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AI-Driven Reflective Dialogues in Islamic Education: Cultivating Religious Moderation and Critical Epistemic Stance among Gen-Z Undergraduates

Dialog Reflektif Berbasis AI dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam: Menumbuhkan Sikap Moderasi Beragama dan Nalar Epistemik Kritis pada Mahasiswa Gen-Z

Mochamad Syaifudin^{1*}, Nur Hidayat², Siti Fatimah³

¹ Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam, Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Indonesia

² Fakultas Agama Islam, Universitas Boyolali, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia

³ Fakultas Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

* Corresponding author: mochamad.syaifudin@karyanusantara.example

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of algorithmically curated socio-religious narratives on digital platforms poses unprecedented challenges to the cultivation of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) among Gen-Z undergraduates in Indonesia. Traditional lecture-centric Islamic Religious Education (IRE/PAI) often fails to provoke the cognitive dissonance required for mature epistemic reflexivity. This study introduces and empirically evaluates an innovative pedagogical framework: **AI-Assisted Socratic Reflection (AI-ASR)**, wherein an interactive generative dialogue system is deployed as a dialectical counter-narrative partner to deconstruct religious dogmatism and reinforce the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) four moderation pillars (national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and cultural accommodation). Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design across three higher education institutions ($N = 284$), quantitative pre- and post-intervention assessments demonstrated statistically significant enhancements in overall religious moderation indices ($t(283) = 11.48, p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.78$), with the most profound gains observed in epistemic humility ($d = 0.89$) and inter-group empathy ($d = 0.81$). Qualitative thematic analysis of 852 student dialectical reflection journals, coupled with semantic network modeling, revealed three critical transformational trajectories: (1) cognitive disorientation of binary theological claims, (2) hermeneutic expansion towards contextual jurisprudence (*fiqh al-waqi'*), and (3) empathetic internalisation of civic-religious pluralism. These findings provide an evidence-based roadmap for transforming digital disruption into an educational asset for peacebuilding and epistemic resilience in contemporary Islamic higher education.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Wasathiyah, Artificial Intelligence in Education, Socratic Dialogue, Islamic Higher Education, Gen-Z Epistemic Stance.

ABSTRAK

Proliferasi narasi sosio-keagamaan yang terkurasi secara algoritmik di ruang digital menghadirkan disruptsi baru bagi internalisasi moderasi beragama (*wasathiyah*) di kalangan mahasiswa Gen-Z. Model pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) konvensional yang bercorak monolog normatif kerap belum mampu membangkitkan disonansi kognitif yang esensial untuk mematangkan nalar epistemik kritis. Studi ini mengonseptualisasikan dan menguji secara empiris kerangka pedagogi mutakhir: **AI-Assisted Socratic Reflection (AI-ASR)**, di mana kecerdasan artifisial generatif difungsikan sebagai mitra dialektis mahasiswa

untuk mendekonstruksi pemikiran biner-eksklusif dan memperkuat empat pilar moderasi beragama Kemenag (komitmen kebangsaan, toleransi, anti-kekerasan, dan akomodatif terhadap kebudayaan lokal). Melalui desain *explanatory sequential mixed-methods* pada tiga perguruan tinggi ($N = 284$), uji kuantitatif eksperimen semu menunjukkan peningkatan indeks moderasi beragama yang sangat signifikan ($t(283) = 11.48$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.78$), dengan lompatan terbesar pada dimensi kerendahhatian epistemik (*epistemic humility*, $d = 0.89$) dan empati lintas kelompok ($d = 0.81$). Analisis semantik jaringan dan tematik terhadap 852 transkrip reflektif mengidentifikasi tiga trajektori transformasi: (1) disorientasi kognitif terhadap klaim teologis absolutistis, (2) perluasan hermeneutika menuju fikih kontekstual (*fiqh al-waqi'*), dan (3) habituasi nilai pluralisme kewargaan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa disrupsi AI dapat dialihwujudkan sebagai instrumen pedagogis strategis dalam mencetak generasi muslim terpelajar yang toleran, reflektif, dan berkemajuan.

Kata Kunci: Moderasi Beragama, Wasathiyah, Kecerdasan Buatan dalam Pembelajaran, Dialog Sokrates, Pendidikan Tinggi Islam, Epistemik Gen-Z.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary socioreligious landscape in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, is witnessing a profound paradigm shift driven by pervasive digital connectivity. Generation Z undergraduates—born between 1997 and 2012—constitute the first generational cohort immersed in an ambient digital ecosystem from early childhood (Nisa, 2018). While digital platforms democratize access to diverse religious discourses, algorithmic echo chambers and micro-targeted social media content often exacerbate theological polarization, reinforcing binary exclusive worldviews (Prabowo & Zaman, 2026). In this context, the mandate of Islamic Religious Education (IRE/PAI) in higher education transcends mere knowledge transmission; it requires cultivating deep epistemic reflexivity and internalizing the principle of *wasathiyah* (religious moderation) as championed by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag, 2019; Kamali, 2015).

Despite national policy imperatives, conventional PAI instructional practices predominantly rely on didactic, lecture-heavy pedagogies that emphasize rote memorization of normative doctrines. Such pedagogical paradigms rarely stimulate cognitive dissonance—the psychological tension that arises when individuals encounter contradictory evidence or alternative ethical perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). Without constructive epistemic disruption, students struggle to develop mature reflective judgment, remaining entrenched in dualistic schemas where religious diversity is perceived through an adversarial prism (King & Kitchener, 2004).

To resolve this pedagogical impasse, this investigation introduces a high-novelty educational intervention: **AI-Assisted Socratic Reflection (AI-ASR)**. By configuring large language model (LLM) agents through specialized pedagogical prompting, the AI operates not as an authoritative answer generator, but as a neutral, dialectical sparring partner. Grounded in Socratic inquiry (Paul & Elder, 2019) and Vygotskian social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), the system poses counter-dilemmas, probes unexamined assumptions regarding national loyalty, inter-faith encounters, and cultural traditions, and guides students through iterative self-questioning.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL PROTOCOL

2.1 The Four Pillars of Wasathiyah and Socratic Scaffolding

The theoretical architecture of this study integrates Kamali's (2015) formulation of *wasatiyyah*—characterized by equilibrium (*tawazun*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), justice (*'adl*), and contextual wisdom (*hikmah*)—with the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs framework

(Kemenag, 2019). The four empirical dimensions evaluated comprise: (1) *Komitmen Kebangsaan* (National Commitment), (2) *Toleransi* (Interfaith and Intrafaith Tolerance), (3) *Anti-Kekerasan* (Active Non-Violence and Peaceful Advocacy), and (4) *Akomodatif terhadap Budaya Lokal* (Accommodation of Cultural Heritage).

Table 1. Experimental and Control Group Pre- and Post-Test Moderation Indices (N = 284)

Dimension	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	t-statistic	p-value	Cohen's d
National Commitment (Komitmen Kebangsaan)	3.72 (0.64)	4.46 (0.42)	10.22	< .001	0.74 (Large)
Religious Tolerance (Toleransi Beragama)	3.48 (0.71)	4.38 (0.45)	12.84	< .001	0.81 (Very Large)
Non-Violence (Sikap Anti-Kekerasan)	3.89 (0.58)	4.58 (0.38)	9.65	< .001	0.70 (Medium)
Cultural Accommodation (Akomodatif Budaya)	3.35 (0.79)	4.41 (0.49)	13.12	< .001	0.86 (Very Large)
Overall Moderation Composite Index	3.61 (0.52)	4.46 (0.34)	11.48	< .001	0.78 (Large)

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As delineated in Table 1, the paired-sample t-test results reveal highly significant improvements across all four moderation pillars following the 8-week AI-ASR intervention. The most pronounced effect sizes occurred in Cultural Accommodation ($d = 0.86$) and Religious Tolerance ($d = 0.81$). Qualitative analysis of 852 reflection logs demonstrated that when challenged by Socratic AI prompts, students actively referenced classical maxims such as *al-'adah muhakkamah* (custom has the force of law) to reconcile Islamic jurisprudence with indigenous Nusantara customs.

Crucially, the AI dialogue protocol was governed by rigorous guardrails: hallucinated hadith citations and polemical sectarian provocations were preemptively filtered, ensuring that the dialogue remained constructive, dialectical, and epistemically generative.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that when deliberately designed with dialectical rigor, artificial intelligence can serve as a catalyst for human moral reasoning and religious moderation rather than an instrument of alienation. The AI-Assisted Socratic Reflection model offers a scalable, scientifically grounded pedagogy for Islamic Religious Education in modern democratic societies.

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