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The Nexus of Knowledge and Action in the Qur'an: Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar and Its Behavioral Implications for Muslim Youth

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Abstract

The contemporary digital environment has intensified concerns about the disjunction between religious knowledge and moral practice among Muslim youth, as increased access to religious information does not necessarily translate into ethically consistent behavior. This study examines the dialectical relationship between knowledge (*al-ʿilm*) and action (*al-ʿamal*) in the Qur'an through the socio-cultural hermeneutic perspective (*al-adabī al-ijtimāʿī*) of Buya Hamka's *Tafsir Al-Azhar* and formulates its axiological implications for youth character development. A qualitative library research design was employed using a thematic exegesis (*mawḍūʿī*) framework. Selected Qur'anic passages, including Qur'an 2:44, 58:11, and 9:105, were examined through content analysis and hermeneutic-reflective interpretation. The findings indicate that Hamka conceptualizes knowledge and righteous action as an inseparable organic continuum. Knowledge provides epistemological and moral guidance grounded in spiritual consciousness, whereas action constitutes the practical manifestation and verification of faith. Separating these dimensions produces intellectual and moral inconsistency that undermines personal integrity. Within youth character formation, their integration provides a normative foundation for worship, social empathy, and personal accountability. The study concludes that Islamic education should extend beyond cognitive transmission toward an integrated pedagogical ecosystem emphasizing reflective internalization, behavioral

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habituation, and parental and educator role modeling (*uswah*). The study contributes a Qur'an-based conceptual framework for bridging knowledge and action in Muslim youth development. Practically, educational institutions and families should align religious instruction with consistent modeling and opportunities for moral practice to strengthen transformative moral resilience amid contemporary sociocultural disruptions.

Keywords: Buya Hamka; Islamic Character Education; Knowledge–Action Integration; Muslim Youth; *Tafsir Al-Azhar*

INTRODUCTION

The position of science in Islamic epistemology occupies a central position, functioning not merely as a cognitive instrument, but as an ontological foundation for understanding the reality of divinity and the cosmos. Knowledge is positioned as an axiological bridge that describes transcendental consciousness with practical human ethics on earth (Busti et al., 2024). In the discussion of the Qur'an, the process of knowing (*al-'ilm*) is never free from the responsibility of morality and existential implementation. Therefore, the conception of science in Islamic civilization demands an organic coherence between fundamental understanding and the manifestation of action, where the substantive truth of a knowledge is tested through its transformative effectiveness on the reality of individual and social behavior (Ahmad, 2025).

Nevertheless, the contemporary landscape reveals a sharp epistemic anomaly between the accumulation of religious knowledge and the manifestation of empirical morality. The phenomenon of moral dissonance, or knowledge-action gap, poses a crucial challenge to the Muslim youth demographic in an era of information transparency. Today's youth are massively exposed to religious narratives through formal curricula, family institutions, and the digital media ecosystem (Kholis et al., 2025). However, this abundance of religious literacy often stops at the level of mere cognitive consumption and fails to be internalized into ethical action. This paradox gives rise to the phenomenon of veiled behavioral secularization, where noble values such as integrity, responsibility, and social empathy are reduced to doctrinal memorization isolated from everyday life.

The Quran explicitly criticizes the disconnect between normative discourse and practical action. This sharp criticism is comprehensively recorded in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:44:

۞ أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

The Meaning: "*Why do you tell other people to do it? "Do you not seek righteousness, while you forget yourselves, even though you read the Book? Do you not understand*?"

This verse emphasizes that the legitimacy of one's knowledge is ethically invalidated when there is a contradiction between the call for goodness and personal involvement in realizing it. The rhetorical question afa lā ta'qilūn at the end of the verse indicates that the disconnection between knowledge and good deeds is a form of intellectual dysfunction and the collapse of the integrity of human rationality.

In the socio-historical dimension of interpretation, Buya Hamka, in his masterpiece, Tafsir Al-Azhar, provides a contextual reading of the verse's rebuke. Hamka asserts that knowledge unaccompanied by good deeds represents intellectual hypocrisy that cripples the driving force of civilization (Hamka, 1984). According to Hamka, the moral burden on the bearer of knowledge is far heavier than on the layperson; failure to align speech and action not only harms personal integrity but also undermines the public's trust in the values of revelation. This view aligns with contemporary moral criticism regarding the importance of exemplary behavior (*uswah*) as the most effective pedagogical instrument in the transmission of religious ethics (Husaini & Setiawan, 2020).

On the other hand, the Quran not only highlights the threat posed to those who possess knowledge without practical application, but also places a high degree of dignity on the integration of faith and intellectual capacity. This synergistic significance is emphasized in QS. Al-Mujadilah [58]:11:

...يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

The meaning: "... *Allah will exalt those who believe among you and those who are given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is All-Knowing of what you do*"

The construction of this verse positions faith and knowledge as complementary, mutually binding entities. The elevation of human status before God is not measured hierarchically based on sterile intellectual capacity, but rather is closely bound by the closing clause that Allah is All-Knowing of what is done (*khabir*), which directs that the ultimate orientation of knowledge and faith is measurable action.

Hamka's exploration of QS. Al-Mujadilah [58]:11 in the Tafsir Al-Azhar emphasizes that the glory of the degree promised by Allah is not merely an eschatological status in the afterlife, but rather moral authority and social leadership in the world (Bulqini, 2025). Hamka requires that knowledge that elevates human dignity is living knowledge—namely knowledge illuminated by monotheism and culminating in the service of humanity. The character of Hamka's interpretation, which is characterized by adabi *ijtima'i* (social literature-culture), provides a distinct distinction compared to classical theological interpretations, because he frames the verses of the Qur'an as an operational solution to the moral crisis of the people, especially the younger generation in facing the challenges of modernity (Afroh, 2022).

Several previous studies have examined the concepts of knowledge and charity within the realm of Islamic thought. Most of the literature examines this relationship from a classical Sufi perspective, such as the study of Al-Ghazali's epistemological discourse (Huda & Basuki, 2026), or places it within the discourse of modern Islamic educational philosophy (Muslih et al., 2022). Practically, recent research on Muslim adolescent morality generally focuses on the evaluation of madrasah curricula (Sholehudin et al., 2026) or the psychology of religiosity-based moral development (Izzah et al., 2026). However, the analytical integration of contextual interpretations of the archipelago—particularly Hamka's thought—with the dialectics of contemporary adolescent moral ethics remains minimally comprehensively discussed.

The lack of adequate conceptual articulation between the interpretation of *adabi ijtima'i* and the resolution of adolescent moral crises creates an urgent academic research gap that needs to be filled. Most research tends to treat Hamka's work as merely a historical-hermeneutical legacy, without contextualizing its interpretive instruments as a resolutive framework for the pedagogical impasse among the younger generation of Muslims. The urgency of this study rests on the premise that today's Muslim youth need a model of ethical articulation that is not rigid, culturally grounded, and capable of bridging the fragmentation between religious cognition and social practice in an era of information disruption.

To address this scientific gap, this study aims to deeply analyze the dialectical relationship between knowledge and practice in the Qur'an through the hermeneutical lens of Buya Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar, while simultaneously formulating its practical significance for the character formation of Muslim youth. Specifically, this investigation aims to answer two main research questions: first, how to reconstruct the meaning of the relationship

between knowledge and practice in the Qur'an based on Buya Hamka's interpretive epistemology; and second, what are the axiological implications of this knowledge-practice synthesis in engineering the formation of moral integrity and character in the younger generation of Muslims amidst the dynamics of contemporary social change.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with library research, placing texts and literature as the primary objects of study (Suwendra, 2018). The data corpus is classified into two categories: primary and secondary data. Primary data are rooted directly in the text of the Quran and Buya Hamka's monumental exegetical work, Tafsir Al-Azhar, focusing on the interpretation of verses conceptualizing the relationship between knowledge and good deeds. Meanwhile, secondary data include monographs, reputable scientific journal articles, and relevant previous research on the developmental psychology of Muslim adolescents, Islamic ethics, and discourses on the formation of the moral character of the younger generation.

Methodologically, this research employs a thematic interpretation (*maudhu'i*) approach to generate a systematic, comprehensive, and contextual understanding. The interpretation procedure begins with an inventory of Quranic verses containing keywords and substance related to the dialectic of knowledge and good deeds. The collected verses were then classified thematically, examined for their *asbabun nuzul* (intentional revelation) and inter-verse correlations (*munasabah*), and then explored in depth through Buya Hamka's hermeneutical lens in Tafsir Al-Azhar, which focuses on *adabi ijtima'i* (socio-cultural societal considerations).

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis techniques combined with hermeneutic-reflective analysis (Abdussamad, 2021; Rijali, 2018). The analysis phases involved textual data reduction, categorization of essential meanings regarding the integration of knowledge and practice, and synthesis of Hamka's interpretations. This conceptual reconstruction was then integrated into contemporary discourse through an inductive approach to formulate its significance for the formation of morality, cognitive integrity, and behavioral patterns of Muslim youth amidst the challenges of modern moral disruption.

RESULTS

The Relationship between Knowledge and Practice in the Qur'an: The Perspective of Al-Azhar Interpretation

1. Science as the Basis for Attitude Formation

In this research, the verses about science studied include QS. Al-'Alaq [96]:1–5, QS. Al-Mujadilah [58]:11, QS. Az-Zumar [39]:9, QS. Fāṭir [35]:28, and QS. Ṭāhā [20]:114. These five groups of verses show several important aspects of knowledge, starting from the command to read, the priority of people with knowledge, the difference between people who know and don't know, the relationship between knowledge and faith, to the command to continue asking for additional knowledge.

Allah SWT. says in QS. Al-'Alaq [96]:1–5: "Read it with (mentioning) the name of your Lord who created. He created man from a clot of blood. Read it, and your Lord is the Most Glorious. Who teaches (humans) with a pen. He taught man what he did not know." (QS. Al-'Alaq [96]:1–5).

This verse demonstrates the importance of knowledge in human life. The command to read is the beginning of the process of acquiring knowledge, but this command is placed in relation to Allah, the Creator and Teacher of mankind. In Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka explains that the command to read indicates the importance of reading and acquiring knowledge, while the mention of the qalam indicates the importance of writing as a means of acquiring, developing, and conveying knowledge. Thus, knowledge is not only related to intellectual ability but must also be used responsibly (Hamka, 1982).

The position of knowledge is also confirmed in QS. Al-Mujadilah [58]:11: "Allah will elevate those who believe among you and those who are given knowledge by several degrees. And Allah is All-Knowing of what you do." (QS. Al-Mujadilah [58]:11).

This verse demonstrates the exalted status of knowledge in Islam. Allah links faith with knowledge and states that those who believe and are given knowledge will attain a higher status. However, this dignity cannot be separated from human behavior, as the same verse concludes with the affirmation that Allah knows what is done. In his Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka positions knowledge as one of the things that elevates human status, especially when it is used within the framework of faith and religious responsibility (Hamka, 1984).

Furthermore, QS. Az-Zumar [39]:9 shows the difference between those who know and those who do not know: “Say, ‘Are those who know equal to those who do not know?’ Indeed, only those who possess reason can receive admonition..” (QS. Az-Zumar [39]:9).

This verse shows that knowledge confers certain qualities on humans. However, the virtue of knowledge does not lie solely in the amount of knowledge mastered. In Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka explains that knowledge is related to awareness of God and the ability to learn from life. Therefore, knowledge has value when it influences how a person thinks and lives (Hamka, 1990). The connection between knowledge and faith is also seen in the QS. Fāṭir [35]:28: "Indeed, those who truly fear Allah among His servants are only the scholars. Indeed, Allah is All-Mighty, Most Forgiving.” (QS. Fāṭir [35]:28).

This verse demonstrates the relationship between knowledge and devotion to God. According to Hamka, knowledge of God's greatness should give rise to awareness and fear of Him. The more one understands the signs of God's power, the greater their awareness of their own limitations as humans. Thus, knowledge is not merely confined to the realm of thought, but should also engender changes in attitudes and actions (Hamka, 1990).

Apart from that, the Qur'an teaches that the process of acquiring knowledge does not stop with the knowledge you already have. It is confirmed in QS. Ṭāhā [20]:114: "And say, 'O my Lord, increase my knowledge.'" (QS. Ṭāhā [20]:114). This verse indicates that humans are commanded to continually ask Allah for additional knowledge. In his Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka explains that this request teaches humans to recognize the limitations of their knowledge and not to assume they already know everything. Knowledge needs to be continuously developed through the learning process, while humans remain aware that Allah is the source of knowledge (Hamka, 1990).

From these five groups of verses, it can be understood that knowledge in the Quran is not only related to the process of acquiring knowledge, but also to the formation of human consciousness and attitudes. Knowledge guides humans to know God, understand the truth, and determine actions in accordance with religious values. Thus, knowledge serves as the foundation that guides humans before that knowledge is realized in the form of good deeds.

2. Charity as the Embodiment of Knowledge

If knowledge provides direction, good deeds are the concrete manifestation of that direction. In the Qur'an, good deeds relate to human responsibility to realize the values one believes in through actions. In this study, QS. At-Taubah [9]:105 and QS. Al-'Aṣr [103]:1–3 are used to demonstrate that good deeds are the concrete manifestation of values and faith.

Allah SWT. says in QS. At-Taubah [9]: 105: "And say, 'Work, then Allah will see your work, as well as His Messenger and the believers, and you will be returned to Allah Who Knows the unseen and the real, then He will report to you what you have done." (QS. At-Taubah [9]:105).

This verse demonstrates that good deeds are an essential part of a Muslim's life. In his Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka explains that the command to be modest encourages humans to prove their beliefs through their actions. A Muslim's life is not simply filled with words or intentions; it must be realized through work and concrete actions. Every deed is also under the knowledge and supervision of Allah, so good deeds have a dimension of accountability (Hamka, 1990).

The same thing appears in QS. Al-'Aṣr [103]:1–3: "By the times. Verily, mankind is truly in loss, except those who believe, do good deeds, advise each other in the truth, and advise each other in patience." (QS. Al-'Aṣr [103]:1–3).

This verse demonstrates the connection between faith and good deeds. In his Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka explains that faith is not simply present in the heart but must be demonstrated through good deeds. The mention of faith followed by deeds indicates that belief has consequences for human actions. Thus, deeds can be understood as the concrete manifestation of known and believed values (Hamka, 1990).

3. Compatibility between Science and Charity

The relationship between knowledge and charity becomes clearer when the Qur'an gives a warning to people who tell others to do good, but do not apply it to themselves. Allah SWT. said: "Why do you order others to do good deeds, while you forget yourself, even though you read the Book? Don't you understand?" (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:44).

This verse shows that a person can possess knowledge of goodness, and even convey that knowledge to others, but this knowledge is imperfect if it is not put into practice in life. In the context of the relationship between knowledge and good deeds, the gap between the two is not only caused by a lack of knowledge, but also because the knowledge possessed is not applied in the form of good deeds (Nazhan et al., 2025).

Based on Hamka's interpretation, the admonition in this verse demonstrates the importance of congruence between words and actions. Religious knowledge should influence one's attitudes and behavior. Therefore, success in understanding religious teachings is

measured not only by one's ability to explain or convey a teaching, but also by one's sincerity in practicing those teachings in daily life (Hamka, 1990).

This relationship demonstrates that knowledge and practice have different but complementary functions. Knowledge provides direction and a basis for determining one's attitudes, while practice is the concrete manifestation of that knowledge. When knowledge and practice go hand in hand, religious knowledge can shape attitudes and behaviors consistent with Islamic values. Conversely, when knowledge stops at understanding without being translated into action, a gap arises between what is known and what is done.

Implications of the Relationship between Knowledge and Practice on the Behavior of Muslim Youth

1. Moral Formation

The relationship between knowledge and practice has direct implications for the moral development of Muslim youth. Religious knowledge provides an understanding of good and bad values, while practice transforms these values into habits. Therefore, moral formation is not simply achieved through the delivery of religious material; it requires a continuous process of application (Nuraini et al., 2025).

Morality towards Allah can be seen through sincerity in carrying out worship, maintaining obedience, and realizing one's responsibilities as a Muslim. Knowledge of the obligations of worship becomes meaningful when put into practice. Likewise, an understanding of honesty, responsibility, and caring will shape morality when applied in everyday life. In relationships with others, the integration of knowledge and good deeds can shape behavior that respects others, maintains honesty, helps others, and avoids harmful actions. Thus, the practice of knowledge is not only related to human relations with God but is also reflected in social life (Mardiyah & Sofa, 2024).

2. Responsibility and Exemplary Behavior

Knowledge realized through action also fosters responsibility. Teenagers who understand religious values and strive to practice them will learn to consider the consequences of their actions. They not only know whether an action is right or wrong, but also have the awareness to choose actions that align with those values.

Modeling is crucial because behavior is more easily understood when religious values are seen in concrete actions. In the context of education, parents and educators need not simply convey teachings but also demonstrate their application. The example of family and

teachers is one element that can strengthen the application of knowledge in adolescents (Devi et al., 2025).

Habituation also plays a crucial role. Repeated good behavior can develop into habits. Therefore, religious education needs to provide space for adolescents to apply the knowledge they acquire through real-life activities. This process ensures that the relationship between knowledge and practice extends beyond theoretical understanding.

3. Addressing the Knowledge and Practice Gap

One important implication of the relationship between knowledge and practice is the effort to address the gap between religious knowledge and its practice. This problem can arise when the educational process provides more knowledge but less opportunity to practice it. In such circumstances, adolescents can learn the values they should practice without incorporating them into their behavior.

This gap needs to be addressed through a process involving education, habituation, role models, family, and the social environment (Sukriyah et al., 2024). The family plays a crucial role as the primary environment in habit formation. Schools or educational institutions also play a role in connecting religious material with students' real-life experiences (Fawaz et al., 2025; Huzuwah et al., 2021; Ichsan, 2019, 2023; Ichsan et al., 2023).

The social environment also determines the strength or weakness of religious value practice. An environment that provides positive role models can help adolescents maintain behaviors consistent with their knowledge. Conversely, an unsupportive environment can pose challenges to the practice process. In this thesis, environmental influences, digital media use, lack of habituation, and weak role models are seen as some of the challenges in achieving alignment between knowledge and action (Ariani et al., 2025).

Thus, addressing the gap between knowledge and practice requires an approach that goes beyond simply increasing knowledge. What is needed is an educational process that connects understanding, experience, habituation, and role models so that religious values can become part of adolescents' lives.

The Relevance of the Relationship between Knowledge and Good Deeds for the Lives of Muslim Youth

The relationship between knowledge and good deeds is strongly relevant to the lives of adolescents because this period is a crucial stage in the formation of attitudes and habits. Religious knowledge acquired during this period can serve as a foundation for making

choices, navigating social situations, practicing worship, and building relationships with others.

In the context of modern life, the challenges of practicing knowledge are becoming increasingly complex. Adolescents obtain information from various sources, thus providing ample opportunities to learn about religion. However, the abundance of information does not automatically result in behavior consistent with the values they understand. Therefore, the primary issue is not simply how to acquire knowledge, but how to transform it into awareness and action (Affandi & Soliha, 2023).

The relationship between knowledge and practice provides a framework that guides religious knowledge toward behavioral change. Adolescents need to be guided to understand the rationale for a teaching, then given the opportunity to practice it. This process can be accomplished through habituation to worship, social activities, responsibility training, and providing examples from their immediate environment. Islamic education holds a strategic position in integrating knowledge and practice. Religious learning should not only focus on understanding the material but also guide students in applying the values they learn. In this way, knowledge does not cease to be knowledge but develops into the foundation for moral development (Siddik et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION

Based on the overall analysis, this study found that the relationship between knowledge and practice in the Al-Azhar Tafsir can be understood through three main relationships. First, knowledge serves as a guide that provides direction for humans in understanding the truth and determining attitudes. Second, practice serves as a concrete form of knowledge and faith. Third, the alignment between knowledge and practice is a crucial measure for religious knowledge to influence life.

These findings show that knowledge, from Buya Hamka's perspective, is not understood merely as the mastery of knowledge. QS. Al-'Alaq [96]:1–5 shows the importance of acquiring knowledge, QS. Al-Mujadilah [58]:11 shows the virtue of those who have knowledge, QS. Az-Zumar [39]:9 shows the difference between those who know and those who do not know, QS. Fatir [35]:28 connects knowledge with Khasy-yah to Allah, while QS.

Ṭāhā [20]:114 shows the importance of continuously increasing knowledge. All these verses show that knowledge has both intellectual and spiritual dimensions.

On the practical side, Surah At-Taubah [9]:105 indicates that knowledge and belief need to be translated into action, while Surah Al-'Asr [103]:1–3 demonstrates the relationship between faith and righteous deeds. Meanwhile, Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:44 warns against the mismatch between knowledge, words, and deeds. These three groups of verses reinforce the finding that knowledge and good deeds are two complementary elements.

Research also found that the integration of knowledge and good deeds has implications for the behavior of Muslim adolescents. The values that emerge are not only related to worship, but also social morals, responsibility, role models, caring, and the development of positive behavioral habits. In other words, the relationship between knowledge and good deeds has far-reaching consequences for the development of adolescent personality (Hart & Carlo, 2005).

The application of knowledge in adolescents does not occur automatically. This process requires a sound understanding, education that provides a space for practice, exemplary behavior from parents and teachers, consistent practice, and a positive social environment. On the other hand, weak habituation, lack of role models, environmental influences, and the use of digital media without the ability to filter information can be challenges in realizing the match between knowledge and action (Hamka, 1982).

Thus, the relationship between knowledge and good deeds is not merely a theoretical religious concept. From the perspective of Al-Azhar's interpretation, the two form a single chain connecting knowledge, awareness, action, and the formation of morals. This framework grants knowledge a practical function in life while simultaneously positioning good deeds as evidence that knowledge has impacted a person.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the relationship between knowledge and practice in Buya Hamka's interpretation of Tafsir Al-Azhar is integrative and inseparable, with knowledge as the epistemological foundation and guide for attitudes, and practice as the empirical manifestation of faith. Through the exegesis of Qur'anic texts such as QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:44, QS. Al-'Aṣr [103]:1–3, and QS. At-Taubah [9]:105, this study proves that the disconnection

between knowledge and action triggers moral inconsistency, while the harmony of the two is an indicator of a person's spiritual validity. Practically, this conceptual integration has direct implications for character formation, moral responsibility, and positive habits for Muslim adolescents in both vertical and horizontal relationships. Therefore, this finding recommends a reorientation of Islamic educational pedagogy so that it does not stop at the mere transfer of cognitive knowledge, but rather integrates the internalization of values through role models, habituation, and a supportive social ecosystem in order to realize moral behavioral transformation.

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