



The Scientific Foundations of Islamic Religious Education: Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology as Mutually Constraining Conditions for Religious Character Formation

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) sering kali digambarkan memiliki tiga landasan filosofis, yaitu ontologi, epistemologi, dan aksiologi. Literatur umumnya memandang ketiga landasan ini bersifat sejajar dan saling melengkapi, di mana masing-masing memberikan unsur yang tidak dimiliki oleh yang lain. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa hubungan di antara ketiganya lebih kuat dan lebih menuntut (kurang nyaman) daripada sekadar hubungan saling melengkapi. Ketiga landasan tersebut saling membatasi; dengan demikian, komitmen pada satu tingkatan menciptakan batasan yang mengikat terhadap apa yang dapat dilakukan pada tingkatan lainnya. Argumen ini dikembangkan melalui analisis konseptual terhadap sumber-sumber filsafat Islam klasik maupun kontemporer. Kerangka pemikiran al-Jabiri mengenai nalar Arab-Islam yang mencakup bayani, burhani, dan irfani digunakan sebagai landasan pembahasan epistemologis, sedangkan konsep ta'dib dari al-Attas menjadi kerangka pembahasan aksiologis. Argumen utamanya adalah bahwa tujuan aksiologis PAI yang telah ditetapkan yakni pembentukan akhlak dan sikap keberagamaan yang tetap terjaga bahkan tanpa pengawasan pihak luar tidak dapat dicapai secara epistemologis dalam situasi di mana epistemologi yang diterapkan telah menyempit hanya pada transmisi bayani semata. Bukti empiris mengenai rancangan Pendidikan Agama Islam yang menunjukkan dominasi hasil pembelajaran berorientasi ta'lim sementara ta'dib dan tarbiyah jarang diintegrasikan dalam artikel ini tidak dipandang sebagai kegagalan pedagogis, melainkan sebagai konsekuensi yang dapat diprediksi dari penyempitan ruang lingkup epistemologis tersebut. Artikel ini diakhiri dengan uraian mengenai implikasi bagi perancangan kurikulum dan penilaian, serta penjelasan mengenai hal-hal yang dapat dianggap sebagai bukti yang menyanggah posisi argumen tersebut.

ABSTRACT

Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam, PAI) is often described as having three philosophical foundations, namely ontology, epistemology and axiology. The literature usually takes these to be parallel and complementary, each adding something the others lack. This article argues that the relation is stronger and less comfortable than the complementarity. The three foundations constrain each other, so that a commitment at one level creates binding limitations to what can be done at the other levels. The argument is developed through a conceptual analysis of classical and contemporary Islamic philosophical sources. Al-Jabiri's tripartite account of Arab-Islamic reason, bayani, burhani and irfani, is the framework of the epistemological discussion and al-Attas's concept of ta'dib is the framework of the axiological discussion. The main argument here is that the stated axiological purpose of PAI, the formation of akhlaq and a religious disposition that survives outside supervision, is epistemologically unreachable in a situation where the operative epistemology has been narrowed down to bayani transmission only. The empirical evidence on the design of Islamic Religious Education, which finds that ta'lim-oriented outcomes dominate while ta'dib and tarbiyah are rarely integrated, is read here not as a pedagogical failure but as the predictable consequence of that narrowing. The article concludes with an account of implications for curriculum design and assessment, and what would count as evidence against its position.

KATA KUNCI

Pendidikan Agama Islam; ontologi; epistemologi; aksiologi; ta'dib; karakter religius

KEYWORDS

Islamic Religious Education; ontology; epistemology; axiology; ta'dib; religious character

A. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia is under some strange burden. It is examined in the same way as a school subject through written exams on aqidah, the Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, akhlaq and Islamic history. It is justified by a purpose that no exam can measure. The stated goal is akhlaq al-karimah: a disposition that is revealed in the way a student behaves when no one is watching. The issue of the gap between what PAI is asked to produce and what it can certify is an old, well-known, and rarely discussed issue at the point of origin.

That scale is philosophical. What a discipline can and cannot teach depends on its account of what there is, how it can be known, and what it is for. For PAI these three commitments have been widely discussed under the headings of ontology, epistemology and axiology. The Indonesian literature on this subject is voluminous, and it is largely consensual to conclude that: PAI is ontologically based on tawhid, epistemologically open to revelation, reason, and intuition, and axiologically oriented to the moral formation.¹ Bahrudin et al. state the position plainly, and Urzilla arrives at the same three-part conclusion based on an analysis of fitrah.² In similar terms, Embong et al. set out the philosophical underpinnings and their implications for Islamic education.³

What this literature does not do is to push on the relation between the three. They are said to be complementary, mutually reinforcing and holistic. The words confirm that the three foundations are working together. They don't say what they do if one of them is compromised. If ontology, epistemology and axiology are merely complementary, then weakening any one of these should degrade PAI's performance proportionally and no more. The other option, developed in this article, is that the relation is constraining rather than additive: a commitment made at one level reduces what the others can deliver to a ceiling, and a truncation at one level makes certain outcomes not just harder but unattainable.

But the difference is practical. A document analysis of the design of Islamic Religious Education by Suhayib and Ansyari revealed that the threefold purpose of ta'lim, ta'dib and tarbiyah is rarely integrated into intended learning outcomes, that ta'lim-oriented outcomes dominate to a degree they call the cognitification of the subject, and that outcome statements, formation activities and assessment

¹ Nursri Hayati, "Konsep Manusia Berdasarkan Tinjauan Filsafat: Telaah Aspek Ontologi, Epistemologi dan Aksiologi Manusia," *Forum Paedagogik* 12, no. 1 (2021); Juairiah, "Analisis Ontologi, Epistemologi, dan Aksiologi Ilmu Perpustakaan dan Informasi," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Perpustakaan dan Informasi* 8, no. 1 (2020): 33–44. <https://doi.org/10.18592/pk.v7i15.3758>

² Andre Bahrudin et al., "Filsafat Pendidikan Islam: Ontologi, Epistemologi, dan Aksiologi," *Dikdaya* 15, no. 1 (2025): 44–51, <https://doi.org/10.33087/dikdaya.v15i1.735>; Riza Urzilla, "Fitrah Manusia dalam Islam: Kajian Filosofis dan Implementasinya dalam Kehidupan Sosial," 23, no. 2 (2025): 280–89. <https://doi.org/10.37216/tadibjurnalpendidikanislamdanisu-isusosial.v23i2.2545>

³ Rahimah Embong et al., "Philosophical Foundations and Their Implications on the Islamic Education," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 25, no. 5 (2017): 57–70.

methods are often unaligned with one another.⁴ On a complementarity reading this is a problem of design to be solved by better alignment work on a constraint reading it is something else: the visible symptom of an epistemology that has been narrowed until the axiological goal became unreachable, whereupon assessment quietly retreated to the part of the goal that remained measurable.

The question is of special importance in the Indonesian context. PAI is a compulsory subject at all levels of general schooling, and its role is increased in madrasah, where it is dispersed in Qur'an-hadith, aqidah-akhlaq, fiqh and Islamic cultural history. It is taught to a very large population by a work force with a wide variance in preparation and it is reported on by the same instruments as mathematics and language. The subject therefore holds an anomalous institutional position, it is the one space on the timetable that is formally tasked with moral formation and it is held to account through a mechanism that is designed to measure recall. Suhayib and Ansyari's finding that intended outcomes tend to cluster at the ta'lim end of the subject's threefold purpose is a description of what that arrangement produces.⁵ The question this article attempts to answer is whether this arrangement is a correctable misalignment or the working out of a prior commitment.

In this article I defend the constraint reading. It takes each of the three foundations in turn, but with a different organising decision in each. For ontology it works from the tawhidic account of the real and asks what that account demands of an educational process. As for epistemology, it goes back to the framework that is always used by Indonesian literature without mentioning it: Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri's analysis of Arab-Islamic reason into bayani, burhani, and irfani.⁶ That framework is not a taxonomy of three options equally on the table. Al-Jabiri proposed it as a diagnosis of the historical competition of these three systems and the manner in which their imbalance led to intellectual stagnation, which, he argued, could be overcome by holding them in tension with one another rather than letting one dominate. So reading PAI through it is a statement about imbalance, not a list. The article's approach to axiology is based on al-Attas's concept of ta'dib, which he developed precisely because he felt that tarbiyah and ta'lim did not name the purpose of Islamic education.⁷

Three qualifications are in order, first. This is a conceptual article, and makes no empirical claims. Where it makes claims about Indonesian classrooms it relies on the work of others, and says so. It does not suggest that PAI should give up on textual instruction, which would be nonsensical given the ontological position it espouses. It also takes a stand on a controversial matter in Islamic educational philosophy rather than offering a neutral survey of that debate, which supporters of the Islamization-

⁴ Suhayib and M. F. Ansyari, "Design of Islamic Religious Education: Purposes, Alignment of Curriculum Components and Contexts," *British Journal of Religious Education* 45, no. 4 (2023): 382–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2023.2220940>.

⁵ Suhayib and Ansyari, "Design of Islamic Religious Education," 384–86.

⁶ Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, *Bunyah al-'Aql al-'Arabi: Dirasah Tahliliyah Naqdiyyah li-Nuzum al-Ma'rifah fi al-Thaqafah al-'Arabiyyah* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1993).

⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1980), 13–22.

of-knowledge program in its more robust forms will want to consider in light of the alternatives discussed in section G.

In order to conduct this research, the method is not empirical investigation or systematic review but conceptual analysis. The article explores what a set of philosophical commitments amounts to and tests the entailment against evidence reported by others. Sources are of three types. The frameworks are found in primary philosophical texts: al-Jabiri on the structure of Arab-Islamic reason and al-Attas on education as ta'dib, and on its metaphysics.⁸ Contemporary peer-reviewed scholarship retrieved from Scopus and Google Scholar with combinations of the terms Islamic religious education, epistemology, ontology, axiology, ta'dib, bayani, burhani, and irfani are used to supply the elaboration of these frameworks and the counter-positions considered in section G. The evidence against which the argument is tested is provided by empirical studies of the design and practice of Islamic Religious Education. Studies that reported data on curriculum design, learning outcomes or teacher practice in Islamic religious education were included; those providing conceptual commentary only were excluded.

Conceptual analysis has a specific and restricted warrant, and it is worth naming what it can and cannot deliver. It can show that a set of commitments implies a conclusion, that two positions are inconsistent, or that a commonly held formulation is weaker than the evidence cited by its holders would warrant. It cannot show the truth of the commitments, nor can it prove the realization of the entailment in any real classroom. Where this article moves from entailment to observation it is borrowing the observations of empirical researchers, and inherits whatever limits attach to their designs. The document-analytic evidence most heavily relied upon reports what curriculum documents say, not what teachers do.

B. Ontological Foundation: What PAI Takes to Exist

Ontology is the study of what is ontology is from the words ontos and logos. It is a question of what is real, whether concrete or abstract, material or immaterial, and that question precedes epistemology, for what can be known depends on what there is to know.⁹ Budianto's account follows Embong and colleagues in treating ontology as the branch of philosophy that deals with the most basic character of the real.¹⁰

The ontological position of PAI is theocentric and tawhidic. God is the ultimate reality, the human being is a unified creature instead of a body with a mind attached to it, and the created order, including

⁸ Al-Jabiri, Bunyah al-'Aql al-'Arabi; al-Attas, The Concept of Education in Islam; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995).

⁹ Bahrudin et al., "Filsafat Pendidikan Islam," 45–46.

¹⁰ Budianto, "The Relevance of Ontology in Educational Management from the Perspective of Islamic Educational Philosophy," 2, no. 2 (2024): 156–69; Embong et al., "Philosophical Foundations," 60–63.

<https://doi.org/10.62612/ijelass.v2i2.51>

that which is not available to the senses, is real.¹¹ Balkis, Arif and Syauqi say that the implication is that PAI is not a field of study but an educational system based on tawhid and directed to the development of the whole man, physical, intellectual and spiritual.¹²

The human being's account carries the most ontological weight. Islamic anthropology states that the person is created on fitrah, an original constitution oriented toward recognition of the Creator that education uncovers and develops rather than installs. The educational implication of Urzilla's analysis is that if the disposition towards truth is native rather than imported, then teaching is less a matter of filling and more a matter of removing what obstructs.¹³ Thus man occupies a double position, that of servant and steward, 'abd and khalifah, neither of which can be subsumed under the other. This is what makes Balkis, Arif and Syauqi insist that PAI is not an additional claim but addresses the whole person, physical, intellectual and spiritual.¹⁴ Teaching by filling the student with knowledge is not just using a bad metaphor; it is operating with a different ontology than the one PAI espouses.

There are two consequences that follow, and these are consequences, not re-statements.

The first is what counts as an educational object; The Qur'an, in surah al-Hashr, describes God in 59:22 as knowing the unseen and the witnessed, al-ghayb wa al-shahadah. The verse claims that reality has two registers and both are really there, to be read ontologically not devotionally. An education which is based on this claim cannot regard the empirically inaccessible as a decorative addition to the empirically accessible. The ontological objects of PAI are God, the human being, the created order, revelation, moral value, and the relations between them. This is not a bigger version of a secular curriculum. It is a curriculum with an alternative inventory of what exists.

The second consequence requires one qualification, for the two-register claim is easily overstated. Saying that the unseen is real does not give one the right to treat unverifiable claims as knowledge and the Islamic tradition has been careful about this. What the tradition asserts is that revelation provides a determinate access to the matters beyond the reach of the senses, and that this access has its own conditions and its own discipline. Al-Attas's description of the worldview is explicit that the metaphysical commitments are structured rather than indeterminate.¹⁵ The ontological claim is that PAI's inventory of the real is bigger, not less disciplined, than the empirical one.

The second consequence concerns measurement, and it is the one that does the analytic work later. If the human being is a unity, the spiritual dimension as real as the cognitive one, then an assessment regime that can register only the cognitive dimension is not merely incomplete. It reports on a part of its object, but presents the report as if it covered the whole. Secular education can justify cognitive

¹¹ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 1–40.

¹² Lutfiah Holifa Balkis, Mahmud Arif, and Radhiyah Syauqi, "Islamic Religious Education from an Ontological Perspective: A Philosophical Study," *At-Ta'lim: Media Informasi Pendidikan Islam* 24, no. 2 (2025): 195–211, <https://doi.org/10.29300/attalim.v24i2.9560>.

¹³ Urzilla, "Fitrah Manusia dalam Islam," 283–86.

¹⁴ Balkis, Arif, and Syauqi, "Islamic Religious Education from an Ontological Perspective," 200–204.

¹⁵ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 41–68.

assessment on the basis that this is what secular education seeks to achieve. For PAI has committed itself to the reality of the thing which the assessment cannot see, and without giving up its ontology it cannot make that defense.

This is where the tawhidic position most dramatically diverges from anthropocentric alternatives, and the difference is not rhetorical. Where the human being is the measure, knowledge is validated by its usefulness to human purposes, and educational success is whatever promotes those purposes. In a reality where God is the ultimate reality, the human being is placed inside a created order, not at its centre, and educational success is closeness to the Creator. It is this very dislocation that is the basis of Al-Attas's critique of secularised knowledge. His objection is not that secular education values reason, but that it severs reason from any account of what reason is ultimately for.¹⁶ Ahmed's reading of al-Attas is helpful here because it treats ta'dib as an indigenous philosophy of education with an internal logic rather than a religious gloss on a universal pedagogy.¹⁷

This ontology has to be granted as an assertion, not as a proof. It is based on revelation. A person who does not believe in revelation cannot believe it. That is an authentic limitation of any confessional educational philosophy and the article does not pretend otherwise. What the article does claim is that the position is internally consistent, and that its consequences can be worked out, which is what the following sections attempt.

C. Al-Jabiri's Triad in PAI: Epistemological Foundation

Epistemology is the study of the origins, methods and validity of knowledge, its scope and limits.¹⁸ Applied to PAI it asks from where the content of Islamic religious education comes, by what procedures it is acquired and what makes a claim within it true.

Indonesian literature responds with a triad: bayani, burhani, and irfani, which roughly correspond to text, reason, and intuition. The origin of the triad is gone from view because it is so often used. It is not a classical formulation, not a neutral description of the history of Islamic thought. It is the analytical apparatus that Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri developed in *Bunyah al-'Aql al-'Arabi* and *Takwin al-'Aql al-'Arabi* to account for the stoppage of Arab-Islamic thought.¹⁹ For the argument it mattered who you attributed it to. Al-Jabiri's point was diagnostic. He argued that the three systems have historically competed rather than cooperated, that dominance of any one leads to a characteristic pathology, and

¹⁶ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 111–17.

¹⁷ Farah Ahmed, "An Exploration of Naquib al-Attas' Theory of Islamic Education as Ta'dib as an 'Indigenous' Educational Philosophy," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50, no. 8 (2018): 786–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1247685>.

¹⁸ Abdi Syahril Harahap, "Epistemologi: Teori, Konsep dan Sumber-Sumber Ilmu dalam Tradisi Islam," *Jurnal Dakwatul Islam* 7, no. 2 (2020): 208–26; Wahyu Rinjani, Haidar Putra Daulay, and Zaini Dahlan, "Masuknya Pemikiran Filsafat ke Dunia Islam," *Pema: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat* 1, no. 2 (2023): 60–70, <https://doi.org/10.46781/dakwatulislam.v5i1.204>

¹⁹ Al-Jabiri, *Bunyah al-'Aql al-'Arabi*, 383–560.

that intellectual revival requires holding them in productive tension. The triad is a taxonomy of three sources of knowledge. As al-Jabiri intended it, it refers to a balance that can be lost.

1. Bayani

Bayani is the acquisition of knowledge through the interpretation of authoritative texts, mainly the Qur'an and the hadith, and their extension through *ijma'* and *qiyas*.²⁰ Its characteristic operations are linguistic and deductive: determining what an expression means, what its scope is, and how a ruling is derived from it. The reason in bayani is a tool of interpretation, not a source of truth per se. The classical disciplines which built upon it, *tafsir*, *hadith criticism*, *usul al-fiqh* and *kalam* are all in one way or another methods for licensing inferences from the text.

The bayani distinguishes between direct and indirect understanding of a text. In the direct approach the text is taken as a finished datum, applicable as it stands. The indirect approach considers it to be matter which has to be interpreted and justified before it can be applied. As Nur and colleagues note, it is the second, not the first, approach that has given rise to the classical disciplines: *tafsir*, *hadith criticism*, *usul al-fiqh*, and *kalam* are all elaborations of the problem of licensing an inference from a text to a conclusion.²¹ Pedagogically the distinction matters. The PAI classroom that presents Qur'anic material as finished information is operating on the direct model, the model that requires the least of both teacher and student, and that the classical tradition itself largely declined to adopt.

Two aspects of bayani are relevant here. It is necessary, because a revealed religion without a method of reading its revelation has nothing determinate to teach. And imperfect in its own terms, because the text needs interpretation and interpretation needs a capacity that the text itself does not offer. Bayani creates the demand for *burhani* from within.

Bayani is also, crucially, the part of the triad that is most easily turned into examinable content. You can transfer, remember and test the textual knowledge. That property is a pedagogical convenience and an epistemological hazard. A system under pressure to demonstrate outcomes will drift toward whatever it can demonstrate

2. Burhani

Burhani bases knowledge on demonstrative argument, logic, causal analysis, syllogism, and empirical observation of the created order.²² It sees reason as a true source of truth, not as a servant of interpretation. It permits the testing and the revision of claims.

²⁰ Sulton Nur et al., "Konsep Epistemologi Bayani, Irfani dan Burhani dalam Filsafat Pendidikan Islam," 9, no. 1 (2024): 32–53. <https://doi.org/10.32764/dinamika.v9i1.4190>

²¹ Nur et al., "Konsep Epistemologi Bayani, Irfani dan Burhani," 36–40.

²² Lily Sardiani Daulay, Nur Elmi, and Ilham Karim Parapat, "Epistemologi Filsafat dan Sains Perspektif Barat dan Islam dalam Dunia Pendidikan," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam dan Multikulturalisme* 4, no. 3 (2022): 408–21, <https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v4i3.2122>.

This is the register of the reading of Islamic education via Popperian falsification by Razaq and Umiarso. It is valuable in that it shows that a tradition rooted in revelation can still accommodate a fallibilist account of human understanding of that revelation.²³

Burhani is what allows a student in PAI to ask why a ruling is so, to follow the reasoning from a Qur'anic verse to a moral principle, and to identify a bad argument for a position that they happen to hold. The most often quoted Qur'anic warrant is the injunction to read in al-'Alaq 96:1-5, which refers to created things as well as the written text as objects of study.

The scope of the burhani in the Islamic thought is wider than the textual reasoning. The tradition makes a distinction between the qawliyyah signs, the verses of revelation, and the kawniyyah signs, the created order that we can observe. They are both objects of study, but studied differently, the first by interpretation, the second by observation and inference. Harahap's account of the sources of knowledge in the Islamic tradition considers this dual object as constitutive, not incidental.²⁴ For PAI, the practical implication is that engagement with the natural world is not an extra-curricular concession to science teaching, but is part of the subject's own epistemological remit. A second, and less noticed, truncation is that of the kawniyyah signs as somebody else's business in the PAI curriculum. This has narrowed burhani to textual argument alone.

Burhani also provides the counterweight to bayani hardening into textual literalism and irfani dissolving into unaccountable subjectivity. For this reason, Al-Jabiri counted it for great importance. The other two lose their corrective where burhani is weak

3. Irfani

Irfani is derived from the root 'arafa, to know, and is cognate with ma'rifah. It is knowledge based on the internal experience, spiritual knowledge, and revelation.²⁵ For this reason the highest knowledge is received rather than constructed, by a heart prepared through dhikr, contemplation and disciplined practice. The Sufi tradition describes this preparation through the stages of takhalli, tahalli and tajalli.

Irfani presents an obvious problem for formal schooling: it cannot be timetabled and cannot be assessed. You can't take a student and put her on unveiling." This is probably why irfani is the element that formal PAI most easily loses, and why its loss is so easy to overlook: when it goes, nothing obvious is broken.

²³ Abd. Rahim Razaq and Umiarso, "Islamic Education Construction in the Perspective of Falsification of Karl R. Popper," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (2019): 117–32, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v5i2.5846>.

²⁴ Harahap, "Epistemologi," 214–19.

²⁵ Nur et al., "Konsep Epistemologi Bayani, Irfani dan Burhani," 44–48; Mahfud Mahfud, "Mengenal Ontologi, Epistemologi, Aksiologi dalam Pendidikan Islam," *CENDEKIA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 4, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.37348/cendekia.v4i1.58>.

The Sufi account of preparation is more rigorous than the word intuition suggests, and the distinction is worth preserving. Takhalli is the casting off of that which disqualifies, tahalli the growth of that which qualifies, and tajalli the disclosure that neither of the first two can force. The sequence is about a discipline, not a mood, and it is done over years. In Islamic education, Mahfud always treats irfani within the framework of this structure.²⁶ Reading irfani as synonymous with feeling, as it often does in curriculum documents that gesture at the affective domain, loses precisely what makes it educationally serious: it is a practice with stages, not a state that arrives.

What is lost, however, is specific. The Irfani is the record where knowledge is not just held but becomes personally binding. A student who can say that honesty is compulsory has bayani knowledge of the compulsoryness. Burhani knowledge is knowing how to build the argument for it. Neither means the obligation has any hold on them. What the irfani register describes is the transition from knowing a norm to being moved by it, and this is exactly what the axiological purpose of PAI requires

4. Integration, and the Price of Its Absence

The three are usually said to complement each other, and in a weak sense they do: each provides something the others lack, and Mukminin, Hanun, and Musthofa show that an integrated design can be achieved in practice in Arabic language instruction in pesantren-based colleges.²⁷ Amin Abdullah's paradigm of integration-interconnection argues the general case that Islamic disciplines should be related instead of separated.²⁸

The stronger claim available, and one that al-Jabiri's diagnostic use of the triad supports, is that the three are ordered by dependence. Bayani can provide content but cannot interpret. Burhani offers interpretive and critical capacity but is indifferent as to whether the agent acts on its conclusions. Irfani provides the internalisation which makes a held proposition into an operative commitment but it has nothing to work on without content and no protection against self-deception without critique. Remove one and the rest don't just do less, they do something other than what was intended.

Whatever one thinks of al-Jabiri's larger project, his own account of the loss of balance is instructive. He saw Arab-Islamic intellectual history as a struggle in which bayani gained institutional dominance, irfani emerged as a parallel authority largely outside the disciplines, and burhani, which had briefly blossomed, was gradually marginalised.²⁹ His

²⁶ Mahfud, "Mengenai Ontologi, Epistemologi, Aksiologi."

²⁷ Amirul Mukminin, Aisyatul Hanun, and M. Lutfi Musthofa, "Integration of Bayani, Burhani and Irfani Epistemologies in Arabic Language Learning in Islamic Boarding School-Based Colleges," *Asalibuna* 9, no. 1 (2025): 91–107, <https://doi.org/10.30762/asalibuna.v9i01.5292>.

²⁸ M. Amin Abdullah, "Religion, Science and Culture: An Integrated, Interconnected Paradigm of Science," *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 52, no. 1 (2014): 175–203, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2014.521.175-203>.

²⁹ Al-Jabiri, *Bunyah al-'Aql al-'Arabi*, 560–70.

diagnosis did not yield three coexisting traditions, but rather one that regulated the curriculum and the other two at its margins. The historical claim in its strong form is contested. What survives the contest is the structural observation: these three registers can and do fall out of balance, the imbalance is institutional not merely intellectual, and the register most easily institutionalised is the one that can be examined.

The Indonesian formulation of this integration in terms of revelation, reason and intuition is consistent with what is argued here and Mardatillah et al.'s case for epistemological reconstruction towards a transformative pedagogy is a version of the same concern.³⁰ It's only a matter of emphasis. The three are described as complementary, leading one to think that more of each is better. To say that they are ordered by dependence is to say that we can tell which loss is fatal to which purpose, and this is more useful to know for a curriculum designer.

This is a term often used without content, and it would be worth specifying what integration looks like in practice. A lesson on an ethical obligation in a PAI would address all three registers by establishing what the relevant qur'anic and hadith material says and how it has been read, considering why the obligation holds and what follows if it is denied, and providing occasion for the obligation to be practised and reflected on rather than just discussed. This shape is followed by the design of Arabic instruction by Mukminin, Hanun, and Musthofa. It is from text to analysis to internalisation in one instructional sequence.³¹ Put this way, the integration requirement is demanding, but not exotic. What makes it rare is that the third element does not produce anything that will be marked in an examination so it is the first thing to go when time is short.

It is worth noting what this means for the Western epistemological tradition. Rationalism and empiricism, the idealist and realist lines from Plato and Aristotle onwards, divide the sources of knowledge between reason and sense.³² Both are in a place that would be called by al-Jabiri *burhani*. The Islamic account is broader at both ends. It allows for a source above reason in revelation, and a mode of apprehension beneath argument in intuition. It is based on a single origin for all three. That breadth is the distinctive claim of the tradition, and to limit PAI to *bayani* transmission loses it twice over.

³⁰ Fuadi Mardatillah et al., "Epistemological Reconstruction of Islamic Education: Developing a Transformative Pedagogical Model to Foster Creativity," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 2 (2025): 1071–94, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v13i2.2200>.

³¹ Mukminin, Hanun, and Musthofa, "Integration of Bayani, Burhani and Irfani Epistemologies," 98–103.

³² Daulay, Elmi, and Parapat, "Epistemologi Filsafat dan Sains," 412–15.

D. Axiological Basis: The Purpose of the PAI

Axiology, from the Greek *axios* and *logos*, is the study of value: what a thing is worth and what it is for. Embong et al. locate the axiology in Islamic education in the virtues that inform educational practice, including justice, integrity and kindness, derived from Islamic teaching.³³

The question for PAI is straightforward. What is the subject for? What does it want to create? The reply in Indonesian policy is the development of students' ability to deepen faith and live it.³⁴ Daulay's formulation, PAI aims at leading the human being towards noble character and towards the condition of *ulul albab*.³⁵

This is considerably sharpened by al-Attas's intervention. He said, "What Islamic education is for cannot be called either *tarbiyah* or *ta'lim*. *Tarbiyah* means growth and nurture and is not confined to human beings, *ta'lim* means transmission of information. He said that the aim of Islamic education is *ta'dib*, that is, inculcation of *adab*, which means knowing and acting according to the proper place of things in the order of creation.³⁶ According to this definition, the educated person is not the one who knows the most but the one whose conduct manifests a proper ordering. Wan Daud explains that *adab* is not a subject that is added to the curriculum but a quality that the whole curriculum produces or does not produce.³⁷

The target has a double structure, an aspect sometimes glossed over in the literature. If the human being is both servant and steward, then PAI aims at a disposition expressed in two directions: worship, in the broad sense of ordering one's life toward the Creator, and stewardship, meaning responsible action toward other people and the created order. The first is seen in Daulay's expression of PAI's purpose in terms of deepened and lived faith. The second is accountable to the stated outcomes of the subject with respect to tolerance, moderation and social responsibility.³⁸ They are not two aims but one aim in two expressions. That is why an account of the purpose of PAI which reduces it to personal piety is as incomplete as one which reduces it to civic virtue. Urzilla's point about *fitrah* applies here, too: The two offices are conjoined in the original human constitution, and education that develops one and neglects the other is not simply narrow but internally inconsistent.³⁹

PAI, therefore, has an axiological target that is awkward in that it is not directly assessable. The student's *adab* shows up over time, in situations the school does not stage, and largely after the student

³³ Embong et al., "Philosophical Foundations," 64–66.

³⁴ Haidar Putra Daulay, *Isu-isu Kontemporer: Pendidikan Agama Islam di Indonesia* (Medan: CV. Manhaji, 2025), 11–12.

³⁵ Daulay, *Isu-isu Kontemporer*, 10.

³⁶ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 22–30; Komaruddin Sassi, "Principles of Islamic Education Epistemology: Tauhid Paradigm (Analysis of the Thinking of Naquib al-Attas)," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 20, no. 1 (2020): 135–72, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol20.iss1.art6>.

³⁷ Wan Mohd nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), 129–75.

³⁸ Daulay, *Isu-isu Kontemporer*, 12–15.

³⁹ Urzilla, "Fitrah Manusia dalam Islam," 286–88.

has left. Any assessment regime, then, will be measuring proxies and the honest question is which proxies stand in a defensible relation to the target.

The target is also broader than the individual. To understand PAI axiologically is to understand that acting well is owed to society and to the created order, as well as to oneself. That is why the stated outcomes of the subject include tolerance, moderation and social responsibility, besides personal piety. This is what Lahmar means when he describes Islamic education as a cultural environment of wisdom. It is not information that is transmitted but a manner of inhabiting the world.⁴⁰ The study of transformative religious education in Gontor by Jusubaidi et al. shows the same institutional orientation.⁴¹

E. Synthesis: Foundations as Boundaries

Now the three sections above can be combined, and the result is stronger than the complementarity thesis the literature usually reaches.

PAI's ontology commits it to the reality of the spiritual dimension of the human. Axiology defines the goal as ta'dib, a state of mind, not a body of knowledge. Embedded between them is the epistemology that dictates what kind of educational process can move a student from where they are to that target.

The constraint is as follows. Ta'dib is a disposition and dispositions are not transmitted. The operation which the irfani register names is that by which the student acquires a disposition by which he comes to hold something as binding. This operation requires practice, exemplification and interior formation and not exposition. Bayani is able to fulfill the obligation. Burhani can prove the obligation and can defend against objection. Nor does either or both yield bindingness. Hence, where PAI's operative epistemology has been reduced to bayani transmission, the axiological target has not only been approached less efficiently. It is not accessible because there is no operation available to do the required conversion.

This gives a prediction that can be tested. When the constraint is satisfied, then a PAI system that has been epistemologically narrowed should exhibit a specific pattern: outcome statements dominated by knowledge objectives, formation activities that are poorly connected to the statements, and assessment methods not aligned with either. This is like what Suhayib and Ansyari discovered. They name the epistemological narrowing inherent in the dominance of ta'lim-oriented outcomes cognitification. Their finding that outcomes, formation activities and assessment are often misaligned is what one would expect if the system were pursuing a target its methods cannot reach and substituting a reachable one.⁴²

⁴⁰ Fella Lahmar, "Islamic Education: An Islamic 'Wisdom-Based Cultural Environment' in a Western Context," *Religions* 11, no. 8 (2020): 409, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11080409>.

⁴¹ Jusubaidi et al., "A Model of Transformative Religious Education: Teaching and Learning Islam in Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 23, no. 1 (2024): 171–212, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol23.iss1.art6>.

⁴² Suhayib and Ansyari, "Design of Islamic Religious Education," 386–90.

The practical reason for preferring the constraint reading is that the complementarity thesis cannot make that prediction. If the three foundations are merely complementary then the observed pattern is a failure of coordination and the cure is to improve the coordination of existing components. On the constraint reading, the alignment work done on a truncated epistemology will produce a properly aligned system that cannot produce *ta'dib*, since the missing component was never a matter of alignment.

It is worth pondering why the complementarity thesis has held so tenaciously. Some of the answer is that it is institutionally comfortable. If the three foundations simply complement each other, then all existing PAI programmes do something useful and the solution to weak outcomes is incremental improvement. The constraint reading is less generous. It holds that a programme may be well run, well resourced, and well aligned, yet be structurally incapable of its stated purpose. That is a harder conclusion to publish, and an unwelcome one to act upon. Ahmed's observation that al-Attas's framework tends to be received as philosophical background rather than as a claim with operational consequences is indicative of the same tendency.⁴³ Background is treated as a foundation and cannot limit anything.

It is worth stating that the constraint runs in the opposite direction as well as it limits the extent to which the argument can be carried. An epistemology open to all three registers does not guarantee *ta'dib*; it allows for it. And an axiological commitment cannot license epistemological laxity: irfani claims that are not disciplined by bayani content and burhani critique are indistinguishable from self-deception, which is why al-Jabiri viewed the unchecked dominance of irfani as a pathology in its own right rather than as an excess of a good thing.

From this perspective the oft repeated statement that ontology, epistemology and axiology are complementary is true but uninformative. What is informative is the direction of dependence: the ontology licenses a target, the axiology specifies it, and the epistemology decides whether it is available at all.

F. Implications, and What Would Go Against This Argument

This article does not contain any empirical findings of its own and is limited to three implications for practice.

The operative question for curriculum design is not whether the learning outcomes cover the three domains but whether the epistemological registers evoked by the stated outcome are actually present in the design. A design error that a domain checklist will not detect is an outcome that is stated in dispositional terms, and that is measured by written examination.

⁴³ Ahmed, "An Exploration of Naquib al-Attas' Theory," 790–92.

The implication for assessment is that PAI needs proxies for disposition that are defensible, not convenient, and needs to state openly that they are proxies. Communal prayer and the communal recitation of the Qur'an are often employed as customary practices and are sometimes justified on the grounds that they lessen reliance on the example of any one teacher. That is a reasonable institutional point. But that is not evidence in itself that it is habituation that produces adab, not compliance. And the axiology is concerned with precisely that distinction.

Another more specific curricular implication has to do with sequencing: If practice and reflection create bindingness rather than exposition, then ordering of a PAI unit is as important as content coverage. Practice at the end is seen as reinforcing knowledge, consolidating what has already been taught. It treats this as a source of knowledge in its own right, locating it inside the unit, as an occasion that gives rise to the questions that the textual and analytic work then addresses. This second arrangement is what the epistemology defended here would recommend, and is not what the outcome-first design logic reported by Suhayib and Ansyari tends to produce.⁴⁴

The implication for teacher preparation is awkward. If irfani formation needs to be exemplified, then the PAI teacher is a condition of the outcome, not simply its deliverer. Tuna's work on the professionalisation of Islamic religious education teachers points to how much is at stake in terms of teacher formation in this subject in comparison with others.⁴⁵ The same dependency that is developing in a very different institutional context can be seen in Lafrarchi's assessment of Islamic religious education curriculum in Flemish secondary schools. This would mean that the problem is structural rather than specific to Indonesia.⁴⁶

The question of habituation deserves more than a passing note, for it is where the argument intersects most directly with existing practice. The account given here provides a defensible space for collective devotional routine. Repeated practice is one of the few mechanisms that operates at the school scale in the irfani register at all, and it doesn't depend on the conduct of any one teacher. Jusubaidi and colleagues' account of institutional formation at Gontor is an example of what a serious version looks like in which routine is embedded in a total institutional culture rather than appended to a timetable.⁴⁷ The danger is that habituation without exemplification and without the burhani element, leads to conformity that disappears when supervision is removed. This is the result that the axiology explicitly wishes to avoid. Habituation is therefore necessary and insufficient, and it's predictable to get compliance and call it character by treating it as a solution, not an input.

⁴⁴ Suhayib and Ansyari, "Design of Islamic Religious Education," 388–91.

⁴⁵ Muhammed Hüseyin Tuna, "The Professionalisation of Islamic Religious Education Teachers," *British Journal of Religious Education* 44, no. 2 (2022): 188–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1999905>.

⁴⁶ Naïma Lafrarchi, "Assessing Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Flemish Public Secondary Schools," *Religions* 11, no. 3 (2020): 110, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11030110>.

⁴⁷ Jusubaidi et al., "A Model of Transformative Religious Education," 190–98.

The argument should also be phrased in a way that it could fail. If it could be shown that a PAI programme designed only for textual transmission and written assessment results in dispositional outcomes similar to those of programmes with significant habituation and exemplification components then the constraint thesis would be false. The thesis would be considerably weakened if measures of student religious disposition were not associated with the epistemological breadth of programme design. Neither test has been run, and would need to be run with dispositional measures more credible than those currently available, which is a research priority in itself.

Two opposite points of view are worth noting. Some in the Islamization-of-knowledge program might say that the ontological commitment does more work than is allowed here so that a well-grounded curriculum produces adab mainly through its content. Other, in line with Kuntowijoyo's objectification, would say that the priority is to translate Islamic values into general social categories, not to secure the interior register, and that focusing on irfani risks making the aims of PAI unanswerable. The contestation between Indonesian Islamic educational institutions studied by Maemonah and colleagues suggests that these are real positions with institutional constituencies and not just academic options.⁴⁸

G. Conclusion

The Islamic Religious Education is grounded in three philosophical foundations and the relationship between them is not the loose complementarity that the literature typically describes. The ontological position of PAI is in line with a tawhidic understanding of the real whereby the human being is a unity and the unseen is really there. Axiologically it aims at ta'dib, a disposition expressed in conduct rather than a quantity of knowledge. Epistemologically it has at its disposal the three registers identified by al-Jabiri, bayani, burhani and irfani, the balance of which he treated as the condition of intellectual vitality rather than as a menu.

The article argues that these are related by constraint. The axiological goal is reached only through an epistemology that conserves the register that can transform propositions held into operative commitments. The failure to produce religious character is not a fault of effort or alignment where PAI has moved inward to textual transmission and cognitive assessment. Implication there.

If this is the case, the practical implication is that improving outcomes of PAI is not primarily a question of better teaching methods or clearer statements of outcomes. It is a question of returning designs to the epistemological breadth that they have lost, and of being honest about what current assessment can and cannot say about the subject's stated aims.

The argument is conceptual, and its central claim has yet to be tested. It makes a prediction that has been matched by one body of document-analytic evidence, which is suggestive and nothing more. What would resolve the question is empirical work correlating the epistemological breadth of PAI programme

⁴⁸ Maemonah et al., "Contestation of Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia: Content Analysis on Social Media," *Cogent Education* 10, no. 1 (2023): 2164019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2164019>.

designs with valid measures of student disposition over time. This article does not address the harder half of the problem -- constructing those measures

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