

THE DIALECTICS OF RELIGIOUS PURIFICATION, TRADITION PRESERVATION, AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article examines the dialectics between religious purification, tradition preservation, and global challenges within the context of Islamic religious education in Indonesia. The study employs library research with a descriptive-critical method, reviewing classical and contemporary literature related to Islam Nusantara, globalization, modernization, radicalism, and religious education practices. The findings reveal that religious purification emphasizes returning religious practices to authoritative texts, whereas the preservation of local traditions highlights the integration of cultural values as a means of social harmonization and strengthening community identity. The tension between these two orientations influences the curriculum, learning strategies, and religious experiences at the local level. Globalization and modernization add further complexity by introducing transnational authorities and value homogenization, while also creating opportunities for cultural glocalization and the revitalization of local traditions. Religious radicalism emerges as an extreme response to social change, whereas cultural resistance functions as an adaptive mechanism for communities to maintain local wisdom. This study underscores the need for Islamic religious education to negotiate between doctrinal purity, local cultural contexts, and global demands in order to produce adaptive, contextual, and relevant educational practices. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and culture, inclusive Islamic educational strategies, and the development of literature on Islam Nusantara in the global era.

Keywords: Religious purification, Tradition preservation, Islamic religious education, Globalization, Islam Nusantara, Radicalism, Glocalization.

Introduction

Globalization as a historical and multidimensional process has brought significant changes to the social, economic, and cultural landscapes of societies worldwide (Appadurai, 1996). Advances in information technology have enabled massive and rapid exchanges of knowledge, creating new social spaces that are no longer limited by geography. For Muslim communities, this condition opens opportunities for broader intellectual interaction and easier access to global religious sources. However, on the other hand, the penetration of global modernity has also triggered identity shocks, especially among Muslim communities in regions with strong local cultural roots, such as the Nusantara (Woodward, 2011). The tension between global and local values then influences how Muslim societies understand, interpret, and practice Islamic teachings (Hudson & Azra, 2008).

This challenge becomes even more prominent with the emergence of religious purification movements whose agenda is to restore religious practices to what is considered the most authentic form. In many cases, purification movements view local traditions such as *selamatan*, *tahlilan*, *hadrah* arts, or customary rituals as forms of syncretism that must be avoided (Eliraz, 2004; Bruinessen, 2013). The epistemological tension between puritan groups and those who emphasize the significance of local cultural contexts has long characterized the historical development of Islam in Indonesia (Fealy & White, 2012). Islam Nusantara, as discussed by Alwi (2022) and Mustamir (2023), demonstrates that the integration of Islam and local culture is a historical process that unfolds dynamically through dialogue, adaptation, and negotiation.

In the global era, another challenge arises from modernization, which not only influences societal mindsets but also shifts religious authority. The emergence of digital scholars, religious influencers, and transnational da'wah networks has generated new standards of religiosity that often lack sensitivity to local diversity (Pusvisasari et al., 2024). This is where Islamic Religious Education (PAI) faces serious challenges. PAI is not only required to teach religious doctrines but also to cultivate moderation, strengthen cultural identity, and respond to strong currents of purification and globalization, which at times risk marginalizing local traditions.

The phenomenon of radicalism further complicates the relationship between religious purification and the preservation of local wisdom. Radical groups often exploit the identity uncertainty of younger generations as an entry point, while simultaneously attacking local traditions as deviations (Hwang, 2018; Salapudin et al., 2023). However, local communities also demonstrate forms of resistance through the revitalization of traditions and local wisdom as mechanisms to maintain social harmony and cultural identity. Azra (in Hudson & Azra, 2008) explains that globalization not only produces cultural homogenization but also opens spaces for resistance to new identity standards through the strengthening of local cultural roots.

In this context, the contributions of Islamic education thought and research become highly important. Several works by Imron Fauzi, for example, emphasize that Islamic education in pesantren and madrasah grounded in local culture possesses the strength to cultivate moderation and inclusive religious identity. In his research on the dialectics of pesantren elites in developing local curricula, Fauzi (2019) shows that the local curriculum developed by pesantren not only preserves tradition but also serves as a cultural strategy to harmonize Islamic values with local culture. In another study, Fauzi and Sabila (2022) argue that participatory and contextual PAI instructional strategies can strengthen the internalization of religious moderation values in schools.

These findings align with various other studies demonstrating that the integration of moderation values and local culture in Islamic Religious Education is effective in reducing tendencies toward exclusivism while developing student character that is moderate, adaptive, and rooted in tradition.

Considering the complexity of the relationship among religious purification, tradition preservation, globalization, and Islamic education, the study of the dialectics of religious purification, tradition preservation, and global challenges in Islamic Religious Education becomes highly relevant. This study is expected to offer a comprehensive analytical framework for developing Islamic education that is responsive to contemporary changes while remaining grounded in the local cultural roots that have long served as the foundation of Islam Nusantara (Alwi, 2022).

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method to conduct an in-depth analysis of the relationships among religious purification, the preservation of local traditions, globalization, modernization, and radicalism within the context of Islamic education. As a purely literature-based study, this research relies on written sources as its primary data, including classical works (*turats*), contemporary literature, indexed journal articles, research reports, policy documents, and other relevant academic publications. The focus of the study is directed toward texts that discuss the relationship between religion and culture, Islamic moderation, societal responses to globalization, as well as literature examining radicalism and the dynamics of tradition preservation in Islamic educational settings.

The data collection procedure involved three main steps: (1) identifying sources through systematic searches in academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Sinta, and Scopus; (2) selecting sources based on specific criteria, including relevance to the topic, author authority, publisher credibility, and year of publication to ensure representation of the latest developments in religion–culture studies; and (3) organizing the literature through bibliographic recording, thematic categorization, and annotated

review of the sources. Works by key scholars such as Clifford Geertz, Abdurrahman Wahid, M. Amin Abdullah, as well as contemporary studies on Islamic education, were also analyzed to provide deeper theoretical perspectives.

Data analysis was carried out using content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis was applied to examine argumentative structures, key concepts, and ideological tendencies in texts related to religious purification, local tradition preservation, the influence of globalization, and the emergence of radicalism. Subsequently, thematic analysis was used to categorize literature findings into the three central themes of this article: (1) the dialectics between religious purification and local traditions, (2) the impact of globalization–modernization on religious practices and Islamic education, and (3) radicalism and resistance to local culture. The analysis process was conducted iteratively through close reading, conceptual coding, argument synthesis, and cross-source interpretation.

To ensure the credibility and dependability of the literature-based findings, several academic procedures were carried out: triangulation of sources by comparing classical works, empirical studies, and contemporary theoretical analyses; critical evaluation of the validity of arguments in each piece of literature; and peer-informed reading, referring to academic standards used in relevant previous studies. Additionally, the researcher maintained auditability by systematically documenting the literature search process, selection criteria, and analytical synthesis, enabling readers to retrace the research process.

This library research method was chosen because it enables a comprehensive analysis of theoretical constructions, discursive dynamics, and the developmental direction of scholarship on the religion–culture relationship within Islamic education. Thus, this study produces conceptually rich and methodologically robust insights in accordance with the standards of reputable Islamic education journals.

Results and Discussion

Religious Purification vs. Tradition Preservation

The tension between religious purification and the preservation of local traditions must be situated within the historical framework of Islamic dissemination in the Nusantara, which was cultural and dialogical in nature. The spread of Islam across the archipelago occurred through trade networks, pesantren institutions, and cultural interaction, allowing local rituals and cultural practices such as *selamatan*, *tahlilan*, pilgrimage, and religious arts to become important media for internalizing Islamic teachings (Woodward, 2011; Fealy & White, 2012). From a historical–theoretical perspective, this process of indigenization produced a distinctive form of Islam—inclusive,

adaptive, and locally rooted—which many scholars identify as the foundation of Islam Nusantara (Alwi, 2022; Pusvisasari, Herliyanto, & Hudallah, 2024).

On the normative level, waves of purification (manifested through Salafism, Wahhabism, or textualist reformism) demand the return of religious practice to textual references interpreted literally. These movements view several local practices as potential forms of syncretism or even threats to the purity of *aqidah* (Eliraz, 2004; van Bruinessen, 2013). However, purification approaches often overlook the social-traditional functions of these practices—such as strengthening communal solidarity, symbolic reproduction, and mechanisms of social reconciliation—which have long constituted key reasons for preserving tradition.

From an educational standpoint, this tension directly affects the curriculum and pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). When purification suppresses local content, the curriculum tends to adopt a normative-transnational orientation; conversely, integrating local traditions requires a design of instructional materials and methods that can explore local values without abandoning *shari'ah* foundations. Fauzi's research on local curriculum development in pesantren shows that pesantren elites actively formulate curricula that preserve local values while affirming Islamic principles—a pragmatic and contextual educational strategy (Fauzi, 2019). These findings reinforce the argument that tradition preservation in education is not mere conservative rhetoric but a curricular pragmatism serving as a vehicle for moderation and social cohesion.

Theoretically, a dialogical solution may be built through the *maqāṣidī* evaluative principle: assessing traditions based on how far they reinforce the objectives of *shari'ah* (justice, humanity, social order) rather than judging them solely by their outward forms. This approach opens opportunities for reconstructing tradition—preserving ethical and beneficial elements, reforming problematic aspects, and educating future generations through the historical narratives and values underlying these practices (Hudson & Azra, 2008; Eliraz, 2004). Thus, the dialogue between purification and preservation must be understood as a normative-political process within education that requires curriculum policy, teacher training, and culturally sensitive public educational narratives.

The Influence of Globalization and Modernization

Globalization—especially in the form of digital platforms, cross-border da'wah networks, and social media—has transformed the landscape of religious authority. Local authorities (kiai, traditional leaders) are no longer the only references; transnational scholars, online preachers, and digital religious content now shape norms of religious practice (Appadurai, 1996; Fealy & White, 2012). This shift tends to standardize religious practices and promote homogenization, placing local practices that do not align with transnational narratives at risk of losing their social legitimacy.

However, globalization is not purely destructive. The concept of *glocalization* demonstrates that local elements may transform into new forms compatible with contemporary audiences. A concrete example in the educational field is the adaptation of PAI curricula that incorporate studies of Islam Nusantara, participatory pedagogical methods, and digital literacy while simultaneously nurturing an appreciation for local traditions (Pusvisasari et al., 2024). The work of Fauzi & Sabila (2022) highlights several applied studies, including the development of SFE (Student Facilitator & Explaining) learning strategies and the integration of moderation values, illustrating how educational practice can mediate global-local dualities through curriculum and pedagogy.

Furthermore, modernization brings new competence demands for Islamic educational institutions: digital literacy, intercultural communication, and critical reasoning skills. Pesantren and madrasah capable of combining locally grounded curricula with mastery of global competencies have the potential to produce graduates who are moderate, adaptive, and resistant to radical narratives. Empirical studies in PAI show that when local content is presented in relevant formats (digital media, community-based projects, experiential learning), tradition can be revitalized as a source of value reinforcement rather than merely an object of conservative preservation.

Radicalism and Resistance to Local Culture

Radicalism exploits identity gaps produced by the erosion of traditional institutions and social inequality. Groups promoting extreme purification use digital platforms to disseminate narratives that reject local traditions by labeling them innovations (*bid'ah*) or polytheistic (*shirik*) (Hwang, 2018; van Bruinessen, 2013). Their strategies become effective when religious education fails to equip learners with textual literacy, critical thinking skills, and contextual historical understanding of local practices.

However, social responses are not passive. Cultural resistance emerges in various forms: recontextualizing rituals, integrating cultural values into moderate da'wah practices, and formulating educational policies that protect local cultural spaces. The concept of *cultural defense* suggests that tradition revitalization is an adaptive strategy against homogenization (Appadurai; Salapudin et al., 2023). In Islamic education, deradicalization strategies are more effective when grounded in curricular reinforcement that integrates historical understanding, critical-thinking exercises, empathy development, and media literacy. The study by Fauzi & Sabila (2022) on participatory learning strategies highlights how learning methods that provide space for dialogue and peer facilitation (SFE) can deepen commitment to moderate values and reduce susceptibility to radical messages.

Synergistically, the findings of this literature review affirm that preventing radicalism and preserving local traditions need not be contradictory; rather, they can form parts of a cohesive educational strategy in which religious education performs a dual role: (1) cultivating theological

firmness that is critical of harmful normative claims, and (2) grounding Islamic teachings within cultural contexts that foster social solidarity. Practical implementation requires curriculum reformulation, enhanced teacher capacity (training in local history and dialogical methods), and education policies that facilitate collaboration among pesantren, madrasah, and indigenous communities.

Based on theoretical review and empirical references, several practical implications for Islamic education policy emerge: first, developing an integrative PAI curriculum that combines textual studies, *maqāṣid* analysis, and local wisdom; second, teacher training programs focused on historical-cultural competence, media literacy, and dialogical pedagogy; third, institutional support for school/pesantren-based cultural revitalization programs redesigned for digital contexts; and fourth, strengthened evaluative research (action research) on curricular interventions aimed at reducing susceptibility to radical narratives.

Future research agendas include multi-site comparative studies on the effectiveness of integrating traditions into PAI curricula in fostering student tolerance; longitudinal studies on pesantren alumni who experience locally grounded curricula to observe long-term identity and social cohesion outcomes; and experimental intervention studies on pedagogical methodologies (e.g., project-based learning) for cultivating religious moderation.

This study presents novelty through a comprehensive analysis that simultaneously maps three major issues—religious purification vs. tradition preservation, the influence of globalization and modernization, and radicalism and cultural resistance—within a unified epistemic framework of Islamic religious education. Unlike previous studies that generally examine these issues separately, this research integrates philological, historical, and sociological perspectives to present a more holistic dialectic of religion and culture. Additionally, the study offers originality by analyzing epistemological interventions in Islamic education, particularly through the reconstruction of learning materials and the strengthening of moderation values based on local wisdom. This approach fills a gap left by earlier research that tended to focus more on macro religious phenomena rather than on how these dynamics translate into pedagogical practices and PAI teaching tools.

The contribution of this study lies in providing a new analytical framework for developing Islamic education that is responsive to the clash between religious purification and local tradition while remaining relevant to globalization challenges. This research offers an integrative model that educators can use to design curricula, learning materials, and instructional strategies capable of maintaining the authenticity of Islamic teachings without negating local cultural values. Beyond its theoretical contribution to strengthening religion-culture scholarship, this study also delivers practical implications for Islamic education policy—especially in reinforcing religious moderation, enriching PAI content with cultural wisdom, and formulating

radicalism-prevention strategies through the adaptive recontextualization of Islamic traditions. In doing so, the study positions Islamic education as a strategic arena for cultivating a harmonious relationship between doctrinal purity and contemporary socio-cultural dynamics.

Conclusion

The study on the *Dialectics of Religious Purification, Tradition Preservation, and Global Challenges in Islamic Religious Education* affirms that religious dynamics in Indonesia unfold through an ongoing dialectical process. Religious purification, the preservation of local traditions, and the influence of globalization are not mutually exclusive entities; rather, they are three interacting forces that shape the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the contemporary era. The findings indicate that the push for religious purification emerges as an effort to safeguard the purity of Islamic teachings from practices perceived as lacking theological legitimacy. At the same time, local traditions—long functioning as a means of internalizing Islamic values—continue to hold a strategic position as media for education, cultural da‘wah, and the formation of communal identity. The dialectics between these elements illustrate that PAI requires an approach that is not only textual and normative but also historical, anthropological, and contextual.

In the context of globalization and modernization, the study reveals that PAI faces both structural and epistemological challenges. Global knowledge flows, digital media, and transnational Islamic networks broaden public access to international religious sources, yet simultaneously shift traditional authorities such as local scholars, pesantren, and indigenous communities. Globalization accelerates the transformation of religious learning patterns, introduces new authorities who may not fully comprehend local contexts, and circulates Islamic narratives that tend to be standardized, often neglecting the wisdom embedded in Nusantara culture. These developments directly affect curriculum construction, teaching methodologies, and value orientations in PAI, which must now bridge the demands of doctrinal purification, appreciation of local traditions, and the realities of an ever-changing global environment.

Religious radicalism—one of the consequences of global-local tensions—highlights the urgency of integrating core Islamic values with the preservation of local traditions within educational settings. The study finds that radicalism frequently exploits identity dislocation caused by globalization and promotes rigid, textualist, and exclusionary models of religiosity. However, societal resistance to cultural homogenization demonstrates that local wisdom remains a strong social bulwark for sustaining moderate religious expression. Within the PAI context, such resistance underscores that religious education cannot be separated from local traditions as spaces for value internalization, character formation, and strengthening of national identity.

Overall, this study underscores that the central challenge for Islamic Religious Education in the global era is not choosing between religious purification and tradition preservation, but managing their dialectics in a way that produces an educational model that is moderate, critical, and relevant to contemporary change. Islam in the Nusantara has historically demonstrated the capacity to harmonize with local culture without compromising the principle of *tawhīd*; this legacy forms a crucial foundation for the advancement of PAI. Thus, PAI must be designed as a space for synthesizing the purity of Islamic teachings, the richness of local wisdom, and sensitivity to global dynamics. Through such creative and integrative approaches, PAI can play a strategic role in cultivating a Muslim community that is inclusive, virtuous, and responsive to the challenges of modernity.

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