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Qur'anic Conceptions of Knowledge and Contemporary Islamic Educational Praxis: Exegesis of QS. Al-Mujadilah 58:11 and QS. Al-Fathir 35:28

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Abstract

This study clarifies terminological distinctions among *'ilm*, science, and knowledge across Western, Arabic, and Indonesian scholarly traditions and examines the pedagogical implications of QS. Al-Mujadilah (58:11) and QS. Al-Fathir (35:28) for Islamic education in Indonesia. A qualitative literature review with narrative synthesis was employed, drawing on classical *tafsir*, Arabic lexica, contemporary exegesis, philosophy of science, policy documents, and peer-reviewed research in Arabic, English, and Indonesian. Reflexive thematic synthesis generated three convergent findings. First, Western and Arabic traditions distinguish structured scientific products, practices or methods, and general knowledge, whereas Indonesian usage often conflates these meanings. Second, the two Qur'anic verses emphasize an integrative ideal that links *iman*, *'ilm*, and ethical conduct, highlighting social responsibility and the elevated status of knowledgeable believers. Third, these conceptual and scriptural resources support an integrative, contextual, and multidisciplinary model of Islamic education. The study proposes an operational orientation of *'ilm* as epistemically rigorous, ethically grounded, and socially engaged. It concludes

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that Islamic education in Indonesia should strengthen curricular integration between Qur'anic values, contemporary sciences, and digital literacy; enhance teacher professionalization and inclusive accreditation; and develop interdisciplinary training supported by collaborative research ecosystems. These findings contribute to Islamic educational thought by offering a conceptually grounded framework for aligning Qur'anic epistemology with contemporary educational reform, while also identifying the need for future empirical evaluation of the proposed reforms.

Keywords: Islamic Education; Qur'anic Epistemology; *'Ilm*; QS. Al-Mujadilah; QS. Al-Fathir

INTRODUCTION

Science and knowledge are two conceptually distinct terms that are often used interchangeably in Indonesian language practice. In English, the word "science" typically refers to the concept symbolized in Arabic by the term "al-'ilm," whereas "knowledge" refers to knowledge in general (Setyawan et al., 2025). In Indonesia, these two terms are often combined into the term "science of knowledge," as reflected in institutional acronyms, such as the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (*Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia*/LIPI), and disciplinary classifications, such as Natural Sciences (*Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam*/IPA) and Social Sciences (*Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial*/IPS). This phenomenon of shared use of terms raises the need for terminological clarification when discussing the concept of science in the context of educational theory and practice.

In the development of scientific discourse in Indonesia, the term "science" is increasingly used as an equivalent to "knowledge," particularly in the expression "science and technology" and in academic degrees such as the Master of Science (Priyono, 2022). The view that equates science and knowledge treats science as a collective category encompassing various forms of systematic, objective, and verifiable knowledge. In the literature on the philosophy of science and methodology, the term "science" generally refers to at least three aspects: (1) structured knowledge products; (2) scientific activities or practices; and (3) scientific methods as a framework for obtaining and evaluating knowledge claims (Syafei, 2025). These definitions emphasize that discussions about science are not limited to semantics alone, but also involve practices and methodologies.

From an Islamic perspective, the Qur'an plays an important role as a source of knowledge and an ethical basis for the practice of science. The concept of seeking knowledge has been evident since the first revelation, which encouraged reading and writing as prerequisites for gaining knowledge (Steiner, 2019). The frequency of occurrence of the root word 'ilm and its derivatives in the Qur'an shows the textual emphasis on the importance of science in religious and social life. Certain verses, for example, al-Mujadilah (58):11 and al-Fathir (35):28, emphasize the social and ethical values of people of knowledge, as well as the moral criteria that distinguish them from others. These verses are relevant to interpreting the role of Islamic education, which not only transmits knowledge but also forms religious attitudes and social responsibility.

Previous studies have consistently found the importance of integrating faith and knowledge in Islamic education. Taufik (2021), in his study of the interpretation of Al-Misbah in Surah Al-Mujadilah verse 11, found that this verse contains integrative educational values between faith, knowledge, morals, and tolerance, which are the main factors in carrying out worship to Allah SWT. This integration is directly related to the elevation of human status in the sight of God. It aligns with Qolbi's (2021) findings, which emphasize that understanding the concept of Islamic education must be grounded in the interpretation of Qur'anic verses on knowledge. He found that one of the most important benefits of seeking knowledge is increasing learners' dignity, and that this can be applied early in formal education.

The differences in the commentators' perspectives demonstrate the richness of interpretations relevant to contemporary Islamic education. Rohman (2023), in a comparative study of Tafsir Al-Qurthubi and Tafsir Al-Munir, found that al-Qurthubi interpreted the term "degree" in QS. Al-Mujadalah: 11 as glory and reward in this world and the hereafter, while Wahbah al-Zuhaili interpreted it as help, victory, and good reputation in this world and the rooms of paradise in the hereafter; while for QS. Al-Fathir: 28, al-Qurthubi emphasized fear of Allah as a characteristic of scholars, while al-Zuhaili added knowledge of the universe and its secrets. The findings of Aini et al. (2023) strengthen this by showing that scholars in QS. Fathir: 28 isis not limited to the field of religion but also includesincludes mastery of other sciences, so that knowledgeable humans become caliphs on earth who are responsible for prospering and developing knowledge. Arsyad's (2025) research, using Fazlur Rahman's double movement hermeneutics, found the universal values of QS. Al-Mujâdalah: 11, including social ethics through inclusivity in

assemblies and respect for knowledge that can be contextualized in modern settings, such as access to education and workplace equality.

Considering the conceptual and practical differences in the use of the term science and in relation to religious values, this study aims to: (1) clarify the meaning of the terms 'ilm, science, and knowledge' in Western literature, Arabic literature, and Indonesian language practice; and (2) explore the conceptual implications of selected Qur'anic verses for the development of an authentic and contextual concept of Islamic education. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the formulation of an operational definition of 'ilm' in the context of Islamic education and to provide a normative basis for educational policies and practices that integrate scientific methodology and religious values.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative literature review (library research) design aimed at clarifying terminological differences between 'ilm, science, and knowledge and at exploring the conceptual implications of selected Qur'anic verses for Islamic education (Creswell, 2013; Nasution, 2023). A narrative-synthesis approach was chosen to integrate findings across heterogeneous literatures. The review focused on thematic synthesis rather than quantitative aggregation, because the research questions are conceptual and interpretive: (1) How are the terms 'ilm, science, and knowledge defined and used across the three literatures? and (2) What conceptual implications do QS. Al-Mujadilah (58:11) and Al-Fathir (35:28) hold for an authentic, contextual Islamic education?

Data collection was conducted systematically and purposively by retrieving primary and secondary texts from various repositories. The sources used included classical exegesis and Arabic lexical works (e.g., al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Munawwir), contemporary exegesis and Islamic education literature, philosophical texts, Indonesian policy documents, and peer-reviewed articles and books cited in the provided manuscripts. The search was conducted in Arabic, English, and Indonesian using keywords derived from the research objectives. Databases and libraries visited included exegesis collections, JSTOR, Google Scholar, national library catalogs, university repositories (Indonesia), and institutional reports (e.g., Ministry of Religious Affairs). Inclusion criteria for this study were texts that explicitly discussed the definition or use of the terms *'ilm*, sains,' or 'knowledge'; or that

provided exegetical analysis of the two focused Qur'anic verses; and published primary or secondary sources, or classical texts available in reliable editions or translations.

Data analysis followed a reflexive thematic synthesis in four iterative stages (Adlini et al., 2022): (1) familiarization—careful reading and coding of included texts with attention to lexical meanings, methodological claims, and normative implications; (2) generation of initial codes—labels for recurring concepts; (3) development of descriptive themes—grouping related codes into higher-order themes mapped to the research questions; and (4) interpretive synthesis—integrating descriptive themes to propose an operational definition of 'ilm' and to derive normative and policy-relevant implications for Islamic education.

To enhance trustworthiness and rigor, the review applied source triangulation, transparency in selection, and reflexivity. Triangulation across language traditions (Arabic, English, Indonesian) and genres (lexica, tafsir, philosophy of science, policy reports) reduced single-source bias. Reflexive notes addressed the authors' interpretive stance and potential biases when reading religious texts alongside normative policy literature. Because the study used publicly available texts, formal ethical approval was not required; nevertheless, classical and contemporary interpreters were cited respectfully and accurately, and modern policy documents were referenced to support claims about Indonesian educational practice.

RESULTS

A Glance at the Qur'an Surah al-Mujadilah (58) Verse 11

"O you who believe, if it is said to you: "Be spacious in the assembly", then be spacious, Allah will surely make space for you. and when it is said: "Stand up", then stand up, surely Allah will raise those who believe among you and those who have been given knowledge by several degrees. and Allah is All-Knowing of what you do" (QS. Al-Mujadilah (58) Verse 11).

Ibnu Abi Hatim narrated the verse above from Muqatil bin Hayyan, he said, "One day, namely Friday, Rasulullah SAW. While in Suffah, a meeting was held in a narrow place to honor the heroes of the Badr war, the Muhajirin and Ansar. Some of the heroes of the Badr war were late in arriving, among them Sabit bin Qais. The heroes of the Badr war were standing outside, visible to everyone. Their Messenger said the greeting "Assalamu'alaikum ayyuhannabi wabarakaatuh." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah

be upon him) responded to the greeting, then they also greeted the people present first, and they responded. The heroes of the Badr war remained standing, waiting for the place assigned to them, but no one assigned it to them. Seeing that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) felt disappointed, he said, "Stand up, stand up." Hypocrites reacted with the intention of criticizing the Prophet, peace be upon him. They said, "By Allah, Muhammad is not fair. Some people came first with the intention of getting a seat nearby, but were told to stand up so that the place would be given to someone late." So this verse came down (Depag RI, 2000).

The word *tafassahu* is mentioned only once in the Quran. It is a verb denoting a command. It is derived from the root word *tafassaha-yatafassahu-tafassuhan*, meaning "to give flexibility." This command is usually directed at people in a crowded place to loosen their grip or allow others to enter, thus gaining the opportunity to sit or be present. Those who have arrived first are asked to make room for newly arrived people of higher standing and prestige in the local community. The root word for "*tafassaha*" is *al-fash*, which means spacious, loose, or spacious. Thus, "*tafassaha*" means to provide spaciousness, leeway, or spaciousness for newly arrived people.

The word *unsyuzu* is a verb that indicates a command, from *nasyaza-yansyuzu-nasyzan. An-Nasyzu* in the dictionary means *kána qá'idan faqáma* (in a sitting and then standing position) (Munawir, 1997). People who were sitting were ordered to stand and give up their seats to those who had just arrived, out of respect. According to al-Sa'labi, the meaning of these words is "stand up, move aside, and give respite to your brothers." Muhammad Ali al-Shabuni explained that if you are ordered to expand, either at the Prophet's assembly or otherwise, then expand, surely your Lord will expand you to His mercy and paradise. Imam al-Fakhri explained that Allah will make room for you, your fortune, your chest, your grave, and heaven (Al-Shabuni, 1999).

According to the al-Munawir dictionary, the word rafa'a means the opposite of wadla'a, which means to lift. Meanwhile, the word darajaat is the plural form of muannas sȃlim from mufrad darajat, which means degree, and is the same as al-rutbah wa al-manzilah, which means position, rank, dignity, and degree (Al-Munawwir, 1997). The scholars think that people who attend an assembly should obey the provisions that apply to that assembly or the orders of those who organize it. People who attend an assembly, whether they come on time or are late, always maintain a good atmosphere, full of

brotherhood and mutual tolerance. For those who arrive first, please fill the space in front so that later arrivals do not have to step over or disturb those who arrived first. For people who arrive late, let them be willing to accept the conditions they encounter, such as not getting a seat (Depag RI, 2000).

The end of this verse explains that Allah will elevate the status of those who believe, obey and obey Him, carry out His commands, stay away from His prohibitions, try to create an atmosphere of peace, security, and tranquility in society, as well as knowledgeable people who use their knowledge to uphold the words of Allah. From this verse, it can also be understood that those with the highest rank in the sight of Allah are those who believe and have knowledge. This knowledge is practiced in accordance with what Allah and His Messenger commanded (Depag RI, 2000).

Muhammad Ali Al-Shabuni interpreted it as saying that Allah elevates the status of believers who carry out His commands and those of His Messenger, that those with special knowledge are at the highest level, and that Allah grants them the highest status in Paradise. Ibn Mas'ud argued that Allah elevates the status of knowledgeable believers above that of the ignorant by several degrees (Al-Shabuni, 1999). Al-Qurtubi said that Allah elevates a person's status because of knowledge and faith, not because of racing to arrive at a gathering. Al-Qurtubi quoted the Prophet's hadith, which means, "The superiority of the learned over the worshippers is like the superiority of the moon over all the stars." According to him, on the Day of Resurrection, three groups will receive help: the prophets, the scholars, and the martyrs. Therefore, the status of the learned is between that of the prophets and the martyrs."(Weaver-Zercher, 2016).

In interpreting the end of the verse above, Mahmud Yunus thinks that Allah will raise the status of those who believe and those who have knowledge. In fact, people with knowledge have a truly high rank, both in the village of the afterlife and also in the world, as we can see with our own eyes. According to him, what is meant by knowledge is not only knowledge related to worship, but also all knowledge that is useful for the benefit of this world and the hereafter. Therefore, it is appropriate for Muslims to become more conscious in seeking this knowledge, even if it reaches European countries and Japan (Yunus, 2002).

A Glimpse of the Qur'an, Surah al-Fathir (35) Verse: 28

"And so (also) among humans, there are creeping animals and livestock of various colors (and types). Indeed, those who fear Allah among His servants are only the ulama. Surely Allah is Mighty, Most Forgiving." (QS. Al-Fathir: 28).

Ulama' is the plural of *'lim*, just as *bukhal'* is the plural of *bakhil*, *kuram'* is the plural of *kĭrim*. *Al-'Ålim* is a very knowledgeable person, or someone with deep knowledge. Initially, the root word consisting of *'Ain-Lam-Mim* means the presence of a mark on something different from another mark. A mark on something is also called an address. *'Alam'* also means a flag or a mountain, because both are signs. The word knowledge is also related to the meaning of the root word, because a knowledgeable person is different from someone who is not knowledgeable. The word *al-'Ulamá'* is aimed at people who have extensive knowledge in any field. In the Islamic context, this expression is usually used to refer to people deeply versed in religious knowledge. This meaning is also used in the word *'Ulamá'* Bani Israil, which is found in Surah Asy-Syu'ara'/26:197. Meanwhile, in this verse, *al-'Ulamá'* is interpreted as someone who understands the science of the universe, because the previous verses talk about the phenomena of the universe. However, people who have deep knowledge, both "religious" and "general" knowledge, should be those who have the nature of fearing Allah the Almighty, because they are the ones who know the ins and outs of the signs of Allah's greatness, both through the verses they read and the signs of Allah's greatness in the universe (Depag RI, 2000).

Ibnu Abbas thinks that what are called ulama are people who know that Allah is all-powerful over everything. In another history, Ibn Abbas thinks that a scholar is a person who does not associate anything with God, who makes lawful what Allah has made lawful and what He has made forbidden, keeps His commandments, and is confident that he will meet Him who will judge and repay all human deeds (Dhahir, 2022). Ibn Kathir thinks that only wise scholars truly fear Allah, because when they know the greatness and power, they will be perfect. With knowledge, he becomes perfect; with fear, he becomes the greatest and most numerous (Hasan, 2020).

Classification of Science

Among Muslims, the classification of science began with al-Kindi in the 3rd/9th century and was continued by others. Aristotle divided science into theoretical, practical, and productive, as explained in Porphyry's Isagoge (preface). Islamic disciplines were added to the ancient sciences, with religious knowledge and metaphysics in the sense of gnosis occupying the highest level (Umam & Syahril, 2023). Al-Farabi, a scientist, created a classification of sciences in his book *Ihsha' al-Ulum* (The Details of Science), known in the West as De Scientiis through the Latin translation by Gerard of Cremona and also its Hebrew translation. He divided science into five, namely: linguistics (syntax, grammar, pronunciation, and speech, poetry); logic; preparatory sciences (arithmetic, geometry, optics, celestial science, music, the science of balances, the science of toolmaking); physics/natural sciences (physics and metaphysics); social sciences (jurisprudence, rhetoric) (Abidin, 2020).

Ibn Khaldun (Abū Zayd ʻAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn al-Ṭunīsī; 732 AH/1332 CE–808 AH/1406 CE) was a Tunisian philosopher and historian who spent part of his life in the Maghreb, Andalusia, and Egypt. He is best known for his monumental work, al-Muqaddimah (often referred to as the introduction or preface to Ibn Khaldun's Tarikh), which contains a theoretical analysis of the social, economic, and political dynamics of society—including the concept of ʻasabiyyah (group solidarity) as a factor in the formation and decline of dynasties. His family background is rooted in the tradition of Yemeni Arabs (said to be descendants of the Banu Wa'il) who migrated to Andalusia; his full name reflects his lineage and school of thought, as well as geographical links to Tunisia, Hadramaut, and Seville. His works and intellectual journey place Ibn Khaldun as an important figure in the tradition of Islamic historiography and social thought (Hamzah & Nisa, 2023).

In his epistemological thinking, Ibn Khaldun distinguished two categories of knowledge: philosophical-intellectual knowledge and transmitted knowledge. Philosophical-intellectual knowledge is knowledge attained through rational reasoning and human experience—including logic, the natural sciences (e.g., medicine and agriculture), metaphysics, and quantitative sciences such as geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy. Conversely, transmitted knowledge includes disciplines that rely on the transmission of texts and the authority of tradition, such as Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, fiqh (jurisprudence),

theology, Sufism, and linguistics (e.g., grammar, lexicography, and literature) (Bhat, 2025). This division demonstrates Ibn Khaldun's focus on the methodology of knowledge: the distinction between knowledge that can be tested through reason and observation, and knowledge rooted in texts and textual transmission.

DISCUSSION

Implications of QS. Al-Mujadilah, 58: 11 and QS. al-Fathir, 35: 28 on Islamic Education

From the interpretation of the two verses above, there are three important points for the development of Islamic education, namely:

1. Islamic education must foster social awareness in people of faith and knowledge

These verses emphasize that a caring attitude toward the social environment should accompany faith and knowledge. The reciprocal interaction between individuals and the social environment generates stimuli that develop cognitive, affective, and psychomotor potential, thereby making individuals creative, innovative, and cultured. Social stimuli—such as habits, values, norms, and behavioral rules—play a vital role in socialization and personality formation. The view of humans as zoon politikon emphasizes that the ability to cooperate and contribute to society is part of human nature; therefore, Islamic education must guide students to be sensitive to others' needs, avoid egoism, and be active in social service.

The relevance in Indonesia is seen in the ongoing corrupt tendencies and practices of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (*Korupsi, Kolusi, Nepotisme*/KKN), which reflect the failure of some moral and social education processes; therefore, the Islamic education curriculum needs to strengthen character education that instills integrity and empathy, emphasizes public service as an arena for learning ethical values in real contexts, and adopts a pedagogy based on social experience (service learning) to develop ethical skills and a sense of social responsibility—these steps not only improve normative knowledge but also shape pro-social behavior through repeated practice, critical reflection, and community engagement, so that graduates can reject KKN practices and contribute to governance with greater integrity.

2. Islamic education serves to enhance individuals' spiritual and material status.

The interpretation of these two verses states that Allah elevates the status of the faithful and knowledgeable, both in this world and the hereafter. Therefore, the goal of Islamic education is to facilitate an increase in students' socio-economic, intellectual, and spiritual status. The curriculum and its implementation must produce competent, ethical, and competitive graduates, not merely for institutional survival. Islamic educational institutions that fail to improve their alumni's competence and social mobility will lose their appeal to society (Ichsan et al., 2025; Ichsan, Ibad, et al., 2023; Ichsan, Samsudin, et al., 2023).

Data and perceptions in Indonesia indicate that many madrasahs and private Islamic schools still lag behind public and private schools in terms of educational outcomes, as reflected in indicators such as national exam results/national education standards, graduation and continuation rates, institutional accreditation, and alumni employment. This disparity is caused by a combination of factors: limited budgets and facilities, limited access to professional training for teachers and education personnel, an accreditation process that is not fully sensitive to the madrasah context, potentially resulting in unfair assessments, and weak connectivity between madrasah curricula and labor market needs (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025).

Therefore, public policy must be comprehensive—including the development of inclusive and proportional accreditation mechanisms for madrasahs, ongoing development and certification programs to enhance teacher capacity (including pedagogical and digital literacy training), targeted investments to modernize facilities and access to technology, and incentives and collaboration platforms between madrasahs, universities, and industry to develop clear career paths for alumni. These measures need to be supported by evidence-based data, evaluative monitoring, and community participation to ensure interventions are sustainable and relevant to local needs. Sources supporting this statement include a World Bank report on primary and secondary education in Indonesia, data from the National Accreditation Board for Schools/Madrasahs (BAN-S/M) on institutional accreditation, a study by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs on madrasas and teacher capacity development, and academic and policy research by the Center for Education Policy Research and articles in accredited journals that discuss the relationship between the quality of religious education institutions and graduate outcomes (Qadri et al., 2024).

3. Islamic education must produce modern scholars who are multidisciplinary and contextual.

The concept of *'ulama'* in QS. al-Fathir (35:28) and contemporary *tafsîr* (as stated by Prof. Quraish Shihab) are not limited to religious scholars alone, but include mastery of *kauniyah* (natural) and *Qur'aniyah* sciences. The ideal scholars of the future are those who master various scientific disciplines and can relate them to *tazkiyah* (moral formation) and to solving social problems (*ijtihâd*). The duties of ulama include tabligh (delivery), *bayân* (explanation), *hakimiyah* (deciding problems), and moral exemplification (Huda & Luthfirrohmah, 2024). The complexity of modern problems requires scholars to have interdisciplinary insights across science, technology, economics, health, and social sciences, in addition to mastery of religious texts.

In the Indonesian context, the crisis of ulama regeneration and the disproportionate distribution of competencies between strong mastery of religious knowledge and weak mastery of science and technology among graduates of religious educational institutions are crucial indicators that Islamic higher education needs structural and paradigmatic reform. This phenomenon is not only evident in the declining interest of the younger generation in entering Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and religious higher education institutions (PTKIN/PTKIS), but also in the limited ability of graduates to play a role in public spaces increasingly dominated by information technology, the digital economy, and 21st-century ethical challenges such as artificial intelligence and climate change (Kawengian et al., 2025).

This reform can be realized through strengthening interdisciplinary study programs, building a collaborative research ecosystem between Islamic higher education institutions and general universities at the national and international levels, and developing a curriculum that systematically integrates Islamic studies and general sciences, as demanded by national education policies and the Golden Indonesia 2045 agenda, which emphasizes the importance of integrating Islamic studies with science and technology. This integrative model not only addresses the need for graduates who are holistic and relevant to the global market, but also enables scholars and alumni of religious institutions to become moral and ethical actors in technological transformation, so that the regeneration of scholars is no longer trapped in the dichotomy of religious knowledge and "worldly" knowledge, but

rather becomes agents of change with insights into science, technology, and Islam at the same time.

QS. al-Mujadilah (58:11) and QS. al-Fathir (35:28) demands synergy between faith, knowledge, and social action; in their interpretation, these two verses view high status not only as the result of strong faith but also as the fruit of true knowledge and real deeds, so that believers are asked to continue learning, sharing knowledge, and applying that understanding in social improvement. In the context of Indonesia which is culturally diverse and has complex social stratification, the translation of these Quranic values requires the reconstruction of Islamic education that is integrative—combining the strengthening of spirituality and morals, a contemporary science-based curriculum, and learning that is responsive to local issues—and contextual, namely linking teaching materials to the real needs of society such as economic empowerment, digital literacy, and tolerance between religions. The ultimate goal is to produce graduates who are not only theoretically competent but also able to take on proactive social roles, create social innovations that improve the quality of life of individuals, strengthen social cohesion, and expand public welfare through transformative educational practices, inter-institutional collaboration, and real-impact evaluation so that the implementation of faith and scientific values results in measurable and sustainable social change.

Strengthening Human Resource Quality from an Early Age

Due to various constraints, the quality of human resources (HR) in Islamic educational institutions is often considered low. However, according to Asnik Khuroidah and Binti Maunah, a key factor in improving the quality of Islamic educational institutions is the availability of qualified human resources, particularly teaching and administrative staff. They emphasize that improving HR quality must be supported by professional management and an attractive strategy, from planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up within the HR management system, so that Islamic educational institutions can increase their competitive advantage in line with the increasingly fierce developments of the times. This situation requires serious attention because, without professional teaching staff and an adaptive management system, quality improvement efforts will be hampered even with adequate infrastructure.

Ideally, education should shape students into individuals who practice good deeds. Muhammad Abduh defined good deeds as any action that benefits oneself, one's group, and the wider community (Amir & Rahman, 2021). Meanwhile, Hamim Ilyas formulated seven dimensions of goodness that can serve as indicators of good deeds: being physically fit (clean, tidy, strong), having good morals, having good religion, working well, living well in society, having good knowledge, and living in a good environment (Prabowo & Ilyas, 2021). These seven dimensions are interrelated and serve as a practical framework for Islamic education to measure and guide the development of students' character. Below, each dimension is explained and linked to the contemporary context.

1. Good body (clean, neat, strong)

Cleanliness and tidiness are fundamental moral principles emphasized in Islamic tradition; cleanliness is even seen as part of faith. Maintaining a clean body, clothing, and environment is not merely a ritual, but also a preventative measure against disease. In practice, many Islamic educational institutions need to promote clean living practices, for example, through hygiene and sanitation curricula, as behavioral gaps persist in some contexts compared to other communities.

Physical strength is also important. A healthy body enables individuals to contribute more to their families and communities. The Prophet Muhammad exemplified the importance of fitness through physical activities such as horse riding and archery, and considered a strong believer superior to a weak one. In today's world, attention to health needs to be expanded: mandatory school programs include physical education, balanced nutrition, and mental health literacy to ensure students are physically and mentally resilient, not just ritualistic (Singh, 2023).

2. Good-natured

Morals are at the heart of religious education. Islam places morals as the goal of prophecy; without them, knowledge and worship lose their value. Therefore, Islamic education must instill ethical values, empathy, and social responsibility through contextual teaching methods, role models among teachers, and the practice of good behavior in everyday life. Contemporary phenomena such as the rise of hate speech on social media emphasize the urgency of character education (Ichsan, 2019; Munawaroh & Ichsan, 2024), namely that students need to be equipped with critical thinking skills and self-control so that they do not easily fall into destructive online behavior.

3. Good religion

Good religious practice encompasses mastery of religious knowledge and consistent practice. Islamic education must balance textual (religious knowledge) and contextual (skills in applying teachings to modern situations) aspects, such as digital ethics, bioethics, and contemporary social issues. In the digital age, critical religious literacy is crucial; namely, the younger generation needs the ability to distinguish accurate religious information from hoaxes or extreme interpretations that circulate freely on online platforms (Prawito, 2025).

4. Good Works

Working with integrity and ethics is part of doing good. Education must instill professionalism, honesty, and a focus on social good so that graduates pursue not only income but also social contribution. With the development of the digital economy and new job markets, Islamic education curricula need to integrate entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and professional ethics so that graduates can compete and innovate without abandoning religious values (Baitussalam, 2025).

5. Good social life

Social charity (shalih sosial) emphasizes horizontal relationships: caring for neighbors, guests, and the community. The Prophet Muhammad exemplified the attitude of honoring guests and maintaining social relationships. Modern challenges include urbanization, individualism, and social fragmentation (Ichsan et al., 2026). Islamic education must develop community service programs, interfaith collaboration, and social activities that strengthen community cohesion and teach intercultural communication skills (Sholeh & Rahman, 2025).

6. Good Informed

Knowledge is a prerequisite for valuable deeds. The concept of lifelong learning aligns with the Prophet's encouragement to seek knowledge, even "to distant lands," as a symbol of openness to knowledge from anywhere. In today's world, mastery of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), digital literacy, and research is crucial for contributing. Islamic educational institutions need to strengthen their scientific and technological competencies and research collaborations so that their contributions are not limited to rituals alone but also contribute to broader societal development (Klaina, 2025).

7. Good environment

The environment significantly influences character formation. Healthy family and school environments support the development of good behavior in children. Current environmental challenges are widespread, with environmental degradation, climate change, and sanitation issues becoming both moral and practical. Islamic education must integrate environmental education and ecological ethics to help students understand the responsibility to preserve nature as a trust (Juliani et al., 2024).

Therefore, understanding the above, the professionalization of teachers and education personnel must be implemented through continuous training, competency-based certification, and incentives for high-performing teachers, supported by a modern human resource management system, such as performance evaluation, career development, and competency-based recruitment, to strengthen the quality of institutions. The Islamic education curriculum needs to be integrated with digital literacy, health, entrepreneurship, and environmental education to ensure graduates are relevant to the needs of the 21st century. The use of technology—such as online learning platforms, open educational resources, and social media—can expand access to quality knowledge but must be balanced with increased digital literacy to prevent the spread of disinformation. Community involvement, including families, community leaders, and the private sector, is crucial for building an environment that supports the formation of holistic good deeds. As a response to current phenomena (online radicalization, religious hoaxes, and individualism), Islamic education must instill critical thinking skills, digital ethics, and values of tolerance.

Efforts to improve the quality of Islamic education cannot simply focus on ritual aspects or traditional curricula. A comprehensive approach is needed that strengthens human resources (teachers and education staff), professional management, contextual curricula, and adaptation to contemporary digital and social challenges. Only through synergy between individual qualities, managerial systems, and the relevance of education to the realities of the times can Islamic educational institutions produce graduates who practice good deeds and benefit the wider community.

CONCLUSION

The study clarified terminological differences between *'ilm*, science, and knowledge across Western, Arabic, and Indonesian literatures and examined the implications of QS.

Al-Mujadilah (58:11) and QS. Al-Fathir (35:28) for Islamic education. Three convergent findings emerged. First, the terms *'ilm*, science, and knowledge are related but not synonymous: Western and Arabic traditions distinguish structured scientific products, scientific practices/methods, and more general knowledge, whereas Indonesian usage often conflates these senses in institutional and educational contexts. Second, the selected Qur'anic verses privilege a holistic ideal in which faith (*iman*), knowledge (*'ilm*), and ethical conduct are mutually reinforcing; the Qur'anic emphasis on elevation of status for the faithful and the knowledgeable implies social responsibility, moral formation, and practical application of knowledge. Third, these textual and conceptual resources support a model of Islamic education that is integrative, contextual, and multidisciplinary—one that fosters social awareness, raises spiritual and material status through relevant competencies, and produces modern scholars competent in both religious and contemporary sciences.

From these findings, the paper proposes an operational orientation for *'ilm* in Islamic education: epistemically rigorous knowledge (methodologically informed), ethically-grounded (*tazkiyah*), and socially engaged (applied for public welfare). Policy- and practice-relevant implications follow: (a) curricula should integrate Qur'anic values with contemporary sciences and digital literacy; (b) teacher professionalization, inclusive accreditation, and targeted investments are needed to close gaps between religious and general education institutions; and (c) interdisciplinary training and collaborative research ecosystems must support regeneration of scholars capable of addressing 21st-century challenges. Limitations of the review—its reliance on available texts and interpretive syntheses rather than empirical fieldwork—temper the generalizability of specific policy prescriptions. Future research should empirically evaluate curriculum reforms and interventions to measure their effects on student competencies, social responsibility, and labor-market outcomes. Research that combines textual hermeneutics with mixed-method case studies in Indonesian madrasahs and Islamic higher education institutions would further validate and operationalize the conceptual model offered here. In sum, reading QS. Al-Mujadilah and QS. Al-Fathir, through comparative lexical, exegetical, and pedagogical lenses, supports an Islamic education paradigm that unites faith, rigorous knowledge, and social action—thereby guiding policy and institutional reforms to produce ethically grounded, academically competent, and socially responsible graduates.

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