

The Dialectic of Kalam, Philosophy, and Sufism in the History of Islamic Thought: Implications for the Development of Islamic Education Curriculum

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Abstract

Contemporary Islamic education faces the challenge of a disconnect between theological, rational, and spiritual aspects in curriculum development. This situation encourages the importance of an integrative study of the Islamic intellectual tradition. This study aims to analyze the development of kalam, philosophy, and Sufism in the history of Islamic thought and their relevance to the development of Islamic education curricula. The study employed library research *with* a historical-philosophical approach and a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach. Data were obtained from the works of key Islamic figures, particularly Al-Ghazali, as well as relevant scientific literature, and then analyzed through *content analysis*. The results show that kalam, philosophy, and Sufism are the three main pillars that shape the Islamic intellectual tradition through strengthening faith, developing rationality, and fostering spirituality. The integration of these three in Islamic education implies the need for curriculum reconstruction that balances faith, intellectuality, and moral aspects. This study confirms that the integration of kalam, philosophy, and Sufism can be a strategic foundation in building an Islamic education curriculum that is more integrative, adaptive, and relevant to the challenges of the times.

Keywords: *Kalam Science, Philosophy, Sufism, Curriculum, Islamic Education*

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic educational institutions currently face a serious challenge in the form of curriculum fragmentation, which has resulted in a crisis of moral identity and scientific capacity. This imbalance occurs because educational institutions tend to focus solely on formal academic achievement without paying equal attention to spiritual depth. The main problem arises when there is a sharp separation between intellectual reasoning and divine values in the teaching and learning process. The fact is that the dominance of one epistemological pattern, particularly the textual *bayani*, often marginalizes the role of critical reasoning (*burhani*) and spiritual intuition (*irfani*) (Erdiyani et al., 2025). As a result, the existing curriculum is often considered to have failed to address the increasingly complex and secular problems of modern life (El-Yunusi et al., 2023). This condition is also inseparable from the rapid social changes and challenges of modernity that demand Islamic education to become more adaptive and integrative (Marlika et al., 2025). This is reinforced by the fact that many educational institutions are solely oriented towards cognitive aspects without addressing the affective and psychomotor dimensions in an integrative manner (Minniswatil & Akhyak, 2024). In Al-Ghazali's perspective, the ideal curriculum should encompass the trilogy of human relationships with God, fellow

human beings, and the universe as an integral whole, not separate entities. Therefore, a curriculum reconstruction is needed that can re-establish integration between previously separate fields of knowledge. This phenomenon confirms that without interdisciplinary dialectics, Islamic education risks losing its social, moral, and spiritual relevance.

Many studies have been conducted on the integration of Islamic knowledge within the Islamic tradition, but its practical implementation within the curriculum still leaves a wide gap. It is known that philosophical thinking is an essential aspect that must be the primary reference in every stage of Islamic education curriculum development (Faizi et al., 2023). Previous research also emphasizes that the philosophical school of education has significant implications for creating innovations to solve problems in the field (Darmanto et al., 2024). In addition, (Zahrani et al., 2022) explain that Islamic educational epistemology ideally integrates revelation, rationality, and spirituality in the educational process. However, the integration of apologetic-rational kalam, deductive philosophy, and spiritual experience-based Sufism has not been widely formulated within a single applicable curriculum framework (Fahmi, 2024). Most research still focuses on the application of a single method, such as *burhani reasoning*, to improve students' critical thinking at the elementary level (Hasan et al., 2023). Furthermore, the existing literature does not fully explain how these three disciplines can be synchronized to improve the overall quality of education (Tarigan & Harahap, 2022). In fact, Al-Ghazali had previously offered a curriculum framework that combined sharia science, human science, and kauniah science which was in line with the orientation of the Independent Curriculum Learning Outcomes on the aspects of hanifiyyah, tasamuh, makarim al-akhlaq, and *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. (Hanafie & Khojir, 2023). Thus, a study is needed that can bridge the dialectical relationship between these three disciplines within the structure of a modern curriculum. This literature mapping demonstrates the need for a new step that goes beyond mere theoretical discourse to comprehensive curriculum application.

This article aims to analyze the relationship between theology, philosophy, and Sufism and formulate its implications for the development of an Islamic education curriculum. Specifically, this research focuses on three main objectives. *First*, to examine the historical development of Islamic thought in bridging the differences in approach between theology, philosophy, and Sufism. *Second*, to analyze the integration of these three disciplines into learning materials and methods that are appropriate to the needs of the times. *Third*, to formulate a foundation for Islamic education that can combine the values of revelation, the power of reason, and spiritual depth in a balanced manner. Focusing on these three aspects is important so that curriculum development is not only oriented towards knowledge transfer, but also on the formation of critical thinking patterns, spiritual awareness, and character of students. Through these objectives, this research is expected to produce a more integrative model for the development of an Islamic education curriculum that simultaneously addresses intellectual and spiritual needs.

Thus, this article seeks to provide a theoretical contribution to strengthening the Islamic education system through an epistemological reconstruction of the curriculum based on the integration of theology, philosophy, and Sufism. This article argues that the dialectic between these three disciplines constitutes a relevant epistemological foundation for building an Islamic education curriculum that balances faith, rationality, and spirituality. The basic assumption is that each discipline has a complementary function: theology strengthens the theological foundation, philosophy fosters critical reasoning, and Sufism fosters moral and spiritual depth. The absence of any of these elements has the potential to create an imbalanced educational orientation that only emphasizes certain aspects partially. Islamic intellectual history demonstrates that the glory of civilization was born when revelation, reason, and spiritual experience were able to be united in a unified scientific structure. Therefore, developing a curriculum based on the dialectic of

Islamic scholarship is an urgent need in responding to the challenges of contemporary Islamic education. Ultimately, the future of Islamic education depends heavily on the ability to formulate a curriculum paradigm that is comprehensive, holistic, and relevant to the challenges of the times.

METHOD

This research is a library research *with* a qualitative descriptive analytical type (Zed, 2018). The approach used is historical philosophical, namely examining the development of theology, philosophy, and Sufism in the history of Islamic thought and analyzing the epistemological and conceptual foundations that underlie the relationship between the three. This approach is used to understand the dialectic of the three disciplines while formulating its implications for the development of Islamic education curriculum comprehensively. The research data sources consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the works of key figures in the traditions of theology, philosophy, and Sufism, especially Al-Ghazali as a representation of the synthesis between theological, rational, and spiritual dimensions. Secondary sources are in the form of journal articles and previous research relevant to the epistemology of Islamic education, integration of knowledge, and curriculum development. Data collection techniques are carried out through documentation studies by identifying, classifying, and selecting literature based on relevance and academic validity (Sugiyono, 2022). The data are then analyzed using *content analysis* through descriptive, analytical, and interpretative stages. The descriptive stage is used to map the characteristics of each discipline, the analytical stage to examine their dialectical relationships, and the interpretative stage to formulate their implications for the reconstruction of the contemporary Islamic education curriculum.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Dialectic of Kalam, Philosophy, and Sufism in the History of Islamic Thought

The history of Islamic thought shows that kalam, philosophy, and Sufism developed as an intellectual response to the social, political, and spiritual changes of the Muslim community. All three arose from the same need: to understand Islamic teachings more deeply amidst the dynamics of a constantly evolving civilization. Kalam seeks to maintain the purity of faith through rational argumentation, philosophy broadens the framework of thought through a logical approach, while Sufism emphasizes the purification of the soul and spirit and the formation of morals. This development proves that the Islamic scientific tradition was not built from its inception, but through the interaction of theological, rational, and spiritual aspects (Nurhayati et al., 2026). Kalam emerged in the early days of Islam when political debates evolved into theological issues, such as questions of faith, human freedom, and the relationship between God's will and human action. This situation gave rise to various theological schools of thought, such as the Khawarij, Mu'tazilah, Asy'ariyah, and Maturidiyah, each of which sought to defend the understanding of faith through argumentative methods. In this context, kalam not only functions as a defense of doctrine but also as the beginning of the formation of a tradition of systematic thought in Islam. The Kalam debate shows that reason is used not to replace revelation, but to explain and defend it rationally (Andika et al., 2025).

The development of Islamic philosophy reached its peak during the Abbasid period, with the translation of Greek works into Arabic. Figures such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd played a major role in establishing an intellectual tradition that made reason a crucial tool for understanding reality, ethics, politics, and metaphysics. Islamic philosophy did not simply adopt Greek thought but adapted it to an Islamic framework. Through its *burhani* (rational) approach, philosophy made a significant contribution to the development of science and the tradition of critical thinking in Islamic

civilization (Yonesi & Saihu, 2026). Its presence demonstrates Islam's openness to knowledge as long as it remains oriented toward the search for truth. On the other hand, Sufism developed in response to formalistic and materialistic tendencies in life. While theology focuses on safeguarding faith and philosophy emphasizes rationality, Sufism emerged to emphasize the importance of the inner dimension of religion. Sufism evolved from the practice of asceticism to a system of spiritual education emphasizing purification of the soul, self-control, and the formation of morals. In contemporary developments, Al-Ghazali's thought has again been widely studied because it is considered successful in integrating knowledge, faith, and morality within a comprehensive Islamic educational framework (Mujrimin, 2025). Sufism thus serves to maintain balance so that intellectual development does not lose its ethical and spiritual orientation.

Although theology, philosophy, and Sufism often experience methodological tensions, history shows that they are not simply opposing disciplines. This tension actually gave rise to a dialectic that enriched the treasury of Islamic thought. Al-Ghazali was a key figure in this process, able to synthesize the power of theology, the rationality of philosophy, and the spirituality of Sufism into a more balanced epistemological framework. (Irawan & Rohman, 2025). Through this synthesis, the history of Islamic thought demonstrates that revelation, reason, and the heart can be positioned as complementary, not mutually exclusive, elements. This historical legacy provides an important lesson for contemporary Islamic education: the integration of knowledge is not a new concept, but rather part of the Islamic intellectual tradition itself. Understanding the historical development of theology, philosophy, and Sufism opens up space for rebuilding a more holistic Islamic education system, so that learning not only produces academic ability but also steadfast faith, the ability to think, and noble character.

Integration of Kalam, Philosophy, and Sufism in the Development of Islamic Education Curriculum

The development of an Islamic education curriculum in the contemporary era demands the integration of knowledge that can address intellectual, spiritual, and moral needs in a balanced manner. The curriculum is no longer sufficient as an administrative learning tool, but must serve as a strategic framework for shaping students' ways of thinking, attitudes, and life orientations. In this context, the integration of theology, philosophy, and Sufism is crucial because they represent the three main dimensions of Islamic education: strengthening the faith, developing rationality, and fostering spirituality (Erdiyani et al., 2025). This integrative approach is necessary to address the curriculum's tendency to often become trapped in a separation between religious, intellectual, and moral aspects. Theology serves as a theological foundation in curriculum development because it provides a rational and systematic foundation for the faith. Through theology, Islamic education can instill a religious understanding that extends beyond normative doctrines and also addresses modern ideological challenges through logical argumentation. The integration of theology into the curriculum is crucial for students to develop steadfast faith and the ability to defend their beliefs reflectively (Rizki & Rijal, 2026). Thus, the learning of the faith is not merely rote but develops into the formation of critical theological awareness.

Philosophy contributes to curriculum development by fostering critical, analytical, and reflective thinking. In Islamic education, philosophy serves to broaden students' horizons, enabling them to not only acquire textual knowledge but also understand the meaning, purpose, and relevance of knowledge in life. A philosophical approach encourages the curriculum to move from a dogmatic approach to dialogical education, which opens up space for discussion, analysis, and problem-solving (Hasan et al., 2023). The inclusion of philosophy in the curriculum is also crucial for building an intellectual tradition that adapts to scientific developments without losing Islamic values. Sufism

complements the curriculum through the development of morals, spiritual awareness, and self-control. Education that emphasizes only cognitive aspects risks producing individuals who are intellectually intelligent but morally weak. The integration of Sufism into the curriculum serves to instill the values of sincerity, inner discipline, ethical responsibility, and a transcendental orientation to life. In the context of Islamic education, Sufism can be implemented through character education, the cultivation of self-reflection, and the strengthening of spiritual relationships with God (Adnan et al., 2025). This argument is supported by (Roqi and Wahyudi., 2025), who state that moral education based on spiritual awareness is important for developing ethical consciousness among younger generations amidst contemporary social crises. In this way, the curriculum produces not only competent students but also students with integrity.

The integration of these three disciplines requires a reconstruction of the curriculum in four main aspects: objectives, materials, methods, and evaluation. In terms of objectives, Islamic education is directed at developing individuals who are faithful, critical thinkers, and virtuous. In terms of materials, the curriculum needs to combine theological teachings, scientific rationality, and spiritual moral education in a balanced manner. In terms of methods, learning must move from a one-way model to a reflective, dialogical one. Meanwhile, in terms of evaluation, educational success is measured not only by academic achievement but also by the moral and spiritual development of students (Sya'adah et al., 2025). This reconstruction demonstrates that the integration of knowledge is not merely the addition of material, but also changes the way of thinking. This integrative perspective aligns with Al-Ghazali's thinking, which positions education as a process of unifying knowledge, faith, and morals (Irawan & Rohman, 2025). Within this framework, the ideal curriculum not only produces mastery of knowledge but also forms individuals with a balance between intellectual strength and spiritual depth. The integration of theology, philosophy, and Sufism ultimately becomes a crucial strategy for building an Islamic education curriculum that is more comprehensive, responsive, and relevant to the challenges of the modern era.

The Relevance of Kalam, Philosophy, and Sufism to Contemporary Islamic Education

Contemporary Islamic education faces increasingly complex challenges in line with globalization, technological advancements, moral crises, and the strengthening trend of secularization within the education system. In this situation, Islamic education cannot simply maintain normative learning patterns oriented solely toward the transfer of religious knowledge; it must also develop a paradigm capable of addressing the needs of the times without losing its fundamental identity. The relevance of theology, philosophy, and Sufism lies in their ability to provide complementary theological, rational, and spiritual aspects in responding to these changes. All three are crucial because contemporary Islamic education is required not only to produce students who understand religion but also who are able to think critically, have good morals, and adapt to modern social dynamics. Theology is highly relevant in strengthening students' faith amidst the emergence of ideological pluralism, relativism of thought, and digital challenges that often obscure the foundations of belief. In the contemporary context, Islamic education requires a theological approach that is not dogmatic, but argumentative, so that students can understand and defend their religious principles rationally. By strengthening theological reasoning, theology can help students confront various modern discourses such as secularism, atheism, and religious disinformation in a reflective and intellectual manner. Thus, theology remains relevant as a means of strengthening faith amidst changing times.

One weakness of contemporary Islamic education is the persistent tendency toward textual learning that leaves little room for dialogue and intellectual reflection. The integration of philosophy enables Islamic education to move toward a more open, dialogical, and responsive learning environment. Through a philosophical approach,

students not only learn to receive information but are also trained to question, understand, and contextualize knowledge within the realities of life (Hasan et al., 2023). This finding supports (Hasan et al., 2023), who argue that the burhani reasoning approach contributes significantly to the development of students' critical thinking within Islamic education. Furthermore, this study strengthens the theoretical perspective that philosophy in Islamic education is not merely speculative thought, but an epistemological instrument for building analytical and problem-solving skills. This finding is strengthened by (Prihatini et al., 2025), who explain that reflective and participatory learning models significantly contribute to improving students' critical thinking and analytical skills. In the modern era, characterized by rapid information flows and complex social changes, these intellectual capacities are increasingly necessary to ensure that Islamic education remains adaptive and relevant rather than intellectually stagnant.

Sufism is equally relevant, particularly in addressing the moral crisis and spiritual emptiness that often arise in modernity. Advances in technology and science without spiritual development can produce students who excel academically but are ethically deficient. Challenges in the digital era also require Islamic education not only to focus on cognitive achievement, but also on strengthening self-control and students' spiritual awareness (Husein et al., 2024). Sufism offers an educational approach that emphasizes self-control, sincerity, spiritual awareness, and moral development. In contemporary education, Sufism's values can be actualized through character education, self-reflection, and strengthening students' moral awareness (Adnan et al., 2025). This result is in line with (Minniswatil and Akhyak., 2024), who emphasize that Sufism-based education contributes to the formation of holistic character and spiritual maturity within the curriculum. Moreover, this study reinforces Al-Ghazali's educational theory, which positions moral purification and spiritual discipline as integral components of the learning process. Therefore, the relevance of Sufism lies not only in preserving spirituality, but also in balancing intellectual achievement with ethical responsibility in contemporary Islamic education.

When theology, philosophy, and Sufism are combined, contemporary Islamic education has a significant opportunity to build a more integrative paradigm. Theology safeguards the foundations of faith, philosophy fosters intellectual intelligence, and Sufism fosters depth of character. This finding supports the integrative epistemological framework of bayani, burhani, and irfani proposed by (Erdiyani et al., 2025), which emphasizes the importance of balancing revelation, rationality, and spirituality in Islamic education. However, this study expands previous research by specifically positioning the dialectic of kalam, philosophy, and Sufism as a practical foundation for curriculum reconstruction. Thus, the contribution of this research lies not only in reaffirming the importance of integration, but also in demonstrating that the classical Islamic intellectual tradition remains relevant as a framework for responding to contemporary educational challenges such as secularization, moral degradation, and the fragmentation of knowledge. Ultimately, contemporary Islamic education will be stronger if it revitalizes the dialogue between revelation, reason, and spirituality within its learning system, thereby shaping a generation that is intellectually, theologically, and morally balanced.

CONCLUSION

The development of theology, philosophy, and Sufism in the history of Islamic thought demonstrates that these three are the main pillars that shape the complete Islamic intellectual tradition. Theology plays a role in strengthening theological foundations, philosophy develops rationality and a tradition of critical thinking, while Sufism forms the moral and spiritual dimensions. Although all three have experienced methodological tensions, history proves that the dialectic between revelation, reason, and spirituality has actually given rise to a rich and dynamic treasure trove of Islamic thought. This confirms

that Islamic civilization was built through the integration of various scientific approaches, not through a mutually exclusive dichotomy.

In the context of developing an Islamic education curriculum, the integration of theology, philosophy, and Sufism is a crucial foundation for building a broader educational system. An Islamic education curriculum should not be solely focused on knowledge transfer; it must also balance strengthening faith, developing critical reasoning, and fostering spiritual morals. This integration allows for the development of an educational model that not only produces students with broad knowledge but also fosters strong faith, reflective skills, and character maturity.

The relevance of these three disciplines to contemporary Islamic education lies in their ability to address modern challenges such as secularization, moral crisis, and the separation of knowledge. Theology provides theological resilience, philosophy fosters analytical skills, and Sufism strengthens moral integrity. Therefore, the reconstruction of contemporary Islamic education requires reviving the integration of theological, rational, and spiritual dimensions so that Islamic education can produce a generation that is adaptive, critical, religious, and character-driven. Therefore, developing a curriculum based on the integration of theology, philosophy, and Sufism is not merely an academic necessity but also a fundamental strategy for the renewal of Islamic education in the contemporary era.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

AD was responsible for conceptualizing the research, conducting literature review, collecting and analyzing data, interpreting the findings, and drafting the manuscript. MM contributed to research supervision, methodological direction, critical review of the manuscript, and validation of the overall research framework. Both authors discussed the results, contributed to the final revision of the manuscript, and approved the final version for publication.

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