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RECONSTRUCTING MADRASAH IDENTITY THROUGH AL-GHAZALI'S EPISTEMOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRAK

Latar belakang : Tren pendidikan kontemporer di Indonesia telah menggeser orientasi madrasah Indonesia yang menyebabkan kehilangan karakter humanistik-religius, yakni pengabaian terhadap aspek spiritual dalam praktiknya. Sebaliknya, karakter empiris-pragmatis menyulitkan madrasah untuk beradaptasi dengan dinamika kebijakan pendidikan kontemporer. Karakter demikian, dibantah oleh al-Ghazali di mana realitas sejati tidak diperoleh melalui rasional-empiris saja tanpa melibatkan intuisi spiritual. **Tujuan:** kebaruan studi ini terletak pada integrasi epistemologi al-Ghazali dalam sistem pendidikan madrasah, berikhtiar mengharmonisasi wahyu ilahi, akal dan intuisi spiritual dalam membentuk praktik pendidikan kontemporer. **Metode:** Berjenis studi kepustakaan (*library research*) melalui sumber sekunder yakni teks ilmiah, artikel jurnal, karya klasik, dan penggalian informasi lebih mendalam untuk mengidentifikasi dampak hubungan wahyu, akal dan intuisi dalam pemikiran al-Ghazali. **Hasil :** Al-Ghazali menggagas bahwa akal dan pengalaman sensorik saja tidak cukup untuk mencapai kebenaran tertinggi tanpa memperhatikan perkembangan spritual (*irfani*) yang didapat melalui penciptaan kondisi yakni latihan spritual (*riyadhah*), ia berpandangan bahwa akhlak merupakan spontanitas jiwa. **Kesimpulan:** dapat disimpulkan rekonstruksi epistemologi madrasah, mampu mengintegrasikan dimensi wahyu (*naql*), akal (*aql*) dan intuisi (*irfani*). Sangat penting bagi madrasah beradaptasi dengan tantangan era kontemporer dengan tetap mempertahankan jati diri sebagai pendidikan formal berciri khas agama Islam, dengan pendekatan yang holistik di mana peserta didik mahir secara intelektual, jujur secara moral dan spiritual.

Keywords:

Al-Ghazali's
Epistemology;
Madrasah Identity;
Reconstruction;
Spiritual Experience.

ABSTRACT

Background: Contemporary's trend in education indoensian has shifted orientation of madrasah, caused disapperance its humanistic-religious character, neglecting of spiritual aspect in practice. On the contrary, empirical-pragmatice inhibited madrasah to adapt with contemporary education dynamics, such a charactes by al-Ghazali, who stated that ultimate reality can not gained by rational-empiric without involving spiritual intuition. **Porpuse of the study:** This study proposes a unique framework for integrating Al-Ghazali's epistemology into madrasah education, aiming to harmonize divine revelation, reason, and spiritual intuition in shaping contemporary educational practices. **Method:** This study employed a library research method using secondary sources, such as scientific texts, journal articles, and classical books, with in-depth information gathering to identify impact of the relationship between scriptural revelation (naql), reason(aql), and intuition in Al-Ghazali's thought. **Result:** Al-Ghazali posited that reason(aql) and empirical experience are insufficient for realization of the ultimate truth without the incorporation of spiritual experience (irfani), gained through creation enviroment namely riyadhah (spiritual training), al-Ghazali stated character was a soul spontaneity, **Conclusion:** thus, it can be concluded that the reconstruction of the madrasah's epistemology has a potential to harmonize the dimensions of scriptural revelation (naql), reason (aql), and intuition (irfani). it is crucial for madrasahs to adapt to contemporary era while maintaining their identity as formal Islamic education through a holistic approach, ensuring that students are intellectually competent as well as morally and spiritually grounded.

A. INTRODUCTION

Madrasahs, as Islamic educational institutions in Indoneisa, possess unique epistemological characteristics that facilitate the formation and dissemination of knowledge. Madrasah epistemology demonstrates a knowledge system that combines divine revelation (al- Qur'an and al-Hadith) with rational thought, serving as the primary foundation of the educational paradigm (Aprison, 2017). In contrast to secular educational frameworks, which typically separate the spiritual dimension from the realm of knowledge, madrasahs position religious values as an integral epistemological foundation throughout educational endeavors. Siregar argues that madrasa epistemology is based on a synthesis of religious knowledge and empirical science, where both domains are considered cohesive and complementary entities in the pursuit of understanding reality (Madrasah & Siregar, 2017). Understanding the epistemology of madrasahs is crucial for critically examining the methodologies through which Islamic educational institutions construct, validate, and convey knowledge to students.

Historically, madrasahs have developed as institutions that not only impart religious knowledge but also integrate diverse branches of scientific inquiry within the paradigm of Islamic epistemology. Research on madrasahs in Mali illustrates that recognized madrasahs are adept at integrating Islamic and Western educational epistemologies in their practices, producing a synthesis of knowledge relevant to both local and global contexts (Boyle, 2019). This evolution marks the transformation of madrasahs from traditional institutions centered on religious knowledge into more holistic educational entities. The integration of Islamic values and philosophical principles into the educational process of elementary madrasahs reflects an effort to

build a comprehensive epistemology that encompasses not only the cognitive dimension but also the spiritual and moral development of students (Agus Triyono&Mujiburrohman, 2025).

The epistemological construction in the madrasah curriculum exhibits distinctive characteristics that distinguish it from other educational systems. Research on the superiority of epistemological construction in the pedagogy of Quranic subjects such as Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak, Jurisprudence, and Islamic Cultural History taught in madrasahs reveals that each subject has an epistemological basis derived from Islamic teachings(Mahalli, 2018). more deeply, the epistemological foundation that guides the development of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, especially in the domain of faith in elementary madrasahs, uses an approach that aligns the propositions *naql* (textual) with understanding *aql* (rational) (Ilma, 2023). This pedagogical strategy enables students not only to commit religious teachings to memory but also to understand the underlying logic and wisdom inherent in each doctrine, thus making the knowledge gained more meaningful and applicable.

Madrasah epistemology faces a series of challenges in the context of modernity and globalization. The dominance of positivism in madrasah education in Indonesia has shifted the epistemological orientation of madrasahs from a humanistic-religious foundation to a more materialistic and technocratic paradigm(Purba, 2025). These criticisms underscore the dichotomy between preserving Islamic epistemological identity and the need to adapt to contemporary educational standards. Research on the influence of Islamic philosophy on madrasah educational institutions emphasizes the importance of analyzing ontology, epistemology, and axiology to ensure that madrasahs adhere to basic Islamic principles while remaining relevant to the evolution of contemporary society (Mujiburrohman, M., & Isrofuzain, 2025). This difficulty requires a reconstruction of the madrasah's epistemology that is adept at accommodating modern scientific advances without losing its identity as an Islamic educational institution.

In the field of modern Islamic education, madrasah epistemology plays a crucial role in shaping the character and intellectual identity of young Muslims. Research on the social and epistemological hybridity of madrasah students in Bangladesh, for example, shows that madrasahs effectively enable students to access diverse forms of knowledge, spanning both religious and secular domains, thus equipping them to navigate the contemporary world without sacrificing their religious identity(Azad & Ahmed, 2021), thus, the philosophy underlying traditional boarding school education, which has epistemological similarities to madrasahs, is able to integrate future educational values while preserving the classical Islamic scientific tradition(Sulton et al., 2022). Thus, a thorough understanding of madrasah epistemology is not only crucial for the advancement of Islamic educational theory but also crucial for developing educational practices that skillfully address the challenges of contemporary society while remaining firmly rooted in authentic Islamic principles.

Epistemology plays a crucial role in the Islamic philosophical tradition, serving as the domain where revelation, rationality, and experiential knowledge converge. Throughout Islamic intellectual history, inquiries into the origins of knowledge, the criteria for validating that knowledge, and the limitations of human cognitive abilities have catalyzed significant and enduring philosophical developments. These discourses

influence methodologies of Islamic sciences, the interpretive Qur'an and Hadith, and the complex relationship between scientific inquiry and religious belief (Hourani, 1958).

Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD) was a prominent scholar who played an instrumental role in the discourse of Islamic epistemology. This era of philosophy not only represents the peak of Islamic philosophical thought but also illustrates the epistemological paradigm of theological-mystical synthesis adopted by al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali emerged from a different intellectual background. He challenged the legitimacy of certain reflexive responses in certain theological contexts and advocated an alternative epistemological paradigm, which elevates revelation and mystical experience (*al-kasyf or mukasyafah*) as more reliable sources of knowledge than rational speculation (Treiger, 2011). This study seeks to answer: How can Al-Ghazali's epistemology reconstruct madrasah identity in response to contemporary educational challenges?

B. METHOD

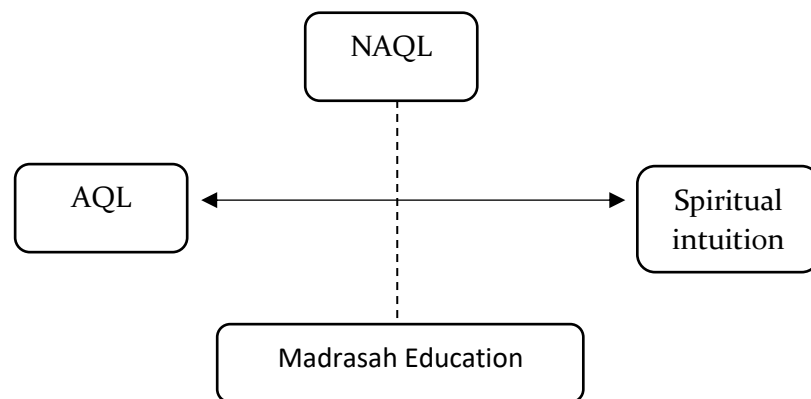
This article analyzes the epistemological construction of madrasas that integrates revelation and rationality, while reconstructing the relevance of Al-Ghazali's epistemological paradigm in updating the epistemological model of madrasas so that it remains compliant with Islamic principles and responsive to the dynamics of contemporary education. This study employs a qualitative methodology. Ethical considerations are applied by ensuring that all texts analyzed are obtained from legitimate academic sources and used in accordance with scientific citation norms. This research is a literature approach with analysis of secondary sources, including Scopus, Web of Science, Institutional Repository, Google Scholar and SINTA-indexed national journals selected based on relevance, academic credibility, and their contribution to discussions of al-Ghazali's epistemology and madrasah education. This research was conducted through content analysis to identify sources of knowledge, the relationship between revelation and reason, and integration of spiritual values in education, including the dominance of *naql*, harmonization *naql-aql*, and the rational-mystical tendencies that emerged in Al-Ghazali's thought. The validation stage was carried out through triangulation of data sources from various interpretations of classical works, contemporary research, and relevant madrasah education theories.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Madrasah epistemology is built on three main and interrelated foundations: divine revelation (the Qur'an and Hadith), rationality (*aql*), and spiritual experience or intuition. This foundation is substantially found in the Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Instruction, which states that religious education is education that provides knowledge and shapes the attitudes, personalities, and skills of students in practicing their religious teachings (Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Schooling, 2007). From an Islamic epistemological perspective, Al-Ghazali recognized three sources of knowledge: *aql*, *naql*, and *spiritual experience*, he stated that the intellect is limited in comprehending the truths of divine matters and cannot be relied upon regarding them; therefore, in relation to these matters, Al-Ghazali pointed to another source, namely the report of the infallible Prophet. (Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, 1927). This underscores

that the intellect is unable to reach the highest truth without spiritual experience (revelation)(Ritoga & Saputra, 2025). Madrasah, as an Islamic educational institution, is based on a humanistic-religious epistemological framework that prioritizes revelation as the primary source of knowledge, while simultaneously recognizing the important role of reason and experiential understanding in the interpretation and application of such knowledge(Aprison, 2017). Three main epistemological orientations that underlie the madrasah curriculum, epistemology *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani*. Epistemology *explanation* emphasizes the understanding of revealed texts through the methodology of tafsir and takwil, which is common in Quranic studies of Hadith and Aqidah Akhlak. Epistemology *burhani*, On the contrary, it emphasizes rational reasoning and logical proof, which are applied in the discipline of Islamic jurisprudence and other rational sciences. Meanwhile, epistemology *mystical* entered on spiritual experience and intuition, which is incorporated into the pedagogy of morality and superstition(Wijaya, n.d.). Madrasah not only provides knowledge of “what” to acquire, but also “how” to attain accurate knowledge and “why” such knowledge is important. This pedagogical approach ensures that the educational experience in the madrasah goes beyond superficial cognitive engagement and fosters students' epistemological awareness of authentic sources of knowledge from an Islamic perspective. Thus, the transformative educational paradigm is conceptualized as a comprehensive process that facilitates harmonious intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth(Chandra, 2025). To describe the integrative relationship between naql (revelation), aql (reason), and irfani (spiritual intuition) in madrasah education, a visual conceptual framework is presented in Figure.

Figure 1. Visual Conceptual Framework



This harmonious intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth was achieved by al-Ghazali through skepticism and the rejection of blind imitation, where he began to question the reliability of reason and senses as sources of knowledge, then discovered intuitive knowledge which is direct illumination from God in the form of divine guidance. True knowledge (*ma'rifah*) is when the soul is able to capture the real form of something so that it produces a clear understanding. Certain knowledge (*al-'ilm al-yaqin*) is knowledge that leaves no doubt or possibility of error. Therefore, any knowledge that does not achieving a full level of certainty is not included in the category *knowledge of the near (al-'ilm al-yaqin)*. (al Ghazali, 2015). The epistemological basis in the formulation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, particularly regarding the subject of faith in elementary madrasas, uses an approach that synergistically combines statements *naql* (textual) with understanding *aql* (rational)(Ilma, 2023).

In madrasah learning practices, two epistemological approaches are frequently used: the naqli approach (based on text/revelation) and the aqli approach (based on reason/rationality). This is based on the fact that many interpretations of the Quran incorporate both approaches in their curricula. For example, in *Tafsir Salman*, the scholarship in *Tafsir Salman* is conducted by combining *al-manhaj al-naqli* And *almanhaj al-aqli*. who believes that religion and science need to be integrated so that they complement each other for the sake of scientific progress which is not free from spiritual values(Ahmad Fikri Luqoni, 2024). Thus, a learning approach that integrates ontological, epistemological, and axiological analysis can improve the quality of student understanding. From an epistemological perspective, teachers not only teach "what" to believe or do, but also "why" and "how" to know that something is true according to Islam. This can be seen in a case study at MTs Al Kahfi Surakarta, where in learning about the prohibition of usury, students are not only informed that usury is haram based on naqli evidence, but are also invited to rationally analyze why usury is detrimental to the economy and society, and how the Islamic economic system offers a fairer alternative(Yadi, Nur Yaman, 2025).

The concept of integrative education in Amin Abdullah's philosophy offers a strong theoretical framework for the integration of knowledge in madrasahs(Khasanah, Mita Nur, Akbar Yusgiantara,Albert Taqy Asy Syakur, 2025). Abdullah proposed an integrative-interconnective approach that views religious knowledge and general knowledge not as separate entities, but as an interconnected network of knowledge. In the madrasah context, this approach translates into A curriculum that does not create a sharp dichotomy between religious and general subjects, but rather seeks points of convergence and mutual enrichment between the two. This concept of integration occurs in Bangladesh, where madrasahs are able to facilitate students' access to various forms of knowledge, both religious and secular(Azad & Ahmed, 2021). This epistemological hybridity enables students to develop dual competencies: they master profound religious knowledge while simultaneously possessing skills in modern science and technology. This means that knowledge is present not only in religious reasoning that separates it from the "non-religious," but is also acquired through students' inner knowledge of reality (al-kasyf mukasyafah). Al-Ghazali emphasized that reason has inherent limitations in understanding metaphysical reality and divine truth, so revelation and mystical intuition are needed to complement it(Ritoga & Saputra, 2025). And the soul returned to health and balance that is, after two months of illness. The essential faculties of reason became reliable and trustworthy with safety and certainty. This was not achieved through structured proofs or ordered arguments, but by the light that God Almighty cast into the heart. This light is the key to most knowledge. Whoever thinks that intuitive knowledge (kashf) is dependent on proofs has limited the vast mercy of God(Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, 1927).

The Epistemological Challenge of Madrasahs in the Modern Era lies in the dominance of positivism in madrasah education in Indonesia, which has shifted the epistemological orientation of madrasahs from a humanistic-religious basis to a more materialistic and technocratic approach (Purba, 2025). For example, in the case of MAN 4 Agam, West Sumatra, the findings stated Religious education at MAN 4 Agam, not only focuses on teaching religious doctrine, but also encourages students to understand religious values logistically, relevantly, and contextually(Naharuddin, 2024). While the contextual and logical approach adopted at MAN 4 Agam represents a progressive

pedagogical effort, from an Al-Ghazalian standpoint it may remain incomplete, as a religious knowledge cannot be reduced solely to the results of empirical observation or exclusively rational analysis. For Al-Ghazali, true knowledge originates from spiritual illumination (*al-kasyf al-sufiyyah*) and the purification of the soul, which signifies the state in which the heart attains the divine light that gives birth to *ma'rifah* direct intuitive knowledge given by Allah. Al-Ghazali strongly refuted the idea that reality can be understood comprehensively alone eyes through the rational-empirical paradigm, asserting that reason has inherent limitations, and that the senses are susceptible to deception (al Ghazali, 2015). Currently, assessment practices in madrassas are still dominated by a cognitive approach and by the measurement of learning outcomes oriented toward memorization. The affective, spiritual, and social dimensions have not received adequate attention in the evaluation system. This condition underscores the urgent need to build an integrative, holistic, and Islamic-values-based assessment paradigm. Assessment is not only a tool for measuring academic achievement but also a means of building students' character, morals, and spiritual awareness (Fatmawati, 2025). To bridge these dimensions, it is argued that integration constitutes a complementary process in which science strengthens religious understanding (faith), while Islam guides the objectives and orientation of human endeavors. Practical strategies to realize this integration include the development of interdisciplinary curricula, teacher training programs to enhance professional qualifications, and the establishment of Islamic Religious Education laboratories that utilize natural phenomena as learning media (Nursalim et al., 2022).

Another challenge facing madrasas is the pressure to adapt to national and global educational standards, which are often at odds with Islamic epistemological values. Islamic educational institutions face a dilemma between maintaining their Islamic identity and scholarly traditions and the demands of adopting modern educational systems and standards (Sulton et al., 2022). In the madrasah context, this dilemma is expressed in the curriculum regarding how much religious subjects should be retained and how much general subjects should be added to meet national standards. Therefore, Islam, based on divine revelation, offers that all forms of knowledge can be classified as religious, as long as they adhere to the basic principles and methodology of truth. Authentic knowledge is inherently Islamic, regardless of its geographic location in regions such as Europe, America, or the Middle East (Mulkhan, 2002). Thus, the curriculum dichotomy between religious and general education becomes confusing (*tahafut*) in Islamic education. Efforts to reconstruct the epistemology of madrasas that can respond to the challenges of modernity without losing its identity require a critical analysis of the epistemological assumptions underlying educational practices in madrasas, as well as the development of epistemological alternatives that are more in line with Islamic values and contemporary needs (Mujiburrohman, M., & Isrofuzain, 2025).

Madrasah epistemology plays a significant role in shaping students' character and identity. It is an educational system that not only produces intellectually intelligent students but also excels morally and spiritually (IHSAN et al., 2025). Thus, character must be actualized in the education system so that forming a noble human being (Mudlofir & Mudlofir, 2013). So that character formation in madrasas is not only through special subjects or extracurricular programs, but must be integrated into the entire learning process based on Islamic epistemology.

Epistemological problems in Islamic education contribute to the weakness of innovation in religious learning methodology (Muhammad Manar, 2024), so that epistemic renewal is needed so that Islamic education can be relevant, progressive, and effective in building the civilization of the people. Al Ghazali criticized religious learning that relies on sensory perception and reason as the only path to certain knowledge, where their intellectual methods are inadequate to understand divine truths (Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, 1927). Based on Al Ghazali's thinking, religious learning should be able to integrate students' spiritual experiences (*alkasyf*) into the educational curriculum. Spiritual intelligence is the foundation for optimizing intellectual and emotional intelligence. (Syahnaz et al., 2023). A study of 125 elementary school children and their mothers in Bogor Regency, West Java, found that the average score for spiritual parenting was higher than for disciplinary parenting. Maternal education, inductive disciplinary parenting, neglectful/verbal abuse, and increasing spiritual parenting were significantly associated with children's character (Rety Puspitasari, Dwi Hastuti, 2013). spiritual education supports self-control, the development of noble character, and the cultivation of positive attitudes in facing life's challenges. (Maslani et al., 2025). A study of 30 parents in the Delhi and Ghaziabad regions of India found that 80% of parents assessed that today's students are prone to anxiety, depression, and isolation, often displaying negativity and an inability to accept criticism constructively. Students tend to understand materialism but struggle to recognize the good in themselves attached to others (Mishra & Muddgal, 2022). In an integrative theory on the development of religiosity and spirituality (R/S) developed by Edward b. Davis et al., it is stated that the development of individual religiosity or spirituality is formed from the motivation to fulfill inner needs, then influenced by beliefs, emotions, life experiences and the socio-cultural environment (Porter et al., 2022). Thus, spiritual education is a search for self-awareness, love, and liberation based on the paradigm that spiritual development cannot be instructed directly, it can be fostered through creating conditions (Maslani et al., 2025). This paradigm is in line with al-Ghazali's definition of morality in a fundamental way, namely the spontaneity of the soul without any consideration or thought (Al-Ghazali, 2011), which means it is obtained through spiritual training (*Riyadhah al-Nafs*).

CONCLUSION

The epistemological framework of the madrasah curriculum requires a comprehensive re-evaluation, as existing epistemological challenges in Islamic education have been shown to hinder methodological progress in religious pedagogy, leading to a learning environment that is predominantly textual, repetitive, and insufficiently engaged with the spiritual dimension of learners. Al-Ghazali's philosophical perspective argues that both reason and sensory perception have inherent limitations in producing absolute truth, religious education must combine revelation, rational thought, and spiritual experience (*al-kasyf*) to produce a cohesive body of knowledge. Contemporary empirical studies include research into the spiritual dimensions of parenting and the impact of spiritual intelligence on children's character formation, suggesting that the cultivation of strong character cannot be realized exclusively through a cognitive-rational framework, but rather requires the formation of an internalized spiritual. The implication is a holistic reconstruction of the epistemology of Islamic education, which integrates the dimensions *naqli*, *aqli*, and *irfani*, it is crucial for madrasahs to effectively face the challenges posed by modernity while maintaining their identity as institutions

rooted in revelation-based education and maintaining their efficacy in shaping individuals of character and decency foundation.

The limitations of this study are located in its analysis of secondary sources, which does not directly involve empirical data. Second, it focuses on Al-Ghazali's epistemology and does not explore the thoughts of other Islamic figures. Further research recommendations include empirical studies involving direct field data and exploring Islamic or Eastern traditions of thought, as well as traditions of thought in the Western world, focusing on the identity of the madrasah as a religious and spiritual education institution.

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