
AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MATERIALS: FROM INDOCTRINATION TO CRITICAL AND REFLECTIVE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT (10 PT)

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) materials in Indonesia have predominantly been developed through a normative and doctrinal approach that emphasizes obedience and memorization rather than critical thinking and moral reflection. This article aims to examine the epistemological foundations underlying IRE materials by employing perspectives from critical pedagogy and Islamic philosophy of knowledge. Using a qualitative approach with library research methods, this study analyzes the relationship between religious epistemology, educational paradigms, and the construction of learning materials. The findings reveal that indoctrinative tendencies in IRE originate from a textualist epistemology that limits dialogue, rational inquiry, and contextual understanding. In contrast, a reflective paradigm of Islamic education requires the integration of revelation, reason, and lived experience in the learning process. This study proposes a critical-reflective learning orientation that positions students as active subjects in meaning-making rather than passive recipients of religious doctrines. Epistemological reconstruction of IRE materials is therefore essential to fostering rational, moderate, and reflective Muslim learners capable of responding to contemporary social challenges. (Calibri, 10 pt).

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Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) occupies a central position within Indonesia's national education system as a means of forming faithful, ethical, and socially responsible individuals. Ideally, IRE is expected to nurture not only religious obedience but also intellectual maturity, moral awareness, and critical engagement with social realities. However, in practice, IRE learning materials are often dominated by normative and doctrinal approaches that emphasize memorization, compliance, and acceptance of fixed religious truths.

Such approaches tend to position students as passive recipients of knowledge, while teachers function as unquestioned authorities. Religious concepts are frequently presented as absolute and final, leaving little room for dialogue, interpretation, or critical inquiry. As a result, religious education risks becoming indoctrinative rather than educative, focusing more on ritual correctness than on ethical reasoning and reflective understanding.

From an epistemological perspective, education is not merely concerned with what is taught, but also with how knowledge is constructed, justified, and transmitted. Islamic epistemology, in its classical tradition, integrates revelation (*wahy*), reason (*'aql*), and experience (*tajribah*) as complementary sources of knowledge. Nevertheless, contemporary IRE materials often reduce this integrative framework to a textualist orientation that prioritizes scriptural authority while marginalizing rational reflection and contextual understanding.

Previous studies indicate that many IRE textbooks and curricula remain descriptive and prescriptive in nature. Moral values are delivered as ready-made norms detached from learners' lived experiences and contemporary social challenges. This condition contradicts the Islamic intellectual tradition, which encourages reflection (tafakkur), reasoning (ta'aqqul), and interpretive effort (ijtihad) as essential dimensions of religious understanding.

Therefore, an epistemological critique of IRE materials is necessary to reassess the foundations of religious knowledge transmission in formal education. This study aims to examine the epistemological assumptions underlying IRE learning materials and to propose a critical and reflective learning orientation that positions students as active subjects in the construction of religious meaning.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach using library research as its primary method. The research focuses on analyzing the epistemological foundations of Islamic Religious Education materials rather than measuring empirical learning outcomes. Data sources consist of classical and contemporary works on Islamic epistemology, critical pedagogy literature, national IRE textbooks, curriculum documents, and relevant scholarly journal articles.

Data analysis is conducted through content analysis and conceptual analysis. Content analysis is used to identify dominant epistemological patterns embedded in IRE materials, while conceptual analysis examines the relationship between epistemology, pedagogy, and the construction of religious knowledge. To enhance analytical validity, triangulation of sources is applied by comparing perspectives from Islamic philosophy and modern educational theory. The analysis is interpretative in nature and aims to develop a coherent conceptual framework for understanding epistemological issues in IRE.

Research Finding

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education materials in Indonesia are predominantly structured within a normative and doctrinal epistemological framework. Religious knowledge is presented as absolute and unquestionable, leaving limited space for critical inquiry, interpretation, or epistemic dialogue. Textual authority is positioned as the primary source of truth, while rational reflection and contextual understanding are largely marginalized.

This epistemological orientation produces an indoctrinative learning model in which memorization and moral obedience are emphasized over reflective understanding. Students are positioned as passive recipients of religious knowledge, while teachers function as the main epistemic authorities. Consequently, learners' capacity to engage critically with religious values and apply them meaningfully in diverse social contexts remains underdeveloped.

Another significant finding is the disconnection between IRE materials and students' lived realities. Ethical concepts such as justice, honesty, and responsibility are frequently presented in abstract terms without engagement with contemporary social issues. As a result, religious learning tends to be ritualistic and theoretical, with limited impact on students' moral awareness and social sensitivity.

Furthermore, elements of critical and reflective learning are minimally integrated into IRE materials. Opportunities for dialogue, questioning, and contextual interpretation are scarce. Although Islamic epistemology emphasizes the integration of revelation, reason, and experience, current materials largely neglect rational inquiry and experiential learning. This imbalance limits the development of independent moral reasoning and reflective religious consciousness among students.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the epistemological structure of IRE materials reflects a textualist paradigm that prioritizes doctrinal certainty over intellectual engagement. Such an approach contradicts the broader Islamic intellectual tradition, which recognizes reason as an essential instrument for understanding revelation. When religious education is reduced to doctrinal transmission, it loses its transformative and emancipatory potential.

From the perspective of critical pedagogy, indoctrinative education reinforces hierarchical power relations between teachers and students. Paulo Freire's concept of the "banking model" of education is evident in IRE practices where knowledge is deposited into passive learners. This model suppresses students' critical consciousness and restricts their ability to interpret religious teachings in relation to real-life experiences.

A critical-reflective learning paradigm offers an alternative epistemological orientation. In this model, students are positioned as active subjects who engage in dialogue, reflection, and contextual interpretation. Teachers act as facilitators who guide moral inquiry rather than imposing fixed meanings. Islamic values are understood as ethical principles that must be interpreted and applied within specific social and cultural contexts.

Integrating this paradigm into IRE materials requires epistemological reconstruction that balances revelation, reason, and experience. By encouraging critical engagement and reflective learning, Islamic Religious Education can contribute to the formation of learners who are not only religiously observant but also intellectually autonomous and socially responsible.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the primary challenge of Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia lies not in its religious content, but in its epistemological foundations. Normative and indoctrinative approaches limit students' critical and reflective capacities, reducing religious education to memorization rather than meaningful understanding.

An epistemological reconstruction of IRE materials is therefore essential. By adopting a critical and reflective learning orientation, Islamic Religious Education can function as a space for intellectual engagement, moral reasoning, and contextual interpretation. Such transformation is crucial for fostering learners who are capable of responding thoughtfully and ethically to contemporary social challenges.

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