

STRATEGIES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE MODERN ERA OF INDONESIA: CREATIVE LEARNING CYCLE AND ETHNORELIGION AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

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Abstract. *This study explores innovative strategies for transforming Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia amid the challenges of globalization and digitalization. Using a qualitative method through literature review and interviews with PAI lecturers, the research examines the integration of the Creative Learning Cycle (CLC) and an Ethnoreligious approach as alternative pedagogical models. Findings reveal that conventional lecture-centered practices are no longer adequate to cultivate students' religious competence, soft skills, and intercultural awareness. The implementation of CLC through Imagine, Create, Play, Share, and Reflect combined with local wisdom, enhances contextual, participatory, and relevant learning experiences. Results indicate that this model strengthens religious moderation and tolerance, improves collaborative and problem-solving skills grounded in Islamic values, and nurtures inclusive identities aligned with global citizenship. Successful adoption depends on lecturer capacity, curriculum flexibility, institutional support, and an inclusive academic culture, with authentic assessment as a key element of evaluation. Overall, the CLC–Ethnoreligious model has the potential to shift PAI from a dogmatic orientation toward reflective, creative, and socially responsive learning suited to Indonesia's plural modern society.*

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education, Creative Learning Cycle, Soft Skills, Higher Education.*

Abstrak. Tujuan penelitian untuk mengeksplorasi strategi inovatif dalam mentransformasi Pendidikan Agama Islam di Indonesia agar mampu menghadapi tantangan kompleks globalisasi dan digitalisasi abad ke-21. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif pada kajian literatur dan wawancara dengan dosen PAI, penelitian ini menganalisis penerapan *Creative Learning Cycle* (CLC) dan pendekatan etnoreligius sebagai model pedagogis alternatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa metode PAI tradisional yang berpusat pada ceramah tidak lagi memadai untuk mengembangkan kompetensi keagamaan, *soft skills*, dan kesadaran lintas budaya mahasiswa. Integrasi model CLC melalui tahapan *Imagine, Create, Play, Share*, dan *Reflect* yang dipadukan dengan kearifan lokal mampu menjadikan proses pembelajaran lebih kontekstual, partisipatif, dan relevan. Temuan empiris menunjukkan adanya dampak multidimensional: (1) dalam aspek religiusitas, mahasiswa menginternalisasi nilai toleransi (*tasamuh*) dan moderasi beragama yang berlandaskan Al-Qur'an dan Hadis; (2) dalam aspek *soft skills*, mahasiswa menunjukkan peningkatan kemampuan empati, kerja sama tim, dan pemecahan masalah yang berakar pada nilai-nilai Islam; dan (3) dalam aspek kompetensi antarbudaya, mahasiswa mengembangkan identitas yang inklusif, empati, serta kesadaran sebagai warga dunia. Keberhasilan implementasi model ini bergantung pada kompetensi dosen, responsivitas kurikulum, dukungan kelembagaan, dan budaya akademik yang inklusif. Evaluasi berbasis asesmen autentik berperan penting dalam mengukur keberhasilan pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa model CLC Etnoreligius mampu mentransformasi PAI dari mata kuliah yang bersifat dogmatis menjadi pengalaman belajar yang reflektif, kreatif, dan aplikatif, yang relevan dengan kebutuhan masyarakat modern dan plural.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Agama Islam, *Creative Learning Cycle*, *Soft Skills*, Pendidikan Tinggi.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapidly growing globalization and digitalization of the 21st century has brought a significant impact on the world and the labor market¹, thus demanding individuals to have adaptive and inclusive 21st century skills, especially in the face of cultural and religious diversity². As a result, according to McKenzie, adaptive and inclusive skills are crucial in helping students to develop and adapt in the face of global cultural diversity³. These skills cover several important aspects that support an individual's success in dealing with a dynamic and diverse environment. Stropnik formulated those adaptive skills include flexibility and adaptability, which allow individuals to adapt to challenges and changes, as well as problem-solving and critical thinking, which help in analyzing situations, finding solutions, and implementing effective strategies⁴. Borelli is of the view that inclusive skills involve cultural awareness and empathy, which enables individuals to understand and respect cultural differences in social interactions, as well as effective communication skills, which ensure information can be clearly conveyed to people from diverse backgrounds⁵.

¹ Peter A. Weldon et al., "Globalization and Higher Education in Southern California: Views from the Professoriate," *Compare* 41, no. 1 (2011): 5–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2010.532360>; Mark C. Thompson, "The Impact of Globalization on Saudi Male Millennials' Identity Narratives," *Asian Affairs* 50, no. 3 (2019): 323–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2019.1636512>.

² Masykuri Abdillah, "Sharia and Politics in the Context of Globalization and Society 5.0," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 2 (2022): 263 – 286, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v22i2.28959>; Thompson, "The Impact of Globalization on Saudi Male Millennials' Identity Narratives."

³ Tará Burnthorne Lopez, April Field Kemp, and Russell McKenzie, "Building Authentic Intercultural Awareness in the Business Classroom," *Journal of International Education in Business* 12, no. 2 (2019): 198 – 211, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIEB-11-2018-0054>; Soyhan Egitim and Roxana Sandu, *Intercultural Language Education through Leaderful Pedagogy: A Collaborative Autoethnographic Approach, Leaderful Classroom Pedagogy Through an Interdisciplinary Lens: Merging Theory with Practice*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1007/9789819966554_10.

⁴ Stasa Stropnik and Jana Kodric, "Adaptive Skills; [Prilagoditvene Spretnosti]," *Psiholoska Obzorja* 21, no. 2 (2012): 41 – 50, <https://doi.org/10.20419/2012.21.362>.

⁵ Sara Borrelli et al., "TransfOrming Transnational IntErcultural Sensitivity for Midwifery Students through an Inclusive Mobility Model: A Mixed-Method Evaluation of the TOTEMM Project," *Nurse Education Today* 138 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2024.106186>.

These skills are essential in creating a more inclusive and adaptive environment, both in the context of education, the world of work, and the community, which can ultimately improve collaboration, tolerance, and social resilience⁶.

To answer these challenges, an education transformation strategy is needed⁷. One of them is the implementation of a participatory education model that places the government as a catalyst, facilitator, and community empowerment, as well as encouraging collaboration with various parties. In addition, the integration of Islamic values with technology is also an important step⁸, as seen in madrasahs that successfully filter digital content ethically, provide teacher training based on Islamic principles, and design value-based learning⁹. Pesantren has also shown adaptive efforts by developing a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the times and strengthening sustainable educational leadership. In the context of strengthening competencies, PAI students need to be equipped with soft skills and intercultural competencies. Intercultural competencies include the ability to interact sensitively with different cultural groups, which can be developed through cultural immersion projects as well as experiential learning. Meanwhile, soft skills such as communication, adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving have proven to be important, both to improve the learning experience and as a provision to face the challenges of the world of work, including in the service and tourism sectors. Thus, PAI in the modern era not only functions as a transfer of religious knowledge, but also as a means of forming a generation of Muslims who are superior, adaptive, and ready to face global dynamics.

⁶ Borrelli et al.

⁷ Pandu Hyangsewu et al., "Efek Penggunaan Gadget Terhadap Social Behavior Mahasiswa Dalam Dimensi Globalisasi," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan* 14, no. 2 (2021): 127–36, <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpipfip.v14i2.39156>.

⁸ Rama Wijaya A Rozak et al., "INTEGRASI NILAI-NILAI PENDIDIKAN SOSIAL-BUDAYA" 10, no. 1 (2021): 11–24, <https://doi.org/10.22460/semantik.v10i1.p11-24>.

⁹ (Hayward, 2018)

The transition from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is very important to answer the needs of students in the digital and pluralistic era¹⁰. This transition requires PAI to adapt by fostering adaptive, inclusive, collaborative, and cultural literacy skills so that students are able to develop in the midst of a diverse and dynamic global environment. One of the main forms of adaptation is the integration of technology in learning. The use of mobile learning (m-learning) has been proven to make Islamic knowledge more accessible and interesting, as well as bridging tradition with modern educational practices. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of e-learning which encourages a more student-centered approach to learning¹¹. Although challenges in the form of low student involvement and high dropout rates are still found, the flexibility and accessibility of e-learning provide great opportunities for the development of PAI in the digital era.

Although numerous studies on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia have discussed the importance of religious moderation, the reinforcement of *Islam rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn* values, and curriculum adaptation in the digital era, most of them remain focused on cognitive and normative aspects of learning. The approaches applied are predominantly textual and teacher-centered, which are insufficient to foster creativity, social empathy, and intercultural competence in today’s plural and global society. Meanwhile, research on innovative pedagogies such as the *Creative Learning Cycle* (CLC) and the ethnoreligious approach remains limited and rarely integrated within the context of PAI. This gap provides the rationale for the present study—to examine how the integration of CLC with local wisdom and ethnoreligious values can transform PAI from a mere transmission of dogma into a reflective, creative, and contextually relevant learning process suited to the demands of modern society.

¹⁰ Mohammad Rindu Fajar Islamy, “Spiritual Healing: A Study of Modern Sufi Reflexology Therapy in Indonesia,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 12, no. 2 (2022): 187–208.

¹¹ Udin Supriadi et al., “The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Preventing Radicalism at Madrasa Aliyah,” *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 1 (2021): 74–90, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v4i1.1073>.

The key problems we highlight in contemporary PAI studies include: (1) the dominance of theoretical and traditional learning approaches that lack students' soft skills; (2) the lack of integration of innovative learning strategies that are responsive to diversity; (3) lack of systematic intercultural competency development; and (4) the gap between universal Islamic values and the context of Indonesian locality. The popularity of scientific studies on the *Creative Learning Cycle* approach is increasing in line with the large number of scientific publications related to it. The graph shows a significant upward trend in research on *Creative Learning*, especially since 2000, with the largest spike between 2010-2020. This reflects a growing focus on innovative learning methods that support 21st-century skills such as creativity and critical thinking. The peak occurred in 2018-2020, This increase was influenced by technological developments and more adaptive educational needs. This can be seen in the graph below:

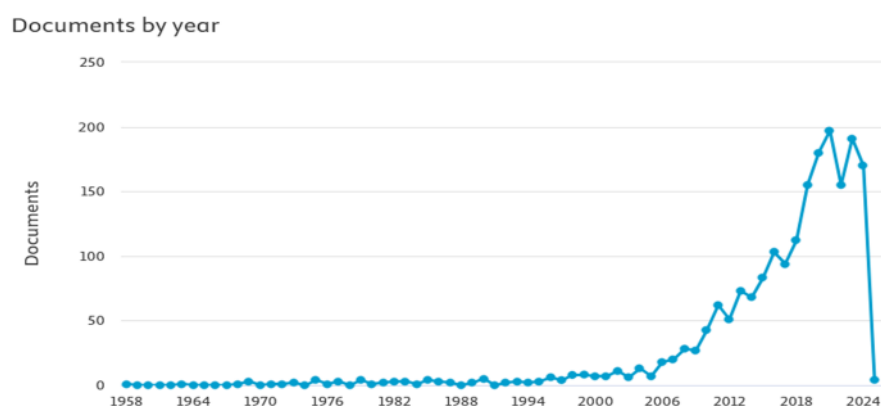


Figure 3. Graph of Increase in *Creative Learning* Scientific Research from Year to Year

These key issues are broken down into several operational questions as follows: How can the development of PAI learning strategies based on *the Creative Learning Cycle* and ethnoreligion approach improve students' 21st century, adaptive and intercultural skills in dealing with diverse social dynamics? What are the factors that affect the application of PAI teaching materials based on *Creative Learning Cycle* and Ethnoreligion in improving 21st century, adaptive and intercultural skills of students in higher education? What are the opportunities, challenges, and obstacles of

PAI based on *Creative Learning Cycle* and Ethnoreligion to change students' attitudes in terms of tolerance and understanding of cultural and religious diversity?

The results of this research are expected to make a real contribution to the development of PAI learning that is more innovative, relevant, and oriented to the needs of students, especially in building a Pancasila Student Profile with a creativity dimension as one of the priorities in the Independent Curriculum.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds a strategic position in shaping moral, intellectual, and cultural resilience in the modern era of globalization and digitalization. In the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, PAI serves not only as a transmitter of doctrinal knowledge but also as a transformative agent fostering character education, creativity, and multicultural understanding.¹² Islamic education contributes globally to the cultivation of peaceful and dialogical citizenship by contextualizing religious interpretations and developing reflective global identities. However, many contemporary practices remain limited to cognitive and lecture-based approaches that do not adequately foster creativity, empathy, or intercultural awareness. Previous studies often treat pedagogical innovation, character formation, and religious identity development as separate domains. This research addresses that gap by integrating these three dimensions into a unified pedagogical framework.

The proposed model combines the *Creative Learning Cycle* (CLC) and the *Ethnoreligious approach* as complementary paradigms. The CLC, introduced by Mitchel Resnick, emphasizes iterative learning through five stages *Imagine, Create, Play, Share, and Reflect* to cultivate creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.¹³ This model encourages students to recontextualize religious knowledge into active exploration and problem-solving, making learning participatory and reflective.

¹² M Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Religious Education Based on Religious Intersubjectivity: Philosophical Perspectives and Phenomenology of Religion," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 19, no. 1 (2022): 141 – 163, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2022.191-11>.

¹³ Rosiana Nur Fazri and Ali Mustadi, "Learning Cycle 5E: An Attempt to Improve Creative Thinking Skills' Pre-Service Primary School Teachers an Classroom Action Research," in *ACM International Conference Proceeding Series*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3452144.3452248>.

Meanwhile, the ethnoreligious approach situates learning within local culture and spiritual values, recognizing that religion exists in constant interaction with social and cultural contexts.¹⁴ It connects Islamic teachings with community-based wisdom such as *gotong royong*, *tepa selira*, and *siri' na pacce*, thereby promoting inclusivity and humanistic religiosity. By combining both, PAI learning becomes more contextual and transformative encouraging students to discover meaning through cultural experience while grounding their understanding in Qur'anic and prophetic ethics.

This study positions itself at the intersection of pedagogical innovation, character formation, and religious identity development in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The Creative Learning Cycle (CLC) functions as a processual dimension that activates creative, reflective, and participatory learning, while the ethnoreligious approach anchors learning in Islamic values and local cultural wisdom. Their integration is theorized to produce multidimensional outcomes: strengthened moral character grounded in Qur'anic ethics such as *ikhlas*, *amanah*, and *tasamuh*; enhanced soft skills including empathy, teamwork, communication, and ethical problem-solving; and improved intercultural competence that fosters inclusivity and respectful engagement in plural settings. This conceptual framework views ethnoreligious values as foundational input, CLC as the pedagogical process, and learning outcomes as visible transformations in students' character and global citizenship awareness. However, despite ongoing discourse on PAI reform, classroom practices remain largely lecture-centered and insufficient in addressing the competence demands of a digital and multicultural society. Previous research has examined value-based or technology-supported learning separately, but lacks integrative models that holistically combine spiritual, cultural, and creative learning dimensions. Empirical insights into CLC integrated with ethnoreligious approaches in higher education are still limited. Therefore, this study fills the critical gap by analyzing the relevance, implementation, and impacts of the CLC–Ethnoreligious

¹⁴ Maxim Popov, "Resolving Identity-Based Conflicts in the North Caucasus," *Periodica Polytechnica Social and Management Sciences* 25, no. 1 (2017): 70 – 77, <https://doi.org/10.3311/PPso.9535>.

model as a transformative pedagogy to elevate the quality and societal relevance of PAI in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative literature review approach with descriptive-interpretive analysis.¹⁵ Data were collected through a systematic review of empirical research, scientific journals, and research reports related to PAI, Creative Learning Cycle, and Ethnoreligious approaches in the context of Indonesian higher education as well as semi-structured interviews with 3 lecturers of Islamic Religious Education at the University of Education Indonesia.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific academic and experiential criteria relevant to the research focus. The inclusion criteria were: (1) lecturers of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at higher education institutions; (2) having more than five years of teaching experience; (3) actively involved in curriculum development or pedagogical innovation projects; and (4) recognized for implementing creative or contextual learning methods in PAI. This purposive selection ensured that each informant possessed the necessary expertise and reflective capacity to provide deep insights regarding innovative pedagogical practices.

The study involved three key informants, which is methodologically justified within qualitative inquiry emphasizing *depth over breadth*. According to Creswell and Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, a small number of expert informants can yield rich, detailed data when the phenomenon under study is specific and the participants have substantial experience. In this context, the three PAI lecturers function as information-rich cases representing diverse institutional contexts and pedagogical perspectives. Data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged from the third interview, indicating adequacy of the sample for interpretative depth.

¹⁵ Ellen J Rogo, "Exploring Qualitative Research," *Journal of Dental Hygiene* 98, no. 4 (2024): 56 – 61.

Data analysis is carried out through content analysis techniques with a thematic approach. The data are organized based on key themes: PAI learning strategies, development opportunities, implementation challenges, and the effectiveness of the CLC-Ethnoreligi

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several alidation strategies were employed triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing. The main research instrument in this qualitative study was the researcher, supported by semi-structured interview guidelines designed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections on the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) based on the *Creative Learning Cycle (CLC)* and the ethnoreligious approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Development of PAI Learning Strategies in the Modern Era: Creative Learning Cycle Becomes an Optional

The implementation of the Creative Learning Cycle (CLC) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can be understood as a transformative learning strategy that fundamentally shifts the position of students from just passive recipients of religious knowledge to a more active role as a constructor of religious knowledge ¹⁶. This change is not only methodological, but also reflects a paradigm shift in Islamic education from an instructional pattern to a participatory-reflective pattern. In the Imagine stage, for example, students are encouraged to develop religious imagination by imagining the application of Islamic values in a modern context colored by a plurality of cultures, technology, and social dynamics. Meanwhile, the Create phase provides space for students to realize these creative ideas through the form of works or practices that are based on Islamic values while being connected to the local wisdom of the archipelago. Nevertheless, the application of CLC in PAI cannot be separated from a number of epistemological and practical tensions. On the one hand, this

¹⁶ Fazri and Mustadi, "Learning Cycle 5E: An Attempt to Improve Creative Thinking Skills' Pre-Service Primary School Teachers an Classroom Action Research."

approach strengthens students' academic autonomy in constructing religious meanings contextually; But on the other hand, he demanded the readiness of lecturers as innovation facilitators and the courage of institutions to provide exploration flexibility. Thus, CLC in PAI is not only a pedagogical tool, but also an arena of identity work for students where they negotiate themselves as Muslims who are critical, creative, and adaptive to the changing times, without losing their normative footing in Islamic teachings and local cultural identity.

The ethnoreligious approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can be understood as a contextualization strategy that seeks to integrate universal Islamic values with the local wisdom of the archipelago. This concept emphasizes that Islam does not exist in a vacuum, but is always dialectic with the culture, traditions, and social identity of the society in which it develops ¹⁷. By adopting this approach, PAI learning gains higher relevance, because students are not only invited to understand Islamic teachings normatively, but also how these values find a form of praxis in the context of local cultural diversity ¹⁸. However, the application of the ethnoreligious approach cannot be separated from a number of challenges. On the one hand, it was able to foster students' appreciation of plurality and prevent the birth of religious exclusivism; but on the other hand, there is a risk of narrowing the meaning when local wisdom is too dominant so that it has the potential to obscure the universal principles of Islam. This tension requires the critical position of PAI lecturers as facilitators to maintain a balance between the authenticity of Islamic teachings and cultural adaptation. In this context, ethnoreligion functions not only as a pedagogical method, but also as an arena for identity work for students. Through the interaction between

¹⁷ Muhammad Makmun Rasyid, "Islam Rahmatan Lil Alamin Perspektif Kh. Hasyim Muzadi," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (2016): 93–116, <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2016.11.1.93-116>; Muhamad Parhan et al., "Responding to Islamophobia by Internalizing the Value of Islam Rahmatan Lil Alamin through Using the Media," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 6, no. 2 (2020): 139, https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v6i2.3695.

¹⁸ Usup Romli et al., "Pengembangan Media Pembelajaran Akidah Dengan Konsep 'Qurani' Berbasis Ict Untuk Siswa Sekolah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran Guru Sekolah Dasar (JPPGuseda)* 4, no. 1 (2021): 60–64.

universal Islamic values and local culture, students build an adaptive, moderate, and contextual Islamic identity.

Lecturer AF described how the ethnoreligious dimension enriched students' cultural awareness and strengthened local wisdom as part of Islamic learning.

“In our Share session, students presented projects connecting Islamic values with Javanese traditions such as *tepa selira* and *gotong royong*. One group created a storytelling performance combining Qur'anic moral themes with Javanese folk tales. It was not just entertaining—it built empathy, respect, and an appreciation for diversity.” (AF)

They are in the process of becoming Muslims who are not only rooted in the traditions of the archipelago, but also have an intercultural awareness that allows them to act as agents of social harmony in a pluralistic society. Lecturer A emphasized that applying the CLC stages made students more proactive and reflective in connecting Islamic teachings with real-life issues. She noted:

“When we started the Imagine phase, I asked students to visualize how Islamic values could guide ethical behavior in social media. In the Create and Play stages, they designed short video campaigns promoting honesty and compassion online. What surprised me was how seriously they reflected on Qur'anic verses about truthfulness (*ṣidq*) and applied them in a digital context.” (NB)

CLC-Ethnoreligi-based learning strategies show significant effectiveness in developing students' soft skills. Through the stages of imagination, creation, exploration, sharing, and reflection combined with Islamic values and local wisdom, students are trained to hone empathic communication, build collaboration in diverse teams, and develop problem-solving skills based on Islamic principles. Furthermore, this approach also fosters critical thinking skills in analyzing the phenomenon of socio-religious diversity that is increasingly complex in the global era. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this model does not occur automatically. Some students still show a tendency to be passive, or have difficulty balancing religious reflection with the demands of critical thinking that emphasizes rational argumentation. This is where the tension between value-oriented and skill-oriented demands occurs. These challenges require the role of lecturers as facilitators to maintain a balance: how modern soft skills can grow without being uprooted from the roots of Islamic religiosity that are the

foundation. In the perspective of identity, CLC-Ethnoreligigi-based learning functions as a vehicle for identity work that enables students to represent themselves as communicative, adaptive, and reflective Muslims. This identity is not only reflected in academic capacity, but also in the ability of students to become social mediators and agents of harmony in the midst of a multicultural society. Thus, this strategy contributes not only to the mastery of 21st century skills, but also to the formation of a moderate, tolerant, and competitive Muslim character in a global context.

The combination of CLC learning approach with Ethnoreligion can be seen in the diagram below:

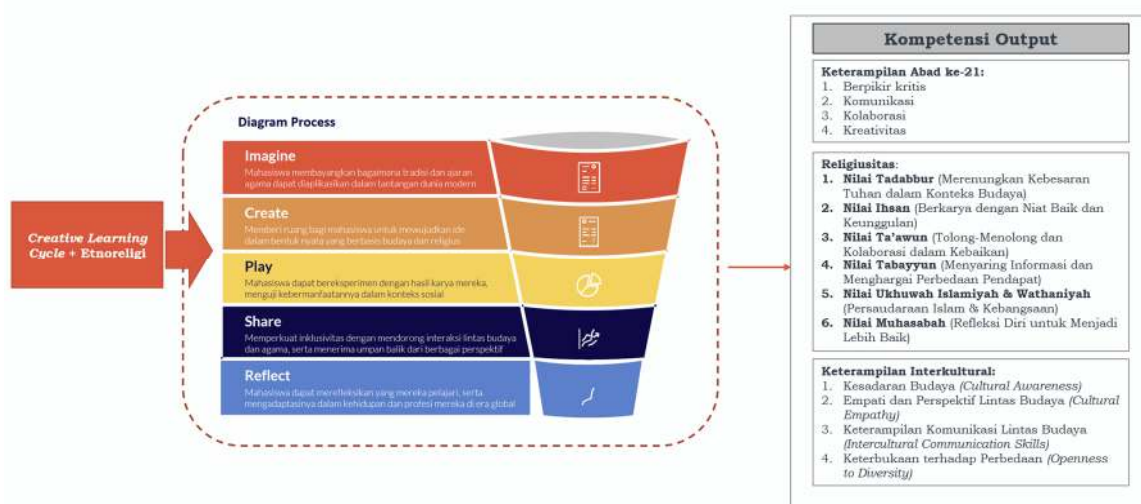


Figure. Process Diagram of CLC and Ethnoreligious-Based PAI Teaching Materials

Our initial identification of scientific research found by global scientists, the existing literature recommends learning methods that are very suitable to be implemented in the 21st century, including; 1) *Problem-Based Learning* (PBL) and *Guided Inquiry Learning* (GIL) ¹⁹, 2) *Integration of Technology and Innovative Learning Environments* ²⁰, 3) *Collaborative and Cooperative Learning*, 4) *Creative*

¹⁹ N. Nurhayati et al., "Enhancing Children's English Vocabulary through Religious Singing Activities in the Era 4.0," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 3 (2024): 1832–37, <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i3.3584>.

²⁰ X Liang, "An Innovative English Teaching Mode Based on Massive Open Online Course and Google Collaboration Platform," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning* 14, no. 15 (2019): 182–92, <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v14i15.11148>.

Pedagogical Frameworks, 5) *Experiential and Active Learning*²¹, 6) *Creative Problem-Solving Methods*, and 7) *Feedback and Reflection*. This strategy can be seen in the diagram below:

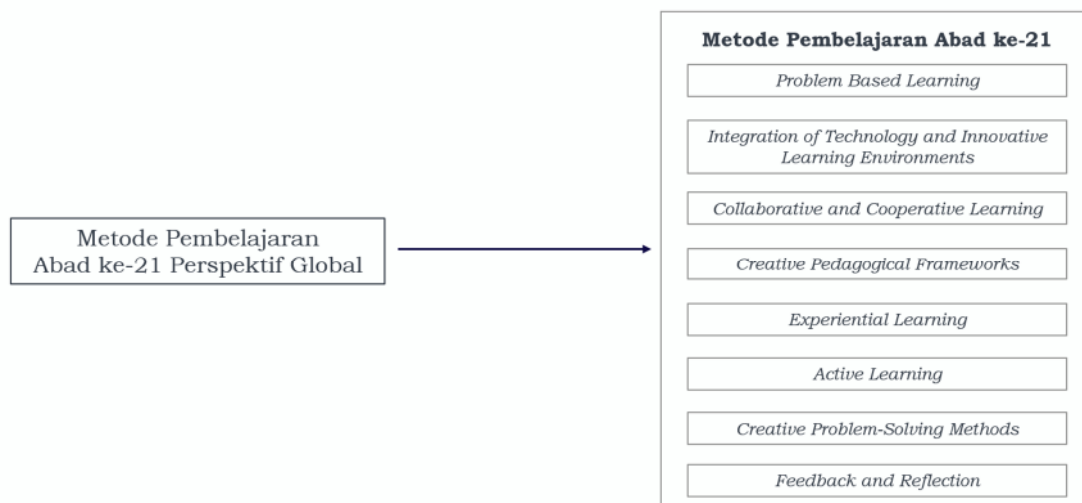


Figure. 21st Century Learning Methods Global Scientists' Recommendations

PAI Development Opportunities in the Modern Era: A Learning Paradigm Transformation

The adoption of the CLC-Ethnoreligigia model opens up strategic opportunities to transform the learning paradigm of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) from a doctrinally inclined approach to a more dialogical, reflective, and applicative learning practice.²² By combining a creative cycle that emphasizes exploration, collaboration, and reflection along with an ethnoreligious context that respects local wisdom, students are no longer positioned as objects of receiving dogma, but rather as active subjects involved in the construction of religious knowledge. This transformation makes room for the creation of learning experiences that are more

²¹ H R Tan, "How Chemists Achieve Active Learning Online during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Using the Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework to Support Remote Teaching," *Journal of Chemical Education* 97, no. 9 (2020): 2512–18, <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.0c00541>.

²² Mohammad Rindu Fajar Islamy et al., "Conceptual Reformulation of Ta'lim as a Paradigm of Islamic Education Learning in Building Educational Interactions Through Rahmaniyyah Principles," *Al-Fath* 15, no. 1 (2021): 19–31, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.32678/alfath.v15i1.4542>.

contextual, relevant, and meaningful for real life. However, this paradigm shift also brings potential tensions. On the one hand, a dialogical and reflective approach allows students to cultivate a critical and tolerant attitude towards diversity; but on the other hand, some may consider that this openness risks reducing the normative authority of Islamic teachings. This debate reflects the dialectic between the need to maintain the purity of Islamic values and the demand to provide adaptive learning to social dynamics. The role of PAI lecturers is very important to navigate these tensions through wise and proportionate facilitation. In the perspective of identity, the CLC-Ethnoreligigian model provides space for students to develop their identity as Muslims who are moderate, tolerant, and adaptive to diversity. This identity is formed through an identity work process that combines religious reflection with critical thinking skills, so that students are able to negotiate their position in a pluralistic society without losing the root of Islamic values. Thus, this new paradigm is not only a pedagogical innovation, but also a strategy for the formation of Muslim identity that is relevant to contemporary global needs.

Learning based on the Creative Learning Cycle (CLC) with an ethnoreligious approach has great potential to form students as agents of social harmony who act as *cultural bridge-builders* in a plural Indonesian society. Through a creative cycle that emphasizes experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application, students not only gain a cognitive understanding of religious values, but also internalize local wisdom that lives in community traditions. This is in line with the theory of Intercultural Competence which emphasizes the ability of individuals to interact effectively and appropriately in cross-cultural contexts through empathic communication skills, an open attitude, and an understanding of diverse perspectives. Thus, students are trained not only as recipients of religious knowledge, but also as social mediators who are able to bridge differences, resolve potential conflicts, and build spaces for dialogue across faiths and cultures. At this point, CLC-Ethnoreligious-religious learning can be understood within the framework of Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, where the learning process is seen as the result of social

interaction and dialogue that allows the formation of new meanings that are more inclusive and transformative for the creation of a peaceful and harmonious society.

The integration of Islamic universal values with local wisdom opens up opportunities for the development of global citizenship that remains rooted in Islamic and Indonesian identity. This concept is in line with the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship which emphasizes the importance of building global concern without relinquishing attachment to local communities.²³ Through the internalization of universal Islamic values such as justice, compassion, tolerance, and respect for human dignity students can develop a global perspective that is responsive to issues of humanity, the environment, and world peace. On the other hand, Indonesia's rich local wisdom of deliberative traditions, mutual cooperation, and cultural plurality provides a strong foundation for forming a strong religious-national identity. This approach is in line with the theory of glocalization which sees that globalization and locality do not negate each other, but can instead synergize in giving birth to adaptive hybrid identities. Thus, students are able to become critical, caring, and participatory global citizens in global issues, while remaining firm in maintaining their cultural and spiritual roots as Indonesian Muslims. He Noted:

“In one project, for example, students from different ethnic backgrounds collaborated to design a digital exhibition titled Islam and Harmony in Local Culture. They explored local wisdom like gotong royong, musyawarah, and tepa selira, and linked these values with Qur’anic concepts of ukhuwah and adl. What struck me most was how naturally they discussed religious differences with empathy and curiosity, not fear.” (GES)

Challenges and Effectiveness of the Implementation of the Creative Learning Cycle-Ethnoreligious Model in PAI Learning: Theoretical and Practical Analysis

The implementation of the Creative Learning Cycle-Ethnoreligigi(CLC-Ethnoreligi) model in Islamic Religious Education learning in the modern era represents a transformative paradigm that faces complex challenges but shows significant effectiveness. A comprehensive analysis of the implementation challenges

²³ Sugiono Sugiono, Andrew Skourdoumbis, and Trevor Gale, “Bridging Homes and Classrooms: Advancing Students’ Capabilities,” *Teaching Education* 29, no. 1 (2018): 17–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2017.1346602>.

and effectiveness outcomes of this model requires an in-depth theoretical approach to understand the dynamics of pedagogical change in the context of multicultural Indonesian higher education. In our view, the fundamental challenge in the implementation of CLC-Ethnoreligion lies in the transformation of the role of PAI lecturers from conventional teachers to innovative learning facilitators. These changes can be understood through the lens of Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory, which emphasizes that paradigm shifts occur through a process of disorienting dilemmas in which individuals must abandon the old frame of reference and develop new perspectives. In the context of CLC-Ethnoreligi, lecturers experience tension between the familiar teacher-centered approach and the student-centered approach that requires intercultural dialogue facilitation skills and the management of diverse student perspectives.²⁴

"The most noticeable thing is the change in my role. So far, I have been used to being the center of student explanations listening, taking notes, finishing. But with CLC-Ethnoreligi, I was required to be a facilitator. Honestly, it was like a "disorienting dilemma" at first. I have to let go of the old ways and direct students to be more active in dialogue and exploration" (GES)

This complexity is reinforced by the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework which requires lecturers to master the intersection between Islamic content knowledge, constructivistic pedagogy, and technological proficiency. In CLC-Ethnoreligi, creative learning cycles that adapt the Kolb model concrete experiences through ethnoreligious interactions, structured reflection, conceptualization based on maqasid al-shari'ah and wasathiyyah, and experimentation through cross-cultural collaborative projects require pedagogical competencies that are much more complex than traditional lecture methods. Rogers' Innovation Diffusion Theory explains that the adoption of CLC-Ethnoreligion does not occur instantaneously, but through stages influenced by the characteristics of innovation, communication channels, and institutional social systems. The readiness of lecturers as early adopters or late majority will determine the speed and success of

²⁴ Mohammad Rindu Fajar Islamy, "Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Religius Serial Film Nusa Dan Rara Dalam Pembentukan Karakter Pada Anak Usia Dini," *Jurnal Obsesi : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini* 6, no. 4 (2022): 3515–23, <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v6i4.1704>.

implementation. Without a sustainable development program that includes training, coaching, and the establishment of communities of practice, this role transformation will face significant resistance.

"Well, this is the next challenge. At CLC, there is a stage of imagination, creation, cross-cultural collaboration... And all usually use technology. So according to TPACK, we must understand Islamic content, creative pedagogy, and technology. It's definitely more complex than traditional lecture methods." (NB)

In addition, the implementation of CLC-Ethnoreligion requires a technological infrastructure that supports collaborative learning and comprehensive institutional support. The SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) framework helps map the use of technology from simply replacing conventional tools to redefining transformative learning tasks. Even in limited resources, activity design can remain innovative through low-tech yet high-cognition approaches such as local community-based case studies, service learning, or conflict mediation simulations. Kotter's Theory of Organizational Change emphasizes that successful transformation requires the creation of urgency, the formation of a coalition of guides, the development of a clear vision, and the institutionalization of new approaches. Institutional resistance to change often arises due to rigid administrative structures that do not support curriculum flexibility and pedagogical experimentation. Without policy support that includes innovative teaching performance incentives, workload alignment, and alternative assessments, innovation will stall as an individual experiment without sustainability. Institutional support also includes developing partnerships with external communities to provide the concrete experiences needed in the Kolb cycle. Cooperation with religious organizations, social institutions, and multicultural communities is a prerequisite for providing an authentic and meaningful learning context.

Furthermore, cultural challenges include student mentality that tends to be passive, biased towards diversity, and a social environment that is less supportive of learning innovation. Bandura's Cognitive Social Learning Theory explains that individual behavior is influenced by the interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. If the academic environment has historically encouraged

passivity and conformity, students will internalize these patterns of behavior. Vygotsky's Social Constructivism emphasizes the importance of meaningful interaction in the zone of proximal development. CLC-Ethnoreligion brings this concept to life through cross-identity collaborative tasks where lecturers act as "more knowledgeable others" who facilitate constructive dialogue. However, this implementation faces obstacles from an academic culture that is still teacher-centered and students who are not used to learning that requires critical thinking and active participation. Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory provides a framework for overcoming bias against diversity through effective contact with conditions: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support. CLC-Ethnoreligia integrates these conditions through a learning design that encourages positive interaction between students from diverse backgrounds.

In the author's analysis, the effectiveness of CLC-Ethnoreligiosity in increasing student religiosity is manifested in the internalization of the values of tolerance (tasamuh), commitment to religious moderation, and the development of an empathetic attitude. These results can be explained through Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development and the Four-Component Rest Model, which shows that effective moral education not only conveys norms but facilitates the processes of moral reasoning, ethical sensitivity, and moral motivation. The creative learning cycle in CLC-Ethnoreligion involves reflective experiences and in-depth discussions that allow students to internalize religious values authentically and applicatively. Through disorienting dilemmas in the form of exposure to diversity issues processed in critical reflection and rational discourse, there is a reconstruction of the student reference framework in accordance with the vision of rahmatan lil-'alamin Islam. Mezirow's Learning Transformation Theory explains how students experience a shift in perspective from a rigid normative understanding to a context-conscious reflective commitment. The internalization of the values of tasamuh and wasathiyyah represents the development of normative obedience to wisdom that is able to integrate Islamic teachings with the reality of social pluralism.

At the same time, the transformation of students' attitudes in understanding, feeling, and interacting with cultural and religious diversity shows the success of CLC-Ethnoreligia in developing intercultural competence. Bennett's Intercultural Sensitivity Development Model (DMIS) describes the individual's progression from the stage of ethnocentrism (rejection, defense, minimization) to ethnorelativism (acceptance, adaptation, integration). CLC-Ethnoreligi, with its "Ethnoreligi" component, explicitly encourages interaction and reflection on diversity, helping students move towards a stage of ethnorelativism where they are able to empathize and adapt to different cultural and religious perspectives. The development of inclusive multicultural identities and conflict mediation capabilities reflect the achievement of a level of adaptation and integration across the spectrum of intercultural sensitivities. Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory and the concept of social identity complexity explain how structured exposure to plural identity through CLC-Ethnoreligion promotes inclusivity and lowers in-group bias. Students develop the ability to integrate multiple identities within themselves, creating a more nuanced and tolerant perspective of differences.

Improved empathic communication skills, diverse teamwork, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking are logical consequences of CLC-Ethnoreligious's design that demands complex collaboration and interaction. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory explains that learning cycles involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation inherently develop soft skills through hands-on practice. Perspective-taking skills and global citizenship awareness develop through techniques embedded in role-play, minority life narratives, and reflection based on religious texts. Social Cognition Theory describes how individuals develop an understanding of the social world and their position in it, including the ability to understand the perspectives of others and global issues. The 21st century literacy framework and the 4C (Critical thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication) competencies show that authentic tasks, problem-posing, and conflict mediation in CLC-Ethnoreligion foster critical thinking and problem solving. Culturally responsive pedagogy that relies on local wisdom ensures

the relevance of learning, reduces resistance, and connects new knowledge with students' cultural identities.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia must undergo a paradigm transformation to remain relevant amid the dynamics of globalization and digitalization. The integration of the *Creative Learning Cycle (CLC)* with the ethnoreligious approach offers a theoretically grounded and practically applicable model for transformative Islamic education. This model effectively develops students' religious consciousness, soft skills, and intercultural competence through participatory, experiential, and reflective learning rooted in local wisdom. Practically, the findings provide several implications for curriculum developers, PAI lecturers, and Islamic higher education institutions. For curriculum developers, the study suggests embedding CLC-ethnoreligious principles systematically in course design to ensure contextual and value-based learning outcomes. For PAI lecturers, continuous professional development is needed to strengthen creative facilitation, authentic assessment, and interdisciplinary collaboration. For Islamic higher education institutions, institutional commitment through supportive policies, technological infrastructure, and academic culture that encourages innovation is essential to sustain this pedagogical transformation.

Scientifically, this research contributes to the discourse on Islamic educational innovation by proposing a conceptual and empirical synthesis between *value-based pedagogy* (ethnoreligion) and *process-based learning innovation* (CLC). It enriches contemporary Islamic education theory by demonstrating how religious identity formation, character education, and global citizenship competencies can be integrated within a single pedagogical framework. Future studies are encouraged to conduct longitudinal or multi-site research to evaluate the long-term impact of the CLC–ethnoreligious model on students' professional ethics, intercultural behavior, and civic participation in diverse social contexts.

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