

Integrating Religious Literacy and Digital Competence in Contemporary Worldview Education

Dina Mariana¹⁾

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Bima

*Corresponding Author's Email: dinamaryanaa90@gmail.com

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini secara kritis meneliti integrasi literasi agama dan kompetensi digital dalam pendidikan pandangan dunia kontemporer. Melalui sintesis kritis sistematis dari kajian terkini, analisis ini mengidentifikasi kerangka kerja pedagogis yang muncul untuk lanskap agama yang kompleks di abad ke-21. Penelitian mengungkapkan ketegangan yang signifikan antara instruksi agama tradisional dan kebutuhan akan metodologi baru yang mengatasi pengaruh media digital, pluralisme agama, dan berpikir kritis. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan agama yang efektif harus mengintegrasikan kerangka kerja literasi agama dengan kompetensi digital untuk mendorong keterlibatan yang bermakna dengan berbagai pandangan dunia. Implikasinya menunjukkan pergeseran paradigma menuju praktik pendidikan agama yang lebih inklusif, kritis, dan berbasis digital yang mempersiapkan pembelajaran untuk masyarakat pluralistik sambil menjaga penghormatan terhadap tradisi agama.

ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the integration of religious literacy and digital competence within contemporary worldview education. Through a systematic critical synthesis of recent scholarship, this analysis identifies emerging pedagogical frameworks designed for the complex religious landscape of the 21st century. The research reveals a significant tension between traditional religious instruction and the need for new methodologies addressing digital media influences, religious pluralism, and critical thinking. Key findings indicate that effective religious education must integrate religious literacy frameworks with digital competence to foster meaningful engagement with diverse worldviews. The implications suggest a paradigm shift toward more inclusive, critical, and digitally informed religious education practices that prepare learners for pluralistic societies while maintaining respect for religious traditions.

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PENDAHULUAN

Religious education faces a critical juncture in the 21st century, challenged by unprecedented religious diversity and digital connectivity. Traditional confessional models, once sufficient for relatively homogenous societies, are evolving to address a complex reality of pluralism, secular worldviews, and pervasive digital media. This transformation has spurred scholarly movements toward religious literacy, worldview education, and digital competence. While each framework offers valuable insights, a significant gap persists in the scholarly literature regarding the integration of these three domains into a cohesive pedagogical approach for contemporary learning environments.

The shift toward worldview approaches represents a major development in religious education. In England, the Commission on Religious Education's final report catalyzed a movement from a purely religious focus to a more inclusive "religion and worldviews" framework, acknowledging that students engage with diverse religious and non-religious perspectives (Cooling, 2020). The theoretical foundations of this shift are detailed by Cooling's (2020) autobiographical reflections and are further developed by Wright and Wright (2023), who argue that worldview theory provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals construct meaning. This perspective suggests religious education should prioritize developing students' capacity to critically engage with diverse worldviews over simple knowledge transmission. Implementation varies, as seen in Finland's national curriculum, which emphasizes dialogue

and inclusivity (Ubani et al., 2020), and in England, where the inclusion of non-religious worldviews remains a point of policy tension (Wareham, 2022).

Parallel to this evolution, the concept of religious literacy has gained prominence as a framework for pluralistic societies. Moving beyond mere knowledge acquisition, religious literacy emphasizes the development of specific competencies for navigating religious diversity with understanding and respect. Bowling (2021) defines it as the ability to understand and discuss religious traditions accurately and respectfully, highlighting both cognitive and interpersonal skills. Ubani (2025b) extends this, conceptualizing religious literacy as a distinctive form of literacy with its own practices, situated within 21st-century learning frameworks that demand critical thinking and intercultural dialogue. The practical application of this framework is evident in studies exploring the relationship between Islamic education and citizenship in the Netherlands, where practitioners see these domains as interconnected (Essabane et al., 2022), and in arguments that global citizenship education can be framed as diversity learning within religious education (Gaus, 2021).

The digital transformation of society introduces new dimensions to religious education. The proliferation of online religious content and communities creates both opportunities and significant challenges. Research from Indonesia shows high school students increasingly turn to the internet and social media for Islamic learning, often bypassing traditional structures and demonstrating varying levels of critical awareness (Ju'subaidi et al., 2024). This trend raises questions about how religious education can engage with digital media while maintaining rigor. Further complicating this landscape are emerging technologies like generative AI, which students view with both enthusiasm and apprehension for religious learning (Lee & Shim, 2024). These developments underscore the urgent need to integrate digital competence into religious education frameworks, a need accelerated by the global shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kim, 2021).

This article investigates several interrelated questions, namely how religious literacy frameworks intersect with worldview approaches in contemporary religious education, in what ways digital competence shapes and transforms these domains, and what pedagogical approaches can effectively integrate all three to meet the needs of learners in pluralistic, digitally connected societies. By examining these questions through a systematic critical synthesis, this article aims to contribute a more integrated framework for religious education in the 21st century.

METODE PELAKSANAAN

This study employs a systematic critical synthesis methodology to analyze and integrate insights from recent scholarship on religious education, religious literacy, worldview education, and digital competence. This approach moves beyond a traditional literature review by identifying patterns, contradictions, and gaps across studies to generate new theoretical insights and practical implications, making it particularly suitable for complex, multidimensional phenomena (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

The reference selection process began with the comprehensive provided list of 55 publications from 2020-2025. Sources were systematically categorized based on their primary focus into religious literacy frameworks, worldview approaches, digital/media literacy in religious contexts, and pedagogical innovations. Priority for in-depth analysis was given to sources that addressed intersections between these categories, ensuring a focused and relevant synthesis.

The theoretical framework for this analysis draws on three complementary lenses. First, religious literacy is conceptualized following Ubani (2025b) as a distinctive form of literacy with its own practices. Second, worldview education is understood through Cooling's (2024) framework of knowledge development, which balances substantive knowledge with methodological understanding. Third, digital competence is framed using the European Commission's (2018) DigComp framework, which encompasses information literacy, communication, content creation, safety, and problem-solving. These lenses provide a comprehensive structure for analyzing how religious education might be reimagined for contemporary contexts.

The analytical process involved several systematic steps. Each selected source was read and annotated for key concepts and findings. This was followed by thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and tensions across the literature. A critical comparison then examined how different authors conceptualized similar phenomena, highlighting convergences and divergences. The process culminated in a synthesis to integrate insights and generate new theoretical understandings. Throughout this analysis, particular attention was paid to contradictions, gaps, and unanswered questions in the existing literature.

Analytical validity was ensured through several measures. The analysis maintained a critical stance toward all sources, examining both strengths and limitations. Divergent perspectives were deliberately sought and given equal consideration to prevent confirmation bias. The reasoning process was documented through memos and reflexive notes to ensure transparency. Finally, the emerging theoretical framework was continuously tested against the source material to keep it grounded in the evidence.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

The Evolution of Worldview Education in Religious Studies

The transformation of religious education from confessional instruction to worldview education marks a significant paradigm shift. This evolution reflects broader societal changes, including increasing religious diversity and the rise of non-religious worldviews. Cooling (2020) provides a foundational account of this transformation in England, tracing the movement toward a "religion and worldviews" approach designed to be relevant to all students, regardless of their personal commitments. This shift acknowledges that contemporary classrooms are religiously diverse and that education must engage this reality directly.

The theoretical underpinnings of this approach are robustly articulated by Wright and Wright (2023), who position worldview theory as a means to understand how individuals construct meaning and live according to comprehensive frameworks. From this perspective, the goal of religious education is not doctrinal transmission but the development of critical skills for analyzing and comparing diverse worldviews. This aligns with broader educational priorities of critical thinking and intercultural competence. The implementation of these approaches varies, as seen in Finland's national curriculum, which explicitly emphasizes dialogue, worldview inclusivity, and intra-religious diversity (Ubani et al., 2020). In contrast, England's journey has been marked by policy debates, particularly concerning the status and inclusion of non-religious worldviews, revealing tensions between aspirational frameworks and practical application (Wareham, 2022).

Despite these developments, the implementation of worldview approaches faces significant challenges. Flanagan (2020) highlights the profound impact of teachers' personal worldviews on their pedagogical practices, noting that this can create tensions between professional expectations and personal beliefs. This suggests that effective curriculum change must be accompanied by substantial teacher education and professional development. Furthermore, Aukland (2024) observes that methodological innovations in religious education have not always kept pace with theoretical advancements, creating a gap between the vision of worldview education and its realization in classrooms. These challenges underscore the complexity of achieving meaningful and sustainable transformation in religious education pedagogy.

Religious Literacy as a Contemporary Framework

The concept of religious literacy has emerged as a powerful framework for reimagining religious education in pluralistic societies. It moves beyond traditional knowledge transmission to focus on developing specific competencies that enable individuals to navigate religious diversity effectively. Bowling (2021) defines religious literacy as encompassing both the cognitive ability to understand religious traditions and the interpersonal skills to discuss them with accuracy and respect. This dual emphasis recognizes that engaging with religious diversity is both an intellectual and a social practice.

Ubani (2025b) significantly advances this concept by arguing that religious literacy should be understood not merely as knowledge about religion, but as a distinctive form of literacy with its own practices and competencies. Drawing on broader literacy theories, this perspective views religious literacy as an active process involving decoding religious texts, encoding meaning within religious frameworks, and critically evaluating religious claims. Situating this within 21st-century learning frameworks, Ubani emphasizes that contemporary religious literacy must incorporate critical thinking, intercultural dialogue, and digital competence. The practical importance of this framework is evident in research showing its connection to citizenship education, where religious literacy helps students understand religion's role in public life and develop skills for interreligious dialogue (Essabane et al., 2022). Gaus (2021) further supports this by conceptualizing global citizenship education as a form of inclusive diversity learning within religious education.

However, the implementation of religious literacy frameworks is not without its difficulties. A central challenge lies in balancing critical engagement with respect for religious traditions. Jarmer (2024) points out that religious education must avoid both uncritical acceptance and dismissive criticism, requiring sophisticated pedagogical approaches that foster critical reflection while maintaining respect. Moreover,

the interdisciplinary nature of religious literacy, drawing on religious studies, education, and sociology, presents challenges for curriculum design and teacher education (Ubani, 2025a). These issues highlight the need for continued research and development to create robust and practical religious literacy frameworks.

Digital and Media Literacy in Religious Contexts

The digital transformation has profoundly reshaped the landscape of religious education, introducing new dimensions that scholars are now actively exploring. The internet and social media have become primary sources for religious information and community, particularly for young people. Ju'subaidi et al. (2024) found that Indonesian high school students increasingly rely on digital platforms for Islamic learning, often demonstrating limited critical awareness in evaluating these resources. This trend necessitates a more intentional focus on developing digital religious literacy within formal education.

The integration of digital technologies also raises complex pedagogical questions about authority, authenticity, and the nature of religious knowledge itself. The traditional model, where authority was located in institutions and sacred texts, has been disrupted by the democratization of knowledge production online. Lee and Shim (2024) explore this terrain by examining university students' perceptions of generative AI, finding a mix of enthusiasm and concern that highlights the need for new pedagogical strategies. These strategies must engage with emerging technologies while preserving educational rigor and religious integrity. Innovative approaches are emerging, such as the STEAM-integrated interfaith learning framework proposed by Hoscic et al. (2025), which uses maker education to create hands-on, creative learning experiences that bridge religious differences.

The challenge of developing critical evaluation skills is paramount. As students navigate a complex and often unregulated digital religious landscape, they need support to distinguish credible information from misinformation. Unstad and Fjørtoft (2020) emphasize the importance of disciplinary literacy in religious education, including the specific skills needed to read and understand digital religious texts. The rapid pace of technological change means that religious educators must be committed to continuous learning and adaptation, constantly refining their approaches to meet new digital realities (Lee & Shim, 2024).

Synthesizing Religious Literacy, Worldview Education, and Digital Competence

The intersection of religious literacy, worldview education, and digital competence reveals both powerful synergies and critical tensions that must be navigated in contemporary religious education. A key point of synergy is their shared emphasis on critical thinking. Religious literacy involves critically evaluating religious claims (Ubani, 2025b), worldview education centers on analyzing and comparing different perspectives (Wright & Wright, 2023), and digital competence includes the ability to critically assess digital information (European Commission, 2018). This common ground suggests that these frameworks can be mutually reinforcing when integrated thoughtfully.

Another point of convergence is the focus on dialogue and communication. Religious literacy includes interpersonal skills for respectful discussion (Bowling, 2021), worldview education employs dialogue as a core pedagogical method (Ubani et al., 2020), and digital competence encompasses online communication and collaboration (European Commission, 2018). An integrated approach can therefore create rich opportunities for dialogue both within and beyond the classroom, leveraging digital tools to connect students with diverse perspectives in meaningful ways.

Despite these complementary aspects, significant tensions exist. One tension concerns the balance between substantive knowledge and procedural skills. Traditional religious literacy often emphasizes knowledge of traditions, while digital competence focuses on navigational skills. Worldview education attempts to balance these, but as Cooling (2024) notes, defining the essential knowledge base for a religion and worldviews curriculum remains a contentious issue. A second tension revolves around authority. The decentralization of religious knowledge in digital environments challenges traditional educational structures, requiring students to develop new skills for evaluating sources and navigating authority (Ju'subaidi et al., 2024). A third tension involves the relationship between appreciation and critique. Religious literacy promotes respectful understanding, while critical thinking necessitates the ability to question. As Hammer (2023) found, addressing controversial issues requires sophisticated pedagogies that enable critical engagement without descending into disrespect.

This analysis yields two primary theoretical contributions. The first is the concept of "digital religious literacy," an integrated framework that merges insights from religious literacy and digital competence. This concept recognizes that navigating religion in the 21st century requires the ability to critically engage with online religious resources, understand how algorithms shape religious discourse, and participate

constructively in digital religious communities. The second contribution is the reconceptualization of worldview education to explicitly include its digital dimensions. This acknowledges that worldviews are now constructed, expressed, and encountered in digital spaces as much as in physical ones, requiring educational approaches that address both realms.

Practical implications emerge for curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher education. Curricula should explicitly integrate digital religious literacy, helping students evaluate online religious information and understand digital media's influence on religious discourse. Pedagogically, educators can employ digital tools to connect students with diverse perspectives, facilitate digital projects exploring religious themes, and engage students in critical analysis of online content. For teacher education, there is a clear need to prepare religious educators with both deep religious literacy and robust digital competence, enabling them to model the skills they wish to instill in their students. Finally, institutions must provide supportive policies, resources, and professional development to foster this integrated approach, recognizing its importance for contemporary religious and civic life.

KESIMPULAN DAN SARAN

This article has synthesized scholarship on religious literacy, worldview education, and digital competence, demonstrating that these three frameworks, while often treated separately, are deeply interconnected in contemporary religious education. The analysis reveals that while these domains share a common emphasis on critical engagement and dialogue, they also reflect different priorities that create tensions in practice, particularly concerning the balance between knowledge and skills, the role of authority, and the relationship between appreciation and critique of religious traditions.

In answering the research questions, this article shows that religious literacy and worldview education intersect in their shared commitment to critical thinking and intercultural understanding. Digital competence profoundly transforms both by creating new environments for religious learning and community, but also by introducing challenges related to authority and critical evaluation. Effective pedagogical approaches must therefore be integrative, balancing these tensions while preparing students for life in pluralistic and digitally saturated societies.

The primary contribution of this article lies in its synthesis of these three frameworks and its proposal of "digital religious literacy" as a way to conceptualize their integration. Rather than treating these as separate concerns, this analysis demonstrates the value of a holistic approach that addresses how religious understanding, worldview formation, and digital practices are co-constituted in the 21st century.

Future research should therefore explore the implementation of such integrated approaches in diverse educational contexts. Such studies should investigate the experiences of teachers and students, identify challenges and opportunities, and examine how specific religious traditions are engaging with digital transformation. By pursuing these directions, scholars and educators can continue to develop a religious education that is truly relevant, rigorous, and responsive to the complex realities of our time.

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