An Epistemological Study of *Naqli–Aqli* Knowledge Integration in Islamic Boarding School Education

Khafidoh[1], Mujiburrohman[1]

[1]Institut Islam Mamba'ul 'Ulum Surakarta, Indonesia

✉vivikhafidoh12@gmail.com *

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the epistemology of Islamic education by highlighting the integration of *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge within the learning system of *tahfidz* Islamic boarding schools. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with caregivers, teachers, and students, participant observation, and document analysis of curricula and instructional guidelines. The data were analyzed thematically using a descriptive-analytical approach. The findings indicate that the epistemology of Islamic education is constructed upon a *naqli–aqli* integration that is holistic, hierarchical, and contextual. This integration is manifested through Quran memorization and classical text studies, the strengthening of literacy and critical reasoning, values-based civic education grounded in Quranic principles, and the internalization of *adab* as an epistemic ethos. This epistemological model contributes to the development of students' intellectual–spiritual character, the enhancement of critical and reflective thinking skills, and the strengthening of the social relevance of knowledge. These findings offer a conceptual contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic educational epistemology that emphasizes a balance between intellectual intelligence, spiritual depth, and social responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

The epistemology of Islamic education occupies a fundamental position in determining the direction, objectives, and quality of educational processes, as it directly influences how knowledge is understood, acquired, and practiced in human life. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, epistemology is not perceived dichotomously between revelation and reason, but rather as an integrative unity in which both mutually complement one another (Saputra, 2025). Classical scholars such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and al-Ghazali emphasized that revelatory knowledge derived from divine revelation and rational knowledge grounded in human reasoning and empirical experience must interact harmoniously to produce knowledgeable individuals who possess moral integrity and ethical responsibility (Alizadeh et al., 2021; Mustapha et al., 2025; Mustofa, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2025). This epistemological integration not only constructs the structure of knowledge but also shapes the ethical

orientation and humanitarian objectives of education itself (Macierowski, 1996; Mohamed & Hao, 2025).

In the Indonesian context, Islamic boarding schools known as pesantren represent educational institutions that historically and practically embody the application of an integrative epistemology (Habibi, 2023). Pesantren function not only as centers for the transmission of classical Islamic knowledge but also as spaces for cultivating students' reasoning, character, and scholarly ethos through learning systems that are deeply embedded in daily life (Surur & Habibullah, 2025). Instructional methods such as direct transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, collective textual learning, individual recitation-based learning, and deliberative legal discussions illustrate how pesantren develop processes of knowledge formation that connect mastery of religious texts with reasoning skills, critical reflection, and ethical habituation (Khotimah et al., 2024; Santi & Aini, 2022; Wirayanti et al., 2024). Thus, pesantren do not merely transfer knowledge, but also shape students' ways of thinking and living within the framework of Islamic values.

The Tahfidzul Quran Islamic Boarding School Nurus Sunnah is one institution that explicitly practices the integration of revelatory and rational epistemology within its learning system. The revelatory dimension is reflected through Quran memorization programs, the study of classical Islamic texts, character formation through ethical discipline, and the internalization of spiritual and moral values. The rational dimension is manifested through thematic learning, scholarly discussions, literacy development, and the cultivation of reflective and contextual thinking. This integration demonstrates the pesantren's effort to preserve the continuity of the Islamic intellectual tradition while simultaneously responding to the demands of modern education, including the development of critical reasoning, twenty-first-century skills, and the capacity to engage with the complexities of contemporary social realities (Afriandi et al., 2024).

Although the integration of revelatory and rational knowledge is a general characteristic of pesantren education, academic studies that specifically examine the construction and implementation of integrative epistemology within the learning system of the Tahfidzul Quran Islamic Boarding School Nurus Sunnah remain limited. Previous studies have tended to address Islamic educational epistemology at a conceptual level or to examine pesantren from sociological and historical perspectives, without sufficiently exploring the practical integration of epistemology in concrete learning processes. Therefore, this study occupies a distinctive position, as it not only examines epistemology at a theoretical level but also reveals its manifestation in pedagogical practices, academic culture, and teacher–student relationships.

In the context of globalization and the fragmentation of knowledge, which often separates religious sciences from general sciences, the strengthening of integrative epistemology has become increasingly relevant (Busral et al., 2025; Engkizar Engkizar et al., 2022). The dichotomy between rationality and spirituality, as well as between text and context, has the potential to weaken the transformative capacity of Islamic education (Wahyuni et al., 2024). Pesantren such as the Tahfidzul Quran Islamic Boarding School Nurus Sunnah offer an alternative epistemological model that situates revelation, reason, and ethics within a unified educational process. Through a learning approach based on a living curriculum, Quranic values are not only studied cognitively but are also embodied in social practices, disciplinary culture, teacher exemplarity, and educational relationships grounded in ethical conduct (Johar et al., 2024; Nasier, 2018). This integration aligns with the paradigm of Islamic education that aims to form the ideal human being, namely individuals who possess intellectual intelligence, spiritual depth, and moral maturity (Brooks & Mutohar, 2018).

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze and describe the epistemology of Islamic education at the Tahfidzul Quran Islamic Boarding School Nurus Sunnah, with a focus on the integration of revelatory and rational knowledge within the pesantren learning system. The study seeks to uncover how this epistemological integration is realized in the curriculum, instructional methods, and academic culture, as well as how the internalization of scholarly values and ethical discipline shapes students' epistemological character. Accordingly, this research is expected to strengthen existing theories of Islamic educational epistemology while also providing conceptual and practical contributions to the development of contemporary Islamic education paradigms.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to explore the epistemology of Islamic education, particularly the integration of revelatory and rational knowledge within an Islamic Boarding School learning system. A qualitative approach was selected because the epistemological integration under investigation is complex, contextual, and deeply embedded in values, meanings, and socio-religious practices that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement (Gerring, 2017; Kassymova et al., 2025; Savin-Baden & Major, 2025). The case study design enabled an in-depth and holistic examination of a single educational institution as a concrete representation of integrative epistemological practice in Islamic boarding school education.

The research was conducted at the Tahfidzul Quran Islamic Boarding School Nurus Sunnah, which was purposively selected due to its distinctive emphasis on combining Quranic memorization, classical Islamic scholarship, character formation, and the development of critical and reflective reasoning. The research participants consisted of the Islamic Boarding School leader as the primary epistemic authority, teachers responsible for core subjects, and students as the main recipients of epistemological internalization (Engkizar et al., 2023; Mujahid, 2021). In addition, institutional documents such as curricula, syllabi, learning schedules, codes of conduct, and instructional materials were examined to enrich and corroborate empirical findings.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to capture participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations regarding the integration of revelatory and rational knowledge in teaching and learning practices. Participant observation allowed the researcher to directly examine classroom interactions, teacher–student relationships, and the lived enactment of ethical and epistemic values in everyday Islamic Boarding School life (Htay et al., 2025; A Jaafar et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2025). Document analysis was used to identify the formal epistemological framework embedded in curricular and institutional policies.

Data analysis was carried out thematically using a descriptive-analytical approach. The analytical process involved data reduction, data display, and inductive conclusion drawing to identify recurring patterns related to epistemological integration, value internalization, and their implications for students' intellectual and spiritual character formation (Markhmadova et al., 2025; Muthatahirin et al., 2025). To ensure trustworthiness, data validity was strengthened through source triangulation and methodological triangulation by cross-checking information obtained from different participants, methods, and documentary sources (Asril et al., 2023; Engkizar et al., 2025; Rahawarin et al., 2020). Prolonged engagement in the field and the use of relevant theoretical references further enhanced the credibility of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Participant Profile and Analytical Focus

The participants in this study consisted of teachers who play a direct role in shaping students' epistemological orientation and character formation at the Tahfidzul Quran Islamic Boarding School. They were selected purposively based on their involvement in core instructional activities, a minimum of three years of teaching experience, and demonstrated competence in their respective subject areas. This selection strategy was intended to obtain rich and relevant data regarding the practical integration of revelatory and rational knowledge within the Islamic Boarding School learning system (Indra & Nadlif, 2024).

The three participants represented complementary epistemic domains: Islamic Religious Education, Indonesian Language Education, and Civic Education. Together, these domains provided an analytical lens for examining how epistemological integration operates across religious, linguistic, and socio-civic dimensions of learning.

Complementary Epistemic Roles in Islamic Boarding School Learning

The findings indicate that each subject area contributes differently, yet interdependently, to the construction of an integrative epistemology. Instruction in Islamic Religious Education emphasizes revelatory knowledge as a normative foundation for understanding truth, morality, and religious obligation. Teaching practices related to Quranic exegesis, prophetic traditions, jurisprudence, and Quran memorization are conducted through gradual pedagogical stages that combine memorization, textual comprehension, and contextual reflection (Ath-Thukhi et al., 2025; E Engkizar et al., 2025; Rosyadi & Athari, 2025). This suggests that revelatory knowledge is not treated solely as cognitive content, but also as a formative process shaping students' moral dispositions and scholarly discipline.

In contrast, Indonesian Language instruction primarily strengthens the rational dimension of knowledge through literacy development, critical reading, and academic writing. These practices support students' capacity to construct arguments, interpret texts, and articulate reflective reasoning (Ummah et al., 2025). Language learning thus functions as an epistemic medium that enables students to bridge religious texts and contemporary realities, reinforcing previous arguments that language plays a central role in shaping conceptual understanding and meaning-making processes.

Meanwhile, Civic Education serves as a space where revelatory and rational knowledge intersect in socio-practical contexts. Quranic values related to justice, responsibility, and social ethics are employed as moral reference points, while rational deliberation is encouraged to critically examine civic life, public ethics, and collective responsibility. This integrative approach suggests that epistemological learning in the Islamic Boarding School extends beyond doctrinal understanding to include reflective engagement with social and civic realities.

Integrative Epistemology in the Islamic Boarding School Learning System

Across the data, the epistemology of Islamic education at the Tahfidzul Quran Islamic Boarding School appears to be structured around an integrative relationship between revelation and reason. Revelation functions as the primary normative source that provides ethical orientation and ultimate meaning, while reason operates as an interpretive and contextualizing instrument. Rather than positioning reason in opposition to revelation, the learning system situates rational inquiry within a revelatory framework, allowing both to function dialogically (Faishal et al., 2022; Soleman et al., 2020).

This epistemological pattern resonates with classical Islamic thought, which generally rejects rigid dichotomies between revelation and rationality. In this context, reason is not marginalized, but its epistemic authority is exercised in relation to moral and spiritual accountability. Such an arrangement reflects a hierarchical yet dialogical

epistemology, in which knowledge development involves continuous interaction between textual authority, rational reflection, and lived experience.

Manifestations of Revelatory Knowledge

Revelatory knowledge occupies a central position within the Islamic Boarding School curriculum, particularly through Quran memorization programs and the study of classical Islamic texts. The findings suggest that memorization is not understood merely as an end goal, but as a means of cultivating intellectual discipline, spiritual awareness, and ethical responsibility (Alam, 2017; Soleman et al., 2020). Instructional methods emphasize respect for textual authority alongside guided interpretation, allowing students to gradually engage with deeper meanings while maintaining reverence for the sacred text.

This approach indicates that rational engagement is not excluded from revelatory learning, but is introduced progressively within established epistemic boundaries. Such practices align with classical perspectives that view reason as a supportive faculty that aids in understanding revelation rather than replacing it.

Manifestations of Rational Knowledge

The rational dimension of epistemology is particularly evident in language-based learning activities. Through critical reading, structured writing, and reflective discussion, students are encouraged to engage analytically with both religious and non-religious texts. Language instruction thus contributes to the development of logical reasoning, interpretive skills, and reflective judgment (Azhar Jaafar et al., 2023; Wekke, 2015).

These findings suggest that rational knowledge is cultivated not as abstract reasoning detached from values, but as a tool for meaningful engagement with texts and social realities. This counters critiques of religious education that characterize it as overly textual or insufficiently reflective, indicating instead a pedagogical effort to balance textual mastery with critical understanding.

Ethical and Civic Actualization of Epistemological Integration

The integration of revelatory and rational knowledge becomes particularly visible in civic-oriented learning. Civic Education provides a pedagogical space where ethical principles derived from religious teachings are examined through rational deliberation in relation to social issues. This process encourages students to reflect critically on their roles as members of society while grounding their civic responsibilities in moral and spiritual values.

Such practices suggest that epistemological integration contributes to transformative learning processes, where students' perspectives evolve through critical reflection on lived experiences. In this sense, knowledge acquisition is linked to ethical awareness and social responsibility rather than limited to cognitive achievement.

Adab as an Epistemic Ethos

One notable finding concerns the role of ethical discipline, or *adab*, as an epistemic foundation. At the Tahfidzul Quran Islamic Boarding School, ethical conduct is embedded within daily learning practices, including respect for teachers, discipline in time management, and etiquette in discussion. These practices indicate that knowledge is perceived as inseparable from moral integrity.

This emphasis supports classical Islamic educational views that regard ethical formation as a prerequisite for meaningful knowledge acquisition. Rational inquiry is therefore guided by ethical considerations, reducing the risk of detached or instrumental reasoning and reinforcing responsible intellectual engagement (Endrizal & Suharti, 2023).

Implications for Student Competence Formation

Taken together, the findings suggest that an integrative epistemological approach contributes to several dimensions of student development. First, it supports the formation of intellectual spiritual character by aligning cognitive learning with moral and spiritual awareness (Sofiani et al., 2025). Second, it facilitates the development of critical and reflective reasoning skills, particularly in interpreting texts and addressing contemporary issues (Furqan, 2019; Wekke, 2015). Third, it enhances the social relevance of knowledge, enabling students to navigate modern realities while remaining grounded in Islamic values (Kalyani, 2024).

While these findings are context-specific, they offer insights into how integrative epistemology may function as a viable framework for addressing knowledge fragmentation in Islamic education (Efendi et al., 2020; Habibi, 2023; Zulfikar, 2021). Rather than presenting definitive claims, this study contributes empirical reflections that may inform broader discussions on epistemological integration in contemporary educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the epistemology of Islamic education at the Tahfidzul Quran Islamic Boarding School is characterized by an integrative relationship between revelatory and rational knowledge that operates in a holistic, hierarchical, and contextual manner. Revelation functions as the primary normative source that provides ethical orientation and meaning, while reason serves as an interpretive and reflective instrument that enables understanding, contextualization, and social application of knowledge. This integration is manifested in pedagogical practices that combine Quran memorization and classical text studies, the development of linguistic reasoning and critical thinking skills, values-based civic education, and the internalization of ethical discipline as an epistemic ethos.

The findings suggest that such an integrative epistemological model contributes to addressing both internal educational objectives of Islamic Boarding School and broader challenges faced by contemporary Islamic education, particularly the fragmentation of knowledge and moral disorientation. Rather than positioning revelatory and rational knowledge in opposition, the model demonstrates how their interaction can support intellectual, spiritual, and ethical development in a coherent educational framework. While grounded in a specific institutional context, the insights from this study may offer conceptual and practical reference points for the development of Islamic educational paradigms that emphasize balance between intellectual capacity, spiritual depth, and social responsibility.

This study is limited to a single case and a qualitative methodological approach. Future research may consider comparative studies across different Islamic Boarding School contexts or the incorporation of quantitative methods to examine the broader impact of integrative epistemological models on students' academic achievement and character development. Such approaches could contribute to a more comprehensive and systematic understanding of Islamic educational epistemology in diverse educational settings.

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