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## Arabic Language and Islamic Epistemology in Muhammadiyah Education: A Bayani Burhani and ‘Irfani Approach to the SDGs

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### Abstract

**Objective:** This study aims to reconceptualize the Arabic language as the epistemological axis of Islamic education within the Muhammadiyah educational system, positioning it as a strategic medium for integrating revelation (wahy), reason (‘aql), and spiritual intuition (dzauq) in response to contemporary educational challenges and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **Theoretical framework:** The theoretical framework is grounded in the triadic epistemology of bayani, burhani, and ‘irfani, as articulated by al-Jābirī and recontextualized in Islamic educational thought, wherein Arabic functions not merely as a linguistic tool but as a unifying epistemic structure. **Literature review:** The literature review reveals that most existing studies approach Arabic instruction from pedagogical, grammatical, or communicative perspectives, while its epistemological role in shaping Islamic knowledge and ethical reasoning remains underexplored. Recent scholarly debates highlight the urgency of repositioning Arabic as a living epistemology capable of sustaining intellectual depth, and ethical responsibility. **Methods:** This research adopts a qualitative philosophical approach, drawing on Muhammadiyah institutional documents, curricular guidelines, and classical as well as contemporary Islamic scholarship. Data are analyzed through conceptual triangulation by integrating textual (bayani), rational (burhani), and intuitive (‘irfani) modes of reasoning. **Results:** The findings demonstrate that Arabic, when framed as an epistemic medium, enables integrative learning, bridges the dichotomy between religious and scientific knowledge, and cultivates ethical consciousness aligned with sustainable educational development. This epistemological integration supports Muhammadiyah’s vision of Islam berkemajuan by promoting inclusive, reflective, and values-based education. **Implications:** The implications of this study suggest that repositioning Arabic within Islamic education can contribute to sustainable knowledge formation, moral reasoning, and intercultural understanding, reinforcing the ethical foundations of the SDGs. **Novelty:** The novelty of this research lies in introducing the concept of Arabic as an epistemological ecology, offering a transformative framework that advances Islamic educational renewal beyond linguistic and technical boundaries.

**Keywords:** arabic language, islamic epistemology, bayani burhani, muhammadiyah, sdgs.

## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of Islamic education exposes a profound epistemological tension: the Arabic language, once the living axis of revelation and reasoning, has been gradually reduced to a mere linguistic apparatus. Revered as the sacred medium of the Qur'an, Arabic was historically the foundation upon which Muslims constructed and transmitted knowledge. Yet in many modern institutions, it is taught as a set of grammatical rules and syntactic exercises, detached from its metaphysical and cognitive essence [1]. This pedagogical reduction transforms Arabic from a source of knowing into an object of study, severing the organic bond between *wahy* (revelation) and *'aql* (reason). As a result, the spiritual and intellectual coherence of Islamic epistemology becomes fragmented, producing learners who may articulate the language fluently but fail to internalize its divine logic, semiotic power, and ontological depth [2].

Beneath this fragmentation lies what may be called an epistemological crisis, a state in which Islamic education oscillates between rigid literalism and secular positivism, unable to reconcile scriptural fidelity with rational inquiry. While classical thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyyah envisioned a harmonious interplay between revelation and intellect, contemporary practice often isolates these domains [3]. The challenge, therefore, is not linguistic but epistemic: how to reclaim Arabic as the medium of integrative knowing, a language through which knowledge reflects both the divine order and human reason. A renewed framework must embrace the Bayani, Burhani, and 'Irfani paradigms of Islamic thought, situating Arabic once more as the living heart of *tafaqquh fi al-din*. Even where understanding falters, as Rosowsky notes, the act of recitation and linguistic engagement itself retains spiritual resonance, affirming that Arabic's sacred form carries meaning beyond its semantics. It is within this sacred-linguistic tension that the possibility of reconstructing an authentic, holistic epistemology of Islamic education emerges.

Muhammadiyah articulates a distinctive educational philosophy that fuses *wahy* (revelation), *'aql* (reason), and *dzauq* (spiritual intuition) into a coherent epistemological framework embodying the vision of *Islam Berkemajuan-Progressive Islam* [4]. Rooted in an integrative curriculum, this framework responds to the long-standing dichotomy between traditional Islamic education and modern secular pedagogy by positioning the Arabic language as the epistemic bridge between faith and intellect. Within this orientation, Muhammadiyah draws upon the triadic model of *Bayani* (textual-linguistic reasoning), *Burhani* (rational-empirical reasoning), and *'Irfani* (intuitive-spiritual reasoning) to cultivate a balanced educational experience that harmonizes revelation, logic, and spirituality. The Arabic language functions as the central axis that gives epistemic coherence to this synthesis, transforming linguistic study into an act of theological reasoning and ethical formation [5].

Through this holistic-integrative vision, Muhammadiyah's curriculum reform transcends disciplinary fragmentation by merging science, technology, and Islamic values within a single intellectual ethos. Education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge but the cultivation of character, consciousness, and transcendence. Muhammadiyah's approach nurtures spiritual, emotional, and intellectual dimensions in unison, reflecting a pedagogy that aspires to form *insan kamil*, the complete human being. The inclusion of Sufi-inspired ethical principles further deepens this epistemology, grounding moral formation in the monotheistic consciousness (*tauhid*) that underpins all Muhammadiyah thought. In this sense, Muhammadiyah education becomes an embodiment of epistemological unity: a living laboratory where revelation informs reason, reason refines intuition, and Arabic serves as the linguistic soul of an integrated Islamic worldview [6].

The study of Arabic as an epistemological matrix within Muhammadiyah's educational praxis reveals the language's profound role as both the medium and method of Islamic knowing. Far beyond a tool for textual comprehension, Arabic embodies the very grammar of revelation, shaping how meaning, reason, and spirituality intersect in Islamic thought. Its syntactic and semantic structures do not merely transmit divine content but also encode the logic through which revelation becomes intelligible [7]. The architecture of Arabic enables nuanced hermeneutical engagement with the Qur'an, allowing the interpreter to perceive layers of meaning that transcend literalism. Within this epistemic frame, Muhammadiyah's integration of *Bayani*, *Burhani*, and *'Irfani* paradigms situates Arabic as the ontological foundation of its tarbiyah philosophy, where *Bayani* affirms the textual sanctity of revelation, *Burhani* situates rationality as an instrument of understanding, and *'Irfani* restores the spiritual consciousness necessary for intellectual humility. The result is a linguistic-spiritual synthesis that anchors Islamic education in a dynamic interplay between divine discourse and human reasoning.

Yet, this epistemological elevation of Arabic is not without its tensions. While the *'Irfani* paradigm celebrates Arabic as a vessel of spiritual experience - where poetry, rhythm, and metaphor become paths to divine proximity - critics warn that such linguistic centrality risks narrowing the epistemic horizons of Islamic thought [8]. An exclusive focus on Arabic may inadvertently marginalize other linguistic and cultural contributions to Islamic civilization, thereby constraining the universality of Islam's intellectual heritage [9]. Muhammadiyah's challenge, therefore, is to maintain epistemic fidelity without linguistic exclusivism to affirm Arabic as the axis of revelation while recognizing the plurality of languages as complementary instruments of divine wisdom. In this balance lies the potential for a renewed Muhammadiyah educational paradigm: one that honors Arabic as the sacred grammar of revelation, yet opens its epistemology to the diverse semiotic landscapes through which Islam continues to speak to the modern world.

The research foregrounds the Arabic language as a vital epistemological axis within the Muhammadiyah intellectual tradition, positioning it not merely as a medium of instruction but as a living framework that shapes the very architecture of Islamic knowledge. In this view, Arabic is both linguistic and metaphysical; its syntax reflects order, its semantics mirrors meaning, and its rhythm carries revelation. This theoretical reframing situates Arabic as a living epistemology that embodies the unity of *wahy* (revelation), *'aql* (reason), and *tajribah* (experience), echoing Lumbard's insight that knowledge in Islam forms an interconnected continuum encompassing the religious, intellectual, and natural sciences [10]. For Muhammadiyah, this implies that the mastery of Arabic is not confined to linguistic proficiency but extends toward an ontological literacy, where understanding the divine word means participating in the divine order. In this way, Arabic becomes the grammar of thought, ethics, and cosmology, a language that both reveals and organizes the structure of Islamic consciousness.

This paradigm carries significant implications for Islamic education reform within Muhammadiyah. The movement's holistic-integrative curriculum represents a deliberate effort to bridge the long-standing divide between religious and scientific knowledge by cultivating students' spiritual, emotional, and intellectual capacities in a single, coherent educational vision [11]. Yet, this research argues that true integration requires more than curricular innovation; it demands the restoration of Arabic's epistemic dignity, a recognition of the language not simply as a subject but as a worldview that animates Islamic values and modes of knowing. Such restoration is especially urgent in postcolonial contexts, where Arabic's intellectual authority has been marginalized by Western epistemologies and linguistic hierarchies. Reclaiming Arabic as the cognitive and spiritual medium of Muhammadiyah's Islam Berkemajuan

thus represents not only an educational reform but an epistemological act of liberation, an effort to re-center Islamic knowledge upon its original linguistic and spiritual foundations [12].

In the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), contemporary education is expected to foster not only cognitive skills but also ethical coherence and epistemic sustainability. However, within Islamic education, SDG-oriented reforms often emphasize curriculum alignment and institutional performance while overlooking the epistemological foundations of knowledge transmission. Arabic, despite its central role as the language of revelation, is largely treated as a technical or pedagogical instrument rather than an epistemic framework. This gap reveals a critical need to reconceptualize Arabic as a sustainable medium of integrative Islamic knowledge formation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing scholarship on Arabic in Islamic education predominantly frames the language as a pedagogical or communicative tool, emphasizing grammar acquisition, instructional methods, and linguistic proficiency. Parallel studies addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within Islamic education tend to focus on curriculum integration, institutional reform, and policy alignment, often treating epistemology as secondary. Consequently, limited attention has been given to Arabic as an epistemological medium that sustains ethical reasoning, integrative knowledge, and spiritual consciousness. This gap suggests the need for a conceptual shift that positions Arabic as a foundation for sustainable Islamic epistemology aligned with holistic educational development [13].

The interplay between language and knowledge in Islamic intellectual history reveals a profound continuity that bridges classical and contemporary thought. Al-Ghazālī perceived language as a vehicle of divine truth, asserting that true understanding of the Qur'an requires not only linguistic mastery but also epistemic purification where the intellect is disciplined and the heart refined to receive revelation. Ibn Taymiyyah extended this discourse by framing Arabic as the rational architecture of revelation, arguing that Qur'anic semantics constitute the foundational logic of Islamic reasoning and thus determine the structure of theological thought itself. In modern scholarship, Mohammed Abed al-Jabiri reinterprets this legacy through his taxonomy of reasoning *bayani* (textual-expressive), *burhani* (demonstrative-rational), and *'irfani* (intuitive-spiritual), which systematically maps the epistemic modes underlying Islamic civilization. His work marks a critical turn in recognizing that linguistic, rational, and spiritual dimensions of knowledge are not competing, but complementary pathways to truth. Expanding these classical frameworks to include multiple epistemological voices can revitalize Qur'anic studies, foster dialogical hermeneutics, and reaffirm Arabic as the living medium through which revelation continues to inform human understanding [14].

Amin Abdullah's integration-interconnection paradigm constitutes one of the most significant intellectual contributions to contemporary Indonesian Islamic thought, offering a framework for harmonizing *bayani* (textual), *burhani* (rational), and *'irfani* (intuitive) reasoning within the educational sphere. By envisioning a dynamic interplay between revelation, reason, and moral intuition, Abdullah's model redefines the relationship between Islamic and general sciences, fostering epistemic dialogue and intellectual inclusivity [15]. This paradigm was later reinterpreted by Haedar Nashir as the philosophical foundation of Muhammadiyah's Islam Berkemajuan, emphasizing education as the arena where these diverse modes of knowing converge into a coherent vision of human development. Within this framework, integration is not merely structural or curricular, but epistemological; it calls for the unification of knowledge sources under a holistic Islamic worldview capable of addressing both religious authenticity and modern relevance.

The implementation of Muhammadiyah's educational reform reveals a critical epistemological tension, particularly concerning the underdeveloped integration of Arabic as a linguistic and intellectual bridge between *wahy* (revelation) and *'aql* (reason). Although significant progress has been made in curriculum modernization and pedagogical reform, Arabic often remains confined to the realm of language proficiency rather than serving as a central medium for knowledge formation. This gap suggests that Muhammadiyah's broader vision of *tajdid al-fikr al-Islami* (renewal of Islamic thought) may risk devolving into administrative and structural reorganization rather than achieving genuine epistemic revitalization [16]. The absence of Arabic as an epistemic axis potentially weakens the integrative ideal of uniting revelation, reason, and experience in Islamic education.

Curriculum modernization in Muhammadiyah institutions seeks to bridge the long-standing dichotomy between religious and scientific knowledge through a holistic and integrative framework that incorporates science, technology, and Islamic values. Yet, despite its ambitious scope, the reform often lacks a robust linguistic foundation capable of connecting textual revelation to scientific reasoning. Without embedding Arabic as the language of meaning-making and conceptual mediation, curriculum reform risks being superficial, integrating subjects structurally but not epistemologically. A genuine synthesis requires Arabic not merely as a communicative tool but as a methodological key for interpreting, contextualizing, and harmonizing diverse fields of knowledge [17].

Pedagogically, Muhammadiyah's educational renewal must also grapple with the persistence of rote learning models that privilege memorization over inquiry and reflection [18]. The incorporation of critical pedagogy - emphasizing dialogue, creativity, and ethical consciousness - has shown potential in cultivating critical thought while preserving Islamic identity. Such pedagogical innovation must be complemented by an epistemological return to Arabic as a medium for critical reflection and spiritual depth. Leadership models inspired by this paradigm, which promote participatory decision-making and intellectual openness [19], could enable a more authentic engagement with Arabic as the grammar of Islamic reasoning. In doing so, Muhammadiyah education could move beyond formal reform toward a living epistemology that reclaims the unity of knowledge within the Islamic tradition.

## METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative philosophical design grounded in an epistemological framework that investigates how the Arabic language functions as the axis of Islamic epistemology within Muhammadiyah's educational paradigm. Rather than viewing Arabic merely as a linguistic tool, the study conceptualizes it as an intellectual framework through which Islamic knowledge is constructed, transmitted, and reinterpreted. Within this perspective, Arabic operates as a mediating space between revelation (*wahy*), reason (*'aql*), and spiritual intuition (*dzauq*), reflecting the synthesis of *bayani*, *burhani*, and *'irfani* paradigms. The qualitative philosophical approach enables a deep exploration of meaning, value, and intellectual coherence in Muhammadiyah's efforts to integrate Islamic and modern sciences.

## Data Sources

The study draws upon both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data include institutional documents issued by Muhammadiyah's Majelis Diktilitbang and selected educational institutions, such as curriculum blueprints, academic guidelines, and policy statements related to Arabic and Islamic studies. These materials provide direct insight into how Arabic is positioned epistemologically within Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy.

Secondary data comprises academic writings, research reports, and classical works on Islamic epistemology, particularly those elaborating the *bayani*, *burhani*, and *'irfani*



frameworks, as well as contemporary analyses of Muhammadiyah's educational reform. Together, these sources offer both historical depth and contextual relevance for philosophical interpretation.

### Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using two complementary techniques: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis involved a systematic examination of educational texts to identify conceptual patterns and epistemological assumptions related to Arabic's role in knowledge formation. The analysis focused on curriculum design, language policy, and pedagogical articulation of Arabic in relation to Islamic thought [20].

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected Muhammadiyah educators, curriculum designers, and scholars of Islamic epistemology. The interviews explored how Arabic is understood and practiced as an epistemological medium - linking rational inquiry, textual exegesis, and spiritual reflection - in actual educational settings. These discussions enriched the interpretive depth of the study by capturing both theoretical visions and practical challenges [21].

### Analytical Framework

The analysis employed an epistemological model integrating the *bayani*, *burhani*, and *'irfani* dimensions of Islamic thought.

1. The *bayani* framework guided the textual and linguistic analysis, focusing on Arabic as the vehicle of revelation and scriptural reasoning.
2. The *Burhani* dimension was used to examine rational and scientific integration, emphasizing Arabic's role in articulating logical and systematic knowledge.
3. The *'irfani* paradigm illuminated the spiritual and experiential aspects of Arabic, viewing language as a means of ethical consciousness and inner understanding.

These three paradigms were analyzed through philosophical triangulation, linking textual interpretation, educational context, and epistemic function to uncover the holistic role of Arabic in Muhammadiyah's intellectual landscape.

### Validity and Reflexivity

Ensuring the conceptual validity and interpretive coherence of this research required a rigorous process of triangulation involving diverse data sources, analytical perspectives, and interpretive stages [22]. By integrating classical Islamic epistemological texts with contemporary Muhammadiyah educational documents, the study established a multi-layered analytical foundation that allowed theoretical consistency and contextual sensitivity to emerge simultaneously. This process ensured that interpretations of Arabic as an epistemological framework were not isolated abstractions but grounded in the lived educational realities of Muhammadiyah institutions. Such triangulation strengthened the credibility of the research by revealing convergences and tensions between traditional knowledge structures and modern educational reforms [23].

At the same time, the researcher maintained a reflexive stance throughout the study, consciously positioning themselves within the broader intellectual and ideological landscape of Islamic education reform. Reflexivity functioned as an ethical and epistemic safeguard acknowledging the influence of the researcher's interpretive background, methodological assumptions, and philosophical orientation on the analytical process [24]. Continuous verification was achieved through comparative readings of key texts and iterative engagement with Muhammadiyah's evolving discourse, thereby ensuring both historical continuity and contextual accuracy in interpretation. This reflexive rigor not only

enhanced the trustworthiness of findings but also affirmed the dynamic and dialogical nature of Islamic epistemology as embodied in the Arabic linguistic tradition.

To incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the methodological framework, this study analytically mapped the epistemological functions of Arabic against SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Conceptual indicators such as ethical reasoning, epistemic integration, and moral sustainability were employed to assess how Arabic-centered epistemology contributes to inclusive, reflective, and value-oriented education. This alignment enabled the evaluation of Arabic not only as an internal Islamic epistemic structure but also as a sustainable educational resource that supports global objectives of ethical knowledge formation and institutional integrity [25].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Arabic as the Epistemological Core of Muhammadiyah Education

The Arabic language serves as a vital epistemological framework within Muhammadiyah's educational practices, facilitating the integration of revelation (*wahy*), reason (*'aql*), and intuition (*dzauf*). This triadic relationship underscores a progressive vision of Islam, termed *Islam berkemajuan*, which harmonizes spiritual depth with rational inquiry. The following sections elaborate on this integration.

#### 1. Arabic as a Unifying Structure

Arabic, in the context of Islamic epistemology, transcends its functional role as a communicative instrument to become the medium through which divine knowledge (*bayani*) is disclosed and interpreted. Its syntactic and semantic structures are not arbitrary but divinely ordained to carry ontological meanings embedded in revelation. The Qur'an, as the ultimate linguistic and epistemic text, manifests its guidance through the morphology, rhythm, and rhetoric of Arabic, making the language itself a repository of divine wisdom. Within this *bayani* framework, mastering Arabic is not merely a linguistic exercise but an act of epistemic devotion, wherein comprehension of grammatical rules, semantic nuances, and rhetorical devices becomes a pathway to unveiling deeper layers of meaning in the Qur'anic discourse. Thus, Arabic embodies the logic of revelation-structuring not only how knowledge is expressed but how it is experienced, internalized, and lived. It anchors Islamic thought in the sacred order of language, ensuring that the epistemological foundations of faith remain coherent, precise, and faithful to divine intent [26].

Simultaneously, Arabic also serves as the language of rational inquiry (*burhani*), nurturing the intellectual and critical dimensions of Islamic scholarship. Within its linguistic system lies a rational architecture that allows for logical analysis, argumentation, and systematic reasoning, enabling the articulation of philosophical and theological ideas with rigor and clarity. The Burhani dimension situates Arabic as the medium through which *'aql* (reason) dialogues with *wahy* (revelation), fostering an intellectual tradition that balances faith and rationality. In Muhammadiyah's educational framework, this rational dimension of Arabic aligns with the movement's commitment to *Islam berkemajuan*, a progressive Islam that embraces scientific reasoning while remaining rooted in the revelatory text. Through this integration, Arabic becomes a vehicle for epistemic empowerment, encouraging students to interrogate, interpret, and innovate within the boundaries of the Islamic worldview. Rather than confining knowledge to dogmatic repetition, the burhani function of Arabic opens a space for dynamic engagement, where language, logic, and faith converge to cultivate critical consciousness and spiritual intelligence [27].

### Integration of Epistemic Elements

The interplay of *wahy* (revelation), *'aql* (reason), and *dzauq* (spiritual taste or intuition) represents the holistic architecture of Islamic epistemology, wherein the *'irfani* dimension acts as the spiritual counterpart to rational inquiry. This triadic relationship forms a continuum rather than a hierarchy, each element enriching the others in the pursuit of truth. *Wahy* provides metaphysical certainty, *'aql* offers analytical clarity, and *dzauq* grants experiential depth, ensuring that knowledge is not confined to intellectual comprehension but extends into ethical embodiment and spiritual realization. In this integrated vision, the *'irfani* paradigm functions as the heart of epistemology, animating the otherwise abstract structures of logic and text with existential meaning. The Arabic language, in this context, becomes a medium of illumination: its phonetic rhythm, rhetorical cadence, and poetic symbolism invite the believer not only to think but to feel revelation to internalize divine knowledge as an experiential truth rather than a mere propositional statement. Such a perspective underscores that true understanding in Islam is not achieved through cognition alone, but through the unity of knowing, being, and becoming [28].

This integrative epistemology finds practical expression in Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy, which embodies *'irfani* values through the cultivation of moral character, empathy, and spiritual discipline. While Muhammadiyah does not formally affiliate with Sufi orders, its educational praxis reflects a *tasawuf amali*, a pragmatic spirituality that harmonizes intellectual rigor with inner purification. The curricula of Muhammadiyah institutions emphasize ethical education (*akhlak mulia*), social responsibility, and *tajdid* (renewal), positioning these as essential outcomes of learning rather than peripheral attributes. Here, the *'irfani* dimension is not expressed through mystical seclusion but through ethical engagement with society, reflecting a *Sufi* ethos within a reformist framework. This synthesis situates Muhammadiyah's pedagogy as a form of applied spirituality, where students are trained not only to reason critically (*burhani*) and interpret textually (*bayani*), but also to cultivate spiritual sensitivity and moral agency (*'irfani*). In doing so, Muhammadiyah preserves the inner life of Islamic education, ensuring that the pursuit of knowledge remains inseparable from the pursuit of virtue and divine proximity [29].

### Broader Implications

The emphasis on Arabic as an epistemic tool underscores its centrality in the formation of Islamic thought and pedagogy. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, language is not merely an instrument of expression but a vehicle of meaning through which revelation, reason, and intuition converge into a coherent epistemological framework. Arabic, as the language of the Qur'an, functions as the ontological medium through which divine reality is interpreted and articulated; its syntax, morphology, and semantics embody theological and philosophical nuances that shape how knowledge is perceived and transmitted. This epistemic role situates Arabic as both a hermeneutic key and a cognitive framework, influencing not only the interpretation of sacred texts but also the ethical and intellectual orientation of learners [30]. The philosophical depth of Arabic demands an educational approach that integrates linguistic mastery with metaphysical understanding, thereby linking the act of learning the language with the cultivation of reflective, value-based cognition. In the context of contemporary Islamic education, this view calls for a renewed exploration of how Arabic can serve as a transformative medium bridging classical epistemologies with modern educational needs and fostering a dynamic synthesis between linguistic precision, ethical formation, and intellectual creativity.

The integration of Arabic within Muhammadiyah's curriculum framework highlights its role as a foundational element for knowledge production, particularly in courses like Tafsir and Aqidah Akhlak. However, the implementation of Arabic as a philosophical axis remains inconsistent across institutions.



## Linguistic Rationality in Curriculum

Arabic is positioned as the logic of revelation, serving as the structural and semantic foundation through which divine truth is mediated to human understanding. Within Islamic epistemology, this positioning elevates Arabic beyond a mere linguistic instrument into a framework of cognition, a logic that encodes divine principles in its morphology, syntax, and rhetorical style. Mastery of Arabic, therefore, becomes not only an act of linguistic competence but also an epistemic discipline that refines the intellect (*'aql*) and attunes it to the nuances of revelation (*wahy*). The grammatical precision, rhythmic cadence, and layered semantics of Arabic embody a rational and spiritual coherence that guides believers toward an integrative comprehension of faith and reason. This epistemic depth situates Arabic as the cornerstone of Islamic pedagogy, where language study transforms into a process of cultivating intellectual humility, ethical discernment, and theological insight [31].

In contemporary Islamic education, this principle is being operationalized through curricular innovations that utilize Arabic texts not only as sources of information but as methodological instruments for inquiry. By engaging with classical and modern Arabic works, students are trained to think within the epistemic logic of Islam rather than merely about it, learning to analyze, question, and internalize religious meanings through the language's own cognitive patterns. This approach promotes what Nordin (2023) terms "epistemic reflection," in which Arabic serves as both content and method, bridging textual engagement with interpretive reasoning. As a result, the act of studying Arabic transforms from a technical exercise into a spiritual-intellectual practice, fostering deeper embodiment of Islamic values, critical literacy, and contextual understanding. Such pedagogical alignment reaffirms the view that linguistic education, when rooted in epistemological awareness, can become a powerful means of nurturing both the intellect and the soul.

## Uneven Implementation

Many educational institutions continue to treat Arabic merely as a skill-based discipline, emphasizing grammar, vocabulary, and communication at the expense of its epistemological and philosophical dimensions. This pedagogical orientation reduces Arabic to a utilitarian function - an instrument for recitation, translation, or ritual comprehension - while overlooking its profound role as the linguistic vessel of revelation and rational thought. In doing so, these institutions risk producing students who are proficient in the technicalities of the language but disconnected from its metaphysical depth and interpretive logic. The separation of linguistic competence from philosophical engagement represents not only a curricular limitation but also an epistemic disjunction within Islamic education itself. Arabic, as the medium of divine discourse, embodies a worldview in which meaning, morality, and metaphysics are intertwined. Therefore, to confine it to functional literacy is to neglect its power to shape consciousness, cultivate intellectual discipline, and mediate the relationship between revelation and reason [32].

This limitation also reflects a partial realization of Muhammadiyah's epistemological vision, which aspires to integrate the dimensions of *bayani* (textual), *burhani* (rational), and *'irfani* (spiritual) knowledge into a unified framework of Islamic education. While Muhammadiyah schools and universities have made significant progress in developing integrative curricula, the compartmentalization of Arabic into a purely linguistic field constrains the transformative potential of this vision. To fulfill Muhammadiyah's intellectual project, Arabic should not stand apart from other disciplines but rather intersect with philosophy, theology, science, and ethics as a medium of reasoning and reflection. Such integration would enable students to experience Arabic as a living epistemic system, one that informs not only how they express ideas but also how they construct, validate, and internalize knowledge. By reclaiming Arabic's philosophical depth, Muhammadiyah institutions can move closer to realizing their goal of producing graduates who embody the

synthesis of faith, intellect, and ethical action, thereby bridging the long-standing divide between linguistic form and epistemological substance [33].

#### Need for Epistemic Embedding

A deeper embedding of Arabic across diverse fields of knowledge - particularly theology, philosophy, and science - is imperative to realize the synthesis of Islamic epistemology envisioned by reformist movements such as Muhammadiyah. Arabic, as the linguistic foundation of revelation, serves not only as a means of communication but as the structural logic through which divine and rational knowledge converge. Its integration into the sciences, social studies, and humanities could revitalize the intellectual spirit of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), allowing students to see knowledge as an interconnected web rather than as fragmented disciplines [34]. When Arabic is approached as both a linguistic and epistemic framework, it facilitates an understanding of scientific inquiry as part of a broader spiritual and moral quest, an approach that aligns with the Qur'anic imperative to "read" the signs of God in both scripture and creation. Thus, embedding Arabic into the discourse of scientific reasoning and modern disciplines is not merely a pedagogical enhancement; it represents a philosophical reclamation of Islam's classical unity of knowledge, where faith and intellect, revelation and experimentation, language and logic, coexist within a single epistemological horizon.

The theoretical contributions of thinkers such as Mohammed Abed al-Jabiri and Mohammed Arkoun further underscore this epistemological imperative. Both scholars advocate for a critical and contextual reinterpretation of Arabic texts that transcends mere linguistic analysis, inviting deeper reflection on the structures of knowledge embedded within the language itself [35]. Al-Jabiri's concept of *al-'aql al-'Arabi* (the Arabic reason) exposes the underlying logic that shapes Islamic intellectual traditions, while Arkoun's applied Islamology urges an interdisciplinary engagement with revelation that combines philology, anthropology, and hermeneutics. These frameworks offer valuable pathways for Muhammadiyah education to reformulate Arabic studies not as rote textualism but as a dynamic arena of intellectual transformation [36]. By drawing on such critical methodologies, Muhammadiyah institutions can cultivate a generation of scholars who read Arabic texts not only with linguistic accuracy but with philosophical depth, engaging revelation as a living discourse that speaks to contemporary issues of ethics, science, and human civilization.

The Muhammadiyah movement's reform in higher education underscores a holistic-integrative paradigm aimed at renewing the epistemological foundation of Islamic education through the synthesis of religious and modern sciences. This reform aspires to transcend the traditional dichotomy between *ulum al-din* and contemporary disciplines by fostering critical thinking, moderation, and inclusivity among students [37]. By encouraging openness and intellectual flexibility, Muhammadiyah's curriculum seeks to nurture a balanced worldview capable of addressing complex global and societal challenges. Yet, despite this ambitious framework, the Arabic component often remains positioned merely as an instrumental tool for religious comprehension rather than as a foundational epistemic medium that anchors the entire intellectual structure [38]. This marginalization constrains the full realization of epistemological pluralism envisioned within the Muhammadiyah educational ethos. The Arabic language, as the axis of Islamic thought, holds potential to unify revelation (*bayani*), rational inquiry (*burhani*), and spiritual insight (*'irfani*) into a cohesive framework for knowledge production and moral formation, a potential yet to be fully actualized.

The interconnection of disciplines within Muhammadiyah's epistemological framework also carries profound implications for spirituality and ethics. The educational model emphasizes ethical consciousness and moral responsibility, resonating with Sufi sensibilities that regard knowledge as a path to self-purification and societal harmony [6]. Such an approach aligns with global educational values that stress sustainability,

responsibility, and human flourishing [39]. However, when Arabic is treated as peripheral rather than as the epistemic backbone of Islamic reasoning, this integrative ideal risks devolving into superficial syncretism. A re-centering of Arabic not merely as a linguistic skill but as the epistemological logic of revelation could deepen the Muhammadiyah curriculum's transformative reach. It would allow learners to engage Islamic texts not just for meaning but for method, enabling an authentic reconstruction of Islamic epistemology that integrates faith, reason, and spirituality in the service of human development and intellectual liberation.

## Reclaiming Arabic as the Grammar of Islamic Reason

The epistemic tension within Muhammadiyah's reform reflects a complex interplay between the instrumentalization of Arabic and its ontological significance as the language of revelation. This duality is rooted in historical perspectives, notably those of scholars like Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah, who viewed Arabic as essential for understanding divine knowledge. Their insights resonate with Al-Jābirī's tripartite epistemology, which emphasizes the integration of various forms of reasoning in education. However, the challenge remains in effectively incorporating these paradigms into a modern curriculum that also embraces contemporary scientific and technological advancements.

### Historical Perspectives on Arabic

Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah both recognized Arabic as the ontological foundation of Islamic knowledge, far surpassing its utilitarian function as a language of communication. For them, Arabic was the *lingua sacra*, a divine medium through which revelation was not only transmitted but also comprehended, shaping the very contours of epistemic reasoning and moral understanding [40]. Al-Ghazālī viewed the mastery of Arabic as essential for penetrating the *batin* (inner meaning) of the Qur'an, where linguistic precision and spiritual reflection intertwine. Ibn Taymiyyah, similarly, emphasized that the integrity of *wahy* (revelation) could only be maintained through Arabic's conceptual structure, which preserves the logic and coherence of divine discourse. Within Muhammadiyah's educational context, this classical insight underscores the necessity of restoring Arabic to its rightful position not as a static subject but as the epistemic grammar of revelation, central to forming an integrated understanding of faith, ethics, and rational inquiry.

In a more contemporary trajectory, Muhammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī's epistemology revitalizes the role of Arabic reasoning through his triadic model of *bayani* (textual), *burhani* (rational), and *'irfani* (intuitive) paradigms. His framework advocates for a holistic reconstruction of Islamic thought, balancing textual fidelity with rational critique and spiritual depth. This synthesis resonates strongly with Muhammadiyah's vision of Islam berkemajuan, which aspires to harmonize revelation, intellect, and moral consciousness within a modern educational framework. Al-Jābirī's model demonstrates that Arabic, when treated as an epistemological medium rather than a linguistic accessory, becomes a bridge between the classical and the contemporary, the sacred and the scientific. In this light, Muhammadiyah's reform could draw upon al-Jābirī's epistemic vision to transform Arabic education into a locus of renewal, where linguistic mastery evolves into a mode of thinking integrating bayani clarity, burhani logic, and 'irfani insight as complementary paths toward holistic knowledge and ethical progress.

### Modern Educational Challenges

The integration of curriculum within Muhammadiyah educational institutions reflects an enduring tension between the preservation of religious knowledge and the advancement of modern sciences. Institutional priorities often lean toward the development of contemporary disciplines such as science, technology, and social studies, while the epistemological and linguistic foundations rooted in Arabic receive comparatively less emphasis. This tendency reveals an underlying imbalance in Muhammadiyah's educational reform: the pursuit of modernization risks fragmenting the unity of knowledge that once

characterized Islamic education, where *wahy* (revelation) and *'aql* (reason) operated in mutual reinforcement. The challenge, therefore, lies not merely in curriculum design but in epistemological orientation how to sustain a framework that is simultaneously faithful to revelation and responsive to modern intellectual demands. Without embedding Arabic as the epistemic bridge connecting divine knowledge and rational inquiry, the integration agenda may remain superficial, reducing reform to administrative coordination rather than genuine epistemic renewal [41].

Addressing this issue requires a reinterpretation of classical Islamic epistemology in light of contemporary educational realities. Classical scholars such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah conceptualized Arabic not only as a linguistic medium but also as a rational and spiritual structure through which divine truths are articulated. Their insights, complemented by al-Jābirī's modern reconstruction of *bayani*, *burhani*, and *'irfani* reasoning, provide a philosophical basis for integrating traditional and modern sciences within Muhammadiyah education. By recontextualizing these epistemic models, Arabic can reclaim its role as the intellectual and moral foundation of Islamic knowledge, guiding engagement with modern disciplines without compromising spiritual integrity. In this sense, Muhammadiyah's vision of Islam berkemajuan can be realized through an educational paradigm that harmonizes revelation and reason, positioning Arabic as the living language of both faith and inquiry.

#### The Interplay of The Bayani, Burhani, And 'Irfani

The interplay of the bayani, burhani, and 'irfani modes of Arabic reveals a rich epistemological framework that positions the language as a conduit for divine revelation, rational discourse, and spiritual experience. This dynamic interaction allows Arabic to transcend mere grammatical structure, evolving into a semiotic universe that harmonizes intellect, text, and soul.

#### Bayani Mode: Revelation and Semantic Precision

The bayani mode represents the foundational epistemological framework of Islamic thought, where Arabic serves not merely as a communicative medium but as the vessel through which divine truths are articulated, preserved, and interpreted. Within this paradigm, the precision of language is inseparable from the authenticity of meaning. The morphology, syntax, and semantics of Arabic collectively safeguard the integrity of revelation. The Qur'an's linguistic structure, rich in metaphor and rhythm, is thus not incidental but integral to its epistemic function. As such, the mastery of Arabic becomes synonymous with the mastery of revelation itself; it is the key to accessing *al-ma'nā al-lughawī* (linguistic meaning) and *al-ma'nā al-ma'nawī* (spiritual meaning). In this sense, the *bayani* tradition functions as a linguistic-theological system that ensures doctrinal coherence and preserves the moral and intellectual unity of the Islamic worldview. It anchors human understanding within the framework of divine communication, affirming that the path to knowledge begins with language and culminates in revelation [42].

Ibn Taymiyyah's contribution deepens this understanding by positioning revelation (*naql*) as the epistemic foundation upon which reason (*'aql*) operates, rather than its competitor. His triadic model linking *naql*, *'aql*, and *fitrah* (innate human disposition) presents an integrated vision of knowledge where linguistic precision and divine guidance coalesce into a coherent epistemological system. In this framework, Arabic emerges as both the logic and the grammar of revelation, enabling reason to function within divinely ordained limits while maintaining intellectual vitality. Ibn Taymiyyah's critique of unrestrained rationalism serves as a reminder that when reason is detached from revelation, it risks producing fragmented or distorted understandings of reality. Thus, the *bayani* mode, grounded in Arabic linguistic structures, not only preserves the textual sanctity of the Qur'an but also sustains the balance between divine authority and human reasoning, an equilibrium essential for revitalizing Islamic education and epistemology in the Muhammadiyah tradition.

### Burhani Mode: Rational Discourse

The Burhani mode positions Arabic as the language of logic, a linguistic and intellectual structure through which rational inquiry becomes possible within the Islamic worldview. Unlike the *bayani* mode, which emphasizes textual fidelity, the burhani paradigm foregrounds the demonstrative and analytical dimensions of Arabic discourse. It is within this framework that linguistic precision transforms into logical clarity, allowing for the articulation of arguments, classifications, and analogies essential to both theological and scientific reasoning. The syntactic and rhetorical flexibility of Arabic enables complex philosophical and deductive thought, aligning linguistic mastery with cognitive sophistication. Through this paradigm, Arabic does not merely describe reality; it constructs it, shaping the epistemic processes that allow Muslims to engage critically with both revelation and the natural world. Thus, the Burhani tradition situates Arabic at the intersection of faith and reason, asserting that rationality, when expressed through the sacred language, remains anchored in divine wisdom while open to intellectual expansion.

Al-Ash‘arī’s theological framework exemplifies the burhani integration of logic and revelation, offering a model where rational inquiry strengthens rather than undermines faith. His defense of Islamic creed through *kalām* (rational theology) demonstrates how linguistic reasoning can illuminate metaphysical truths without compromising orthodoxy. By employing Arabic as a medium for systematic thought, Al-Ash‘arī transformed theological discourse into an epistemic exercise that harmonizes logic with belief. This synthesis also reflects the intellectual ambition of Muhammadiyah’s educational vision, which aspires to unite *‘ilm al-dīn* (religious sciences) and *‘ulūm al-ḥayāt* (modern sciences) within a coherent epistemological framework. In this sense, the *Burhani* mode serves as a bridge between classical Islamic rationalism and contemporary scientific rationality, enabling a form of intellectual engagement that is both critical and devotional [43]. It reaffirms that the pursuit of knowledge, when rooted in the Arabic logic of revelation, remains a sacred endeavor, one that nurtures both the intellect and the soul.

### ‘Irfani Mode: Spiritual Intuition

The ‘irfani mode situates Arabic within the realm of spiritual intuition and experiential knowledge, grounding language in the inner dimensions of faith and consciousness. Unlike the bayani and burhani modes, which operate through textual interpretation and rational demonstration, the ‘irfani paradigm transcends discursive reasoning by engaging the heart (*qalb*) and the soul (*ruh*) as epistemic faculties. Within this framework, Arabic becomes not only a tool for communication but a medium for experiencing divine reality, each word, sound, and rhythm of the Qur’an acting as a mirror that reflects spiritual truths beyond literal comprehension. The recitation (*tilāwah*) and contemplation (*tadabbur*) of Qur’anic Arabic awaken a state of inner awareness where meaning is not merely understood but felt [44]. Thus, the ‘irfani dimension of Arabic education seeks to nurture *dzauq al-ma‘rifah* (taste of knowledge), a form of wisdom attained through presence, humility, and reflection. In this sense, Arabic serves as the bridge between the intellect and the spirit, where linguistic beauty becomes an instrument for unveiling divine unity within the self and the cosmos.

This ‘irfani approach complements the Bayani and Burhani modes by restoring the personal and communal dimensions of understanding revelation. Thinkers like al-Jābrī and Nasr Hamid Abū Zayd exemplify this synthesis through their humanistic interpretations of the Qur’an, where meaning is shaped not only by textual analysis but by lived experience and moral consciousness. Their works reveal that Arabic, as the language of revelation, possesses an elasticity that allows it to respond to the evolving ethical and existential concerns of modern Muslim societies. This view resonates deeply with Muhammadiyah’s vision of *Islam berkemajuan* (progressive Islam), which emphasizes faith that is intellectually grounded yet spiritually vibrant. By integrating ‘irfani awareness into education, Arabic instruction moves beyond rote learning toward cultivating a



transformative spirituality, one that encourages empathy, ethical responsibility, and the pursuit of transcendental truth. In this mode, Arabic becomes a lived epistemology, inviting believers not only to understand divine revelation but to embody it in their social, emotional, and spiritual lives.

Within Muhammadiyah's epistemological reform, this triadic interplay offers a powerful pathway toward decolonizing Islamic knowledge. The subordination of Arabic to Western epistemic categories has long fragmented Islamic intellectual life, reducing revelation to textualism and reason to secular rationality. Reinstating Arabic as an epistemic axis restores its mediating role between the sacred and the rational, bridging classical scholarship with modern inquiry. Such repositioning aligns with Muhammadiyah's philosophy of Islam berkemajuan, where the pursuit of progress is inseparable from fidelity to revelation and moral consciousness.

**Table 1. Epistemological Concepts in Arabic Intellectual Tradition**

Epistemology	Core Concepts & Key Terms	Meaning and Educational Implication
Bayānī	<i>Naql</i> (النقل) – transmission of revelation <i>Lafz</i> (اللفظ) – precision of wording <i>Dalālah</i> (الدلالة) – textual indication	Centers knowledge on scriptural authority; emphasizes mastery of Arabic grammar and semantics to preserve doctrinal integrity and textual fidelity in Islamic education.
Burhānī	<i>‘Aql</i> (العقل) – rational intellect <i>Burhān</i> (البرهان) – demonstrative proof <i>Nazar</i> (النظر) – reflective reasoning	Positions reason as a complementary tool to revelation; promotes critical thinking and integration of logic and science in the curriculum.
‘Irfānī	<i>Dhawq</i> (الذوق) – spiritual taste or intuition <i>Kashf</i> (الكشف) – unveiling of divine truth <i>Tajrubah rūḥiyyah</i> (التجربة الروحية) – spiritual experience	Highlights inner experience and moral intuition; supports the development of spiritual intelligence and ethical consciousness in education.

The future of Muhammadiyah's educational renewal rests on reconceptualizing Arabic not merely as a linguistic tool but as an epistemological ecology that integrates diverse paradigms of knowledge. Within this framework, Arabic becomes a living medium through which the bayani, burhani, and ‘irfani modes of knowing interact, bridging textual revelation, rational inquiry, and spiritual intuition. This approach affirms that language, reason, and revelation are not isolated domains but mutually constitutive dimensions of a holistic pedagogy. By treating Arabic as a unifying epistemic space, Muhammadiyah's education can move beyond instrumental language instruction toward cultivating a deeper synthesis between faith and reason, aligning with the movement's broader vision of *tajdid al-fikr* (intellectual renewal) and *al-takāmul al-ma‘rifī* (knowledge integration).

Such a transformation calls for a reimagined curriculum that embodies the interconnectedness of science and religion, fostering a dynamic educational ecosystem rooted in both inquiry and spirituality. The integration of bayani, burhani, and ‘irfani paradigms offers a multidimensional framework for cultivating critical reflection and ethical consciousness, positioning students as active interpreters rather than passive recipients of knowledge [45]. However, this integrative model must avoid collapsing the unique epistemological distinctions that define Islamic thought. As R'boul and Barnawi

caution, uncritical synthesis may risk homogenizing Islamic knowledge and diminishing its distinctive spiritual depth [46]. Therefore, the challenge for Muhammadiyah lies in achieving a balanced integration where Arabic serves as both the medium and the method for constructing an educational paradigm that is simultaneously rational, revelatory, and spiritually transformative.

The analysis demonstrates that positioning Arabic as an epistemological axis enables Muhammadiyah education to operationalize the integrative ideals of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 and SDG 16. Through the bayani paradigm, Arabic sustains textual integrity and ethical continuity, ensuring that knowledge remains anchored in revelation. The Burhani dimension facilitates rational coherence, allowing Islamic education to engage scientific reasoning without epistemic rupture. Meanwhile, the ‘irfani paradigm cultivates moral awareness and spiritual responsibility, reinforcing values essential for peaceful and just institutions. Together, these dimensions reveal Arabic as a mechanism of epistemic sustainability, supporting holistic learning, ethical governance, and culturally grounded educational transformation within a global sustainability framework.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Arabic language constitutes the epistemic infrastructure of Islamic knowledge rather than a mere linguistic instrument within Muhammadiyah education. Positioned as the axis of Islamic epistemology, Arabic functions as a mediating system that unites revelation (wahy), rational inquiry (‘aql), and spiritual intuition (dzauq) through the integrated paradigms of bayani, burhani, and ‘irfani. This trilateral epistemic ecology enables Islamic education to move beyond disciplinary fragmentation toward a coherent model of knowledge production grounded in ethical meaning, intellectual rigor, and spiritual consciousness. The findings affirm that epistemological integration cannot be achieved solely through curricular restructuring or interdisciplinary discourse; it requires a reorientation of language as the locus where truth, reason, and moral responsibility converge. From the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this epistemic repositioning of Arabic carries significant implications. By fostering holistic learning, ethical reasoning, and intellectual inclusivity, Arabic-centered epistemology directly supports SDG 4 (Quality Education), particularly its emphasis on inclusive, equitable, and values-based education. The integration of Burhani reasoning further aligns with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) by encouraging analytical thinking and scientific engagement rooted in ethical frameworks. Meanwhile, the ‘irfani dimension contributes to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by cultivating moral awareness, social responsibility, and spiritual accountability qualities essential for just governance and social cohesion. However, this study also identifies a persistent epistemic gap in Muhammadiyah’s educational praxis, namely the instrumentalization of Arabic as a technical subject detached from its epistemological depth. Such a reduction risks weakening the integrative vision of Islam Berkemajuan by limiting Arabic’s capacity to unify religious and scientific knowledge. Addressing this gap requires restoring Arabic as both the method and medium of knowing, where language becomes a cognitive, ethical, and spiritual framework for engaging contemporary challenges. Ultimately, revitalizing Arabic within the bayani–burhani–‘irfani continuum offers a transformative pathway for Muhammadiyah education to articulate a sustainable Islamic modernity, one that harmonizes revelation, reason, and experience while contributing meaningfully to the global agenda of human development and epistemic sustainability embodied in the SDGs.

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### Author Contribution

All authors contributed substantially to this research. The first author conceptualized the study and developed its framework. The second author conducted the global information analysis. The third author collected field data within the Muhammadiyah cadre development system. The fourth author reviewed the literature, refined the arguments, and ensured consistency with existing Islamic epistemological perspectives within the Muhammadiyah organization. All authors approved the final manuscript.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no known financial or non-financial conflicts of interest in the conduct of this research. This research was conducted solely for academic purposes, with independence in data interpretation and analysis. Institutional affiliations supported this process without influencing the findings, thus ensuring neutrality in discussing the study of Islamic epistemology within the Muhammadiyah organization.

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