

ChatGPT as an Algorithmic Epistemic Mediator in Contextual Islamic Religious Education and Religious Moderation

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines ChatGPT as an algorithmic epistemic mediator in contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and its implications for religious moderation. The development of generative artificial intelligence has transformed how students access, interpret, and validate religious knowledge, raising pedagogical and epistemological concerns in Islamic education. This study employed qualitative library research by analyzing scholarly literature published between 2021 and 2026 from academic databases and journal portals, including Google Scholar, SINTA, Scopus-indexed journals, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and Elsevier. The literature was analyzed through reduction, thematic categorization, critical interpretation, and conceptual synthesis. The findings indicate that ChatGPT has an ambivalent role in contextual PAI learning. On the one hand, it may support religious moderation by expanding access to diverse Islamic perspectives, encouraging student inquiry, strengthening digital religious literacy, and facilitating reflective learning. On the other hand, it may also create risks such as simplification of religious teachings, algorithmic bias, pseudo-authority, and pseudo-moderation when AI-generated responses are accepted without critical verification. This study argues that ChatGPT should not be positioned as an autonomous epistemic actor or a final source of religious authority, but as a mediated learning aid that requires teacher verification, critical digital literacy, and reflective-dialogical learning. The study contributes to Islamic education scholarship by offering a conceptual framework for integrating ChatGPT responsibly into contextual PAI learning without weakening the epistemological foundations of religious knowledge.

Keywords: *Chatgpt, Algorithmic Epistemic Mediator, Islamic Religious Education, Religious Moderation, Critical Digital Literacy*

A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), has significantly reshaped educational practices, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI). AI-based applications such as ChatGPT enable students to access religious information instantly, interactively, and adaptively according to their learning needs (Darmawan et al., 2025; Maslichah & Hilalludin Hilalludin, 2026). In contextual PAI learning, this development creates opportunities to connect religious materials with students' everyday realities and to support more reflective learning practices. However,

the presence of ChatGPT also raises an important epistemological question: how should religious knowledge generated through algorithmic systems be accessed, verified, and positioned within Islamic education?

This transformation is not without problems. PAI learning is not only concerned with the transfer of religious knowledge but also with the formation of values, attitudes, and ethical awareness, including religious moderation (Patih et al., 2023). Religious moderation emphasizes balance, tolerance, justice, and the ability to understand religious differences proportionally (Helmy et al., 2021). In this context, ChatGPT may help students encounter diverse Islamic perspectives and broaden their religious literacy. At the same time, it may also produce risks when students accept AI-generated responses without critical verification. Such risks include the simplification of religious teachings, decontextualized explanations, algorithmic bias, and superficial understandings of religious moderation.

From a pedagogical perspective, this situation creates a dilemma in contextual PAI learning. On the one hand, ChatGPT can increase access, flexibility, and responsiveness in learning. On the other hand, students may begin to treat AI-generated answers as authoritative religious explanations without examining their sources, methods, and contexts (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Therefore, ChatGPT should not be understood as an autonomous epistemic actor, but rather as an algorithmic epistemic mediator. It mediates students' access to religious knowledge through language patterns, data structures, and probabilistic responses, while still requiring teacher verification, critical digital literacy, and reflective classroom dialogue.

Previous studies on digital technology in Islamic education have generally emphasized the contribution of digital media to learning effectiveness, religious literacy, and the development of inclusive attitudes (Suryani et al., 2026; Zaimina, 2024; Zaini et al., 2025). Other studies have discussed religious moderation and the risk of pseudo-moderation in digital religious learning, especially when students engage with religious information without adequate critical literacy (Sudarmin Sudarmin & Amaluddin Amaluddin, 2025). These studies are important, yet they mostly focus on digital media, digital literacy, or pedagogical effectiveness in general. They have not sufficiently examined generative AI, particularly ChatGPT, as an algorithmic mediator that shapes how students access, interpret, and validate religious knowledge in contextual PAI learning.

Based on these limitations, three research gaps can be identified. First, studies that specifically connect ChatGPT with contextual PAI learning remain limited. Second, research on religious moderation in digital environments tends to focus on social media and online religious discourse rather than generative AI. Third, existing studies have not sufficiently examined the ambivalent role of ChatGPT as an algorithmic epistemic mediator that may both support and distort religious moderation. This gap is important because ChatGPT does not merely deliver information; it reorganizes religious knowledge into algorithmically generated responses that may influence how students understand religious authority, difference, and moderation.

Based on these gaps, this study offers a conceptual contribution by positioning ChatGPT not merely as a learning medium, but as an algorithmic epistemic mediator in contextual PAI learning. This means that ChatGPT influences how religious knowledge is accessed, simplified, reorganized, and interpreted in digital learning environments, although it does not possess religious authority, methodological consciousness, or normative accountability. Therefore, the issue of ChatGPT in PAI learning is not only technological or pedagogical, but also epistemological because it concerns how religious truth is accessed, validated, and internalized by students in the digital era. This study critically analyzes the use of ChatGPT in contextual PAI learning, identifies its potential to support religious moderation, examines possible forms of distortion, and formulates a conceptual reconstruction for using AI more responsibly in Islamic education.

Theoretically, this study is built on three interconnected frameworks. First, contextual PAI learning emphasizes the connection between religious materials and students' lived realities so that religious education becomes reflective, applicable, and ethically meaningful. Second, religious moderation provides the normative orientation for understanding Islamic teachings through balance, tolerance, justice, and openness to diversity. Third, critical digital literacy functions as a control mechanism that enables students to evaluate AI-generated religious information, recognize algorithmic limitations, and avoid uncritical dependence on instant answers. By integrating these frameworks, this study argues that ChatGPT can only support contextual PAI learning and religious moderation when it is positioned as a mediated learning aid under teacher guidance, not as a final source of religious authority.

B. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research. This design was chosen because the study focuses on a conceptual and critical analysis of the use of ChatGPT in contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, particularly in relation to the strengthening and possible distortion of religious moderation. Library research is appropriate for studies that analyze, interpret, and synthesize scholarly sources to construct conceptual arguments within a particular field of inquiry (Abdurrahman, 2024). This study did not examine classroom practices empirically, but analyzed scholarly literature to construct an interpretive framework regarding the epistemological position of ChatGPT in Islamic education. The main data sources consisted of journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and policy-related documents discussing artificial intelligence in education, ChatGPT, digital literacy, contextual PAI learning, Islamic epistemology, and religious moderation.

The literature search was conducted through academic databases and journal portals, including Google Scholar, SINTA, Scopus-indexed journals, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and Elsevier. The publication period was limited to 2021–2026 to ensure the relevance of the literature to recent discussions on generative AI and digital religious learning. The search used combinations of keywords such as “ChatGPT in Islamic education,” “artificial intelligence and religious moderation,” “digital literacy in Islamic

education,” “AI and epistemology,” “contextual PAI learning,” “algorithmic bias,” and “digital religion.” The inclusion criteria covered scholarly works that discussed AI, ChatGPT, Islamic education, religious moderation, digital literacy, or digital epistemology; were published in academic outlets; were relevant to educational, epistemological, or religious dimensions of generative AI; and were available in full text. The exclusion criteria included non-academic sources, duplicated publications, studies without clear relevance to Islamic education or religious moderation, and publications that lacked sufficient conceptual or methodological clarity.

Data were analyzed using a qualitative critical analysis approach through four stages. First, relevant literature was reduced and selected according to the focus of the study. Second, the selected literature was categorized into major themes, including the pedagogical potential of ChatGPT, the strengthening of religious moderation, the risks of simplification, algorithmic bias, pseudo-authority, pseudo-moderation, and the role of teacher verification and digital literacy. Third, the literature was critically interpreted by relating these themes to the frameworks of contextual PAI learning, religious moderation, and critical digital literacy. Fourth, a conceptual synthesis was developed to formulate ChatGPT as an algorithmic epistemic mediator in contextual PAI learning. This analytical procedure follows the logic of qualitative data analysis, which involves data reduction, data display, interpretation, and conclusion drawing, while also allowing critical synthesis across relevant literature (B. Miles et al., 2014; Rijali, 2018). This synthesis was used to explain how ChatGPT may support reflective religious learning while also requiring pedagogical and epistemological control so that AI-generated responses are not treated as final sources of religious authority.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Epistemological Transformation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

The development of artificial intelligence has transformed not only learning methods but also the epistemological structure through which religious knowledge is accessed, mediated, and interpreted in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). In conventional PAI learning, religious knowledge is generally transmitted through teachers, authoritative texts, scholarly traditions, and pedagogical guidance. This structure reflects the Islamic intellectual tradition, in which the validity of knowledge is not determined merely by the availability of information, but also by the credibility of sources, methodological accountability, and the continuity of scholarly transmission. In Islamic scholarship, religious understanding is shaped through processes of verification, interpretation, and contextualization, including the use of established disciplines such as tafsir, hadith studies, and *usul al-fiqh* (Kusrini et al., 2021).

The emergence of ChatGPT introduces a different epistemological mechanism into this learning process. ChatGPT does not produce religious knowledge through scholarly transmission, normative reasoning, or methodological interpretation. Instead, it generates responses through algorithmic processing, linguistic patterns, and probabilistic

prediction based on large-scale datasets. Therefore, the knowledge produced by ChatGPT should not be equated with the authority of teachers, scholars, or classical Islamic texts. It is better understood as algorithmically mediated information that may assist learning, but still requires verification and interpretation within an accountable pedagogical framework (Hidayat et al., 2026; Muhyiddin et al., 2026).

This shift creates a transformation in the way students encounter religious knowledge. In traditional PAI learning, students usually engage with religious concepts through guided explanation, classroom interaction, and teacher supervision. In AI-mediated learning environments, students can directly obtain answers to religious questions from ChatGPT without necessarily passing through a process of teacher verification or scholarly contextualization. This condition may expand access to religious information, but it also creates the risk that students treat instant AI-generated responses as sufficient religious explanations. As a result, the learning process may shift from reflective inquiry to immediate informational consumption.

The epistemological transformation caused by ChatGPT should therefore be understood as ambivalent. On the one hand, ChatGPT can democratize access to religious information and support students in exploring diverse Islamic perspectives. On the other hand, this openness may weaken the role of religious authority if students do not possess adequate critical digital literacy. The central issue is not simply whether ChatGPT can provide useful answers, but how those answers are interpreted, verified, and integrated into religious learning. Without critical guidance, students may fail to distinguish between algorithmically generated information and religious knowledge that has been validated through scholarly methods (Hufron & Lailatul Rifqoh Izzati, 2026).

In this context, ChatGPT should be positioned as an algorithmic epistemic mediator rather than an autonomous epistemic actor. It mediates access to religious knowledge by reorganizing information into conversational responses, but it does not possess religious authority, interpretive consciousness, or normative responsibility. This position is important for maintaining the epistemological integrity of PAI learning. The use of ChatGPT in Islamic education should therefore be accompanied by teacher guidance, critical digital literacy, and reflective-dialogical learning so that AI-generated information becomes a starting point for discussion rather than a final source of religious truth.

2. The Ambivalence of ChatGPT as a Learning Medium: Between Emancipation and Reduction

The use of ChatGPT in contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning presents an ambivalent pedagogical position. On the one hand, ChatGPT offers emancipatory potential by expanding students' access to religious information, supporting autonomous learning, and enabling more flexible interaction with learning materials. Its ability to respond quickly and adaptively allows students to explore religious questions beyond the limitations of classroom time and conventional learning resources. In this sense, ChatGPT can support self-directed learning and help students

connect religious concepts with issues they encounter in everyday life (Haidar, 2025; A. Z. F. Putri & Fikri, 2025).

The interactive nature of ChatGPT may also contribute to more exploratory and learner-centered learning. Students can ask follow-up questions, compare explanations, and request clarification on concepts that are difficult to understand. This flexibility is relevant to contextual PAI learning because religious education is expected to relate Islamic teachings to students' lived realities, social experiences, and contemporary challenges. When used critically, ChatGPT can function as an initial discussion partner that stimulates curiosity and encourages students to engage more actively with religious materials (Hamidalloh, Muhid, et al., 2026).

However, this emancipatory potential must be understood together with the epistemological limitations of ChatGPT as a generative AI system. ChatGPT does not possess consciousness, intentionality, normative responsibility, or religious authority. Its responses are not produced through *ijtihad*, scholarly deliberation, or methodological interpretation of Islamic sources, but through algorithmic prediction based on linguistic patterns and pre-existing data structures. Therefore, the explanations generated by ChatGPT may appear coherent and authoritative, even though they do not necessarily reflect accountable religious reasoning (A. Z. F. Putri & Fikri, 2025; Spitzer, 2023).

This limitation creates the risk of reduction in religious learning. The complexity of Islamic teachings, including differences in interpretation, historical context, legal reasoning, and ethical nuance, may be simplified into short and easily consumable answers. Although such simplification may help students gain initial understanding, it can also weaken the deeper process of religious learning when students accept the responses without further verification. In the long term, religious knowledge may be reduced to instant information rather than being understood as a reflective process that requires critical inquiry, contextual understanding, and teacher guidance (Hamidalloh & Fahmi, 2025).

Thus, the ambivalence of ChatGPT lies in its dual capacity to support and limit learning at the same time. It can expand access to religious information and encourage students to explore diverse perspectives, but it may also promote superficial learning if used as a final source of truth. ChatGPT can open a space for dialogue, but it cannot replace the dialogical, ethical, and interpretive role of teachers in PAI learning. Therefore, its pedagogical value depends on how it is integrated into the learning process. When guided by teachers and supported by critical digital literacy, ChatGPT can become a learning aid that enriches religious discussion. Without such guidance, it may reinforce instant, fragmented, and reductive forms of religious understanding.

3. Strengthening Religious Moderation: Potential for Rationalization and Pluralization of Understanding

Within the framework of contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI), ChatGPT has the potential to support religious moderation when it is used as a tool for exploration, comparison, and reflection rather than as a final source of religious authority. Religious moderation requires students to understand Islamic teachings through balance, tolerance,

justice, and openness to diversity. It is not merely a passive attitude of accepting differences, but a reflective capacity to evaluate religious views proportionally and responsibly (Helmy et al., 2021). In this context, ChatGPT may help students encounter diverse Islamic perspectives and recognize that Islamic thought contains various interpretive traditions, legal opinions, and contextual considerations.

This potential is related to the capacity of ChatGPT to present multiple explanations in response to a single religious question. When students ask about issues such as tolerance, social ethics, interreligious relations, or contemporary moral problems, ChatGPT can provide initial access to different viewpoints that may not always be fully available in conventional classroom discussions. Such exposure can encourage students to realize that religious understanding is not always monolithic. Previous studies on digital religious learning indicate that access to diverse religious perspectives can contribute to more inclusive attitudes when supported by proper guidance and critical literacy (Suryani et al., 2026; Zaimina, 2024).

In this sense, ChatGPT may contribute to the rationalization of religious understanding. Students can be encouraged to compare arguments, examine contexts, and ask why certain views differ from one another. This process is important because religious moderation is strengthened not only by exposure to diversity, but also by the ability to evaluate diversity through reasoned and ethical reflection. ChatGPT can serve as an initial stimulus for this process by providing alternative explanations that teachers may later verify, contextualize, and discuss with students. Therefore, its contribution to moderation depends on whether AI-generated responses are integrated into a reflective-dialogical learning process rather than consumed as instant answers.

ChatGPT may also support digital religious literacy by helping students identify, compare, and clarify religious information found in digital spaces. In an environment where students are frequently exposed to fragmented religious content, hoaxes, and provocative narratives, AI can be used as a starting point for clarification and discussion. However, this function remains limited because ChatGPT does not verify religious truth in a normative or scholarly sense. Its responses must still be examined against authoritative Islamic sources, teacher explanation, and relevant scholarly references. In this regard, critical digital literacy becomes essential because students need the ability to evaluate sources, identify bias, and distinguish between useful information and authoritative religious knowledge (Hufron & Lailatul Rifqoh Izzati, 2026; Lisyawati et al., 2023).

The potential of ChatGPT to strengthen religious moderation is therefore conditional. Without teacher guidance and critical digital literacy, exposure to diverse viewpoints may not automatically lead to moderation. It may instead create epistemological confusion, especially when students are unable to distinguish between strong, weak, contextual, or deviant interpretations. There is also a risk of excessive relativism, in which all religious views are treated as equally valid without methodological evaluation. Under such conditions, religious moderation may be reduced

to superficial openness rather than a principled attitude grounded in Islamic knowledge, ethical reflection, and responsible reasoning.

Thus, ChatGPT can support the pluralization and rationalization of religious understanding only when it is placed within a controlled pedagogical framework. Teachers play a central role in helping students interpret AI-generated responses, compare them with authoritative sources, and relate them to the principles of religious moderation. In this way, ChatGPT may function as an algorithmic epistemic mediator that opens access to diverse perspectives, while the teacher remains responsible for guiding verification, contextualization, and value internalization in PAI learning.

4. Distortions of Religious Moderation: Simplification, Bias, and Pseudo-Authority

The use of ChatGPT in contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning may also create several forms of distortion in students' understanding of religious moderation. In this study, distortion refers to the reduction, deviation, or superficial reconstruction of religious understanding that may emerge when religious knowledge is mediated through algorithmic systems without sufficient verification. These distortions do not mean that ChatGPT always produces incorrect responses. Rather, they indicate the epistemological risks that may occur when students treat AI-generated explanations as complete, neutral, or authoritative religious knowledge.

The first form of distortion is the simplification of religious teachings. Simplification occurs when complex religious concepts are presented in short, general, and context-free explanations. In Islamic education, many religious issues require attention to textual sources, historical context, differences among scholars, legal reasoning, and ethical considerations. However, ChatGPT tends to produce concise and easily understandable responses because it is designed to generate conversational answers. This tendency may help students obtain an initial explanation, but it can also reduce the depth of religious understanding when students do not continue the process of verification and contextualization. As a result, religious moderation may be understood only as a general message of tolerance, without sufficient awareness of its normative, methodological, and ethical foundations (S. N. A. Putri & Fadlullah, 2022).

For example, when students ask about interreligious tolerance, ChatGPT may generate a normative answer stating that Islam teaches peace, tolerance, and respect for others. Such an answer may be useful as an introductory explanation, but it remains incomplete if it does not explain the diversity of scholarly interpretations, the limits of tolerance in Islamic legal and ethical discussions, or the social context in which moderation is practiced. In this condition, moderation risks being reduced to a simple slogan rather than understood as a principled and reflective religious attitude. Therefore, teacher guidance is needed to help students move from general AI-generated explanations toward deeper and more accountable religious reasoning.

The second form of distortion is algorithmic bias. Algorithmic bias refers to the possibility that AI-generated responses reproduce dominant perspectives, cultural assumptions, or patterns embedded in the data used to train the system. In the context of

religious learning, this bias may appear through the dominance of certain interpretations, the marginalization of local Islamic traditions, or the presentation of religious issues in overly universal terms. ChatGPT does not produce answers from a neutral epistemological position; its responses are shaped by datasets, model design, and the way prompts are formulated by users. Therefore, students need to understand that AI-generated answers are not free from bias and must be critically evaluated before being used in religious learning (Hufron & Lailatul Rifqoh Izzati, 2026).

The third form of distortion is pseudo-authority. This occurs when students perceive ChatGPT's responses as authoritative religious judgments, even though the system does not possess sanad, scholarly accountability, interpretive responsibility, or normative authority. ChatGPT may present answers in a fluent and confident style, which can create the impression that the information is reliable and complete. The risk is that students may accept AI-generated explanations without comparing them with authoritative Islamic sources, teacher explanations, or established scholarly references. In Islamic education, this condition is problematic because religious knowledge requires not only information but also credible transmission, methodological reasoning, and ethical responsibility (Kusrini et al., 2021; Teneva, 2021).

The fourth form of distortion is pseudo-moderation. Pseudo-moderation refers to a superficial form of religious moderation in which students may reproduce moderate language without developing a deep understanding of its principles. In this situation, students may state that Islam teaches tolerance, balance, and openness, but their understanding remains shallow because it is not built through reflection, dialogue, and value internalization. This risk becomes stronger when students rely on AI-generated responses as instant formulations of moderate attitudes. As discussed by Sudarmin and Amaluddin (2025), pseudo-moderation reflects the appearance of moderation without sufficient depth of religious understanding. In AI-mediated learning, this phenomenon may occur when moderation is reduced to algorithmically generated statements rather than cultivated through guided religious education.

These four forms of distortion show that ChatGPT should not be used as a final authority in contextual PAI learning. Its responses may serve as learning stimuli, but they must be examined through teacher verification, critical digital literacy, and reflective-dialogical discussion. The central problem is not the presence of ChatGPT itself, but the absence of pedagogical and epistemological control in its use. When students are guided to question, compare, and verify AI-generated responses, the risk of distortion can be reduced. Conversely, when ChatGPT is used without critical supervision, it may encourage simplified, biased, and pseudo-authoritative forms of religious understanding.

Therefore, the integration of ChatGPT into PAI learning requires a clear distinction between algorithmically generated information and authoritative religious knowledge. Information produced by ChatGPT may support learning, but it must be placed within a framework of verification, contextualization, and value formation. In this sense, the role of teachers remains central, not only as facilitators of classroom activities but also as guardians of epistemic validity in religious education.

5. Epistemological Dilemma: Tension between Technology and Religious Authority

The use of ChatGPT in contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning creates an epistemological dilemma between technological accessibility and religious authority. This dilemma does not simply concern whether technology should be accepted or rejected in Islamic education. Rather, it concerns how religious knowledge mediated by AI should be positioned, verified, and integrated into the learning process. ChatGPT offers efficiency, flexibility, and immediate access to information, but religious knowledge in Islam requires more than speed and availability. It requires source credibility, interpretive accountability, ethical responsibility, and contextual understanding (Kusrini et al., 2021; Manshur & Isroani, 2023).

The first dimension of this dilemma is the tension between accessibility and validity. ChatGPT makes religious information easier to access, allowing students to ask questions and receive answers quickly. This accessibility can support learning, especially when students need initial explanations or clarification of basic concepts. However, the ease of access does not automatically guarantee the validity of the information produced. AI-generated responses may be coherent and informative, but they do not necessarily pass through the verification procedures that characterize Islamic scholarship. Therefore, accessibility must be balanced with critical validation through teachers, authoritative texts, and relevant scholarly references.

The second dimension is the tension between speed and depth. ChatGPT's main strength lies in its ability to generate instant responses. In educational contexts, this can help students overcome barriers to understanding and encourage independent exploration. However, religious learning is not merely the acquisition of quick answers. It involves gradual understanding, reflection, ethical awareness, and value internalization. If students become accustomed to receiving instant explanations without further inquiry, PAI learning may shift from a reflective process into a pattern of fast information consumption. In this situation, the depth of religious reasoning may be weakened, especially when complex issues are reduced to short and simplified responses (Hamidalloh, Permadi, et al., 2026).

The third dimension is the tension between technological mediation and religious authority. In traditional PAI learning, the teacher plays an important role in guiding students' understanding, explaining context, correcting misconceptions, and connecting religious texts with students' lived realities. The presence of ChatGPT may change this relationship because students can obtain religious explanations directly from an algorithmic system. This does not mean that teachers lose their role, but it does require a redefinition of teacher authority in AI-mediated learning. Teachers are no longer only transmitters of information, but also epistemic guides who help students evaluate, compare, and contextualize AI-generated responses.

This dilemma shows that ChatGPT should not be treated as a substitute for religious authority. Its role is more appropriately understood as a supporting tool that mediates access to information and stimulates discussion. The problem arises when

students place excessive trust in AI-generated responses without understanding their limitations. ChatGPT does not possess interpretive consciousness, religious commitment, or normative responsibility. Therefore, the authority to determine the validity of religious knowledge must remain within accountable pedagogical and scholarly frameworks (Hidayat et al., 2026; Hufron & Lailatul Rifqoh Izzati, 2026).

Consequently, the integration of ChatGPT into contextual PAI learning requires a balanced approach. Technology can be used to enrich learning, but it must remain under the guidance of teachers and the discipline of critical digital literacy. Students need to be taught that AI-generated responses are not final answers, but starting points for further inquiry, comparison, and reflection. In this way, the tension between technology and religious authority can be managed productively, allowing ChatGPT to support learning without weakening the epistemological foundations of Islamic education.

6. Critical Reconstruction: Towards Epistemic Integration between AI and Islamic Religious Education

The epistemological dilemma surrounding the use of ChatGPT in contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning requires a critical reconstruction of how AI is integrated into religious education. This reconstruction does not aim to reject technological development, but to place ChatGPT within a pedagogical and epistemological framework that is consistent with the objectives of Islamic education. The main issue is not whether ChatGPT should be used, but how it should be used responsibly so that it supports learning without replacing religious authority, teacher guidance, and reflective understanding.

The first element of this reconstruction is the repositioning of teachers as epistemic authorities in AI-mediated learning. In contextual PAI, teachers do not merely transmit religious information; they interpret religious meanings, guide moral reflection, verify sources, and connect Islamic teachings with students' lived realities. Therefore, ChatGPT should be positioned as a supporting tool that provides initial information, examples, or discussion prompts, while teachers remain responsible for verifying the accuracy, context, and relevance of AI-generated responses. This position is important because religious education requires interpretive accountability and ethical guidance that cannot be provided by algorithmic systems (Hamidalloh, 2025).

The second element is strengthening critical digital literacy. Students need to understand that ChatGPT generates responses based on algorithmic processes and data patterns, not through religious reasoning, sanad-based transmission, or scholarly accountability. Critical digital literacy enables students to evaluate AI-generated information, recognize possible bias, identify simplification, and compare digital responses with authoritative Islamic sources. In this sense, digital literacy functions as a safeguard that prevents students from accepting AI-generated religious explanations passively or treating them as final religious truth (Zaimina, 2024; Hufron & Izzati, 2025).

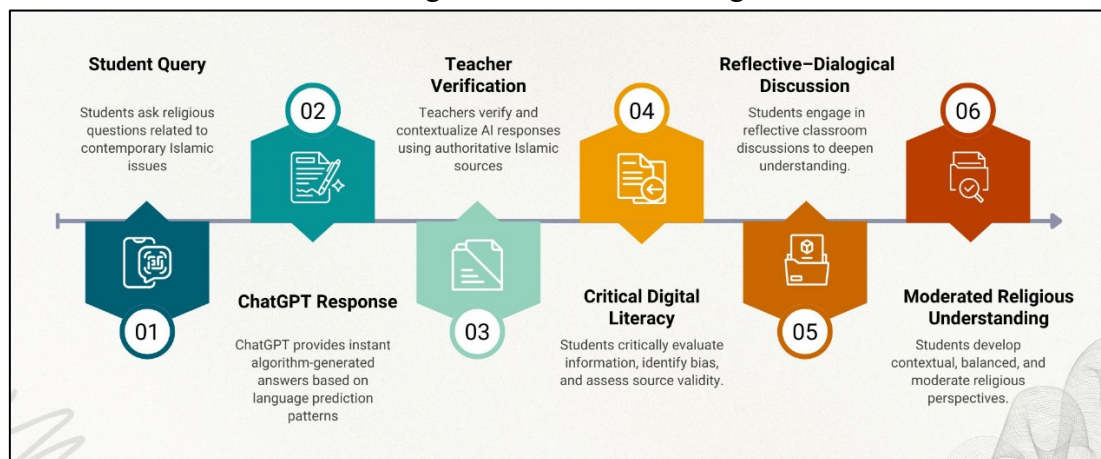
The third element is the development of reflective-dialogical learning. ChatGPT should be used as a stimulus for inquiry rather than as an endpoint of learning. Teachers can ask students to compare ChatGPT's responses with the Qur'an, hadith, tafsir, Islamic

jurisprudence, textbooks, and scholarly explanations. Students can then be guided to discuss similarities, differences, limitations, and contextual meanings. Through this process, AI-generated responses become materials for reflection and dialogue, not substitutes for religious understanding. This approach is consistent with the need for religious learning to cultivate critical reasoning, ethical awareness, and internalization of values (Shah et al., 2025).

The reconstruction proposed in this study can be understood as an integrated learning cycle. First, students formulate religious questions related to contextual issues in their lives. Second, ChatGPT is used to generate initial explanations or alternative perspectives. Third, teachers guide students to verify these responses using authoritative Islamic sources and relevant scholarly references. Fourth, students engage in reflective discussion to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and contextual relevance of AI-generated answers. Fifth, the learning process is concluded by formulating a moderated understanding that is rooted in Islamic values, critical reasoning, and responsible interpretation. This cycle places ChatGPT as an algorithmic epistemic mediator, while the teacher remains the main guide in verifying and contextualizing religious knowledge.

Figure 1 illustrates this conceptual reconstruction. The framework shows that ChatGPT does not stand at the top of religious authority, but functions as an intermediary tool within a guided learning process. Its role is located between students' contextual questions and the reflective-dialogical process facilitated by teachers. The figure also emphasizes three controlling elements: teacher epistemic authority, critical digital literacy, and reflective-dialogical learning. These three elements ensure that AI-generated responses are not accepted as final truth, but are tested, compared, and discussed within accountable Islamic educational practices.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for integrating ChatGPT into contextual Islamic Religious Education learning



Source: Authors' synthesis, 2026.

The framework in Figure 1 also demonstrates the need to balance technological rationality and reflective rationality. Technological rationality provides speed, access, and flexibility, while reflective rationality ensures depth, verification, and value internalization. Without reflective rationality, AI may reduce religious learning to instant

information consumption. Conversely, when placed within a guided pedagogical framework, ChatGPT can help enrich learning discussions, broaden students' perspectives, and support the development of religious moderation.

Therefore, ChatGPT should be understood as an algorithmic epistemic mediator in contextual PAI learning. It mediates access to religious information, but it does not possess the authority to determine religious truth. Its educational value depends on how teachers and students use it within a framework of verification, critical literacy, and reflective dialogue. Through this reconstruction, AI can be integrated into Islamic education without weakening the epistemological foundations of religious learning.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of ChatGPT in contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning should be understood not merely as a technological or pedagogical issue, but as an epistemological issue. ChatGPT changes the way students access, interpret, and validate religious knowledge in digital learning environments. In contrast to traditional PAI learning, which relies on teacher guidance, authoritative Islamic sources, scholarly transmission, and interpretive verification, ChatGPT produces responses through algorithmic processes, linguistic patterns, and probabilistic prediction. Therefore, ChatGPT should not be positioned as an autonomous epistemic actor or a final source of religious authority, but as an algorithmic epistemic mediator that requires pedagogical and epistemological control.

The analysis shows that ChatGPT has an ambivalent role in contextual PAI learning and religious moderation. On the one hand, it may support learning by expanding access to diverse Islamic perspectives, stimulating student inquiry, strengthening digital religious literacy, and encouraging more contextual and reflective discussions. On the other hand, it may also create risks such as simplification of religious teachings, algorithmic bias, pseudo-authority, and pseudo-moderation when students accept AI-generated responses without critical verification. These risks indicate that religious moderation cannot be built merely through exposure to instant digital information, but requires guided reflection, ethical reasoning, and value internalization.

This study argues that the responsible integration of ChatGPT into PAI learning requires a reconstruction of learning orientation through three main elements. First, teachers must remain epistemic authorities who verify, contextualize, and interpret religious information. Second, students need critical digital literacy to evaluate AI-generated responses, identify bias, and distinguish between algorithmically generated information and authoritative religious knowledge. Third, learning must be developed through reflective-dialogical practices that position ChatGPT as a stimulus for discussion rather than as an endpoint of religious understanding. Through this framework, ChatGPT can support contextual PAI learning without weakening the epistemological foundations of Islamic education.

The main contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing ChatGPT as an algorithmic epistemic mediator in contextual PAI learning. This concept helps explain

the dual possibility of AI in Islamic education: it can broaden access to religious knowledge and support moderation, but it can also distort religious understanding if used without teacher guidance and critical literacy. However, this study remains limited as a conceptual library research and does not empirically examine student behavior, teacher practice, or classroom implementation. Future studies are therefore needed to investigate how ChatGPT is actually used in PAI classrooms and how AI-mediated learning influences students' religious understanding, digital literacy, and moderation practices in educational contexts.

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