

Revisiting the Origins of *Ilm al-Kalam*: Interreligious Dialogues and Their Impact on Islamic Educational Thought

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Abstract: This article revisits the historical and interreligious origins of *Ilm al-Kalam* and explores its implications for contemporary Islamic educational thought. Drawing on Alexander Treiger's seminal analysis in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, the study employs qualitative textual methods to examine the formative dialogues between early Muslim theologians and Arab Christian thinkers, revealing that *Kalam* developed through dynamic epistemological engagement rather than in isolation. By critically tracing its philosophical, theological, and pedagogical transformations across time, the study argues that *Kalam*'s rational and dialectical methodologies offer significant potential for revitalizing Islamic education. The findings highlight the limitations of internalist historiographies and call for a reimaged curriculum model that integrates historical consciousness, critical reasoning, and ethical responsibility. Positioned within a transdisciplinary framework, the article proposes that *Ilm al-Kalam* be recontextualized not merely as a theological discipline but as a living epistemic tradition capable of informing pedagogical innovation in the face of global educational and ethical challenges.

Abstrak: Artikel ini menelaah kembali asal-usul historis dan interreligius dari *Ilm al-Kalam* serta mengeksplorasi implikasinya terhadap pemikiran pendidikan Islam kontemporer. Dengan merujuk pada analisis mendalam Alexander Treiger dalam *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, studi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis teks untuk mengkaji dialog-formasi antara para teolog Muslim awal dan pemikir Kristen Arab, yang menunjukkan bahwa *Kalam* berkembang melalui keterlibatan epistemologis yang dinamis, bukan secara terisolasi. Dengan menelusuri transformasi filosofis, teologis, dan pedagogis *Kalam* sepanjang sejarah, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa pendekatan rasional dan dialektis dalam *Kalam* memiliki potensi besar untuk merevitalisasi pendidikan Islam. Temuan ini menyoroti keterbatasan historiografi internalis dan menyerukan model kurikulum baru yang mengintegrasikan kesadaran historis, nalar kritis, dan tanggung jawab etis. Melalui kerangka transdisipliner, artikel ini memposisikan *Ilm al-Kalam* bukan sekadar sebagai disiplin teologi, tetapi sebagai tradisi epistemik hidup yang mampu mendorong inovasi pedagogis dalam menghadapi tantangan pendidikan dan etika global masa kini.

1. Introduction

The transmission of theological knowledge and the formation of *Ilm al-Kalam* have been pivotal in shaping Islamic intellectual traditions, particularly in relation to educational frameworks and epistemological foundations. In today's educational context, where Islamic education is increasingly required to respond to global discourses on pluralism, critical thinking, and technological integration, a renewed engagement with *Ilm al-Kalam* becomes not only relevant but essential. Its conceptual tools such as rational inquiry (*nazar*), dialogical reasoning, and ethical deliberation offer valuable resources for

curriculum design that balances textual authenticity with cognitive development.¹ Learning objectives in Islamic education are no longer confined to rote memorization or doctrinal transmission, they now aim to cultivate moral agency, reflective judgment, and civic responsibility.²

This transformative direction is evident in reforms that incorporate kalamic reasoning into the study of creed (*aqidah*), ethics (*akhlaq*), and interdisciplinary subjects. The evolution of Kalam reflects a dynamic interplay between the preservation of tradition and the imperative for innovation a theme increasingly echoed in global efforts to harmonize religious education with the complexities of modernity.³ This interplay is evident in contemporary initiatives such as the integration of classical Islamic texts with critical pedagogy at institutions like the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM),⁴ the incorporation of ethics and theology into digital learning platforms such as Bayyinah TV,⁵ and the reform of religious curricula in countries like Indonesia and Morocco, where madrasah education has embraced scientific literacy and civic education alongside traditional subjects.⁶ These examples demonstrate how theological heritage can be revitalized through pedagogical innovation without compromising its core principles. Within this context, examining theological transmission unveils critical insights into the adaptability and continuity of Islamic thought across shifting socio-intellectual terrains. Accordingly, an epistemological reevaluation grounded in the historical dynamics of Ilm al-Kalam offers promising avenues for the renewal and contextualization of Islamic education in the present era.

Historically, Ilm al-Kalam emerged not in isolation but through profound engagement with diverse intellectual traditions, notably the early Arab Christian theological debates.⁷ This interreligious context provided a fertile ground for early Muslim theologians to articulate and defend foundational Islamic doctrines. The New Kalam movement during the late Ottoman period exemplified this trajectory, aiming to reconcile Islamic theology with contemporary Western scientific and philosophical thought.⁸ Similarly, within the community of Ahl-e Haqq, the Kalam-khān tradition preserved theological discourse through meticulously maintained defters,⁹ reflecting a communal epistemology rooted in both textual fidelity and spiritual authority. Efforts by scholars such as Abu Ishaq al-Zahid al-Saffar, who vigorously defended Kalam's scientific

¹ Mahmudulhassan and Muhammad Abuzar, "Ethical Curriculum Development: Insights From Islamic Epistemology," *JURNAL PEDAGOGY* 17, no. 2 (October 15, 2024): 169–78, doi:10.63889/pedagogy.v17i2.219.

² Nurhaizatul Jamil, *Faithful Transformations: Islamic Self-Help in Contemporary Singapore* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2025).

³ Najwan Saada and Zehavit and Gross, "Islamic Education and the Challenge of Democratic Citizenship: A Critical Perspective," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38, no. 6 (November 2, 2017): 807–22, doi:10.1080/01596306.2016.1191011.

⁴ Md Mahmudul Hasan and Abdul Rashid Moten, *Journey to Islamicisation of Human Knowledge: A Festschrift in Honour of Mohd. Kamal Hassan* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2023).

⁵ Hafiz Taj Din and Deputy Colleges, "The Contribution of Islamic Education to Bridging Global Knowledge Gaps," *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2025): 9–17.

⁶ Toto Suharto, "Transnational Islamic Education in Indonesia: An Ideological Perspective," *Contemporary Islam* 12, no. 2 (2018): 101–22, doi:10.1007/s11562-017-0409-3.

⁷ Alexander Treiger, "The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology," ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, March 31, 2016), doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696703.001.0001.

⁸ M. Sait Özvarlı, "An Analysis of the New Kalam Movement in Its Historical and Intellectual Context," *Islam Tətkikləri Dərgisi* 13, no. 2 (2023): 581–604, doi:10.26650/iuitd.2023.1240015.

⁹ Bülent Akin, "The Tradition of Kalam-Khan in Ahl-e Haqq and the Role of Kalam-Khan Records ('Conks') in the Conservation and Transmission of Tradition 'Huma Bird Fell Down But Didn't Die,'" *Milli Folklor*, no. 111 (2016): 100–115.

legitimacy against traditionalist critiques, further highlight the discipline's evolving methodology and responsiveness to epistemic pressures of the time.¹⁰ These historical episodes demonstrate Kalam's resilience and its capacity for methodological innovation across different eras.

However, while a substantial body of literature addresses the internal development of Kalam, few studies have critically assessed its formative interreligious dynamics in relation to Islamic education as a discipline. The implications of these theological interactions for the epistemological foundations, curriculum design, and pedagogy in Islamic educational institutions remain underexplored. For instance, while institutions such as madrasahs and Islamic universities teach aspects of Kalam, the framing often remains doctrinal rather than dialogical or critical. By revisiting the external theological encounters that shaped Kalam, this study seeks to bridge that gap and argue for a more integrated understanding one that positions Kalam not only as a theological-philosophical enterprise but also as a pedagogical tool that can enhance critical reasoning, interfaith literacy, and epistemic humility within contemporary Islamic education.

Philosophical influences also significantly shaped the development of Kalam. Thinkers such as Muhsin Fayd Kashani, who integrated elements of philosophy and Sufism into Imami Kalam, expanded the framework of theological reasoning beyond sectarian boundaries.¹¹ Similarly, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's contributions to postclassical Kalam introduced a more elaborate ontological system based on the categories of substance and accident, presenting a direct challenge to Aristotelian hylomorphism.¹² Meanwhile, the atomistic theories of the Ash'arites were not mere borrowings from Greek thought but creative rearticulations grounded in Islamic metaphysics, emphasizing ontological simplicity and divine omnipotence. These engagements reflect an enduring epistemological flexibility that enriched Islamic theological discourse and enabled it to speak across disciplines and traditions.¹³ Consequently, Islamic epistemology particularly as it informs education, must be seen not as the product of static revelation alone, but as a result of dynamic philosophical negotiation capable of responding to new intellectual conditions.

Contemporary critiques and reconstructions of Kalam further underscore its adaptability and educational relevance. Fazlur Rahman, for example, emphasized the necessity of reconstructing Kalam to revitalize its dynamic function in the face of modern societal, scientific, and ethical challenges. His vision encourages educators to reconceptualize Islamic knowledge frameworks in line with both Qur'anic values and contextual demands. The argumentation patterns in late Ottoman Kalam, as explored in studies on Islamic argumentation theory, demonstrate a shift toward discursive

¹⁰ Demir Abdullah, "Māturīdī Theologian Abū Ishāq Al-Zāhid Al-Saffār's Vindication of the Kalām," *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 20, no. 1 (2016): 445–502, doi:10.18505/cuifd.12582.

¹¹ Nafiseh Ahl Sarmadi, Janan Izadi, and Seyyed Mehdi Emami Jomeh, "Philosophical-Mystical Kalām: A Case Study on Muhsin Fayd Kāshāni's Theological Methodology," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 15, no. 3–4 (2022): 41–62, doi:10.1353/isl.2022.a930319.

¹² Suteja, M. Sugeng Sholehuddin, and Irfan Hania, "The Value of Social Care Character Education Through Zikir Tarekat Qadiriyyah Wa Naqsyabandiyah," *EDUKASIA ISLAMIKA: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2022): 78–91.

¹³ Fatima Akkaya Öge, "The Development of Ash'arite Atomism: The Understanding of Substance in the Ash'arite Kalām of the Mutaqaddimīn Period," *Hittit Theology Journal* 22, no. 1 (2023): 267–302, doi:10.14395/hid.1229298.

rationality, which can serve as a valuable pedagogical model in modern classrooms.¹⁴ While figures like Huseyin Kazım Kadri resisted this reformist tendency advocating for the primacy of jurisprudence over theological renewal the discourse on Kalam's modernization persisted and even gained momentum.¹⁵ Furthermore, contemporary debates surrounding Islamic cosmological arguments, particularly the dilemmas of causality and divine temporality, underscore the continued relevance of Kalam as a medium for engaging not only theological questions but also scientific literacy, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning in educational settings.

In sum, this study revisits the interreligious and philosophical dynamics that shaped Ilm al-Kalam not merely as a contribution to theology, but as a foundational epistemic tradition with deep relevance for Islamic educational theory and practice. Drawing on transdisciplinary insights, including those of Alexander Treiger, Fazlur Rahman, and historical figures like al-Saffar and al-Razi, it aims to articulate how Kalam can inform an educational epistemology that is both faithful to tradition and responsive to the demands of the contemporary world.¹⁶ Theological reasoning, when integrated thoughtfully into Islamic education, can become a transformative pedagogical resource one that fosters not only doctrinal understanding but also dialogical engagement, spiritual depth, and intellectual pluralism.

In the educational sphere, the epistemological foundations influenced by Kalam continue to impact Islamic pedagogy. The medieval Islamic education system effectively reconciled philosophy, Sufism, and Kalam to form holistic theological education.¹⁷ Contemporary challenges, such as defining coherent Islamic education goals, reflect unresolved tensions between reason and revelation.¹⁸ Progressive Islamic education models aim to integrate democratic and multicultural values while remaining rooted in Islamic epistemology.¹⁹ Innovations like Fethullah Gulen's character-focused Islamic curriculum further exemplify this adaptive educational spirit.²⁰ Thus, interdisciplinary Islamic education today inherits a rich epistemological legacy demanding critical and contextual engagement.

Nevertheless, there are notable limitations and unresolved controversies within previous studies. Much of the discourse on Ilm al-Kalam tends to isolate it from its interreligious theological influences, particularly overlooking the formative role of early Arab Christian debates in shaping its discourse.²¹ This has led to a historical amnesia that distorts the pluralistic foundations of Islamic theology. Furthermore, bibliometric

¹⁴ Serkan Ince, "The Epistemological Orientation of Ottoman Argumentation Theory and Its Relation to Kalām," *Journal of Argumentation in Context* 12, no. 3 (2023): 278–306, doi:10.1075/jaic.22021.inc.

¹⁵ Rabiye Çetin, "Hüseyin Kāzım Kadri'nin Yeni İlm-i Kelām Karşıtı Söylemi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme TT - An Assessment on Hüseyin Kāzım Kadri's Discourse Against the New Kalām of Science," *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 22, no. 2 (2018): 807–31, doi:10.18505/cuid.459541.

¹⁶ Christopher Alan Bobier, "God, Time and the Kalām Cosmological Argument," *Sophia* 52, no. 4 (2013): 593–600, doi:10.1007/s11841-013-0362-4.

¹⁷ Fadil Yani Ainusyamsi et al., "Mediaeval Theology of Education: Embracing Philosophy, Kalām, and Sufism," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 105, no. 5 (2024): 1–15, doi:10.46222/pharosjot.105.513.

¹⁸ Rahmah Binti Ahmad H.Osman and Naseeb Ahmed Siddiqui, "'Travelers of Unknown Path': On the Aim of Islamic Education," *Intellectual Discourse* 29, no. 1 SE-Articles (June 17, 2021): 5–34, doi:10.31436/id.v29i1.1756.

¹⁹ Saada and and Gross, "Islamic Education and the Challenge of Democratic Citizenship: A Critical Perspective."

²⁰ Muhamad Restu Fauzi, Tasman Hamami, and Hyung-Jun Kim, "Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Innovation: Fethullah Gülen's Perspective," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 1 (June 30, 2024): 186–200, doi:10.14421/jpai.v21i1.7089.

²¹ Özervarlı, "An Analysis of the New Kalam Movement in Its Historical and Intellectual Context."

mappings of Islamic education research indicate a significant expansion in Islamic character education; however, the epistemological foundations underlying these initiatives remain underdeveloped.²² There is a tendency to emphasize normative and doctrinal content while neglecting the philosophical and dialogical roots that could support critical, reflective pedagogy.²³

Traditional approaches to Islamic education risk rendering it static and unresponsive to contemporary interdisciplinary demands, particularly in curriculum design and the integration of modern sciences.²⁴ Despite ongoing curricular innovations in various Muslim contexts, substantial epistemic tension persists especially regarding how to balance theological authenticity with the imperatives of scientific literacy and global citizenship education.

To address these gaps, this study analyzes the processes of theological transmission that underlie Ilm al-Kalam, with particular attention to its early development in conversation with Arab Christian theological debates, as discussed by Alexander Treiger. It seeks to elucidate how these interreligious theological influences shaped the rational-epistemological structure of Islamic theology and, by extension, Islamic educational thought. By situating Kalam within a complex discursive network rather than a hermetically sealed tradition, this study challenges the persistent assumption of a self-contained Islamic epistemology.

The primary contribution of this article lies in offering a reflective reconstruction of Islamic education paradigms particularly in curriculum development and epistemological orientation grounded in the dialogical and rational legacy of classical Islamic thought.²⁵ It advocates for a pedagogical model that re-engages the intellectual openness of early Kalam, enabling Islamic education to more effectively respond to contemporary needs. Ultimately, the study proposes an interdisciplinary framework that bridges historical insights with forward-looking educational strategies, fostering a dynamic synthesis of theology, ethics, and critical inquiry reform.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative textual analysis within the framework of documentary research to examine the theological transmission and epistemological formation of Ilm al-Kalam, with particular emphasis on its implications for Islamic educational epistemology.²⁶ This approach was chosen for its suitability in analyzing complex theological arguments, historical trajectories, and the interpretive evolution of religious discourse—elements that are best captured through in-depth engagement with primary and secondary texts. A critical examination was conducted on foundational sources, notably Alexander Treiger's contributions in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*,

²² Hanif Cahyo Adi Kistoro et al., "Islamic Character Education: Mapping and Networking Data Using Bibliometric Analysis," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 20, no. 2 SE-Articles (December 31, 2023): 195–214, doi:10.14421/jpai.v20i2.8027.

²³ Sitti Jamilah, "Moderate Islamic Education to Enhance Nationalism among Indonesian Islamic Student Organizations in the Era of Society 5.0," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 12, no. 3 (2021): 79–100.

²⁴ Rihab Grassa, Hichem Khelif, and Imen Khelil, "The Development of Islamic Accounting Education in the UAE and Its Challenges: An Institutional Perspective," *Journal of Financial Reporting and Accounting* 22, no. 3 (January 1, 2024): 527–45, doi:10.1108/JFRA-08-2021-0215.

²⁵ Hellen Tiara and Danu Danu, "Epistemology of Islamic Education: Criticism and Alternative Solutions," *HEUTAGOGIA: Journal of Islamic Education* 3, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 115–26, doi:10.14421/hjie.2023.31-09.

²⁶ Raya Fidel, "Are We There yet?: Mixed Methods Research in Library and Information Science," *Library & Information Science Research* 30, no. 4 (2008): 265–72, doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2008.04.001.

supported by an extensive review of contemporary scholarship on Kalam and Islamic education.

The analysis followed a descriptive-analytical and historical-critical methodology, aimed at tracing argumentative structures, identifying contextual shifts, and assessing the epistemological relevance of Kalam across various periods. Specifically, the study undertook thematic classification of Treiger's arguments, which were then subjected to comparative analysis alongside the works of key scholars such as Josef van Ess, Michael Cook, Jack Tannous, and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.²⁷ This comparative thematic strategy enabled a nuanced understanding of the transmission, transformation, and reinterpretation of Ilm al-Kalam across different intellectual traditions and educational paradigms.

Data collection and analysis were supported by the application of critical reading frameworks, historical-comparative matrices, and the use of bibliographic management software such as Zotero, which facilitated systematic annotation, source classification, and citation tracking. These tools enabled a structured engagement with the selected texts and supported consistency in thematic analysis.

To ensure interpretive fidelity and source credibility, the study employed theoretical triangulation by drawing from three intersecting domains: Islamic theology, early Christian theological history, and Islamic educational epistemology.²⁸ This triangulation served not only to validate interpretive perspectives but also to enrich the analysis by situating Ilm al-Kalam within a broader dialogical and pedagogical framework. In doing so, the study engaged Islamic educational themes related to curriculum conceptualization, pedagogical rationality, and the ontological assumptions underlying knowledge transmission.

Cross-verification between primary texts and secondary scholarship was meticulously conducted to assess the coherence of interpretations and to guard against theological or historiographical bias. This included tracing how specific theological themes evolved across different authors and eras, with particular attention to their relevance for contemporary Islamic educational challenges.

Furthermore, reflexive analysis was integrated throughout the research process to strengthen methodological rigor. This was operationalized through memo-writing and iterative researcher journaling, allowing the author to critically examine their own positionality, underlying assumptions, and interpretive frameworks. Rather than seeking empirical saturation, the study prioritized epistemic validation ensuring that the philosophical and theological claims were coherently grounded across textual traditions and educational paradigms.

3. Results

3.1. Historical Context and External Influences

The present study investigates the transhistorical development of Ilm al-Kalam within the context of interreligious interactions, particularly highlighting its formative influences from early Arab Christian theological debates. Previous research has primarily

²⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1980).

²⁸ Chayot Gadtet, "Rethinking the Roles of Pastoralists' Indigenous Religious Practices in Nuer Nation Zone, Gambella Region, South-West Ethiopia," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 12, no. 1 (2025): 2451508, doi:10.1080/23311983.2025.2451508.



emphasized the internal dynamics of Kalam.²⁹ However, this study foregrounds external stimuli shaping Islamic theological discourse, aligning with the findings of hybridization in Kalam in response to internal and external philosophical challenges.³⁰ The historical interactions of early Muslim communities with groups such as the Aqoyale, Tanukaye, and Tu'aye underscore a significant cross-cultural dialogue that shaped the intellectual landscape of early Islamic theology.

These early interactions demonstrate how the formative period of Kalam was profoundly influenced by theological and philosophical debates occurring within adjacent Christian communities. This interaction is significant not merely for the exchange of doctrinal ideas but also for the methodological and epistemological approaches borrowed and adapted by early Muslim theologians. The fluidity of intellectual exchanges in the historical milieu underscores Kalam's foundation on engagement rather than isolation. Furthermore, the study identifies how these exchanges were central in shaping key theological debates within Islamic discourse, such as discussions on divine predestination (*qadar*). The interreligious debates provided early Muslim scholars with sophisticated argumentative strategies, enhancing Kalam's intellectual rigor. Hence, the historical context provided an environment where theological articulation was directly stimulated by external intellectual pressures.

This research substantiates Treiger's argument³¹ that Kalam emerged primarily as an intellectual and strategic response to theological challenges presented by surrounding religious traditions. An unexpected finding was the extensive influence these interactions had on Islamic educational philosophy, particularly concerning dialectical reasoning and moral responsibility. The historical engagement with moral debates, notably the Qadar controversy, emerged as pivotal in framing contemporary Islamic ethical education. Thus, contemporary Islamic education must embrace its historical and intellectual complexity to remain relevant and dynamic. Overall, acknowledging these historical interactions enriches our understanding of Kalam's origins and underscores the importance of fostering intellectual openness in contemporary Islamic educational contexts. It positions the historical experience not as a threat to Islamic purity but as an essential and formative aspect of Islamic intellectual heritage.

3.2 Epistemological Reassessment

The epistemological implications of Kalam's historical development, as revealed in this study, reinforce the necessity of integrating dynamic reasoning into Islamic educational frameworks.³² Kalam, historically functioning as an adaptive intellectual response, highlights an essential pattern of dynamic engagement rather than insular theological reflection. Similar to modern movements such as New Kalam addressing contemporary Western ideologies.³³ Kalam was characterized by active intellectual interaction with external ideas.

This active engagement underscores a historical epistemological flexibility within Islamic thought, challenging narratives of Islamic epistemology as static or

²⁹ Abdullah, "Māturīdī Theologian Abū Ishāq Al-Zāhid Al-Saffār's Vindication of the Kalām"; Bilal Ibrahim, "Beyond Atoms and Accidents: Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī and the New Ontology of Postclassical Kalām," *Oriens* 48, no. 1–2 (2020): 67–122, doi:10.1163/18778372-04801004.

³⁰ Öge, "The Development of Ash'arite Atomism: The Understanding of Substance in the Ash'arite Kalām of the Mutaqaddimīn Period."

³¹ Treiger, "The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology."

³² Saadet Altay, "Fazlur Rahman's Criticism of Kal'm in the Context Of Reconstructing of the Scien-Ce of Kal'm," *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 25, no. 2 (2021): 853–74, doi:10.18505/cuid.963525.

³³ Özervarlı, "An Analysis of the New Kalam Movement in Its Historical and Intellectual Context."

monolithic. Early Kalam's capacity to adapt and incorporate various philosophical methods signifies an inherent openness within Islamic thought towards external intellectual stimuli. This historical openness remains crucial for contemporary Islamic educational practice.

Moreover, these findings resonate with broader epistemological discussions in contemporary Islamic education that advocate for renewing methods of reasoning and critical inquiry. Kalam's historical trajectory provides compelling evidence for the necessity of cultivating a responsive and adaptable epistemological framework within modern Islamic curricula, capable of addressing diverse intellectual and moral challenges.

This pattern of interaction aligns with³⁴ findings on the historical integration of philosophy, Sufism, and theology within Islamic intellectual traditions. These findings reaffirm the necessity for a renewed approach to *ijtihād* within Islamic educational contexts, responding proactively to global ideological and philosophical challenges.³⁵ The epistemological reassessment promoted by this study advocates reconstructing Islamic epistemology with historical openness, facilitating meaningful intellectual development and flexibility in contemporary educational practices.

Ultimately, embracing the historical complexity and epistemological dynamism of Kalam can significantly enhance Islamic educational practices, providing students with robust tools for critical thinking and ethical reasoning in a rapidly globalizing world.

3.3 Critique of Internalist Narratives

Contrary to earlier narratives emphasizing the internal evolution of Kalam,³⁶ the present study underscores significant external genealogies. Figures like *Abū Ishāq al-Zāhid al-Saffār* may have advocated for Kalam's internal legitimacy,³⁷ but this research highlights the essential role of cross-cultural intellectual exchanges. Additionally, the bibliographic studies of³⁸ suggest that misinterpretations often arise from insufficient acknowledgment of external influences in early Kalam literature.

Critically reassessing these internalist narratives enables scholars to appreciate the broader contexts that shaped Kalam's development. Acknowledging these external influences enriches the understanding of Islamic intellectual history, allowing for a more nuanced appreciation of theological development as inherently interactive and dialogical.

The findings of this study also suggest that internalist narratives may limit the potential for dynamic educational strategies within contemporary Islamic curricula. Overcoming this historiographical limitation involves embracing a comprehensive understanding that recognizes the multifaceted influences shaping Islamic theology.

Engaging critically with van Ess's internalist historiographical assumptions,³⁹ as elucidated by Treiger, this study demonstrates the necessity for a broader

³⁴ Sarmadi, Izadi, and Jomeh, "Philosophical-Mystical Kalām: A Case Study on Muhsin Fayd Kāshānī's Theological Methodology."

³⁵ Fuad Mahbub Siraj and Ridwan Arif, "The Existence and the Construction of 'Ilm Al -Kalam as Islamic Discipline and Its Significance to Wasatiyyah," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 17, no. 1 (2020): 38-52, doi:10.24035/IJIT.17.2020.168.

³⁶ Çetin, "Hüseyin Kâzım Kadri'nin Yeni İlm-i Kelâm Karşılıtı Söylemi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme TT - An Assessment on Hüseyin Kâzım Kadri's Discourse Against the New Kalām of Science."

³⁷ Abdullah, "Māturīdī Theologian *Abū Ishāq Al-Zāhid Al-Saffār*'s Vindication of the Kalām."

³⁸ Musa Sancak and Aziz Ençakar, "A Review, in the Context of Fuat Sezgin, of the Early Period of Kalam Literature," *Darulfunun İlahiyat* 30, no. 3 (2019): 37-65, doi:10.26650/di.2019.30.2.0065.

³⁹ Jan Thiele, "Commonness and Derivative Work in Aš'arite Literature: A Comparison of *Diyā Al-Dīn Al-Makkī*'s *Nihāyat Al-Marām* and *Abū Al-Qāsim Al-Ansārī*'s *Al-Ğunya Fī Al-Kalām*," *MIDEO - Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicaine Des Etudes Orientales Du Caire* 32 (2017): 135-66.



historiographical approach. Recognizing external influences encourages a more comprehensive and pluralistic understanding of Islamic theological development, thereby enriching contemporary discourse and educational curricula.

Thus, the critique of internalist approaches is not merely academic but deeply practical, enabling contemporary educators and scholars to foster a more dynamic and historically informed theological education that genuinely reflects the rich, multifaceted history of Islamic intellectual tradition.

3.3 Dialogical and Dialectical Roots

A significant explanation for the findings lies in the inherently dialogical nature of early Islamic epistemology. Early Muslim communities were inevitably exposed to Christian and Hellenistic philosophical thoughts.⁴⁰ This intellectual permeability fostered the adoption and subsequent Islamization of foreign argumentation methods, crucially shaping Kalam's dialectical structure.⁴¹ This dialogical heritage emphasizes that Islamic epistemology has historically thrived in conditions of intellectual engagement and exchange rather than isolation. The dialectical methods central to Kalam are products of this historical engagement, demonstrating how external philosophical tools were effectively adapted to serve theological and educational objectives within an Islamic framework.

Furthermore, this historical evidence advocates for a continued commitment to dialogue and intellectual exchange in contemporary Islamic education. It underscores the potential benefits of engaging constructively with diverse philosophical and ethical traditions, promoting intellectual growth and ethical depth among students. Echoing,⁴² the findings call for a revival of Kalam's original dynamism in modern educational contexts, emphasizing that historical external influences should not be viewed as epistemological deviations but as strategic adaptations. By maintaining a balanced epistemological coherence with core Islamic principles, Islamic education can responsibly incorporate historical dialogue and dialectical reasoning to enrich intellectual and moral formation.

4. Discussion

The central implication of this study is the necessity for Islamic education to reframe its historical interconnectivity not as a source of epistemological vulnerability, but as an intellectual strength.⁴³ The findings suggest that curricula grounded in dialectical reasoning, historical consciousness, and critical engagement offer strategic resilience against ideological rigidity and dogmatism.⁴⁴ By incorporating a critical understanding of its theological formation particularly the dialogical evolution of *Ilm al-Kalam* Islamic education can more effectively cultivate students' moral discernment, intellectual adaptability, and ethical reasoning.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Ibrahim, "Beyond Atoms and Accidents: Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī and the New Ontology of Postclassical *Kalām*."

⁴¹ Öge, "The Development of Ash'arite Atomism: The Understanding of Substance in the Ash'arite *Kalām* of the Mutaqaddimīn Period."

⁴² Altay, "Fazlur Rahman's Criticism of Kal'm in the Context Of Reconstructing of the Scien-Ce of Kal'm."

⁴³ Rahmah Binti Ahmad H.Osman and Naseeb Ahmed Siddiqui, "'Travelers of Unknown Path': On the Aim of Islamic Education."

⁴⁴ Bobier, "God, Time and the Kalām Cosmological Argument."

⁴⁵ Lili Sholehuddin Badri and Ahmed Abdul Malik, "Implementation of Islamic Education Values in Building Students' Religious Character through an Affective Approach Based on the Qur'an," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 1 (June 30, 2024): 217–33, doi:10.14421/jpai.v21i1.7260.

However, this engagement must be approached with discernment. Avoiding uncritical syncretism is imperative; any integration of interdisciplinary insights must maintain epistemological coherence with core Islamic principles.⁴⁶ Thus, meaningful curricular reform hinges on achieving a dynamic equilibrium between fidelity to tradition and openness to intellectual plurality.

This synthesis compels a reimagining of Islamic education that prioritizes critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and historical literacy.⁴⁷ Epistemological openness is not merely desirable but essential for preparing learners to navigate multicultural, pluralistic societies an insight increasingly emphasized by scholars in Islamic educational reform.^{48,49} Integrating the legacy of Kalam's historical transmission into contemporary curricula provides a foundational model for character education, capable of addressing moral complexity in globalized contexts.^{50,51}

Ultimately, the reconstruction of Islamic education along these lines anchored in tradition, informed by history, and open to interdisciplinary engagement has the potential to foster a new generation of Muslim learners: intellectually robust, ethically grounded, and globally responsive. This study thus positions Ilm al-Kalam not only as a historical discipline but as a living pedagogical resource for contemporary educational transformation.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to critically examine the historical transmission and epistemological evolution of Ilm al-Kalam, particularly its interreligious and philosophical engagements, to explore its potential contributions to contemporary Islamic educational epistemology. By situating Kalam within dialogical and rational traditions, the research sought to reconceptualize it not merely as a theological discipline, but as a pedagogical tool capable of enriching curriculum development, fostering critical reasoning, and enhancing epistemic openness in Islamic education. The findings reveal that Ilm al-Kalam developed not in isolation, but through dynamic engagement with early Arab Christian theology, Hellenistic philosophy, and diverse Islamic intellectual traditions. These interactions shaped its epistemological structure, emphasizing dialectical reasoning, rational inquiry (nazar), and ethical deliberation. The study highlighted the formative role of interreligious dialogue in shaping theological reasoning, the enduring relevance of philosophical engagements in expanding Islamic epistemology, the inadequacy of internalist historiographies in fully capturing Kalam's dynamism, and the need for educational models grounded in Kalam's dialogical heritage to address contemporary challenges. This study contributes to Islamic educational theory by advocating for a curriculum model rooted in the historical and dialogical foundations of Kalam. It reframes

⁴⁶ Muhamad Restu Fauzi, Tasman Hamami, and Hyung-Jun Kim, "Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Innovation: Fethullah Gülen's Perspective."

⁴⁷ Khoirul Umam Addzaky, Uswatun Hasanah, and Zaki Faddad Syarif Zain, "Developing Wasathiyah Epistemology: A Literature-Based Study of Moderate Islamic Knowledge in The Post-Truth Era," *HEUTAGOGIA: Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 199–217 (4AD), doi:10.14421/hjie.2024.42-05.

⁴⁸ Moch Tolchah, "The Political Dimension of Indonesian Islamic Education in the Post-1998 Reform Period," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 8, no. 2 (2014): 284–98, doi:10.15642/JIIS.2014.8.2.284-298.

⁴⁹ Jamilah, "Moderate Islamic Education to Enhance Nationalism among Indonesian Islamic Student Organizations in the Era of Society 5.0."

⁵⁰ Grassa, Khelif, and Khelil, "The Development of Islamic Accounting Education in the UAE and Its Challenges: An Institutional Perspective."

⁵¹ Hanif Cahyo Adi Kistoro et al., "Islamic Character Education: Mapping and Networking Data Using Bibliometric Analysis."



theological education as a site of critical engagement, supports curriculum development that fosters moral agency and civic responsibility, encourages educators to draw upon Kalam for pedagogical renewal, and offers a framework for interdisciplinary education that balances tradition with global educational demands. However, the study is limited by its conceptual nature, relying on textual analysis without empirical fieldwork. This restricts its generalizability and may not fully capture localized adaptations of Kalam-based education. To address these gaps, future research should conduct empirical studies that explore how Kalam's principles can inform curriculum design, assess the effectiveness of dialectical methods in Islamic classrooms, integrate Kalam into digital learning, and document institutional experiences with Kalam-based pedagogy. Ultimately, by grounding Islamic education in the rational and dialogical legacy of *Ilm al-Kalam*, educators can cultivate learners who are intellectually robust, ethically grounded, and prepared to engage meaningfully in a pluralistic and rapidly changing world.

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