



Revitalizing Islamic Education in Bela Negara Universities: Between Ideological Challenges and Religious Value Transformation

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Abstract

Islamic Religious Education in non-religious bela negara universities plays a strategic role in shaping students' moral integrity and spirit of nationalism. However, its implementation faces complex ideological challenges, including campus secularization, plurality of beliefs, and students' pragmatic orientation towards spiritual values. This study aims to analyze the challenges, strategies, and models for revitalizing PAI learning in universities with a bela negara character. This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis of PAI lecturers and students at Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur. The results show that PAI learning is still dominated by a normative- instructive paradigm that is irrelevant to the character of millennial students. The main challenge arises from the tension between universal religious values and national ideology, which is taught formalistically through the bela negara curriculum. To overcome this, a model of revitalization of learning based on religious moderation is needed, which integrates national values through a contextual approach, critical discourse, and the use of dialogical digital learning. This model strengthens the internalization of inclusive and rational Islamic values and fosters loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia. This study confirms that the revitalization of PAI learning is not only a methodological innovation but also an ideological transformation that synergizes the spiritual, intellectual, and nationalistic values of students. These findings are an important reference for the development of the PAI curriculum in non-religious universities with a bela negara character.

Keywords:

Islamic Religious Education; Revitalization of Learning; Non-Religious Universities

A. INTRODUCTION

(Hafiz et al., 2025) article states that revitalization in the context of Islamic Religious Education is a systemic renewal process that emphasizes the transformation of the curriculum, learning methods, and the role of lecturers so that religious learning is more contextual and adaptive to the digital era. Revitalization also means efforts to integrate students' intellectual and spiritual values to shape critical, moderate, and characterful individuals amid global challenges and technological disruption. In the context of non-religious universities that have a patriotic character, such as the Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur. (UPNVJT), the existence of Islamic Education courses is not merely a means of imparting religious knowledge, but also serves as a medium for the transformation of spiritual values in line with the spirit of nationalism and love for the country. This is in line with the mandate of Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education, which emphasizes that higher education serves to develop the potential of students to become people of faith, devoted to God Almighty,

with noble character, as well as professional knowledge and skills (Tim Direktorat Pembinaan Sekolah Dasar, 2012).

In practice, PAI learning in non-religious universities often faces quite complex ideological challenges. The phenomenon of campus secularization and the flow of globalization of values have created a gap between normative religious understanding and the social reality of students. Students in the digital era tend to think rationally, critically, and pragmatically about religious teachings (Saputra et al., 2025). This condition is further complicated by the emergence of moral relativism and declining interest in spiritual studies among students who are more career-oriented (Rahman et al., 2023). As a result, PAI is often considered merely a formality, rather than a vehicle for character building and national ideology.

On the other hand, the character of *bela negara* inherent in UPNVJT presents both opportunities and challenges. The values of *bela negara* emphasize loyalty to the nation and state, but in practice, this can create tension between the universal religious values of Islam and the national ideology institutionalized through the *bela negara* curriculum (Simatupang et al., 2025). This ideological tension is evident when students are faced with the dilemma between expressing their religious identity and their commitment to nationalism. Therefore, PAI lecturers are required to have pedagogical competence as well as ideological sensitivity in order to be able to synergize the two value systems in a proportional and dialogical manner.

Based on these conditions, it is necessary to revitalize PAI learning, which not only emphasizes methodological aspects but also strengthens ideological transformation. Revitalization here is interpreted as an effort to revive the spirit of PAI learning so that it is in line with the times without leaving behind the essence of Islamic values. A number of studies show that the application of religious moderation-based PAI learning can create a harmonious, tolerant, and inclusive academic climate amid student diversity (Hadi et al., 2014). Research conducted by (Radiyah, 2024) shows that the revitalization of Islamic education in Indonesia focuses on curriculum renewal, teaching method innovation, and policy support that is adaptive to technological developments. The results of this research confirm that a comprehensive revitalization strategy can improve the quality of Islamic education in preparing a golden generation that is globally competitive. This approach emphasizes the importance of instilling the values of tolerance, justice, and love for the homeland within the framework of Islamic teachings of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

In addition, technological developments and the digitization of learning have become a necessity in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0. The use of digital technology in PAI learning opens up a broader, more interactive, and relevant dialogue with the characteristics of the digital generation of students (Sahlan et al., 2022). A digital learning and critical discourse-based approach allows students to relate Islamic values to national issues, thereby fostering a balanced ideological awareness between faith and nationalism.

Although several studies have discussed the importance of religious moderation and the integration of *bela negara* values in Islamic education, empirical studies examining the practice of revitalizing PAI learning in non-religious universities are still relatively limited. Most previous studies have focused on normative and conceptual aspects, while ideological dynamics in the campus environment have not been studied in depth, especially in universities with patriotic characteristics such as UPNVJT. Therefore, this study has novelty in portraying the process of revitalizing PAI learning contextually in a general higher education environment oriented towards national values.

This study aims to analyze in depth the various challenges, strategies, and models of revitalizing PAI learning in non-religious universities with a *bela negara* character. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of a contextual PAI learning model and serve as material for academic policy considerations for higher education institutions in strengthening the role of PAI as an ideological and moral pillar of the nation in the digital era.

B. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of lecturers and students regarding the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in non-religious universities with a patriotic character, particularly at Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur (UPNVJT).

Research data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with four PAI lecturers and eight students from four different faculties: the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Economics and Business, and the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences. These faculties were deliberately selected because they represent diverse academic clusters social sciences, engineering, economics, and legal studies allowing the study to capture variations in how PAI is understood, contextualized, and practiced within different disciplinary cultures. The multidisciplinary selection also reflects UPNVJT's identity as a patriotic campus, where each faculty integrates the bela negara mandate in distinct ways. Therefore, including these faculties provides a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of PAI learning experiences across academic domains.

Observations were conducted directly in several PAI classes to review the interaction processes, teaching methods, and student responses to materials related to Islamic and national values. Meanwhile, document analysis focused on examining the Semester Learning Plan (RPS), syllabus, and campus policies concerning religious moderation and bela negara education.

The data analysis process followed the interactive model of (Miles et al., 2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This entire analytical cycle was carried out repeatedly to ensure consistency and depth. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation and member checking with participants, ensuring that interpretations remained aligned with field realities.

In addition, this study adhered to ethical research standards. All participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the study and provided informed consent prior to interviews and observations. Participant identities were protected through confidentiality principles. Through this methodological design, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and reflective portrayal of the PAI learning model that integrates religious and nationalistic values within the context of a bela negara oriented university.

C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

The PAI Learning Paradigm in Bela negara Universities

The results of the study show that the paradigm of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at the Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur (UPNVJT) still tends to be normative-instructive, where lecturers are the center of information delivery and students play a passive role as recipients of material. Based on observations of four lectures in the Faculty of Economics and Business and the Faculty of Engineering, learning activities were dominated by lectures, the delivery of thematic verses and hadiths, and the assignment of reflective tasks without adequate space for critical discussion.

One PAI lecturer said that it is still difficult to achieve a proportional balance between theological values and national values:

"We are still trying to balance the delivery of faith material and national values, but students are more interested in practical matters, not theological concepts." (Interview, R1-Islamic Education Lecturer, September 12, 2025).

This view is reinforced by students' perceptions that PAI learning on campus does not provide learning experiences that are relevant to their lives as part of an academic community with a patriotic character.

"PAI feels like a continuation of religious education in high school; it does not feel relevant to campus life or bela negara." (Interview, R3-Law Student, September 13, 2025).

This finding indicates a gap between the normative approach and the contextual needs of

students in the digital age. A learning paradigm that focuses too much on the transfer of religious values without critical dialogue makes it difficult for students to relate Islamic values to national and patriotic practices. This is in line with (Suhail et al., 2025) analysis, which states that religious education in higher education is often trapped in a pattern of dogmatic transmission rather than encouraging the transformation of moral and social awareness.

Meanwhile, at the Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur, which has a bela negara campus character, PAI should be a means of integrating religious and nationalistic values, not just teaching doctrine and worship. (Hafiz et al., 2025) emphasizes that religious education in general higher education institutions needs to shift to a transformative- dialogical paradigm, which encourages students to internalize religious values in national practices such as discipline, responsibility, leadership, and social empathy.

From interviews with several lecturers and students, methodological and ideological challenges were also found. Methodological challenges include limited variations in learning strategies that are adaptive to the characteristics of Generation Z, such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, and experiential learning that emphasize active student involvement (Basri, 2025; MOHD. FAUZAN, 2025). Meanwhile, ideological challenges are related to the perception of some students that PAI is only a compulsory course, not a space for character building in bela negara and religious moderation (Kurniawan et al., 2025).

Thus, the PAI learning paradigm in bela negara campuses still requires conceptual and methodological revitalization so that it does not only function as a normative instrument but also becomes an agent of transformation in shaping a strong, adaptive, and nationalistic religious character. This change requires lecturers to become transformative educators who are able to bridge religious values with the spirit of bela negara through reflective, participatory, and contextual approaches.

Ideological Challenges: Campus Secularization and Plurality of Beliefs

The results of the study show that Islamic Education (PAI) lecturers at the Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur face significant ideological challenges. These challenges stem mainly from two main issues: the secularization of the academic space and the plurality of student beliefs. Campus secularization in this context does not mean rejection of religion, but rather the separation of the spiritual and scientific dimensions in academic life. This phenomenon often occurs in public universities, where scientific rationality is considered the main domain, while religious aspects are positioned as a private sphere (Bahri, 2022).

From the results of interviews with one of the Islamic Education lecturers at the Faculty of Economics and Business, it was revealed that some students view religion as a personal matter that is irrelevant to discuss in the context of nationality:

"Some students believe that religion is a personal matter, not something to be discussed in the classroom. They respect religion, but reject it when it is linked to national ideology." (Interview, R-3-PAI Lecturer, September 10, 2025).

This attitude shows the strong influence of the modern secularism paradigm, which emphasizes scientific objectivity but often ignores the role of spiritual values in shaping national character. This is in line with the results of research by (Anwar & Muhayati, 2021), which explains that students in public universities tend to view religion only as an aspect of individual morality, not as a public ideology that can guide national life.

In addition, the plurality of students' beliefs also poses a challenge in managing PAI learning. Although the majority of students at the Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur are Muslim, there are also non-Muslim students who are active in bela negara activities and cross-value courses. This diversity requires PAI lecturers to apply an inclusive pedagogical approach that respects diversity of views. One non-Muslim student responded positively to the approach taken by the lecturer:

"I am happy when PAI lecturers explain the value of defending the country from a universal perspective, not just Islam. So we can still think and discuss." (Interview, R2- FEB Student,

September 12, 2025).

This approach is in line with the concept of religious moderation, which is a fair, balanced, and respectful way of practicing religion (Rahmat & Khoiriyah, 2023). Religious moderation plays an important role in building an inclusive academic space, where Islamic values and national values can engage in dialogue without negating each other. (MOHD. FAUZAN, 2025) emphasizes that the application of moderation in PAI learning becomes an ideological bridge between religiosity and nationalism, two entities that are often considered contradictory in public discourse on campus.

The challenges of secularization and plurality indicate that the revitalization of PAI learning in bela negara campuses cannot only focus on methodological innovation. It must touch on a deeper ideological dimension, namely the reconciliation between spiritual and nationalistic values. PAI lecturers need to become ideological bridges capable of transforming Islamic values into national moral energy without losing their theological substance .

The Dynamics of Millennial Students and Shifting Spiritual Values

Data analysis shows that Generation Z students have a more pragmatic, reflective, and contextual spiritual orientation. Based on interviews with ten students from four faculties, 70% stated that they prefer Islamic Education topics that discuss contemporary issues such as radicalism, social media ethics, or spirituality in the workplace, rather than theoretical material such as classical creed or jurisprudence.

One FISIP student said:

"We want PAI to discuss realities, such as how to be a devout student while remaining critical of state policies." (Interview, R-4-FISIP Student, September 11, 2025).

This finding is in line with (Mukhlisa et al., 2025) theory, which states that the digital generation is more interested in experiential learning and critical reflection. PAI lecturers who are able to relate Islamic teachings to contemporary social issues will find it easier to encourage active student participation.

However, some students also admitted to experiencing ideological confusion when faced with narratives linking nationalism with faith. A student from the Faculty of Engineering said:

"Sometimes we are confused, is defending the country part of worship, or just a civic duty?" (Interview, R-1-FT Student, September 13, 2025).

This statement shows the need for conceptual clarity in PAI learning. Revitalizing learning is not enough by simply updating methods, but must also reinforce the ideological foundation that defending the country is an implementation of Islamic teachings about love for the homeland (*hubbul wathan minal iman*) (Yusuf et al., 2025).

Revitalization Strategy: Integration of Religious and Nationalistic Values

The results of the study show that there are three main strategies used by PAI lecturers in revitalizing learning in the campus environment of bela negara, namely: (1) a moderate approach to religion, (2) integration of bela negara values into the PAI curriculum, and (3) utilization of digital technology in learning.

a. Religious Moderation Approach

Islamic Education lecturers emphasize the principle of *wasathiyah* (balance) by linking Islamic teachings to national values. In a lecture session themed "Jihad and Bela negara," lecturers invite students to analyze relevant verses and hadiths and then discuss the context of modern nationalism. This approach helps students understand that the spirit of bela negara is an implementation of the values of justice and *maslahah* (public interest) in Islam (MOHD. FAUZAN, 2025). Other studies also show that strengthening religious moderation is effective in fostering national awareness and preventing ideological polarization on campus (Noor, 2023).

b. Integration of Bela negara Values in the PAI Curriculum

A review of the RPS documents and syllabus shows that there have been updates to the PAI learning outcomes at UPNVJT that include values of defending the country, such

as discipline, responsibility, mutual cooperation, and loyalty to the country. Lecturers use national case studies, such as the role of Islamic scholars in the struggle for independence and the contribution of Islam to public policy, to strengthen the relevance of PAI in shaping students' national character. This approach is in line with the Character Education Framework concept, which emphasizes the integration of spiritual, moral, and nationalistic values in higher education (Patih et al., 2023).

c. Utilization of Technology and Digital Learning

PAI lecturers actively utilize digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Kahoot!, and Mentimeter to create participatory interactions. Students are also assigned to make reflection videos with the theme "Islam and Defending the Country." Of the 20 videos collected, 15 of them highlight the narrative of peaceful Islam and love for the homeland, indicating an increase in students' ideological literacy regarding national values. This strategy supports (Najib et al., 2022) finding that the integration of digital technology not only modernizes teaching methods but also becomes an ideological medium for instilling religious values creatively and contextually among Generation Z.

Thus, these three strategies show that the revitalization of PAI learning on the bela negara campus is not only oriented towards pedagogical innovation but also towards strengthening students' national ideology and spirituality in the context of moderate Islam.

Revitalization Model: PAI as Ideological Transformation

The results of the analysis show that the revitalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in bela negara universities not only requires methodological innovation but also ideological transformation that synergizes the values of spirituality, nationalism, and digital literacy. This revitalization model consists of three main dimensions that are interrelated.

d. Reflective Spirituality.

PAI is directed at strengthening spiritual awareness based on critical reflection, not merely the repetition of dogma. Students are encouraged to understand Islamic teachings contextually in facing the problems of modernity and nationality. As explained by (Abdullah, 2017), religious education in higher education must develop reflective spirituality that encourages students to think theologically and rationally about social reality.

e. Integrative Nationalism.

This dimension places national values as an inherent part of faith. PAI not only discusses religious rituals but also interprets Islamic teachings in the context of love for the homeland, social responsibility, and national ethics. Verses from the Qur'an about justice ('adl), trustworthiness, and ukhuwah (brotherhood) are used as a basis for strengthening the spirit of defending the country. (Hafiz et al., 2025) emphasizes that religious education that instills the values of integrative nationalism plays an important role in building students' national character.

f. Dialogic Digital Literacy.

PAI learning utilizes digital technology to create interactive discussion spaces and disseminate moderate Islamic narratives. Students are trained to become co-creators of educational content that promotes religious moderation, diversity, and loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia. The results of research by (Rahman et al., 2023) show that religious digital literacy can expand the space for academic da'wah and strengthen the ideological participation of the younger generation in a multicultural context.

Thus, this revitalization model confirms that PAI on the campus of the bela negara institution serves as a forum for shaping the ideological character of students who are religious, rational, and patriotic (Rahmat & Khoiriyah, 2023).

D. CONCLUSION

The revitalization of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning in bela negara universities, particularly at the Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur, confirms that the main challenges of IRE are not only methodological but also ideological. The secularization of academic spaces, plurality of beliefs, and students' pragmatic orientation toward spirituality demand a paradigm shift in learning from a normative-instructional pattern to a reflective and contextual model. The findings of this study indicate that effective revitalization occurs through three main dimensions: reflective spirituality, which fosters religious awareness based on critical thinking; integrative nationalism, which synergizes the values of faith with the spirit of bela negara; and dialogical digital literacy, which utilizes digital media to strengthen narratives of moderate Islam and diversity.

Given these findings, future studies should broaden the scope of inquiry by examining the interaction between religious moderation, national defense values, and digital literacy across different university models both religious and non-religious to identify contextual variations in PAI learning revitalization. Researchers are also encouraged to employ mixed-method approaches or longitudinal designs to capture changes in students' ideological, spiritual, and civic orientations over time. Furthermore, comparative studies between universities with strong ideological frameworks and those with more secular orientations would provide deeper insights into how institutional culture shapes the transformation of Islamic education. Through such expanded directions, future research will contribute to developing a more comprehensive, adaptive, and empirically grounded model of PAI revitalization that aligns with contemporary societal challenges. Thus, PAI functions not only as a means of transferring religious knowledge but also as a medium of ideological transformation that harmonizes students' spiritual, intellectual, and nationalistic values to form a religious, critical, and inclusive generation committed to the integrity of the nation and state.

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