

Critical-descriptive integration of multiple intelligences theory in the development of islamic learning methodology in the digital era

Abdurrahman ^{a,1}, Endin Mujahidin ^{b,2}, Santi Lisnawati ^{b,3}

^{a,b,c} Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor, Indonesia,

^{*1} abdurrahman.ah@gmail.com , ² endin.mujahidin@uika-bogor.ac.id , ³ santilisnawati@gmail.com

^{*}Abdurrahman

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ABSTRACT

The digital era has fundamentally changed the educational landscape, demanding innovation in learning methodologies, including in the context of Islamic education. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory offers a rich framework for understanding the diversity of learners' potential. This article presents a critical-descriptive integration of MI theory in the development of Islamic learning methodology in the digital era. The descriptive approach is used to outline the potential of MI in designing adaptive and inclusive Islamic learning, while the critical approach highlights the challenges and limitations that may arise. This integration has the potential to create a learning environment that is more personal, effective, and relevant to the spiritual and intellectual needs of the digital generation. This article aims to analyze the Multiple Intelligences (MI) method in the development of Islamic learning methodology, in the era of digital transformation. This article maps the relevance of the MI approach to the needs of contemporary Islamic education. The results of the study indicate that MI can be an effective pedagogical approach, as long as it is reconstructed through an Islamic value framework.

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Introduction

The massive wave of digital transformation has permeated various aspects of life, including education. Islamic schools and educational institutions are now faced with the challenge of adapting to this reality by seeking new ways to effectively convey Islamic values and knowledge to a generation growing up alongside technology (Nurhayati & Rosadi, 2022). Traditional learning methodologies often fail to accommodate the diversity of learning styles and the unique potential of each individual, a problem that is exacerbated by the homogeneity of curricula and teaching methods (Erwin et al., 2023).

Howard Gardner, through his Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), proposed that human intelligence is not singular but consists of at least eight types of interrelated intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. This theory offers a new paradigm for understanding students' potential, moving beyond narrow intelligence measurement standards. In the context of Islamic education, the application of MI promises a more holistic

and personalized approach in shaping students' character, spirituality, and religious understanding (Putra & Dewantoro, 2022).

This article aims to critically-descriptively analyze how the MI theory can be integrated into the development of Islamic learning methodologies in the digital era. The descriptive approach outlines the positive potential of this integration in creating a richer and more inclusive learning experience. Meanwhile, the critical approach explores potential challenges, biases, and areas that require special attention during implementation. Islamic education is an integral part of societal and national life, reflecting the noble ideals of a nation. Therefore, Islamic education must adapt to the times in its learning process while remaining firmly rooted in authentic Islamic teachings. Unfortunately, current learning activities often deviate from the original objectives of Islamic education.

Thomas Armstrong, in his book *Awakening Genius in the Classroom*, criticizes classical learning models for creating several issues. First, educators tend to label students as either "smart" or "dumb." Second, classroom atmospheres often become monotonous and boring because teachers focus only on one or two types of intelligence—typically linguistic and logical-mathematical. Third, teachers struggle to spark student interest due to the lack of creativity in the learning process. Meanwhile, psychological research shows that every individual possesses multiple forms of intelligence.

The development of digital technology has had a significant impact on nearly every aspect of life, including education. Amid the influx of information and the transformation of learning culture, the Islamic education system is required to adjust without losing its identity. Today's learners grow up in a fast-paced, visual, and interactive ecosystem, making conventional teaching approaches increasingly less effective. This presents a unique challenge for Islamic education in its effort to fulfill its grand vision of producing *insan kamil*—individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, and virtuous.

One response to these challenges is the emergence of the theory of multiple intelligences, developed by Howard Gardner. This theory posits that every individual possesses a range of intelligences, not limited to logical-mathematical and linguistic, but also musical, kinesthetic, visual-spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and existential. After two decades of research on human intelligence, Gardner introduced the concept of Multiple Intelligences, highlighting bio-psychological potentials—the diverse innate capabilities present within every individual. Gardner mapped these broad human abilities into nine comprehensive categories (Nurhikmah, 2023).

The primary goal of MI-based learning is to explore and develop students' talents as provisions for future success. Therefore, it is essential to create learning models that can reach and accommodate these different types of intelligence. Gardner's research has led to educational approaches that provide meaningful experiences and ultimately help develop and optimize all of students' intelligences.

The MI approach has inspired innovations in the field of education, including in Islamic schools. However, it is crucial to examine in depth whether the MI approach aligns with the Islamic educational paradigm, which is founded on *tawhid* (monotheism), *adab* (ethics), and piety. Can MI serve as a path to forming the complete human being (*insan kamil*) from an Islamic perspective, or does it risk obscuring the transcendental goals of Islamic education?

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach using the library research method, focusing on a critical-descriptive approach (Nurhayati, Lias Hasibuan, 2021). The main objective of this method is to analyze and describe Howard Gardner's concept of Multiple Intelligences (MI) within the context of developing Islamic learning methodologies, particularly in responding to the challenges of the digital era. The descriptive approach is used to outline the components of MI theory and the characteristics of the digital era, while the critical approach is employed to evaluate the integration of both within the framework of contemporary Islamic education (Putra & Dewantoro, 2022).

Data collection was conducted through literature review of primary and secondary sources, journal articles, and relevant academic publications from the past five years. The data were analyzed using content analysis, which allows the researcher to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between the concepts of MI theory and Islamic digital learning methodologies (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021). This analysis was carried out systematically in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

The critical-descriptive approach in this study is highly appropriate as it not only aims to describe the MI theory and Islamic learning practices but also to critically evaluate how their integration can enhance the effectiveness of Islamic education in digital-based learning. This is particularly important given that the challenges faced by Islamic education in the digital era require adaptation to technology without losing the essence of spiritual and transcendental values.

In the integration process, the researcher also conducts a comparative analysis of contemporary digital learning models that have adopted MI theory in general education, and examines their potential application within the context of Islamic curriculum and instructional strategies. Through this method, the study is expected to contribute to the formulation of Islamic learning methodologies that are not only adaptive to technology but also appreciate the diversity of learners' intelligences as part of the human fitrah (Moleong, 2022).

Result

The Compatibility of Multiple Intelligences Theory with the Principles of Islamic Education

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) developed by Howard Gardner offers an educational approach that views each individual as possessing various forms of intelligence, such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, kinesthetic, and naturalistic. This concept aligns with the principles of Islamic education, which emphasize that human beings are created by Allah with diverse and unique potentials (fitrah) that must be developed holistically. In Islam, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a process of nurturing all dimensions of the human personality—physical, spiritual, intellectual, and moral (Syarifah, 2019).

Islamic educational principles also highlight the concept of insan kāmīl, the ideal human being who integrates intellect, heart, and actions. This is conceptually in line with the MI theory, which does not prioritize a single form of intelligence but acknowledges and facilitates all learner potentials (Romadhina & Ruja, 2024). Islamic education must not be confined to academic intelligence alone (such as logical-mathematical or linguistic), as the

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself exemplified a broad spectrum of intelligences: communication (linguistic), leadership (interpersonal), contemplation (intrapersonal), and observation of nature (naturalistic).

Moreover, MI theory opens up opportunities for Islamic educators to design non-monolithic learning strategies that are responsive to the needs and strengths of each student. This is relevant to the Islamic principle of *ta'dīb*, which is the process of humanizing individuals by shaping their character and guiding them according to their individual potential. MI-based learning in Islamic education can serve as a medium to cultivate noble character, as students are guided to understand themselves and their social environment more consciously (Sahnan, 2020).

Therefore, the MI theory can be considered compatible with the foundational principles of Islamic education, provided it is integrated with transcendental values. The application of this theory not only enhances the effectiveness of learning but also reinforces the core objective of Islamic education: to nurture knowledgeable, faithful, and morally upright individuals (Usman & Maulana, 2025). Thus, developing an MI-based Islamic curriculum becomes a promising strategy for presenting Islamic education that is relevant, holistic, and future-oriented.

Practical Implementation of Multiple Intelligences in Digital-Based Islamic Education

The application of the Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory in digital-based Islamic education enables a more inclusive and personalized approach to students' needs. By utilizing digital technology, educators can access a variety of media and platforms that support MI-based learning, such as interactive videos, 3D simulations, adaptive quizzes, and educational apps that accommodate diverse learning styles. This is particularly relevant to the challenges of Islamic learning in the digital era, which demands active student engagement and adaptive methods suited to the characteristics of the digital-native generation (Abubakar et al., n.d.).

For instance, linguistic intelligence can be developed through platforms like Islamic podcasts, interactive tafsir applications, or online discussion forums that enhance communication and Islamic literacy skills. Meanwhile, logical-mathematical intelligence can be reinforced through Islamic educational games based on problem-solving, zakat and muamalah simulations, or Islamic data analysis presented in logic-based quizzes. Digital innovations allow each intelligence to be nurtured and developed optimally without being limited to one-way learning models (Ratnasari et al., 2020).

Students with visual-spatial intelligence may benefit from content such as interactive infographics, animated videos of prophetic stories, and visual maps of Islamic history. Platforms like Canva, Powtoon, or Edpuzzle can be used by teachers to deliver material in a more visual and interactive format. Meanwhile, musical intelligence can be accommodated through the use of digital nasyid, Qur'anic audio learning, or activities like composing dakwah songs as part of creative Islamic learning (Sajari & Al Maqrizi, 2024).

MI-based education is also crucial for cultivating interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Platforms like Google Classroom or Sharia-based LMS systems can be utilized to encourage group collaboration, discussions on Islamic values, and personal reflections through digital journaling. Activities such as digital dakwah projects or Islamic vlogs help students engage with communities while reflecting on their spiritual experiences. Intrapersonal intelligence can also be developed through digital meditation features based on *dzikr* or self-reflection apps (Nurzaidah & Ruslaini, 2025).

Equally important is the development of bodily-kinesthetic and naturalist intelligences. In the digital context, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence can be fostered through practical projects such as creating digital wudhu tutorials, recording videos of Sunnah sports, or virtual Hajj simulations. Meanwhile, naturalist intelligence can be facilitated through applications that observe Allah's creation in nature, integration of kauniyah verses in science education, or environment observation through Islamic-based GIS tools. All of this highlights how technology can bridge the practice of MI without abandoning the core values of Islamic education.

The implementation of MI in digital-based Islamic education requires teacher readiness to creatively and purposefully design and integrate digital media. Teachers need training to identify students' dominant intelligences and develop appropriate learning tools supported by technology that aligns with MI. Additionally, the Islamic curriculum must provide flexible space for sustainable MI implementation, as part of the effort to shape a complete, adaptive, and highly competitive Muslim generation in the digital era.

Models or Examples of Integrating Multiple Intelligences in Islamic Teaching Methods

The integration of the Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory into Islamic teaching can be modeled through thematic and multimodal approaches. One effective model is thematic project-based learning that combines linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. For example, students are assigned to create a vlog on the theme of the Prophet Muhammad's character (akhlaq), which requires them to conduct research, write scripts, speak in front of a camera, and reflect on the meaning of Islamic values in real life. This model not only builds conceptual understanding but also fosters social skills and self-awareness (Amelia et al., 2022).

For logical-mathematical intelligence, teachers can integrate the teaching of fiqh muamalah or zakat using simple financial simulations through digital applications. For instance, students can be invited to calculate zakat income based on fictional cases or by using an online zakat calculator app. This model nurtures rational understanding of sharia principles and encourages critical thinking regarding the application of Islamic law in modern economic contexts.

Meanwhile, visual-spatial intelligence can be accommodated through mind-mapping methods to understand Qur'anic verses or the genealogy of the prophets. Teachers can use platforms like Canva or MindMeister to help students create interactive concept maps. This is highly effective for learning complex subjects such as Usul al-Fiqh, Sirah Nabawiyah, and the concept of tawhid. Such visualization also assists non-verbal learners in understanding abstract content in a more concrete way.

Musical intelligence can be integrated through songs or educational nasyid to help memorize daily prayers, short hadiths, or the names of Allah. In Islamic elementary schools, teachers can use music as a medium for both spiritual and cognitive reinforcement, as rhythm and repetition can accelerate memory retention. In addition, students can be encouraged to create their own Islamic lyrics as a form of self-expression aligned with Islamic values (Putri & Ismet, 2020).

For bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, simulation methods and field practices are ideal. For example, Hajj rituals can be taught using a miniature model of the Ka'bah, with students physically moving through each stage of the pilgrimage. Similar methods can be applied in teaching wudhu, prayer, or taharah practices, allowing students to learn through their bodies rather than text alone. These physical activities align with Islamic traditions that emphasize the balance between knowledge and action.

Finally, naturalist intelligence can be integrated into Islamic lessons by connecting *kauniyah* (natural) verses in the Qur'an with direct observation of nature. For instance, in lessons on the creation of the universe, students may be asked to observe their surroundings, reflect on the signs of God's greatness, and produce a digital report. This not only sharpens their sense of wonder toward creation but also instills ecological responsibility from a faith-based perspective.

The research findings indicate that the theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) is conceptually compatible with the principles of Islamic education, which emphasize the comprehensive development of human potential. Within the Islamic framework, humans are viewed as beings with physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. This finding reinforces that the application of MI theory in Islamic education can help optimize the learners' innate potential (*fitrah*) through a more holistic and personalized approach.

The study also reveals that all eight types of intelligence in MI theory—linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, visual-spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic—can be integrated into digital-based Islamic learning strategies. For instance, linguistic intelligence can be enhanced through online discussions and reflective writing, while visual-spatial intelligence can be developed through the use of infographics, *dakwah* videos, and graphic-based applications.

Field data obtained from literature reviews and documentation show that Islamic educational institutions that have begun to implement MI-based approaches have experienced a significant increase in student engagement and learning interest. This occurs because learners feel that the teaching methods are more aligned with their learning styles and interests. Project-based learning, gamification, and collaborative digital learning are among the most frequently used strategies to accommodate multiple intelligences.

Moreover, the analysis indicates that digital-based MI implementation also enhances the contextual understanding of Islamic values. Students not only memorize verses or *hadith*, but are also able to connect them to real-life experiences and their surrounding environment through naturalistic and interpersonal intelligences. In this context, Islamic learning becomes more meaningful and applicable to daily life.

However, the research also identifies several significant limitations in implementation. The main challenge lies in teachers' readiness, both in terms of understanding the MI concept and their ability to use digital technology pedagogically. Many teachers still rely on one-way lecturing methods and are unfamiliar with MI-based digital learning platforms. Teacher training emerges as one of the strategic recommendations from this study.

Another key finding highlights that institutional and curricular support plays a crucial role in the successful integration of MI theory into Islamic learning. Flexible curricula that are open to differentiated approaches encourage teachers to innovate in lesson planning. Conversely, rigid, exam-oriented curricula hinder the development of MI-based teaching methods.

Overall, the research findings affirm that a critical-descriptive approach to integrating MI theory contributes to building a more contextual, inclusive, and adaptive methodology for Islamic education in the digital era. The researcher has successfully described how MI theory is not merely technical but can also be integrated with the values and vision of Islamic education to shape *insan kāmīl* (the complete human being).

Thus, the research provides a conceptual and practical foundation for Islamic education in the digital era to shift from a homogeneous approach to a differentiated one based on students' potentials. The critical and descriptive integration of the Multiple Intelligences theory enables more effective, relevant, and empowering Islamic learning that nurtures all aspects of human intelligence.

Discussion

The theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), developed by Howard Gardner, offers an alternative approach to understanding human intelligence, emphasizing that every individual possesses various unique forms of intelligence that can be developed in a balanced way. In the context of Islamic education, this theory is highly relevant in addressing the need for learning that is not only cognitive but also includes the affective, spiritual, and social aspects of learners. Therefore, integrating MI theory can enrich Islamic teaching methods, which have traditionally been uniform and conventional (Muslih et al., 2024).

The research findings show that MI theory provides an inclusive and holistic pedagogical framework for Islamic education, particularly in responding to the complex character of students in the digital age. These findings affirm that Islamic learning that overly emphasizes cognitive aspects and memorization is insufficient to shape the whole person. Thus, the integration of MI is essential as an approach that accommodates the diversity of student intelligences and encourages active participation in the learning process.

In depth interpretation of the data shows that the application of MI theory can strengthen the affective and spiritual dimensions of Islamic education, especially when combined with appropriate technology. Learners with interpersonal intelligence are more engaged in learning through online group interaction, while those with musical intelligence find it easier to grasp Islamic moral messages through audio-visuals based on tone or rhythm. Consequently, the MI approach not only expands cognitive dimensions but also opens space for more contextual and meaningful religious expression.

Compared to previous studies, this research offers a more comprehensive approach by combining a critical-descriptive perspective of MI theory with Islamic educational values. For example, the study by Ramadhan et al. focuses more on adapting cognitive psychology in Islamic education but does not explicitly examine its practical relevance in the digital ecosystem. This research, on the other hand, adds the dimension of educational digitalization as a crucial context that reinforces the need for an adaptive MI approach (Ramadhan et al., 2025).

Earlier studies also showed positive outcomes from MI-based learning approaches but were mostly limited to the general education context. These findings broaden the scope by emphasizing that MI principles are deeply aligned with the Islamic concept of *fitrah*—that every human is created with unique potential that must be developed in a balanced and integral way. Therefore, integrating MI is not only compatible with Islam but also reinforces the foundational philosophy of Islamic education that is personalistic and humanistic.

An important implication of these findings is the need for curriculum reform in Islamic education to be more flexible and open to multiple-intelligence-based approaches. At present, the curriculum is still dominated by a homogeneous approach that does not provide enough space for exploring individual potential. The MI approach can offer solutions by promoting

lesson designs based on students' interests, talents, and learning styles without neglecting Islamic spiritual and moral objectives.

Furthermore, MI theory encourages a transformation of the teacher's role from merely an instructor to a facilitator who identifies and develops the various potentials of students. In the digital context, teachers are not only expected to master Islamic content but also to be proficient in digital tools that support personalized learning. This reinforces the importance of developing technopedagogical competence among Islamic educators today.

The transformation of modern Islamic education through MI theory also impacts the character formation of students. With an approach that humanizes learners, Islamic values such as ikhlas (sincerity), tawadhu' (humility), ukhuwah (brotherhood), and responsibility can be more easily internalized, as students feel valued and encouraged to contribute according to their strengths. This reflects the distinctive nature of Islamic education, which seeks not only academic achievement but also character and moral development.

Thus, integrating MI theory into digital Islamic education is not merely a pedagogical innovation but also a strategic effort to transform the Islamic educational system to be more relevant, responsive, and spiritually grounded. This serves as a foundation for realizing an Islamic education that is not only informative but also transformative in line with the mission of rahmatan lil 'alamin—shaping a generation of Muslims who are intelligent, creative, and ethical.

The main strength of MI theory lies in its recognition of the diversity of human potential as unique individuals. In the Islamic context, this aligns with the principle of fitrah, namely that each human being is created with specific inclinations and capacities that need to be optimally developed. Islam emphasizes not only the intellectual aspect but also the spiritual, emotional, and social, which are substantially reflected in Gardner's eight types of intelligence. This makes MI theory highly relevant in designing Islamic education that is not only academic but also humane and transformative.

However, it must be critically acknowledged that MI theory was developed within a secular Western psychological framework, which tends to emphasize worldly potential. This poses a challenge when applying the theory in Islamic education, which is based on transcendental values. From the Islamic perspective, intelligence is not merely a tool for achieving worldly success but must be directed toward servitude to Allah and the development of a civilized society. Therefore, MI needs to be conceptually Islamized so that its application remains within the bounds of sharia and Islamic faith values.

Another limitation of MI theory is the absence of a value hierarchy among the different types of intelligence. All forms of intelligence are considered equally valuable in the learning process. In the Islamic context, this can be problematic, as Islamic education places the value of tawhid (monotheism) at the center of all educational activities. This means intelligence must be grounded in tawhidic values and directed toward strengthening students' character and faith. Therefore, the MI approach in Islamic education requires filtration and reinterpretation to remain aligned with the goals of Islamic education.

Despite these limitations, MI integration still holds strategic value in building a Muslim generation in the digital era. Today's generation lives in a dynamic, highly visual digital ecosystem, making learning approaches based solely on verbal instruction or memorization inadequate. MI theory provides a foundation for developing Islamic learning that is multimodal, interactive, and compatible with the learning styles of digital natives. With this approach, Islamic values can be transmitted in more creative and effective ways.

Moreover, the use of MI theory can help Islamic education avoid the trap of homogenized methods, which often hinder equitable access to students' potential. For example, students with kinesthetic intelligence often fail to thrive in traditional teaching systems based on text and lectures. The MI approach offers a differentiation framework that allows students to learn according to their strengths, thereby supporting the formation of a more complete and confident generation of Muslims.

In conclusion, a critical assessment of MI theory reveals that, while it has philosophical limitations in the Islamic context, its pragmatic strengths can still be selectively and purposefully utilized. If integrated with the core principles of Islamic education—*ta'dib* (ethical education), *tarbiyah* (nurturing), and *tazkiyah* (purification)—MI theory can serve as a powerful instrument in transforming Islamic education in the digital age. This further strengthens the role of Islamic education in shaping Muslims who are intellectually intelligent, spiritually mature, and adaptive to the times.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the critical-descriptive integration of the Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory into the development of Islamic education methodology in the digital era is a relevant and strategic approach to addressing contemporary educational challenges. The MI theory provides a framework for understanding the diversity of students' potentials and opens the way for a more inclusive, adaptive, and value-based learning design in line with Islamic principles.

The use of digital technology in Islamic education enables the utilization of various media and learning strategies that support the development of multiple intelligences. Through this approach, learning is no longer limited to cognitive and memorization aspects but extends to affective, social, creative, and spiritual dimensions of the students. This aligns with the Islamic vision of education that emphasizes the development of a complete human being (*insan kâmil*).

However, the findings also reveal that the implementation of this integration faces several challenges, particularly concerning teachers' readiness, technological limitations, and rigid curricula. Therefore, strengthening educators' capacity, developing integrative curricula, and utilizing technology pedagogically are key prerequisites for the success of this approach.

Overall, the integration of the MI theory into digital-based Islamic education provides a significant contribution to building a learning system that is not only modern and interactive but also firmly rooted in Islamic spiritual and ethical values. This approach lays the foundation for the transformation of Islamic education toward a more humanistic, contextual, and impactful system in shaping an excellent Muslim generation in the digital era.

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