Research Traditions in Islamic Education: An Integrative Perspective

Riri Susanti[1], Zulfani Semiarni[2], Dertha Mukhtar[3], Amril Huda M.[1]

[1]STAI Al-Hikmah Pariangan Batusangkar, Indonesia
[2]Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia
[3]Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sumatera Barat, Indonesia

✉ ririsusanti@staialhikmahpariangan.ac.id *

Abstract

This study analyzes research traditions and methodological models in Islamic education grounded in three major foundations empirical, historical, and normative and proposes an integrative research model to address the complexity of contemporary educational challenges. Each research tradition is characterized by distinct epistemological assumptions, analytical orientations, and methodological contributions, which necessitate a critical examination of their respective strengths and limitations. Employing a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, this study is based on a literature review of books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and relevant scholarly documents. The analysis involves conceptual classification, critical evaluation of research models, and synthesis of interrelationships among research traditions. The findings indicate that the empirical tradition provides an objective basis through measurable data, the historical tradition offers contextual understanding through source criticism and reconstruction of educational development, while the normative tradition establishes philosophical and value-based foundations derived from the Qur'an, hadith, and classical Islamic scholarship. However, when applied in isolation, each tradition reveals methodological limitations. Therefore, this study emphasizes the urgency of an integrative research model that synthesizes empirical, historical, and normative dimensions to produce more holistic, relevant, and applicable analyses in Islamic education research. This integrative framework contributes methodologically to the development of Islamic education studies, particularly in curriculum design, instructional models, educational policy, and the reinforcement of Islamic values in educational practice.

INTRODUCTION

Research constitutes a fundamental instrument in the construction and advancement of scientific knowledge. Since the Enlightenment era, research has served as a primary foundation for understanding reality through various approaches, ranging from empirical observation and historical inquiry to normative reflection (Giraldo et al., 2022). Each of these research traditions has made a significant

contribution to the development of knowledge, however, when applied in isolation, they also exhibit limitations in addressing the complexity of contemporary issues, particularly in the field of education (Gold et al., 2001; Özdemir & Springer, 2022; Soneryd & Sundqvist, 2023).

Within the educational context, the empirical tradition plays a crucial role in providing objective and verifiable data through systematic methodological procedures. The development of empirical paradigms from positivism and interpretivism to pragmatism has broadened research perspectives by offering diverse ways of understanding reality and educational phenomena (Hamdi et al., 2022; Syamsuddin, 2022; Wang, 2008). Meanwhile, the historical tradition emphasizes the importance of understanding socio-cultural dynamics through source criticism, event reconstruction, and interdisciplinary approaches that enable educational analysis across broader temporal trajectories (Alrwajfah et al., 2021; Farmani et al., 2023; Nawaz & Jahangir, 2015; Yu & Wright, 2016). In contrast, the normative tradition focuses on values, morality, and principles of action, thereby enriching the ethical and philosophical dimensions of educational inquiry, particularly in formulating the goals and directions of ideal education.

Although these three traditions each possess distinct strengths, their partial application often results in fragmented analyses. Educational research that relies solely on empirical data risks neglecting historical context and value-based considerations, while historical or normative approaches applied independently are often less responsive to evolving empirical realities (Balsas, 2022; Fakhruddin et al., 2025; Maidugu & Isah, 2024; Umar et al., 2024). Therefore, an integrative research model is required to synthesize the strengths of empirical, historical, and normative traditions within a unified analytical framework.

An integrative research approach enables researchers not only to explain educational phenomena objectively but also to situate them within relevant historical contexts and to critically consider their accompanying normative implications (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Ath-Thukhi et al., 2022). Consequently, integrative research is believed to produce more comprehensive, applicable, and context-sensitive analyses in addressing contemporary educational challenges. Furthermore, this approach has the potential to make significant contributions to theoretical development, educational policy formulation, instructional strategy design, and the reinforcement of educational values in response to the dynamics of globalization, modernization, and digitalization (Okenova et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2025).

Based on this conceptual framework, this article critically examines research traditions and methodological models in Islamic education namely empirical, historical, and normative approaches and proposes an integrative research approach as a relevant methodological framework for advancing Islamic education research in the contemporary era.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach aimed at examining research traditions and methodological models in Islamic education. The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for analyzing philosophical paradigms, methodological frameworks, and theoretical constructions through an in-depth examination of relevant scholarly literature. Accordingly, this study is conceptual in nature rather than field-based, focusing on analytical and argumentative engagement with research theories and models (Alshater et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2023, 2023).

The data sources consist of scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books on research methodology, academic works on Islamic education, and relevant scientific documents addressing empirical, historical, normative, and integrative research traditions (E. Engkizar et al., 2023, 2024; Kallio et al., 2016). The

unit of analysis is not human subjects but academic entities, namely concepts, theories, and research models. Data were selected purposively based on their relevance, academic credibility, and contribution to the methodological discourse in Islamic education.

The research procedure was conducted in four main stages: i) systematic identification and collection of relevant literature; ii) classification and categorization of data into key themes such as research traditions, epistemological foundations, methodological characteristics, and applications in Islamic education; iii) content analysis involving critical reading, interpretation, comparison, and identification of conceptual patterns; and iv) synthesis and conclusion drawing to construct coherent and integrative scholarly arguments.

Data analysis was carried out using qualitative content analysis through data reduction, thematic organization, and interpretative synthesis. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing insights from diverse academic sources, along with critical engagement with prior relevant studies (Engkizar et al., 2023). This analytical strategy enables a comprehensive and systematic understanding of research models applicable to the development of contemporary Islamic education studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that research traditions in Islamic education have developed through three main foundations empirical, historical, and normative traditions each characterized by distinct epistemological assumptions, methodological approaches, and scholarly orientations. The empirical tradition is oriented toward objective data that can be verified through observation, experimentation, or surveys (Sanches et al., 2024). The historical tradition emphasizes the reconstruction of the development of Islamic education across time and space, while the normative tradition examines Islamic values, principles, and teachings as the foundation of education (Akhtar et al., 2023). Overall, the findings reveal that these three traditions have been widely employed in studies of Islamic education; however, they are often applied in isolation. In fact, contemporary research demands more comprehensive and integrative approaches to achieve a holistic understanding of the dynamics of Islamic education.

Applications of Empirical Research in Islamic Education

First, Islamic education curriculum evaluation. Through empirical research, the effectiveness of curricula can be examined, for instance, the extent to which Qur'an and Hadith instruction influences students' character development. Second, instructional methods. Empirical models are used to assess the implementation of instructional approaches such as *tahfidz*, *halaqah*, or technology-based learning in madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools. Data are obtained through classroom experiments or case studies. Third, student behavior. Empirical research can investigate the relationship between religious practices and academic achievement, discipline, or learning motivation among students in Islamic educational institutions. Fourth, management and policy in Islamic education. For example, empirical studies may assess the impact of government programs such as Madrasah BOS funding, madrasah digitalization initiatives, or policies integrating science and Islamic knowledge in Islamic higher education institutions.

The study finds that the empirical tradition has exerted a substantial influence on the development of modern Islamic education methodology. Its defining characteristics include the use of measurable data, scientific verification, and objective approaches to evaluating curriculum effectiveness, instructional practices, and student behavior. This tradition is strongly influenced by the positivist paradigm,

which views reality as something that can be systematically measured (Sanches et al., 2024).

Characteristics of the Historical Tradition in Islamic Education

Historical research in Islamic education is characterized by fact reconstruction, source criticism, and socio-cultural contextual analysis. The findings indicate that the Rankean tradition, with its principle of *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (history as it actually happened), has significantly influenced historical research methods in Islamic education (Günther, 2020). At the same time, hermeneutic approaches offer interpretive perspectives that seek to understand educational values and meanings within specific historical contexts. Meanwhile, the Marxist tradition provides a structural analysis of the dynamics of Islamic education in relation to economic and social transformations. Historical research is particularly important because it traces the roots of the development of madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), classical *kitab kuning* curricula, and the impact of colonialism on Islamic education systems. Thus, the historical tradition offers the longitudinal perspective necessary to understand the evolution of Islamic education over time (Az-Zahra et al., 2025; Rahawarin et al., 2025).

In the context of Islamic education, historical research is highly relevant, as the development of Islamic education cannot be separated from its historical legacy from classical madrasah systems and *pesantren* to colonial educational institutions and the modernization of Islamic education in the post-independence era.

First, the history of Islamic educational institutions, which examines the emergence and development of madrasahs, *pesantren*, *surau*, and Islamic universities, as well as their contributions to civilization building. Second, the history of Islamic educational figures, which explores the educational ideas of Muslim scholars and intellectuals, such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, and KH. Ahmad Dahlan. Third, Islamic education policy, which has undergone significant changes from the colonial period to modern Indonesia. During the Dutch colonial era, Islamic education was marginalized and developed independently under constrained conditions, giving rise to madrasahs and *pesantren* as adaptive responses to educational modernization (Kosim et al., 2023; Sya'bani, 2024; Zarkasyi, 2020). Following independence, the Indonesian government began integrating madrasahs and *pesantren* into the national education system through regulations, institutional support, and the strengthening of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

In the modern era, policies increasingly emphasize quality standardization. These changes have enhanced the legitimacy of Islamic education, expanded access to learning and employment opportunities, and strengthened its role in developing religious and competitive human resources. Fourth, curricular transformation, whereby Islamic education curricula initially centered on *kitab kuning* using traditional methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*, emphasizing religious mastery and moral development. However, this model proved insufficient to meet the demands of modern society. Subsequent transformations led to the emergence of madrasahs and Islamic universities that integrate religious and general sciences through interdisciplinary approaches. This transformation has reduced the dichotomy between sciences, enhanced graduate competitiveness, and encouraged more relevant instructional innovation. Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly in maintaining Islamic identity and ensuring substantive, rather than merely administrative, integration of knowledge.

Characteristics of the Normative Tradition in Islamic Education

The findings demonstrate that the normative tradition plays a crucial role in determining the values, objectives, and standards of Islamic education. This approach is grounded in Islamic doctrinal sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and the works of classical and contemporary scholars. The core characteristic of the normative

tradition lies in its orientation toward ideal concepts such as *insan kamil*, *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, and *ta'lim* (Akhtar et al., 2023; Wijaya, 2021). The findings further show that normative research is widely employed in analyzing the principles of Islamic education, formulating curriculum objectives, establishing ethical standards for teachers and learners, and developing the philosophical foundations of education. Normative research ensures that educational practices remain aligned with Sharia values and do not deviate from the spiritual mission of Islam.

The analysis also reveals that normative models such as doctrinal, textual-normative, and conceptual models are used in the development of Islamic Religious Education curricula and the formulation of ethical standards in Islamic education. The doctrinal model is employed to analyze Qur'anic verses and Hadith related to education, while the textual-normative model is used to interpret religious texts within curricular and policy contexts. The findings further indicate that normative research helps ensure that Islamic education policies remain aligned with *maqasid al-shari'ah* and Islamic legal principles.

Integrative Research Tradition

The study finds that an integrative approach has become a methodological necessity in contemporary Islamic education. This approach brings together empirical data, historical context, and normative values to produce more comprehensive analyses. Morgan (2022) highlight that the longstanding dilemma between positivism and interpretivism can be addressed through an integrative approach. Meanwhile, Tinajero et al (2024) demonstrate how normative values can be integrated with empirical measurements in studies of self-regulated learning. The findings of Seyfried & Reith (2019) further reinforce the urgency of mixed methods approaches in higher education research. Thus, the integrative approach is not merely a methodological option but an epistemological necessity for addressing the complexity of Islamic education.

Integrative Research Models in Education

The integrative research tradition in education is reflected in various models that combine empirical, historical, and normative dimensions. Each model seeks to address educational complexity by linking theory, data, and values. Several key models deserve particular attention.

First, Mixed Methods Research. Morgan (2022); Soicher et al (2024); Suárez-Orozco (2019) emphasize that mixed methods research is not simply a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, but an epistemological framework that enables the integration of normative theory with empirical data. This approach operates within a critical realist framework, in which researchers not only collect facts but also interpret the values and meanings underlying the data. Consequently, mixed methods research provides space for educational studies to generate findings that are rich, valid, and normatively meaningful.

Second, the Science–Values Integration Model. In biology education research, Kun et al (2022); Putra & Melkias (2022) demonstrates that learning about living systems cannot be separated from value dimensions. For example, studies of ecology and sustainability connect empirical data (such as ecosystem observations) with moral norms (such as the obligation to protect the environment). This model emphasizes that science and values must be integrated within an integrative framework so that education produces not only factual knowledge but also ethical awareness.

Third, Motivation and Educational Psychology Models. Integrative motivation theory (Educational Psychology Review, 2023) and analyses of self-regulated learning by Tinajero et al (2024) provide concrete examples of integrative research in educational psychology. Both models combine normative dimensions (such as the importance of autonomy, responsibility, and learning goals) with empirical evidence (including cognitive data, learning behaviors, and psychological measurement

outcomes). Through these models, education is understood not only as a cognitive process but also as a measurable formation of character and personal values.

Fourth, Reflective History of Education. Elzamzamy et al (2024); Kühn et al (2023) demonstrate that research on the history of education can be reflective and integrative in nature. Bernhard, through a study of teachers' beliefs in history education in Austria, employs mixed methods to integrate empirical data with historical interpretation. Meanwhile, Sariyatun et al. integrate the traditional leadership values of Mangkunegara I with a reflective pedagogical paradigm. These examples show that the history of education is not merely a narrative of the past, but a field of integration between data, values, and normative reflection.

Fifth, Islamic Education. In the context of Islamic education, research integration is particularly prominent. Sulistyani examines the integrative educational system during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, in which normative traditions (sharia teachings), historical dimensions (early Islamic educational practices), and empirical considerations (the relevance of these practices to contemporary education) are harmoniously intertwined. This highlights the importance of integrative research models in developing Islamic education studies that remain responsive to contemporary challenges.

The integrative approach emerges from the need to overcome the limitations of individual research traditions. Islamic education research cannot be adequately understood from a single perspective, as it encompasses cognitive, historical, moral, and social dimensions. Findings from Seyfried & Reith (2019); Tinajero et al (2024) indicate that combining empirical data with normative values and historical contexts produces a more comprehensive understanding of learning processes and educational experiences. Mixed methods approaches, science–values integration, and reflective historical studies represent concrete examples of integrative models relevant to modern Islamic education. This discussion reinforces the conclusion that the integrative approach is not merely a methodological choice, but an epistemological necessity in Islamic education research.

Comparative analysis shows that previous studies in Islamic education have largely focused on a single research tradition empirical, historical, or normative considered separately. However, several recent studies have begun to adopt integrative approaches, particularly in the context of higher education and curriculum development. The findings of this study extend and complement prior research by providing a systematic mapping of the relationships among the three main research traditions and integrative models in Islamic education. This study offers a novel contribution in the form of a more explicit methodological synthesis that is relevant to Islamic education research in Indonesia. Accordingly, this research expands the discourse on Islamic education methodology toward a more interdisciplinary and applicative direction, emphasizing the integration of empirical, historical, and normative traditions.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the three main traditions in Islamic education research empirical, historical, and normative each possess distinct epistemological strengths that are mutually complementary. The empirical tradition provides an objective foundation through measurable and verifiable data; the historical tradition offers contextual insight into the development of Islamic education through factual reconstruction; and the normative tradition presents value orientations and philosophical foundations through the analysis of religious texts. The most significant finding of this study is the urgency of an integrative research model that combines these three traditions in order to produce analyses that are more comprehensive, relevant, and applicable to the needs of contemporary Islamic

education, particularly in curriculum development, instructional practices, educational policy, and the reinforcement of Islamic educational values.

The primary strength of this study lies in its systematic conceptual approach to mapping the relationships among the empirical, historical, and normative traditions, as well as in the methodological synthesis proposed through the integrative research model. This study not only examines the epistemological characteristics of each tradition, but also demonstrates how empirical research practices, historical interpretation, and normative inquiry can be integrated within a unified methodological framework. Furthermore, the study enhances the relevance of integrative methodology by presenting concrete examples from recent literature, thereby making a significant theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic education research methodology in the global and digital era.

The limitations of this study primarily stem from its literature-based nature, which does not allow for empirical testing of the integrative model within more complex field research contexts. In addition, the scope of the literature reviewed is limited to several key approaches and does not comprehensively represent the full range of contemporary research traditions, such as critical or postmodern perspectives that are also developing within educational studies. This study also does not elaborate on the technical procedures required to operationalize the integrative model in empirical–historical–normative research. Therefore, further research is needed to test the effectiveness of the integrative model through real-world case studies, develop appropriate research instruments, and expand the exploration of other research paradigms relevant to Islamic education.

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