

Digital Pedagogy in Action: Enhancing Critical Thinking through YouTube in Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract

The integration of information technology in education has become increasingly critical in the digital era, particularly for enhancing pedagogical effectiveness. YouTube, as the world's most prominent video-sharing platform, has emerged as a significant educational tool across diverse disciplines, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Despite providing global access to extensive educational content, substantial challenges persist in its pedagogical implementation, particularly regarding inadequate digital literacy among Indonesian secondary school students. This study investigates the utilization of YouTube as an instructional medium for developing critical thinking skills in PAI learning contexts. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research collected data through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving PAI teachers and students from multiple Indonesian high schools. Findings reveal that while YouTube offers diverse educational content with potential to foster critical thinking development, the majority of students engage in passive consumption patterns, lacking analytical depth in processing presented material. Although interactive features, including comment sections, content sharing, and subscription mechanisms, demonstrate potential for promoting deeper cognitive engagement, their educational benefits remain underutilized. The study identifies two principal barriers to effective YouTube integration: insufficient student digital literacy and inconsistent content quality. These findings contribute to the emerging scholarship on digital platform utilization in religious education and provide empirical evidence for enhancing critical thinking pedagogy through technology-mediated instruction in Indonesian educational contexts.

Keywords: YouTube, Islamic Religious Education, critical thinking skills, digital literacy, qualitative case study

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Introduction

The integration of information technology has fundamentally transformed contemporary educational practices, creating new paradigms for teaching and learning across diverse contexts (Kriswinahyu, 2024). Among the rapidly evolving digital platforms, YouTube has emerged as a dominant force in global education, transcending its original entertainment-focused design to become a widely accessible educational resource (Wijaya, 2020). The platform's flexibility and universal accessibility have positioned it as a significant medium for knowledge dissemination,

enabling learners to access educational content anytime and anywhere (Fathira & Masbiran, 2024). In Indonesia, YouTube's penetration is particularly notable, with more than 96% of internet users accessing the platform regularly, and approximately 60% utilizing it specifically for educational purposes (Rohayati, 2021). These statistics underscore YouTube's substantial potential as a pedagogical tool capable of supporting diverse learning objectives (Agustina et al., 2022). Furthermore, the platform hosts varied content formats—including instructional videos, academic discussions, religious lectures, and interactive demonstrations—that can facilitate the development of higher-order thinking skills, particularly critical thinking (Sumanik & Indrawati, 2024).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia serves the fundamental purpose of cultivating comprehensive and applicable religious understanding among students (Khakim & Zubaidi, 2024). Beyond mere theoretical knowledge acquisition, PAI curriculum emphasizes the development of critical thinking competencies as essential learning outcomes (Mardiani et al., 2024). Contemporary PAI pedagogy requires students to move beyond passive reception of religious information toward active analysis, critical evaluation, and contextual application of religious teachings in everyday life (Chairunisa et al., 2024). Within this framework, YouTube presents significant opportunities as an educational medium capable of supporting these pedagogical objectives (Harmoko, 2021). However, despite widespread platform accessibility, substantial challenges persist, particularly concerning inadequate digital literacy among Indonesian secondary school students (Afrina & Zulaikha, 2024).

Empirical evidence demonstrates both the promise and limitations of YouTube in educational contexts. Research by Rohayati (2021) reveals that 74% of Indonesian students identify YouTube as a primary source for locating learning materials, including religious content. Despite this high utilization rate, significant gaps exist in leveraging the platform for critical thinking development. Jamil and Pratiwi (2022) found that 65% of students who use YouTube for learning report improvements in their critical thinking abilities; however, these gains are limited to students who actively seek educational content and engage in analytical processing of materials. The majority of student users continue to consume content passively, without employing critical evaluation strategies (Kodrata, 2024).

Current demographic data indicates that Indonesia has approximately 212.9 million internet users, with roughly 88% actively accessing YouTube. While these figures reflect substantial technological penetration, they simultaneously highlight the critical gap between platform accessibility and effective educational utilization, particularly within PAI instruction. The disconnect between access and meaningful engagement necessitates more structured pedagogical approaches and explicit instructional guidelines to help students transform YouTube from a passive consumption medium into an active tool for critical thinking development (Nuroh, 2023).

This study addresses the central question: How can YouTube be effectively utilized to enhance students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction? While YouTube offers extensive, readily accessible educational content, a fundamental challenge emerges from insufficient digital literacy among Indonesian students, resulting in predominantly passive platform engagement without substantive analysis of presented materials. Consequently, this research explores the multifaceted challenges inherent in integrating YouTube as a pedagogical medium within PAI contexts, particularly regarding critical interpretation of religious teachings and engagement with contemporary social issues. Additionally, this study examines student perceptions and responses to YouTube-based instruction, assessing whether students perceive the platform as beneficial for developing

critical thinking competencies and the extent to which they actively engage in analytical processing of viewed content.

This study aims to investigate YouTube's potential as an instructional tool for cultivating critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education. The specific research objectives include: (1) To identify optimal strategies for YouTube utilization that promote active critical thinking development rather than passive information consumption among PAI students. (2) To examine barriers and challenges associated with YouTube integration in PAI instruction, including digital literacy deficiencies, content quality variability, and pedagogical delivery methods. (3) To evaluate student perceptions and engagement patterns regarding YouTube-based PAI instruction, specifically assessing the extent to which students perceive the platform as facilitating deeper, more critical, and reflective understanding of religious subject matter.

Through these objectives, this research seeks to contribute new insights into YouTube's pedagogical potential as an educational medium capable of enhancing educational quality in Indonesia, specifically advancing critical thinking competencies within Islamic Religious Education contexts.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to investigate the application of YouTube as a pedagogical tool for developing critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction. The case study approach was selected for its capacity to provide in-depth, contextualized understanding of contemporary phenomena within real-life educational settings (Yin, 2018). This methodological framework enables comprehensive exploration of the complex interactions between digital platform usage, pedagogical practices, and cognitive skill development in authentic learning environments.

YouTube, as a video-based digital platform, offers engaging and interactive modalities for students to access diverse learning materials, including religious education content. The evolution of digital technology has positioned YouTube learning videos as highly effective resources for introducing complex concepts and stimulating critical discourse among learners (Liew & Hassan, 2021). Beyond content comprehension, YouTube-based instruction facilitates the development of analytical competencies essential for information assessment and evaluation—fundamental components of critical thinking development (Riyadi, 2023).

Within Islamic Religious Education contexts, YouTube enables students to access multifaceted perspectives on Islamic teachings, encompassing both theoretical foundations and practical applications through content created by diverse scholars and educators. Empirical evidence indicates that students who engage with educational videos demonstrate increased analytical activity and participatory discussion regarding course materials, thereby enhancing their critical thinking capacities when addressing contemporary issues related to religious teachings (Utomo et al., 2022). Consequently, YouTube integration in PAI instruction aims to transform students from passive information recipients into active critical thinkers who question assumptions, evaluate evidence, and construct reasoned arguments based on logical analysis of video content.

Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted across multiple Indonesian secondary schools where YouTube is utilized as a supplementary instructional resource in PAI courses. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of individuals with relevant experiences and insights regarding YouTube-based PAI instruction. The research involved:

Student participants: Secondary school students actively enrolled in PAI courses who regularly engage with YouTube educational content

Teacher participants: PAI instructors who incorporate YouTube videos into their pedagogical practices

The purposive sampling strategy ensured participant selection based on their direct involvement with YouTube-integrated PAI instruction, thereby providing rich, information-dense data relevant to the research objectives.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection employed multiple qualitative methods to achieve comprehensive understanding and methodological rigor:

In-depth interviews were conducted with both PAI teachers and students to explore their experiences, perceptions, and practices regarding YouTube utilization in religious education. (a) Teacher interviews focused on video selection criteria and pedagogical rationale, integration strategies for YouTube content within lesson plans, perceived impact on student critical thinking development, challenges encountered in platform implementation. (b) Student interviews examined Patterns of YouTube engagement for PAI learning, analytical processes employed when viewing educational videos, perceived benefits and limitations of video-based learning, self-assessed critical thinking development.

Classroom Observations: Direct classroom observations were conducted during YouTube-integrated PAI lessons to document authentic learning interactions. Observational focus included Student engagement patterns with video content, verbal and non-verbal responses during video viewing, participation in post-viewing discussions and analytical activities, collaborative learning behaviors during group work, teacher facilitation strategies and instructional scaffolding. Observations provided contextualized behavioral data complementing self-reported interview information, enabling triangulation of findings.

Document Analysis: Documentation review encompassed analysis of teacher lesson plans incorporating YouTube resources, student assignments and reflective writing about viewed content, YouTube video content selected for instructional purposes, and assessment rubrics evaluating critical thinking competencies. Document analysis provided supplementary evidence regarding pedagogical approaches and learning outcomes.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed systematic qualitative procedures to identify meaningful patterns and themes:

Thematic Analysis: Interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents were analyzed using thematic coding techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process included (1) Familiarization: Repeated reading of transcripts and field notes to achieve data immersion, (2) Initial coding: Line-by-line coding to identify significant data segments, (3) Theme development: Grouping related codes into potential themes, (4) Theme review: Refining and validating themes against the dataset, (5) Theme definition: Clearly articulating the essence of each theme, (6) Interpretation: Analyzing themes in relation to research objectives and theoretical frameworks

Descriptive Analysis: Complementary descriptive analysis was employed to systematically present findings regarding YouTube-based learning processes and their impact on students' analytical and evaluative capacities. This approach enabled coherent narrative presentation of complex qualitative data while maintaining fidelity to participants' experiences and perspectives.

Results and Discussion

YouTube as a Learning Tool in Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

YouTube has become one of the most popular platforms in the world that allows its users to not only watch videos, but also to create and share content (Tahmina, 2023). According to Liew and Hassan (2021), YouTube offers various types of content, ranging from music, vlogs, movie trailers, to tutorials. This diversity makes it a very important tool in learning and entertainment. YouTube is not only a place of entertainment, but also a learning space that can be accessed by all groups, including students. Riyadi (2023) highlighted that the open access nature of YouTube allows students to access various sources of information, which can directly increase their knowledge. The platform provides opportunities for self-paced learning based on global access, and encourages critical thinking and deep self-reflection (Choudhary & Kandel, 2025).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), YouTube offers various advantages that are not only limited to the delivery of teaching materials, but also to the development of critical thinking skills. Along with the development of the digital era that increasingly encourages online learning, platforms such as YouTube have become a significant space for developing critical thinking skills. In Islamic teachings, there are values that prioritize intellectual involvement, self-reflection, and independent reasoning (Mokodenseho et al., 2024). These values are in line with YouTube's potential as a tool to train critical thinking. Islamic concepts such as *Husnuzan* (positive thinking), *Ijtihad* (independent thinking), and *Muhasabah* (introspection) can be integrated into educational resources on YouTube, which can later improve students' critical reflection and analysis (Jamil & Pratiwi, 2022). As Utomo et al. (2022) argue, the use of these principles in the context of digital platforms helps bridge the gap between traditional religious education and technology-based learning, thereby facilitating holistic development for students.

With its open access format, YouTube is one of the platforms that supports not only the enrichment of students' knowledge, but also encourages them to think critically and reflectively about the information they consume (Kurniawan et al., 2024). In the context of PAI, YouTube provides a space for students to not only receive knowledge, but also practice the ability to analyze and reflect on Islamic teachings in depth. By integrating relevant Islamic concepts into digital content on YouTube, the platform plays an important role in character formation and intellectual development of students (Mardiani et al., 2024). This is in line with the goal of Islamic education to create individuals who have the ability to think critically, are able to conduct self-introspection, and practice independent reasoning in daily life (Kodrata, 2024).

The importance of YouTube in supporting faith-based education, such as PAI, lies in the platform's ability to introduce a variety of approaches to developing critical thinking skills. Through YouTube, Islamic values that prioritize rationality, reflection, and independence in thinking can be conveyed in a way that is relevant and easy to understand by the digital generation. Thus, YouTube becomes an effective tool to enrich the experience of learning Islamic religion which is not only limited to classical texts, but can also adapt and innovate in the ever-evolving digital era.

The Advantages of YouTube as a Learning Platform

YouTube offers incredible global access for its users, allowing anyone from different parts of the world to access a wide variety of multimedia content (Amalia, 2024). This is especially advantageous for students who want to explore a variety of learning resources that suit their needs and learning styles (Shoufan & Mohamed, 2022). As revealed by Suandi

(2022), YouTube provides opportunities for students to access diverse information, ranging from academic topics to personal hobbies, thus giving them the freedom to choose the type of learning that best suits them. The globalization of learning through YouTube is expanding educational horizons, allowing students in any country to take advantage of resources that previously may not have been accessible (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

Another advantage that YouTube has is the diversity of content it offers. Starting from tutorial videos, educational materials, vlogs, entertainment, to documentation, YouTube has something for everyone (Hayirli, 2025). This variety of content is especially beneficial for students who are looking for different ways to engage in their learning process (Engagement & Iamnitchi, 2024). These platforms allow them to learn through engaging and practical visual videos, which may be more effective than traditional methods (Guaya et al., 2024). For example, a student who prefers visual-based learning can easily find videos that teach specific topics in a more engaging and easy-to-understand way (Riyadi, 2023).

YouTube also offers monetization opportunities for content creators. Through YouTube's partner program, creators can generate revenue from their videos, which not only incentivizes them to continue producing quality content, but also provides space for creators to develop their professional skills. This creates an ecosystem where high-quality content is continuously encouraged to be produced, providing benefits for content creators and their audiences.

The Disadvantages of YouTube as a Learning Platform

While it has many benefits, YouTube also faces a number of challenges. One of the main drawbacks is the existence of inappropriate content. Although YouTube has strict content guidelines, some inappropriate videos can still get away and appear on the platform (Setiawan & Novita, 2024). This is risky for students who can be inadvertently exposed to content that does not match the educational values they expect. Jagad ID (2023) noted that despite efforts to supervise the content posted, there is still a possibility that students are exposed to material that could damage their development.

Additionally, YouTube's complex monetization policies can be a barrier for content creators. Many creators, especially those just starting out, have difficulty understanding YouTube's monetization rules and requirements, which can hinder their ability to generate a steady income. This can lead to confusion and frustration among content creators who are trying to turn their work into a source of income, without a clear understanding of how the monetization system works on these platforms (Yoo, 2021).

Lastly, YouTube focuses heavily on the number of impressions and likes to determine the popularity of content. This pressure to get more views and likes sometimes leads some creators to use clickbait tactics or create controversial content to attract attention, which can reduce the educational quality of the videos they create. This phenomenon is not only detrimental to quality-focused creators, but it can also confuse students who are looking for more serious and reliable information (Yoo, 2021).

YouTube offers a huge opportunity in the world of digital education, providing global access, content diversity, and monetization opportunities for content creators. However, challenges such as inappropriate content, complicated monetization policies, and pressure to chase impressions and likes show that while YouTube offers many advantages, there are aspects to consider to maximize its benefits in the context of learning. With a good understanding of its potential and drawbacks, YouTube can be a very useful tool for education in this digital age.

Developing Critical Thinking Skills through YouTube

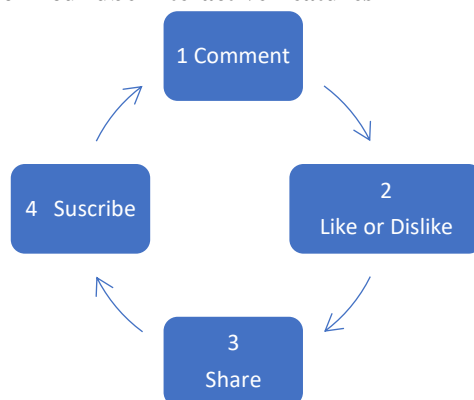
YouTube as a learning platform offers a wide variety of educational content, such as video lessons, discussions, and case studies that can be an effective means to improve students'

critical thinking and analytical skills. By accessing a wide variety of educational content, students not only gain information, but also have the opportunity to develop skills in evaluating, analyzing, and questioning critically. Through expert speakers, in-depth discussions, and quality content, YouTube creates a space where students are encouraged to think critically and reflectively (Alderton, 2021).

Some YouTube features directly support the development of critical thinking skills: (1) *Subscribe*: The subscription feature allows students to receive regular updates on new relevant content. This facilitates deeper engagement with the content you like. However, it is important for students to hone critical thinking skills when choosing a channel to ensure that it aligns with their learning goals (Magnone et al., 2023). Choosing the right channel allows students to keep their insights updated, but it's also worth remembering that not all content available on YouTube is beneficial for self-development. (2) *Likes*: The "Likes" feature allows students to give consent to content they enjoy or find useful. This feature serves as positive feedback for content creators, which can motivate them to continue producing content that supports educational goals (Morris, 2021). However, keep in mind that giving "Likes" based solely on the popularity or appearance of the content can be superficial. Students need to ensure that their engagement is based on careful consideration of the quality of the content (Berliner, 2022). (3) *Dislikes*: The "Dislike" feature gives students the opportunity to express dissatisfaction with the content, while also providing constructive feedback for content creators (Al-Rahmi et al., 2022). However, this feature should be used wisely and responsibly so as not to have an unnecessary negative impact on the creator, especially when the disagreement is subjective and not based on a clear reason. (4) *Sharing*: The sharing feature expands the reach of the content by allowing students to share videos with others, thus creating opportunities for broader discussion and critical reflection. However, students must be careful in sharing content so that there are no misunderstandings or the spread of inaccurate information (Ergin & İnan, 2024). Sharing content can encourage productive dialogue, but it can also be risky if the content shared contains false or misleading information. (5) *Comments*: The comments section on YouTube provides a space for students to engage in discussions, share opinions, and provide feedback on content. This feature supports collaborative learning, where students can share ideas with each other and expand their understanding. Nonetheless, the comment section also requires moderation to ensure that the communication that occurs remains constructive and respectful (Alvarado et al., 2020). Good moderation will maintain the quality of the discussion and avoid comments that are negative or irrelevant.

Figure 1

Flow Diagram of YouTube Interactive Features



Through these various interactive features, YouTube not only serves as a platform for information consumption, but also as a space for critical reflection and self-development. By using existing features wisely, students can enrich their learning experience, develop critical thinking skills, and participate in helpful discussions. Therefore, YouTube is a very potential tool in building critical thinking skills that are indispensable in the modern world of education.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that YouTube represents a significant pedagogical tool with substantial potential for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction, particularly in fostering critical thinking competencies among secondary school students. The platform's open-access architecture enables students to engage with diverse educational content spanning theoretical instruction to reflective discourse on contemporary Islamic issues. Through systematic integration of foundational Islamic intellectual principles—*Husnuzan* (positive assumption), *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning), and *Muhasabah* (self-introspection)—YouTube can function as an effective medium for cultivating critical thinking, reflective practice, and autonomous reasoning capacities. The platform's content diversity not only facilitates knowledge acquisition but also creates pedagogical spaces for critical thinking development aligned with Islamic education's fundamental objectives of producing intellectually engaged, analytically capable learners.

Research findings reveal a complex landscape of opportunities and challenges. While YouTube offers considerable advantages including global accessibility, content diversity, and interactive features that support collaborative learning, significant limitations persist. Inappropriate content presence, algorithmic prioritization of engagement metrics over educational quality, and platform complexity present ongoing obstacles to effective educational utilization. Moreover, empirical evidence indicates that the majority of students engage with YouTube content passively, lacking the analytical frameworks necessary to critically evaluate information quality, assess source credibility, and synthesize multiple perspectives—competencies essential for meaningful critical thinking development.

The study identifies digital literacy deficiency as a critical barrier to effective YouTube integration in PAI instruction. Without explicit pedagogical scaffolding and structured guidance in critical media consumption, students remain vulnerable to misinformation, fail to distinguish between authoritative and unreliable sources, and miss opportunities for deep analytical engagement with religious content. These findings underscore the necessity of comprehensive digital literacy curricula that equip students with critical evaluation frameworks specifically adapted to digital religious education contexts.

Based on research findings, several practical recommendations emerge for educators seeking to optimize YouTube utilization in PAI instruction: (1) Develop structured pedagogical frameworks that guide students in critical content evaluation, including explicit instruction in source credibility assessment, bias recognition, and evidence-based reasoning applicable to religious discourse. (2) Integrate Islamic critical thinking methodologies (*Ijtihad*, *Muhasabah*) systematically into digital learning activities, helping students apply traditional Islamic intellectual practices to contemporary digital contexts. (3) Provide curated content guidelines that help students identify high-quality educational resources while developing autonomous evaluation capabilities. (4) Facilitate active engagement through structured post-viewing discussions, analytical assignments, and collaborative projects that transform passive consumption into active critical analysis. (5) Implement digital literacy education as an integral component of PAI curriculum, addressing platform-specific challenges and opportunities within religious education contexts.

This study's qualitative case study design, while providing rich contextual insights, limits generalizability to broader populations. Future research should employ mixed-methods approaches incorporating quantitative measures of critical thinking development to assess YouTube's pedagogical effectiveness more comprehensively. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining sustained engagement patterns and long-term critical thinking outcomes would provide valuable insights into YouTube's enduring educational impact.

Further investigation is needed to explore optimal pedagogical strategies for different student populations, examine teacher training needs for effective YouTube integration, and assess how varying content types and interactive features differentially impact critical thinking development. Comparative studies across educational contexts and religious traditions could illuminate culturally specific considerations for digital platform utilization in faith-based education.

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Conflict of interests

The author(s) declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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