

# Is There Still a Need for Universities in The AI Era? Reading Fathul Wahid's Arguments from the Perspective of Islamic Education

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## ABSTRACT

In the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the existence of universities as institutions of higher education has become a pressing question, especially regarding their role in shaping students' character, morals, and critical thinking within the context of Islamic education. This article analyzes the relevance of universities amid the advancement of AI, drawing on Fathul Wahid's arguments regarding the preservation of academic functions and religious values. The methods used are a literature review and a conceptual analysis of Wahid's works, with a focus on how universities can serve as forums for integrating science, ethics, and spiritual values in Islamic higher education. The findings show that, even though AI offers easy access to information and supports innovation in the learning process, universities still play an irreplaceable strategic role, namely shaping character, critical thinking, and a comprehensive understanding of religious values. The conclusion of this article emphasizes that universities remain relevant in the AI era, and their. The main contribution is to emphasize the importance of integrating knowledge and religious values as the foundation of Islamic higher education, thereby producing a generation that is intelligent, moral, and adaptable to technological developments.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) over the past few decades has brought fundamental changes across many aspects of human life, including higher Education. AI is no longer just a supporting technology; it has become a system capable of performing complex analyses, producing written works, making data-based decisions, and even mimicking human thought patterns. The presence of AI has sparked both optimism and anxiety, especially regarding the future of universities as formal educational institutions (Man, S. R., 2025). Amidst the increasingly sophisticated capabilities of AI, a fundamental question arises: are universities still necessary in the AI era? Will the function of universities remain relevant when machines can access, process, and distribute knowledge instantly and at scale? These questions are not only technological, but also philosophical, sociological, and pedagogical. Since its inception, universities have not only been places for the transfer of knowledge, but also spaces for the formation of the whole human being intellectually, morally, socially, and spiritually. However, as AI increasingly replaces many human cognitive functions, including writing essays, answering exam questions, and designing scientific solutions, universities are in an identity crisis. This concern is further amplified when online learning, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and AI-based learning platforms offer Education that is more flexible, inexpensive, and faster than conventional university systems (Kasman, R. A., Burhan, S Munir, H. B., 2025).

While existing literature on "AI in Islamic Education" often focuses on the practical application of AI tools—such as chatbots for learning Arabic or digital platforms for teaching jurisprudence—this article identifies a significant gap in the philosophical-conceptual discourse. The primary distinction of this study lies in its critical examination of Fathul Wahid's thought as a bridge between modern technological reality and the essence of higher Education. Unlike general studies that view AI merely as a technical substitute, this analysis uses Wahid's perspective to reposition the University not as a competitor to AI, but as a space for "human-forming" that transcends digital capabilities. Since its inception, universities have not only been places for the transfer of knowledge, but also spaces for the formation of the whole human being

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It is in this context that Fathul Wahid's thinking becomes relevant to examine. As an academic and higher education thinker, Fathul Wahid does not see AI as a threat that automatically negates the role of universities. Instead, he views AI as a moment of reflection for universities to review the essence of their existence. Fathul Wahid's argument emphasizes that universities should not be confined to purely technical functions, such as delivering material and conducting cognitive testing, because these functions are susceptible to technological replacement. Universities must reaffirm their role as spaces for developing critical thinking, character building, fostering ethics, and honing wisdom—dimensions that cannot be fully replicated by machines. However, the discourse on the relevance of universities in the AI era will be lopsided if viewed solely through the lens of technology and modern educational management. Another, more fundamental perspective is needed, one that is rooted in moral and spiritual values. In the context of Muslim society, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) offers a rich conceptual framework for reinterpreting the meaning of Education, science, and humanity itself. IRP does not view Education solely as a process of mastering skills or accumulating information, but rather as a path to forming *insan kamil*—humans who are balanced between reason, heart, and deeds. (Sudirman, S., Kumalasari, I., Hidayat Siregar, T., Susriarningsih, S Hasanah Lubis, L., 2025).

From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, Science has never been neutral and value-free. Science is always related to purpose, orientation, and moral responsibility. AI, however advanced, remains a product of human reason that lacks moral awareness, intention (*niyyah*), and ethical accountability before God. Therefore, although AI is capable of processing data and producing seemingly "intelligent" answers, it cannot replace the role of humans as moral and spiritual subjects (Kasman, R. A., Burhan, S Munir, H. B., 2025) this is where universities, especially those based on Islamic values, have a strategic role to ensure that technological developments go hand in hand with moral development and transcendental awareness. Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education views the learning process as worship and a means of getting closer to Allah. This concept gives a much deeper meaning than just the efficiency or effectiveness of learning. The University, in PAI's view, is not only an academic institution but also a *tarbiyah*, *Ta'dib*, and *Ta'lim* space. *Tarbiyah* emphasizes the gradual development of human potential; *Ta'dib* emphasizes the formation of *adab* and ethics; while *Ta'lim* focuses on the transmission of knowledge. These three concepts affirm that Education cannot be reduced to the interaction between user and machine, as is often the case in AI-based learning systems. Fathul Wahid's argument for the University's need to maintain its humanitarian dimension found strong resonance within the Islamic Religious Education paradigm. While Fathul Wahid emphasized the importance of critical reason, empathy, and wisdom, PAI added a spiritual and moral dimension as the main foundation. Thus, universities in the era of AI are not only required to be adaptive to technology, but also to further clarify their ethical and transcendent vision. Without a solid foundation of values, universities risk being reduced to mere labor-training centers, subject to market logic and technological efficiency. (Sudirman, S., Kumalasari, I., Hidayat Siregar, T., Susriarningsih, S Hasanah Lubis, L., 2025)

In addition, the perspective of Islamic Religious Education also reminds us that humans have epistemological limitations that cannot be overcome only by technology. AI works based on past data and statistical patterns, while Islamic Education emphasizes the importance of wisdom, moral intuition, and awareness of human limitations before God. The University serves as a space of dialogue between science and faith, between rationality and spirituality, between technological progress and ethical responsibility. (Kasman, R. A., Burhan, S Munir, H. B., 2025) This dialogical function is difficult, if not impossible, to replace with an AI system that lacks a human being's existential experience. Thus, this article is a conceptual study with critical analysis, aiming not only to answer the question "is there still a need for universities in the era of AI?", but also to enrich the discourse with Islamic values that emphasize the meaning, purpose, and direction of Education. Through this approach, the University is not positioned as an institution that competes with AI, but rather as a human-forming space capable of responsibly managing, directing, and controlling technology. Therefore, this article seeks to critically examine Fathul Wahid's argument regarding the relevance of universities in the era of AI, then read it through the lens of Islamic Religious Education (Man, S. R., 2025).

Thus, this article is a conceptual study with critical analysis. This study moves beyond the "technical-utilitarian" trend of AI-education research by specifically "Reading Fathul Wahid's Thought" through an Islamic lens. It aims not only to answer the question "Is there still a need for universities?" but

also to clarify their ethical and transcendent vision. Through this approach, the University is not positioned as an institution that competes with AI, but rather as a human-forming space capable of responsibly managing, directing, and controlling technology. Therefore, this article seeks to critically examine Fathul Wahid's argument regarding the relevance of universities in the era of AI, then read it through the lens of Islamic Religious Education.

## 2. METHOD

The research presented in this article uses a qualitative approach, with a conceptual-analytical literature review. This method was chosen because the research aims to analyze and understand the phenomenon of the relevance of universities in the era of artificial intelligence from the perspective of Islamic education, particularly through the arguments put forward by Fathul Wahid. The literature search was conducted systematically across several academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and Moraref, using keywords such as "Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education," "Islamic Education Transformation," "Fathul Wahid," and "Future of Universities." The search was limited to publications from the last 10 years (2015–2025) to ensure the data's contemporary relevance, with filtering prioritizing peer-reviewed articles and authoritative books. Library research is an appropriate method in this context because the required data consist of texts, literature, academic documents, books, scientific journals, articles, and other written sources related to the topic. Thus, this study emphasizes the collection, analysis, and interpretation of available secondary data, without conducting field observations or collecting primary data. The first step in this research is to identify and select relevant literature. This process involves searching for books, journal articles, seminar proceedings, and other scientific works that discuss several important aspects, including the existence of universities, the transformation of education in the digital age, the influence of artificial intelligence on the education system, and the principles and perspectives of Islamic religious education. In particular, literature examining Fathul Wahid's views became the focus of the study, enabling the research to analyze the arguments he put forward regarding the relevance of universities amid technological advances and AI. At this stage, the researchers emphasized the quality criteria for the sources, such as the author's credibility, the year of publication, the relevance of the content, and whether the source was peer-reviewed. Thus, the literature used is not only extensive but also of high quality and capable of providing a strong theoretical foundation (Kahfi, N. S., Reyza, F. A., S et al., 2023). After the literature is collected, the next stage is data classification and categorization. Researchers map themes based on the research's focus, for example, the role of universities in the AI era, changes in learning methods driven by technological advances, challenges in Islamic education, and the concept of character and moral education from an Islamic perspective. This classification is important to facilitate researchers in conducting a comprehensive analysis of Fathul Wahid's arguments (Effendi, F., S Fahyuni, E. F., 2020).

In the context of Islamic education, the literature used includes interpretations of the Qur'an and hadith, classical texts, and contemporary writings that relate Islamic educational principles to modern educational practices. With this approach, the research can bridge the gap between Islamic educational theory and the reality of education in the era of high technology. The data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Researchers systematically interpreted, coded, and elaborated on Fathul Wahid's arguments, then linked them to other literature to assess the relevance of universities in the AI era. The researchers systematically interpreted and elaborated on Fathul Wahid's arguments, then linked them to other literature to assess the relevance of universities in the AI era. This analysis did not stop at merely identifying arguments but also emphasized critical interpretations of the implications for Islamic religious education. The researcher considers how Islamic principles, such as moral values, worship, and character building, can still be implemented in modern universities influenced by artificial intelligence. Thus, the analysis integrates two main aspects: contemporary thinking about modern education and classical and modern views of Islamic education.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### 1. Tracing the position and meaning of Higher Education in the era of Artificial Intelligence

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought fundamental changes to the way humans acquire, manage, and produce knowledge. Information that was previously only accessible through formal institutions is now instantly available through various AI-based digital platforms. This situation raises fundamental questions about the relevance of higher education: are universities still necessary when machines can answer questions, analyze data, and even write scientific papers? This question is not merely technical, but philosophical, because it touches on the deepest meaning of

education itself. In this context, Fathul Wahid emphasizes that the crisis faced by universities in the AI era is not one of existence, but of meaning. Higher education can no longer be understood merely as a place for the transfer of knowledge, because this function has been largely taken over by technology. AI can provide information faster, more broadly, and often more efficiently than conventional learning methods. However, information efficiency is not the main goal of higher education. From the beginning, universities were born as spaces for the formation of the whole human being, not merely as producers of instrumental knowledge. If higher education is reduced to merely a provider of academic content, then its existence is indeed threatened by AI. However, if universities are understood as spaces for intellectual dialectics, character building, sharpening of conscience, and the search for meaning in life, then technology cannot replace them. This is where the strategic position of universities in the era of artificial intelligence lies: not as competitors to technology, but as determinants of the direction of technology use itself.

From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, education is never intended solely to enlighten the mind (*ta'limta'lim*), but also to shape manners and morals (*tarbiyah* and *ta'dibta'dib*). AI, despite its sophistication, lacks moral awareness, spiritual responsibility, and transcendental dimensions. It works based on algorithms, not values. Therefore, the presence of AI actually reinforces the urgency of higher education as an institution that instills ethical, spiritual, and humanitarian values. Universities become an important space to ensure that technological progress remains within the corridor of human welfare.

Furthermore, higher education in the AI era should be understood as a space for reflective learning. (Man, S. R., 2025). AI is capable of answering the questions "what" and "how," but it is not capable of fully answering the questions "why" and "for what purpose." These questions are at the core of the philosophy of education and are very relevant to the Islamic view of humans as rational and moral beings. Universities play a role in guiding students to not only accept instant answers, but also to critique, reflect on, and take responsibility for the knowledge they acquire. (Sudirman, S., Kumalasari, I., Hidayat Siregar, T., Susrianiingsih, S Hasanah Lubis, L., 2025).

In Fathul Wahid's article, it is emphasized that universities must dare to re-reflect on their educational goals. Do universities only want to produce graduates who are technically ready to work, or humans who are capable of critical thinking, empathy, and social responsibility? In the AI era, this question becomes even more important because technical skills can quickly become obsolete, while character and values are the main differences between humans and machines. Higher education that loses its value orientation will be easily replaced, but higher education rooted in human values will become increasingly relevant. From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, humans are seen as caliphs on earth, who have a mandate to manage science and technology wisely. AI cannot fill this position, because AI has no moral responsibility or dimension of worship. Therefore, universities need to position themselves as institutions that prepare people to fulfill this role of khalifah. Higher education not only transfers expertise but also shapes awareness of social, environmental, and spiritual responsibilities in the use of technology. (Man, S. R., 2025).

## **2. AI and educational goals: between technological efficiency and humane goals**

The presence of artificial intelligence (AI) in education holds great promise for efficiency, speed, and convenience. Learning processes that previously took a long time can now be accelerated through automated systems, learning data analysis, and virtual assistants that can answer various academic questions. In this context, AI is often understood as a solution to various educational problems, ranging from limited resources to unequal access to information. However, behind these promises of efficiency, a fundamental question arises: is education only aimed at achieving quick, measurable results, or does it have a deeper, more humanistic mission? Fathul Wahid emphasizes that the discourse on AI in education is often trapped in technical and instrumental aspects. (Yulianti, G., Bernardi, B., Permana, N., S Wijayanti, F. A. K, 2023). Education is treated as a production system that must become increasingly efficient, cost-effective, and output-oriented. In this paradigm, the success of education is measured by how quickly students graduate, how high their academic scores are, and how well graduates' competencies match the needs of the job market. AI is then positioned as a tool to optimize these achievements. Although this approach has practical benefits, it risks reducing the meaning of education to a mere mechanical process. From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, the purpose of education is never understood narrowly. Education aims to shape individuals who are knowledgeable, faithful, and moral, and able to fulfill their roles as servants and caliphs on earth. This goal is holistic and transcends short-term pragmatic interests. Therefore, when AI is used in education, the main question is not how efficiently the technology works, but whether it supports or obscures the true purpose of education. The efficiency of technology cannot be ignored (Kasman, R. A., Burhan, S Munir, H. B., 2025).

AI can help lecturers and students manage information, personalize learning, and expand access to knowledge sources (Saraswathi & R. Kalaivani, 2025). To a certain extent, this efficiency can support a

more inclusive and adaptive educational process. However, efficiency is not the ultimate goal; rather, it is a means to an end. When efficiency becomes the primary goal, education can lose its human dimension. The learning process, which should involve dialogue, reflection, and character building, can be replaced by cold interactions between humans and machines. The humanistic goal of education lies in the process of forming awareness, values, and moral responsibility. AI lacks ethical awareness and is unable to assess moral good or evil. It only processes data based on algorithms designed by humans. (Darmawati S Nurhafizah, 2025) Therefore, education that is overly dependent on AI, without strengthening the human dimension, risks producing a generation that is technically intelligent but lacking in wisdom. In this context, universities and educational institutions have a responsibility to maintain a balance between the use of technology and the reinforcement of human values. (Sudirman, S., Kumalasari, I., Hidayat Siregar, T., Susriarningsih, S Hasanah Lubis, L., 2025)

Fathul Wahid reminds us that educational goals must always be formulated before determining the role of technology. AI should follow educational goals, not the other way around. If the goal of education is to shape people who think critically, empathize, and are responsible, then the use of AI must be directed to support these goals. Education should not be trapped in a technological logic that judges success solely by speed and accuracy, because humans are not machines that can be optimized without considering their inner dimensions (Bhalla, 2025). In Islamic Religious Education, educational goals are also closely related to the formation of manners. Manners cannot be taught instantly through technology because they are formed through role models, social interaction, and life experiences. AI can help convey material on ethics or religious values, but it cannot replace humans in exemplifying and instilling these values. Therefore, humanistic education places technology as a support, not a substitute for the educational relationship between educators and students (Man, S. R., 2025).

### **3. The role of the University as a character and conscience in the perspective of Islam**

In the midst of rapid technological development, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), universities are undergoing a significant shift in their role. Universities can no longer be positioned solely as Centers for the transmission of technical knowledge and skills, as these functions can now be performed more quickly and efficiently by technology. In this context, the existence of the University

actually finds its new relevance in a role that cannot be replaced by machines, namely as an institution that forms human character and conscience. This role becomes increasingly important when technological developments have the potential to surpass the moral and spiritual readiness of their users. Fathul Wahid asserted that the University is actually a space for humanization. Higher education is not only responsible for educating the intellect but also for shaping students' personalities, values, and ethical sensitivity. (Sofa Muthohar, L. M. K., Hilyatul K. A., Nasikhin, S Annisa F. N., 2025) Universities are meeting places for ideas, values, and experiences that shape the way students see themselves, others, and the world. In this context, character and conscience are the main foundations that determine how Science and technology will be used: whether for the benefit of humanity or precisely to undermine the social order.

In the Islamic religious perspective, education has goals that go far beyond intellectual achievement. Islamic education places the formation of morals at the core of the entire learning process. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) emphasized that the mission of Prophethood is to perfect human character. Therefore, universities operating within the framework of Islamic values have a moral responsibility to ensure that the development of Science goes hand in hand with the formation of students' character and conscience. Science without morals is seen as a potential danger, as it can be used without moral control. (Darmawati S Nurhafizah, 2025) The University as a character builder does not work through the transfer of normative knowledge alone, but through a continuous process of habituation, example, and social interaction. The academic environment, the relationship between faculty and students, and the institution's culture play an important role in shaping students' personalities. In Islam, the formation of character cannot be separated from the concept of *adab*, which refers to the inner attitude and behavior that reflect awareness of man's position before God, his fellow man, and the universe. The University becomes a strategic space to instill academic manners, including honesty, responsibility, humility, and an ethical, critical attitude. The development of AI presents new challenges in the formation of character and conscience. Technology can provide instant answers, but it can erode the processes of reflection and academic honesty. The practice of plagiarism, excessive reliance on AI, and the loss of a sense of intellectual responsibility are phenomena that are increasingly coming to the fore (Kornieva et al., 2025). In this situation, universities are required not only to establish rules but also to instill moral awareness of the meaning of academic honesty and integrity. In Islam, honesty is a fundamental value that has not only a social dimension, but also a spiritual one, since every human act will be accounted for before Allah. (Kasman, R. A., Burhan, S Munir, H. B., 2025).

#### **4. The changing role of lecturers in the era of AI: from material communicator to ethics and critical thinking Mentor**

The development of Artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally changed the landscape of higher education, especially in the way knowledge is accessed and delivered. Information that used to be the main domain of lecturers can now be obtained by students quickly through various AI-based platforms. This condition challenges the traditional role of lecturers as mere transmitters of material, because the knowledge-transfer function is no longer the main advantage of formal education. In this context, the change in the lecturer's role becomes an inevitability, not just a pedagogical choice. Fathul Wahid emphasized that, in the era of AI, lecturers should not be trapped in fear of machines replacing human roles. Rather, this change should be interpreted as an opportunity to reaffirm the essential functions of lecturers and cannot be replaced by technology. AI can provide answers, but it cannot guide students in understanding the meaning, implications, and consequences of that knowledge. Therefore, the role of the lecturer shifted from merely presenting the material to a mentor who guides thought processes and attitude formation. From an educational perspective, this change requires lecturers to focus more on developing students' critical thinking. AI can present a variety of viewpoints and data, but students still need guidance to assess the validity, relevance, and bias of the information. The role of lecturers is to help students ask the right questions, formulate rational arguments, and develop reflective abilities. Critical thinking does not grow automatically through exposure to information, but rather through dialogue and directed intellectual processes.

In addition, the era of AI underscores the importance of lecturers as ethical mentors. The use of AI in learning and research presents a range of moral issues, from academic integrity to the social responsibility of using technology (K V, 2025). AI lacks ethical awareness, so the decision on how technology is used is entirely in the hands of humans. Lecturers have a responsibility to instill ethical awareness in students so that they can use AI responsibly and meaningfully. From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, the role of lecturers as ethical mentors has a strong foundation. Lecturers are seen not only as teachers of knowledge, but also as *murabbi* who guide the formation of morals and manners. The example of lecturers in being honest, fair, and responsible is an important factor in student character education. AI can help the learning process, but it cannot replace the moral example that only humans can provide. The change in the role of lecturers also includes the ability to build more humanistic educational relationships. In the midst

With increasingly digitized learning, students risk experiencing alienation and losing the meaning of learning. Lecturers play a role in creating a dialogue space that allows students to express ideas, doubts, and personal reflections. This relationship is an important means of fostering students' self-awareness and moral responsibility, something that cannot be facilitated by AI. (Sofa Muthohar, L. M. K., Hilyatul K. A., Nasikhin, S Annisa F. N., 2025)

#### **5. AI, Academic Integrity, and Ethical Challenges in Islamic Education**

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has serious implications for academic integrity in universities. In the context of Fathul Wahid's argument about the relevance of universities in the AI era, the issue of integrity cannot be separated from universities' basic function as guardians of scientific values, ethics, and intellectual responsibility. AI can generate text, answer questions, and even compile scientific works with a high degree of similarity to human writing. This condition raises academic concerns: does the learning process still reflect students' intellectual effort, or is it merely the result of interaction with machines? From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), academic integrity is not only an administrative or technical issue, but also a moral and spiritual one. Islam views knowledge as a trust that must be obtained and used honestly. The Qur'an and hadith emphasize the importance of honesty (*ṣiḍq*), trustworthiness, and responsibility in every aspect of life, including in the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, the use of AI that blurs the line between personal effort and technological assistance has the potential to undermine the value of academic honesty if it is not accompanied by a strong ethical awareness (Kotsis, 2024).

Fathul Wahid's argument, emphasizing universities as spaces for character building and critical thinking, becomes increasingly relevant in this situation. AI can replace many technical functions, but it cannot replace the process of internalizing values, moral reflection, and the formation of ethical awareness. In Islamic Religious Education, the learning process aims not only to produce cognitively intelligent graduates but also individuals with noble character and awareness of divine responsibility (Mulia Rejeki, 2025). If universities surrender completely to technological efficiency without maintaining the ethical-spiritual dimension, then universities lose their educational spirit. The ethical challenges of using AI in Islamic education are also related to the concept of intention (*niyyah*). In Islam, the value of an action is largely determined by the intention behind it. Students who use AI as a tool to understand concepts or broaden their horizons remain within the ethical corridor, as long as they intend to learn and

develop. However, when AI is used to replace the thinking process, to cheat covertly, or to obtain grades without legitimate effort, then such practices are contrary to the principles of Islamic education. This is where universities have a strategic role to play in guiding, not merely supervising. (Baharuddin, B., Sahidin, S., Kholilah, A., S Yanuar, F. A., 2025).

### **6. Synergy model of AI and Islamic values in college transformation**

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has raised fundamental questions about the relevance of universities in the digital age. Fathul Wahid, in his various reflections, affirms that the University will not lose its Meaning as long as it maintains its substantive role as a space for the formation of critically thinking, moral, and civilized human beings. From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), the question "Is there still a need for universities in the era of AI?" opens the door to formulating a transformation model of higher education that is not only technologically adaptive but also grounded in values. It is at this point that the synergy between AI and Islamic values becomes an important key in building the future of Higher Education (Sofa Muthohar, L. M. K., Hilyatul K. A., Nasikhin, S Annisa F. N., 2025) AI, with its ability to process data, accelerate analysis, and personalize learning massively, is often positioned as a threat to the role of lecturers and educational institutions. However, in the Islamic view, technology is essentially a tool (*wasilah*), not a goal. Islamic values view science as a mandate that must be used for the benefit of humans and servitude to God. Thus, AI cannot replace the University, but rather challenges the University to reorient its mission: from mere knowledge transfer to the formation of intellectually, spiritually, and morally whole human beings.

The synergy Model of AI and Islamic values in the transformation of Higher Education departs from the realization that AI excels in the cognitive-instrumental realm. In contrast, Islamic values assert ethical, transcendental, and humanitarian dimensions (Irpani, 2025). Islamic universities or colleges that integrate PAI should not reject AI on dehumanization grounds, but instead use AI to strengthen the role of education as a process of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), *Ta'dib* (formation of adab), and *Ta'lim* (development of knowledge). In this context, AI can enrich learning, while Islamic values serve as a moral compass to guide its use. Fathul Wahid's arguments about the importance of the University as a space for dialogue, reflection, and the search for Meaning found a strong resonance in PAI. Islamic education emphasizes that science is not value-neutral; rather, it is always associated with purpose and moral responsibility. Therefore, the synergy of AI and Islamic values requires universities to not only teach how to use AI, but also invite students to reflect on the ethical, social, and spiritual implications of the technology. In this case, the University plays the role of guardian of values amid the rapid flow of automation and algorithmization of life. The transformation of universities through the synergy of AI and Islamic values also demands a change in the pedagogical paradigm. AI enables more personalized, adaptive, and data-driven learning. However, Islamic Religious Education reminds that true learning touches not only the intellect, but also the heart and behavior. Lecturers are no longer just a source of information, because the role can be taken over by AI, but become *murabbi* and *muaddib* who guide students in understanding the Meaning of science, fostering ethical responsibility, and building spiritual awareness. Thus, the presence of AI actually emphasizes the role of humans in education, rather than negating it. (Rahmawati, A., Amirah, S. N., S Wijaya, N., 2025).

### **7. Strategic Framework for AI-PAI Integration in Islamic Higher Education**

To ensure the relevance of universities, Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) must move beyond philosophical discourse toward a practical management framework. While theoretical debates regarding the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are essential, the rapid pace of technological disruption requires a concrete roadmap for institutional survival. This framework is designed to bridge the gap between high-level Islamic educational philosophy and day-to-day academic operations, ensuring that the integration of technology does not erode the institution's spiritual identity. This integration model combines technological efficiency with the spiritual-ethical core of Islamic education. It operates on the principle that technology is a *wasilah* (means) that must be governed by *maqasid* (objectives) to achieve true *maslahah* (public benefit). By embedding Islamic values into the management of technology, IHEIs can avoid the trap of technological determinism, where the machine dictates the direction of education. Instead, the institution remains the master of the technology, directing its use to enhance human dignity and intellectual growth in accordance with the tenets of Islamic faith (Supriatna, 2025).

The framework consists of four main pillars that serve as the foundation for this transformation. These pillars address the ethical, pedagogical, institutional, and evaluative aspects of higher education, providing a holistic approach to modernization. Through this structured framework, Islamic universities can offer a unique educational experience that balances the speed of digital tools with the depth of character building, ensuring they remain relevant as centers of wisdom in the AI era.

## Discussion

### 1. Universities in the Age of AI: The Challenge of Technological Disruption to Scientific Authority

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought fundamental changes to the way humans acquire, manage, and produce knowledge. Amid these changes, universities, as institutions long regarded as centers of scientific authority, face serious challenges. AI not only serves as a technical tool, but also as an entity capable of generating text, analyzing data, and even providing academic recommendations that were previously the exclusive domain of the academic community (Wahid, F., 2023). This situation raises a crucial question: do universities still hold scientific authority in the AI era, or are they experiencing a significant shift in their role? Historically, universities were built on scientific legitimacy, namely the authority of lecturers and scientists to transmit knowledge, guide critical thinking, and systematically produce science. This authority stems not only from mastery of the subject matter but also from scientific methodology, academic ethics, and a long intellectual tradition. However, the presence of AI challenges these foundations. When students can obtain instant explanations, theory summaries, and even complex analyses simply by entering commands into an AI system, the position of lecturers as the sole source of knowledge becomes increasingly diminished. Knowledge is no longer monopolized by classrooms or campus libraries, but is widely distributed in a virtually limitless digital space (Effendi, F., S Fahyuni, E. F., 2020).

This disruption has a direct impact on how universities are perceived. If previously universities were seen as the main place to "gain knowledge," in the AI era, this function has become less relevant in practice. AI can provide information at a speed and in quantities that exceed human capacity. As a result, the scientific authority of universities based on mastery of information faces a legitimacy crisis. However, this challenge is not merely a technological issue, but rather a matter of educational paradigm (Kahfi, N. S., Reyza, F. A., et al., 2023). Universities that still adhere to a one-way knowledge transmission model will fall further behind, while AI continues to develop as an alternative source of knowledge.

Furthermore, AI also blurs the line between producers and consumers of knowledge. In academic tradition, knowledge is generated through a rigorous research process, tested through peer review mechanisms, and disseminated through controlled scientific forums. AI, on the other hand, generates knowledge by compiling existing data without epistemological awareness or moral responsibility. This poses an epistemic challenge for universities: how to distinguish between scientifically valid knowledge and algorithmically generated information when there are no clear educational values or objectives. If universities fail to assert their epistemological role, scientific authority may shift from academic institutions to technological systems (Mahmudah, H. et al., 2023).

### 2. Fathul Wahid's argument on the relevance of Universities: a critical review within the framework of Islamic education

Discourse on the relevance of universities in the era of artificial intelligence cannot be separated from the ideas of Fathul Wahid, who consistently placed universities not just as labor-producing institutions, but as intellectual and moral spaces for civilization. In his various views, Fathul Wahid asserted that the University's biggest challenge is not technological progress itself, but the reduction of higher education to merely a pragmatic tool to meet market needs. This argument became an important entry point for reviewing the University's position within the framework of Islamic Education, which, from the very beginning, viewed education as a process of forming a whole person. According to Fathul Wahid, universities remain relevant amid technological disruption because they perform functions that cannot be replaced by machines, namely fostering critical reasoning, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. AI can process data and generate information, but it lacks the moral capacity to determine the direction and purpose of knowledge. In this context, the University acts as a guardian of value orientations in the development of science. This view aligns with the perspective of Islamic Education, which views science not as an end in itself but as a means to draw closer to Allah and realize the benefits for humanity. Knowledge deprived of value will lose its Meaning and potentially become a source of harm, as has been warned in various Islamic scientific traditions. (Kahfi, N. S., Reza, F. A., S et al., 2023)

Fathul Wahid also criticized the tendency of modern universities to be trapped in quantification logic, such as ratings, administrative accreditation, and publication productivity. For him, this kind of orientation risks obscuring the University's ultimate goal as a truth-seeking space. Within the framework of Islamic education, this criticism resonates strongly. Islamic education emphasizes a balance between cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects. When universities overemphasize material and symbolic achievements, the dimensions of manners, morals, and sincerity in studying become marginalized. In fact, the Islamic scientific tradition places *adab* above knowledge, because without *adab*, knowledge loses its blessing. Furthermore, Fathul Wahid stressed the importance of the University as a vibrant intellectual community. The University is not just a collection of buildings, curricula, and technologies, but a space of dialogue between people who learn and correct each other. This argument is relevant to the concepts of

halaqah and majlis ilmu in Islamic tradition, where learning takes place in a dialogical, personal, and sustainable manner. AI, although sophisticated, cannot replace the educational relationship between teachers and students, which is full of moral examples. In Islamic education, the relationship has a deep spiritual dimension, because knowledge is not only transferred, but also transmitted through exemplary attitudes and life values (Effendi, F., S Fahyuni, E. F., 2020)

### **3. Islamic Religious Education and the role of universities in shaping ethics, meaning, and humanism in the era of AI**

The development of artificial intelligence has brought significant changes to the landscape of higher education, including how humans understand knowledge, work, and social relations. In the midst of the current acceleration of technology, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in maintaining the dimensions of ethics, meaning, and humanism, so as not to be eroded by the instrumental logic of technology (Bustomi, A. et al., 2022). The University, as an academic space, has a responsibility to ensure that AI advances not only produce technically capable human beings but also morally and spiritually dignified ones. Islamic Religious Education views humans as beings with dimensions of reason, heart, and spirit (Ahmad & Zahir, 2025). In this perspective, science is never value-neutral, but rather always tied to specific goals and orientations. AI, while capable of processing data and generating algorithm-based decisions, lacks ethical awareness and moral responsibility. Therefore, the University, through PAI, plays an important role in equipping students with an Islamic ethical framework to use technology responsibly and in a benefit-oriented manner. Without an ethical foundation, AI has the potential to amplify inequality, eliminate empathy, and reduce humans to mere data objects (Mahmudah, H. et al., 2023)

In addition to ethics, Islamic Religious Education also shapes the meaning of education in the era of AI. While success is often measured by efficiency, productivity, and material achievement, PAI offers a transcendent perspective that positions science as a path of devotion to God and service to fellow human beings. The University serves not only as a place of skill development, but also as a space for existential reflection on life goals and social responsibility. Thus, PAI helps students understand that technological advances should enrich humanity's meaning, not just empty it. Furthermore, the University's role in Islamic Religious Education is closely related to strengthening humanist values. Humanism in Islam is not opposed to religiosity, but is rooted in the concept of human glorification as a caliph on Earth. In the age of AI, when human relationships are increasingly mediated by technology, universities have a responsibility to foster empathy, justice, and social care. Islamic religious education contributes to building awareness that technology should be placed as a tool to strengthen human values, not replace them (Bustomi, A. et al., 2022.)

### **4. Managerial Implications: Transforming Islamic Higher Education Policy**

The integration framework proposed in the results section demands a radical shift in how Islamic universities are managed. Unlike general institutions that may prioritize purely technical efficiency, IHEIs must implement a "Value-Driven Management" approach. This means that an ethical impact assessment must precede every technological investment. The transition from a "material communicator" to an "ethics mentor" for lecturers requires systematic faculty development programs. Universities need to invest in training that does not just teach "how to use ChatGPT," but "how to integrate AI into Tazkiyatun Nafs (soul purification) and Ta'dib (character building)." By doing so, Islamic higher education provides a unique value proposition that AI cannot replicate: the formation of a khalifah who is technically expert but spiritually grounded (Jalil et al., 2025).

In addition to human resource development, this managerial transformation requires restructuring the internal quality assurance system to stop focusing solely on quantitative metrics. Islamic universities need to develop internal audit mechanisms to measure the success of AI integration not only in terms of administrative efficiency, but also in its contribution to the holistic well-being (Falah) of the academic community. This policy ensures that campus digitalization remains at the service of the University's sacred mission, preventing the emergence of "algorithmic souls" while creating an environment where technological progress and spiritual maturity grow side by side in harmony. Finally, the management of Islamic higher education must take a proactive role in digital advocacy and in the development of institutional technology ecosystems aligned with local and religious values (Supriatna, 2025). This involves allocating resources to create internal databases and specialized AI tools that have been filtered through Islamic epistemological standards to minimize the risk of secular bias and misinformation. By taking ownership of this technological infrastructure, we do not merely act as passive followers of global trends but instead lead the way in demonstrating how artificial intelligence can be a force for intellectual and moral liberation. This strategic leadership is essential to ensure that the

University remains a lighthouse of truth and a guardian of human dignity in an increasingly automated world.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In the era of artificial intelligence (AI), universities remain indispensable, but their role is no longer limited to serving as knowledge-transfer centers. Reading Fathul Wahid's arguments from the perspective of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) shows that universities are increasingly strategic spaces for the formation of a whole person who is knowledgeable, moral, critical, and morally responsible. AI can replace many basic technical and cognitive functions. However, it cannot take over universities' role in inculcating Islamic values, such as adab, wisdom, justice, and spiritual awareness. In Pai's perspective, the University serves as a container for tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul), strengthening the ethics of using science, and guiding humans so that technology is used for benefit rather than just efficiency.

To deal with technological disruption in the college environment, this article suggests several strategic steps:

1. Reorientation of curricula and vision: the University must clarify its ethical and transcendent vision, ensuring that education is not reduced to a mere labor-training center subject to market logic.
2. Synergy of Technology and Islamic values: universities need to implement transformation models that make AI a tool (wasilah) to enrich learning. In contrast, Islamic values serve as a moral compass in their use.
3. Strengthening the role of lecturers as Murabbi: lecturers should be encouraged to build educational relationships that are more humanistic and focus on character building and moral role models, things that cannot be provided by machines.
4. Development of Critical Reasoning and ethical literacy: students need to be equipped with the ability to criticize the results of AI, understand algorithmic bias, and maintain academic honesty as a form of divine accountability.

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