

Needs Analysis of Progressive Islam-Based Aqidah Akhlaq Learning in Muhammadiyah Pesantren

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the need to improve Aqidah Akhlaq learning in Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools, which continue to face challenges in instructional approaches. The aim of this research is to analyse the learning needs of Aqidah Akhlaq based on Progressive Islam by identifying the gap between existing conditions and the expected ideal conditions. The study employs a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design, beginning with the collection of quantitative data through questionnaires, followed by qualitative data from interviews, observations, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). This approach is intended to provide a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of learning needs. The findings indicate that Aqidah Akhlaq learning has successfully instilled the fundamental concepts of tawhid (Islamic monotheism), faith, morality, moderation, and students' social responsibility. However, based on J.C. Richards' needs analysis framework, the primary gap was identified in the objective needs, particularly in pedagogical aspects, the development of critical thinking, teacher competence, and the utilization of instructional media. From the perspective of subjective needs, students expect learning that is more contextual, interactive, and provides opportunities for discussion to connect Aqidah teachings with real-life situations. These findings suggest that the need for development does not lie in the substance of the content, but rather in transforming the instructional approach from one oriented toward text transmission to one that integrates the comprehension of Arabic texts, critical reasoning, social context, and the integration of Islam and science. This study provides a conceptual foundation for developing a Progressive Islam-based Aqidah Akhlaq learning model that is more contextual, dialogical, collaborative, and student-centered.

Keywords: Needs analysis; Aqidah Akhlaq learning; Progressive Islam; Muhammadiyah pesantren; Islamic education

INTRODUCTION

Religious education has a strategic role in shaping the character, morality, and identity of the younger generation in Indonesia. The teaching of Aqidah Akhlaq is one of the main components of Islamic education, as it instills faith while building learners' moral foundation to face the ever-changing dynamics of social life (Romadlon & Istikomah, 2021). In the context of the post-modern era marked by the development of science, technology, and socio-cultural complexity the teaching of Aqidah Akhlaq faces new challenges related to the relevance of materials, pedagogical approaches, and the integration of Islamic values with contemporary realities (Cukras-Stelągowska et al., 2024; Ishola, 2023). Learning practices in pesantren still largely employ a teacher-centered learning approach, with primary references drawn from classical texts written in Pegon script, taught through *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods (Bruinessen, 1990; Rasikh, 2018; Ruldeviyani et al., 2024). This predominantly verbalistic model of instruction often positions students as passive recipients of knowledge, with limited opportunities for critical analysis. Such conditions have the potential to foster

taqlid (unquestioning adherence) to past scholarly authorities and to constrain the development of students' critical reasoning and intellectual creativity (Bahwi, 2011). These challenges become increasingly relevant as Islamic educational institutions are expected to respond constructively to social changes and the advancement of knowledge.

The Progressive Islam paradigm developed by Muhammadiyah through *Risalah Islam Berkemajuan* offers an alternative perspective, emphasizing openness, inclusivity, and the integration of Islamic teachings with modern science (Central Board of Muhammadiyah, 2023). Through this approach, the teaching of Aqidah Akhlaq is not only oriented toward strengthening faith but is also directed at shaping learners who are critical, adaptive, and capable of actualizing Islamic values in modern social life (Habibi, 2018; Romadlon et al., 2023). Therefore, Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) should possess a distinctive characteristic by integrating the tradition of Islamic education with the spirit of *tajdid* (renewal). This position enables Muhammadiyah *pesantren* to serve as an experimental space for developing Aqidah Akhlaq learning based on Progressive Islam (Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). Furthermore, Muhammadiyah's concept of modernity situated between literalist and liberal tendencies provides an opportunity to present a learning model that remains rooted in Islamic values while also being open to contemporary developments (Zubaidah Rahim, 2006). However, the development of a contextual learning model requires an initial understanding of actual learning needs, including aspects of curriculum, materials, methods, teacher competencies, as well as the support of the learning environment (Wang & Newell, 2025). Despite this potential, research examining the learning needs of Progressive Islam-based Islamic studies, including Aqidah Akhlaq in Muhammadiyah *pesantren*, remains limited. Consequently, sufficient empirical evidence to guide the implementation of the principles of Progressive Islam in educational practice is still lacking.

To develop a learning model rooted in the values of Progressive Islam, it is essential to emphasize the integration of Islam and science as an epistemological foundation in Aqidah Akhlaq learning. Preliminary observations in two Muhammadiyah *pesantren* indicate that the integration of Aqidah Akhlaq learning has not yet clearly reflected Progressive Islam values. The integration of science in explaining Aqidah concepts remains weak, as does the connection between Aqidah Akhlaq concepts and students' everyday life. Preliminary interviews suggest that this condition is influenced by the use of Arabic-language textbooks published by the Muhammadiyah *Pesantren Development Institute*, which often limits learning to word-for-word translation. As a result, the integration of Islamic Aqidah with scientific perspectives and the concept of Progressive Islam has not yet been optimally implemented. As Fazlur Rahman sees it, revelation and reason must complement one another so that religious understanding is not only normative but also rational and contextual (Fauzi & Winarto, 2025). The teachings of aqidah should not be delivered merely as doctrine; rather, they should be analyzed and connected with natural phenomena and the development of scientific knowledge as part of the process of *ijtihad* and the use of critical reasoning (Abdullah, 2014). This aligns with the importance of a dialogical and integrative paradigm through a multidisciplinary approach, ensuring that religious understanding is not narrow but is relevant to real-life contexts (Abdullah, 2003). Thus, it can be concluded that learning becomes more meaningful when it connects faith with reality, fostering critical, reflective, and adaptive ways of thinking in line with the realities.

Various previous studies have attempted to introduce innovations in Aqidah Akhlaq learning. The implementation of the direct instruction model has been shown to improve students' understanding and behavior, balancing cognitive aspects with the practice of values (Anida et al., 2023). Other innovations include the development of character education-based board game media, which make learning more interactive and enjoyable while also supporting the formation of students' character (Usral & Alfurqan, 2023). In addition, *pesantren* are also viewed as strategic institutions in the development of moderate Islam through educational

processes that are adaptive to change (Zaluchu et al., 2025). In addition, our previous studies have demonstrated innovative efforts in developing Aqidah learning. The implementation of the Reading, Encoding, Annotating, and Pondering (REAP) strategy has been proven to enhance students' information literacy (Romadlon et al., 2020). The development of Aqidah textbooks based on the REAP strategy has demonstrated high feasibility and effectiveness in improving students' critical thinking skills (Romadlon et al., 2021). Subsequent research developed Aqidah teaching materials based on Progressive Islam for Muhammadiyah junior high school students (Romadlon et al., 2023), as well as a conceptual study on the Progressive Islam paradigm, which functions as a bridge between the tradition of Islamic scholarship and modern science (Romadlon et al., 2023). Although these studies demonstrate innovations in terms of strategies, media, and teaching materials, research that specifically maps the needs of Aqidah Akhlaq learning within Muhammadiyah pesantren remains very limited. Most studies tend to focus on testing the effectiveness of products or instructional approaches, while comprehensive needs analysis as a foundation for developing learning models has not been widely conducted. In fact, Muhammadiyah pesantren possess distinct ideological and institutional characteristics compared to other Islamic educational institutions, thus requiring a more specific needs mapping.

Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the needs for Aqidah Akhlaq learning based on Progressive Islam in Muhammadiyah pesantren, examining both the objective and subjective needs of educational stakeholders. Needs analysis is understood as a process of identifying the gap between actual and ideal learning conditions, while also revealing the perceptions, motivations, aspirations, and expectations of learning users (Richards, 2017). This approach enables the research not only to capture explicitly recognized needs but also to uncover latent needs that have not been previously identified.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed methods approach with an explanatory sequential design. The research begins with a quantitative analysis through the distribution of questionnaires to respondents to obtain a general overview and to descriptively map learning needs. This is then followed by a qualitative approach involving interviews, observations, and focus group discussions (FGD). The explanatory sequential design is considered effective for integrating quantitative data, which provides broad coverage, with qualitative data, which provides depth of understanding, thereby enabling a comprehensive picture of a particular context (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). This study adopts J.C. Richards' needs analysis model as the main framework for analyzing the object, encompassing two dimensions: (1) objective needs, which relate to needs measured through curriculum, materials, teacher competencies, and learning facilities; and (2) subjective needs, which relate to needs emerging from the perspectives, motivations, and aspirations of students and educational stakeholders. Through this framework, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the learning needs of Aqidah Akhlaq in Muhammadiyah pesantren (Richards, 2017).

This study was conducted in two Muhammadiyah pesantren selected purposively based on the criterion that they seriously engage in Islamic studies. The identities of the pesantren are anonymized to ensure data privacy. One of the defining characteristics of Muhammadiyah pesantren, as outlined by the Muhammadiyah organization, is the integration of Islamic values with a reform-oriented outlook. The study participants consisted of 92 Grade IX students from two Muhammadiyah *pesantren*, three Aqidah Akhlaq teachers, and two *pesantren* administrators. The students were selected using a total sampling technique, whereas the teachers and administrators were recruited through purposive sampling because they were considered to possess relevant knowledge and experience regarding the implementation of Aqidah Akhlaq instruction. Students at this level are considered relevant because they are in the formal operational stage, as

proposed by Jean Piaget a stage of cognitive development in which individuals begin to think abstractly, logically, and idealistically. This enables them to understand and reflect more critically on concepts of aqidah and akhlaq (Mauliya, 2019).

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through several methods:

1. Interviews with students, teachers, and pesantren administrators to explore the experiences, perceptions, expectations, and needs of the research subjects;
2. Direct observation during Aqidah Akhlaq learning in the classroom to examine interactions between teachers and students, teaching methods, and instructional media used in natural settings;
3. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) involving key stakeholders to explore shared ideas, enabling the researcher to gain a collective perspective on an ideal and contextually appropriate Aqidah Akhlaq learning model (Rahmawati et al., 2024; Shabina et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, secondary data consist of documents owned by the pesantren, such as curriculum, syllabus, learning modules, and related institutional policies.

The research questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This approach allows for a more measurable and descriptive analysis of perceptions, levels of satisfaction, and the needs of students and teachers (Ardiansyah et al., 2023). The indicators developed in the instrument cover several important aspects, including understanding of *tauhid*, integration of Islam and science, contextualization of the Qur'an and Sunnah, critical thinking skills (*ijtihad*), learning approaches, as well as the principles of moderation (*wasathiyah*) and *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

Before being used in the study, the instrument was first tested for its validity and reliability. Content validity was conducted through expert judgment involving three experts, consisting of two experts in Islamic education and one in research methodology. Furthermore, empirical validity was tested using the Pearson Product Moment correlation. The test results indicated that all items had correlation coefficient values ranging from 0.450 to 0.890, which were greater than the r-table value of 0.404 at a 0.05 significance level; therefore, all instrument items were declared valid. Instrument reliability was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, yielding a value of 0.875, which indicates that the instrument has good internal consistency as it exceeds the minimum threshold of 0.70. The results obtained, showing a value above 0.70, mean that the instrument has good reliability and is suitable for use.

All data will be analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Milles et al., 2014).

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Data integration was conducted in accordance with the characteristics of the explanatory sequential design. The results of the quantitative analysis were used to determine the focus of qualitative data collection (connecting), while the results of interviews, observations, and focus group discussions (FGDs) were utilized to explain, deepen, and interpret the quantitative findings (merging). Subsequently, both types of data were compared through a triangulation process to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the learning needs of Aqidah Akhlaq based on Progressive Islam in Muhammadiyah Pesantren.

This study adhered to research ethics principles. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained official permission from the pesantren authorities and requested informed consent from all research

participants. All respondents' identities were kept confidential through a data anonymization process, and each participant was granted the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Aqidah Akhlaq learning process, in general, has become an important part of shaping students' character and religious understanding. Students in Muhammadiyah pesantren are at the secondary education level, equivalent to junior and senior high school students. Learning activities are conducted in classrooms and other venues, such as mosques and libraries, under the guidance of *ustadz* or teachers with Islamic educational backgrounds. The learning process takes place in a relatively conducive atmosphere. Students actively follow the teacher's explanations and take notes on key points from the material presented.

The learning process uses Arabic-language textbooks published by the Institute for Pesantren Development of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah (LP2PPM). However, the use of Arabic cannot be directly implemented for students at the early junior secondary level. In grade VII, the material is still delivered in Indonesian combined with Arabic, with a focus on instilling basic concepts such as the pillars of faith (*rukun iman*) and moral values. This aligns with al-Ghazali's theory, which emphasizes that early Aqidah education aims to strengthen children's beliefs (Al-Ghazali, 2005). Only at the subsequent grade levels does the learning process gradually begin to use Arabic-language textbooks.

Based on observations, the teaching methods used are still predominantly lecture-based, involving direct explanation and simple question-and-answer sessions. Interviews with teachers indicate that the use of Arabic in higher-level classes makes it difficult to implement more innovative teaching methods, as much of the limited time is spent on understanding the texts. The use of more participatory learning methods, such as group discussions and case studies, remains relatively limited. As a result, students are not yet actively engaged in the learning process, particularly in critically examining Aqidah teachings and moral values. Interaction between teachers and students tends to be limited to teacher-initiated questioning, which students respond to. Nevertheless, students actively ask questions when they encounter material they do not understand.

Furthermore, the culture established within the pesantren environment plays a significant role in shaping students' understanding of Aqidah concepts and moral values. Through structured activities in daily pesantren life such as the habituation of congregational prayers, regular religious studies (*pengajian*), and the cultivation of discipline and responsibility, Islamic values are internalized within the students. This pesantren environment contributes substantially to the formation of students' character. However, there remains a need to develop learning approaches that are more contextual, reflective, and relevant to the challenges of modern life.

Analysis of Aqidah Akhlaq Learning Conditions in Muhammadiyah Pesantren

The next stage involves analyzing the learning conditions by distributing questionnaires to students and teachers. The data were analyzed using a Likert scale (1–5), with the percentage of “agree–strongly agree” responses and the mean scores for each indicator examined.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Students' Questionnaire Results

Aspect	Main Indicator	Percentage	Mean Score
Contextual Tauhid	Tauhid as a life practice	84%	4.3
Social Integration	Worship has social impact	81%	4.2
Qur'an & Sunnah	Contextualization of verses & hadith	78%	4.1
Critical Thinking (Ijtihad)	Opportunities for questioning & discussion	72%	3.9

Modern Methods	Adaptation to technology & the times	69%	3.8
Moderation (Wasathiyah)	Open-minded and tolerant attitudes	86%	4.4

Based on the data above, it can be seen that aspects of Aqidah Akhlaq values such as *tauhid*, moderation, and social morality fall within the strong to very strong categories. This is reflected in the high percentage of agreement and mean scores for the indicators of contextual tauhid (84%; 4.3), moderation (86%; 4.4), and social integration (81%; 4.2). These findings indicate that the learning process has successfully internalized fundamental Islamic values in students' lives, particularly in terms of faith, social attitudes, and moderate religiosity.

However, in pedagogical terms, a gap remains. Indicators such as the contextualization of Qur'anic verses and hadith (78%; 4.1), critical thinking (72%; 3.9), and modern learning methods (69%; 3.8) show relatively lower scores compared to other aspects. This suggests that the learning process has not fully encouraged the development of higher-order thinking skills and has not yet optimally integrated adaptive learning approaches in line with contemporary developments. Thus, the main issue does not lie in understanding values, but rather in the delivery strategies and the development of the learning process.

Table 2. Recapitulation of Teachers' Questionnaire Results

Aspect	Main Indicator	Percentage	Mean Score
Critical Learning	Students are active & think critically	75%	4.0
Digital Media	Utilization of technology	68%	3.7
21st Century Curriculum	Future competencies	80%	4.1
Student Participation	Space for expression	77%	4.0
Inclusivity	Respect for differences	85%	4.3
Teacher Development	Training & professional improvement	70%	3.8
Facilities & Infrastructure	Support of learning facilities	66%	3.6
Need for New Model	Progressive Islam-based approach	88%	4.5

These results indicate that teachers have a relatively high level of awareness regarding the importance of inclusive, critical, and 21st-century competency-based learning. This is reflected in the high scores for inclusivity (85%; 4.3), 21st-century curriculum (80%; 4.1), and the need for developing learning models based on Progressive Islam (88%; 4.5). However, several aspects still show limitations, particularly in the use of technology (68%; 3.7), teacher professional development (70%; 3.8), and the support of facilities and infrastructure (66%; 3.6). These findings suggest that the challenges faced are not related to teachers' awareness or commitment, but rather to the supporting factors for implementing learning in practice. Looking at the trend of Likert-scale responses, most respondents selected "agree" and "strongly agree" in response to the importance of applying participatory learning methods. However, in terms of actual implementation, there is still a tendency toward "less agree" responses. This indicates that the main issue lies not in resistance but in the suboptimal practical implementation of learning.

Needs of Aqidah Akhlaq Learning Based on Progressive Islam

This section comprehensively examines the needs of Aqidah Akhlaq learning in Muhammadiyah pesantren, integrating subjective and objective needs and drawing on J.C. Richards' needs analysis framework. Thus, this analysis provides a more holistic picture of current conditions and the direction for developing Aqidah Akhlaq learning based on Progressive Islam.

In terms of content/materials, the learning content already covers core aspects of aqidah and akhlaq, such as the pillars of faith (*rukun iman*) and commendable moral values. This aligns with student questionnaire results, which show high agreement on contextual tauhid understanding (84%; mean score 4.3) and social value integration (83%; mean score 4.2), indicating that learning has successfully instilled fundamental Islamic values at a normative level. However, from a subjective perspective, students expect more contextually relevant materials that connect to daily life, as reflected in the statement: *"We want to learn how to address real-life problems, not just memorization."* Therefore, from an objective standpoint, there is a need to develop learning materials that integrate aqidah with critical reasoning, scientific approaches, and social realities. While the material is normatively strong, it still requires transformation toward being more reflective, contextual, and integrative.

In the pedagogical aspect, the learning process is still dominated by lecture methods and simple question-and-answer sessions. It remains largely teacher-centered and has not fully accommodated participatory, problem-solving-oriented learning. This finding is consistent with questionnaire results showing relatively lower scores for modern learning methods (69%; mean score 3.8). From a subjective perspective, students express a desire for more interactive learning with opportunities for discussion, as reflected in the statement: *"If possible, there should be more discussions so we can express our opinions."* Objectively, there is a need to develop more dialogical, collaborative, and problem-based learning approaches to enhance student engagement and higher-order thinking skills. Thus, a shift from conventional to participatory and contextual learning is necessary.

The findings indicate that, in practice, teachers spend most of their instructional time helping students comprehend Arabic-language Aqidah textbooks. During the interviews, teachers reported difficulties in explaining and facilitating students' understanding of materials written in Arabic. As one teacher stated, *"We want to make learning more engaging, but we are constrained by our limited understanding of effective methods for teaching Arabic classical texts."* This statement does not imply that teachers consider Arabic-medium Islamic studies to be unimportant. On the contrary, the use of Arabic-language textbooks in Islamic subjects, including Aqidah Akhlaq, at the two Muhammadiyah pesantren reflects a strong commitment to developing students' mastery of primary Islamic sources in Arabic. This is consistent with the educational objective of the pesantren to produce scholars with deep expertise in Islamic studies. As stated by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, one of the essential prerequisites for becoming a *mujtahid* or an expert in Islamic scholarship is proficiency in the Arabic language. Therefore, teaching Aqidah Akhlaq in Arabic represents a relevant and effective strategy for achieving this educational outcome (Qardawi, 1996). This situation limits opportunities to implement student-centered learning. Therefore, there is a pressing need to develop instructional materials or textbooks that not only support teachers in implementing student-centered learning but also assist students in developing the ability to understand Aqidah Akhlaq text written in Arabic. This competency is expected to serve as a foundational step for enabling students to independently study classical Islamic texts (*turats*) in the future.

Regarding critical thinking development, the indicator remains relatively low (72%; mean score 3.9), indicating that analytical and reflective skills have not been optimally developed. This also reflects the limited integration between aqidah teachings and rational-scientific approaches. In the perspective of Progressive Islam, strengthening aqidah should not only rely on normative understanding but also involve *ijtihad*, critical reasoning, and dialogue with scientific knowledge. Subjectively, students express interest in discussion-based learning but feel it is not yet fully facilitated. Objectively, there is a need to integrate aqidah with the natural and social sciences so that faith is understood not only as doctrine but also explained rationally in terms of empirical realities.

In terms of teacher competence, the indicators show that teachers have a good understanding of Islamic content and awareness of the importance of 21st-century learning (80%; mean score 4.1) and inclusivity (85%; mean score 4.3). Essentially, teachers already possess a proper conceptual understanding of effective learning processes. This is supported by the moderate professional development score (70%; mean score 3.8). Therefore, there is an objective need to enhance teachers' pedagogical competence through continuous training, mentoring, and strengthening their ability to integrate innovative methods and educational technology.

Finally, in the media and infrastructure aspect, the use of learning media remains limited and does not yet fully utilize technology. Learning is not fully supported by adequate facilities to create engaging and interactive experiences (68%; mean score 3.7), and infrastructure still needs improvement (66%; mean score 3.6). From a subjective perspective, teachers acknowledge limitations in using digital learning media, both in terms of skills and availability of facilities, resulting in suboptimal implementation of interactive media. This supports the need for developing more varied, technology-based learning media (Romadlon & Farisi, 2024). Consequently, learning can become more adaptable to contemporary developments, thereby enhancing student engagement and understanding.

Based on the results of the needs analysis, which integrates both objective and subjective findings, a mapping of Aqidah Akhlaq learning needs can be formulated as presented in the following table:

Table 3. Mapping of Aqidah Akhlaq Learning Needs

Aspect	Learning Condition	Subjective Needs	Objective Needs
Materials	Materials already cover <i>tauhid</i> , faith, and akhlaq; normatively strong	Students expect contextual and relevant materials for daily life	Development of reflective, integrative materials based on social realities and science integration
Pedagogical Methods	Dominated by lectures and Q&A (teacher-centered)	Students want interactive and discussion-based learning	Development of dialogical, collaborative, and problem-based learning methods
Critical Thinking (Ijtihad)	Critical ability not yet optimal; still textual	Students want space for discussion and independent thinking	Integration of aqidah with science to foster critical reasoning and <i>ijtihad</i>
Teacher Competence	Teachers understand content, but innovative pedagogy is limited	Teachers need training and methodological references	Strengthening pedagogical competence, training, and technology integration
Media & Infrastructure	Limited media; technology not optimally utilized	Teachers feel limited in using digital media	Development of technology-based media and improvement of facilities and infrastructure

Based on the needs analysis, the researchers found that the primary issue in Aqidah Akhlaq learning at Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools does not lie in the substance of the curriculum, which adequately covers the concepts of *tawhid*, faith (*iman*), and morality (*akhlaq*). Rather, the problem is rooted in the pedagogical approach, which has not sufficiently enabled active, contextual, and student-centered learning. The development of students' critical thinking and *ijtihad* has been hindered by the predominance of lecture-based instruction, the extensive time required to comprehend Arabic-language texts, and the lack of

instructional materials that support student-centered learning. Although teachers demonstrate strong mastery of the subject matter, they still require enhanced pedagogical competence, access to innovative teaching methods, and the effective integration of technology into the learning process. Therefore, the most urgent need is the development of a Progressive Islamic Aqidah Akhlaq learning model supported by Arabic-language instructional materials, integrating scientific knowledge with contemporary social realities, employing dialogical and collaborative learning strategies, and utilizing technology to create more meaningful learning experiences that meet the demands of twenty-first-century education.

Discussion

Based on the research findings, the Aqidah Akhlaq learning materials already cover the main components such as *tauhid*, faith, and morality, and fall within a normatively strong category. This is consistent with previous studies that describe pesantren learning as focusing on normative reinforcement through the indoctrination of aqidah and the cultivation of akhlaq through the study of classical texts, often aimed at countering deviant teachings (Setiawan et al., 2025; Widodo, 2018). However, there is a clear need for materials that are more contextually relevant and grounded in everyday life. This finding underscores the need to develop materials that are not only normative but also reflective and contextual. Therefore, an integration between aqidah and social realities, as well as scientific approaches including the integration of science is required. Such integration enables learning materials to bridge the gap between religious texts and the context of modern life (Fauzi & Winarto, 2025; Idris & Mokodenseho, 2021; Romadlon et al., 2023).

The findings on the pedagogical aspect indicate that Aqidah Akhlaq instruction is still predominantly conducted through lectures and simple question-and-answer sessions, reflecting a teacher-centered approach. This condition also impacts the limited development of students' critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills. Therefore, there is a need to implement more interactive learning that provides space for discussion. Accordingly, it is necessary to develop dialogical, collaborative, and problem-based learning methods that can enhance student engagement. Numerous studies have shown that the development of collaborative and problem-based learning approaches can improve critical thinking skills and foster a strong interest in discussion and expressing opinions (Cossu et al., 2024; Duane & Satre, 2014; Fredy et al., 2026). The development of relevant teaching materials is also essential, as numerous studies have shown that well-designed instructional materials can effectively support the implementation of specific teaching methods in the learning process (Bahri et al., 2023; Liao, 2026; Romadlon & Farisi, 2024; Wanci et al., 2024).

From the perspective of teacher competence, the findings indicate that teachers possess a strong understanding of Islamic subject matter; however, they are not yet optimal in implementing innovative teaching practices. Therefore, strengthening teachers' pedagogical competence through continuous training and the development of technology-based, innovative learning is necessary. This aligns with studies suggesting that even the teaching of Arabic classical texts in pesantren can be optimized to support active learning. Hence, enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills is essential to create more active learning environments in pesantren (Efendi & Promadi, 2023; Firdaus & Rofi'ah, 2024).

In terms of media and infrastructure, the findings show that the use of learning media remains limited and has not yet been optimally utilized. Therefore, it is necessary to develop technology-based learning media and improve supporting facilities and infrastructure for interactive learning. This aligns with previous studies indicating that Islamic education can benefit from technological tools, such as digital libraries commonly used in Islamic studies such as *al-Maktabah al-Shamilah* or other digital applications to support 21st-century student competencies (Romadlon & Farisi, 2024; Romadlon & Handayani, 2024). Furthermore, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Arabic language learning has the potential to accelerate

students' understanding of complex vocabulary and grammatical structures, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of learning Arabic-language Islamic texts (Abdelmajeed & Alansary, 2026; Alkaabi & Almaamari, 2025; Amraoui et al., 2026; Salido et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the need for developing Progressive Islam-based Aqidah Akhlaq learning in Muhammadiyah Pesantren does not primarily lie in the content aspect, as the existing learning process has successfully instilled fundamental concepts of *tauhid*, faith, morality, moderation, and students' social responsibility. Based on J.C. Richards' needs analysis framework, the main gaps were identified in the objective needs, particularly in the dimensions of pedagogy, critical thinking development, teacher competence, and the utilization of learning media. Meanwhile, from the perspective of subjective needs, students expressed the need for more contextual and interactive learning that provides opportunities for discussion and connects Aqidah teachings with real-life contexts.

The findings of this study highlight that the main challenge in Aqidah Akhlaq learning at Muhammadiyah Pesantren lies in the limitations of pedagogical strategies and the optimization of Arabic-language instructional materials to create active and reflective learning experiences. Therefore, the primary contribution of this study lies in mapping the gap between the strengths of the pesantren's Islamic scholarly tradition and the demands of 21st-century learning, namely the need to transform text-oriented learning into a learning process that integrates textual understanding, critical reasoning, social contexts, and scientific developments. In this context, the development of Progressive Islam-based Aqidah Akhlaq learning should be directed toward a model that combines strengthening Arabic Islamic literacy with dialogical, collaborative, problem-based approaches, as well as the integration of Islam and science.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of Islamic education development by demonstrating that needs analysis is not merely a tool for identifying learning deficiencies but can also serve as an epistemological foundation for designing Islamic learning models that are contextual and responsive to contemporary changes. Practically, the findings provide a foundation for Muhammadiyah Pesantren to develop instructional materials, strengthen teachers' pedagogical competencies, and innovate learning media while maintaining the characteristics of Arabic classical text-based studies in accordance with student-centered learning principles.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations because it was conducted in only two Muhammadiyah Pesantren with specific characteristics; therefore, the findings cannot yet be generalized to pesantren institutions broadly or Muhammadiyah Pesantren specifically. Furthermore, this research remains at the needs analysis stage and has not yet tested the effectiveness of the developed learning model. Future studies are therefore needed to design, develop, and empirically test a Progressive Islam-based Aqidah Akhlaq learning model through experimental approaches or design and development research to validate its contribution to improving the quality of Islamic education.

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