INCLUSIVE EPISTEMOLOGY: A SYNTHESIS OF AL-GHAZALI AND FAZLUR RAHMAN FOR A MODERN ISLAMIC CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Amid the challenges of globalization and the digital age, Islamic education faces a profound crisis: how to weave classical spiritual heritage with the imperative for modern inclusivity. This context motivates an innovative exploration synthesizing Al-Ghazali's epistemology, which integrates irfani (intuitive) and rational dimensions, with Fazlur Rahman's contextual hermeneutical approach. The primary goal is to establish an inclusive epistemology as a robust foundation for a modern Islamic curriculum, achieved through a deep comparative analysis of both thinkers' ideas, aimed at developing a pedagogy that embraces diversity, critical thinking, and humanistic values within pluralistic societies like Indonesia. Employing a qualitative method based on library research and descriptive-analytic comparative analysis, this study examines primary sources, including Al-Ghazali's Ihya Ulum al-Din and Fazlur Rahman's Islam and Modernity, triangulated with secondary literature on knowledge integration. The synthesis yields an inclusive curricular framework that unites textual, rational, and intuitive dimensions. This framework is highly relevant for reforming Islamic Religious Education (PAI) through models based on Qur'anic justice, fostering a generation adaptive to contemporary issues. This research's core contribution is bridging the gap between tradition and innovation, thereby promoting a more vibrant, inclusive, and globally competitive Islamic education.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali-Fazlur Rahman; Inclusive Epistemology; Modern Islamic Curriculum.

Introduction

Islamic education faces a crucial dilemma in the contemporary era due to globalization l revolution. On one hand, it adheres firmly to its spiritual and intellectual heritage, yet on the other, it is compelled to adapt to rapid social, cultural, and technological changes, including the moral crisis of Generation Z (Ondeng et al. 2025; Fadhilah dan Usriadi 2025). Traditional epistemological paradigms, tending towards *bayani* (textual) and *burhani* (rational), have proven insufficient in providing holistic solutions. Therefore, a curriculum revitalization is necessary not only to preserve doctrine but also to foster critical thinking, inclusivity, and humanization, while safeguarding Islamic values amidst the torrent of information (Rahmayanti et al. 2025).

In this context, a comparison of the thoughts of Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) and Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988 CE) becomes highly relevant. Al-Ghazali offers an epistemology integrating *irfani* (intuitive-spiritual) and rational elements, emphasizing intellectual and spiritual balance (Syaifudin 2013; Zamhariroh, Azis, dan Nata 2024). Fazlur Rahman, meanwhile, provides a contextual perspective through his "double movement" method and dynamic Qur'anic hermeneutics, stressing a historical-contextual understanding of the Qur'an (Syaifudin 2013). Despite their differing epistemological emphases, both hold significant potential for synthesis to forge an inclusive epistemology.

The urgent need for an inclusive epistemology stems from the requirement for Islamic education to produce intellectually and spiritually intelligent learners who possess social awareness, tolerance, and adaptability within a multicultural society (Rivai et al. 2025; Samilah 2024). This research aims to explore and synthesize the epistemologies of Al-Ghazali and Fazlur Rahman as a basis for integrating a PAI (Islamic Religious Education) curriculum that is more holistic, humanistic, and relevant to the current context, focusing on the development of critical thinking, spirituality, and tolerance. The references primarily include 70% of publications from the last 5 years, alongside primary works by Al-Ghazali (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*) and Fazlur Rahman (*Major Themes of the Qur'an*, *Islam and Modernity*) to establish a strong epistemological foundation.

Despite numerous studies examining the thoughts of Al-Ghazali and Fazlur Rahman separately, and some research comparing their ideas within the context of Islamic educational epistemology, a gap persists in academic literature regarding a specific synthesis that integrates Al-Ghazali's *irfani* dimension with Fazlur Rahman's contextual approach to form an inclusive epistemology ready for application in modern Islamic curricula. Many prior studies have focused more broadly on curriculum reform or the integration of Islamic values into inclusive curricula, but there remains a lack of explicit synthesis that combines these two epistemologies to produce a holistic, humanistic, and relevant framework for contemporary challenges such as the moral crisis among Generation Z and the need for inclusivity in multicultural societies like Indonesia. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a more comprehensive and applicable synthesis (Hamka 2021).

The main problem confronting Islamic education today is the imbalance between preserving classical epistemological traditions and adapting to global dynamics, where the PAI curriculum often fails to integrate critical and inclusive elements to address moral crises and social diversity. The utility of this research encompasses theoretical contributions to the development of a national inclusive PAI curriculum, practical benefits for educators, and policy implications for promoting humanization amidst digital disruptions (Mardatillah et al. 2025). Operationally, Al-Ghazali's epistemology refers to the *irfani*-rational integration for intellectual-spiritual balance, while Fazlur Rahman's epistemology is defined as a contextual "double movement" approach connecting Qur'anic principles with contemporary realities (Sibawaihi 2022). Their synthesis is operationalized as a holistic PAI curriculum framework for inclusive education.

Methods

This research is qualitative in nature with a descriptive-analytical approach, focused on the synthesis of Al-Ghazali's and Fazlur Rahman's epistemologies to build an inclusive curriculum framework in contemporary Islamic education (Saputra, Hermawan, dan Priatna 2024). The library research method is used as the primary basis, involving systematic collection of literature through keyword searches (e.g., "Al-Ghazali *irfani* rational," "Fazlur Rahman double movement," "*bayani burhani irfani* PAI curriculum") on credible databases like Google Scholar and ResearchGate, combined with comparative analysis to explore complex philosophical concepts contextually, as is common in Islamic thought studies (Syaifudin 2013). Literature selection criteria prioritized primary sources from the thinkers' original works, secondary sources post-2010 for relevance (70% recency), and thematic alignment with epistemology integration, ensuring 20-30 sources via inclusion/exclusion based on peer-review status and citation impact. This approach enables an in-depth description of the thoughts of both figures, followed by comparison and synthesis of practical implications for PAI curriculum reform in Indonesia (Tarigan, Dalimunthe, dan Pratama 2025).

Primary data sources are drawn from original works, such as Al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* and *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (focusing on *irfani*-rational integration via ta'lim rabbani and soul purification for knowledge acquisition), as well as Fazlur Rahman's *Islam and Modernity* and *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (focusing on contextual hermeneutics through "double movement" methodology, moving from historical context to general moral principles and back to contemporary application). Secondary data include supporting literature such as journals and books on Islamic epistemology, curriculum integration, and inclusive education, selected from credible databases like Google Scholar and ResearchGate, with priority given to post-2010 publications for contemporary relevance (Rahmayanti et al. 2025). The total references amount to approximately 20-30 sources, collected systematically through thematic searches and annotations.

Analysis is conducted through source triangulation for validation, cross-verifying primary texts with secondary interpretations and empirical PAI studies, using a structured three-step process: (1) individual description of epistemological concepts via thematic coding of key passages (e.g., Al-Ghazali's rational-spiritual balance, Rahman's dialectical hermeneutics); (2)

comparison of similarities and differences (*bayani*: textual authority; *burhani*: rational demonstration; *irfani*: intuitive illumination) employing side-by-side matrices to highlight complementarities, as in Al-Jabiri's epistemological critique adapted for synthesis; and (3) synthesis of an inclusive curriculum model by integrating dimensions proportionally (e.g., 40% *bayani*, 30% *burhani* , 30% *irfani*). Manual content analysis techniques or software such as NVivo (for node-based coding of patterns in epistemological themes, as used in Indonesian Islamic education reform studies) are applied to identify patterns, ensuring accurate hermeneutic interpretation (Syaifudin 2013). Research ethics are maintained through precise citations (APA/Turabian style), while the main limitation is reliance on written texts, which can be supplemented with empirical studies in the future.

Result and Discussion

Results

The synthesis of Al-Ghazali's and Fazlur Rahman's epistemologies produces an inclusive curriculum framework that integrates three main dimensions: *bayani* (textual-revelatory), *burhani* (rational-empirical), and *irfani* (intuitive-spiritual), as the foundation for holistic modern Islamic education. From the comparative analysis, Al-Ghazali's thoughts in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* emphasize the balance between *irfani* and rational elements to form the *insan kamil*, where knowledge is not merely an accumulation of facts, but rather the purification of the soul through the integration of spiritual and intellectual aspects (Zamhariroh et al. 2024). Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman, through *Islam and Modernity*, introduces contextual hermeneutics via the "double movement" to understand historical texts and apply them dynamically to address contemporary issues such as pluralism and technological advancement (Khatami dan Dina 2024).

Crucially, this specific integration of *irfani* and contextual hermeneutics has not been fully explored in prior studies, leaving a gap in developing a ready-to-apply inclusive epistemology for modern Islamic curricula. This study addresses this gap by offering a more comprehensive and applicable synthesis. The synthesis of both yields a flexible curriculum model: 40% textual content (bayani) for doctrinal foundations, 30% rational (burhani) for critical thinking, and 30% intuitive (*irfani*) for character development, aligned with the latest regulations of the Merdeka Curriculum 2024, which emphasizes inclusivity for children with special needs (Kemdikbud 2025). These findings are supported by recent studies showing that the integration of Islamic epistemology enhances student competencies in modern learning environments, with an increase in tolerance of up to 25% in inclusive PAI learning (Rivai et al. 2025). This framework is relevant for PAI reform in Indonesia, where 13 new regulations from Kemendikbudristek 2025 strengthen the legal umbrella for inclusive education from early childhood to high school, including the integration of gender equality and disability access (Herdy, 2025). The analysis results indicate that the application of this synthesis can reduce educational access inequalities, as seen in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum that supports student diversity (Kartika 2024).

Discussion

The inclusive epistemological synthesis from the thoughts of Al-Ghazali and Fazlur Rahman brings fresh air to Islamic education today, addressing its contemporary rigidity and perceived irrelevance amidst pervasive digital information and moral crises (Fadhilah dan Usriadi 2025). Inclusive epistemology, in this context, is operationally defined as a comprehensive knowledge framework that integrates diverse sources revelation, reason, and intuition to promote equitable access to learning for all students, regardless of background, fostering tolerance and adaptability in multicultural settings. Al-Ghazali, an 11th-century scholar, advocated for true knowledge as a blend of a pure heart (*irfani*) and a sharp mind (rational), emphasizing soul purification before knowledge acquisition, akin to cleaning a mirror to gain a clear reflection (Zamhariroh et al. 2024). This approach is particularly pertinent for cultivating strong, empathetic character amidst the moral challenges posed by digital globalization and negative social media content.

Complementing this, Fazlur Rahman, a 20th-century modern thinker, offered a more flexible perspective with his "double movement" hermeneutics. This method involves first understanding the Qur'an within its historical context and then reinterpreting its universal principles to address contemporary issues, such as applying verses on justice to environmental concerns or women's rights in the AI era. Contextual pedagogy, operationally, refers to teaching methods that adapt Islamic texts to real-world scenarios, encouraging critical dialogue and application rather than rote learning, thereby bridging historical wisdom with modern problem-solving. Rahman's emphasis on Islam as a living and adaptive tradition (Khatami dan Dina 2024) complements Al-Ghazali's inner spirituality, creating a comprehensive inclusive epistemology encompassing bayani (sacred texts), burhani (logical reasoning and empirical evidence), and *irfani* (deep intuitive understanding) (Yu'timalahuuyatazaka 2015). This integrated model serves as a balanced framework, making the PAI curriculum more engaging and beneficial for diverse learners.

In Indonesia, this synthesized epistemological framework holds significant implications for inclusive education. The Merdeka Curriculum 2024, supported by Kemendikbud, already champions equal access and integration of gender and disability considerations (Kemdikbud 2025). Humanization of education, here, is defined operationally as a learner-centered process that prioritizes emotional, ethical, and spiritual growth alongside cognitive skills, aiming to develop compassionate individuals who embody Islamic values like rahmah (mercy) in diverse classrooms. Research indicates that such integrated approaches can boost student tolerance by up to 25% through PAI lessons that are dynamic and relevant to real-life situations, like discussing online bullying through Qur'anic values (Rivai et al. 2025). This aligns with findings on peace-building PAI curricula that foster appreciation for religious and cultural diversity from an early age (Juliani et al. 2025), preparing a more adaptive generation for Industry Revolution 5.0, where Islamic values provide a moral compass amid AI-driven changes (Habibi 2023).

However, challenges persist. Many PAI teachers lack adequate training in teaching *irfani* or contextual hermeneutics, often leading to rote memorization rather than deeper spiritual integration, particularly in rural areas (Indah 2025). Furthermore, new 2025 Kemendikbudristek

regulations concerning inclusive education require substantial budgetary support for effective on-ground implementation, especially for assistive learning tools for students with disabilities. Despite these hurdles, the Al-Ghazali-Rahman synthesis presents an opportunity to develop a "love-based" curriculum, integrating cyber literacy with gentle morals to mitigate online radicalization risks (Fadil 2025).

The proposed curriculum model with a 40% bayani, 30% burhani , and 30% *irfani* allocation is not an arbitrary estimation but is rooted in the analytical findings of this study. Holistic curriculum, operationally, means a balanced educational design that encompasses intellectual, emotional, and spiritual domains, ensuring comprehensive student development through interconnected learning experiences rather than isolated subjects. The bayani dimension is foundational, representing the unchangeable scriptural and doctrinal core of Islam. A 40% emphasis ensures that students firmly grasp fundamental Islamic knowledge and values, which Al-Ghazali deemed crucial for purification of the soul (Zamhariroh et al. 2024). The burhani component, set at 30%, reflects Fazlur Rahman's call for rationalism and ijtihad in understanding and applying Islamic teachings to contemporary problems. This proportion facilitates critical thinking, scientific inquiry, and problem-solving skills necessary for modern challenges. Finally, the *irfani* dimension, also at 30%, is derived from Al-Ghazali's profound emphasis on spiritual intuition and inner purity as the highest form of knowledge. This allocation is crucial for character development, emotional intelligence, and empathetic understanding, which are vital for fostering tolerance and humanization in education. This weighting is designed to create a balanced curriculum that equips students with robust doctrinal knowledge, critical intellectual tools, and profound spiritual and ethical grounding, moving beyond a unidimensional approach toward a holistic educational experience.

The contribution of this synthesis extends beyond theory, serving as a practical bridge between historical wisdom and future needs. Pilot programs at institutions like UIN Imam Bonjol Padang could test this model, enabling students to apply Qur'anic teachings to inclusivity issues, informed by commentaries like Hamka's and Shihab's tafsirs (Samilah 2024). Further empirical research, such as pre- and post-implementation surveys, is necessary to validate its effectiveness. Ultimately, this approach fosters an Islamic education that is simple yet strong: inclusive, dynamic, and compassionate, preparing students to navigate a rapidly changing world while maintaining their spiritual roots (Awalia dan Sari 2025).

Conclusion

This research concludes that the synthesis of Al-Ghazali's epistemology with the integration of *irfani* (intuitive-spiritual) and *bayani* (textual) dimensions, combined with Fazlur Rahman's thoughts through contextual hermeneutics "double movement" and *burhani* (rational), produces a robust inclusive epistemological framework as the foundation for modern Islamic education curriculum. This framework not only preserves traditional values but also fosters critical thinking, tolerance, and adaptation to contemporary challenges such as digital moral crises and pluralism (Fadhilah dan Usriadi 2025), making it highly relevant for the reform of Islamic Religious

Education (PAI) in Indonesia, particularly in supporting the inclusive regulations of Kemendikbudristek 2025 that emphasize equal access and holistic character formation. The integration of these three dimensions (*bayani*, *burhani*, *irfani*) forms a dynamic curriculum capable of producing an adaptive and inclusive Muslim generation, aligned with Qur'anic principles of justice (Awalia dan Sari 2025).

For future research, it is recommended to conduct empirical studies such as classroom action research in madrasahs to test the effectiveness of this model, the development of PAI teacher training programs based on inclusive epistemology to address barriers to spiritual integration (Indah 2025), as well as comparative analyses of cross-country curricula or impacts on love-based digital literacy in the IR 5.0 era (Fadil 2025). These recommendations are expected to drive applicative transformations, especially at UINs like Imam Bonjol Padang, to enrich the discourse on more holistic and relevant Islamic education.

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