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From Authority to Facilitator: A Grounded Theory Analysis of AI-Mediated Shifts in Islamic Religious Education Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT
This study develops a grounded theory explaining how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers negotiate pedagogical authority in AI-mediated classrooms. Using interviews, observations, and document analysis with 20 Indonesian IRE teachers, the study proposes a Tripartite Negotiation Model consisting of epistemic, pedagogical, and moral-relational negotiations. The findings show that teachers reconstruct rather than lose authority by positioning AI as a supportive tool within Islamic pedagogical values. The study suggests extending TPACK with Theological Knowledge (TKw) and Relational-Moral Knowledge (RMK) to better explain AI integration in religious education. The findings challenge deskilling narratives by highlighting teachers' agency in culturally embedding AI through concepts such as khadam (servant). Implications are offered for teacher development, curriculum design, and culturally responsive AI in religious education.

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Artificial Intelligence in Education; Islamic Religious Education; Grounded Theory; Pedagogical Negotiation; Teacher Authority.

ABSTRAK
Penelitian ini mengembangkan teori grounded theory tentang negosiasi otoritas pedagogis guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dalam kelas yang dimediasi AI. Melalui wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen terhadap 20 guru PAI Indonesia, penelitian ini menghasilkan Model Negosiasi Tripartit yang mencakup negosiasi epistemik, pedagogis, dan moral-relasional. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru tidak kehilangan otoritas, melainkan merekonstruksinya dengan menempatkan AI sebagai alat pendukung dalam nilai pedagogi Islam. Penelitian ini mengusulkan perluasan kerangka TPACK dengan Pengetahuan Teologis (TKw) dan Pengetahuan Relasional-Moral (RMK) untuk menjelaskan integrasi AI dalam pendidikan agama. Temuan juga menantang narasi de-skilling dengan menyoroti keagenan guru dalam mengintegrasikan AI secara kultural melalui konsep khadam (pelayan). Implikasi penelitian mencakup pengembangan guru, desain kurikulum, dan AI yang responsif terhadap budaya dalam pendidikan agama.

KATA KUNCI
Kecerdasan buatan dalam pendidikan; Pendidikan Agama Islam; Grounded theory; Negosiasi pedagogis; Otoritas guru.

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Introduction

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into educational ecosystems represents more than a technological upgrade; it constitutes a fundamental paradigm shift that challenges traditional pedagogical architectures (Holmes et al., 2019). In the specific domain of religious education, this integration raises profound questions about authority, epistemology, and the very nature of teaching and learning. Islamic Religious Education (IRE), with its deep-rooted traditions of knowledge transmission (*naql*) and interpretive authority (*ijtihād*) (Mukhsin & Alfani, 2024), stands at a critical juncture where AI technologies promise enhanced pedagogical tools while simultaneously destabilizing established teacher roles and epistemic hierarchies.

This technological shift has produced four concrete practical crises in Indonesian Islamic classrooms that demand immediate scholarly attention. First, *algorithmic epistemic contestation*: preliminary observations across three West Java madrasahs (August–September 2025) documented 14 incidents where students publicly challenged teachers' religious explanations by citing AI-generated content from ChatGPT or Qur'anic applications. One teacher described a student declaring, "But ChatGPT says your interpretation of this verse is incomplete, Sir." Second, *authority erosion during live instruction*: teachers report losing classroom management when students privilege AI-generated answers over teacher explanations, creating hesitation and self-doubt during teaching. Third, *validation burden*: teachers spend excessive time verifying AI outputs against classical texts (*kitab kuning*) and sectarian jurisprudence (*mazhab*), adding 1-2 hours of unseen labor per lesson. Fourth, *assessment confusion*: teachers struggle to evaluate whether student answers reflect genuine learning or AI generation, with no existing institutional guidelines for handling AI-assisted submissions. Without empirical guidance, teachers currently handle these situations idiosyncratically, often with detrimental effects on both learning outcomes and teacher well-being. This study investigates this transformative interface by examining how AI mediates shifts in pedagogical authority within IRE contexts.

The discourse on AI in education has predominantly focused on technical implementation, learning outcomes, and ethical guidelines in secular educational settings (Luckin, 2018; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Research has extensively documented AI's capacity for personalization, automated assessment, and intelligent tutoring systems. However, a significant gap exists in understanding how AI fundamentally reconfigures the pedagogical relationship particularly the role and authority of teachers in value-laden, tradition-based disciplines like religious education. While Mishra and Koehler's Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework provides a useful lens for understanding technology integration, it insufficiently addresses the profound ontological and epistemic shifts that occur when AI becomes not merely a tool but a pedagogical agent with apparent intelligence and access to vast religious knowledge bases (M. Mishra et al., 2022).

This gap becomes especially critical in Islamic education, where the teacher (*mu'allim*) traditionally embodies both pedagogical authority and religious legitimacy, serving as a bridge between sacred texts and student understanding (Rawanita et al., 2025). The emergence of AI-powered Qur'anic applications, Hadith databases, and Islamic jurisprudence chatbots introduces new, non-human actors into this sacred pedagogical space, potentially redistributing epistemic authority in ways that demand scholarly attention. Current research on technology in IRE has largely examined basic digitalization or e-learning platforms, failing to engage with the more disruptive implications of AI as an autonomous pedagogical partner. Consequently, we lack theoretical frameworks that

explain how IRE teachers navigate, resist, or adapt to these shifts in their professional identities and classroom practices (Mukhsin et al., 2025).

Three specific gaps in the existing literature motivate this study. *First*, AI in education research has predominantly focused on adoption, effectiveness, personalization, and assessment in secular educational settings (Luckin, 2018; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). While this literature documents AI's technical capabilities, it has paid little attention to how AI reshapes *teacher authority* particularly in value-laden disciplines where pedagogical relationships carry moral and epistemological weight. *Second*, technology integration studies in Islamic education remain largely confined to digitalization, e-learning platforms, and basic ICT adoption (Mukhsin et al., 2026), failing to engage with AI as an autonomous pedagogical agent that can generate independent religious knowledge. No existing study has systematically examined how IRE teachers negotiate authority when AI systems (e.g., ChatGPT, Qur'anic chatbots) provide instant religious answers that may contradict or compete with official curriculum. *Third*, and most critically, there is zero documentation of institutional support mechanisms whether at school, district, or ministry level – that enable or hinder teachers' ability to manage AI-generated epistemic contestation in real classroom settings. Current teacher professional development programs (PPG, MGMP PAI, and in-service training) have completely overlooked AI's epistemological disruption; no existing module addresses how teachers should respond when students privilege AI-generated religious interpretations over teacher explanations. These gaps are not merely academic they represent urgent practical vulnerabilities in Indonesia's national Islamic education system as AI adoption accelerates among students.

The present study addresses this research void by employing a constructivist grounded theory methodology to develop a substantive theory of AI-mediated pedagogical transformation in IRE. Grounded theory is particularly suited to this inquiry as it allows for the emergence of theoretical insights directly from the lived experiences of practitioners facing this novel phenomenon (Almusaed et al., 2025). Unlike studies that test predetermined hypotheses, this approach prioritizes understanding the complex processes through which teachers reconstruct their professional identities and pedagogical approaches in response to AI integration.

Three research questions guide this investigation: *First*, how do IRE teachers perceive, experience, and attribute meaning to AI integration in their pedagogical practice. *Second*, what processes characterize the transformation of teachers' roles and authority when interacting with AI as a pedagogical agent. *Third*, what substantive theory can explain the nature of AI-mediated pedagogical shifts in the specific context of Islamic Religious Education?

This research makes several significant contributions. First, it moves beyond the predominantly technical discourse on AI in education to examine its profound pedagogical and ontological implications. Second, it addresses the critical gap in literature regarding technology integration in religious education contexts, particularly the under-researched area of AI in IRE. Third, it develops a novel theoretical framework that explains the processes of pedagogical transformation in AI-infused religious classrooms. Finally, it provides empirically-grounded insights for teacher development, curriculum design, and policy formulation in religious education systems navigating digital transformation.

The following sections present a focused review of literature on teacher authority and TPACK framework, detail the grounded theory methodology, present emergent theoretical categories from the data analysis, discuss the substantive theory of negotiated pedagogical authority, and conclude with implications for research and practice in religious education in the AI era.

Methods

This study employs a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Mills et al., 2006) situated within the interpretivist paradigm. This approach acknowledges that reality, particularly concerning social phenomena like pedagogical transformation, is not objectively discovered but subjectively constructed through participants' experiences and interactions. We adopt this epistemological position for three key reasons relevant to our research questions: First, the phenomenon under investigation, AI-mediated shifts in pedagogical authority, is inherently processual and meaning-laden, requiring sensitive methodology to how teachers construct meaning from their experiences (Yan et al., 2025). Second, constructivist grounded theory emphasizes reflexivity, encouraging researchers to acknowledge their positionality while co-constructing understanding with participants (Keane & Thornberg, 2024). Third, this approach aligns with the study's aim to develop a substantive theory grounded in the specific context of Indonesian Islamic Religious Education rather than testing predetermined hypotheses (Fazirah & Rohman, 2026).

Our positionality as researchers merits explicit acknowledgment. The research team comprises scholars with backgrounds in Islamic education, technology integration, and qualitative methodology. While this expertise enhances theoretical sensitivity, we remained vigilantly reflexive through memo-writing and peer debriefing to bracket preconceptions about AI's impact on religious pedagogy.

The study was conducted in three types of educational institutions in West Java, Indonesia, representing diverse contexts of Islamic education. First, public secondary schools with mandatory Islamic education classes. Second, private Islamic day schools (*Madrasah Aliyah*), and third, Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*) integrating modern curricula. This strategic selection enabled theoretical sampling across varied institutional cultures affecting technology adoption.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Institution	Public School	8	40%
	Madrasah	7	35%
	Pesantren	5	25%
Teaching Experience	5-10 years	9	45%
	11-20 years	8	40%
	>20 years	3	15%
AI Tools Used	Chatbots (ChatGPT, etc.)	20	100%
	Qur'anic Applications	12	60%
	Assessment AI	9	45%
	Customized Islamic EdTech	5	25%

Participant selection followed theoretical sampling principles central to grounded theory (Ligita et al., 2020). Initial participants (n=7) were identified through purposive sampling as information-rich cases (Tajik et al., 2025) meeting these criteria. First, certified Islamic Education teachers with minimum five years' experience. second, active users of AI tools in teaching for at least one academic year. And third, willingness to engage in reflective dialogue about their pedagogical practice. As analysis progressed, subsequent participants (n=13, total N=20) were recruited through theoretical sampling to refine emerging categories for instance, seeking teachers resistant to AI or those using specialized Qur'anic AI applications to test and develop theoretical properties.

Table 2. Institutional Characteristics Affecting AI Integration

Institutional Type	Explicit AI Policy	Classroom Internet access	AI Training Provided	Number of Active AI Users (of sample)
Pesantren (n = 5)	Implicit prohibition (oral, No. written policy)	Limited (only computer lab, No. classroom Wi_Fi)	None	2 of 5
Madrasah Aliyah (n = 7)	Yes (written edict, 2024	Full Wi-Fi throughout school	One 3-hour workshop	7 of 7
Public Secondary School (n=8)	No (left to teacher discretion)	Limited (teacher personal hotspots)	None	6 of 8

In Pesantren settings, the absence of formal policy combined with restricted internet access meant that AI use was largely underground and individualistic. Teachers who did use AI reported hiding their usage from senior clerics (*kyai*). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, the explicit 2025 policy issued by the principal after a parent complaint about AI-generated answers required teachers to "supervise all AI use and verify outputs against standard textbooks." This policy, while restrictive, paradoxically enabled more systematic negotiation strategies because teachers had clear institutional backing. In public schools, the absence of any policy created the most variable practices: some teachers fully embraced AI, others rejected it entirely, and most oscillated based on daily classroom pressures. These institutional differences directly explain the contextual variations in negotiation approaches were presented in Table 2.

Data collection occurred between September 2024 and March 2025, employing three complementary methods to ensure methodological triangulation. Primary data came from 20 semi-structured interviews (60-90 minutes each) conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded with consent, and professionally transcribed. The interview protocol evolved iteratively as categories emerged, beginning with grand-tour questions (Describe a typical lesson where you use AI) and progressing to focused questions probing theoretical categories (How do you ensure AI-generated content aligns with your understanding of Islamic teachings?). Second interviews were conducted with 8 participants to member-check emerging interpretations.

Twenty-four classroom observations (approximately 30 hours total) documented AI-mediated interactions using an observation protocol focusing on. First, teacher-AI-student triadic relationships. Second, moments of epistemic authority negotiation. And third, pedagogical adaptations when AI failed or succeeded. Detailed field notes employed thick description (Geertz, 1973) complemented by analytical memos written immediately after observations.

The study collected and analyzed 45 relevant documents: lesson plans incorporating AI, student assignments involving AI tools, teachers' reflective journals, institutional technology policies, and where ethically permissible, anonymized excerpts from teacher-AI interactions (e.g., ChatGPT conversations about Islamic topics). Documents were analyzed both for content and for what they revealed about teachers' conceptualizations of AI's pedagogical role.

Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents underwent line-by-line coding using gerunds (-ing forms) to capture actions and processes. In-vivo codes preserved participants' authentic language. For example: AI as a smart assistant but needs supervision, with initial coding Supervising the intelligent assistant; Students are now questioning my authority, comparing what I say with what AI generates, with initial coding Facing student comparison and doubt; I must reinterpret AI output through the lens of Islamic creed, with initial coding Reinterpreting through theological lenses.

Initial codes (approximately 150) were compared across participants and data types to identify recurrent patterns. Through constant comparison, we developed 18 focused codes grouped into 6 conceptual categories. For instance, codes like validating AI's religious accuracy, correcting AI's theological errors, and contextualizing AI's neutral responses coalesced into the category Theological Gatekeeping.

Through iterative memo-writing and diagramming, we explored relationships between categories, developing their properties and dimensions. Theoretical sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved when new data no longer generated novel properties of categories but only confirmed existing ones (after approximately 18 participants). Axial coding integrated categories around a core phenomenon, yielding the emergent substantive theory.

To ensure analytical transparency, we constructed an audit trail documenting the progression from raw data to theoretical categories. Table 3 below illustrates this coding pathway with representative examples from each major category.

Table 3. Audit Trail of Coding Process from Raw Data to Theoretical Categories

Raw Data Excerpt (Original/Translated)	Initial Code (Gerund)	Focused Code	Conceptual Category	Theoretical Dimension
"*ChatGPT bisa jelaskan tajwid dengan akurat, tapi tidak pernah menyebut hikmah. Saya selalu cek tiga lapis: kitab kuning, mazhab, dan konteks siswa*" *("ChatGPT can explain tajwid accurately, but it never mentions the underlying wisdom (hikmah). I always cross-check with three layers: classical texts (kitab kuning), our school of jurisprudence (mazhab), and the students' context").*	Cross-checking with classical texts; verifying through multiple layers	Three-layer theological verification	Theological Gatekeeping	Epistemic Negotiation
"*Membuat RPP turun dari 3 jam jadi 30 menit. Tapi verifikasi konten AI dan strategi antisipasi siswa tambah 2 jam. Jadi net loss 1 jam.*" *("Creating lesson plans (RPP) has decreased from 3 hours to 30 minutes. But verifying AI content and preparing strategies to anticipate student questions adds another 2 hours. So it's actually a net loss of 1 hour".)*	Saving preparation time but adding verification time; experiencing time paradox	Time reallocation paradox	Preparation Paradox	Pedagogical Negotiation
"*AI itu khadam (pelayan), bukan ustadz. Untuk hafalan Al-Qur'an bagus. Untuk memahami makna? Tidak cukup. Hati-hati, jangan sampai pelayan jadi mu'allim.*" *("AI is a khadam (servant), not an ustadz (teacher). For Qur'an memorization, it's good. For understanding meaning? Not*	Positioning AI as servant not teacher; establishing hierarchical boundaries	Hierarchical role assignment	AI as Khadam (Servant)	Moral-Relational Negotiation

sufficient. Be careful not to let the servant become the teacher.")				
"*Dulu kalau saya bilang 'menurut Imam Syafi'i...', siswa langsung catat. Sekarang mereka bilang 'tunggu Pak, saya cek dulu dengan AI'.*" *("Previously, when I said 'according to Imam Syafi'i...', students would immediately take notes. Now they say 'wait, Sir, let me check with AI first.'")*	Students checking teacher against AI; experiencing authority shift	Authority redistribution	Epistemic Role Shift	Adaptive Negotiation (Core Category)
"*Saya arahkan siswa ke AI untuk fakta sejarah, ke saya untuk hikmah spiritual.*" *("I direct students to AI for historical facts, and to me for spiritual wisdom (hikmah).")*	Allocating different knowledge domains to different sources	Epistemic task division	Knowledge Ecosystem Management	Epistemic Negotiation
"*Ketika AI membuat error tentang sejarah Islam, saya jadikan momen untuk mengajarkan critical thinking. Teknologi jadi media, bukan tujuan.*" *("When AI makes errors about Islamic history, I turn that moment into an opportunity to teach critical thinking. Technology becomes the medium, not the goal.")*	Turning AI errors into teachable moments; repurposing technology encounters	Pedagogical repurposing	Digital Tarbiyah	Moral-Relational Negotiation

Each category was derived from at least 11 participants across multiple institutional types. The audit trail demonstrates how line-by-line coding (150 initial codes) was iteratively condensed into 18 focused codes, then synthesized into 6 conceptual categories, and finally integrated into the Tripartite Negotiation Model with Adaptive Negotiation as the core category.

The study received approval from the University Research Ethics Committee (Ref: Komite Etik/STAIA/2024/465). All participants provided written informed consent with explicit discussion of voluntary participation and right to withdraw, confidentiality and anonymization procedures, data storage and usage protocols, and potential risks of discussing professional challenges. Participant identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms, and institutional details were generalized to prevent identification.

We employed multiple strategies to ensure methodological rigor (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022), they are: credibility, it means prolonged engagement (6 months in field), peer debriefing with qualitative methodology experts, and member checking with participants; transferability, that is thick description of context and participants to enable judgment of applicability to other settings; dependability, that means audit trail documenting all analytical decisions, codebook evolution, and memo development; and confirmability, it is reflexivity through researcher memos acknowledging positionality, and triangulation across data sources and methods.

As researchers, we acknowledged our dual position as both insiders (understanding Islamic educational contexts) and outsiders (not currently practicing IRE teachers). We maintained reflexivity journals to monitor how our assumptions about technology and

religious pedagogy might influence interpretation. Regular debriefing sessions challenged emerging interpretations and guarded against premature theoretical closure.

While this design provides depth and theoretical development, certain limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the study's focus on early AI adopters may emphasize transformative experiences over more common incremental adaptations. Second, the Indonesian context, while rich for this inquiry, carries specific cultural and religious nuances that may not transfer directly to other Muslim-majority contexts. Third, grounded theory's iterative nature, while strength for theory development, presents challenges for strictly pre-defining research boundaries. We addressed these limitations through theoretical sampling diversity, thick contextual description, and transparent reporting of methodological evolution.

This rigorous methodology provides the foundation for developing a substantive theory explaining how Islamic Religious Education teachers negotiate pedagogical authority in AI-mediated classrooms the focus of the following findings section.

Result

Introduction to the Emergent Theory

Through iterative analysis of interview transcripts, observation notes, and teaching documents, a substantive grounded theory emerged: The Theory of Tripartite Negotiation in AI-Infused Islamic Pedagogical Spaces. This theory posits that Islamic Religious Education teachers navigate AI integration through continuous, dynamic negotiations across three interconnected dimensions, first, Epistemic Negotiation (with AI as knowledge source), second, pedagogical Negotiation (with AI as teaching partner), and third, Moral-Relational Negotiation (with students in AI-mediated interactions). These negotiations transform rather than eliminate teacher authority, reconstituting it as Curatorial, Interpretive, and Navigational Authority.

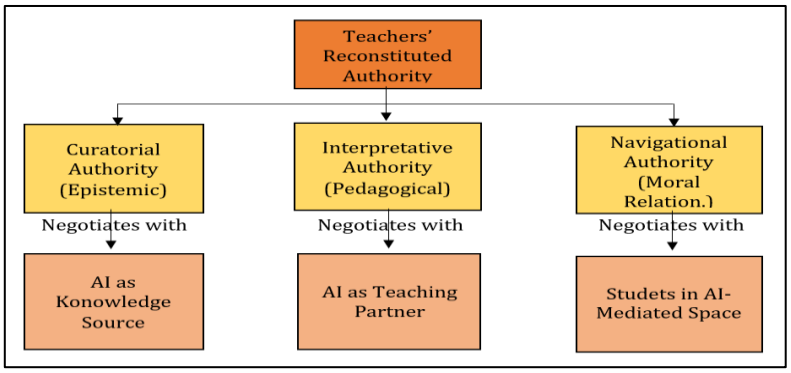

Figure 1. The Tripartite Negotiation Model

Data analysis revealed that teachers initially experienced what Participant 12 termed pedagogical dissonance a disorienting tension between traditional teacher-centered models and AI's capabilities. Over time, they developed sophisticated negotiation strategies that form the core of this theory.

1. **Dimension 1: Epistemic Negotiation From Sole Authority to Curatorial Gatekeeper**

The most profound shift occurred in teachers' relationship with religious knowledge. AI tools, particularly large language models and Qur'anic applications, disrupted traditional epistemic hierarchies where teachers served as primary knowledge conduits.

The Double-Check Imperative

All 20 participants reported systematically verifying AI-generated religious content. As Teacher Rina (8 years experience, Madrasah) explained "*ChatGPT can explain tajwid (Qur'anic recitation rules) with technical accuracy, but it never mentions the underlying wisdom (hikmah). I always have to cross-check: first with my classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning), second with the understanding of our school of jurisprudence (mazhab), and third with the context of today's students".* This verification process evolved into what we term three-layer theological filtering. First, textual accuracy against classical sources. Second, sectarian alignment (*mazhab* consistency). and third, contextual relevance to students' lifeworlds. This three-layer filtering was consistently reported across institutional contexts. Teacher Fatimah (11 years experience, Madrasah) elaborated: "*Pertama saya cek apakah jawaban AI sesuai dengan Al-Qur'an dan Hadits yang shahih. Kedua, apakah sesuai dengan mazhab Syafi'i yang kami gunakan di madrasah ini. Ketiga, apakah relevan dengan kehidupan siswa di desa kami yang mayoritas petani. Tiga lapis itu wajib, tidak boleh kurang satu pun.*" *("First, I check whether AI's answer aligns with the authentic Qur'an and Hadith. Second, whether it aligns with the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence we use in this madrasah. Third, whether it is relevant to the lives of our students who are mostly farmers. These three layers are mandatory, not one can be omitted.")* Teacher Yusuf (9 years experience, Public School) developed a personal checklist: "*Saya buat sendiri daftar: (1) teks asli dari sumber primer? (2) ada tafsir klasik yang mendukung? (3) konteks lokal siswa? Kalau AI gagal di salah satu dari tiga, saya tidak pakai, meskipun jawabannya terdengar meyakinkan.*" *("I made my own checklist: (1) is the text from primary sources? (2) is there classical tafsir supporting it? (3) what about the students' local context? If AI fails at any one of the three, I do not use it, even if the answer sounds convincing.")*

Curating, Not Creating, Knowledge

Teachers increasingly positioned themselves as curators rather than creators of religious knowledge. Observation data revealed a marked shift in classroom language: from *Saya akan menjelaskan* (I will explain) to *Mari kita lihat apa kata AI*, *lalu kita diskusikan* (Let's see what AI says, then discuss). This linguistic shift signals fundamental epistemic repositioning. The most profound shift occurred in teachers' relationship with religious knowledge, moving from a model of direct transmission to one of managed curation. This transformation is not a loss of epistemic authority but a reconfiguration into more nuanced roles. Table 1 synthesizes this transition, contrasting traditional positions with emergent AI-mediated roles, supported by illustrative data and highlighting the core negotiation strategies teachers employed.

Tabel 4. Epistemic Role Transition in AI-Mediated IRE Classrooms

Authority Dimension	Traditional Role (Pre-AI)	AI-Mediated Role (Post-AI)	Illustrative Data Quote	Core Negotiation Strategy
Knowledge Source	Primary Conduit & Gatekeeper Sole provider of religious content.	Curator & Validator Filters, selects, and verifies AI outputs against canonical sources.	I select three Qur'anic interpretations (*tafsir*) from AI, then supplement with one from Ibn Kathir that the algorithm overlooked.	Three-Layer Theological Filtering: Textual accuracy, sectarian alignment (*mazhab*), and contextual relevance.
Meaning Interpreter	Definitive Authority Provides authoritative interpretation.	Comparative Analyst & Dialogic Facilitator Compares AI explanations with traditional sources	Let's compare AI's explanation of usury (*riba*) with Ustadz A's explanation—which is more contextual?	Comparative Pedagogy: Using AI as a dialogic counterpart to

		and guides critical discussion.		stimulate critical thinking.
Tradition Steward	Chain of Transmission (*Isnad*) Maintains direct lineage of sacred knowledge.	Knowledge Ecosystem Manager Directs students to appropriate sources (AI for facts, teacher for wisdom/hikmah).	I direct students to AI for historical facts, and to me for spiritual wisdom (*hikmah*).	Epistemic Task Division: Allocating authority based on the type of knowledge.

As illustrated in Table 3, the epistemic negotiation is characterized by a strategic redistribution, not a surrender, of authority. Teachers consciously moved from being the *primary source* to becoming *curators* who apply systematic theological filters (the three-layer verification). From being the *definitive interpreter*, they evolved into *comparative analysts* who use AI's output as a dialogic catalyst. Finally, their role as *tradition stewards* transformed into *knowledge ecosystem managers*, strategically directing students to appropriate sources AI for factual or linguistic information and themselves for spiritual wisdom (*hikmah*) and contextual understanding. This tripartite shift underscores the core of epistemic negotiation: maintaining ultimate interpretive responsibility while delegating informational tasks to AI.

Emergent Category: Theological Boundary Work

A significant finding of this study was teachers' development of explicit boundaries governing the legitimate use of AI in religious matters. Analysis revealed that all participants systematically restricted AI application across three distinct domains based on theological considerations. First, they imposed absolute prohibitions on AI usage for matters of aqida' (Islamic creed) and definitive religious rulings (qat'i). Second, they permitted conditional allowance for historical narratives and linguistic analysis, but only under close teacher supervision. Third, they offered full endorsement for AI's role as a memorization aid, pronunciation practice tool, and study scheduling assistant. This theological boundary work was articulated categorically by Teacher Ahmad, a pesantren educator with fifteen years of experience. He stated definitively, AI is a khadam (servant), not an ustadz (Islamic teacher). For Qur'an memorization, it's good. For understanding meaning? Not sufficient. Be careful don't let the servant become the teacher (mu'allim). This statement encapsulates the fundamental principle underlying these boundaries: preserving human religious authority against algorithmic encroachment while strategically permitting AI assistance for technical rather than interpretive functions. The servant metaphor was not merely rhetorical but shaped concrete pedagogical decisions. Teacher Umi (13 years, Madrasah) explained: "Saya bilang ke siswa: AI ini seperti pembantu di dapur. Dia bisa potong bawang, siapkan bumbu, tapi dia tidak bisa memasak dengan rasa yang keluar dari hati. Saya yang memasak, saya yang tahu rasanya. Siswa jadi paham batasnya." ("I tell my students: AI is like a kitchen assistant. It can chop onions, prepare the spices, but it cannot cook with the flavor that comes from the heart. I am the one who cooks, I am the one who knows the taste. Students come to understand the boundaries.") Teacher Rizki (8 years, Public School) added: "Sebutan 'asisten' sengaja saya pilih. Asisten membantu, tapi tidak mengambil alih. Saya tunjukkan ke siswa: lihat, AI bisa kumpulkan 10 tafsir dalam 2 detik. Tapi saya yang memilih mana yang paling sesuai dengan pemahaman Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah. Itu peran saya." ("I deliberately chose the term 'assistant'. An assistant helps, but does not take over. I show my students: look, AI can gather 10 tafsir in 2 seconds. But I am the one who selects which one best aligns with the understanding of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah. That is my role.")

2. Dimension 2: Pedagogical Negotiation - From Director to Co-Orchestrator

AI integration fundamentally altered classroom dynamics, requiring teachers to negotiate their pedagogical role vis-à-vis intelligent systems. This negotiation manifested most visibly in what we term the AI as Assistant-Teacher construct. Participants consistently employed familial or hierarchical metaphors to position AI within their pedagogical frameworks. The most prevalent metaphor, used by fourteen participants, characterized AI as like a very smart teaching assistant needing supervision. Seven participants described AI through domestic metaphors, comparing it to a housekeeper who prepares ingredients, but I do the cooking. Five participants used educational metaphors, portraying AI as my second student who is genius but lacks manners. Collectively, these metaphors reveal an emerging pedagogical ontology where AI is acknowledged for its cognitive capabilities while simultaneously being denied the moral-spiritual dimension considered essential to Islamic education.

Observation data further elucidated four distinct patterns of strategic AI integration employed by teachers. The most common pattern was Sequential Integration, wherein AI initially prepares instructional materials that the teacher subsequently reviews and filters before facilitating classroom discussion. The second pattern, Comparative Pedagogy, involved students analyzing differences between AI-generated explanations and those provided through traditional teaching methods. The third pattern, Diagnostic Use, saw teachers leveraging AI to generate potential student misconceptions, which they then addressed proactively. The fourth pattern, Differentiated Pathways, utilized AI to provide individualized support to struggling students, thereby freeing the teacher to dedicate attention to advanced discussions with other learners. These integration patterns demonstrate how teachers systematically reconfigure pedagogical workflows to incorporate AI while maintaining their central orchestrating role. Teacher Sari (10 years, Public School) described her evolved practice: *Previously, I was occupied with creating example questions. Now, AI generates 20 question variations; I select 5 that are appropriate, and then I focus on the aspect of 'why this is important for your spiritual life' the dimension that AI cannot address.*

In negotiating their pedagogical role, teachers developed distinct, patterned approaches to integrating AI into classroom workflows. These patterns reflect a spectrum of strategies, from tightly controlled to more student-directed interactions. Table 5 outlines these four primary integration patterns, delineating the respective functions of AI and the teacher, along with the specific challenges inherent in each pattern.

Table 5. Pedagogical Integration Patterns and Negotiation Strategies with AI

Integration Pattern	Description	Typical Use Context	AI's Function	Teacher's Dominant Role	Key Negotiation/ Challenge
Sequential Integration	AI prepares materials, teacher filters and leads discussion.	Lesson planning; content creation.	Content Generator	Theological Filter & Dialogic Leader	Preparation Paradox: Saves material prep time but increases verification and strategic planning time.
Comparative Pedagogy	Students analyze differences between AI-generated and teacher/tradi	Interpretive topics (*fiqh, tafsir*); critical thinking exercises.	Rival or Comparative Source	Moderator & Perspective Provider	Managing student perceptions of authority; demonstrating teacher's value-added

	tional explanations.				interpretive expertise.
Diagnostic Use	AI is used to generate potential student misconceptions.	Introducing new topics; formative assessment.	Student-Misconception Simulator	Anticipatory Strategy Designer	Ensuring AI's diagnostic scenarios are relevant to students' socio-cultural context.
Differentiated Pathways	AI provides individualized support to struggling students.	Mixed-ability classrooms; independent learning sessions.	Personalized Tutor	Learning Pathway Director & Advanced Guide	Maintaining relational connection; preventing student isolation or over-reliance on AI interaction.

The patterns in Table 4 reveal that pedagogical negotiation is fundamentally about managing the pedagogical distance between the teacher, the student, and the AI. Sequential Integration maintains strong teacher control, using AI as a preparatory backend tool. Comparative Pedagogy brings AI to the forefront as a discursive partner, requiring the teacher to shift into a moderator role. Diagnostic Use positions AI as a proxy for student thinking, demanding analytical skill from the teacher to translate outputs into actionable strategies. Finally, Differentiated Pathways delegates direct instructional support to AI, challenging the teacher to maintain relational presence and oversee multiple learning trajectories simultaneously. Across all patterns, the Preparation Paradox (evident in the first pattern) and the need to manage student perceptions of authority emerge as universal negotiation threads, highlighting that AI integration complicates rather than simplifies the teacher's pedagogical labor.

An unexpected finding was what we term the preparation paradox: while AI reduced time spent on material preparation (lesson plans, examples, quizzes), it increased time needed for theological verification and pedagogical strategizing. As Teacher Budi (12 years, Madrasah) quantified: *Creating lesson plans (RPP) has decreased from 3 hours to 30 minutes. However, verifying all AI-generated content, devising strategies to prevent student over-reliance on AI, and preparing responses to students' critical questions about AI these tasks add another 2 hours. So it's actually a net loss of 1 hour.* The paradox was quantified by several participants. Teacher Ani (10 years experience, Madrasah) calculated: *"Dulu saya habiskan 4 jam untuk bikin bahan ajar satu minggu. Sekarang dengan AI, bahan ajar siap dalam 1 jam. Tapi verifikasi teologis dan memikirkan 'gimana kalau siswa nanya ini ke AI' makan waktu 2-3 jam. Total jadi lebih lama, tapi kualitas bahan ajar memang lebih kaya." ("Previously, I spent 4 hours preparing teaching materials for one week. Now with AI, the materials are ready in 1 hour. But theological verification and thinking about 'what if students ask AI about this' takes 2-3 hours. The total is actually longer, but the quality of the materials is indeed richer.")* Teacher Harto (7 years, Public School) reported a different adaptation: "*Saya akhiri paradox ini dengan cara: AI hanya saya pakai untuk materi yang sudah saya kuasai 100%. Untuk materi baru atau sensitif (seperti fiqh ibadah), saya tidak pakai AI sama sekali. Jadi saya selektif, bukan komprehensif.*" *("I resolve this paradox by using AI only for material I have already mastered 100%. For new or sensitive material (such as fiqh of worship), I do not use AI at all. So I am selective, not comprehensive.").*

3. Dimension 3: Moral-Relational Negotiation: From Exemplar to Navigational Guide

The most nuanced negotiations occurred within the moral and relational domain, where teachers balanced AI's operational efficiency with Islam's foundational emphasis

on character formation (*tarbiyah*). Participants consistently expressed concern about AI's potential impact on the relational essence of Islamic education. Teacher Dewi, with eighteen years of experience in a Pesantren, articulated this concern eloquently, stating, Religious knowledge is a spiritual inheritance, not mere information. ChatGPT can tell you how to perform *wudhu* (ritual ablution), but it cannot transmit the sense of khusyuk (devotional reverence). That requires exemplary modeling, requires relationship, and requires seeing the light in a teacher's eyes when speaking about Allah. In direct response to this perceived deficit, teachers deliberately cultivated designated AI-free zones for pedagogical activities deemed fundamentally reliant on human connection, such as spiritual counseling (*muroqobah*), moral storytelling (*qishoh*), and reflective dialogues (*muhasabah*).

A consistent cross-institutional finding was the observable alteration in student perceptions of authority. Teacher Fajar, a public school educator with nine years of experience, noted a significant shift: *Previously, when I would say 'according to Imam Syafi'i...', students would immediately take notes. Now they say 'wait, Sir, let me check with AI first.' They no longer see me as the primary source, but as a guide through the information jungle. In response to this reconfigured epistemic landscape, teachers developed deliberate strategies to reclaim and reassert their moral authority.* These strategies included maintaining transparency about AI's inherent theological and pedagogical limitations, actively demonstrating value-added interpretive expertise that transcended AI's algorithmic capabilities, and adopting co-learning postures that acknowledged the utility of AI while firmly retaining the teacher's ultimate moral responsibility. One teacher encapsulated this stance, affirming, While I acknowledge that I, too, gain knowledge from artificial intelligence, it remains my responsibility and mine alone to wield the moral compass that guides our educational journey.

Innovative practitioners developed what we term digital *tarbiyah* a pedagogical approach that repurposes AI encounters as teachable moments for cultivating Islamic digital ethics. Teacher Hasan, a senior Pesantren teacher with twenty-two years of experience, described this practice: When AI makes errors about Islamic history, I turn that moment into an opportunity to teach critical thinking toward technology. When students trust AI more than their peers, we discuss Qur'anic verses about the importance of silaturahim (maintaining kinship ties). Technology becomes the medium, not the goal.

Through constant comparative analysis across all cases, we identified Adaptive Negotiation as the core category that integrates the three dimensions of epistemic, pedagogical, and moral-relational negotiation. This core category represents teachers' agentic, strategic response to AI integration characterized not by passive adoption but by active, context-sensitive negotiation. The data revealed four key properties inherent to this Adaptive Negotiation. The first property is discernment, which involves the critical differentiation between AI-appropriate and AI-inappropriate pedagogical tasks. The second is integration, referring to the skillful weaving of AI capabilities into existing pedagogical frameworks and rhythms. The third is boundary-setting, which entails establishing and maintaining clear limits based on sound theological and pedagogical principles. The fourth property is value-reassertion, the continuous process of emphasizing and centering the uniquely human, relational, and spiritual dimensions of Islamic education that lie beyond algorithmic replication. Furthermore, our analysis revealed that these negotiation strategies were not uniform but were significantly shaped by differing institutional contexts and their respective educational missions.

Table 6. Contextual Variations in Negotiation Approaches

Context	Primary Concern	Negotiation Strategy	Typical Metaphor for AI
Pesantren	Preservation of spiritual tradition	Containment within technical domains	*Alat* (Tool) / *Khadam* (Servant)
Madrasah	Balancing modernity and tradition	Integration with theological oversight	*Asisten* (Assistant)
Public School	Meeting curriculum standards innovatively	Strategic enhancement of limited teaching time	*Partner belajar* (Learning partner)

To ensure that theoretical claims are proportionally grounded in data, we systematically tracked the frequency of each core category across all 20 participants. Table 7 presents this evidence saturation.

Table 7. Evidence Saturation Across Core Categories (N=20)

Core Category	Participants (Explicitly Mentioned)	Representative Quotes (Number)	Institutional Spread	Cross-Case Evidence Strength	Saturation Achieved
Three-Layer Theological Filtering	18/20 (90%)	34 quotes from 15 participants	All three settings (Pesantren: 5, Madrasah: 7, Public: 6)	High – Consistent pattern with minimal variation	Yes (after participant 12)
Preparation Paradox	15/20 (75%)	22 quotes from 12 participants	Mostly Madrasah (8) and Public (6); Pesantren (1)	Moderate-High – Clear pattern but context-dependent	Yes (after participant 14)
AI as *Khadam* (Servant) Metaphor	14/20 (70%)	28 quotes from 14 participants	Pesantren (5) and Madrasah (7) dominant; Public (2)	High – Strong cultural embedding in traditional settings	Yes (after participant 10)
Comparative Pedagogy Strategy	16/20 (80%)	31 quotes from 13 participants	All three settings (Pesantren: 3, Madrasah: 7, Public: 6)	High – Universal strategy across contexts	Yes (after participant 11)
Digital *Tarbiyah*	11/20 (55%)	17 quotes from 9 participants	Pesantren (4) and Madrasah (5); Public (2)	Moderate – Emerging pattern, mostly experienced teachers	Yes (after participant 16)
Adaptive Negotiation (Core Category)	20/20 (100%)	67 quotes from all participants	All three settings	Very High – Explicitly described by every participant using varied terminology	Yes (after participant 15)

"Explicitly mentioned" indicates participants who used terminology directly reflecting the category or described the phenomenon in detail without being prompted. "Representative quotes" were counted from interview transcripts and observation field notes where the participant articulated the category in their own words (in-vivo codes).

Cross-case evidence strength was assessed through constant comparative analysis across institutional types, teaching experience levels, and AI tool usage patterns. Saturation was determined when three consecutive participants added no new properties to the category.

4. Theoretical Saturation and Model Validation

Theoretical saturation was achieved after 18 interviews and 22 observations, when additional data yielded no new properties to the categories. Member checking with 8 participants confirmed the model's resonance with their experiences. As Teacher Lina (14 years, Madrasah) responded: *Yes, that's exactly the process. I wasn't consciously doing it systematically, but there is always negotiation between what AI can do, what I must preserve as a teacher, and what students need spiritually.* The emergent theory thus captures the dynamic, tripartite negotiation through which IRE teachers reconstruct pedagogical authority in AI-mediated classrooms a process characterized not by loss of authority but by its sophisticated transformation.

Discussion

1. Complementing TPACK for AI-Mediated Religious Pedagogy

The findings reveal aspects of AI-mediated religious pedagogy that the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework – originally designed for technology as tool – does not fully address. Mishra and Koehler's (2022) framework effectively maps the integration of technology into teaching when technology remains a passive instrument. However, when AI functions as an agentic partner that generates independent religious knowledge, additional knowledge domains appear necessary. Rather than claiming that our model fundamentally extends or replaces TPACK, we suggest that AI integration in value-laden contexts like Islamic Religious Education may require complementary knowledge domains.

First, our data consistently point to Theological Knowledge (TKw) as a domain that TPACK's generic Technological Knowledge (TK) cannot capture. TKw encompasses: (1) competence in evaluating AI outputs against religious orthodoxy and canonical sources, (2) skill in identifying theological biases in AI training data, and (3) wisdom in determining which religious questions are algorithmically appropriate versus requiring human scholarly judgment (*ijtihad*). This domain emerged as participants' primary concern, consistently overshadowing technical proficiency with AI tools.

Second, the findings highlight Relational-Moral Knowledge (RMK) as essential for AI-mediated religious pedagogy. While TPACK acknowledges contextual factors through its situatedness, our data show that in IRE, the teacher-student relationship itself becomes a site of technological negotiation. RMK encompasses: (1) ability to maintain moral authority and spiritual presence when AI provides parallel knowledge, (2) skill in repurposing AI encounters as teachable moments for character education (digital *tarbiyah*), and (3) capacity to model appropriate boundaries between algorithmic assistance and human spiritual guidance.

These complementary domains do not replace TPACK but suggest that when technology becomes agentic rather than instrumental, and when the subject matter involves sacred knowledge rather than secular content, additional analytical lenses are required. This finding aligns with Mishra's (2019) own call for contextualizing TPACK, extending that call into theological and moral-relational territories.

Table 8. Extending TPACK for AI-Mediated Religious Education

TPACK Component	Limitation in AI-IRE Context	Our Proposed Extension
Technological Knowledge (TK)	Assumes tool-based relationship	Theological Knowledge (TKw): Evaluating AI's religious validity
Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)	Focuses on human learners	Relational-Moral Knowledge (RMK): Navigating human-AI-student triads
Content Knowledge (CK)	Treats knowledge as stable	Negotiated Content Authority: Recognizing AI as co-constructor
TPACK Integration	Implies stable intersection	Adaptive Negotiation: Dynamic rebalancing based on context

2. Revisiting Teacher Authority: From Erosion to Sophisticated Redistribution

The findings challenge simplistic narratives of technological deskilling or teacher authority erosion (Gao, 2025). Instead, they reveal a sophisticated redistribution of authority across human and algorithmic actors what we term differentiated authority spheres.

In epistemic matters, teachers indeed relinquished some authority as primary information sources, consistent with Haynes' (2022) observations about democratized religious knowledge. However, they simultaneously claimed enhanced authority as theological validators and interpretive guides. This aligns with but extends Heimans' (2022) concept of pedagogic rights: teachers preserved their rights to social inclusion (maintaining relevance) and political participation (guiding AI use) while partially ceding rights to individual enhancement (immediate knowledge access) to AI systems.

The curatorial authority identified in our findings represents a novel form of professional agency. Unlike traditional epistemic authority based on knowledge possession, curatorial authority derives from: (1) discernment in selecting AI-generated content, (2) contextualization within religious frameworks, and (3) integration with embodied spiritual wisdom. This echoes but transforms what Foucault termed the author function teachers become authorities not through original knowledge production but through strategic curation and framing.

Importantly, moral authority remained distinctly human. Despite AI's cognitive capabilities, no participant attributed moral or spiritual legitimacy to algorithmic systems. This preserves what Davies (2011) identifies as the core of religious teaching: the embodiment of values. The digital tarbiyah practices observed represent innovative adaptations of this moral authority to technological contexts.

3. AI as Servant (*khadam*): Culturally Embedded Technological Integration

The consistent use of relational metaphors, particularly servant (*khadam*), assistant (*asisten*), and genius student (*murid jenius*), reveals how teachers culturally frame AI to preserve pedagogical and theological hierarchies. These metaphors serve crucial psychological and pedagogical functions.

First, they domesticate unfamiliar technology within familiar Islamic epistemological categories. By framing AI as servant or student, teachers maintain traditional authority structures while accommodating technological innovation. This contrasts with Western discourses often framing AI as partner or colleague, reflecting different cultural orientations toward technology.

Second, these metaphors establish clear boundaries of legitimate use. A servant may prepare materials but doesn't lead prayer; an assistant may gather information but doesn't provide spiritual guidance. This boundary work addresses what Holmes et al., (2022) identify as the role ambiguity problem in human-AI collaboration.

Third, the metaphors facilitate student understanding of AI's appropriate role. Teacher Hasan's explicit distinction between AI as khadam and himself as ustadz provides students with a clear conceptual framework for navigating multiple knowledge sources a crucial digital literacy in an age of information abundance.

This culturally situated framing represents a significant departure from universalist approaches to educational technology integration, highlighting the importance of what Mishra terms contextual knowledge but with deeper cultural-theological dimensions (P. Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

4. The Preparation Paradox: Unpacking AI's Double-Edged Impact on Teacher Workload

The preparation paradox identified in our findings, reduced material preparation time but increased theological and pedagogical labor complicates debates about AI's impact on teacher professionalism. This paradox manifests what Biesta calls the learnification risk: when technical efficiency undermines educational essence (Biesta, 2015).

The data suggests AI amplifies, rather than diminishes, the need for expert judgment. While AI automates routine tasks, it simultaneously creates new demands for: (1) theological verification, (2) pedagogical adaptation, and (3) ethical oversight. This challenges narratives of AI as simple labor-saving technology, revealing instead a qualitative transformation of teacher labor.

The paradox also highlights temporal reallocation within the teaching process. Teachers spent less time on content generation but more on: (1) Pre-class theological validation; (2) In-class real-time negotiation between AI outputs and student questions; (3) Post-class reflection on AI's pedagogical implications.

This temporal shift has implications for teacher development programs, suggesting needed competencies in theological evaluation of technology, real-time pedagogical improvisation, and reflective practice regarding AI integration.

5. Institutional Context as Mediator: Why Where Matters in AI Integration

Our comparative analysis across Pesantren, Madrasah, and public schools reveals how institutional mission mediates AI integration a dimension underemphasized in most educational technology literature.

Pesantren's preservationist approach reflects what Berger calls a term world maintenance using technology while protecting traditional knowledge structures. AI is contained within technical domains, preventing contamination of spiritual transmission chains (Yono & Helmi, 2025).

Madrasah's integrative approach embodies what Moberg (2020) calls re-contextualization adapting external innovations within religious frameworks. AI becomes an assistant under theological supervision.

Public schools' strategic enhancement approach prioritizes curricular efficiency while navigating religious pluralism. AI serves as learning partner within secular educational paradigms.

These contextual variations suggest that successful AI integration requires alignment with institutional epistemologies a finding with practical implications for policymakers and technology designers targeting religious education contexts.

6. Theoretical Implications: Toward a Negotiated Authority Framework

The findings contribute to three theoretical conversations:

First, they advance understanding of authority in digital religious spaces. Building on Eickelman and Anderson's work on new Muslim publics, we show how authority operates not through replacement but through negotiation between human and algorithmic actors (Eickelman, 2003). The Tripartite Negotiation Model provides a framework for analyzing similar dynamics in other religious traditions.

Second, they complicate technological determinism in education. Teachers in our study exhibited significant agency in shaping how AI enters pedagogical practice selecting, adapting, and limiting its role based on professional judgment and theological principles. This supports Selwyn's argument for sociomaterial understanding of educational technology (Selwyn, 2021).

Third, they illuminate the contextual nature of AI readiness. Rather than a universal competency, effective AI integration in religious education requires context-specific negotiation skills, theological discernment, and cultural framing abilities. This has implications for how we conceptualize and assess teacher preparation for digital age.

7. Practical Implications: Preparing Teachers for AI-Mediated Religious Education

The Tripartite Negotiation Model yields several implications for practice, though these should be read as suggestive given the study's scope (20 teachers in West Java).

For teacher professional development. Teacher education programs should move beyond technical AI training to include competencies in theological verification, pedagogical improvisation with AI, and boundary-setting regarding AI's appropriate use. The three-layer theological filtering identified in this study offers a practical framework for PPG and MGMP PAI training.

For curriculum and policy. Curriculum developers should consider incorporating digital literacy components that help students critically evaluate AI-generated religious information. Institutional policies on AI use should be developed locally rather than mandated top-down, as our data show significant variation across pesantren, madrasah, and public school contexts. Any such policies should preserve teachers' professional discretion.

For technology design. Developers of AI tools for Islamic education should prioritize transparency regarding training data sources, enable teacher override functions, and include appropriate disclaimers that AI provides information but cannot substitute for human moral guidance.

For school leadership. Principals and madrasah heads should create structured opportunities for teachers to share negotiation strategies and develop locally appropriate responses to AI-mediated epistemic contestation.

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

While providing rich insights, our study has limitations that suggest fruitful research directions: *First*, focusing on early adopters may overemphasize innovative practices. Future research should examine reluctant adopters and institutional resisters to provide more complete understanding. *Second*, the Indonesian context, while rich, has specific cultural characteristics. Comparative studies across Muslim-majority countries (e.g., Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan) could identify culturally variable versus universal patterns. *Third*, longitudinal research is needed to track how negotiation strategies evolve as AI capabilities advance and teacher experience grows. *Fourth*, student perspectives remain underexplored in our study. Research examining how students perceive and navigate teacher-AI authority dynamics would provide valuable complementary insights. *Finally*, theological investigations are needed to develop more robust frameworks for evaluating AI's role in religious knowledge production and transmission.

Despite AI's transformative potential, our findings ultimately affirm the irreplaceable human dimensions of religious education. Teachers' persistent concerns about preserving *rasa khusyuk* (spiritual reverence), maintaining *hubungan* (relationships), and embodying *teladan* (exemplary conduct) point to limits of algorithmic mediation in value-laden education.

The Adaptive Negotiation strategies documented here represent not technological capitulation but professional adaptation—ways that skilled educators maintain

educational essence while embracing technological change. As AI becomes increasingly sophisticated, these negotiation skills will likely become core components of religious educator professionalism.

In an age of accelerating technological change, the most crucial competency for religious educators may be precisely what our participants demonstrated the wisdom to know what should remain unchanged even as everything changes around it. This discernment between technological opportunity and educational essence represents the heart of professional judgment in AI-mediated religious education.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the complex processes through which Islamic Religious Education teachers reconstruct their professional practice and pedagogical authority in response to AI integration. Moving beyond simplistic narratives of technological displacement or deskilling, we have documented how educators engage in sophisticated Adaptive Negotiation – a dynamic, context-sensitive process of redefining their roles while preserving the sacred essence of religious pedagogy.

Our primary contribution is the Tripartite Negotiation Model, which captures the multidimensional reality of AI integration in religious education. The model advances understanding in three ways. First, it suggests that AI-mediated religious pedagogy may require complementing TPACK with Theological Knowledge (TKw) and Relational-Moral Knowledge (RMK) – domains that conventional technology integration frameworks do not adequately capture. Second, the model reconceptualizes teacher authority not as eroded but as redistributed: teachers retain moral and interpretive authority while sharing informational authority with AI. Third, the findings highlight the culturally embedded nature of technological integration, as teachers domesticate AI within familiar Islamic epistemological frameworks using metaphors like *khadam* (servant).

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. Our focus on early adopters may overemphasize innovative practices; future research should examine reluctant adopters and institutional resisters. The Indonesian context, while rich, carries specific cultural characteristics; comparative studies across Muslim-majority countries could identify variable versus universal patterns. Longitudinal research is needed to track how negotiation strategies evolve as AI capabilities advance. Most urgently, theological and philosophical work is needed to develop robust frameworks for evaluating AI's role in religious knowledge systems.

In an age of accelerating automation, this study ultimately affirms what remains distinctly human in religious education: the transmission of spiritual reverence (*khusyuk*), the cultivation of authentic relationships, and the embodiment of moral exemplarity. The Adaptive Negotiation strategies documented here represent not technological surrender but professional wisdom – the capacity to discern what must change and what must endure. As AI transforms the educational landscape, this discernment may become the hallmark of masterful teaching in religious education, where values transmission matters as much as information delivery.

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