformative learning, Islamic education.

Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the 21st century faces an existential challenge unprecedented in the history of Islamic education in Indonesia. Social, technological and cultural transformations occurring at an exponential rate have fundamentally altered the way the younger generation accesses information, interprets religion and internalises spiritual values (AL-Ulum & Wahab, 2025). Generation Z (born 1997–2012) and Generation Alpha (born 2013–2025), who now

dominate secondary schools and higher education institutions, are digital natives who have grown up in a digital ecosystem characterised by critical thinking, multitasking, visual orientation and a tendency to seek instant results (Shevchenko, 2025). This situation presents both a paradox and an opportunity: on the one hand, they possess high digital literacy and extensive access to information; on the other hand, they face moral decline, individualism, dependence on mobile devices, and vulnerability to radical narratives in the digital sphere (AL-Ulum & Wahab, 2025).

The main challenge in educating Generations Z and Alpha lies not merely in the delivery of religious material, but rather in the internalisation of authentic and meaningful moral and spiritual values in everyday life (Shevchenko, 2025). The uncontrolled flow of information in the digital space has given rise to the phenomena of disinformation, misinformation, and religious content that is scientifically and sharia-illegitimate, which significantly influences the formation of students' sexual norms, views on violence, and religious beliefs (Anderson & Dron, 2011). Adult content, violence, hoaxes and cyberbullying on social media can foster negative character traits in pupils without proper guidance; consequently, Islamic religious education is required to shield them from the negative influences of the digital environment (Setiawan et al., 2025).

However, the reality on the ground shows that Islamic Education (PAI) is still dominated by conventional approaches that lack innovation and are irrelevant to the characteristics of the digital generation. One-way lectures, rote learning and the transfer of cognitive knowledge remain the dominant practices in many schools and madrasahs, even though these methods are becoming increasingly unpopular with pupils who are accustomed to visual, practical and technology-based approaches (Aslan, 2017a). Consequently, pupils experience boredom, lack motivation to delve deeper into religious material, and view Islamic Education as a formalistic subject detached from the realities of their lives. The discrepancy between rigid teaching methods and the dynamic needs of Generations Z and Alpha creates an ever-widening gap between the Islamic values taught and their application in daily life (Annisya & Resty, 2025).

The dominance of conventional methods in Islamic Education (PAI) not only results in low interest in learning but also in the failure to internalise transformative Islamic values. Research indicates that Islamic Education (PAI) that focuses on the transfer of cognitive knowledge without direct experience and critical reflection results in a superficial, pragmatic understanding of religion that is susceptible to extreme interpretations (Syibli & Aslan, 2025). Learners are able to memorise Islamic principles and concepts but fail to relate them to their social, cultural and personal contexts, meaning that religious values do not become an authentic guide to life. This situation is exacerbated by a lack of teacher training in designing innovative learning that integrates technology, direct experience and transformative reflection (Safitri et al., 2025).

Amidst this crisis of relevance, an experience-based approach has emerged as a promising pedagogical alternative to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and spiritual practice. Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning emphasises that meaningful learning occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Morris, 2020). In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), this approach enables learners to internalise Islamic values through direct practice such as worship, social interaction, community service projects, and reflection on their spiritual experiences (Sa'adah et al., 2026). The implementation of the Experiential Learning model in Islamic Education has been shown to enhance pupils' religious awareness, social responsibility and reflective understanding of their spiritual experiences, despite facing constraints such as limited facilities, time and teachers' readiness to design experience-based learning (Zulkarnain et al., 2025).

However, an experience-based approach alone is insufficient if it is not contextualised within the socio-cultural reality of the learners. This is where local wisdom acts as a bridge, grounding the universal values of Islam within the context of the local culture and traditions that are alive within the community. Local wisdom, defined as the values, norms and traditions passed down through generations and practised within community life, serves as an effective medium for the internalisation of moderate (wasathiyah) and inclusive Islamic values (Putra & Aslan, 2019). Research indicates that the integration of local cultural values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation and good manners into Islamic Education (PAI) through folk tales, proverbs and local traditions can enhance the relevance, contextuality and effectiveness of learning (Kibtiyah et al., 2025).

The integration of local wisdom into PAI serves not only as a strategy for contextualisation but also as a bulwark against the influences of globalisation, which brings with it foreign cultural currents that are not always in harmony with Islamic values and the culture of the Nusantara (Fajarini, 2014). In rural areas and indigenous communities, local wisdom rooted in Sufi traditions, such as the Naqshbandi Order, functions not only as a cultural practice but also as an effective medium for the internalisation of the values of Islamic creed, ethics and brotherhood (ukhuwah Islamiyah). Models for integrating local wisdom into Islamic education can be categorised into four: the additive model (the addition of local cultural material), the infusion model (the incorporation of local values into every topic), the transformative model (the reconstruction of the curriculum based on local wisdom), and the synergistic model (Islam and local wisdom as complementary sources of knowledge) (Wijayati, 2024).

Although experience-based and local wisdom-based approaches have demonstrated their effectiveness, both require a deeper pedagogical foundation to bring about sustainable shifts in perspective. It is here that transformative pedagogy, rooted in Jack Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning, offers a comprehensive

theoretical framework. Mezirow defines transformative learning as a process in which individuals transform problematic frames of reference (ways of thinking, thinking habits, perspectives on meaning) into ones that are more inclusive, discerning, open, emotional and reflective. This process begins with a perplexing dilemma, followed by self-examination, critical evaluation of assumptions, exploration of new roles, action planning, and the reintegration of new perspectives into one's life (Mezirow, 2018).

In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), transformative pedagogy is highly relevant to the aims of Islamic education, which seek not only to transfer knowledge but also to shape character, spirituality and transformative social awareness. The application of transformative learning in PAI can be analysed through the ten phases proposed by Mezirow, which are linked to the context of Islamic education: (1) perplexing dilemmas, such as the gap between religious teachings and social reality; (2) self-examination through feelings, such as reflection on religious practices that have hitherto been carried out; (3) critical evaluation of assumptions, such as scrutinising past beliefs and thoughts about religion; and so on, up to the reintegration of new perspectives into daily life. Research indicates that transformative pedagogy in Islamic Education (PAI) is capable of preventing radicalism through the internalisation of religious moderation in behaviour—not merely cognition—as well as fostering spiritual awareness, social ethics and tolerance among learners (Mezirow, 2018).

However, although these three approaches—experience-based, local wisdom, and transformative pedagogy—have been studied separately within the context of Islamic Education, there has yet to be a systematic synthesis that integrates all three into a single coherent and practical conceptual framework. Previous research has tended to focus on a specific approach, such as the effectiveness of Experiential Learning in enhancing spiritual intelligence (Zakariyah et al., 2022), the integration of local wisdom into the PAI curriculum (Putra & Aslan, 2019), or the application of Mezirow's theory in Islamic education (Mezirow, 2003). This research gap creates a need for an article that not only reviews these three approaches separately but also synthesises them into a holistic, contextual and transformative 21st-century PAI learning model.

Consequently, this article aims to bridge this gap by presenting a systematic synthesis of the three main approaches—experience-based, local wisdom, and transformative pedagogy—within the framework of 21st-century PAI learning. The contribution of this article lies in the development of a 21st-century PAI learning model (PAI-21) that synergistically integrates these three approaches, thereby producing learning that is not only relevant to the characteristics of Generations Z and Alpha but is also capable of bringing about sustainable and authentic transformations in perspective.

Research Method

This study employed a literature review method to critically and comprehensively synthesise the scientific literature on 21st-century PAI learning models that integrate experience-based approaches, local wisdom and transformative pedagogy. Primary data sources were obtained from national and international journal articles, books and other documents. The literature selection process comprised four stages: (1) initial identification of several articles deemed to have potential; (2) screening based on inclusion criteria (focus on PAI, experience-based approaches/local wisdom/transformative pedagogy, relevant empirical or conceptual research) and exclusion criteria (duplicates, full-text unavailable, outside the time frame); (3) an assessment of suitability through an analysis of methodological quality and substantive relevance, and (4) the final inclusion of those meeting quality and relevance standards for in-depth analysis. The data analysis technique employed content analysis using a thematic approach, whereby the selected literature was coded, categorised and synthesised to identify key themes, conceptual patterns and research gaps, which were then integrated into a coherent and applicable conceptual framework for a 21st-century PAI learning model (Snyder, 2019); (Elijah & Aslan, 2025).

Results and Discussion

Main Approaches: Experiential Learning, Local Wisdom as the Basis for Contextualisation, and Transformative Pedagogy

The experiential learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is a pedagogical paradigm that positions direct experience as the primary medium for the internalisation of Islamic values. The theory of Experiential Learning developed by David Kolb asserts that meaningful learning occurs through a four-stage cycle: concrete experience, observational reflection, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Morris, 2020). In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), this approach enables pupils not only to memorise Islamic principles and concepts cognitively, but also to experience them directly through acts of worship, social interaction, community service projects, and reflection on their spiritual experiences, thereby making religious values an integral part of their daily lives (Rahayu et al., 2025).

The implementation of an experience-based approach in Islamic Education has demonstrated significant effectiveness in enhancing various religious dimensions of pupils. Research conducted by Raihani & Mutaqin, (2025) at SMK Yayasan Islam Tasikmalaya, shows that the application of the Experiential Learning model in Islamic Education (PAI) enhances students' religious awareness, social responsibility and reflective understanding of their spiritual experiences, with learning interest scores rising from 64.8 at the outset to 76.9 following the implementation of this model. These findings are reinforced by the research Puspitasari et al., (2022), which found that teachers' strategies in designing experience-based learning—through direct social and

religious activities—can enhance student engagement, learning motivation, and the internalisation of moral values in a more authentic manner compared to conventional lecture methods.

However, the effectiveness of an experience-based approach is inextricably linked to the sociocultural context in which learning takes place. It is here that local wisdom serves as a basis for contextualisation, grounding the universal values of Islam within the cultural realities and living local traditions of the community. Local wisdom is defined as the knowledge, values, norms and cultural practices that have developed over generations within a particular community, resulting from adaptation to the local environment and culture (Fitrah & Hartati, 2021). From an Islamic educational perspective, local wisdom is not merely a cultural artefact, but rather an effective medium for the internalisation of Islamic values that are *wasathiyah* (moderate), inclusive, and relevant to the context of learners' lives (Kreeft, 2009).

The integration of local wisdom into Islamic Education (PAI) can be achieved through various complementary strategies. Firstly, aligning teaching materials with the local context, whereby teachers identify local wisdom values that are consistent with Islamic teachings and integrate them into the curriculum (Wijayati, 2024). Secondly, the use of folk tales, proverbs, songs, dances and local traditions as learning media to make Islamic Education (PAI) material more engaging and meaningful for pupils. Thirdly, visits to historical sites and the involvement of local traditional or religious figures in the learning process to provide an authentic context for the values being taught (Fitrah & Hartati, 2021). Fourthly, the development of PAI modules and teaching materials that are contextualised with local wisdom, so that teachers have systematic guidance in integrating local values into their teaching (Fitrah & Hartati, 2021).

Empirical research indicates that the integration of local wisdom into PAI has a significant positive impact on pupils' understanding and character. A study conducted by Faqih Utsman, (2022), found that integrating local wisdom into PAI teaching enhances pupils' holistic understanding of religious and local cultural values, whilst strengthening their cultural identity and religious character. Similar findings were reported by Wijayati, (2024), which demonstrated that education based on local wisdom can strengthen character, improve social intelligence, and develop pupils' cultural identity, in line with the principles of Islamic education that emphasise a balance between knowledge, ethics, and spirituality. Within the *pesantren* environment, Islamic education based on local wisdom for early childhood is implemented through formal classroom learning, children's involvement in the *pesantren*'s religious activities, and the cultivation of daily behaviours in line with local Islamic values, thereby making learning more contextual and closely aligned with children's everyday experiences (Fajarini, 2014).

However, the integration of local wisdom into Islamic Education (PAI) serves not only as a strategy for contextualisation but also as a bulwark against the influences of globalisation, which brings with it foreign cultural currents that are not always in

harmony with Islamic values and the culture of the Indonesian archipelago. In rural areas and indigenous communities, local wisdom rooted in Sufi traditions, such as the Naqshbandi Order, functions not only as a cultural practice but also as an effective medium for the internalisation of the values of Islamic faith, ethics and brotherhood . Models for integrating local wisdom into Islamic education can be categorised into four: the additive model (adding local cultural material to the existing curriculum), the infusion model (incorporating local values into every topic of Islamic Education), the transformative model (reconstructing the curriculum based on local wisdom as a pedagogical foundation), and the synergistic model (Islam and local wisdom as complementary sources of knowledge) (Kreeft, 2009).

Although experience-based and local wisdom-based approaches have demonstrated their effectiveness, both require a deeper pedagogical foundation to bring about sustainable and authentic shifts in perspective. It is here that transformative pedagogy, rooted in Jack Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning, offers a comprehensive theoretical framework. Mezirow defines transformative learning as a process in which individuals transform problematic frames of reference (ways of thinking, thinking habits, perspectives on meaning) into ones that are more inclusive, discerning, open, emotional and reflective. This process begins with a perplexing dilemma, followed by self-examination, critical evaluation of assumptions, exploration of new roles, action planning, and the reintegration of new perspectives into one's life (Mezirow, 2003).

In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), transformative pedagogy is highly relevant to the aims of Islamic education, which seek not only to transfer knowledge but also to shape character, spirituality and transformative social awareness. Research conducted by Mezirow,(2003) through a systematic literature review of 30 journal articles found that Mezirow's transformative learning—comprising ten stages, ranging from a perplexing dilemma to reintegration into life—is highly relevant to PAI, particularly when reinforced by Islamic concepts such as muhasabah an-nafs (self-reflection), tabayyun (clarification), tajdid (renewal), and istikamah (consistency). The implementation of this model empowers learners to become agents of change who are adaptive, reflective, socially responsible, and morally and spiritually mature, thereby producing intelligent and well-rounded Muslims (Yudiawan & Himmah, 2023); (Yanti et al., 2022).

The application of transformative pedagogy in Islamic Education (PAI) can be analysed through the ten phases proposed by Mezirow, as adapted to the context of Islamic education. The first phase is the 'disorienting dilemma', which refers to a situation that is confusing or challenges long-held beliefs, such as the gap between religious teachings and the social realities faced by learners (Alya et al., 2025). The second phase is emotional self-examination, in which learners reflect on the religious practices they have engaged in to date and how these have influenced their lives. The third phase is the critical evaluation of assumptions, which involves scrutinising past

beliefs and thoughts about religion, including assumptions that may no longer be relevant. Phases four to ten encompass exploring new roles, planning actions, acquiring new knowledge and skills, trying out new roles, building self-confidence, and reintegrating new perspectives into daily life (Aini & Acetylena, 2026).

The significance of transformative pedagogy in Islamic Education is not limited to individual transformation but also has a broad social dimension. Research indicates that transformative pedagogy in Islamic Education is capable of preventing radicalism through the internalisation of religious moderation in behaviour—not merely cognition—as well as fostering students' spiritual awareness, social ethics and tolerance (Efendy & Irmwaddah, 2022). In the context of a multicultural society such as Indonesia, transformative pedagogy serves as a vital instrument for shaping citizens who are not only religious but also inclusive, democratic, and capable of living peacefully alongside one another amidst diversity (Widiastuti et al., 2018).

The integration of these three approaches—experience-based, local wisdom, and transformative pedagogy—within a single coherent conceptual framework offers greater transformative potential than the application of each approach in isolation. The experience-based approach provides a concrete medium for the internalisation of values, local wisdom provides a relevant sociocultural context, and transformative pedagogy ensures that learning does not merely result in superficial behavioural change, but also in a profound and sustainable transformation of perspective (Kibtiyah et al., 2025). The synergy of these three approaches aligns with the vision of transformative Islamic education, which emphasises three main pillars: a normative foundation (drawn from the theology of liberation in the Qur'an and Sunnah, which emphasises social justice); a philosophical foundation (integrating prophetic theological values and critical pedagogy, which views human beings as free historical subjects); and an operational foundation (embodying this paradigm through the reconstruction of a curriculum grounded in socio-religious realities, dialogic learning methods, egalitarian relationships between educators and learners, and action-based assessment) (Arnadi et al., 2021).

The implementation of the integration of these three approaches in Islamic Education (PAI) teaching practice requires a paradigm shift from the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge to the teacher as a facilitator and mediator who connects Islamic concepts with local cultural practices and transformative reflection. Teachers need to design learning activities that trigger direct experiences (such as community service projects, documentation of local traditions, or campaigns for religious moderation), integrate the values of local wisdom into every PAI topic, and facilitate critical reflection that encourages learners to examine their assumptions about religion and life (Faqih Utsman, 2022). Furthermore, teachers also need to collaborate with traditional leaders, religious figures and local cultural practitioners to ensure that the integration of local wisdom is carried out authentically and is not merely a superficial addition to the curriculum (Aslan, 2017b); (Aslan & Pugu, 2025).

The challenges in implementing the integration of these three approaches cannot be ignored. The main obstacles include limited facilities and time for experience-based learning, a lack of teacher training in designing transformative learning, and resistance from some quarters who regard local wisdom as a non-Islamic practice (Nurazizah et al., 2022). To address these challenges, systematic efforts are required, including: (1) the development of learning module guidelines that coherently integrate the three approaches; (2) workshop training to enhance teachers' capacity in designing experience-based learning, incorporating local wisdom and transformative pedagogy; (3) the development of contextual Islamic Education (PAI) teaching materials that incorporate local wisdom; (4) encouraging community participation in the process of integrating local wisdom, and (5) utilising digital technology to facilitate access to and the dissemination of information regarding the integration of these three approaches (Aslan & Ningtyas, 2025); (Aslan, 2026); (Aslan & Putra, 2020).

Conceptually, the integration of experience-based approaches, local wisdom and transformative pedagogy in 21st-century Islamic Education represents a shift from an educational paradigm focused on the transfer of knowledge to one that emphasises the transformation of perspectives and the empowerment of learners as agents of social change. This paradigm aligns with the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasises the development of the 4C competencies (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication) as well as the strengthening of authentic character and spirituality (Sanawan et al., 2026). Thus, the integration of these three approaches is not only theoretically relevant but also practically applicable in addressing the challenges of Islamic Education in the digital and globalised era.

Consequently, the experience-based approach, local wisdom and transformative pedagogy constitute the three main, mutually complementary pillars in shaping a holistic, contextual and transformative 21st-century PAI learning model. The experience-based approach provides a concrete medium for the internalisation of values through direct practice; local wisdom provides a sociocultural context that grounds universal Islamic values in local realities; and transformative pedagogy ensures that learning results in a profound and sustainable transformation of perspective. The integration of these three approaches requires a commitment from all stakeholders—teachers, curriculum developers, policymakers, and local communities—to work together to realise Islamic Religious Education that not only fosters cognitive development but also shapes character, spirituality, and transformative social awareness.

A 21st-Century Model for Islamic Religious Education

The 21st-Century Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning Model is a teaching approach designed to accommodate contemporary developments, technological advancements and the needs of pupils in the digital age and in the context of globalisation. This model focuses on developing students' competencies in a deep

understanding of Islam, whilst reinforcing character values relevant to the challenges of the modern era (Nisa et al., 2021); (Hasan et al., 2021). In the context of the 21st century, Islamic Education (PAI) teaching can no longer rely on conventional, teacher-centred methods but must shift to an interactive, problem-based, collaborative and learner-centred approach that emphasises the development of the 4C competencies (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication) (Prasahaja et al., 2026).

The key characteristics of the 21st-century Islamic Education (PAI) learning model include being integrative, holistic, scientific, contextual, thematic, effective, collaborative, and learner-centred, with the learner at the centre of the learning process (Khafifatulhian & Misbah, 2023). This approach requires teachers to design Lesson Plans (RPP) that integrate 21st-century skills and the use of technology, so that learning is not merely the transfer of cognitive knowledge, but also the development of character, spirituality, and life skills relevant to contemporary social realities (Rusdianti et al., 2025). The components of the 21st-century PAI learning model include, at a minimum: (1) clear learning strategies, (2) an appropriate learning model, (3) a sound approach to the subject matter and pupils, (4) relevant teaching materials, (5) learning methods suited to the type of material, (6) varied learning techniques, (7) media as learning tools, (8) authentic learning assessment, and (9) remedial support to ensure mastery of the material (Widjaja et al., 2022); (Wicaksono, 2021).

Teaching methods in Islamic Religious Education in the 21st century encompass a range of complementary innovative approaches, namely: technology-based learning approaches, collaborative learning approaches, problem-based learning approaches, experience-based learning approaches, inquiry-based learning approaches, project-based learning approaches, interactive learning approaches, inclusive teaching-based learning approaches, and learning approaches that integrate values and ethics (Aslan, 2017a). The application of varied learning approaches, such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL), Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), Jigsaw, and the Flipped Classroom, can enrich pupils' learning experiences and encourage them to think critically, evaluate, and create new knowledge (Aslan & Sidabutar, 2025); (Fitroh & Aslan, 2026).

The Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model is a learning model that uses problems as a starting point for gathering and integrating new knowledge based on students' real-life experiences in their daily lives (Prasahaja et al., 2026). In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), PjBL can be implemented through projects that integrate Islamic values with social realities, such as documenting local religious traditions, campaigns for religious moderation on social media, or mini-research projects on the implementation of moral values within the community. Research indicates that the use of information technology, project-based learning models, and the integration of Islamic values within a contemporary context can significantly enhance the quality of PAI learning (Wicaksono, 2021).

The Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) model emphasises the process of discovery and construction of knowledge by pupils through investigation, exploration, and

critical reflection on religious and social phenomena. In PAI, IBL can be implemented through simple research activities on local Islamic history, the analysis of religious texts using a contextual approach, or the exploration of local wisdom values that are in harmony with Islamic teachings. This approach is in line with the principles of constructivism, which views students as active agents in the construction of meaning, rather than merely passive recipients of knowledge (Zakariyah et al., 2022).

The Flipped Classroom model is a pedagogical innovation that reverses the traditional sequence of learning, whereby students study the material independently at home via videos, e-modules or e-learning platforms, and then use class time for discussion, reflection and the application of concepts through collaborative activities. In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), the Flipped Classroom enables students to study Islamic concepts independently, and then use face-to-face time for critical discussion, transformative reflection, and experience-based projects that integrate Islamic values with the realities of their lives (Toha et al., 2025).

Creative pedagogical approaches in 21st-century Islamic Education utilise interactive methods, such as group discussions, simulations and educational games, to enhance student participation (Widjaja & Aslan, 2022). Simulations can be used to teach concepts of fiqh through role-play of religious practices, conflict resolution based on Islamic values, or ethical decision-making in dilemmatic situations. Educational games, such as interactive quizzes on Islamic history, moral value puzzles, or the gamification of Qur'anic learning, can significantly boost student motivation and engagement (Rachmawati et al., 2020).

The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) is an essential component of the 21st-century Islamic Education (PAI) learning model. The use of digital media, learning applications, and e-learning platforms in the PAI learning process not only enriches learning resources but also facilitates flexible, personalised, and contextual learning (Sulastri et al., 2023). Platforms such as Google Classroom, Edmodo or Moodle can be used for distributing materials, online discussions and formative assessment, whilst applications such as Quizizz, Kahoot or Wordwall can enhance interactivity and gamification in learning. However, the integration of technology must be accompanied by adequate digital literacy so that pupils are able to distinguish between valid religious information and hoaxes in the digital space (Sanawan et al., 2026).

The implementation of 21st-century learning principles in Islamic Education (PAI) requires teachers to act as scaffolders and facilitators who design learning in a detailed and systematic manner. Teachers' responsibilities include: (1) effective and detailed lesson planning (lesson plans must be comprehensive), (2) incorporating higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) into every learning activity, (3) applying varied learning models suited to the characteristics of the subject matter and the pupils, (4) integrating relevant and meaningful technology, (5) creating an inclusive and democratic learning environment, (6) developing authentic assessments that measure

not only cognitive skills but also affective and psychomotor skills, and (7) engaging in continuous reflection on pedagogical practice to improve the quality of learning (Zakariyah et al., 2022).

The 21st-century Islamic Education (PAI) learning model must also integrate the values of local wisdom as a basis for contextualisation that grounds the universal values of Islam within the reality of local culture and traditions. The integration of PAI learning based on local wisdom can be implemented through the strategies of *niteni* (observing), *niroke* (imitating) and *nambahi* (developing), which are principles of traditional Javanese learning; the application of the methodological domain through artistic and cultural skills; and the application of the philosophical domain through the principles of '*ing ngarso sung tulodho*' (leading by example), '*ing madyo mangun karso*' (fostering enthusiasm), and '*tut wuri handayani*' (providing encouragement from behind). This strategy fosters the development of religious character, independence, discipline, tolerance and democratic values in learners (Faqih Utsman, 2022).

The experience-based approach is the cornerstone of the 21st-century PAI learning model, which positions direct experience as the medium for the internalisation of Islamic values. Drawing on the ideas of John Dewey, this article proposes three models for the development of Islamic Education (PAI): Experiential Religious Learning, Problem-Based Islamic Learning, and Democratic-Dialogic Islamic Learning, which emphasise direct experience, reflective dialogue, and problem-solving as the core of the learning process (Salisah et al., 2024). The Experiential Religious Learning model positions experience as the primary foundation of PAI learning, in line with Dewey's principle that knowledge arises from the interaction between the individual and their environment; thus, PAI is no longer taught solely through verbal explanations, but through authentic and meaningful religious experiences (Safrudin, 2026).

The 21st-century PAI learning model must also be responsive to the diversity of pupils' intelligences. Research conducted by Khafifatulfian & Misbah,(2023) analysed 21st-century learning models—namely the quantum, cooperative and differentiated learning models—based on multiple intelligences in the PAI subject. The findings indicate that teaching which accommodates diverse intelligences (linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and existential) can significantly enhance the effectiveness of learning and student engagement. The differentiation model, for example, enables teachers to adapt learning content, processes and outcomes to each student's intelligence profile and learning style, thereby making learning more personalised and inclusive (Khafifatulfian & Misbah, 2023).

The principles of 21st-century learning planning that must be integrated into the Islamic Education (PAI) model include analysing student needs, mapping 4C competencies, integrating technology, developing authentic assessment, and continuous reflection (Nasution, 2024). Teachers need to conduct an in-depth analysis

of student characteristics (including Generation Z and Generation Alpha, who are digital natives), design activities that stimulate critical and creative thinking, facilitate collaboration through group projects, and develop communication skills through presentations, discussions, and the publication of students' work (Zakariyah et al., 2022). Furthermore, 21st-century PAI learning must integrate Islamic values and ethics into every activity, so that it not only develops cognitive competences and skills but also shapes authentic character and spirituality (Salsabila, 2018).

Overall, the 21st-century PAI learning model is an integrative synthesis of various innovative approaches—technology-based, collaborative, problem-based, experience-based, inquiry-based, project-based, and local wisdom-based—designed to produce learning that is relevant, meaningful, and transformative. This model aims not only to enhance pupils' religious understanding but also to foster character, spirituality and life skills relevant to the challenges of the 21st century, including digital literacy, religious moderation, tolerance and social responsibility. Implementing this model requires commitment from all stakeholders—teachers, curriculum developers, policymakers and local communities—to work together to realise an Islamic Education programme that not only fosters cognitive development but also shapes character, spirituality and transformative social awareness.

Conclusion

The 21st-century Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning model, which synthesises experience-based approaches, local wisdom and transformative pedagogy, offers a holistic, contextual and transformative conceptual framework to address the challenges of IRE in the digital and globalised era. The integration of these three approaches results in learning that focuses not only on the transfer of cognitive knowledge but also on the internalisation of authentic Islamic values through direct experience; the contextualisation of local culture, which grounds universal Islamic values within the socio-cultural reality of the learners; and critical reflection that fosters profound and sustainable transformation of perspectives. The synergy of these three pillars aligns with the demands of 21st-century competencies (the 4Cs: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication) as well as the strengthening of character and spirituality relevant to the characteristics of Generations Z and Alpha as digital natives.

The implementation of this 21st-century Islamic Education (PAI) learning model requires a paradigm shift from the teacher as a knowledge transmitter to the teacher as a facilitator, mediator and designer of learning experiences who devises learning activities that integrate direct experience (such as community service projects, documentation of local traditions, and campaigns for religious moderation), local wisdom values (through folk tales, proverbs, traditions, and the involvement of traditional and religious leaders), and transformative reflection (through learning journals, critical discussions, and muhasabah an-nafs) into a coherent whole.

Furthermore, the integration of information and communication technology, the application of innovative models (Project-Based Learning, Inquiry-Based Learning, the Flipped Classroom), and the development of authentic assessment that measures cognitive, affective and psychomotor dimensions are essential components for ensuring learning that is relevant, meaningful and transformative.

Overall, the systematic synthesis of experience-based approaches, local wisdom, and transformative pedagogy within the 21st-century PAI learning model represents a shift from an educational paradigm focused on knowledge transmission to one that emphasises perspective transformation and the empowerment of learners as agents of social change. This model is not only theoretically relevant but also practically applicable in addressing the challenges of Islamic Education in the digital age, including moral decline, individualism, dependence on digital devices, vulnerability to radical narratives, and the disconnect between the Islamic values taught and daily life practices. Consequently, the implementation of this 21st-century PAI learning model requires a commitment from all stakeholders—teachers, curriculum developers, policymakers, and local communities—to work together to realise an Islamic Education (PAI) that not only fosters cognitive development but also shapes character, spirituality, and transformative social awareness.

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