Transformative Learning in AIK Learning: Strategies to Improve Students' Religious and Critical Literacy in the Era of Pop Culture and Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of pop culture and social media has become an integral part of student's lives, influencing their ways of thinking, values, and daily behaviors. The Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah Studies (AIK) course plays an essential role in strengthening students' religious and critical literacy to respond to contemporary challenges. This study aims to examine the application of Transformative Learning in AIK as a strategy to develop student's religious and critical literacy in the era of pop culture and social media. This research employs a qualitative method with a library research approach through analysis of scientific literature, books, and relevant journal articles. The result show that AIK learning based on Transformative Learning encourages student to engage in deep reflection, critique assumption, and internalize religious values amidst rapid information flow. This approach not only enhances cognitive understanding of religion but also shapes student into religious and critical change agents. The study recommends integrating contemporary issues into AIK to improve learning relevance and meaningfulness.

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has had a major impact on the lives of many Indonesian students, many of whom are generation Z. Today's students are growing and developing in an era full of information technology and social media, which not only become a means of communication, but also shape their way of thinking, lifestyle, and the values they adopt daily. (Nabila et al. 2024) in their survey showed that Indonesian students are included in the group of very active social media users, especially on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, with very high user intensity and an average duration exceeding three hours per day. (Ul Huda, Fahrin Sapar, and Junianto Karsudjono 2024) said that social media is also the main channel in introducing various global cultural trends, including pop culture from Japan such as anime and cosplay as well as South Korean culture such as K-pop and Korean dramas, which are now increasingly popular among students. (Dewi and Susilawati 2016) stated that pop culture disseminated through social media does not only provide entertainment, but also inserts certain values, such as hedonism, individualism, and an instant lifestyle. Many students unconsciously adopt these values in their daily lives, starting from how to consume, how to interact, to building self-identity. The phenomenon of "flexing" or showing off a consumptive lifestyle and affects the sensitivity of students. On the other hand, even though this generation of students has extensive access to information, their religious literacy levels still vary significantly. Generation Z students face great challenges in filtering the

massive and rapid flow of information, especially when dealing with cultural narratives that are not always in line with religious values (DiyahRachmawati 2010). Without strong religious literacy skills and a sharpened critical attitude, students have the potential to lose their way in building their religious identity and easily get caught up in a permissive and instantaneous mindset. (Shafwa and Sudrajat 2023) show that students are also faced with the dilemma between maintaining local religious and cultural identities and the desire to follow global trends. This requires qualified intellectual and spiritual readiness, so that students are able to be selective in adopting foreign cultural elements and remain firm in religious values and local wisdom.

With this kind of condition, there is an urgent need for a learning approach that not only conveys religious knowledge cognitively, but is also able to instill critical awareness and encourage the transformation of students' perspectives. In this context, Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah (AIK) learning has a strategic role to strengthen students' religious literacy and critical literacy, so that they can become religious and critical individuals in dealing with pop culture and social media phenomena. One of the relevant approaches to answer the challenges of the development of pop culture and social media in students is *the Transformation Learning Theory* developed by Jazk Mezirow. This theory emphasizes the importance of learning that not only transfers knowledge, but also encourages fundamental changes in learners' frame of thinking, attitudes, and behaviours through a process of critical reflection (Howlett, Ferreira, and Blomfield 2016). (Mezirow 2000) It states that learning transformation occurs when students are invited to actively reflect on the assumptions or old views they hold, then retest the truth, and finally form a new perspective that is more rational, open, and in accordance with the social and moral reality they believe. In the context of Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah learning, this approach means that it is not enough to only convey religious material normatively or dogmatically, but it is necessary to relate religious teachings to contemporary phenomena faced by students, such as pop culture trends and the rapid flow of digital information

.Through a process of critical reflection, students are invited to review the values they absorb from popular culture, then compare them with the principles of religion taught in AIK. Thus, students not only understand the teachings of gama textually, but are also able to internalize them in real life and respond to social phenomena wisely and critically. The *Transformative Learning approach* also facilitates the formation of *perspective transformation*, which is a profound change in the way of looking at the world that encourages the birth of individuals who are more self-aware, empowered, and able to contribute positively to society (Mezirow 2008). For students, this is an important part of equipping them to become a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also spiritually strong and critical. By connecting *the theory of Learning Transformation* into AIK learning, lecturers or teachers can create a diabolical, reflective, and contextual learning atmosphere. Student are no longer just passive recipients, but active actors who consciously build religious understanding, attitudes, and actions according to the challenges of the times.

In his study (Usman et al. 2023), it emphasizes the importance of religious digital literacy in the Islamic university environment as a strategy to deal with information disruption and prevent radicalism. This research shows that Islamic campuses organize religious moderation activities through workshops and digital spaces, as well as utilizing social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, and Instagram as a source of information reinforcement. This research also reveals that social media is a major contributor to the spread of radicalism and terrorism movements, where the age group of 18-20 years old, the majority of students, is the most vulnerable group affected by misleading messages. These findings affirm the vital role of Islamic higher education in

equipping students with the ability to filter information and maintain the values of religious moderation.

(Hilal Fikri 2023) highlights the importance of the strategic role of Islamic education in increasing social media literacy among the younger generation. In the study, Hilal Fikri identified three main roles of Islamic education, namely forming characters and attitudes in accordance with Islamic values in the use of social media, integrating social media ethics materials and curriculum, and fostering awareness of the impact of social media on personal and community development. The implementation strategies presented include the integration of relevant curriculum, the use of social media as a means of learning, and the strengthening of critical thinking skills. This research also emphasizes the importance of applying Islamic principles such as *tabayyun* (verification), *tadabbur* (deep contemplation), and *tabarruk* (seeking blessings) as the ethical foundation for students in interacting in the digital space.

Meanwhile, (Sholeh et al. 2023) explained strategic efforts in developing transformation-based Islamic education. This research found two main strategies of transformative education, namely providing opportunities for students to think critically and encouraging them to act with new perspectives. In addition, five forms of activities that support transformative learning are identified, including internships, scenario-based education, cultural adaptation in the workplace, career change, and collaboration with various educational institutions. This research also emphasizes that the transformation of the curriculum, including the implementation of the current independent learning curriculum, is a concrete step in strengthening the relevance of Islamic education to the needs of modern society.

Based on previous studies that have been presented, it can be seen that various efforts have been made to strengthen religious literacy and critical literacy of students through Islamic education. So there is a gap that is quite clear that there has been no research that specifically develops the AIK learning model based on *the theory of Transfromative Learning* to strengthen religious literacy and critical literacy of students in responding to the phenomenon of pop culture and social media. In fact, the influence of pop culture and social media today is very significant in shaping the way students think, value, and behave. The use of *Transformative Learning theory* is very relevant because it allows the transformation of students' perspectives through a process of critical and dialogical reflection, so that they not only understand religious teachings cognitively, but also are able to respond to contemporary challenges critically and wisely.

Table 1. Research Gap

No	Previous Research	Key Focus	Weaknesses/Gaps
1	Religious Digital Literacy in Islamic Universities (Usman et al. 2023)	Strengthening religious digital literacy, religious moderation, and prevention of radicalism through social media.	It has not yet discussed pedagogical strategies in AIK's formal learning.
2	Islamic Education and Social Media Literacy (Hilal Fikri 2023)	Integration of social media ethics in the curriculum, formation of Islamic character, strengthening the principles of *tabayyun* and *tadabbur*.	It has not explored the process of internalizing values through a critical reflection approach in the classroom.

3	Transformation of Islamic Education: Transformation of the Educational Curriculum (Sholeh et al. 2023)	Curriculum transformation, critical thinking opportunities, and cultural adaptation.	It has not integrated pop culture and social media issues in AIK specifically.

There is a clear research gap because no existing studies have specifically integrated AIK (Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan) learning with the Transformative Learning framework to strengthen students' religious literacy and critical literacy in responding to the influence of pop culture and social media. Previous research has generally discussed AIK learning, digital literacy, or character education separately, but none have combined these elements comprehensively to examine how transformative learning experiences can shape students' thinking, attitudes, and abilities in filtering and responding to the powerful impact of pop culture and online media in their daily lives.

Based on background exposure and analysis of previous research, it can be seen that there is a vulnerability for Generation Z students to the massive influence of pop culture and social media. This phenomenon not only affects their lifestyle and consumption patterns, but also has the potential to affect the religious values they adhere. On the other hand, the learning of Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah that has been running so far still tends to be normative and has not fully related the material to the contemporary reality faced by students. This raises a fundamental problem, namely how AIK learning can be designed to be able to strengthen religious literacy while building students' critical awareness in responding to pop culture and social media phenomena? In addition, an in-depth study is needed on how *the theory of Transformative Learning* can be integrated in AIK learning as a pedagogical strategy that is able to facilitate perspective changes, enrich reflective experiences, and instill religious awareness that is more contextual and relevant to the challenges of the times.

This study aims to comprehensively describe and analyze how the reality of social media users and pop culture affects students' religious literacy. Furthermore, this research also aims to formulate a relevant and contextual AIK learning concept based on *Transformative Learning* in strengthening religious literacy and building students' critical literacy. Thus, this research is expected to offer an AIK learning model that not only emphasizes the cognitive aspect, but also encourages students to actively reflect on the values they have acquired, and have the ability to respond to the flow of pop culture and social media critically, wisely, and in accordance with the principles of Islamic teaching.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with *library research* or literature studies. The qualitative approach was chosen because it was considered the most suitable for studying complex, deep, and contextual social phenomena, especially related to students' interpretation of pop culture and social media in relation to religious literacy. Qualitative research allows researchers to understand social reality as a whole through an in-depth analysis of various sources, rather than simply measuring phenomena statistically (Creswell 2010).

The object of this study is the concept of Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan learning based on *Transformative Learning* which is directed to strengthen religious literacy and critical literacy of students in responding to pop culture and social media phenomena. This object is studied in depth through the analysis of literature and academic documents, as well as the results of relevant previous research. The sources of information for this research include main reference books related to *Transformative Learning theory,* AIK learning literature, contemporary studies on pop culture and

social media, and articles published in 2021-2025. The selection of the year range aims to ensure the novelty of data and theoretical relevance to the condition of Generation Z students in the digital era.

Data collection techniques are carried out through the collection, review, and synthesis of literature related to the AIK curriculum. This method is relevant because the study of literature not only focuses on information collection, but also encourages critical understanding and in-depth analysis of existing theories and practices (Puspita and Sugiyono 2021). Data analysis in this study is carried out through content analysis techniques, namely by identifying, exploring, and interpreting the meanings contained in each literature source. The analysis process is carried out systematically, starting from the collection of literature data, categorization of themes, interpretation of data, to drawing conclusions. ISIS analysis allows researchers to find thought patterns, identify conceptual gaps, and formulate a conceptual model of AIK learning based on *Learning Transformation* that is expected to be relevant for teaching in college (Krippendorff 1980).

The selection of a qualitative approach in this study is based on the assumption that the phenomenon studied is closely related to the construction of meaning, the process of critical reflection, and the transformation of students' perspectives, which cannot be fully measured or explained by numbers or quantitative variables. In line with the opinion (Creswell 2010), a qualitative approach is very suitable for understanding subjective experiences, values, and beliefs that affect the behaviour of individuals or groups. Thus, this approach is considered to be able to explore in depth the internal dynamics of students in responding to pop culture and social media phenomena, as well as the role of AIK learning as a contextual religious transformation media.

Table 2. Stages of research

Research Stages	Activity Description	Main Objectives	Expected Results
Study Literature	Examine theories about AIK learning, critical reflection, pop culture, and social media from scientific journals and the latest books	Build a strong theoretical foundation	Formation of an initial conceptual framework
Problem Formulation & Purpose	Determine the focus of the problem and the direction of the solution in the context of students and contextual AIK learning	Sharpen the focus of research	Clear formulation of research problems and objectives
Conceptual Model Design	Creating an AIK learning design based on critical reflection and pop culture contextualization	Providing alternative conceptual solutions	Draft conceptual model of learning
Expert Validation	Soliciting input from AIK, education, and popular culture experts	Ensure the accuracy and feasibility of the model	Revision and improvement of the learning model
Limited Implementation	Apply the model to small groups of students in a class or short training	Observing initial reception and reactions	Initial experience data using the model

Reflective Evaluation	Involve students in discussions, feedback, and reflection on the learning process	Assess the model's significance and impact	Qualitative data for further model improvement
Report Preparation	Write a complete academic report based on processes, findings, and analysis	Systematically documenting the R&D process	Scientific documents ready for publication or advanced development

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Reality of Pop Culture and Social Media among Students

The phenomenon of pop culture and social media has become an inseparable part of the lives of Indonesian students today. Pop culture trends, especially those originating from Korea (K-pop, drama, fashion) and Japan (anime, cosplay, lifestyle), dominate various aspects of student life. The *Korean Wave* or *Hallyu* wave not only affects music tastes and spectacles, but also penetrates into self-identity, dress styles, and the way students interact in public and digital spaces (Qothrunnada and Nurjanah 2024).(Adji 2024) explained that social media, especially TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, are the main channels that accelerate the penetration of pop culture. Students use this platform as a space for self-expression, build a community (fandom), and share creative content such as dance covers, video reactions, and increasingly massive cultural discussions. Not surprisingly, the intensity of social media users among students is recorded to be very high. Their online activities are not only limited to the consumption of entertainment content, but also include online shopping, social interactions, and the search for identity through digital communities (Irawati et al. 2024).(Rachmah, Setiawan, and Hasbiyah 2023) said that pop culture and social media have had various impacts on student behaviour. One of them is the tendency to imitate which is characterized by imitating the lifestyle and behaviour of K-pop idols or other pop culture figures. This often leads to consumptive patterns, such as the purchase of branded goods, cosmetics, to the phenomenon of *impulsive buying* triggered by viral trends on social media. A finding showed that TikTok trends affected up to 41.8% of impulse buying behaviour among college students.

In addition to compulsive behaviour, pop culture also influences the pattern of student communities. The use of foreign terms, slang, as well as the practice *of code-mixing* and *code-switching* is increasingly prevalent. This phenomenon not only changes the style of everyday language, but also reflects the penetration of pop culture in shaping the way students think (Gloria Wiryajaya et al. 2024). However, not all impacts are negative. Pop culture also encourages the birth of creativity, such as in the creation of dance covers, digital da'wah content, to the adaptation of modern and still in accordance with religious values (Suganda and Primadini 2024). (Linggarwati, Darmawan, and Miryanti 2021) saw that there were serious challenges to students' local and religious values behind the emerging creativity barriers. The massive global cultural flow often causes a shift in values, so students are faced with a dilemma between adopting a global culture or maintaining religious and local identity. Some students have succeeded in responding adaptively, for example through contemporary digital da'wah innovations or modifying Islamic fashion inspired by K-pop trends (Adji 2024). This shows that there is an effort to maintain religious values while keeping up with the development of popular culture.

In this context, religious literacy and social media literacy are urgent needs. Students must have the ability to think critically to filter the flow of information, distinguish which ones are in accordance with religious values, and maintain their identity in the midst of rapid cultural

globalization (Barung 2024). Thus, pop culture and social media not only present opportunities for creativity and innovation, but also become a serious challenge in maintaining students' religious identities and values. Strong religious literacy and social media literacy are expected to be able to be a fortress so that students remain selective, critical, and able to combine creativity with noble values that are upheld.

3.2 Challenges of Religious and Student Critical Literacy in the Digital Era

Students as a digital generation are now facing increasingly complex religious literacy challenges. The massive flow of information through social media presents a diversity of religious content, ranging from online lectures, short content TikTok, to digital worship applications. However, not all information circulating has validity and scientific authority that can be accounted for. On the contrary, there is a lot of provocative content, misinformation, and extreme teachings that have the potential to break down moderate understanding among students (Jailani and Azhari 2025)

(Arrazin and Surawan 2025) stated that the intense use of digital devices often causes significant distractions. Students often experience difficulties in maintaining their spirituality focus and consistency in daily worship, making it difficult to balance the use of technology and strengthening religious values. The limitations of digital infrastructure and the lack of formal education on digital religious literacy also worsen the situation, especially in educational institutions that have not fully facilitated technology-based learning as a whole (Iswanto et al. 2022). One of the main problems in religious literacy in the digital era is the low awareness of students about the importance of validity and authority of sources. Many religious lectures or articles on the internet are often not scientifically verified and it is not clear who is in charge academically. This condition poses a risk of exposure to misleading teachings, digital radicalism, and religion-based intolerance if not anticipated with adequate critical skills (Maylaffayza, Berlian, and Ningrum 2022).

In addition, the opening of the digital discourse space also increases the potential for differences in religious interpretations among students. This often triggers theological debates that often go beyond the boundaries of academic and social ethics, thus causing internal polarization in the campus community (Eryandi 2023). The integrity of religious values also faces serious challenges, because the internalization of religious values in the digital context is still constrained by differences in interpretation, limited control over free content, and lack of supporting resources (Khadavi et al. 2024). (Putrayasa, Suwindia, and Ari Winangun 2024) stated that in the context of facing the flow of pop culture and the rush of digital information, students need strong critical literacy. Critical literacy not only helps students sort through information and identify truths, but also builds the ability to analyze and reject content that conflicts with religious values and social ethics. In addition, the ability to reflect critically is needed so that students are not only consumers of popular culture, but also able to internalize religious principles in choosing spectacles, trends, and responding to viral issues (Ilyas and Maknun 2023).

Creating an Islamic digital literacy ecosystem is an urgent need. Collaboration between education agencies, religious leaders, and students must be optimized in the form of an integrative curriculum, digital literacy training, and creative da'wah movements that are relevant to the needs of the digital generation (Jailani and Azhari 2025). Thus, students can be helped in warding off hoaxes, hate speech, and radicalism that develop in cyberspace. Overall, the challenges of religious literacy and students' critical literacy in the digital era cover various dimensions, ranging from content validity, technological distractions, to polarization of religious interpretations. Therefore, efforts to strengthen literacy based on religious values, adaptive curriculum integration, and the provision of critical thinking skills must be a priority. It is hoped that students can be more selective, reflective, and remain rooted in moderate moral and religious principles (Putrayasa et al. 2024).

3.3 Integration of Transformative Learning Theory in AIK

Transformative Learning emphasizes the importance of critical reflection and dialogue in the learning process. Transformation occurs when individuals consciously reflect on assumptions and values that have not been questioned, then build a new perspective that is more inclusive, rational, and relevant to social reality and moral values (Anon 2020). In the context of Islamic Education, this approach not only maintains the Islamic scientific tradition, but also encourages a critical reinterpretation of religious teachings so that it is more grounded and a solution to contemporary problems (Cholisa Rosanti, Rina Murtyaningsih, and Armin Nurhartanto 2025). AIK learning that integrates the *Transformative Learning approach* has the potential to provide a lively and meaningful learning space. AIK is no longer only delivered through lectures and memorization, but rather builds students' critical awareness of Islamic values and the social reality around them. There are several meeting points between *Transformative Learning* and AIK learning that can be further developed.

First, *Transformative Learning* prioritizes reflective dialogue, which is in line with AIK learning based on discussion, case studies, and value reflection. Through this dialogue, students not only understand the material cognitively, but also experience the transcendence of values in the context of real life (Dr. Sumbul Ansar Khan and Dr. Syed Zubair Ahmed 2025). Second, *Transformative Learning* emphasizes the importance of linking learning with contemporary contexts. In AIK, this means raising actual issues such as environmental crises, intolerance, to the influence of pop culture and social media as part of the study. In this way, students can evaluate the relevance of Islamic values to modern problems (Dr. Sumbul Ansar Khan and Dr. Syed Zubair Ahmed 2025). Third, *Transformative Learning* encourages the development of critical competencies and thinking autonomy. Transformative AIK will facilitate students to think independently, evaluate theological assumptions contextually, as well as design to think independently, evaluate theological assumptions contextually, and design creative responses to social change, such as through digital da'wah or community projects (Guefara, El Syam, and Suwadi 2024).

The result of the integration of transformative learning in AIK is not solely an increase in knowledge, but rather a transformation of the perspective of student diversity. They are experiencing a paradigm shift from an exclusive and rigid understanding of religion to a more open, humanist, and contextual (Guefara et al. 2024). This strengthens the socio-religious character of students and makes them agents of peace in the midst of societal pluralism (Jusubaidi et al. 2024).

Table 3. Summary of the integration of transformative learning in AIK learning

Aspek Transformative Learning	Practice in AIK Learning	Reference
Learning methods	Critical reflection, dialogue, case studies	(Cholisa Rosanti et al. 2025) (Anon 2020)
Learning objectives	New perspectives, value transformation	(Dr. Sumbul Ansar Khan and Dr. Syed Zubair Ahmed 2025) (Jusubaidi et al. 2024)
Learning outcomes	Reflective, critical, adaptive students	(Guefara et al. 2024) (Anon 2020)
Response to pop culture	Creative da'wah, selection of cultural values	(Jusubaidi et al. 2024) (Dr. Sumbul Ansar Khan and Dr. Syed Zubair Ahmed 2025)

The rapid digital transformation and strong pop culture currents have significantly shaped the social and cognitive landscape of students. In the midst of this change, the learning of Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah is required to be contextual in order to be able to answer the needs and

challenges of the current generation. AIK's learning model that only focuses on delivering dogma and memorization is no longer adequate. As a more adaptive and meaningful alternative, a critical reflective learning approach is proposed to be the foundation in designing AIK learning in the digital era. (Sailirrohmah and Azani 2025) argue that the critical reflective learning model is oriented towards the development of self-awareness, critical thinking skills, and contextual internalization of Islamic values. In this approach, students are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of diversity, critique the socio-cultural phenomena they encounter on social media and pop culture, and relate them to moderate and transformative Islamic values. This approach not only trains cognition, but also fosters empathy, social awareness, and moral courage in responding to contemporary problems.

3.4 Critical Reflective Conceptual Models

This conceptual model consists of four main components that work together to strengthen students' understanding and practice of Islamic values in the digital era. Critical Reflection encourages students to reassess their religious values and personal experiences while objectively evaluating popular social media content such as hijrah trends, religious influencers, or extreme religious narratives through an Islamic and value-based lens (Afiyah and Yenuri 2025).Dialogic Learning is facilitated through open discussions, case studies, and digital forums that promote collaboration across diverse backgrounds. This component fosters a participatory learning environment in which students actively exchange ideas, question assumptions, and construct knowledge collectively (Maulisa, Sri Rahmawati, and Zainuri 2025).

The third component, Contextualization of Materials, links AIK (Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan) content to current issues to make learning more relevant and applicable. This includes examining how social media algorithms shape religious perceptions or how viral online culture can blur the boundaries of Islamic moral values (Toni Gunawan Rambe 2025).Finally, Values Internalization aims to cultivate genuine changes in attitudes and behaviours toward moderate, just, and solution-oriented Islamic values. These values are not only understood theoretically but are also manifested in students' everyday actions and decision-making processes (Afiyah and Yenuri 2025).

3.5 Implementation Strategies in the Context of Pop Culture and Social Media

To ensure that this conceptual model can be implemented effectively, a set of well-planned strategies aligned with students' needs is required. One recommended approach is Case Studies and Content Analysis, where students analyze trending viral phenomena on social media such as the use of Islamic symbols in music, fashion, or entertainment as reflective discussion material in class (Sailirrohmah and Azani 2025). Another strategy involves Reflective Journals and Digital Projects, in which students document their digital experiences through reflective writing and create AIK-based creative content such as short videos, infographics, or podcasts (Toni Gunawan Rambe 2025). Interactive and Collaborative Discussions across groups with diverse Islamic backgrounds are also encouraged, as they foster tolerance, inclusiveness, and an open-minded, critical mindset among students (Afiyah and Yenuri 2025). Finally, Media and Religious Literacy Training equips students with the skills to critically filter digital information while understanding Islamic value frameworks when responding to religious content circulating on social media. (Toni Gunawan Rambe 2025) said that this model is able to improve students' religious understanding in depth while forming reflective and adaptive characters. More than just knowing the teachings of Islam, students become agents of change who are able to respond to contemporary issues with a friendly, solutive, and contextual Islamic narrative. Thus, this approach paves the way for a new paradigm of AIK learning that is not only informative, but also transformative and relevant to the digital era

3.6 Implications and Relevance of the Reflective-Critical AIK Concept in the Context of Pop Culture and Social Media

The reflective and critical-based AIK learning design developed in the context of pop culture and social media has a significant impact, both conceptually and practically. This approach fundamentally shifts the AIK learning paradigm from an indoctrinative pattern to a dialogical and transformative approach. Students are no longer positioned as passive recipients of religious materials, but rather as active subjects who construct the meaning of Islam based on their experiences in the digital world and popular culture (Saada and Magadlah 2021).(Firmansyah et al. 2025) said that in the midst of a massive and complex flow of information on social media, this learning concept requires students to not only understand Islamic values, but also to be able to criticize, reflect, and internalize them in daily life. AIK is not just a memorization of religious texts, but a process of forming contextual value awareness. Values such as justice, tolerance, and wisdom are taught not only as concepts, but as social practices that are connected to students' digital reality. The practical implications of this approach are very real. Students are invited to become active actors inreinterpreting religious symbols and responding to moral issues circulating in the digital space. They learn to be producers of moderate and inclusive Islamic narratives, not just as consumers of information. In this context, they are also equipped with the ability to *self-inquiry, critical awareness,* and *ethical discernment* as a fortress against the flow of disinformation, hate speech, and extremist propaganda that is rampant on social media (Hidayati 2024).

(Maisyanah et al. 2024) stated that in a broader perspective, this approach is very relevant to strengthen students' religious identities in the postmodern era. As religious authority begins to fragment and religious references are no longer limited to conventional clerics but also digital influencers, critical literacy skills become very important. Students also need to have acumen in sorting out information, questioning symbolic authority, and verifying religious narratives they encounter online. By integrating Islamic principles such as *tabayyun* (information verification), *tadabbur* (contemplation of meaning), and *ta'awun* (social collaboration), this reflective-critical AIK learning helps build students' capacity to play an active role in creating a healthy, inclusive, and civilized digital space (Lili Sholehuddin Badri and Ahmed Abdul Malik 2024). They are not only religious individually, but also socially transformative.

(Afi Parnawi et al. 2025) argue that institutionally, this approach opens up major reform opportunities for Islamic Higher Education. The AIK curriculum needs to be directed to not only teach dogma, but also facilitate learning that encourages awareness, social criticism, and moral responsibility. Thus, graduates of Islamic universities not only have religious knowledge, but also become agents of change who are able to bring Islamic values to the lives of digital society in an ethical, contributive, and pluralistic manner.

Table 4. Discussion

Aspects Studied	Key Findings	Analysis and Discussion	Practical Implications
Needs of Z/Alpha Students	Students need AIK learning that is relevant to their digital social and cultural realities	Conventional AIK learning is considered rigid, does not touch the existential anxiety and current context of students	A contextual, reflective, and communicative approach is needed

The Role of Critical Reflection	Reflection opens up space for reinterpreting Islamic values in the context of students' daily lives	Through in-depth questions and personal experience involvement, students better understand and appreciate the material	AIK learning should integrate reflective space in the learning process
Social Media & Pop Culture	Students are familiar with symbols, idioms, and narratives from popular culture and social media	Pop culture is not an enemy, but a medium that can be used to bridge the value of AIK	The use of popular content and visual approaches can increase engagement and meaning of learning
Changes in Attitude and Awareness	This model shapes students to be more critical, spiritual, and contextual in religion	Change is not only cognitive, but touches the realm of social attitudes and spirituality	AIK education has the potential to be a tool for personal and social transformation, not just a transmission of doctrine
Model Eligibility	This AIK learning model is valid in terms of content, well accepted by students and lecturers	Learning activities are more dialogical, participatory, and fun	The model deserves to be developed and applied more widely

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that reflective-critical AIK learning contextualized in the reality of pop culture and social media is able to answer the challenges of religious education in the digital era. This approach places students as active subjects who not only understand Islam textually and normatively, but also contextually, critically, and transformatively.Through this method, AIK is not just a space for the transfer of Islamic knowledge, but has developed into an arena for the formation of mature and inclusive religious identity. Students are not only invited to internalize Islamic values, but also to reinterpret religious narratives in the context of social media that is full of meaning, identity conflicts, and information complexity.The results of the study show that the reflective-critical approach strengthens students' digital literacy capacity, ethical sensitivity, and spiritual awareness in religion. The Islamic identity that is formed is not black and white, but flexible and wise in responding to the differences and challenges of the times. Thus, reflective-critical AIK learning contributes significantly to the mission of Islamic higher education that liberates, enlightens, and humanizes.This research opens up space for further development, especially in the implementative and evaluative dimensions. First, further research is needed that focuses on measuring the effectiveness of this reflective-critical approach quantitatively using instruments that have been tested for validity and reliability. This is important to obtain broader empirical data on its influence on improving religious competence, digital literacy, and student tolerance.Second, comparative studies can be conducted to compare the reflective-critical approach with other AIK learning models, such as contextual, transformative, or project-based, in various contexts of Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.Third, future research can also explore how the role of AIK lecturers as facilitators of dialogue and moral reflection can be strengthened through pedagogic training based on critical pedagogy and media literacy.Finally, the integration of this approach into the national curriculum of AIK systemically needs to be studied further in order to present Islamic education that is not only normative and spiritual, but also social, inclusive, and relevant to the real world of today's students.

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