



Transforming Islamic History Education through Digital and Critical Pedagogical Approaches

Abdulloh Azzam^{1*}, Mutamakin²

¹Universitas Islam Cordoba Banyuwangi, Indonesia

Email:azzam@uicordoba.ac.id

²Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Ma'had Al-Hikam Malang, Indonesia

mt.makkin@staima-alhikam.ac.id

*Corresponding Author:

azzam@uicordoba.ac.id

Abstrak

Di tengah globalisasi dan era digital, pendidikan sejarah Islam di Indonesia perlu bertransformasi dari pola hafalan tradisional menuju strategi pedagogis yang lebih kritis dan didukung teknologi. Penelitian ini mengisi celah literatur dengan menyatukan pendekatan dekolonial dan integrasi teknologi digital dalam pembelajaran sejarah Islam, sebuah bidang yang kerap dianggap stagnan karena dominasi metode ceramah dan hafalan. Melalui tinjauan pustaka naratif sistematis, studi ini menyeleksi dan menganalisis 40 penelitian yang terbit pada periode 2019–2024 untuk memetakan arah perubahan desain pembelajaran sejarah Islam di berbagai konteks pendidikan Islam. Sintesis menunjukkan adanya pergeseran kuat menuju pembelajaran aktif, terutama Project-Based Learning (PBL) dan Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), yang dalam sejumlah laporan empiris berkaitan dengan peningkatan yang bermakna pada motivasi dan retensi peserta didik, termasuk peningkatan sekitar 37% (PBL) dan 29% (IBL). Pemanfaatan perangkat digital, termasuk media interaktif seperti virtual reality (VR), juga terbukti meningkatkan keterlibatan belajar, namun kesenjangan infrastruktur dan akses masih menjadi kendala utama. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya kurikulum yang responsif budaya dengan menjembatani khazanah keilmuan Islam klasik dan kompetensi digital global, sekaligus melatih pembacaan sejarah secara kritis dalam masyarakat yang plural. Secara praktis, studi ini menyediakan kerangka yang dapat digunakan oleh pendidik, pengembang kurikulum, dan pembuat kebijakan di lembaga pendidikan Islam Indonesia untuk merancang pembelajaran sejarah Islam yang lebih menarik, kritis, dan kontekstual.

Kata kunci: *pendidikan sejarah Islam, pembelajaran aktif, integrasi teknologi, pedagogi dekolonial*

Abstract

In the face of globalization and the digital era, Islamic history education in Indonesia requires a shift from traditional rote memorization toward more critical and digitally supported pedagogical strategies. This study addresses a literature gap by bringing together decolonial perspectives and technology integration in a field that is often viewed as stagnant due to lecture-centered instruction. Using a systematic narrative literature review, we screened and analyzed 40 studies published between 2019 and 2024 to map how Islamic history learning is being redesigned across Islamic education settings. The synthesis indicates a clear movement toward active learning, especially Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), which are linked in several empirical reports to notable gains in student motivation and retention, including improvements of around 37% (PBL) and 29% (IBL). Digital tools, including immersive media such as virtual reality (VR), further strengthen engagement, yet uneven infrastructure and access remain persistent constraints. Overall, the findings support a ly responsive curriculum that bridges classical Islamic scholarship with global digital competencies while enabling students to read historical narratives critically in plural societies. Practically, this study offers a usable framework for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in Indonesian Islamic institutions to design more engaging, critical, and context-sensitive Islamic history learning.

Keywords: *Islamic history education, active learning, technology integration, decolonial pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

In many Indonesian madrasahs, Islamic History is still taught as a sequence of names and dates (Fauzi, 2021, p. 45). Yet students now learn through screens, clips, and quick stories. When lessons stay in lecture mode, it seems harder for learners to connect past Muslim societies with their own questions about identity, citizenship, and diversity. Some teachers have started to experiment with curriculum reforms, including project work aligned with Kurikulum Merdeka in SKI classes (Zainuddin, 2023, p. 89). Still, classroom practice often lags behind these aspirations, especially when assessment rewards recall over interpretation (Hasmar, 2020, p. 78), and when teacher digital literacy gaps mirror the wider “digital-immigrant vs digital-native” tension in Indonesian classrooms (Kurniawati et al., 2018).

Recent Indonesian SKI studies show motivation rises when students build projects and investigate sources (Rani, 2021, p. 95). Teachers can start small, even with simple local topics and artifacts. In one MTs setting, project based learning improved mastery because students planned tasks, shared roles, and defended their claims with evidence (Afifah et al., 2024, p. 539). Inquiry and problem based lessons also support critical thinking, which often signals stronger higher order skills (Bariyah et al., 2022, p. 284; Huwaida & Jannah, 2022, p. 78). These approaches matter because they push students toward justification and interpretation, not only repetition, and they make historical learning look closer to reasoning practice than to content delivery.

Digital tools are spreading fast in many SKI classrooms today. Wordwall and YouTube studies often report higher engagement in SKI lessons (Aprilia et al., 2023, p. 1441; Munawir et al., 2023, p. 400). Yet these papers rarely show how media can support inquiry questions and project cycles within one coherent lesson design (Saputra, 2024, p. 101). Access and readiness vary, so the same platform works in one school but fails in another (Siregar et al., 2022, p. 279). Online project work shows this clearly, since infrastructure and teacher guidance shape outcomes quite strongly (Juwanti et al., 2020, p. 134). This is also why digital practice should be read as a pedagogical and justice issue, not only a technical upgrade, because design choices in digital learning can widen or reduce inequality depending on who has access and support (Bali et al., 2020; Farrow, Robert, Tim Coughlan & Pitt, 2023).

The story frame also matters, sometimes more than the tool. Textbook critiques note that values appear, but tasks often push acceptance, so students rarely debate context and evidence (Imansyah et al., 2022, p. 155). Decolonial discussions warn that inherited frames can reproduce binaries that do not fit Indonesian realities (Dannari et al., 2021, p. 425). In decolonial terms, what counts as “important history” is shaped by power and knowledge hierarchies, not neutral selection, so students need guided opportunities to notice centering, omission, and whose voices are treated as authoritative (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000). Recent philosophical critiques also stress that decolonizing Muslim thought is not only about rejecting the West, but about interrogating the structures that shape how Muslims think, rank, and legitimate knowledge (Faruque, 2024). A

culturally responsive SKI curriculum, then, should connect local experience with wider networks, while keeping ethical formation in view (Rohmat, 2020, p. 211).

This article examines how SKI pedagogy in Indonesia is designed and how it supports engagement and higher order thinking. It then explores what happens when projects and inquiry meet digital media across school conditions (Fauzi, 2021, p. 45). The aim is practical for teachers, curriculum teams, and policymakers in Indonesian Islamic institutions, but it is also explicitly integrative. Rather than treating digital tools, active learning, decolonial framing, and infrastructure constraints as separate conversations, this paper synthesizes them into one coherent lesson logic that can be translated into design routines and policy-relevant guidance (Dannari et al., 2021, p. 425; Saputra, 2024, p. 101). In this sense, the contribution is not only a review of trends, but a synthesis approach that shows why disconnected “success stories” often fail to scale, and what kind of coherent model can keep engagement, critique, and feasibility in the same frame (Bali et al., 2020; Farrow, Robert, Tim Coughlan & Pitt, 2023).

METHODS

This study used a systematic narrative literature review for Islamic history education in contemporary madrasahs and schools, with Indonesia as the interpretive setting and online databases as the field site. The stages were planning, searching and selecting literature, analysis and synthesis, and triangulation, and this sequencing follows the discipline expected in rigorous review work (Hart, 1998). We logged each search weekly in a spreadsheet with screening notes for traceability, and we treated searching itself as a method that needs explicit decisions (Krantz, 2010, pp. 588–592). We chose this hybrid design because it allows pattern mapping while still, to some extent, reading studies as situated educational stories within qualitative design traditions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It also helped us keep the narrative flow of classroom change visible, which many madrasah studies describe in practical rather than experimental terms.

From the initial search pool, titles and abstracts were screened across several search rounds, then full texts were assessed to confirm scope, quality, and relevance, and these steps followed online research practice that treats databases as evolving and uneven archives (Hooley & Wellens, 2012). Duplicates were removed, and borderline items were discussed in pairs, especially when a text leaned to theology, lacked peer review, had no full text, or blurred method focus. We summarised screening in a PRISMA style flow diagram, and the aim was simple transparency rather than perfection. For each item, we extracted publication details, setting, participants, intervention features, outcomes, and reported challenges, using consistent keyword strings and filtering discipline (Krantz, 2010, pp. 588–592). We also kept an interpretive stance, since qualitative synthesis still depends on how texts are read as situated accounts, not only as containers of findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

We applied thematic analysis across the 40 studies, moving from familiarisation to coding, theme development, and revision in the way Braun and Clarke describe for thematic work (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Coding was done manually in a spreadsheet, and we built a simple codebook so the same phrases were tagged consistently across papers over time, which fits the practical sensibility of qualitative coding as taught in education research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This kept the analysis readable and easy to trace for reviewers. Trustworthiness was supported through an audit trail of screening decisions and theme revisions, and we used triangulation by comparing patterns across study types and school levels (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As a light validity check, two SKI teachers reviewed the theme map and flagged labels that felt too abstract for classroom realities.

Table 1 This methods can be summarized in the table below:

Core area	What we did	Output
Design and scope	Systematic narrative literature review, Indonesia as context, online databases as site	Search protocol and PRISMA style screening record
Data and procedures	Selected 40 peer reviewed studies from 2019 to 2024, applied inclusion and exclusion rules, extracted key fields	Final dataset list and extraction sheet
Analysis and quality	Manual thematic analysis, ethics of fair representation, trustworthiness via triangulation and audit trail	Codebook, theme map, and validation notes

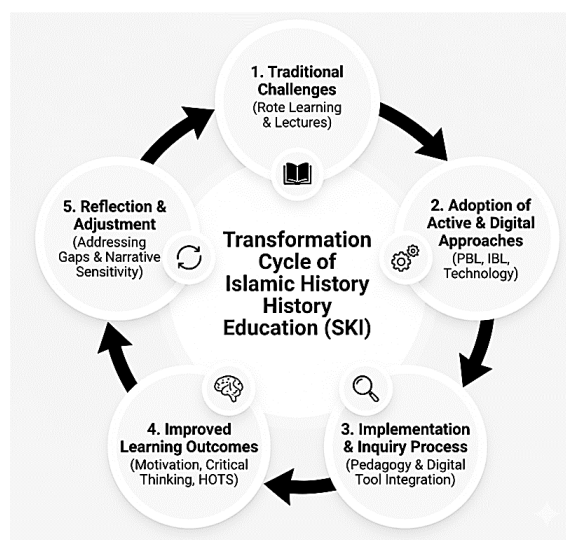


Figure 1 Transformation Cycle of Islamic History Education

This circular flowchart, the Transformation Cycle of Islamic History Education (SKI), illustrates the systematic process of modernizing pedagogy in Indonesian madrasahs to move from traditional memorization toward critical digital literacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme Integrating Digital Pedagogy under Uneven Infrastructure

This theme refers to the use of digital media and platforms in SKI learning, alongside the limits created by access, readiness, and school support (Sanusi, 2024). The theme is about digital tools entering SKI lessons today, yet they arrive inside unequal capacity and uneven teacher preparation, including pressures to align pedagogy, content, and technology in more integrated ways (Saili et al., 2024). Across the reviewed studies, digital integration ranged from simple visual media to web based games and video platforms, often used to make historical narratives feel closer and more concrete for learners (Aprilia et al., 2023, p. 1441; Musliaty, 2019, p. 45). Several papers described these tools as motivation triggers, especially when the activity allowed quick feedback and visible progress (Munawir et al., 2023, p. 45). At the same time, the same set of studies repeatedly noted that access to devices, stable connectivity, and teacher capacity shaped what could actually be sustained in class (Siregar et al., 2022, p. 279), and this challenge becomes sharper when Gen Z identity questions and historical learning goals meet fragmented digital exposure (Meliny & Hidayati, 2024).

A recurring pattern appeared in the studies on interactive web media, where the tool itself was less important than how it was staged in a lesson. The Wordwall study described a classroom routine where students moved through short tasks, compared scores, and returned to missed items, which the authors linked to increased motivation and learning outcomes (Aprilia et al., 2023). It was not only about fun. One long observation thread suggested that rapid feedback reduced passive waiting and kept the teacher circulating, which likely helped maintain attention across mixed ability groups (Aprilia et al., 2023). Still, the same kind of media required teacher confidence with setup and pacing, and this issue aligns with studies that show teacher beliefs and comfort with multimedia strongly shape what is actually used and how consistently it is used (Muslimah, 2024). It also fits the TPACK argument that integration constraints are often competence and planning problems, not merely device problems (Saili et al., 2024). Adoption was also framed as conditional, shaped by perceived ease and usefulness in the online learning acceptance study (Siregar et al., 2022).

Video based learning appeared in the dataset as a pragmatic bridge between narrative history and students' daily media habits. The YouTube study at the primary level described students following short historical explanations and then answering tasks, with reported improvements in learning results (Munawir et al., 2023, p. 400). The finding was simple but persistent across accounts. Several descriptions stressed that audiovisual storytelling helped learners recall sequence and characters, which resembles earlier arguments about visual media raising interest in SKI (Musliaty, 2019, p. 45). At the same time, digital media use without clear learning contracts can drift into entertainment, especially when classroom control is weak, and this drift can also flatten complexity and invite simplified "truth claims" if students are not guided in

critical media literacy (Deroo, 2021). The evidence here mainly shows how teachers tried to align familiar platforms with SKI content, rather than claiming a single best tool (Munawir et al., 2023).

Another set of papers positioned digital integration as hybrid and low bandwidth, using portable media that can work even when connectivity is limited. The smartcard learning media study described an approach where students used a structured set of cards to review Khulafaur Rasyidin content and strengthen cognitive outcomes in grade V (Rahmah & Rosyidah, 2024, p. 271). The design was still interactive, but it avoided the need for constant internet access. This approach also resonates with literacy based SKI learning, where reading, summarising, and reconstructing narratives become a practical route to deeper understanding without relying on heavy platforms (Faidah & Maarif, 2022). In several cases, teachers also built capacity by moving learners from consumers to producers of learning media, and media exhibitions can work as a motivational scaffold while strengthening design skills and classroom creativity (Hijriyah et al., 2024). The picture from these studies is modest but clear. Teachers often looked for tools that can survive school constraints (Rahmah & Rosyidah, 2024, p. 271).

Digital storytelling appeared as a more planned form of integration, since it asked teachers to design narrative flow and student tasks within one lesson structure. The ASSURE based study described how digital storytelling was organized through steps that guided analysis of learners, objectives, media selection, participation, and evaluation (Saputra, 2024). It reads as a design discipline rather than a gadget story. This design logic fits integrated curriculum arguments that push teachers to connect content, inquiry routines, and assessment in one coherent learning sequence rather than treating media as an add on (Douglass, 2021). If narrative is treated as discourse practice, then the key issue is not only the story told but also how meaning is produced through classroom language, tasks, and authority, which is why discourse framing matters when teachers plan storytelling lessons (Mulyana, 2005). A related point about readiness surfaced in the online learning acceptance study, where perceived usefulness and ease were treated as key conditions for sustained use (Huda, 2024).

A final sub finding concerned institutional support, where digital integration was linked to leadership, planning, and teacher development rather than individual enthusiasm alone. The managerial transformation paper argued that digital era SKI learning requires institutional coordination, including support for infrastructure and program planning (Ramdhan, 2023). This emphasis fits with the strategic management paper that framed globalization challenges as needing structured institutional responses, not only classroom level improvisation (Susanto et al., 2024). The systemic challenge framing also matters here. Digital change in Islamic education is repeatedly described as tied to broader globalization pressures that schools cannot solve through classroom tactics alone (El-Mubarak et al., 2021). The evidence suggests that digital pedagogy emerged where schools aligned tools, training, and realistic lesson designs, even if the tools were simple (Ramdhan, 2023).

Table 2 Islamic History Education Traditional vs Transformative Approaches

Dimension	Traditional approaches	Transformative approaches
Learning focus	Recall of key events and concepts	Meaning making through inquiry and projects
Classroom pattern	Teacher centered delivery	Student centered tasks and dialogue
Typical learning tools	Textbook summaries and oral explanation	Digital media plus guided inquiry prompts
Expected learner output	Correct answers and memorized narratives	Explanations, comparisons, and justified claims
Common constraints	Low engagement and limited critical reasoning	Uneven access plus teacher readiness gaps

This table condenses what the results show about practice patterns, without making strong causal claims.

The results suggest that digital integration in SKI is best understood as a pedagogical arrangement, not as a single technology choice. This point matters because several studies showed that a platform can lift motivation, yet outcomes depend on how tasks are staged and discussed in class (Aprilia et al., 2023). The lesson design seems to be the hinge. Pedagogy and formation in Islamic education also point to this direction, since identity formation is shaped by structured learning relationships, not by tools alone (Sahin, 2013). When teachers linked media use to inquiry moves, students were more likely to treat the activity as learning rather than entertainment, and this is also where competence and integration constraints become visible in practice (Saili et al., 2024). The implication is not that digital tools replace pedagogy, but that they make pedagogy more visible and testable in practice, especially within modern schooling tensions that Islamic pedagogy must negotiate (Memon & Alhashmi, 2018).

A second strand of debate is about engagement versus depth, which appears implicitly across the reviewed Indonesian studies. Web games and video tasks often raise participation quickly, and the Wordwall study reported motivation and learning gains (Aprilia et al., 2023). Yet SKI is not only a memory exercise. Rote learning patterns can raise short term compliance but weaken motivation and meaning when learners do not see interpretive purpose in the lesson (Abduh & Taqwa, 2022). This concern becomes sharper in digital contexts, because simplified content and viral fragments can mislead students unless teachers teach critical media literacy and reflective critique (Deroo, 2021). A workable alternative is literacy based SKI learning that shifts students toward reading, reconstructing arguments, and connecting evidence to narrative claims, which supports deeper learning even when technology is modest (Faidah & Maarif, 2022).

A third strand concerns infrastructure and equity, which becomes more visible when digital integration is treated as a national direction rather than a school experiment. The Kurikulum Merdeka PBL study suggests there is room for flexible learning design, including projects and inquiry cycles (Zainuddin, 2023, p. 89). Still, implementation gaps remain, because institutional planning and coordination shape whether policy becomes stable classroom practice (Ramdhan, 2023). In such contexts, inequality in infrastructure and readiness is not a side note. It becomes

part of the learning design problem itself, and digital era challenges for Islamic education are often framed as structural and uneven across schools and communities (Sanusi, 2024).

The results also speak to the HOTS agenda, although many studies use different terms when describing it. Inquiry and problem based studies link active methods to critical thinking outcomes, which is often treated as a proxy for higher order skills (Bariyah et al., 2022, p. 284). At the same time, because this review includes diverse study designs, claims about “what works” should be read cautiously and contextually, especially when methods and reporting quality vary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is why outcome measures matter. Reviews of project based learning highlight that learning gains depend on how outcomes are defined and assessed, not only on whether a method is labelled PBL (Guo et al., 2020). The message stays consistent. Digital tools help only when they push learners to question, compare, and justify claims.

Cultural sensitivity and narrative framing form another debate strand that becomes sharper when digital media expands the range of sources students encounter. The textbook critique study suggests that content and tasks can still be narrow and uncritical, even when values are mentioned (Imansyah et al., 2022). Digital content can amplify this risk if the teacher simply swaps a textbook page for a video clip, so the decolonial question becomes practical and classroom level, not only ideological (Dannari et al., 2021). One concrete route is to use problem-posing routines from critical pedagogy to make “whose history is centered” a learning problem that students must investigate and debate (Hidayat, 2013).

For example, a short VR or 360-degree virtual tour of a local Islamic heritage site can be paired with a guided comparison task, where students contrast what the national narrative highlights with what local memory, artifacts, or place-based evidence makes visible, then they write a claim about bias and omission. That comparison can then move into a digital storytelling assignment in which students build a counter-narrative using selected evidence, voice-over reflection, and a justification section that explains why their framing differs, so storytelling becomes an argument practice rather than decoration (Hambali et al., 2021). This concern also fits historiography debates about universal topics and the politics of framing historical time, since what is selected as “important history” is never neutral (Al-Azmeh, 2007). The role of media, then, is to widen evidence and voices, while pedagogy keeps interpretation grounded.

To make the decolonial strand more teachable, the table below translates the argument into a simple lesson flow that uses technology to surface bias, compare frames, and build an evidence-based counter narrative.

Table 3 Step

Step / Focus	Teacher move (prompt)	Student task (output)	Digital tool option
1. Identify the “center”	Ask what the official narrative highlights and what it ignores	List what is centered vs silenced	Short clip or VR/360 tour
2. Compare frames	Provide two frames to test, national textbook vs local evidence	Make a comparison note with 2–3 differences	Digital archive folder or curated links
3. Challenge bias with evidence	Ask students to justify claims with artifacts, quotes, or place-based cues	Write a short claim + evidence chain	Digital storytelling storyboard

4. Re-narrate responsibly	Guide reflection on ethics, context, and limits of interpretation	Produce a counter narrative with a justification paragraph	Digital storytelling video/audio
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This table keeps the decolonial aim concrete, while still fitting uneven infrastructure because each step can run with either high-tech options or low-bandwidth substitutes without changing the inquiry logic.

The novelty of this article sits in its synthesis logic, since it reads digital integration, critical narrative sensitivity, and Indonesian madrasah constraints as one connected problem. Integrated curriculum work is useful here because it frames coherence as the core task, not simply adding activities (Douglass, 2021). Our review draws links across levels and formats, and it highlights how readiness constraints shape the same classroom moment, including the practical pressures of competence and integration that many teachers face (Saili et al., 2024). The claim is modest but useful. It shifts attention from tool choice to design coherence, while also keeping feasibility visible through institutional planning realities (Ramdhan, 2023).

Table 4 Novelty through synthesis logic across three connected problems

Component	Often treated separately in prior work	Connected treatment in this article
Digital integration	Focus on tool choice and short term engagement	Read as a design issue shaped by access and pedagogy
Critical narrative sensitivity	Framed as content critique or decolonial stance	Linked to everyday tasks and classroom routines
Madrasah constraints	Seen as background limitation	Treated as a core variable shaping what is feasible
What is new	Parallel discussions with limited intersection	One integrated lens that explains uneven outcomes

The novelty claim here is methodological and conceptual, since it links constraints, pedagogy, and narrative framing into one analytic frame.

Practical implications follow from this synthesis, especially for curriculum teams and teacher training programs in Indonesia. Teacher beliefs toward multimedia matter, because beliefs often predict whether media use becomes a stable routine or a one time experiment (Muslimah, 2024). Teacher development can also move beyond “how to use tools” into “how to design learning media with students,” and media exhibitions provide a concrete pathway for motivation and production based learning (Hijriyah et al., 2024). At the institutional level, strategic management framing is relevant because teacher training needs policy, budgeting, mentoring, and long term planning, not only workshop style interventions (Susanto et al., 2024).

A hybrid strategy seems especially relevant for madrasahs that face constraints yet still want to support active learning and critical historical reasoning. The smartcard media study shows that structured interactive tools can strengthen cognitive outcomes without demanding constant connectivity (Rahmah & Rosyidah, 2024). Visual media research also suggests that simple images

and displays can raise interest and support recall, which can be paired with inquiry prompts and short debates (Musliaty, 2019). Adoption still depends on perceived usefulness and ease, so low bandwidth strategies should be designed to feel practical and manageable for teachers, not only ideal on paper (Siregar et al., 2022). In this way, digital integration does not become an all or nothing decision.

There are limitations in the reviewed evidence that should be acknowledged before making strong generalizations. Interpretive synthesis depends on how studies are read and compared, and qualitative handbooks remind us that triangulation and audit trails reduce bias but do not erase interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Review boundaries also matter, since literature review choices always include exclusions that shape findings (Hart, 1998). Finally, online search results are not neutral. Platforms, indexing practices, and keyword design can bias what appears as “the field,” so internet based research logic should be treated as a methodological constraint, not only a convenience (Krantz, 2010). Future work could deepen this by adding classroom observations and student work samples across urban and rural madrasahs, then tracing how design decisions shape learning over time.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to clarify how Islamic History learning in Indonesian madrasahs is being designed today, and what helps it move beyond recall toward meaningful historical reasoning. Across the reviewed literature, a consistent pattern appears. Digital tools and active methods can raise engagement, yet results depend on design coherence, teacher readiness, and uneven infrastructure. In many classrooms, technology works best when it is embedded in a learning sequence rather than used as a stand-alone add-on. The strongest takeaway is not “which tool” works, but how tasks are structured so students interpret, question, and justify.

The research question asked how SKI pedagogy is configured in Indonesia and how it can support engagement and higher order thinking under real school conditions. Transformation is possible, but it is conditional, since it requires inquiry routines that guide interpretation, digital or hybrid media that support narrative work, and sensitivity to framing so history is read with context rather than accepted as a closed story. The contribution of this article sits in its synthesis logic, because it treats digital integration, narrative-critical sensitivity, and madrasah constraints as one connected problem, which shifts attention from adopting media to designing routines that reliably produce reasoning and reflection. These implications point to action by multiple actors. Teachers need simple, repeatable routines, while the Ministry of Religious Affairs can support modular units with assessment cues that reward interpretation, and LP2M in PTKI can strengthen training and mentoring linked to classroom practice. As a literature review, this study cannot confirm causal impact, so future research should test these patterns through R&D of a PBL-SKI model, ethnographic studies of decolonial pedagogy in pesantren settings, and needs-assessment surveys on teacher readiness for technology integration.

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