Integrating Mixed Methods Paradigms for Research Gap Identification in Islamic Education Research

Yudi Gucandra[1], Zulfani Sesmiarni[1]

[1]Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia

✉ yudigucandra@uinbukittinggi.ac.id *

Abstract

The phenomenon of weak problem identification and research gap analysis in Islamic Education studies reflects a serious epistemological challenge within the academic environment. Many student and faculty research projects remain repetitive and lack strong theoretical and empirical grounding. This article aims to examine the epistemological differences between quantitative and qualitative paradigms in the process of identifying research gaps and to integrate both within the methodology of Islamic Education research. The study employs a qualitative method using a conceptual Systematic Literature Review (SLR) by reviewing scientific articles indexed in Scopus and SINTA from 2020 to 2025. The data were analyzed through narrative and comparative synthesis focusing on ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions. The findings indicate that the quantitative paradigm is oriented toward theoretical verification (gap of extension and conflict), whereas the qualitative paradigm emphasizes meaning exploration (gap of void and emergent meaning). The integration of both paradigms produces the Epistemological Gap Framework (EGF), a conceptual model that combines the logic of verification and exploration in formulating research gaps in Islamic Education. This model is expected to strengthen methodological rigor, enhance epistemological awareness, and enrich the scholarly contribution to the development of Islamic Education as a scientific discipline.

INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of Islamic Religious Education functions as a scientific medium for developing theory, strengthening educational practice, and addressing the spiritual challenges of modern human life in the context of a dynamic global society. Within the framework of Islamic epistemology, scientific activity should be grounded in an integrative awareness of revelation, reason, and empirical reality. As emphasized by Mahmudin et al (2021) and Al-Faruqi (1998), knowledge must be rooted in the principle of monotheism as the foundation of the unity of knowledge. Therefore, research in Islamic Religious Education should not merely focus on technical or instructional aspects but must be anchored in authentic, contextual, and meaningful scientific problems that contribute to the development of Islamic values within education. Ideally, researchers in Islamic Religious Education are able to

identify scientific gaps in an epistemological manner by linking empirical evidence, educational theory, and normative Islamic principles. This process requires deep reflective and analytical capacity so that research is not merely descriptive but also reflective and transformative. As stated by Roni et al (2020), meaningful research always begins with a clear and testable mapping of conceptual gaps. Similar findings are reinforced by Liu et al (2023) who highlight the importance of epistemological awareness in building an integration of knowledge, faith, and action within Islamic education research.

An in-depth review of various scientific publications in Islamic higher education institutions shows that most research in the field of Islamic Religious Education is still dominated by repetitive and procedural work patterns, with a tendency to replicate conventional research designs without conducting epistemological analysis of the underlying knowledge gap. In many cases, research is directed mainly toward testing the effectiveness of certain learning models, approaches, or media, while the conceptual aspects and theoretical foundations are often shallow and not supported by a well-established scientific framework. As noted by Monica & Nurul (2024), there is a widespread pattern of replication without reflection among researchers in Islamic Religious Education.

This condition is further reinforced by findings indicating that most research in faculties of education remains focused on examining the influence of independent variables on learning outcomes without formulating explicit knowledge gaps. Sugawara & Nikaido (2014) similarly highlight the weak conceptual capacity of students in deriving research problems from theoretical studies. As a consequence of this technocratic orientation, the contribution of Islamic Religious Education research to the development of Islamic educational theory becomes limited and remains predominantly descriptive rather than analytical, demonstrating a crisis of epistemological awareness that hinders the emergence of methodological innovation and the construction of scientific knowledge rooted in Islamic values.

Structural conditions within Islamic higher education institutions have had a significant impact on the quality of scientific development and the research capacity of lecturers and students. Research activity is often treated merely as an administrative requirement rather than as a space for scientific dialectics aimed at uncovering meaning and formulating solutions to socio-religious problems. This phenomenon reflects a shift in academic orientation from the pursuit of scientific truth toward the fulfillment of bureaucratic targets, which, according to Zuhri (2023) has led to a crisis of epistemological awareness among researchers in Islamic Religious Education.

In a similar context, there has emerged a crisis of originality, indicated by the tendency of academics to replicate previous studies without offering substantial theoretical or methodological advancements. S & Tobroni (2024) also highlight the weak reflective ability in designing theoretical frameworks rooted in Islamic values and the social realities of learners. To overcome these challenges, an integrative methodological approach is needed one that does not only emphasize the verificative aspects of the quantitative paradigm but also accommodates the exploration of meaning emphasized in the qualitative paradigm. Through this integrative approach, the research paradigm in Islamic Religious Education can become more epistemological, contributive, and objective in bridging the empirical and spiritual dimensions of knowledge.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method with a conceptual Systematic Literature Review approach, which is designed not merely to inventory previous research findings but to trace the epistemological logic underlying the development

of methodology in Islamic Religious Education and to synthesize these findings into a new conceptual model with theoretical depth and practical relevance (Albshkar et al., 2025; Muthatahirin et al., 2025). This approach is chosen because the study focuses on epistemological reconstruction rather than empirical hypothesis testing, specifically on how researchers in Islamic Religious Education identify research gaps as the basis for scientific development, as discussed by (Snyder, 2019). In the current context, the procedures for the Systematic Literature Review are developed according to the updated Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses 2023 guidelines formulated by Campbell et al (2023), which emphasize transparency and traceability in the process of literature selection.

The design of this study adapts the conceptual Systematic Literature Review framework that integrates theoretical synthesis with epistemological reflection to generate a comprehensive analytical structure (Akyuni et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025). The results of this process are used to construct the Epistemological Gap Framework as a conceptual device that bridges the verification-oriented quantitative paradigm and the exploration-oriented qualitative paradigm in Islamic Religious Education research through three systematic stages adapted from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses 2023 guidelines, namely literature identification, literature selection, and assessment of eligibility and data extraction based on theoretical quality and contextual relevance, as suggested by (Engkizar et al., 2025; Nathie et al., 2024).

The data analysis in this study applies a narrative and comparative synthesis approach, which is methodologically selected to trace the construction of knowledge and identify epistemological patterns underlying the differences between research paradigms in Islamic Religious Education. Through narrative synthesis, the researcher interprets how each paradigm understands and frames research gaps within the context of Islamic education, referring to the analytical framework of Engkizar et al (2025); Snyder (2019), which emphasizes the importance of conceptual narrative in establishing theoretical coherence, and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses 2023 guidelines refined by Campbell et al (2023) to ensure transparency and systematic analysis. Meanwhile, comparative synthesis is used to identify relationships and epistemological differences between the verification-oriented quantitative paradigm and the exploration-oriented qualitative paradigm.

The analytical process is conducted through three main stages: conceptual abstraction, namely extracting the core ideas from each piece of literature; thematic categorization, which groups similar epistemological issues; and integrative synthesis, which combines the findings into a unified conceptual framework. The validity of the study is maintained through source triangulation strategies as recommended by (Valtakoski, 2024), a conceptual audit trail as described by Gierus et al (2025), and meta-theoretical reflection according to (Grass, 2024) to ensure traceability and objectivity of interpretation. Through this rigorous analytical mechanism, the conceptual model known as the Epistemological Gap Framework is produced. This model illustrates the relationship between paradigms, forms of research gaps, and strategies for identifying them, and it affirms that research gaps in Islamic Religious Education are not only empirical but also epistemological, and therefore must be understood as a dynamic dialogue between data, theory, and Islamic values that underpin the scientific reasoning of Islamic education (Eltoukhi et al., 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The understanding of research gaps in the study of Islamic Religious Education is generally confined to a narrow interpretation that equates research gaps merely with the absence of empirical data or variables that have not yet been tested,

while the epistemological and conceptual dimensions which should serve as the basis for formulating scientific questions are often overlooked. As emphasized by Salsabilah et al (2025) , many studies in Islamic Religious Education continue to use quantitative instruments to measure learning effectiveness but fail to demonstrate how the theories they employ reveal genuine gaps in knowledge that need to be scientifically explained. This pattern confirms the findings of Wald et al (2024), who argues that most researchers interpret research gaps only as "gaps of data," rather than as "gaps of meaning" or "gaps of theory," which are fundamentally more critical for the construction of knowledge.

As a result of this bias, research in Islamic Religious Education tends to be descriptive, repeating previous patterns without strong conceptual differentiation, thereby limiting its originality and theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic education as an academic discipline. This also indicates that the methodological pattern of research in Islamic Religious Education continues to replicate traditional frameworks without meaningful exploration of new paradigms that are more reflective, interdisciplinary, and grounded in dynamic Islamic epistemology (Az-Zahra et al., 2025; Kalsum et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025).

A review of scientific publications from 2020 to 2025 shows that the quantitative paradigm remains the mainstream approach in research on Islamic Religious Education. However, this dominance is often not accompanied by critical reflection on the epistemological framework underlying the relationships among the measured variables. Afriana et al (2022) found that most studies focus on testing causal relationships without examining the theoretical rationale behind the selection of variables. Consequently, the process of identifying research gaps tends to be reduced to a simple statement that "variable X has not been studied in relation to variable Y," instead of questioning why variable X is philosophically significant in the context of Islamic education or how existing theories remain insufficient to explain Islamic educational realities. In this regard, Nurhidayah & Usiono (2024) note that the use of mixed methods approaches in Islamic Religious Education research is still very limited, even though such approaches possess significant potential to uncover religious and social meanings that cannot be captured by numerical data alone. Similarly, Salsabilah et al (2025) assert that the lack of epistemological reflection constitutes one of the most significant methodological gaps in Islamic Religious Education, leading to fragmented knowledge development without a strong and integrative conceptual foundation.

A systematic review of recent literature reveals that methodological gaps in Islamic Religious Education research do not solely arise from a lack of research topics but also from the limited diversity of research designs. Most studies still rely on cross-sectional designs with one-time survey approaches that are insufficient to capture the contextual and continuous dynamics of Islamic educational processes. Zuhri (2023) notes that only a few studies employ longitudinal designs, field experiments, or in-depth qualitative studies capable of portraying changes in students' religious behavior in a temporal and holistic manner. In the same context, Dluha et al (2024) highlights a "gap of void" in the development of Islamic Religious Education instructional materials, as research focusing on the construction of religious meaning in the digital era remains scarce and often stops at a descriptive level, without epistemological exploration of how learners actively construct their religious understanding.

These findings are reinforced by Alamin (2023), , who emphasizes that the integration between educational technology and methodological approaches in Islamic Religious Education remains separated and is not yet connected through a comprehensive conceptual framework. Therefore, research gaps in Islamic Religious Education are not only related to "what has not been studied" but also to "how

research is conducted," including the extent to which the methodology used can represent the epistemological complexity and spirituality of Islamic education (Htay et al., 2025; Jaafar et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2025).

From the perspective of research epistemology, the findings indicate that most studies in Islamic Religious Education have not been able to align the methodological paradigm employed with the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying it, resulting in a disconnection between methodological choices and the philosophical foundations of scientific inquiry. This condition creates a conceptual research gap in which researchers implicitly adopt positivistic or interpretivistic frameworks without critically reflecting on their compatibility with Islamic values. For instance, Purnama et al (2024) highlight that many quantitative studies adopt positivistic realist assumptions that position truth exclusively in empirical data, without considering the moral and spiritual dimensions of learners, which constitute the essence of Islamic education.

On the other hand, qualitative studies often remain at the level of describing meaning without reconnecting it to broader theories of Islamic education or formulating new integrative conceptual constructions. This situation demonstrates that research gaps in Islamic Religious Education are not only methodological but also epistemological, concerning the ways knowledge is constructed, validated, and understood within the framework of Islamic scholarship. More broadly, Soicher et al (2024) emphasize that mixed methods designs with explicit epistemological grounding are essential for connecting empirical and reflective logics in building an integrated educational science based on values.

The application of mixed methods or combined quantitative and qualitative approaches in Islamic Religious Education research essentially presents significant potential for addressing research gaps resulting from the dichotomy between data verification and meaning exploration. However, its implementation in practice remains far from optimal. A comparative study by Suárez-Orozco (2019) demonstrates that integrating qualitative approaches into large-scale quantitative studies enriches explanations of research gaps by enabling researchers to understand contextual dimensions behind numerical data.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, the stages of research from instrument selection to data analysis and interpretation are often carried out without reference to epistemologically coherent mixed methods logic, resulting in incomplete synthesis between empirical data and Islamic values. This phenomenon indicates an "implementation gap," referring to the suboptimal use of research designs capable of capturing the complexity of Islamic education in a holistic, integrative, and reflective manner. Consistent with this, Wald et al (2024) asserts that research quality is not determined solely by methodological choices but also by the researcher's ability to articulate a clear scientific justification or gap statement, an aspect that remains weak in many publications in Islamic Religious Education and requires strengthening to produce meaningful theoretical contributions.

A systematic review of recent literature further shows that in the context of the digital transformation of Islamic Religious Education, significant research gaps remain concerning the use of educational technology without adequate epistemological and axiological examination. Abubakari (2024) asserts that the use of digital technology in Islamic education is often seen merely instrumentally as a medium for delivering information, without deeper investigation into the spiritual meaning, ethical interaction, and value construction that emerge within the digital learning space. This illustrates that research gaps in Islamic Religious Education are also contextual, relating to social changes and technological advancements that have not been adequately addressed through adaptive and value-oriented methodological designs.

In another study, Salsabilah et al (2025) identify that aspects of quality management and school leadership in the digital era remain insufficiently explored, despite their strategic role in strengthening technology-based Islamic education. Therefore, research in Islamic Religious Education that aims for high scientific contribution must broaden its perspective, not only evaluating the effectiveness of digital media but also examining how technological and social transformations challenge, reshape, and enrich research methodologies in modern Islamic education.

An analysis of various publications shows that research gaps in Islamic Religious Education arise not only from methodological or epistemological limitations but also from constraints related to research populations and settings, indicating the presence of contextual and demographic research gaps. Many studies rarely focus on learners from science, technology, or vocational backgrounds, even though their epistemic and spiritual needs differ from those of students in religious studies. Purnama et al (2024) found that students in science and technology fields are often marginalized in Islamic Religious Education research, leading to the loss of essential interdisciplinary dimensions within Islamic educational approaches.

Globally, Islamic Religious Education literature shows similar trends, where research focusing on Islamic boarding schools, rural madrasahs, or developing countries remains limited in both quantity and analytical depth. Salsabilah et al (2025) highlight that international research in Islamic Religious Education is still concentrated in specific regions and narrow themes, creating geographical and thematic gaps that hinder the construction of universal Islamic education theories. Thus, Islamic Religious Education research that aims for significant academic contribution must adopt more inclusive frameworks in terms of population, culture, and social context, so that research findings reflect the diversity of Islamic experiences and enrich global scholarship (Fitri et al., 2025; Johar et al., 2024; Nuha et al., 2024).

The synthesis of literature findings indicates that the "gap of conflict" between general educational theory and the practice of Islamic Religious Education remains a significant epistemological issue, particularly when Western learning theories are applied in Islamic institutions without contextual adaptation to Islamic values, resulting in implementation that is not always effective in shaping students' religious character. For example, the application of general motivation theories in Islamic Religious Education frequently ignores spiritual and transcendental orientations that form the foundation of religious learning, thereby diminishing their explanatory relevance. Thematic analysis of several publications suggests that this gap between universal theory and Islamic practice inhibits the development of authentic theoretical contributions in Islamic Religious Education because researchers tend to import concepts without epistemic reconstruction. In a more contemporary context, Mahrani et al (2022) finds that the digital transformation of Islamic Religious Education has created new forms of "gaps of conflict," rooted in tensions between spiritual values and technological logic, as digitalization processes are not yet accompanied by adequate value frameworks. Thus, the development of research models in Islamic Religious Education must aim at approaches capable of reconciling conflicts between theory, Islamic values, and empirical contexts so that research gaps can be addressed meaningfully through epistemically balanced conceptual and methodological integration.

The overall synthesis of literature underlines the urgency of developing a conceptual framework that can guide researchers in Islamic Religious Education in formulating research gaps systematically and on a strong epistemological foundation. The Epistemological Gap Framework is proposed as a conceptual instrument that integrates four key dimensions of research data, meaning, method, and context so that researchers can identify knowledge gaps not only from empirical aspects but also

from the underlying structures of meaning and epistemological assumptions. Although this model has not been extensively tested empirically in the field of Islamic Religious Education, the synthesis of literature shows strong potential for strengthening methodological rigor, as demonstrated by Mathews et al (2025), who emphasize the importance of epistemological explicitness in educational research designs. Meanwhile, the study of Gierus et al (2025) shows that improvements in methodological quality correlate with increased theoretical contributions, indicating that research in Islamic Religious Education must adopt more reflective and conceptually robust designs. Therefore, studies that identify research gaps conceptually and methodologically have significant potential to broaden contributions not only to Islamic education theory but also to educational methodology more broadly.

The findings of this study indicate that the fundamental problem in the development of research in Islamic Religious Education does not lie in the limitation of topics, but rather in epistemological weaknesses in identifying the scientific gaps that form the basis of research originality. Most studies remain oriented toward variable testing and the use of instruments without being preceded by a deep conceptual reflection on the nature of knowledge and the theoretical assumptions being employed. This view aligns with the argument of Wald et al (2024), who asserts that every research study must have an explicit scientific justification so that its novelty and theoretical relevance can be scientifically accounted for. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, the need for such justification requires a balance between values derived from Islamic transcendental principles and empirical rationality generated from scientific observation. As emphasized by (Mahmudin et al (2021) in *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* and Al-Faruqi (1998) in *Al-Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*, Islamic epistemology demands an integration of faith, reason, and experience as a unified methodological structure that cannot be separated. Therefore, research in Islamic Religious Education that follows technical procedures without epistemological awareness risks producing data that are statistically valid but philosophically shallow, resulting in limited contributions to the development of holistic Islamic educational theory.

The tendency of research in Islamic Religious Education to imitate the methodological patterns of general education without adequate epistemological adaptation has generated an epistemological misfit, namely a mismatch between the theoretical frameworks adopted and the Islamic value system that underpins the field of study. This phenomenon shows that many researchers remain trapped in the mechanistic use of the positivistic paradigm without considering the dimensions of spirituality and morality that form the core of Islamic epistemology. Soicher et al (2024) emphasize that the effectiveness of modern educational methodology depends heavily on the compatibility of scientific paradigms with the underlying social context and values, meaning that the transfer of paradigms without philosophical reinterpretation risks producing distorted meanings.

In this context, (Purnama et al (2024) demonstrate that effective research designs in Islamic Religious Education must explicitly integrate spiritual, moral, and socio-religious orientations to ensure that the identified scientific gaps are truly significant from an epistemological perspective. Thus, the originality of research in Islamic Religious Education is not measured by the extent to which it imitates Western methodological models, but by its ability to reinterpret those paradigms within the framework of Islamic values that are both living and contextual.

From a research methodology perspective, the Epistemological Gap Framework introduced in this study represents an effort to achieve epistemic reconciliation between the verification-oriented quantitative paradigm and the exploration-oriented qualitative paradigm. This framework is designed to bridge the

dichotomy between evidence-based reasoning and meaning-based inquiry, two major streams in religious social research that often operate in isolation. Campbell et al (2023) emphasize the importance of integrating the logic of "evidence and meaning" in systematic reviews so that research findings are not only empirically valid but also conceptually and contextually relevant. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, the application of the Epistemological Gap Framework enables researchers to understand that every research gap should be examined through two epistemic pathways: the lack of measurable empirical evidence and the limited depth of understanding of religious meaning. In this way, research in Islamic Religious Education does not stop at the level of data verification but evolves toward conceptual reflection that connects data, values, and theory, thereby strengthening its scientific contribution and theoretical significance.

A critical analysis of recent literature shows that the dominance of the quantitative paradigm in research within Islamic academic environments remains very strong, even though this approach is often not fully aligned with the characteristics of religious education, which emphasizes values, meaning, and spiritual context. Afriana et al (2022) found that many studies in Islamic Religious Education adopt quantitative methodologies mechanically without questioning their epistemological suitability for the normative and reflective nature of religious knowledge. This condition generates a paradox between the validity of empirical data and the depth of religious meaning, as the orientation toward measurement often neglects the transcendental aspects of learners as subjects of religious education. Conversely, the qualitative approach offers opportunities to explore spiritual and symbolic experiences within religious learning processes, as illustrated by Erciyes (2020) through his study on experiential-based social education. Thus, the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches becomes an urgent epistemological necessity so that research in Islamic Religious Education does not merely test theories but is also able to interpret values, contexts, and meanings underlying religious phenomena comprehensively.

In the practical field of Islamic education, the emergence of the gap of conflict is often caused by the application of secular educational theories without adequate value adaptation to Islamic principles, resulting in dissonance between theoretical assumptions and the religious realities of learners (Fernando et al., 2022). Costa (2024) shows that many modern learning theories fail to explain religious behavior and spiritual motivation because they are rooted in secular and individualistic conceptions of human nature. In this context, researchers in Islamic Religious Education are required not merely to adopt global theories textually, but to reinterpret them through Islamic epistemological frameworks so that research outcomes possess deeper theological, sociological, and pedagogical relevance. This process aligns with the Epistemological Gap Framework, which emphasizes the importance of recontextualization that is, adjusting universal theories to the value and cultural contexts of Islam. (Liu et al (2023) assert that such recontextualized approaches not only fill scientific gaps but also strengthen the legitimacy of Islamic knowledge as an independent epistemic system responsive to contemporary dynamics.

The findings regarding the gap of void in research on Islamic Religious Education reveal that the spiritual and religious experiences of learners and educators have not yet been sufficiently explored either methodologically or epistemologically. Dluha et al (2024) highlights the absence of phenomenological studies capable of uncovering the depth of inner experiences within religious learning processes, even though this dimension is essential to the integrity of Islamic education. Within the framework of Islamic epistemology, as emphasized earlier by Al-Faruqi, spiritual experience is not merely a subjective phenomenon but a legitimate source of

knowledge when processed through rational reflection and guided by divine revelation (Engkizar et al., 2023). The absence of research in this area has caused many studies in Islamic Religious Education to stop at the level of external behavior without understanding the spiritual meaning underlying it. Therefore, the development of qualitative methodologies grounded in Islamic values becomes crucial to address gaps of meaning and gaps of theory, as well as to pave the way for constructing new theories on spiritual education that integrate empirical, reflective, and transcendental dimensions.

Further conceptual discussion indicates that the gap of extension in research on Islamic Religious Education can be optimized through the implementation of deliberately designed and epistemologically grounded mixed-methods approaches rather than merely technical ones. This approach allows for the expansion of research dimensions not only in terms of context or population but also in enhancing theoretical understanding of the relationships between religious experience, spiritual meaning, and the religious behavior of learners. Gierus et al (2025) emphasizes that combining quantitative and qualitative methods has the potential to increase the validity of findings and broaden scientific contributions by linking numerical data with deeper interpretations of meaning. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this approach provides researchers the opportunity to connect the measurement of students' religious perceptions with narrative analyses of how they interpret religiosity in their daily lives. Therefore, the gap of extension should not be understood merely as an effort to broaden the research context, but as an epistemological strategy to deepen theoretical understanding, reinforce contextual relevance, and foster synthesis between empirical data and Islamic values that form the core of religious education.

The development of digitalization in Islamic education has generated new dimensions of research gaps, especially related to the epistemological reconstruction of the role of technology in religious learning processes. Abubakari (2024) asserts that the digital competence of Islamic education teachers has not yet been conceptually and philosophically examined, even though digital transformation has changed the structure of religious authority and the patterns of interaction between teachers and learners in virtual learning spaces. The absence of epistemological analysis has caused the use of digital technology to become trapped in purely instrumental functions rather than serving as a means of strengthening spirituality. Alamin (2023) highlights that studies attempting to integrate Islamic epistemology with digital technology remain very limited, thereby requiring cross-paradigmatic approaches capable of bridging scientific logic with transcendental values. Such integration is essential to ensure that technology does not function as an agent of secularization but as a medium for reinforcing spiritual, moral, and humanistic values within modern Islamic education. Thus, addressing research gaps in the digital era is not merely about technological adaptation but involves an epistemic transformation in how Islam understands, utilizes, and directs technology for meaningful educational purposes.

Epistemologically, the integration of quantitative and qualitative paradigms in research on Islamic Religious Education represents an attempt to build ontological balance, namely a harmonious relationship between the empirical dimension as a source of data and the spiritual dimension as a source of meaning. This approach does not merely combine two analytical methods but synthesizes two modes of thinking verification and reflection which together generate comprehensive and objective knowledge. In the updated model of integrated knowledge synthesis, Campbell et al (2023) emphasize that effective knowledge synthesis not only validates existing theories but also creates space for the emergence of new meanings through dialogue between data, values, and context. By applying the Epistemological Gap

Framework, researchers in Islamic Religious Education can interpret research gaps more reflectively, not only based on the absence of empirical evidence but also grounded in the moral, social, and spiritual needs of contemporary Muslim communities. This approach positions research in Islamic Religious Education not merely as an instrument of theory testing but as a vehicle for developing inclusive, contextual, and theologically meaningful knowledge for strengthening Islamic scholarly traditions.

This study affirms that improving the quality of research in Islamic Religious Education requires the development of deep epistemological awareness among researchers, because the quality of knowledge is determined not only by methodological accuracy but also by philosophical awareness of the origins and purposes of knowledge. Research that merely reproduces Western paradigms without epistemic reflection risks perpetuating the colonial bias of knowledge, namely a dominance of thinking that ignores Islamic values and worldview. Grass (2024) emphasizes that such reproduction of knowledge bias creates epistemic asymmetry, in which non-Western intellectual traditions are continually positioned as objects rather than subjects of theory production. Therefore, Islamic higher education institutions must reformulate research methodology curricula by emphasizing the importance of identifying research gaps based on Islamic values, epistemological reflection, and the integration of complementary scientific paradigms that unite rationality and spirituality. Through these efforts, research in Islamic Religious Education will not merely function as a procedural academic activity but will evolve into a model of knowledge development that is epistemically just, morally reflective, and transformative for the advancement of modern Islamic scholarship.

Table 1. Epistemological synthesis of quantitative and qualitative paradigms in identifying research gaps in Islamic religious education

Dimension of Analysis	Quantitative Paradigm (Verificative)	Qualitative Paradigm (Explorative)	Integration within the Epistemological Gap Framework
Ontological Assumptions	Reality is objective, measurable, and generalizable	Reality is subjective, contextual, and multidimensional	Reality is understood as an integration of empirical facts and spiritual meaning
Epistemological Assumptions	Knowledge is obtained through observation and data verification	Knowledge emerges through the interpretation of meaning and experience	Knowledge is valid when it combines empirical evidence with value-based reflection (Al-Faruqi, 1982).
Research Purpose	To test theories and examine relationships among variables	To discover meaning and understand religious experience	To synthesize data and meaning to generate theory grounded in Islamic values
Types of Research Gaps	Gap of extension dan gap of conflict (Costa, 2024)	Gap of void dan gap of meaning (Dluha, 2024)	Epistemological gap connecting the absence of evidence and the absence of meaning.
Analytical Approach	Deductive and statistical	Inductive and narrative	Dialectical: integrating evidence and meaning (Tricco et al., 2023)
Main Strengths	High validity and generalizability	Depth of meaning and contextual sensitivity	Ontological balance between empirical data and spiritual values
Contributions to Islamic Religious Education	Measuring the effectiveness of religious education in a structured manner	Understanding learners' spirituality and morality	Producing Islamic educational theory that is both empirical and reflective

Table 2. Research directions in Islamic religious education based on the epistemological gap framework

Type of Research Gap	Focus of Study in Islamic Religious Education	Recommended Approach	Epistemological Implications
Gap of Conflict	Adaptation of Western theories within Islamic contexts	Recontextualization of values and theories (Ramadhan et al., 2025)	Preventing secular bias in religious education
Gap of Void	Absence of studies on spirituality	Phenomenological studies grounded in Islamic values (Dluha et al., 2024)	Reaffirming spirituality as a source of knowledge
Gap of Extension	Limitations in research context and design	Reflective mixed-methods design (Gierus et al., 2025)	Integrating empirical data with religious meaning
Gap of Digital Epistemology	Use of digital technology without value-based reflection.	Epistemological inquiry on digital religiosity (Abubakari et al., 2024; Muhammad et al., 2024)	Integrating technology with Islamic spirituality

The epistemological synthesis presented in the two tables emphasizes that the development of research in Islamic Religious Education requires a more structured, systematic, and value-based methodological orientation. Each type of research gap whether related to theoretical conflicts, the absence of spiritual dimensions, limitations in research context, or challenges in digital epistemology demonstrates the need for a scientific approach that is responsive to the dynamics of Islamic scholarship and contemporary social change. Through this mapping, researchers gain clearer guidance in designing studies that are not only methodologically rigorous but also philosophically and contextually relevant. Therefore, these tables serve as an operational guide for researchers to develop research designs that are critical, reflective, and aligned with the epistemological needs of Islamic Religious Education today.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the successful identification of research gaps in Islamic Religious Education is strongly determined by the epistemological objectivity of researchers in understanding the nature of knowledge and scientific methodology. Based on the findings of a conceptual Systematic Literature Review, it was discovered that the majority of studies in Islamic Religious Education remain trapped within a quantitative paradigm that emphasizes data verification, while the dimensions of meaning, values, and philosophical reflection have not been fully explored. The qualitative paradigm, which is oriented toward the exploration of meaning, offers an important pathway for strengthening spiritual and social values within the context of research in Islamic Religious Education.

Through the integration of both paradigms, the Epistemological Gap Framework is introduced as a conceptual effort to bridge empirical and reflective logics. This framework guides researchers to identify research gaps not only in terms of the absence of empirical evidence (void of data) but also the absence of meaning (void of meaning). With this approach, research in Islamic Religious Education can provide a more significant contribution to the development of Islamic educational theory and value-based educational practices. Practically, the Epistemological Gap Framework encourages the emergence of studies in Islamic Religious Education that are more innovative, contextual, and epistemically objective.

REFERENCES

Abubakari, M. (2024). The digital frontier within Islamic education: research gaps overview in digital competence. *Journal of Computing Research and Innovation*, *9*(2), 317–331. https://doi.org/10.24191/jcrinn.v9i2.435

Abubakari, M. S., Zakaria, G. A. N., & Musa, J. (2024). Perceived compatibility and students' intention to adopt digital technologies in Islamic education institutions. *Cogent Education*, *11*(1), 2430869. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2430869

Afriana, S., Rahmaniar, E., & Shaleh, S. (2022). Concept of Quantitative Research Methodology and Its Implications on Methods in Islamic Education. *IJECA (International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application)*, *5*(2), 133. https://doi.org/10.31764/ijeca.v5i2.8973

Akyuni, Q., Engkizar, E., Alhadi, M., Syamer, S., Witri, N., Khairiyah, K., & Mulyawati, H. (2025). Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards Program: Chances and Challenges. *Journal of International Affairs and Students Mobility*, *1*(1), 41–56. https://doi.org/https://jiasmy.intischolar.id/index.php/jiasmy/article/view/4

Al-Faruqi, I. R. (1998). *Tauhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*. International Institute of Islamic Thought. https://lib.ui.ac.id/detail?id=20128569

Alamin, Z. (2023). Peningkatan Pendidikan Islam melalui Pemanfaatan Platform Edukasi Berbasis Kecerdasan Buatan. *KREATIF: Jurnal Studi Pemikiran Pendidikan Agama Islam*, *5*(3), 14–22. https://doi.org/10.52266/kreatif.v21i1.1353

Albshkar, H. A., Alouzi, K. M., Numan, M., Anuar, K. A. B. A., & Domdom, C. B. (2025). Five Activities to Enhance Spiritual and Emotional Intelligence in International Students. *Journal of International Affairs and Students Mobility*, *1*(1), 29–40. https://doi.org/https://jiasmy.intischolar.id/index.php/jiasmy/article/view/3

Az-Zahra, D. W., Ediz, M. H., Nafian, Z. I., & Metriadi, M. (2025). Aberrant Behavior of Widows in Muslim Societies. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Thought and Research*, *1*(2), 55–65. https://mujoter.intischolar.id/index.php/mujoter/article/view/15%0Ahttps://mujoter.intischolar.id/index.php/mujoter/article/download/15/12

Campbell, F., Tricco, A. C., Munn, Z., Pollock, D., Saran, A., Sutton, A., White, H., & Khalil, H. (2023). Mapping reviews, scoping reviews, and evidence and gap maps (EGMs): the same but different— the "Big Picture" review family. *Systematic Reviews*, *12*(1), 2178. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-023-02178-5

Costa, J. (2024). Mixed Methods in Educational Large-Scale Studies: Integrating Qualitative Perspectives into Secondary Data Analysis. *Education Sciences*, *14*(12), 1347. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14121347

Dluha, A. Y. S., Masithoh, A. D., & Rizqiyah, A. (2024). Teaching Materials Development in the Scope of Islamic Education Research in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, *12*(1), 127. https://doi.org/10.36667/jppi.v12i1.1797

Eltoukhi, A. M. M., Burhanuddin, B., & Kohhar, W. W. A. (2025). Challenges Faced by Tahfizh Teachers in Teaching the Quran in Muslim-Majority Countries: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Quranic Teaching and Learning*, *1*(3), 108–124. https://joqer.intischolar.id/index.php/joqer/article/view/13

Engkizar, E., Jaafar, A., Masuwd, M. A., Rahman, I., Datres, D., Taufan, M., Akmal, F., Dasrizal, D., Oktavia, G., Yusrial, Y., & Febriani, A. (2025). Challenges and Steps in Living Quran and Hadith Research: An Introduction. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research of Higher Education (IJMURHICA*, *8*(3), 426–435. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24036/ijmurhica.v8i3.396

Engkizar, E, Jaafar, A., Masuwd, M. A., Rahman, I., Datres, D., Taufan, M., Akmal, F., Dasrizal, D., Oktavia, G., Yusrial, Y., & Febriani, A. (2025). Challenges and Steps in Living Quran and Hadith Research: An Introduction. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research of Higher Education (IJMURHICA*, 8*(3), 426–435. https://doi.org/10.24036/ijmurhica.v8i3.396

Engkizar, Engkizar, Jaafar, A., Taufan, M., Rahman, I., Oktavia, G., & Guspita, R. (2023). Quran Teacher: Future Profession or Devotion to the Ummah? *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research of Higher Education (IJMURHICA)*, 6*(4), 196–210. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24036/ijmurhica.v6i4.321

Erciyes, E. (2020). Paradigms of Inquiry in the Qualitative Research. *European Scientific Journal ESJ*, 16*(7), 181–200. https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2020.v16n7p181

Fernando, R., Hasanuddin, T., Rangga, K. K., & Utama, D. D. P. (2022). Professional Mosque Management Model Based on Religious and Academic Activities in the Community. *Khalifa: Journal of Islamic Education*, 6*(2), 196. https://doi.org/10.24036/kjie.v6i2.275

Fitri, R., Asril, Z., Sabri, A., Remiswal, R., Firdaus, F., & Zalnur, M. (2025). Implementation of Microteaching Based on Self-Directed Learning. *International Journal of Islamic Studies Higher Education*, 4*(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24036/insight.v4i1.226

Gierus, B., Du, T., Maduforo, A. N., Gilbert, B., & Koh, K. (2025). Prevalence and Quality of Mixed Methods Research in Educational Subdisciplines: A Systematic Review. *SAGE Open*, 15*(2), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251335171

Grass, K. (2024). The Three Logics of Qualitative Research: Epistemology, Ontology, and Methodology in Political Science. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, 8*(1), 42–56. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/14083

Htay, S. S., Po, E. T. H., & Kaewkanlaya, P. (2025). Building Student Character through Worship in Elementary Schools. *Muaddib: Journal of Islamic Teaching and Learning*, 1*(2), 55–63. https://doi.org/https://muaddib.intischolar.id/index.php/muaddib/article/view/11

Jaafar, A., Kamaruzaman, N. R., & Idris, M. (2025). The Concept and Practice of Islamic Education in Realizing Peace in Society. *Muaddib: Journal of Islamic Teaching and Learning*, 1*(2), 24–35. https://doi.org/https://muaddib.intischolar.id/index.php/muaddib/article/view/10

Johar, R. D. P., Yulisa, I., & Oktaminal, F. P. (2024). Criteria for Selecting a Life Partner among Muslim Adolescents : A Mixed Methods Analysis. *International Journal of Islamic Studies Higher Education*, 3*(2), 81–95. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24036/insight.v3i1.174

Kalsum, U., Datres, D., Sulastri, W., & Burhanuddin, . B. (2025). The Concept and Practice of Jihad in Islam. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Thought and Research*, 1*(2), 13–22. https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.2132

Liu, X., Lin, R., Liu, Y., & CAI, X. (2023). Improved Pt Dispersion by Modified Carbon Support with Low Surface Oxygen Content and Extra Mesopores. In *Journal of Islamic Pedagogy* (Vol. 8, Issue 1, pp. 45–63). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4471039

Mahmudin, M., Ahmad, Z., & Basit, A. (2021). Islamic Epistemology Paradigm: Worldview of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies Syed Muhammad Naqueb Al-Attas. *International Journal of Social Science and Religion (IJSSR)*, 2*(1), 23–42. https://doi.org/10.53639/ijssr.v2i1.41

Mahrani, M., Sari, S. M., & Depalina, S. (2022). Students' Difficulties at Elementary

School in Increasing Literacy Ability. *Attractive : Innovative Education Journal, 4*(1), 122–128. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.51278/aj.v4i1.336

Mathews, H. M., Rogers, W., Shaheen, T., Curran, J., & Youngs, P. (2025). Contrasting Opportunities to Learn Across Domains in Special Education Teacher Preparation: A Mixed Methods Study. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education, 127*(3), 3–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681251341057

Monica, D., & Nurul, R. (2024). Research redundancy in Islamic higher education: An epistemological review. *Islamic Research Review, 12*(2), 88–104. https://doi.org/10.17613/wqhb-3425

Muhammad, G., Surana, D., Sanusi, I., & Suhartini, A. (2024). Islamic Education As An Effort To Strengthen Morals In The Era Of Globalization. *AL-WIJDÂN Journal of Islamic Education Studies, 9*(1), 108–125. https://doi.org/10.58788/alwijdn.v9i1.3602

Muthatahirin, M., Hanjit, C., Aminudin, W. S. A. B. W., & Nasir, A. A. B. A. (2025). Exploring Activities of International Dormitory Students to Advance Social Intelligence. *Journal of International Affairs and Students Mobility, 1*(1), 17–28. https://doi.org/https://jiasmy.intischolar.id/index.php/jiasmy/article/view/2

Nathie, M., Mahdzan, N. S., Hanifa, M. H., Ahmad, W. M., & Zainudin, R. (2024). Islamic and Conventional Financial Literacy: Systematic and Bibliometric Literature Analyses. *Journal of King Abdulaziz University: Islamic Economics, 36*(2), 29–60. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4197/Islec.36-2.2

Nuha, N. U., Faridi, A., & Tobroni, T. (2024). Implementation of the Context, Input, Process, Product Model in Evaluating Islamic Education Institutions. *International Journal of Islamic Studies Higher Education, 3*(3).

Nurhidayah, N., & Usiono, U. (2024). Metode Systematic Literature Review untuk Pentingnya Karya Ilmiah dalam Pendidikan Tinggi. *Jurnal Sains Student Research, 2*(6), 380–387. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.61722/jssr.v2i6.2987

Purnama, W., Nasir, T. M., & Erihadiana, M. (2024). Student Perceptions of the Basic Concepts of Islamic Education. *Ta'dib: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 29*(2), 25089. https://doi.org/10.19109/td.v29i2.25089

Rahman, F. A., Ulwi, K., & Aminudin, W. S. A. B. W. (2025). The Role of Islamic Education in Realizing in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 3). *Muaddib: Journal of Islamic Teaching and Learning, 1*(2), 12–23. https://doi.org/https://muaddib.intischolar.id/index.php/muaddib/article/view/7

Ramadhan, N. A., Anggraini, S., & Madhakomala, R. (2025). Developing Critical Thinking and Social Awareness through Contextual Learning and Social Transformation: A Systematic Review. *Ensiklopedia: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Inovasi Pembelajaran Saburai, 5*(02), 203–212. https://doi.org/10.24967/esp.v5i02.4237

Roni, S. M., Merga, M. K., & Morris, J. E. (2020). Conducting Quantitative Research in Education. In *Journal of Physics A: Mathematical and Theoretical* (Vol. 44, Issue 8). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9132-3

S, A. M., & Tobroni, T. (2024). Epistemologi Pendidikan Agama Islam. *Ikhlas : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Islam, 2*(1), 166–181. https://doi.org/10.61132/ikhlas.v2i1.303

Salsabilah, W. S., Maisah, M., & Roudoh, R. (2025). Bibliometric and Systematic Review of Islamic Education Learning Quality: Trends, Gaps, and Future Directions. *Journal Evaluation in Education (JEE), 6*(2), 438–452. https://doi.org/10.37251/jee.v6i2.1518

Sari, P. I., Tita, E. I., & Albizar, . A. (2025). Eight Concepts and Practices: Buying and Selling in Islam. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Thought and Research, 1*(2), 38–54. https://mujoter.intischolar.id/index.php/mujoter/article/view/1

Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and

guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, *104*, 333–339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039

Soicher, R. N., Baker, A. R., & Thomas, R. C. (2024). A Mixed-Methods Research Design to Advance Inclusive and Equitable Teaching. *Innovative Higher Education*, *49*(6), 1105–1125. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-024-09741-5

Suárez-Orozco, C. (2019). Reflections on the Promise of Mixed-Methods Research in Education. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *121*(10), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811912101011

Sugawara, E., & Nikaido, H. (2014). Properties of AdeABC and AdeIJK Efflux Systems of Acinetobacter baumannii Compared with Those of the AcrAB-TolC System of Escherichia coli. *Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy*, *58*(12), 7250–7257. https://doi.org/10.1128/AAC.03728-14

Valtakoski, A. (2024). Bridging conceptual gaps in service research: A metatheoretical reflection. *Journal of Service Management*, *35*(6), 66–83. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-35-6-66

Wald, N., Harland, T., & Daskon, C. (2024). The gap statement and justification in higher education research: an analysis of published articles. *European Journal of Higher Education*, *14*(2), 308–323. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2023.2189132

Zuhri, Z. (2023). Exploring the Landscape of Research in Islamic Education: A Bibliometric and Systematic Review. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *15*(4), 4747–4761. https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i4.4031