

Trends of Islamic Religion Education in Higher Education: A Bibliometric Review

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to map and analyze the research trends related to Islamic religious education in higher education over the last five years. The study was conducted through a literature review using a bibliometric approach on 87 articles taken from Scopus and SINTA databases, with 35 selected articles that met the inclusion criteria from 2020 to 2025. The selection and data analysis process followed the PRISMA protocol to ensure the validity and quality of the findings, while bibliometric visualization was carried out using VOSviewer 1.6.20 software. The findings show that 2021 became the peak of publication activity, primarily focusing on the professional development of Islamic Religious Education teachers and the digitalization of Islamic learning among students. In addition, the issue of inclusive religious education and interfaith dialogue also received attention as a response to efforts in reducing radicalism and strengthening cross-religious understanding. The network co-occurrence analysis revealed significant attention to the impact of the pandemic on the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education learning. Most of the studies (84%) used a qualitative approach, showing a strong tendency of researchers to examine the implementation of Islamic values deeply, especially in integrating spirituality, character strengthening, and the formation of ethical behavior of students in higher education.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Critical Religious Education, Higher Education Institution, Bibliometric Review, Systematic Review, Vosviewer

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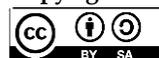
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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) constitutes a fundamental component of the national education system, playing a strategic role in shaping students' character, spirituality, and moral integrity. PAI does not merely focus on strengthening faith and piety to Allah SWT but also emphasizes the internalization of Islamic values encompassing aspects of creed (aqidah), worship (ibadah), ethics (akhlaq), and Islamic civilization (Kamilla dkk., 2025) Within higher education, Islamic education serves a broader purpose beyond the transmission of normative religious teachings by fostering reflective, critical, and contextual thinking in line with the demands of the modern era. Core values such as tolerance, honesty, social responsibility, and respect for diversity are central to PAI learning in shaping students' religious character (Nuraini & Susiani, 2024; Rohim, 2016).

Despite its pivotal role, the implementation of PAI across educational institutions continues to face significant challenges. Globally, previous studies have revealed that Islamic education is often perceived as overly conservative and insufficiently adaptive to pedagogical and technological innovation (Elbanna & Muthoifin, 2024) (Susanti et al. 2024). These challenges are even more apparent within Indonesian higher education, where the learning process must transition toward digital approaches particularly in the wake of the

COVID-19 pandemic, which has transformed educational paradigms worldwide (Mujiburrahman dkk., 2022). Consequently, PAI lecturers are increasingly required to enhance their professional competence and digital literacy to effectively transmit Islamic values within the context of online and technology-based learning.

At the national level, several studies have addressed similar issues. (Muslimin & Ruswandi, 2022) (Susanto et al. 2025) emphasized the need to reconstruct Islamic education to ensure its relevance in contemporary contexts, while (Muawanatul dkk., 2023) highlighted the lack of methodological innovation in Islamic learning within universities. However, most prior research remains thematic focusing on curriculum, pedagogy, or digital learning practices (Hanif, 2019; Nurasih dkk., 2025) without providing a systematic mapping of research trends over the past five years. Meanwhile, international studies by (Arvisais & Guidère, 2020) and (Charki dkk., 2022) predominantly focused on Islamic education at the primary and secondary levels, offering limited insight into the dynamics of PAI research within higher education settings.

This condition reveals a research gap, namely the absence of a comprehensive and systematic mapping of Islamic Religious Education research trends in higher education, particularly concerning thematic evolution, publication patterns, and methodological tendencies. Such mapping is crucial for determining the direction of academic development, informing educational policies, and strengthening the professional capacity of educators. Moreover, bibliometric analyses that could visualize scholarly contributions, research networks, and dominant topics remain scarce within the context of Islamic education, especially in Indonesia (Godazgar, 2025) (Masuwai dkk., 2024) (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020).

To address this gap, the present study adopts a bibliometric approach integrated with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine research trends in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) within higher education from 2020 to 2025. Specifically, this study aims to (1) analyze publication trends, key contributors, and countries with the highest research productivity; (2) visualize thematic developments and scholarly collaboration networks; and (3) explore the dominant research methods employed in PAI studies. The findings are expected to contribute both conceptually and practically to advancing Islamic education scholarship, guiding policy formulation, and enhancing educator professionalism amid ongoing digital transformation and the evolving dynamics of religious education in the modern era.

This study holds significant theoretical and practical value for the field of Islamic education. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive bibliometric mapping of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) research conducted in higher education institutions between 2020 and 2025. Through this mapping, the study identifies key thematic clusters, research methodologies, and evolving scholarly networks that characterize the current landscape of PAI research. This approach not only enriches the understanding of how Islamic education scholarship has evolved in the digital era but also provides an empirical foundation for developing future research agendas.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers meaningful implications for educators, researchers, and policymakers. For educators, the findings highlight the importance of enhancing digital competencies and integrating technology into Islamic learning while maintaining spiritual and ethical values. For researchers, the bibliometric visualization offers valuable insights into underexplored topics and potential areas for interdisciplinary collaboration. For policymakers, the study provides an evidence-based overview of research trends that can inform strategic decisions in curriculum design, professional development programs, and institutional policy related to Islamic education in higher education contexts.

In addition, this study introduces a methodological contribution by integrating bibliometric analysis with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) framework, allowing for a more transparent, replicable, and data-driven understanding of research trends. This

combination ensures both the depth of qualitative synthesis and the objectivity of quantitative mapping an approach still rarely applied in Islamic education studies. Overall, the findings of this research are expected to serve as a foundation for developing innovative, digitally responsive, and value-oriented models of Islamic Religious Education aligned with the demands of the 21st-century learning environment.

METHOD

This research uses a literature study approach with bibliometric analysis methods to examine citations and scientific publications and collect literature data to map a particular field as a basis for further research (Van Dinter et al., 2021). This literature study gives readers insights into the latest developments in the reviewed research object (Carrera-Rivera et al., 2022). The data sources of this research come from articles indexed in Scopus and Sinta, which were obtained through platforms such as Mendeley and Taylor & Francis. This study covers the period from 2020 to 2025 to analyze the current trends in Islamic Religious Education in higher education. From those data sources, 87 scientific data points were found according to the predetermined keywords.

The literature search strategy in this research was carried out online (González-Zamar et al., 2020), using articles indexed in Scopus and journals included in the Sinta category. The main reference sources include Mendeley and Taylor & Francis. As shown in Table 1, data from these sources were selected based on their high quality and easy access to relevant information.

Table 1. Database Search Strategy

Filter	Description
Year	2020-2024
Subject Area	Social Science
Keyword Filter	Islamic Religious, Education college, Islamic education
Source Type	Open-access journal
Language	English
Document Type	Article

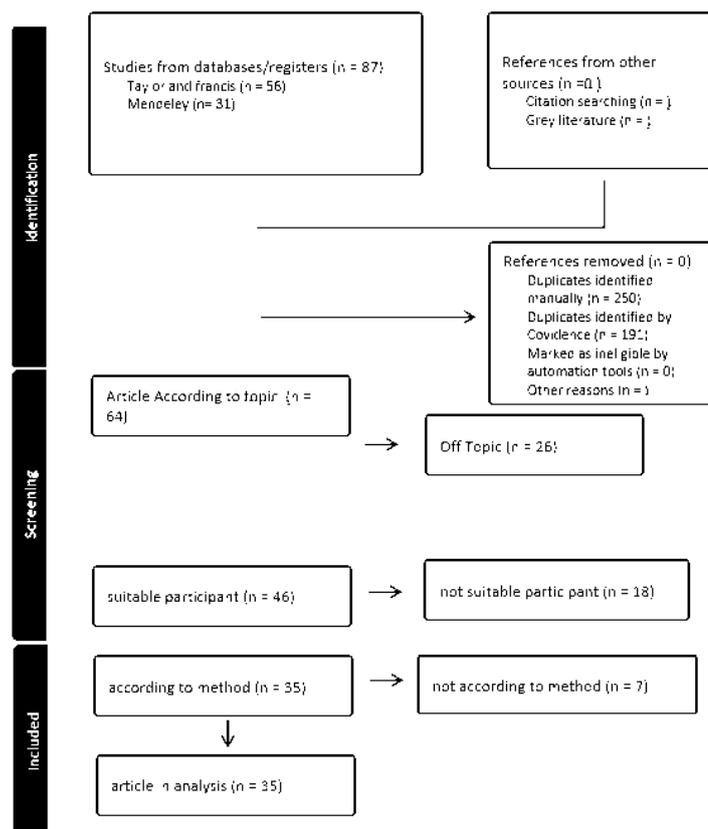
The selection of literature data at this stage was carried out strictly to ensure that the chosen articles matched the predetermined keywords (C. Wang & Si, 2023). According to the study presented by Juhaidi et al., the selection criteria involved two stages, namely inclusion and exclusion, which will be explained further below (Juhaidi dkk., 2024). This process was conducted carefully to ensure the selected documents met the established quality standards.

Table 2. The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Must involve Islamic Religious Education in higher education.	Not involving Islamic Religious Education in higher education.
Must be published from 2020 to 2025.	Outside the specified time.
Only articles are allowed.	Review, Editorial, and non-empirical studies
Must be published in English.	Others
Must focus on Islamic Religious Education.	Islamic Religious Education articles
Must be open access.	Others
Only Scopus and Sinta-indexed articles are accepted.	

Next, the identified literature was selected based on inclusion criteria, such as relevance to the topic, publication within the last five years, the validity of the references, and exclusion criteria for literature considered irrelevant or less valid. The selected literature was then analyzed using a bibliometric analysis approach to identify the main themes, such as Islamic Religious Education in higher education. The results of this analysis were synthesized to formulate the key elements that support relevant Islamic Religious Education. Data validation was carried out through source triangulation to ensure the consistency and credibility of the findings (Ihwanah et al., n.d.).

Figure 1. Prism research flow chart



The selection process of articles in this research consisted of three stages. The first stage was identification, where screening was carried out to remove duplication from 87 articles obtained from Scopus and Sinta journals using related keywords, so that only articles without duplication remained. The second stage was screening based on topic and complete text, which resulted in 64 articles that met the inclusion criteria, while 26 articles were excluded. After further analysis, 46 articles were retained according to the inclusion criteria, while 18 were excluded because the participants did not match. After that, the next step was screening articles according to the desired method, where 35 articles were suitable and 7 articles were excluded because they were literature review studies. The third stage was inclusion, which reported the number of articles that qualified, namely 35 articles that would be used for data extraction and further analysis (Adima et al., 2025; Anwar et al., 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze publication trends, citations, and journal contributions and identify the gaps and potential development in Islamic Religious Education in universities across different countries. Research on Islamic Religious Education in higher

education from 2020 to 2025 shows a decrease in the discussed themes. Based on Table 3, the year 2021 recorded the peak of discussions about the professional development of Islamic Religious Education teachers and the digitalization of Islamic education among students (Pabbajah et al., 2021). In addition, the highest number of citations by researchers also occurred in the same year. These findings indicate the importance of a shift in the professional development of educators, which leads to self-directed and collaborative learning, as well as the need for learning that focuses on practices relevant to the advancement of contemporary education and student engagement (Alhashmi & Moussa-Inaty, 2021)

Table 3. Citation and Publication Trends

Year	Number of Articles	Number of Citations
2021	12	165
2022	10	57
2023	7	36
2024	4	29

Research on Islamic education in higher education in Table 3 highlights the development of a religious academic culture based on religious moderation in Islamic universities, especially in higher education institutions in Indonesia. This research emphasizes the importance of integrating traditional Islamic education (pesantren) with the academic curriculum to prevent extremism and to build a moderate understanding of Islam (Chotimah et al., 2022). In addition, research by Abdullah & Nento explores students' perceptions of religious moderation. It identifies the factors influencing these attitudes, such as understanding Islam, balance of sharia, human values, religious pluralism, minority rights, national engagement, anti-violence, friendship, and educational curriculum (Abdullah & Nento, 2021). This strengthens the understanding of religious moderation among students in Islamic higher education by stressing the importance of inclusive attitudes and tolerance in a plural society.

Table 4. The Trends of Authors with the Highest Citations

Authors	Number of Citations
Nur Ali, Benny Afwadzi, Irwan Abdul & Muhammad Islahul Mukmin	
Abdul Haris Abdullah & Shinta Nento	
Maali Mohammed Jassim Alabdulhadi and Kalthoum Mohammed Alkandari	
Ana Saraya, Annisa Mardhatillah, Elisa Novianur Fitriani, Adiyono	
Najwan Saada & Haneen Magadlah	

Based on the table above, from a total of 35 journals discussing the theme of Islamic Religious Education in universities, there are 5 journals with main contributors often used as references. The research by (Ali et al., 2021) recorded the highest number of citations, namely 100, which shows a significant influence. This research highlights the importance of inclusive religious education and interfaith dialogue in reducing radicalism as well as increasing understanding and respect among religious communities, especially between Muslim and Christian communities. The case studies at UIN Malang and IAIN Tulungagung show that direct involvement with other religious communities, such as visiting places of worship and interfaith dialogue, can develop pluralistic and peaceful attitudes among students.

Table 5. Top Contributors to Journal Publishers

Source	T	Nun
<i>Cogent Education</i>	Sc	
<i>British Journal of Religious Education</i>	Sc	
<i>AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikar</i>	S	
<i>Al-Ulum</i>	S	
<i>Aqlamuna: Journal of Education Studies</i>	S	

Table 5 shows the top five journals discussing Islamic Religious Education in higher education from 2020 to 2025. *Cogent Education*, which is indexed in Scopus, published five articles related to Islamic Religious Education, emphasizing the importance of transforming learning models in higher education with a focus on integrating technology in Islamic education. These studies examine changes in the application of technology to improve the learning of the Islamic religion in the digital era (Abubakari dkk., 2024; Nasir dkk., 2024; Nopriyansa, 2021). Other articles discuss the role of moderation in Islamic education to promote tolerance, intellectual security, and prevent radicalism, as well as criticize the shallow understanding of religious moderation, which is often seen only as a theoretical concept rather than a transformational force in shaping character (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024; Barizi dkk., 2023; Chotimah dkk., 2025). In addition, the *British Journal of Religious Education* discusses the factors that influence professional recognition, including the level of training, work schedule, state accreditation, type of work contract, and the way they demonstrate professional competence through performance (Alhashmi & Moussa-Inaty, 2021; Tuna, 2022)

Figure 2. The Proportion of Research Methods in Islamic Education Studies

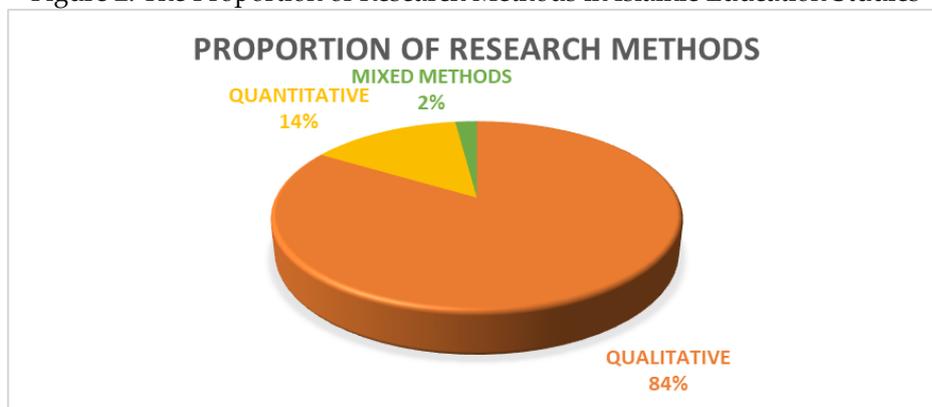


Figure 2 shows that the trend of research methods in the topic of Islamic education in higher education involves various approaches, where the choice of the correct method is critical to determine the validity of a study (Shabira et al., 2024). From a total of 35 articles, the research methods used include qualitative, mixed methods, and quantitative. This study shows that the qualitative method makes the most significant contribution, 84%, followed by the quantitative method, 14%, and the mixed method, 2%. The qualitative method is more widely applied in Islamic education research in higher education because this approach uses case studies. Therefore, researchers prefer qualitative methods to implement the values of Islamic education in higher education, especially in integrating spirituality in Islamic education at the university level,

focusing on developing students' character and ethical behavior. This research involves interviews with Islamic education lecturers and observation of learning activities at Brawijaya University and Malang State University (Chanifah et al., 2021). Studies revealed that the decline of morality and character among students needs serious attention, and they also emphasized the importance of integrating ethical and moral values in education (Solehuddin et al., 2023). This research aims to design and apply a learning model that can encourage character development through Living Values Education (LVE), which includes values such as respect, compassion, and responsibility.

Figure 3. Co-authorship Visualization

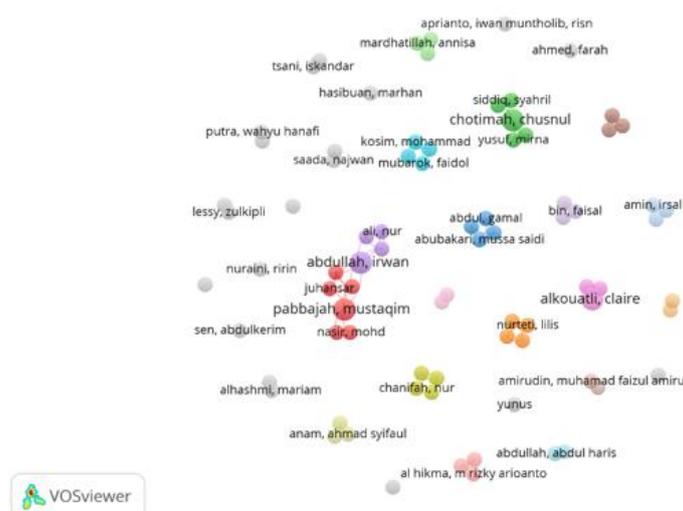
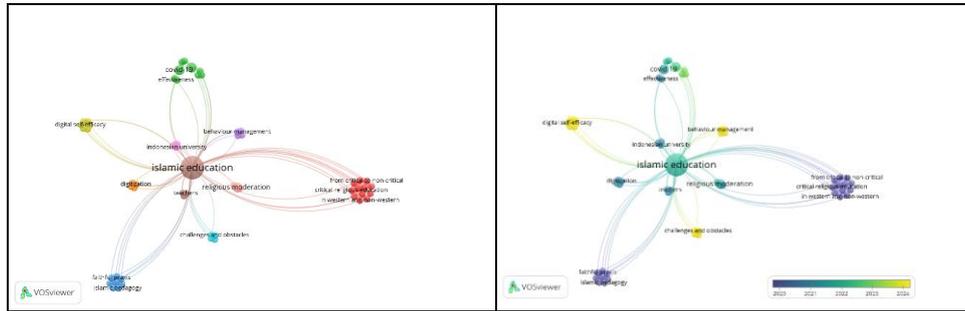


Figure 3 shows the collaboration among authors with the theme of Islamic education trends in universities using the VOSviewer software. The colors indicate collaboration between one author and another. This analysis involves 80 authors from 35 articles with co-authorship (Spante et al., 2018). Each size of the color cluster shows collaboration, where the larger the color, the greater the collaboration among the authors. For example, authors such as Abdullah Irwan, Pabbajah Mustaqim, Juhansar, and Nasir Mohd discuss the digitalization of Islamic education among Indonesian students who rely on smartphones to access Islamic knowledge and shift traditional learning to virtual education (Nasir et al., 2024; Pabbajah et al., 2021). In the meantime, Abdul, Gamal, Abubakari, and Mussa Saidi discuss the factors that influence the adoption of digital technology in the context of Islamic education, aiming to understand how perceptions of educational compatibility and digital confidence affect students' intention to use digital technology in learning at Islamic educational institutions (Abubakari et al., 2024).

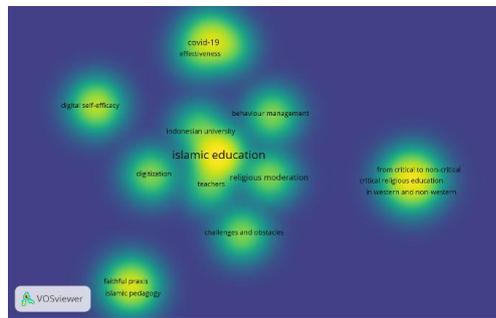
Chotimah, Siddiq, Mardhatillah, Aprianto, and Kosim (Chotimah et al., 2022) highlight the importance of developing an academic-religious culture based on religious moderation in the environment of Islamic universities, especially at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung. They emphasize that integrating traditional Islamic education (pesantren) into the academic curriculum plays a strategic role in preventing extremism and shaping a moderate understanding of Islam.

Figure 4. (a) Network Visualization Co-occurrence, (b) Overlay Visualization Co-occurrence, (c) Density Visualization Co-occurrence.



(a)

(b)



(c)

The picture above is a visualization of the keyword network in research related to Islamic Education, analyzed using the VOSviewer software. This analysis aims to identify the focus of the study and the connection among topics in the academic literature on Islamic education. A total of 136 keywords were identified, with "Islamic Education" as the most dominant keyword, showing its position as the central topic. This indicates that all the connected clusters reflect the interdisciplinary nature and the complexity of contemporary Islamic education studies. The first cluster, marked in red, includes religious moderation and critical religious education in Western and non-Western contexts. This cluster highlights the development of critical discourse in religious education, especially emphasizing the moderate approach as a response to global religious dynamics (Hamdan Hasibuan et al., 2022; Ustadiyah, 2023)

The second cluster, marked in green, includes the keywords "Covid-19" and "Effectiveness", showing attention to the impact of the pandemic on the effectiveness of the learning process in the context of Islamic education (Hasibuan, 2021). The third cluster, in yellow, brings up the keywords "Digital" and "Self-efficacy", which reflect the research focus on the readiness of teachers, lecturers, and students in using technology, especially in the implementation of online learning (Amirudin et al., 2023; Mujiburrahman et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the blue cluster, which includes the keywords "Islamic pedagogy" and "Faithful praxis", emphasizes the importance of pedagogical approaches based on Islamic values, as well as teaching practices that are consistent with religious principles (Ustadiyah, 2023)

Figure B shows the mapping results that indicate a significant thematic shift in Islamic Religious Education studies during the last five years. The overlay visualization of "Islamic Education" keywords illustrates research trends from 2020 to 2024. The colors in the visualization reflect the time of the topic's appearance, starting from purple (2020) to yellow, which represents the newest topics in 2024–2025 (Adima et al., 2025). The purple cluster, which dominated in the period 2020–2021, contains

keywords such as “Critical religious education”, “Islamic pedagogy”, and “Faithful praxis”. These topics focus on the theoretical and philosophical dimensions in Islamic education, with an emphasis on reconstructing the paradigm of religious education to be more critical, contextual, and responsive to contemporary challenges (Alkouatli, 2024; Al-Razi et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the yellow cluster reflects recent research issues, marked by keywords such as “Digital self-efficacy”, “Behaviour management”, and “Challenges and obstacles”. These topics highlight the factors that influence the adoption of digital technology in Islamic education, and also how these innovations play a role in increasing the effectiveness and productivity of learning (Abubakari et al., 2023, 2024; Ansyah, 2022)

Figure C presents a heatmap visualization representing the research landscape in Islamic education. The keyword “Islamic education” appears in the central position with a larger font size and brighter color intensity, showing that this topic has the highest frequency and acts as the center of various interconnected themes. One of the prominent topics is “Indonesian university”, which reflects the geographical focus of research, especially in Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, and a well-established Islamic education system (Shah et al., 2015) (Asrori et al. 2025). Previous studies also highlight the theme of religious moderation and teachers' role in internalizing moderation's values into educational practice (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024; Bellibaş et al., 2021). Teachers not only implement the value of moderation through their professional attitudes and behaviors but also face various challenges influenced by teaching experience and socio-cultural context. These studies emphasize the importance of moderation in Islamic education as a strategy to develop tolerance, guarantee intellectual freedom, and prevent the growth of radical ideologies in the education environment

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that research trends in Islamic education at higher education institutions over the past five years highlight the growing importance of technology integration in Islamic learning. These results indicate a significant shift in the professional development of educators, emphasizing self-directed and collaborative learning, as well as the need for practice-oriented approaches that align with the advancement of contemporary education and enhance student engagement.

The analysis, which involved 87 selected articles published between 2020 and 2025, demonstrates that the majority of studies focused on the integration of digital technologies into Islamic education. The results further underscore the necessity of strengthening the professional competence of Islamic education lecturers (PAI teachers), advancing the digitalization of Islamic learning, and promoting inclusive religious education as essential components of modern Islamic educational practice.

This study demonstrates that research trends in Islamic education at higher education institutions over the past five years have primarily focused on the professional development of Islamic education teachers (PAI lecturers) and the digitalization of Islamic learning among university students. In addition, the issue of inclusive religious education and interfaith dialogue has received significant scholarly attention as a response to efforts aimed at mitigating religious radicalism and strengthening interreligious understanding within academic environments.

These findings differ from several previous studies that predominantly emphasized curricular aspects and educational policy, such as those conducted by (Anwar dkk., 2022; Kamilla dkk., 2025) which mapped research trends in Islamic education (PAI) in Indonesia with a focus on thematic directions and institutional influences rather than on teacher professionalism. Similarly, the study by (Nurasih dkk., 2025) concentrated on the implementation of problem-based learning within Islamic education, whereas the present study highlights pedagogical competencies and the professional development of Islamic education lecturers within the context of digital transformation.

Meanwhile, (Dyah Fathimah dkk., 2025) examined only the implementation of Android-based mobile learning in Islamic education without addressing the integration of Islamic values in shaping students' character. The study by (Albana dkk., 2023) on the other hand, focused on mapping global research issues related to religion in general, without providing a specific emphasis on the context of Islamic education in higher education institutions. Likewise, (Mahfuzh dkk., 2025) concentrated on the development of social-emotional intelligence within the discourse of Islamic education, whereas the present study highlights the dimension of teacher professionalism and its relevance to the digital transformation of learning.

Furthermore, (Muslimin & Ruswandi, 2022) emphasized the challenges and issues surrounding the implementation of Islamic Education (PAI) in higher education institutions but did not systematically map the existing research trends in this field. In contrast, (Chotimah dkk., 2022) explored the development of an academic-religious culture based on religious moderation within Islamic universities; however, their study did not employ a bibliometric approach to examine patterns of publication and scholarly collaboration.

Considering the results of the analysis, this study focuses on the professional development of Islamic education teachers (PAI lecturers) as well as the strengthening of students' character and spirituality within higher education institutions. This focus serves as a key distinction from previous studies, which primarily emphasized curricular design or the utilization of instructional technology. Most prior research provided general recommendations for policymakers to prepare educators and learners to navigate the digital era, particularly in relation to the implementation of online learning.

In contrast, this study offers a more applied and contextually grounded contribution by emphasizing the importance of enhancing digital competencies among lecturers, students, and policymakers in Islamic education, enabling them to effectively utilize technology in the learning process. Accordingly, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing Islamic education (PAI) learning models that are not only adaptive to digital transformation but also rooted in Islamic spiritual and ethical values.

This study, however, has several limitations that should be taken into consideration for future research. First, there are limitations in the data sources, as the study only utilized two major academic databases, Scopus and SINTA. Although both databases are highly reputable, this restriction may have excluded relevant articles indexed in other databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, ERIC, and ProQuest. Consequently, the reviewed literature may not fully represent the entire body of scholarly publications on Islamic education (PAI) trends in higher education, both nationally and internationally. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the data sources by integrating multiple national and international databases to achieve more comprehensive and representative findings.

Second, this study presents limitations in the implementation of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. Although the research followed the PRISMA protocol, essential stages such as the screening process, assessment of literature quality, and data extraction procedures were not elaborated in sufficient detail, which may affect the transparency and replicability of the results. Furthermore, the bibliometric analysis conducted using VOSviewer remains largely descriptive and does not incorporate advanced quantitative analyses such as co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, or network centrality analysis. Future studies are thus encouraged to adopt more comprehensive bibliometric approaches – such as co-word analysis or cluster mapping – to reveal more complex thematic relationships among research topics.

Third, this study also faces temporal limitations, as the analysis covers the period from 2020 to 2025, while the year 2025 is still ongoing. This situation may introduce potential bias in interpreting research trends, given that not all publications for the final year are yet available in academic databases. Additionally, the study does not include a comparative analysis across countries or institutions, even though geographical and

institutional factors may influence the direction and focus of PAI research. Therefore, future research is advised to incorporate a quality appraisal stage and expand the scope of comparative analysis across countries and institutions to enhance methodological validity and the depth of academic inquiry.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the trend of Islamic Religious Education studies in higher education during the last five years (2020–2025) has experienced a dynamic development, with the peak of publication in 2021. The primary focus of research in this period includes the professional development of Islamic Religious Education teachers, the digitalization of Islamic learning, and the importance of inclusive religious education and interfaith dialogue as a response to the issue of radicalism. The qualitative approach dominates the research methods, reflecting scholars' efforts to deeply explore the Islamic values that are integrated into strengthening students' character and spirituality. These findings also underline the critical role of Islamic Religious Education in responding to global challenges, including the impact of the pandemic on the effectiveness of learning. Therefore, this study makes a significant contribution in mapping the direction of Islamic Religious Education research in higher education and becomes a reference for developing curriculum, learning methods, and education policies that are more adaptive and contextual.

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