

## Rebuilding Islamic Religious Education: Toward Meaningful Learning Through Teaching Innovation

Eprianto<sup>1\*</sup>, Ari Koswara<sup>2</sup>, Abdurrahmansyah<sup>3</sup>, Nurlaila<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a crucial role in shaping students' moral character and spiritual awareness. However, contemporary IRE remains dominated by teacher-centered instruction and rote memorization, limiting students' ability to contextualize Islamic values. Despite ongoing reform discourses, a critical research gap persists: the absence of a systematic instructional framework that effectively bridges theological foundations with contemporary pedagogical, contextual, and digital realities. This study analyzes instructional design development in IRE through conceptual deconstruction to promote meaningful learning. The novelty of this research lies in proposing a theo-anthropocentric instructional framework that reconceptualizes IRE pedagogy by integrating student-centered strategies, contextual relevance, and digital technology. Employing qualitative library research, data from scholarly works (2020–2025) were synthesized using content and descriptive–analytical techniques. Findings reveal that traditional models overemphasize cognitive knowledge while neglecting affective and experiential dimensions. Consequently, IRE transformation requires innovative pedagogies and technological integration to connect religious teachings with authentic experiences. Ultimately, IRE must transcend mere knowledge transmission to cultivate meaningful learning that fosters moral responsibility, critical reflection, and spiritual growth in contemporary learners.

**Keywords:** Islamic education development, instructional innovation, meaningful learning

#### History:

Received : 12 Marc 2026

Revised : 30 April 2026

Accepted : 13 Mei 2026

Published : 13 Mei 2026

**Publishers:** LPM IAIN Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik Bangka Belitung, Indonesia

**Licensed:** This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



<sup>1234</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia

\*Author Correspondent: [eprianto04@guru.smk.belajar.id](mailto:eprianto04@guru.smk.belajar.id)

### Introduction

Learning fundamentally represents a transformative process characterized by significant changes in individuals' knowledge, skills, and behavior (Jauhari, 2020). In the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), this transformation holds a deeper dimension because it serves as a central instrument for nurturing moral character, strengthening spirituality, and shaping students' ethical consciousness. A grateful personality is an essential component in students' character development, reflected through attitudes and behaviors that acknowledge and appreciate blessings (Afandi & Pranajaya, 2022; Niemiec et al., 2021). Ideally, Islamic education should not only transmit religious knowledge but also cultivate values and meaningful understanding that guide students in their daily lives.

However, in practice, the implementation of Islamic education often remains confined to rigid textual approaches and formal instructional routines that emphasize memorization rather than comprehension. This situation reflects a persistent gap between the intended curriculum and the realities of classroom instruction, indicating that the instructional design and development of Islamic education have not yet been systematically and innovatively addressed. The challenges faced by Islamic education are increasingly complex in the modern era. Numerous studies highlight that Islamic learning environments frequently rely on rote memorization and formalistic teaching practices that limit students' critical engagement and contextual understanding of religious teachings (Aripin & Nurdiansyah, 2022; Sofiyandi et al., 2024). Although memorization remains an important component in certain aspects of Islamic learning—particularly in Qur'anic studies—it often

becomes problematic when it is not accompanied by contextual interpretation, reflection, and application in real-life situations. Consequently, students may develop fragmented religious knowledge that lacks relevance to contemporary social realities (Bahri et al., 2021; Rabilla, 2022). These conditions suggest that Islamic education requires a methodological shift from purely normative and memorization-based instruction toward approaches that integrate understanding, experience, and contextual learning.

From a broader perspective, the persistence of such challenges is closely related to the way Islamic education curricula are conceptualized and implemented. Islamic education curricula should not be viewed merely as static documents but as dynamic instructional designs capable of integrating theological values with the anthropological realities of learners (Abdurrahmansyah, 2021). In this regard, curriculum development involves more than administrative tasks such as preparing lesson plans; it represents a philosophical effort to translate Islamic teachings into meaningful learning experiences within modern contexts. Without a value-oriented and well-structured instructional design, Islamic education risks being reduced to a mere transfer of knowledge rather than facilitating the internalization of ethical and spiritual values among learners.

The urgency for reconstruction and innovation in Islamic education becomes even more apparent in the era of digital disruption and global transformation. Many learning failures in Islamic education stem from instructional designs that prioritize cognitive outcomes while neglecting affective and psychomotor domains grounded in authentic learning experiences (Abdurrahmansyah, 2021). Contemporary educational discourse increasingly emphasizes the importance of meaningful learning, which occurs when new knowledge is connected with learners' prior cognitive structures and real-life experiences (Echarri, 2020; Vargas-Hernández & Vargas-González, 2022). Meaningful learning also aligns with transformative learning perspectives that encourage critical reflection and the reformation of students' perspectives through dialogical and experiential learning processes (Teemant et al., 2024). Therefore, transforming Islamic education requires educators to reconceptualize instructional design as a dynamic blueprint that evolves continuously in response to societal and technological changes.

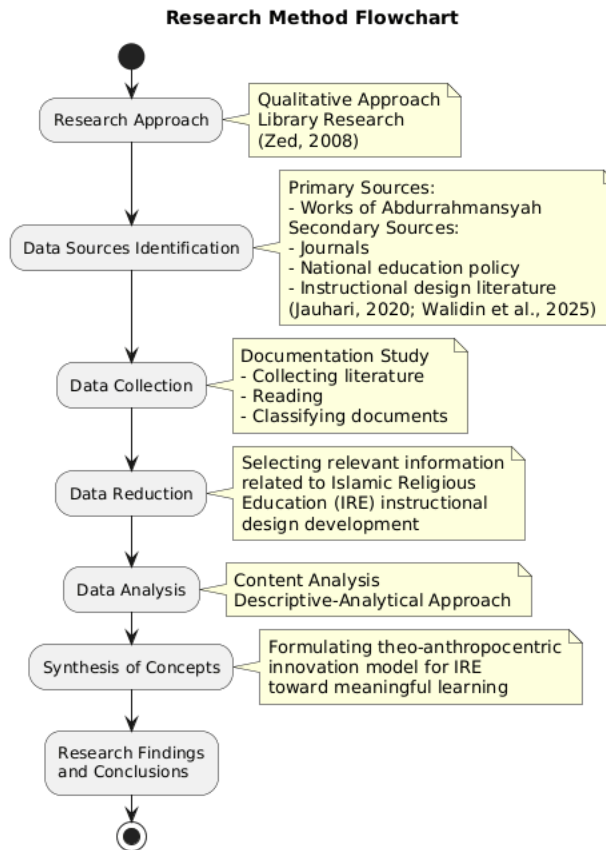
Despite growing scholarly discourse on IRE reform, a critical research gap persists: existing studies predominantly focus on isolated pedagogical interventions or technological adoption without critically examining the underlying epistemological and instructional assumptions that perpetuate rote-based, teacher-centric paradigms. Few studies systematically deconstruct traditional instructional designs to propose an integrated framework that aligns theological foundations with contemporary anthropological, contextual, and digital learning realities. To address this gap, this study poses the following research question: *How can the instructional design of Islamic Religious Education be deconstructed and reconstructed to foster meaningful learning in contemporary educational contexts?*

The novelty of this research lies in its explicit epistemological deconstruction of entrenched IRE assumptions—specifically challenging the conflation of religious knowledge with rote memorization and the positioning of teachers as absolute authorities. By synthesizing contemporary learning theories, digital pedagogies, and theo-anthropocentric principles, this study moves beyond descriptive curriculum updates to propose a reconceptualized instructional framework. This framework transforms fragmented, cognitive-heavy practices into holistic, value-driven, and experiential learning ecosystems, thereby offering a theoretically grounded and actionable model for meaningful IRE innovation. Accordingly, this article aims to analyze the essence and scope of instructional design development in IRE through conceptual deconstruction and pedagogical innovation, employing a qualitative approach to critically examine scholarly works from 2020–2025 and synthesize new conceptual perspectives that bridge theoretical foundations with practical instructional transformation.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) combined with critical conceptual analysis to deconstruct and reconstruct instructional design paradigms in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Data were retrieved exclusively from Google Scholar using a transparent search protocol with targeted keyword combinations: ("Islamic Religious Education" OR "PAI") AND ("instructional design" OR "curriculum innovation") AND ("meaningful learning" OR "pedagogical transformation"). Publications were filtered to include peer-reviewed articles and scholarly works published between 2020–2025, screened through a three-tier process against inclusion criteria: (1) explicit focus on IRE pedagogy, (2) discussion of student-centered or technology-integrated learning, and (3) full-text accessibility in English or Indonesian.

Data analysis followed a replicable three-stage framework: (1) thematic coding to categorize traditional paradigms, innovations, and digital integrations; (2) critical deconstructive reading to challenge assumptions equating religious knowledge with rote memorization and teacher-centric authority; and (3) thematic synthesis to reconstruct findings into a coherent theo-anthropocentric instructional framework. All search strings, inclusion criteria, and coding categories are documented to enable precise replication by subsequent researchers.



**Figure 1.** Research Method Flowchart

The research method diagram above illustrates the flow of qualitative research using a library research approach. The study began with the determination of the research approach, followed by the identification of data sources consisting of primary and secondary literature relevant to the development of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum design. Data were collected through documentary research by compiling and classifying various library sources. This is followed by a data reduction process to select the information most relevant to the research

focus. The next stage is data analysis using content analysis and a descriptive-analytical approach to critically examine curriculum development theories. The results of the analysis were then synthesized to formulate a concept of Islamic educational innovation that is theocentric and anthropocentric, which is expected to produce a PAI design development model that supports the creation of meaningful learning in the context of contemporary education.

## Results and Discussion

### Deconstructing the Traditional Paradigm of Islamic Religious Education

The deconstruction of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) requires more than identifying surface-level pedagogical problems; it demands a fundamental epistemological critique of the assumptions that have structured IRE for decades. This study reveals that traditional IRE operates on three problematic epistemological assumptions that must be challenged: (1) the equation of religious knowledge with rote memorization, (2) the positioning of teachers as absolute epistemic authorities, and (3) the absence of critical epistemological reflection on the nature and purpose of Islamic knowledge itself.

#### 1. Challenging Assumption 1: Knowledge is not memorization

Traditional IRE has conflated *knowledge acquisition* with *textual memorization*, creating what Freire (1970) termed "banking education," where students become passive repositories of doctrinal information. This assumption is epistemologically flawed because it reduces Islamic knowledge—which historically encompassed rational inquiry (*'aql*), spiritual insight (*kashf*), and practical wisdom (*hikmah*)—to mere textual recall. The data reveal that when memorization is not accompanied by contextual interpretation, critical reflection, or experiential application, students develop what this study terms "fragmented religiosity": the ability to recite religious texts without understanding their ethical implications or contemporary relevance.

This epistemological reductionism has serious pedagogical consequences. Students can memorize Qur'anic verses or hadith but struggle to derive moral principles applicable to modern ethical dilemmas such as digital citizenship, environmental stewardship, or social justice. The traditional paradigm thus creates a gap between cognitive mastery and moral transformation, undermining the very purpose of Islamic education as character formation (*tahdhib al-akhlaq*).

#### 2. Challenging Assumption 2: Teachers is not the Absolute Authority

The second assumption requiring deconstruction is the positioning of teachers as unquestionable epistemic authorities. Traditional IRE classrooms operate on a unidirectional knowledge transmission model where the teacher possesses religious truth and students are expected to receive it passively. This hierarchical structure reflects what Foucault (1997) described as "power-knowledge" relations, where authority is maintained through control of what counts as legitimate religious knowledge. However, this assumption is epistemologically unsustainable in contemporary contexts for several reasons:

- a. Epistemic plurality: Students today encounter diverse Islamic interpretations through digital media, challenging the notion of a single authoritative voice
- b. Pedagogical ineffectiveness: Absolute teacher authority suppresses student questioning, critical thinking, and personal meaning-making processes essential for genuine value internalization
- c. Theological inconsistency: Islamic intellectual tradition itself values *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *shura* (consultative deliberation), suggesting that knowledge construction should be dialogical rather than authoritarian

The data indicate that when teachers function as facilitators rather than absolute authorities, students demonstrate higher engagement, deeper conceptual understanding, and greater willingness to apply Islamic values in complex real-life situations. This suggests that

epistemic humility—teachers acknowledging the limits of their knowledge and inviting collaborative inquiry—produces more meaningful learning outcomes than epistemic absolutism.

### 3. Challenging Assumption 3: The Absence of Epistemological Criticism

The third and most fundamental issue is traditional IRE's lack of epistemological self-reflection. The paradigm operates without questioning: *What counts as valid Islamic knowledge? Whose interpretations are privileged? How is religious knowledge constructed, validated, and transmitted?* This absence of epistemological criticism results in what this study identifies as "uncritical traditionalism"—the unquestioned reproduction of pedagogical practices simply because they are traditional.

Epistemological criticism requires examining the theo-anthropocentric tension in IRE: the balance between divine revelation (theocentric) and human learner realities (anthropocentric). Traditional IRE has leaned excessively toward theocentric transmission, neglecting how learners' cognitive development, cultural contexts, and lived experiences shape their understanding of religious truths. Contemporary learning theories demonstrate that meaningful learning occurs when new knowledge connects with prior cognitive structures and authentic experiences—yet traditional IRE often ignores these anthropological realities in favor of standardized content delivery. Table 1 below illustrates not merely the characteristics of traditional IRE, but the epistemological gaps these characteristics create:

**Table 1.** Epistemological Critique of the Traditional Islamic Education Paradigm

Dimension	Traditional Assumption	Epistemological Problem	Educational Gap
Nature of Knowledge	Knowledge is the same as memorizing text	Reduces complex Islamic epistemology to information recall	Students master content but lack contextual application
Source of Authority	Teacher as absolute authority	Contradicts Islamic values of <i>shura</i> and <i>ijtihad</i> ; creates dependency	Limited critical thinking; passive learning culture
Learning Process	Unidirectional transmission	Ignores constructivist principles; suppresses student agency	Weak value internalization; superficial understanding
Assessment Focus	Knowledge recall	Measures cognitive performance, not moral transformation	Gap between religious knowledge and ethical behavior
Epistemological Stance	Uncritical traditionalism	Absence of meta-cognitive reflection on knowledge itself	Inability to engage with contemporary ethical challenges

Source: Critical synthesis of Abdurrahmansyah (2021), Jauhari (2020), and contemporary learning theories.

The table above illustrates the structural characteristics of traditional Islamic education practices. These patterns demonstrate that the dominant paradigm emphasizes cognitive memorization rather than experiential learning. Such conditions confirm the need for pedagogical reconstruction to transform Islamic education into a more dynamic and meaningful learning process.

### Curriculum Innovation: Toward Epistemological Reconstruction

Having deconstructed traditional assumptions, this section examines how curriculum innovation attempts epistemological reconstruction—reconceptualizing what Islamic knowledge is, how it is constructed, and what purposes it serves. Recent curriculum innovations reveal an emerging shift from static knowledge transmission to dynamic knowledge construction. For

instance, Iskandar et al (2025) demonstrate that integrating Qur'anic learning with project-based activities requires students to construct meaning rather than merely receive information. This represents an epistemological shift: knowledge is no longer viewed as a fixed commodity possessed by teachers, but as an evolving understanding co-created through active engagement. Table 2 illustrates the theoretical relationships between different innovation approaches and their underlying epistemological orientations:

**Table 2.** Epistemological Analysis of Curriculum Innovation Models (2020–2025)

Innovation Model	Underlying Epistemology	Theoretical Relationship	Addresses Which Gap?
Qur'an-based PBL (Iskandar et al., 2025)	Constructivist: knowledge built through problem-solving	Connects revelation, critical thinking, and practical application	Bridges cognitive-moral gap
Active Learning Integration (Edy & Sumarta, 2024)	Social constructivism: knowledge emerges through interaction	Links student agency, engagement, and deeper understanding	Challenges teacher-as-authority assumption
Contextual Learning (Sugiarto, 2025)	Pragmatic epistemology: knowledge validated through real-world application	Integrates textual sources, contextual interpretation, and behavioral change	Addresses the fragmentation problem
Deep Learning Framework (Sulastri et al., 2024)	Transformative epistemology: knowledge restructures perspectives	Combines reflection, critical analysis, and perspective transformation	Develops epistemological self-awareness

Source: Synthesized from primary studies (2020-2025) using an epistemological analysis framework

### Innovative Learning Models: Operationalizing Epistemological Change

The shift from traditional to innovative learning models represents more than methodological change—it embodies epistemological reorientation. Each innovative model challenges traditional assumptions in specific ways:

1. Problem-Based Learning (PBL) directly contests the knowledge=memorization equation by positioning students as knowledge producers who must analyze complex real-world problems through Islamic ethical frameworks. When students investigate issues like environmental degradation or social inequality using Qur'anic principles, they engage in *ijtihad*—independent reasoning that traditional IRE often suppresses.
2. Joyful Learning challenges the teacher-as-absolute-authority assumption by creating horizontal learning relationships where teachers facilitate rather than dictate. Emotional engagement and motivation increase because students exercise agency in their learning process, contradicting the passive recipient role prescribed by traditional paradigms.
3. Technology-Based Learning introduces epistemological pluralism by exposing students to diverse Islamic interpretations beyond the classroom teacher. Digital platforms enable access to multiple scholarly perspectives, requiring students to develop critical evaluation skills rather than accepting singular authoritative views.

**Table 3.** Epistemological Functions of Innovative Learning Models

Learning Model	Challenges Which Assumption?	Epistemological Mechanism	New Knowledge Relationship
Problem-Based Learning	Knowledge is not memorization	Students construct solutions through inquiry	Knowledge as practical wisdom ( <i>hikmah</i> )
Joyful Learning	The teacher is not an absolute authority	Emotional engagement with intrinsic motivation	Knowledge as meaningful experience
Technology-Enhanced Learning	Absence of epistemological criticism	Multiple sources to critical comparison	Knowledge as contested, requiring evaluation
Project-Based Learning	All three assumptions	Collaborative creation to authentic application	Knowledge as co-constructed and contextual

### Digital Transformation: Epistemological Implications

Digital technology in IRE is not merely a pedagogical tool but an **epistemological disruptor**. AI-based systems, multimedia platforms, and augmented reality fundamentally alter how religious knowledge is accessed, validated, and applied:

1. Democratization of knowledge: Digital tools decentralize epistemic authority, challenging the teacher's monopoly on religious interpretation
2. Multimodal epistemology: Visual, auditory, and interactive formats engage multiple ways of knowing beyond textual memorization
3. Personalized learning pathways: AI systems adapt to individual cognitive styles, acknowledging anthropological diversity that traditional IRE ignores

However, this transformation requires critical epistemological vigilance. Without guidance, digital pluralism can lead to epistemic confusion or superficial engagement. Therefore, digital integration must be accompanied by instruction in digital epistemic literacy—the ability to evaluate sources, recognize bias, and construct coherent Islamic understanding from diverse digital resources.

### Toward Meaningful Learning: A Theo-Anthropocentric Epistemological Framework

The culmination of this deconstructive-reconstructive analysis is a new epistemological framework for ire that balances theological foundations with anthropological realities. Meaningful learning in ire occurs when:

1. Cognitive dimension: students understand islamic concepts through critical inquiry, not memorization
2. Affective dimension: values are internalized through reflection and emotional engagement, not imposed through authority
3. Psychomotor dimension: knowledge translates into behavioral practice through authentic experiences
4. Social dimension: learning involves collaborative meaning-making, not isolated reception
5. Epistemological dimension: students develop meta-cognitive awareness of how islamic knowledge is constructed, validated, and applied.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that globalization has significantly influenced the interaction between global cultural flows and local identities, including the identity of Malay Islam in Southeast Asia. Rather than causing the disappearance of local traditions, globalization often creates a dynamic process of cultural negotiation in which local communities reinterpret global influences within their own sociocultural frameworks. In this context, Islamic educational institutions—such as pesantren, madrasah, and Islamic schools—play a crucial role in mediating the relationship between global transformation and local cultural continuity. Through curriculum

development, cultural activities, and the integration of local wisdom, these institutions function as important agents in preserving Malay Islamic cultural identity while simultaneously adapting to modern educational demands.

Furthermore, the literature reviewed in this study indicates that the preservation of Malay Islamic identity in the era of globalization depends largely on the ability of Islamic educational institutions to balance cultural preservation with educational innovation. The integration of local wisdom, cultural traditions, and Islamic values within educational practices enables these institutions to maintain cultural continuity while preparing students to engage with global knowledge and technological developments. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions not only serve as centers of religious education but also as strategic platforms for sustaining cultural identity and strengthening the resilience of Malay Islamic communities in an increasingly interconnected global society.

## Reference

- Abdurrahmansyah. (2021). *Kajian Teoritik Dan Implementatif Pengembangan Kurikulum*. RajaGrafindo Persada.
- Afandi, N. K., & Pranajaya, S. A. (2022). Grateful Personality Development of Junior High School Students in East Kalimantan. *Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education*, 4(2), 235–248. <https://doi.org/10.21093/SAJIE.V4I2.4496>
- Aripin, S., & Nurdiansyah, N. M. (2022). Modernization of Education: A New Approach and Method in Learning Islamic Religious Education. *Tadris Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 17(1), 100–117. <https://doi.org/10.19105/tjpi.v17i1.5916>
- Bahri, S. A., Badawi, B., Hasan, M., Arifudin, O., Fitriana, I. P. A. D., Arfah, A., Rambe, P., Saputri, A. N. C., Lestaringrum, A. I. P., Larasati, R. A., Panma, Y., Clara, H., & Irwanto, I. (2021). Pengantar Penelitian Pendidikan Sebuah Tinjauan Teori dan Praktis. In *Pertambangan*.
- Echarri, F. (2020). Can Art Museums Help Environmental Education? An Interdisciplinary Vision to Promote Meaningful Learning. *Revista De Educación Ambiental Y Sostenibilidad*, 2(2), 1–14. [https://doi.org/10.25267/rev\\_educ\\_ambient\\_sostenibilidad.2020.v2.i2.2303](https://doi.org/10.25267/rev_educ_ambient_sostenibilidad.2020.v2.i2.2303)
- Edy, S., & Sumarta. (2024). Innovation in the Development of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Secondary Schools. *Research Horizon*, 4(3), 21–42.
- Foucault, M. (1997). *Seks dan kekuasaan : sejarah seksualitas*.
- Iskandar, I., Materan, M., & Syamsi, N. (2025). Integrative Curriculum Framework for Practical Qur’anic-Based Educational Economic Development. *JURNAL ISLAM NUSANTARA*, 9(4), 537–554. <https://doi.org/10.33852/jurnalin.v9i4.642>
- Jauhari, M. T. (2020). Desain Pengembangan Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam di Sekolah dan Madrasah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2(1), 328–341.
- Niemiec, R. M., Russo-Netzer, P., & Rute Gomes Esperandio, M. (2021). Character Strengths Beatitudes: A Secular Application of Ancient Wisdom to Appreciate Strengths for Spiritual Happiness and Spiritual Growth. *Religions 2021*, Vol. 12, Page 1000, 12(11), 1000. <https://doi.org/10.3390/REL12111000>
- Rabilla, A. (2022). Implementation of the 4T+1M Method in Tahfiz Qur’an Lessons in MTs. Darul Ulum Budi Agung Medan. *Ar-Rasyid Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.30596/arrasyid.v2i2.12148>

- Sofiyandi, M. A., Nurhakim, Moh., & Khozin, K. (2024). Future Development of Indonesian Education: A Review of the Urgency of Reconstructing Instruction Designs for Islamic Religious Education. *Edumaspul - Jurnal Pendidikan*, 8(1), 134–143. <https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v8i1.7593>
- Sugiarto, F. (2025). Integration of Qur'an and Hadith Values as Pedagogical Innovation to Improve the Quality of Islamic Education. *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Agama*, 17(1), 171–184. <https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v17i1.6817>
- Sulastri, N., Anwar, S., Suherman, U., & Cipta, E. S. (2024). Deep Learning-Based Planning Model for Islamic Education in Indonesian Integrated Schools. *EDUKASIA Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran*, 5(2), 645–658. <https://doi.org/10.62775/edukasia.v5i2.1734>
- Teemant, A., Upton, T. A., & Sherman, B. (2024). Inclusive Learning Communities: An English Learner Framework for All Educators. *Tesol Journal*, 15(3). <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.798>
- Vargas-Hernández, J. G., & Vargas-González, O. C. (2022). Strategies for Meaningful Learning in Higher Education. *Journal of Research in Instructional*, 2(1), 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.30862/jri.v2i1.41>