

The Construction of Santri Epistemology: The Role of Aqidah Education in Shaping the Islamic Worldview at SMP Darul Hijrah

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Abstract

Contemporary Islamic education faces a fundamental challenge in the form of *epistemological confusion* resulting from the hegemony of a secular worldview. This study aims to analyze the construction of santri epistemology through Aqidah education at Pondok Pesantren Tahfidz SMP Darul Hijrah 1 Surabaya. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through indepth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that Aqidah education does not merely function as the transmission of dogmatic theological knowledge, but rather serves as a metadiscourse in shaping the Islamic worldview. The epistemological construction process occurs through three phases: (1) dewesternization of science by rejecting skepticism; (2) internalization of the hierarchy of knowledge that places revelation above reason; and (3) manifestation of the ethics of *Insan Kamil*, which gives rise to awareness of the “primordial covenant” (*mitsaq*) and true freedom within the santri. These findings affirm that an Aqidah curriculum grounded in *Ta’dib* is effective in forming an integrative santri rationality that transcends the dichotomy between religious and general sciences.

Keywords: epistemological construction, Aqidah education, Islamic worldview, *Ta’dib*, pesantren.

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INTRODUCTION

The most significant challenge faced by Islamic education in the contemporary era is not merely moral decline, but rather epistemological confusion. The rapid flow of global information has brought with it values of secularism and materialism that gradually shift the worldview of young Muslims in perceiving reality. As emphasized by AlAttas, the crisis of *adab* and knowledge originates from the loss of a holistic Islamic intellectual framework in understanding God, humanity, and the universe (AlAttas, 2019). In this context, the Islamic worldview (*Ru’yatul Islam lilWujud*) functions as a vital cognitive shield for filtering foreign paradigms that are incompatible with Islamic values.

Religious education, particularly Aqidah as a subject, should function as the primary foundation in shaping this worldview. Aqidah should not be taught merely as theological dogma or rote memorization of the pillars of faith (*transfer of knowledge*), but rather must be transformed into an epistemological framework that underlies the santri’s mode of thinking (*transfer of worldview*). However, empirical realities often reveal a dichotomy: santri may be proficient in memorizing the evidences of *tawhid*, yet their approaches to social issues or scientific understanding remain trapped in secularpragmatic thinking patterns. This aligns with the critique of Hidayatullah and Arif (2022), who argue that ethics in the secular worldview are understood merely as a relative social contract, whereas Islam demands permanent ethics grounded in *Din* (Hidayatullah & Arif, 2022).

This dichotomy indicates a deeper epistemological pathology. Huringiin and Azfathir (2018) assert that the dominance of Western paradigms in knowledge does not necessarily generate ultimate truth, but instead spreads confusion and skepticism (Huringiin & Azfathir, 2018). Such a paradigm stands in direct opposition to Islamic epistemology, which is not founded upon doubt, but upon certainty derived from revelation. Without a process of cleansing these skeptical elements (*dewesternization*), Aqidah education fails to instill firm conviction, leaving santri intellectually disoriented when encountering modern scientific discourse.

Pondok Pesantren Tahfidz SMP Darul Hijrah 1 Surabaya offers a unique and strategic research setting. As an institution integrating a Qur'anic memorization curriculum with formal junior high school education, it stands at the intersection between revelatory texts and modern scientific contexts. Santri at the junior high school level (early adolescence) are at a crucial stage of abstract cognitive development, during which epistemological structures begin to form permanently. This raises the question of how far the Aqidah curriculum at this institution is able to intervene in this process and shape santri who are not only capable of memorizing the Qur'an, but also of thinking in a Qur'anic manner.

Previous studies on Aqidah education in pesantren have largely focused on character formation and ritual observance. For example, Masyithoh and Achadah (2021) found that Aqidah plays a vital role in shaping santri discipline (Masyithoh & Achadah, 2021). Similarly, studies by Kahfi et al. (2025) and Wulandari et al. (2023) emphasize the impact of Aqidah understanding on consistency in ritual worship (Wulandari et al., 2023; Kahfi et al., 2025). Research on Tahfidz pesantren by Arifin et al. (2020) proposes a *tadabbur*-based learning model for moral improvement (Arifin et al., 2020). However, these studies generally stop at behavioral and ritual dimensions. Few studies have specifically examined the role of Aqidah education in epistemological construction—namely, how Aqidah shapes santri rational structures and Islamic worldview in responding to scientific and social realities. This study seeks to fill that academic gap.

Accordingly, this research aims to critically analyze how the epistemological construction of santri occurs through Aqidah education at Pondok Pesantren Tahfidz SMP Darul Hijrah 1 Surabaya. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to models of Aqidah education that are functional in building an Islamic worldview, as well as practically informing the development of integrative pesantren curricula in Indonesia.

Within the framework of epistemological construction, Islamic education cannot be sufficiently understood merely as *tarbiyah*. The term *tarbiyah* is considered less precise because it tends to emphasize physical/material nurturing, resembling the secular Western concept of education. In contrast, AlAttas proposes *Ta'dib* as a more precise concept. *Ta'dib* encompasses discipline of the body, soul, and spirit, emphasizing recognition of the proper place of human beings within the order of existence. Through *Ta'dib*, Aqidah education is not merely a transfer of knowledge, but an instillation of *adab* that forms a hierarchical and just worldview.

Furthermore, epistemological construction is closely related to ethical understanding. Hidayatullah and Arif (2022) explain that within the Islamic worldview, ethics are not merely social norms or civic education as understood in the West. Islamic ethics represent a permanent disposition of the spiritual dimension of human beings in relation to themselves, God, society, and the state (Hidayatullah & Arif, 2022). Therefore, Aqidah curricula in pesantren must go beyond the cognitive level and reach the spiritual dimension in order to form this “permanent disposition.”

The process of santri epistemological construction does not occur in a vacuum, but must be preceded by what Huringiin and Azfathir (2018) term *dewesternization*. Referring to AlAttas, this is a conscious effort to identify, separate, and isolate secular elements from

the santri's intellectual framework (Huringiin & Azfathir, 2018). Aqidah education at Darul Hijrah functions as the primary filter in this isolation process, ensuring that the santri's worldview is free from secular dualism and humanism before *tawhidic* values are internalized.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. This approach was chosen because the primary objective of the research is to explore in depth the abstract and complex processes of epistemological construction and Islamic worldview formation among santri. The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Tahfidz SMP Darul Hijrah 1 Surabaya. Research subjects were selected using purposive sampling and included the school principal (*mudir*) for policy-related data, Aqidah teachers for instructional processes, and students in grades VIII–IX selected based on teachers' recommendations regarding their academic articulation abilities.

Data were collected through (1) indepth interviews to explore conceptual understandings of God and the universe, (2) participant observation of halaqah and classroom learning activities, and (3) documentation analysis of curricula and santri written works. Data analysis followed the circular model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source and methodological triangulation to confirm consistency in findings related to worldview formation.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This study found that Aqidah education at SMP Darul Hijrah does not operate as an isolated subject, but rather functions as a metadiscourse encompassing all academic activities and daily life of the santri. The epistemological construction process occurs through three dialectical phases: (1) dewesternization of knowledge, (2) internalization of the Islamic worldview through curriculum integration, and (3) manifestation of *Insan Kamil* ethics.

Field findings reveal a conscious effort by educators to cleanse secular elements embedded in modern scientific concepts. In science instruction, santri are taught to reject skepticism as the epistemological foundation of Western knowledge. As confirmed by Huringiin and Azfathir (2018), Western paradigms often disseminate confusion. This was reflected in interviews with teachers who deliberately filtered learning materials to ensure alignment with *Sunnatullah*. This approach effectively replaces skepticism with certainty rooted in revelation.

Contrary to the criticism that religious education merely emphasizes rote memorization, learning at Darul Hijrah has evolved into a *transfer of worldview*. Santri are taught the hierarchy of knowledge (*maratib al'ilm*), placing revelation as the highest authority validating rational sciences. Interviews demonstrate that santri no longer perceive scientific causality as autonomous natural law, but as divine habit (*adatullah*). This indicates the successful construction of an Islamic worldview free from sacred profane dichotomy.

The culmination of epistemological construction is the emergence of ethical human beings. Using the five ethical principles of *Insan Kamil* proposed by Hidayatullah and Arif (2022), the study found that santri demonstrate selfperfection, true freedom, integrated faith and knowledge, authentic happiness (*sa'adah*), and awareness of the primordial covenant

(mitsaq). Discipline and motivation are internally driven by theological consciousness rather than external coercion.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Aqidah education at Pondok Pesantren Tahfidz SMP Darul Hijrah 1 Surabaya has transcended its traditional function. Aqidah is no longer merely a subject of theological memorization (*transfer of knowledge*), but serves as an epistemological foundation shaping the santri's worldview (*transfer of worldview*). The shift from *tarbiyah* to *Ta'dib* is shown to be crucial in forming integrative santri rationality.

The epistemological construction process begins with dewesternization, fostering cognitive immunity against skepticism, and continues with the hierarchical placement of scientific reason under Qur'anic truth. The most tangible implication is the ethical transformation of santri toward the ideal of *Insan Kamil*, where freedom and happiness are understood spiritually rather than materialistically. Ultimately, this study affirms that genuine curriculum integration must occur at the philosophical level, positioning Aqidah as a metadiscourse that guides all scientific activity, offering a concrete solution to epistemological confusion in contemporary Islamic education.

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