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# THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN USING AI CHATBOTS FOR CHILDREN'S ISLAMIC EDUCATION: PERSPECTIVES OF GEN-Z FAMILIES IN INDONESIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The rapid application of artificial intelligence (AI) in everyday life can weaken parental control over the religious values that underpin Islamic pedagogy. This study seeks to analyze the transformation of digital devices, including artificial intelligence chatbots, into media representing Islamic religious education for children in Gen-Z families. From a qualitative case study of Gen-Z couples in Central Java, Indonesia, we found that AI-based digital delegation by parents has complex dimensions: motives, patterns, and complex theological dilemmas. In terms of motivation, parents who use AI chatbots are driven by the urgency to respond quickly to their children's religious questions, a tendency to offer contextual analogies from the digital world, and a mindset focused on conceptual mastery of fiqh ibadah, which makes AI a tool to overcome the admission of ignorance. These seeds develop according to a progressive three-phase scheme: exploratory-confirmation (AI as guardian, reconfirmed), routine digitalization (integration of AI into daily rituals with reduced supervision), and authoritative replacement (full instrumentalization – delegating complex theological questions to machines). However, this systematic development raises three fundamental theological dilemmas: the absence of scientific sanad (chain of evidence), which weakens the principle of Islamic knowledge transmission; the absence of a moral dimension, which hinders character building through role models; and recent concerns about sins associated with erroneous algorithmic guidance. These findings call for the development of an Islamic digital ethics framework that is sensitive to the penetration of technology in modern family religious education.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Digital Parental Delegation, Gen-Z, Chatbot Ai, Islamic Religious Education for Children.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z in Indonesia is the first generation to live in a highly advanced digital environment since birth. For them, technology, including AI, is no longer just a tool, but a fundamental part of everyday life (Szymkowiak *et al.*, 2021). Unfortunately, many parents belonging to the Gen Z group now rely on AI chatbots to answer their children's religious questions (for example, about prayer procedures or the meaning of Quran) (Utama & Sumarna, 2024). In the practice of applying religious values through this means, there is a paradox: what should be transported by religious scholars, teachers or parents as spiritual guardians are handed over to machines. Machines could only answer according to the data it has, and not through a theological neutrality; for instance, machines have no cultural, social or spiritual understanding towards Islamic teachings (Kong 2001). The author suggests that it threatens the transition of religious authority from humans with moral awareness and spiritual sensitivity to machines without conscience (Stolow, 2013). Now, the distinction between understanding the Divine and helping others navigate their spiritual journeys is increasingly murky. This is the heart of the matter: turning to AI as a central resource for children's learning – especially about religion – isn't so much a technological problem, as it is an epistemic and moral crisis.

Several studies on the phenomenon of delegating religious education to technology have been conducted and attracted academic attention. A recent study by Isetti *et al.* in 2020 revealed that 68% of urban millennial parents use digital Quran apps as a substitute for face-to-face teaching, with 74% of them admitting that these apps are inadequate in the socio-historical context of the verses. Meanwhile, Usmonov (2025) found that religious chatbots often issue contradictory fatwas due to limitations in comparing the nuances of fiqh from different schools of thought. Davies (2019) also documented the phenomenon of "digital religious responsibility transfer" among the urban middle class, where parents unwittingly transfer responsibility to religious content creators on social media. More significantly, Ozimek's 2022 longitudinal study showed a decline in children's ability to reason spiritually when religious instruction continues without human interaction. The 2020 ethnographic study Budiasa & Agama critiques the illusion of AI intelligence, which merely reproduces historical data without distinguishing contextual intelligence from *ijtihad*. However, these five studies, which are intermediary and regression studies of millennial parents and urban services, fail

to capture the unique realities of Gen-Z families. This generation constructs relational and spiritual identity boundaries through digital channels from birth. A key difference from previous parents is that this pluralistic knowledge is integrated, relative to the digital and physical worlds. In this regard, delegating religion to AI is no longer a replacement for parents, but rather an expansion of their role, a role that has not been academically researched.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze how digital devices, specifically artificial intelligence, are transforming into a vehicle for delegating Islamic religious education for children in Gen-Z families. This objective is operationalized through three research questions: (1) What motivates Gen-Z parents to use AI chatbots as a resource for Islamic religious learning for their children?. 2) How do AI-generated religious content interact, or get selected, in everyday parenting practice? and (3) What theological dilemmas do Gen-Z parents face in trusting non-human beings as religious authorities? This study took place in three purposely chosen villages located in the mountainous area of Batang Regency (Sangubanyu, Wonosari, and Jlamprang). First, these mountainous regions serve as a middle ground between conservative rural faith traditions and the overwhelming penetration of digital technology through the government's digital village initiative. Second, the Gen-Z community here is generally those who have returned from the city, bringing with them unique hybrid child-rearing practices: combining local religious values with urban technological reliance. Third, the relatively isolated geographical conditions highlight the paradox of the digitalization of religion: limited access to physical religious teachers encourages reliance on AI, while sharpening the conflict between traditional religious authority and religious authority with algorithmic authority.

This research was conducted exploratively considering two urgencies: theoretically, to respond to the urgent need for a new analytical framework capable of untangling the epistemological knot where Islamic religious authority based on centuries of "human scientific lineage (*sanad*)" clashes with algorithmic entities without a *sanad*. Theoretically, the results of this study form the basis of ethical guidelines on the use of AI in religious education by referring to Islamic pedagogical values and an early warning system related to the erosion of traditional religious authority in the younger generation of Indonesian Muslims (Wildan, Pratama & Sugiarto, 2025). The findings of this study are presented in three sub-chapters that directly address the three

research questions (motivation, patterns, and theological dilemmas); the discussion integrates these findings with the concept of religious authority in Islam and policy recommendations for educational institutions and relevant ministries. Within this structure, this article not only reports the case but also conceptually contributes by mapping the boundaries of the use of AI in religious education for children born to Gen Z parents.

**2. RESEARCH METHODS**

This research focuses on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) Chatbots as a means of transferring Islamic knowledge to children born in Generation Z. This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design in order to thoroughly examine the complexity of such phenomenon within its natural setting (Baskarada, 2014). This has to be the case, since the phenomenon we are employing here and that we are going to explore in this study, "digital parental delegation," is extremely contextualized and fluid in nature so as to escape quantifiable metrics of subjective meanings. The qualitative methodology would enable the researcher to capture narratives; thus, it can be helpful in exploring behaviors based on rich and complex lived experiences of Generation Z parents utilizing AI technology for their children Islamic education practices. These kinds of studies provide micro reflections of the interaction between humans, technology and religious values which are largely revealed in large-scale reviews (Marlina & Ulya, 2024; Firmando & Wahyudi, 2024; Ahmad, 2025; Thoriquttyas & Rohmawati, 2024). Furthermore, since this is qualitative research, it provides

methodological flexibility inviting responses to any unforeseen insights that arise during data collection and analysis (Naeem & Thomas, 2025; Shaieba, 2025) while enabling a closer exploration of the possible function of AI as an additional aid within the medium of Islamic education (Sartika et al., 2020; Hernawati et al., 2024) as well as new opportunities and challenges around its displacement into domestic environments in the digital sphere.

Data collection involved the application of three triangulation methods: unstructured in-depth interviews, document review, and participant observation (Starman, 2013). Interviews were conducted with 10 Gen-Z parents, aged 23–28 (born 1997), in Sangubanyu Village from September 10, 2025, to January 17, 2026, for a total of 12 hours divided into three consecutive sessions (averaging four hours per session) to facilitate the exploration of various theological motivations and dilemmas. Interviews were conducted in Javanese (the local mother tongue of the village, a variant of Batang Regency) to gain depth in emotional and conceptual exploration. Interviews were then transcribed into Indonesian for data reduction and finally translated into English with the informants' written consent for international publication. Document review included screenshots of interactions between children and an AI chatbot discussing the use of religious apps. Observations were conducted over a week, during which researchers observed daily family activities (e.g., religious learning using AI and dinner discussions) to observe how children and their family members interacted naturally with digital interfaces without any bias due to social pressure responses.

*Table 1: Informant Profiles.*

No.	Initials	Village	Gender	Age	Children
1	Z1	Sangubanyu	Women	25	1
2	Z2	Sangubanyu	Male	26	1
3	Z3	Sangubanyu	Women	25	2
4	Z4	Sangubanyu	Male	28	2
5	Z5	Wonosari	Women	26	1
6	Z6	Wonosari	Male	26	1
7	Z7	Wonosari	Women	28	3
8	Z8	Jlamprang	Male	28	3
9	Z9	Jlamprang	Women	23	1
10	Z10	Jlamprang	Male	26	1

Data validation in this study used triangulation of methods, sources, and time frames. In source triangulation, findings from interviews with informants with diverse attributes (such as different levels of education and work experience) are cross-validated, allowing researchers to capture a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon

being studied (Haerana et al., 2024; Meiana & Minsih, 2023). Triangulation methods further enrich this validation by aligning interview results with other forms of data, including digital documents and participant observation notes, to identify thematic consistency (Kusmaryono & Wijayanti, 2023; Oktaviani et al., 2024). Additionally, time

triangulation involves conducting follow-up interviews to ensure that the meanings generated by informants remain stable over time, thereby strengthening the reliability of the interpreted data (Jakes & Burrus, 2022; Rohmah & Kaltsum, 2023). The analytical process (e.g., the confluence model by Miles and Huberman) involved data reduction through thematic coding, display of each data in appropriate matrices, as well as conclusions discussed with respect to fidelity and divergence of AI-fatwas and local religious rules, which may show insight into the implications of digital ethics at religious authorities (Nur et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2024). Also, credibility was also applied through member checking, where initial results were returned to participants to verify them and ensure the perspectives and meanings used in the data matched what they meant (Gidakovic, 2024; Intening et al., 2022).

### 3. RESULTS

#### *3.1. Motivation Of Gen-Z Parents in Using AI Chatbots As a Reference for Islamic Religious Teaching for Children*

The findings of the study reveal three crucial motivations underlying the dependence of Gen-Z parents in the Batang mountainous region on AI chatbots in children's religious learning. First, the need for instant responsiveness in answering children's spontaneous religious questions that arise outside the formal recitation schedule—such as the procedure of prostrating *sahwi* during congregational prayers or the law of disposing of leftover food—makes AI a dialogue partner that is present 24 hours a day without waiting for the availability of *ngaji* teachers or village *kiai* whose access is limited in remote areas. Second, the desire to present religious illustrations that are contextual with the digital world of children, where chatbots are able to present modern analogies such as worship situations using technology when *infaq* using QRIS, or the patience of the Prophet Ayyub in the narrative of "character-leveling", so as to build a bridge of meaning between classical Islamic values and the daily reality of children who are technologically literate. Third, the limitations of conceptual mastery

of *fiqh* of worship by parents themselves who often only rely on memorization of rituals without understanding the evidence, so that when children ask "why should ablution be done before prayer?", they turn to AI as a shield to avoid admitting ignorance in front of children. This suggests the existence of a unique dynamic that indirectly erodes parental pedagogical authority and normalizes the transfer of spiritual responsibility to algorithmic entities that lack the capacity to instill value through exemplification and emotional closeness.

The geographical limitations of the Batang mountainous region create a gap in access to formal religious learning resources, so Gen-Z parents are turning to AI chatbots as a responsive solution to children's spontaneous questions that arise outside of the study schedule. Z1 revealed, "My son suddenly asked when he was eating, 'Mom, is it okay if the leftover rice is given to the chicken?' I immediately opened the chatbot, and five seconds later it was answered using Javanese." The availability of 24 hours without an unlimited time is a crucial added value in the midst of the lack of local religious figures. Z4 emphasized, "If you wait for the Monday of the study, the child has forgotten the question. AI is like a *ustaz* who stands by in the pocket." Z7 added a spatial perspective, "There are only two hours a week for village *kiai*, while children can ask questions at any time when they are playing in the sand in the yard." Parents, for instance, feel the pressure to provide immediate answers when children outside of a formal context ask questions so as not to break the child's learning flow. Z3 also recounts personal experience, "The question regarding prostration comes up at eight o'clock in the evening, I'm embarrassed to call the *ustadz* that night better to ask AI secretly. Z9 pointed out the features of the digital generation, "The children of the current generation cannot wait for tomorrow, if they don't answer right away, then they'll be looking for themselves on Youtube which isn't necessarily true." As Z6 concluded, this urgency was reflected in the need for chatbot: "Chatbots are an emergency solution For when religious questions come outside the formal schedule, there's no need to wait for the time of recitation." Technological dependency on regional isolation is mainly based on instant response.

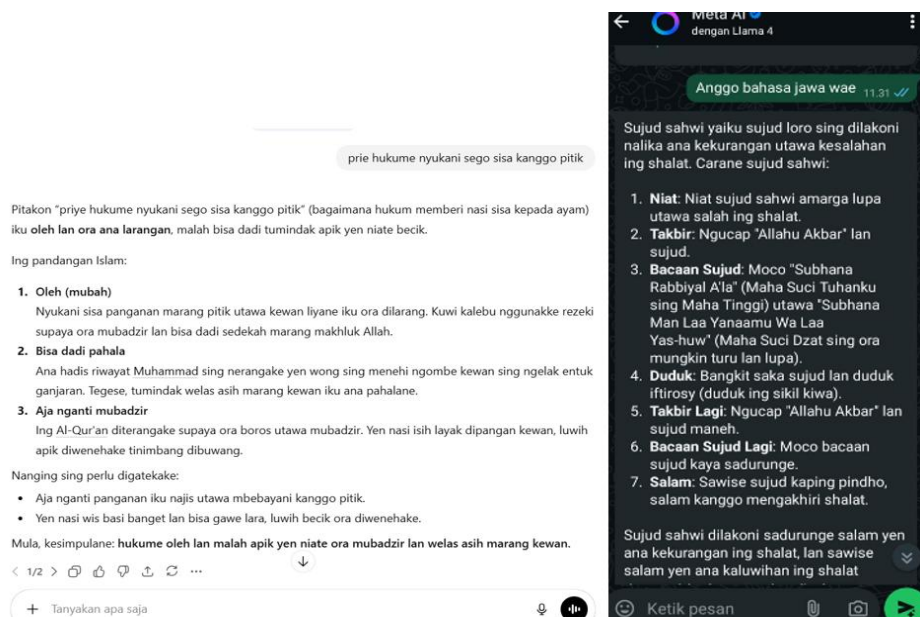


Figure 1: Z6 And Z3 Conversations with Chat GPT And Meta About Islamic Fiqh.

AI chatbots are creative translators that render classical Islamic values into the dialect of a digital age that our children understand. Parents discover that as much as they attempt with traditional analogies, they often don't cut through to the understanding of the generation that grew up in the tech ecosystem. He then shared an example of how his adaptive strategy worked, "I already told the AI to transfer the story about the Prophet Joseph in a way that it is like a 'level-up' analogy at the game, immediately they understood about life test." In this context, theological abstraction can become relevant narrative. Z8 in Chapter 5 sharing transactional examples, "When the child is confusion about zakat so AI providing example of e-wallet balance, immediately connect since he likes to see QRIS at the stall. Z2 had a contemporary narratological layer Chatbots w. Creating patient story of prophet Ayyub using "loading patience 99%" language, kids laugh toh but also crucial for them to know This bi-directional strategy is not just helpful for conceptual absorption, but the formation of a lading, attractive disposition towards religious material. Z10 speaking out "I requested AI to expand on alms pertaining to topping up game analogy, kids initiate save coin for digital piggy bank etc. Mantra of techno metaphor to success of Z3, " Kids readily grasp that ablution is similar small sin reset just as restarting of cellphone, well-versed analogy made abstract concept tangible by means of AI". They literally say in Z7 that they are better than the classical way, 'If you read the old books children are drowsy. But if the A.I. gives a specimen of worship, he is even going to ask for a follow-up in TikTok." The success of value transfer

will hinge on this bridge of meaning between a tradition and new technology.

A structural cause of delegation of authority to algorithmic systems: Gen-Z parents & their limited conceptual mastery of worship fiqh Respondents noted their religious education often focused on ritual without philosophical underpinnings. Z4 savagely exposes his own intelligence in the end, "I can pray but you get asked 'why do you have two dawns? helplessly add, "It is easier to call up AI rather than pull it out." The Z9 generational aspect was introduced by a chapter titled, "My son asks 'why do I have to use water for ablution? So I can just say 'from the sound of that' although I wish I could answer with evidence." Fear of losing their status as the authoritative figure and the inexperience with facing children's urgent questions lead to anxiety. Z1 showed that the strategy, "I'm embarrassed to say 'Mom doesn't know' in front of my child, just pretend to open the cellphone, search for it in the chatbot and look authoritative. Z6 points out to the core of the systemic problem, "Previously I only knew how to pray movements by my parents teaching me, and never explaining what's meaning. Now kids are becoming critical, asking 'why' all the time, and AI serves as a shield for them so that they do not have to look dumb. Z5 encapsulated the current reality of his generation's religious education, "We Gen-Z only learn religion in elementary school now kids are more clever, 'why' after 'why', AI becomes a shield so that we don't look stupid. Z8 confirms this dependence as an almost structural necessity, "Chatbots are saviors when our juvenile questions seem uncontainable by our rituals that lack any

substantive understanding except in their mechanical performance." This substantial knowledge gap, however, creates a vacuum temporarily filled by technology.

Complex psychological dynamics arise when parents use AI as an intermediary to protect the image of pedagogical authority in the presence of children. This phenomenon reflects the tension between intellectual honesty and the desire to maintain authority as the primary educator. Z3 describes his theatrical strategy, "I pretend to read the results of the chatbot with a serious expression so that the child doesn't realize that his mother doesn't know the answer." Z7 expressed concern about the long-term implications, "If I say 'I don't know', the child may not ask again tomorrow. It's better to use AI so that authority is maintained." Protection of self-esteem is the hidden motive behind the adoption of learning technology. Z2 adds a dimension of credibility, "Children are now quick to grasp if their parents are not consistent in their answers. Use AI, at least, the answer is standard and there is a postulate." Z10 realizes the paradox he faces, "Ironically, I use technology to be considered authority, even though I am handing over authority to machines." Z1 acknowledged the emotional vulnerability underlying this decision, "I'm afraid that the child will be disappointed if they find out that their mother doesn't understand the basics of religion, so AI becomes a psychological shield for me." Z6 summed up this existential dilemma, "Chatbots are an emergency bridge between parental self-esteem and the child's need for answers, even though they are aware that this is not a long-term solution." The protection of self-image as a competent parent is a hidden motive that drives the normalization of technological dependence in the spiritual realm.

Gen-Z attachments to such new style of spiritual orienters also reflect on one of the paradigmatic shift in the way religious upbringings look like in this transfer climate. The prevalence of AI has become so entrenched in the life of academia that its use can be an instinctive reflex, one that often comes with minimal thought about its lasting impact on pedagogy. Details of this new ritual is described by Z5 as follows: "When my child asks me about religion, I reflexively reach for my cellphone before answering him, almost in the manner that it has become a mandatory ritual. Even though Z8 agrees that awareness can go beyond the affective limits of technology, and therefore states, "I know well that AI cannot hug children or be an example in direct, but yes, it is a habit more than manual sources," it recognizes systemic dependency. Z4 added,

"Children even trust answers from chatbots because they say 'there is a verse', even though the read version I interpret from my cellphone. This has created a paradox where machines are perceived as having more credibility than parents, regarding the spiritual matter. Z9 has a nascent worry that we tend to ignore, \*Sometimes I think, will children be closer to AI than I am to religious matters? But yes, this is already comfy to use." Affective gap that technology can never fill Z3 understands, "Chatbots get complete evidence but don't give hugs when children are frightened of sin. I am supposed to do that part, but I forget a lot." This cultural transformation was expressed concisely by Z7 saying, "We Gen-Z believes more in technology than oral tradition, so religion affairs are finally left up to algorithms that have the status of neutral and correct." This normalization suggested a larger transformation in how familial religious authority was constructed.

### ***3.2. The Pattern of Digital Parental Delegation Gen-Z In Using AI Chatbots As a Reference for Islamic Religious Teaching for Children.***

The study's findings reveal three-tiered patterns in the use of AI *chatbots* by Gen-Z parents as a reference for children's Islamic religious learning, which form a progressive spectrum from controlled dependency to total delegation. The first pattern, exploratory-confirmative, was characterized by the use of AI to answer children's spontaneous questions about basic worship procedures such as ablution and prayer, with reconfirmed algorithmic responses to local religious leaders as a "cultural filter" to maintain local religious authority. This pattern then evolved into a digital routine, where AI is integrated into the family's daily rituals through scheduled question-and-answer sessions (some are held after Maghrib and/or morning) with a focus on the morals and stories of the prophet, driven by the need to respond to children's sudden questions about basic fiqh. At this stage, external supervision shrinks as trust in technological "neutrality" strengthens, so AI transforms from a tool to an autonomous educational actor. The peak is reached in the pattern of authoritative substitution, when parents explicitly delegate complex theological questions such as destiny or inheritance law to AI without human intervention, with the justification that "machine intelligence is more objective than human subjective interpretation". All three of these patterns are temporally proximate (it generally takes an individual nuclear family 6–8 weeks to transition from pattern one to pattern three) and mutually

reinforcing through social normalization: some models of substitution by nuclear families create conformity pressures that accelerate the transition within other families. This devil has brought about through impenetrability and obscurity such a gradual breaking down of the previous viewpoint of religious authority, whereby everything was rational without ever becoming free from power relations.

To that end, Gen-Z parents in the first pattern should be cautious enough not to use recruitment technology as an escape, only briefly mentioning the irrepressibly sudden curiosity of their children about the basic rituals of worship and verifying them at local values. "If asks how to do ablution properly, I open the chatbot first so it's quick, but later will still ask Ustadz again at the mosque for sure the answer corresponding what is taught here," said Z1 reflecting a critical awareness of the limitations of algorithmic knowledge. This belongs to wider attempts of resolving the suitability of digital technologies in a contextually traditional (and at certain times local) currency of religious custom. Z3 said he likes to remind his son, "This is what the robot says, we'll check with Kiai later," which means that he doesn't believe a machine is the issuer of absolute truth. Religious leaders are therefore confirmed as a means of creating a regional cultural filter to safeguard the world in which they live from 'disturbance' or upheaval within the local hierarchy of authority. "Teachers are still better at knowing the characters of village children than AI who does not know our culture," said Z5, whom she said emphasized the importance of contextualizing religious knowledge. Z7 added a new layer of selectivity: "I use chatbots just for technical matters such as in prayer readings, but on morals and verse interpretations, it becomes compulsory to consult a madrasah teacher. Even the skeptical Z2 admitted, "At first I was doubtful, but after a month being paired with Kiai's explanation of it I started to believe AI could be an early discussion partner." Z9 summarised this philosophy for us: "We do not reject technology, but there should be a 'human bridge' between machine answers and children's understanding.

During 6 to 8 weeks, selective exploration turned into freakish search in a digital way leading towards routineization of it - this brought with itself drastic reduction in the frequency of external verification for these new orders as confidence grew overwhelming on omniconstancy maintained by algorithms. "What I used to do was every AI answer, I asked the teacher, now it barely happens anymore - because they always have the same answer and in a way never

contradicts what I learned," said Z4 who explained how the use of this technology has become normal part of life. This process is then crystallized in more formal family rituals that are set into the daily timetable. Every Maghrib, children gather to open a chatbot together to ask the story of the prophet - so it's like a new habit at home," explains Z6 who spoke on how technology is shaping new spiritual routines. Z8 adds time discipline, saying, "I do morning scheduling in the morning before school. Fifteen minutes of religious questions from AI so that I am not distracted by other gadgets. The illusion of technological "neutrality" is the psychological precursor for diminished human oversight. "AI is never impatient or disgusted to be answered to strange children's questions, which may happen when humans see themselves asked continuously," said Z10 on the affective advantages of machines. Z3 admits the longstanding consequences: "I started going to lectures less and less, as I was like 'Oh, I can just get all of these explanations from chatbots - at first I didn't realize that this was actually dangerous.' Z5 said collectively: "My neighbor [who used to] diligently go to the taklim [assembly] now prefers to open AI applications in search of religious answers."

The consolidation of patterns for digital routineization is establishing a functional dependency that exists in the Gen-Z parenting ecosystem, whereby chatbots are no longer viewed as an adjunct part of children's daily religious learning but rather an essential component. The content shifted focus away from procedural worship procedures to morals and understanding of religious narrative. "My son, at this time, attains the story of the Prophet Joseph from chatbot - he said it's more thrilling to learn it this way as he can ask questions evermore without being angry," explained Z7 in illustrating the interactive appeal of technology for in child. So integrated into day-to-day family life, it provides an expectation of structure that is hard to deny. "If you forget to open the chatbot at night, the child protests - he says 'tomorrow you can't get the prophet's story'," said Z1 who explained how these digital rituals have become a psychological need of children. Z9 threw in an economic angle: "I even bought a special data package just to get religious chatbots with, because every day children want to be used." Less deference to traditional loci of authority is, perhaps, an inevitable byproduct of digital convenience. Z2, specifically described such a changing way of sociality in relation to its religious environment quota for children that "I have not gone to TPA the last two months because I am relying on AI sessions after Maghrib." Z4 has observed a

common phenomenon in his surroundings : “Many young parents living around Sangubanyu came, seeking guidance about recipe – now they aren’t attending recitation regularly – they said enough knowledge can be obtained through chatbots.” The change in behavior was encapsulated by Z6: “At the beginning it was just a prank, now it has become an obligation and habit – without AI something is missing in children’s religious education.”

A critical turning point occurs when digital routineization evolves into authoritative substitution, characterized by explicit delegation to complex theological questions without any human intervention at all. The domain of religious interpretation that was previously a monopoly of the ulama is now transferred to algorithms with the justification of technological rationalization that glorifies the objectivity of machines. “When my child asks about destiny, I immediately tell him to ask a chatbot – faster and the answer is systematic than the sometimes-convoluted human explanation,” said Z8, who shows a fundamental shift in the hierarchy of religious references. Z10 adds an epistemological dimension by stating, “I believe AI is fairer because it has no political or sectarian interests – the answer is purely from scriptural data.” Social normalization accelerated the adoption of substitution patterns through conformity pressures in a community environment that considered skepticism of technology to be outdated. “In Wonosari, if neighbors have used AI for all religious questions, we will be embarrassed if we still ask Kiai back and forth – considered outdated,” said Z5 who described the social dynamics driving change. Z3 acknowledges the influence of peer groups: “At first I was afraid of being wrong, but after seeing friends in WhatsApp groups satisfied with the AI answers to inheritance questions, I came to believe it.” Z7 declares total dependence: “Now I never ask the teacher anymore – because AI can answer at any time without having to wait for the recitation schedule.” Z1 summed up the philosophical belief: “Humans can be wrong by emotion or forget, but machines don’t – that’s why I trust AI more for sensitive things like inheritance law.”

The tendency for some in Gen-Z parenting styles to treat statements as independent of the speaker’s will has very heavy implications for inter generational transmission of religion through a generation that now sees algorithmic authority as true and is in itself a result of the underlying state in which statements are perceived more than they are present. The replacement of everything to the bots is not only an effective strategy but a signifier of

modernity, while the mere humans casually believe in technology’s epistemological supremacy. “I think AI is more global because it reads millions of books, and Kiai only has a few references,” Z6 said when asked why he found the volume of data at the machine’s disposal convincing. Z4 offers a comparative perspective: “When there is a difference between Kiai and AI, I tend to believe in AI – because the answer mentions data statistiques and also full references. This created a generation of children whose leaders in religious discussion were naturally quoted as authorities chosen by algorithms. “Now he tells me things like ‘Chatbot says this’ – no longer refers by name to the teacher who’d explained a law, or anything like that,” said Z9, which demonstrates something of an existential change in how authority gets internalized. Z2 recognizes systemic reliance: “I don’t remember the last time I referred to a cleric – All family religious issues are now being solved by AI in seconds. Z8 expressed the technocentric mindset: “It’s the digital age – AI puts everything in front of us quicker and more accurately, why revert back to old methods that were slow and subjective?” Z5 gives us this reflection while they are trapped in the system: “We know it could be dangerous, yet we already get used to it – changing this habit is like swimming against the current in Gen-Z nowadays.

During participatory observation in the Z8 family room, it was observed that the dynamics of interaction consistently reproduce a new hierarchy of authority in the transmission of religious values: when a seven-year-old child was asked by his parents about the law of breaking the fast due to illness, he spontaneously grabbed his parent’s tablet, typed the question fluently without looking at the face of his father sitting beside him, and then read out the AI’s response with a patronizing intonation – “It says it is permissible to qada, because there is a hadith narrated by Bukhari-Muslim.....” – while the father nodded in approval without giving any additional explanation or referring to personal spiritual experiences. In the next session, when the mother tried to explain the meaning of takbir by quoting a kiai lecture in the mosque, the child interrupted by opening the chatbot’s conversation history that featured a trilingual infographic and historical statistics on takbir use, then said, “It’s clearer, ma’am,” followed by the mother who smiled resignedly while turning her gaze to her own phone screen which also displayed a similar chatbot interface. These interactions are repeated in a ritualistic pattern: religious questions arise → digital devices are accessed → algorithmic responses are

adopted as a conclusion to the discussion → the lack of elaboration of values by parents, confirming that the domestic space has been transformed into an ecosystem in which epistemological authority is no longer negotiated through dialogue between humans, but rather validated through the speed of access and the visual aesthetics of machines.

### 3.3. Theological Dilemmas Felt by Gen-Z Parents

The results analyzed show three forms of theological dilemmas for Generation Z parents from Batang Regency who rely on AI chatbots as the standard of Islamic learning for their children. First of all, the dilemma of scientific sanad. Parents are aware that the AI they use does not have a sanad or scientific genealogy which is a sign of religious authority in Islam. Therefore, there is an existential anxiety that fatwas made by algorithms, even if textually correct, do not have an epistemological validity in Islam that requires a language of scientific transmission that has not been interrupted or uninterrupted until the sages. Second, the spiritual dilemma of learning. Participants felt that there was no heart dimension in their children's interactions with AI that made it difficult to internalize spiritual values. Islamic religious learning is not only the transfer of information but a change of character through example and emotional connection with a good religious teacher, which is impossible to replicate by algorithms. Third, the taklif dilemma on the second day. Parents are theologically wary about accountability for sin in the afterlife if AI introduces the wrong culture of worship to their children. The legislative consideration, in this case, is because in the perspective of Fiqh, parents are the full representatives of their children, whereas there is no such legal or spiritual entity in a non-human context. These three dilemmas create residual ambivalence, on the one hand, parents depend on AI, because access to teachers in Batang Regency which is in the highlands is very limited; On the other hand, they are confused by their rational desire to use technology and their theological presence as a reminder that religion cannot be simplified into data.

Anxiety about the absence of scientific sanad in the response of AI chatbots became the first source of existential anxiety. They understand that in the Islamic scientific tradition, the validity of a fatwa is not only determined by the accuracy of the text but also by the genealogy of transmission of knowledge that is continued to the Prophet PBUH through a chain of verified teachers. "I am often anxious, where did this AI get its knowledge from? There is no Kiai

or ulama who is the teacher, even though religious knowledge must be continuous in its sanad," said Z3 who showed a deep awareness of Islamic epistemological prerequisites. A similar concern was added by Z7: "How can I trust a fatwa from a machine that has never been in the taklim assembly or have studied its knowledge directly with a qualified teacher." Z1 expressed a deeper level of skepticism: "The chatbot can memorize all the verses, but it does not have a mentor passing over the knowledge with blessings – that's what makes me uncomfortable. Sent from my SM-G986B using Tapatalk As Z9 rightly says here the paradox is there- 'the answer was correct based on law but no barokah because good scientific genealogies are none which follows Islam. Z5 gives the more spiritual dimension: "Spiritual knowledge requires a transformation of teachers, not just speed in accessing data – AI can't give that." Following Z4 and Z2, Z8 summed up the structural dilemma: "We are caught between practical necessity [...] and the principle of sanad that cannot be compromised in the Islamic scientific tradition."

The conflict between the accuracy of AI-generated content and epistemological legitimacy of Islam seems to be deepening further as questions surrounding infallibility are increasingly being asked in regards to specific questions getting bot-generated responses. There is a serious risk of misinterpretation to children's faith construction process however the answers that AI provides are generally denoted corresponding with text type of yellow book cover since it does not encompass historical and methodological aspects (parents well aware). "AI says this is the law, but it never gives an explanation of what scholar's opinion is followed in which school I should refer – that's why I feel worried," said Z2, who stressed the contextual constraints of the algorithm. Z6 provides a methodological element: "In Islam, every single law has its evidence and qiyas but AI just feeds us conclusions without the process of ijtihad that can be held accountable. Z4 acknowledges cognitive dissonance: "I know textually the answer must be right, Parsing Sandmonkey is about methodology however and my little heart wonders who do I blame should this be a methodological wrong. Z10 talks about generational issues: "My child do not care anymore of the opinion regarding whom is referred, clear that speed-answering is what matters – and this ends to erode awareness of scientific authority importance." Cage 3 nice: Z3 stresses the urgent need for sanad

However, the spiritual dilemma of learning in the age of AI janitors when parents find that there is no

heart in their children interacting with these high-tech conversation partner chatbots, hampering them from being transformed to become a well-mannered character which is indeed the essence of Islamic religious education. They know that the internalization of spiritual values occurs only through an intangible bond, not just informational transfer but example, emotional proximity, and values from a merciful human relationship between teacher and student. "Prayer readings can be memorized with AI, but tawadhu that [the father-mother] teaching their child to memorize, how is the teacher greets them or Kiai patient enough in [the lesson], this kind of things are irreplaceable," Z5 said, showing that he/she realized the affective dimension of learning religion. Z9 contributed a personal touch, saying "When I studied at the religious studies department holding Kiai's hand, there was no explanation of spiritual vibration—how can AI provide that? Z1 recognizes the technological limitations: "The chatbot never cries when the story of the Prophet's hijrah is told, never hugs a sad child – even though it's an important part of moral education." Z8 was deeply concerned: "Religion deals with the heart, yet artificial intelligence only speaks in logic – if a child is having an experience of God, how will they feel that, if the teacher is machine without a soul? Z4 tell that see the psychological effect, "Children become skilled in memorization, but cold spiritually, none to hear stories of the prophet when they invited taklim assemblies as usual. Religious education, Z6 explained, is the transfer of love to Allah through human relationships – not just the transfer of data from a server to a mobile phone screen.

The deepest theological anxiety arises in the form of the taklif dilemma in the last days, where parents are overwhelmed with fear of accountability for sin in the hereafter if AI gives wrong guidance regarding the worship of children who are their shari'i responsibility. In the conception of fiqh, parents act as kafil who must ensure the validity of children's religious education, but the absence of accountability mechanisms for non-human entities creates a gap of accountability that threatens the safety of the family's afterlife. "I often wake up at night thinking: if a child's prayer is wrong because of the teachings of AI, who is responsible on the Day of Judgment? Me or the machine?" said Z7 who described the heavy psychological burden due to the ambiguity of theological responsibility. Z2 adds the dimension of fiqh: "In Islam, parents are obliged to ensure the validity of their children's worship, but what if the reference is a machine that cannot be held

accountable according to sharia?" Z10 articulates an eschatological concern: "I was afraid in the hereafter [they will] ask me: why do you pass your kids religious stuff onto something which can't be holding accountable?" Z3 recognized a moral paradox: "In this world, I'm pleased and it's easy for AIT. But in the hereafter, I'm terrified of not having someone to show as a witness that I've done my utmost to try and educate children properly." Z1 shows spiritual vulnerability: "How can I find tranquility now that one of my child's life choices is dependent on an algorithm that knows no sin and no reward? Z5 summarized the existential challenge: "We are torn between the demands of our present moment and the timeless obligation before God that cannot be overridden by technology's ease.

Thus, permanent ambivalence becomes a lingering psychological malady of Gen-Z parents who find themselves ultimately caught between the practical rationality which supervenes and governs machine-readiness to process access points circulating around updated input provided by data from beyond the Accord fields in book format and their actual awareness of theology pushing away at AI-ification barrelled as x-dots processed details used for bucket sorting. They recognize the reliance on chatbots as an adaptive response to geographic and sociological realities, yet they also lament the slow disfiguration of the most hallowed virtues of Islamic education, which are interrelational and metamorphic. "I know it's not theologically correct but there is no teacher in my village who can come every day, so AI is our savior in another risk of spiritual danger," said Z8, describing a structural dilemma that will prove to be easier written than resolved. Z4 introduces the social aspect: "All my neighbors are using AI, if I refuse to speak, then my child will lag behind – but in my heart I never feel calm because this is not how salaf should be taught. Z6 acknowledges the dependence on function: "I will open a chatbot to consult on religions, and every time I do so there is that little voice in my heart saying 'this is not how religious education should be'. A constant personal struggle for Z9, who says, "AI is very useful of course (I need it), but I miss the aura of taklim class – spiritual love and transfer of knowledge. And Z2 finishes the philosophical thought: "Religion is about the relationship with the Living One, but we are forced to mediate this through something spiritually dead—a paradox that endlessly continues."

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal the complex

dynamics of AI-based digital parental delegation in Islamic religious education among Gen-Z families in Indonesia, which is manifested through three interrelated dimensions: motivation, patterns, and theological dilemmas. Motivationally, parents turning to AI chatbots are driven by the need for instant responsiveness to children's spontaneous religious questions, the desire to present contextual analogies based on children's digital world, and the limitations of conceptual mastery of worship fiqh that makes AI a shield to avoid the recognition of ignorance. This motivation gives birth to a three-stage progressive pattern: exploratory-confirmatory (AI as a reconfirmed complement to kiai), digital routineization (integration of AI into daily rituals with shrinking supervision), to authoritative substitution (total delegation of complex theological questions to algorithms). However, this progression does not take place without deep inner conflict. Parents experience three fundamental theological dilemmas: the absence of scientific sanad in AI that violates the principle of transmission of Islamic knowledge, the absence of a spiritual dimension that hinders character transformation through example, and the latter-day taklif anxiety regarding the responsibility of sin for algorithmic guidance errors. These three dimensions form a central paradox: pragmatically rational technological dependence creates epistemological and spiritual rifts in the transmission of religious values, where the ease of access to information erodes the foundations of religious authority based on the genealogy of teachers and emotional closeness—the core of authentic Islamic pedagogy.

The results of the study have profound implications in rethinking the epistemic structure of Islamic pedagogy under digital ecosystem which is shifting from a traditional knowledge transmission rooted on sanad, teacher-student lineage to an algorithmic authority, devoid of spiritual dimension. It is not merely a new valuable medium of learning for this stage of digital delegation; but more than that, it indicates a paradigmatic crisis affecting us in the contemporary space of educational jurisprudence (fiqh tarbiyah), where the indocentric modalities are practiced through the *uswah hasanah* principles which lie at the heart of Islamic pedagogy have degenerated into an effective information transfer and contextualization, rather than spiritual transference (Sirait 2023; Lutfi & Prasetya, 2024). Theoretically, this expands the framework of the sociology of religion through what I call algorithmic religious authority, based on data objectivity and algorithmic speed to produce religious depth instead

of human *ijtihad* capacity (Al-Refai, 2020; Campbell, 2023).

Furthermore, the observer from exploratory-confirmatory to authoritative replacement uncovers normalisation mechanism that collapse traditional religious authority structuring through a process including commodification of religious knowledge into instant information (Hjarvard, 2008; Firmonasari et al., 2020); separating Islamic value from local culture and parental disintegration as the conveyor agent on the educational journey. This statement indicates how advanced such technologies have the potential to be, but at the same time occurs a foul: technology that seems like it should open borders for knowledge ultimately creates an abyss between religious knowing (*ma'rifah*) and spiritual experience (*dzauq*), where we re-think literally what "success" is in religious education – via achieving perfect texts or emotional transformation aligning learners with Godly values, respectively – an active phenomenon that machines cannot reproduce independently (Wibowo & Istiyani, 2021; Hamengkubuwono & Pratama, 2022).

The findings of this study support and at the same time expand on the findings of relevant previous studies, it also reveals new dimensions that have not yet been mapped. Pabbajah (2024) who identifies "digital religious outsourcing" among urban millennials is supported by the findings of authoritative substitution patterns in Gen-Z, but this study deepens by revealing the progression of three temporal stages—exploratory-confirmatory, digital routineization, and authoritative substitution—that were not observed in previous generations because Gen-Z views the physical-digital boundary as a continuous spectrum. Royhan & Haqiqiqi's (2025) study of AI's contradictory fatwas was confirmed, but this study adds a theological layer by exposing the uneasiness of the scientific sanad that is the foundation of Islamic epistemology, something that has escaped their technical analysis. Alkhouri (2025) which documents the decline in spiritual understanding due to digital learning is in line with the findings of spiritual dilemmas, but this study is enriched by the context of mountainous rural areas which actually exacerbates technological dependence due to limited access for religious teachers, a paradox not seen in urban areas. Garg (2024) who criticizes the illusion of AI intelligence in the religious domain is reinforced by the findings of the afterlife tactile dilemma that reveals the eschatological anxieties of Gen-Z parents. The novelty of this research lies in three things: (1) the exploration of the unique context of Gen-Z families

in marginal mountainous areas that experience dissonance between local religious conservatism and technological dependence; (2) the identification of three specific theological dilemmas (sanad, spiritual, taklif) that are the foundation of Islamic criticism of algorithmic authority; and (3) the disclosure of the mechanism of normalization of parental delegation that takes place progressively over a short period of time (6–8 weeks), indicating a previously undocumented rate of erosion of traditional religious authority.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

From these results, it can be said that Generation Z Indonesia must immediately implement the principle of "active supervision" by making AI also an initial tool that must first be consulted with religious teachers or parents before being executed, so as not to face fatal risks such as ignoring fatwas under certain conditions (traveling, illness), or irrelevant interpretations according to the local context. For accountability, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs and Minister of Primary and Secondary Education must immediately issue technical regulations in the form of fatwas to ensure compliance with Islamic law in religious matters, then develop AI applications with Muslim scholars and technology experts, and ensure that the AI algorithm is symbolized with clear Indonesian fiqh points in each output. In addition, the government also needs to disseminate specific ethical instructions, namely "guidelines for the use of AI in Children's Religious Education", to enforce the role of parents as the primary filter and that no major legal decisions can be handed over to machines, introduce digital religious literacy programs, for example, live training sessions for Gen-Z parents to critically accompany their children throughout the new developments in religious teachings.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on empirical evidence, the study argues that Gen-Z parents delegating their children Islamic religious education to AI does not merely represent a

progressive technological adjustment; rather it signals an impending epistemological crisis: in just 6–8 weeks without proper intervention through methods such as sanad (traditional chains of transmission), centuries of tradition is lost and supplanted by morally insignificant algorithms. Most disconcertingly, this erosion is sharpest in hill recent religious strongholds – a paradox where limited access to the flesh-and-blood teachers from one's faith spurs greater dependency on "fire brigade" AI. Still more impressive, Gen-Z parents submit consciously to three theological quandaries (sanad, spiritual, taklif) yet continue full delegation due to the pragmatics of rationalism: instant comfort conquers eschatological consequence. Here we discover a tragic paradox – technology that became a doorway to knowledge which instead trained generations of those who at creeds with total precision in terms amorphous to the spiritual heart where prayer becomes in and answer of movements algorithmic without solemnity and morality an accounting without transformation. The most terrifying is this process of normalization occurs without any considerable objection, due to AI being able to disguise as "neutral", when in fact data bias that it reproduce reality based on the Western context that actually contradictory toufiq Indonesia. The core theme of many fatwa is how to be good, and this paper presented a most uncomfortable conclusion: We are currently in the throes of gestating the first generation in Islamic history who gets their fatwas from those who have neither sanad nor qalbu and apocalyptic accountability; A high-risk social experiment whose price we will only discover once these children become adults and attain reproductive agency without sound spiritual grounding.

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