



## The Epistemology of Medieval Islamic Education: Historical Portraits of the Abbasid Dynasty During Caliph Harun Ar-Rashid

Abdul Ghofur<sup>1</sup>; Khoirudin Nasution<sup>2</sup>; Makmun Efendi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Student of Doctoral Degree, UNU Surakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer in UIN Yogyakarta and UNU Surakarta, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Lecturer in UNU Surakarta, Indonesia

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### **Abstract**

This research is focusing on the epistemological pattern of Islamic education during the Abbasid dynasty, especially during the Caliph Harun ar-Rashid. This study is library research using a historical approach. The research findings indicate that the background influencing the development of educational epistemology during the Abbasid dynasty, especially during the Caliph Harun is the translation movement, the construction of Bait al-Hikmah, the high number of Islamic educational institutions such as kuttab / maktab, low education in the palace, procurement of bookstores, the existence of Knowledge Convention, optimizing the function of mosques, madrasas for the public, and providing houses for ulema. More, the existence of scientists around the Caliph Harun promoted the progress of science, civilization, and Islamic education. In addition, the advance of political stability and economic circumstances during the Caliph Harun had also made scientific activity, Islamic education, and knowledge development becomes maximum. Moreover, Islamic education epistemology during the Caliph Harun can be mapped into three major streams of the underlying theory of knowledge, first, rational knowledge; second, sensory knowledge; and third, knowledge of Kasyaf through revelation or intuition. Several forms of knowledge developed from the epistemological style of Islamic education include the science of interpretation, the science of hadith, the science of kalam, the science of language, and the science of Tasawuf. Epistemology of Islamic education spawned many methods for scientific study such as nadzr, tadabur, tafakur, bayyinah, burhan, mulahzah, tajrib, istiqra, qiyas, tamsil, ta'wil, dzati, HISSI, khayali, aqli, sybhi, and more.

**Keywords:** *Epistemology of Islamic Education; Bayani; Burhani; Irfani; Dynasty Bani Abbasiyah; Caliph Harun*

### **Introduction**

Abbasid dynasty reached its golden peak from Caliph Harun to al-Wasith. The characteristic of Abbasid caliph has been marked by history that had an image of strong personality because they are in the vortex of political and religious power. Such characters bring the progress of Islamic civilization and

society's prosperity to the highest level, and it also helps to prepare a political moral foundation for the development of philosophy, science, and civilization. Hence, such condition creates comfort and well-being for Muslims at that time (Nakosten, 1964, 7). The Caliph of Harun developed Islamic education by strengthening knowledge and science, opening space for study, procurement of libraries across the region, and establishing a translation agency (Syamsul, 2011, 18). The Caliph of Harun embraced scholars to develop knowledge and made Baghdad the center of an intellectual movement that attracted educated people around the world to come (Syalabi, 2003, 110). A palace becomes a place to gather the philosophers and ulema, poets, historians, jurists, and doctors. This time was the glory of Islamic Civilization and it was incomparable (Murodi, 2004, 47).

Baghdad becomes "the city of knowledge" which is very popular with bookstores because it is supported by high paper production there. Such thing gives an intellectual and cultural effect to the development of a great Islamic education epistemology in encouraging the laying of civilization. As Bobrick has said that there is a street in the commercial district of Baghdad that is specially reserved for the sale of paper and books (Bobrick, 2012, 41). The Caliph of Harun put high attention on science because he is an educated person (Hasan, 1989, 15). Islamic scientific and educational activities reached a golden peak, both *naqliyah* and *'aqliyah* (Hasan, 1989, 22). Besides, there is philosophy, observatory, and translation of foreign manuscripts into Arabic. The carrying capacity of the development of the epistemology of Islamic education during the Caliph Harun was also adequate Islamic educational institutions such as mosques, madrasas, *halaqoh*, *kuttab*, research institutions, and libraries (Yunus, 1990, 63).

The progress of science and Islamic education during the Caliph Harun made Muslims experience prosperity and justice because the security and facilities provided by the state made it easier for people to get education freely. To support the development of Islamic education, the Caliph of Harun also gave high appreciation to the written works with the expensive rewards (Suwito, 2005, 99). The success of Caliph Harun in developing Islamic education cannot be separated from the role of the people around him (Hanun, 1999, 14). It is because the Abbasid caliphs before Harun were more focused on fixing the internal government's matter, expanding the territory, and strengthening the military for religious purposes (Nata, 2011, 43). His concern for the advancement of Islamic education is a top priority, and as a national goal by writing letters to all governors to promote Islamic education, opening space for learning, holding state exams, and providing scholarships (Yatim, 2001, 43).

The Caliph of Harun strengthened the development of Islamic education by building several educational institutions and observatories such as *Bait al-Hikmah* and hospitals that could support learning activities. During the Caliph of Harun, there had been cultural acculturation begin from Arabic, Persian, to Greek cultures (Ali, 1998, 68). The carrying capacity of the country's abundant wealth was used to carry out intellectual movements by fulfilling educational facilities, providing convenience to anyone who put high attention in developing Islamic education, both Muslim and non-Muslim (Syalabi, 2003, 78). The Caliph of Harun distributed zakat for the sake of education, health, and research, during his reign there were no people who needed to be given zakat because of the prosperity and justice that had been existed (Hanun, 1999, 27). He became a responsive leader to solve his people's problems even small problems. He took the right decisions by discussing with the ulema (Hasjmi, 89). Through Islamic educational institutions, Caliph Harun regulated all aspects of education including writing papers so that he could get an official diploma from the state (Hanun, 1999, 120). The Caliph Harun provided a stimulus to anyone who could graduate quickly with the best grades (Lapidus, 2000, 79). The concept of Islamic education during the Caliph Harun demanded designs on ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Syalabi, 2003, 187). Hence, this article looks at how Islam became a source of epistemological development of Islamic education during the Caliph of Harun as a form of construction of an education system based on universal values on the unity of God, the principle of the unity of the meaning of truth and the unity of the source system.

## Research Method

This research was qualitative literature research using a comprehensive historical approach. The historical approach sees Islamic civilization as a political, social, economic, theological, and intellectual aspect (Kuntowijoyo 1994, 33). With this historical approach, this study was expected to see the dynamics of the development of the epistemology of Islamic education during the Caliph Harun with a diachronic historical reading model, namely periodization or one stage to the next stage in the course of history (Kuntowijoyo, 1994, 36). To see the scientific network that was built for the development of the epistemology of Islamic education, this study used the Foucaultian perspective on the archeology of science (Muqowan, 2012, 25). This perspective was to examine the Islamic scientific tradition in history to reveal critical reasoning that was practiced in the trajectory of the Islamic tradition (Arkoun, 1994, 113). Data collection was carried out using the documentation method such as works or references related to the theme. This research used qualitative data analysis (Bable, 2002, 370) with an interactive model of analysis including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Milles, 1984, 24). Data were analyzed by coherence interpretation using the *Verstehen* method (Salim, 2001, 151). *Verstehen* method is a kind of interpretation to explain the observed sociological phenomena following the meaning given by the object of research (Muhajir, 2000, 89).

## Result and Discussion

The period of the Abbasid dynasty is identical to the development of science, philosophy, and Islamic education. Meanwhile, the period of Caliph Harun is not only famous as the peak of *al-hadlarah al-Islamiyah* but also describes the glorious era of world civilization progress. During the Umayyad Dynasty, Islamic education activities are not systematically organized, only in the form of scientific reasoning activities that are implanted as the basis before moving to the Abbasid Dynasty (Qomar, 2005, 64). Islamic education is understood not only as a transfer of knowledge learning process, but also the development of thoughts and sources of knowledge that support *al-harokah al-'ilm*. Islamic education no longer only discusses the science of *naqliyah* in mosques as *al-markaz al-'ilm* but also scientific and technological development directed to observatories and research for the systematic development of exact *aqliyah* knowledge.

The Caliph of Harun opens himself up and accepts high civilizations of other nations such as Greece, Persia, and India (Hasan, 1989, 15). This makes science develop rapidly both *naqli* and *'aqli* that is encouraged by religious teachings in the Qur'an and hadith that embrace the idea of thinking; and the influence of an outside culture that is absorbed into Islamic civilization. After the collapse of the Greek culture, the Christian scholars are used to develop science-based *aqliyah Bayt al-Hikmah* by the Caliph of Harun (Nakosten, 1964: 131). This reality has encouraged the existence of a scientific tradition for the development of the epistemology of Islamic education as a form of the journal to acquire knowledge. According to Suwito, this has become an important component in Islamic education during the Caliph Harun's era (Suwito, 2005, 108).

Through the scientific context of epistemology, Islamic education is growing fast because it gets the satisfaction of knowledge by interacting directly with educators (Syalabi, 2003, 308). This scientific triumph is to strengthen the epistemology of Islamic education during the Caliph Harun in the field of *naqliyah* science by searching for Islamic knowledge that is textual such as hadith as Imam Bukhari and Imam as-Shafi'i had done in *ushul al-fiqh* (Zahrah, 1974, 30). The high attention of Caliph Harun in the sector of knowledge has made him channeled through various scientific activities by transferring various knowledge into the Islamic world from Sanskrit, Syriac, Persian, Syrian, and Greek. (Lapidus, 2000, 57). The development of Islamic education both *aqliyah* and *naqliyah* have become the beginning of the rise of Abbasid dynasty which started from Cordoba in Spain to Mutans in Pakistan so that it experiences to progress in various fields of knowledge, art, and technology (Al-Khatib, 1931, 221). It is not surprising

that during the Caliph Harun many scientists have produced well-organized scientific works (Syalabi, 2003, 130).

The progress of civilization is directly proportional to the progress of knowledge in several cities that become centers of Islamic education such as Damascus, Qayrawan, Alexandria, Fustat, Cairo, al-Mada'in, Jundishapur, Bachtra, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Baghdad. They employ Persian scholars such as the Barmak Family who has served as vizier, namely Yahya bin Khalid during Caliph Harun who is initially an educator in the palace (Al-Khatib, 1931, 201). The intersection of politics, freedom of thought, and economic stability makes the country experience rapid progress in intellectual activities. The existence of the Abbasids as *al-washilah* for the sake of engaging the tradition of Greek civilization is then developed in Egypt and transferred to other scientific centers in Europe such as Seville, Cordoba, and al-Hamra. Islamic education at that time was an effort to improve spirituality, shape human beings, and develop the potential of human reason (Al-Khatib, 1931, 201). The actualization of all human potentials reflects human dignity as God's creatures, both as khalifatullah and abdullah (Mibtadin, 2021, 54).

The epistemology of Islamic Education during the Caliph of Harun has displayed diverse patterns, so it gives rise to the variety of disciplines in Islamic studies. Science is rational, that epistemology is based on the analysis of the human mind. Several patterns of the epistemology of Islamic education are developed in Islamic studies such as interpretation, hadith, kalam, language, and *Tasawuf*. The development of *naqliyah* is faster than *aqliyah* because Arab civilization is a text civilization "al-hadlarah an-nash" so language is easy to discuss (Ihsan, et al, 2007, 95). The epistemology of Islamic education gives birth to many methods for scientific studies such as nadzr, tadabur, tafakur, bayyinah, burhan, mulahzah, tajrib, istiqra, qiyas, tamsil, ta'wil, dzati, hissi, imaginary, aqli, syibhi, and others. The epistemological description of Islamic education during the Caliph Harun can be mapped into three major currents: first, rational knowledge; second, sensory knowledge; and third, knowledge of kasyaf through revelation or intuition. According to al-Jabiri's mapping, paying attention to subject matter during the Caliph Harun's time, at least the epistemological style of Islamic education can be divided into three forms: first, in the form of studying compiled bayani texts such as interpretation, nahwu, hadith, poetry, dates, and Arabic. Second, aspects of spirituality are summarized in irfani such as prayer, *Tasawuf*, and the third, related to research studies that are summarized in burhani such as counting and astronomy (Al-Jabiri, 2003, xix).

The epistemology of Islamic education takes the starting point of Islam as an epistemological building or *manhaj al-fikr* to discuss knowledge by placing Allah/ *God* as the source of knowledge and truth. The epistemology of Islamic education places humans as subjects seeking knowledge and truth (Al-Jabiri, 2003, 87). Sources of Islamic teachings, the Qur'an, and hadith as texts are believed to have a central role in providing inspiration and determining the scope, direction, and magnitude of Islamic knowledge to be addressed. (Al-Jabiri, 1991, 93). Knowledge in Islam places the concept of monotheism as a central concept emphasizing the absolute oneness of God, metaphysically and axiologically supreme (Mibtadin, 2021, 62).

The epistemology of Islamic education principally provides a perspective on three main issues, first, regarding the sources of knowledge; second, the nature and character of science, the existence of a world that exists outside our minds, and how to know it; and third, regarding the truth (Charles, 1976, 32). The source and nature of truth are beyond the reach of the human mind (Suhartono, 2006, 68). The epistemology of Islamic education during Caliph of Harun in gaining knowledge is not only rationalism and empiricism but also intuition or revelation as an authoritative source of knowledge. Intuition is a direct source of truth from God in the form of revelation or insight without deduction, induction, rationality speculation, and field observation. This knowledge in Islam is known as *al-'ilm al-hudlury or al-'ilm al-laduny* which position is one level below revelation (Zainuddin, 2005, 73).

The first is the epistemological pattern of Bayani education, an epistemology that includes the discipline of scientific studies that stems from language as its objects such as nahwu, fiqh, ushul fiqh, kalam, and balaghah. The epistemology of Bayani Islamic education Model is *al-manhaj al-fikr* which is based on the holy text and has full authoritativeness in determining the direction of truth. The role of the human mind in this epistemology is the restraint or regulator of lust, justification, and confirmation of truth in the authority of the text (Al-Jabiri, 2003, 122). During the Caliph of Harun, the epistemology of bayani is used by fuqoha, mutakallimin, and ushuliyun for several things. First is analyzing the text to get the meaning, and secondly is, istinbath law from *al-nushush al-diniyah*. The character of reasoning activity that underlies the knowledge production process of bayani epistemology is based on cognitive mechanism, the pillars link *furu'* with *ushul* because of the compatibility of the two. *Fuqoha* calls it *Qiyas*. *Qiyas* is *istidlal bi al-syahid 'ala al-ghaib*, an analogical reasoning between the sensory world, and *tasbyih* according to balaghah experts (Al-Jabiri, 2003, 217). The epistemological principles of Bayani as a source of knowledge are the Qur'an, hadith, qiyas, and ijma' (Al-Jabiri, 1991, 23). Bayani's epistemology essentially departs from the proposition as a basic legal reference and source of knowledge about human attitudes and actions that must be returned to *al-nushush al-diniyah*. The three sources other than *Al-Qur'an* become explanatory tools, interpretation media, and complement the universality of the *Al-Qur'an* itself (Syafuddin, 2013).

The second is the epistemology of Burhani Islamic education which is related to knowledge based on the power of ratio carried out with logical arguments (Saifullah, 1989, 136). Bayani has generated knowledge through analogy *furu'* to the origin, Irfani through a process of spiritual union with God, then Burhani through logical principle is believed to be true (Al-Jabiri, 1989, 59). The source of Burhani knowledge is the ratio because it provides judgments and decisions on information that enters through the senses (Saifullah, 1989, 101). In Islamic education during the Caliph of Harun, the epistemology of Burhani is seen in lessons that use the power of reason as an analytical tool such as algebra, arithmetic, geometry, and astrology (Falak). The function and role of reason in this epistemology are as a critical tool analysis (Suhartono, 2008, 125). Burhani's epistemology is rationalism in Islam, the human mind can find various kinds of knowledge. In Islamic studies, the mind can know issues of good and bad, right and wrong, as well as about metaphysics (Muhajir, 2011, 98). In Islamic studies, Burhani is called the scientific approach in understanding the reality of religion, and religion is seen in the historical, anthropological, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and hermeneutic approaches (Iqbal, 1968, 153). Burhani epistemology is not directed at reason or mind but reality so that human knowledge is a posteriori because the world has the nature of reality, both physical and non-physical (Muhajir, 1997, 139).

The third is the epistemology of Islamic education Irfani which emphasizes the source of knowledge of spiritual intelligence. Irfani emphasized *kasyf* which is the disclosure of the hijab or the secret of God's reality to achieve the unity of existence with *tarbiyah al-ruhaniyah* through *riyadhah* and the expected purity of heart. He bestows His knowledge directly or *al-'ilm al-hudlury*. *Kasyf* enters the human's mind and it is conceptualized and presented to others logically using the *aqliyah* argument. Islamic education during the Caliph of Harun is a step to gain knowledge with an irfani pattern through three stages: preparation, acceptance, and disclosure (Sutrisno, 1996, 76), Al-Ghazali refers to these to the terms *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajjali* (Suharto, 2014, 57). The first is *the takhalli* or cleaning stage as a form of *tarbiyah al-ruhaniyah* so that you are ready to get *kasyf*, you must go through a spiritual level called *maqam*. There are at least seven (7) stages that must be passed to reach *maqam ma'rifat or mahabah* namely repentance, *wara'*, *zuhud*, *faqir*, *patience*, *tawakal*, and *ridla* (Nasution, 1989, 34).

The second is the *tahalli* stage or the dressing phase of a person taking as much as possible the rays of God's knowledge by beautifying character, conscience, and morality. At this stage, a person gets the reality of self-awareness that is so absolute or *kasyf* that with this awareness someone can see himself or *musyahadah* as a known object. In *Tasawuf*, it is known as *Ittihad*, *Hulul*, *Ma'rifat*, *Mahabbah*, *Wahdah al-wujud*, or the unity of existence as *Hudluri science* or self-object knowledge (Yazdi, 1999, 51). The third stage is *tajjali* or disclosure of contemplative knowledge to the others both orally and written.

Although *Irfani* knowledge does not include "scientific conceptions" and representations of self-unification, it feels difficult to communicate to others considering its subjective nature, inwardness, and not all of these experiences can be expressed (Kartz, 1998, 23). Although it is subjective, not everyone can experience the same religious experiences, but everyone can get to the truth by doing this.

The *irfani* epistemological pattern of the Caliph of Harun is practiced as an effort to improve the quality of the faith and spirituality of Muslims employing *suluk*, *tariqah*, and other *Sufistic* teachings. The aim is to develop the substance of Islamic spirituality to build awareness and other religious experiences that differ in their incidence and expression but have the same essence. In Islamic education, *Irfani* is known as intuition or taste, humans can gain knowledge directly without going through a certain reasoning process. According to Bergson, intuition is the highest and personal product of human thought (Kartanegara, 2003, 61). The epistemological patterns of Islamic education developed during the Caliph Harun are *bayani*, *burhan*, and *irfan*. They are a trilogy of knowledge that complements, greets, and provides semi-permeable space for religious texts, ratios, and *kasyf*. The balance of these three epistemologies is what brought the Abbasid dynasty to its peak of glory.

The epistemological discourse of Islamic education during the Caliph of Harun among the *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani* do not become the main problem, even the three of them can synergize and work together in developing knowledge-based on reason or human thinking, revelation, and intuition (*kasyf*) so that there is no epistemological break. The existence of interconnection integration between the three epistemologies of the Caliph of Harun era has opened up harmonious relations of various sources of knowledge which was manifested in the epistemology of Islamic education. Then, it forms a pattern of metaphysical realism that recognizes universal truths that are above the individual and collective objective truths. Islamic education has sought to foster and maintain a balance between the three so that we can realize human beings who have spiritual intelligence.

The rapid development of the epistemology of Islamic education during the Caliph Harun is directly proportional to the development of Islamic culture and civilization. It is marked by the number of formal and non-formal educational institutions (Fahmi, 1979, 29). The development of the epistemology of Islamic education as part of a large flow of civilization is influenced by internal and external factors. The internal factor is in the form of carrying the doctrine of Islamic teachings itself, while external factors are related to external stimuli and challenges so that the potential to carry Islamic teachings can grow and develop (Mukaromah, 2018). Throughout classical Islam, the determination of the educational system and curriculum was in the hands of the *ulema*, a group of people who were knowledgeable and accepted as authoritative in matters of religion and law (Stanton, 1994: 52). Islamic education during the Caliph of Harun has given the freedom to develop epistemology without having to leave other epistemologies (Nasabe, 1989, 5). To take just an example, *Bayani* epistemology which is often displayed in the study of religious texts does not merely leave *burhani* with the text as the object of study, nor does it leave *irfani* with a *Sufistic* pattern.

## Conclusion

The epistemological pattern of Islamic education during the Abbasid period, especially Caliph Harun, displays a variety of patterns that give rise to various scientific disciplines in Islamic studies. The epistemology of Islamic education during the Caliph of Harun is mapped into three forms: 1) rational knowledge; 2) sensory knowledge, and 3) knowledge through revelation or intuition. In developing the epistemology of Islamic education, the *Bayani*, *Burhani*, and *irfani* cannot be separated from the methods such as rational, intuitive, dialogical, comparative, and critical. The epistemology of Islamic education raises many methods for scientific studies such as *nadzr*, *tadabur*, *tafakur*, *bayyinah*, *Burhan*, *mulahzah*, *tajrib*, *istiqla*, *qiyas*, *tamsil*, *ta'wil*, *dzati*, *hissi*, *imaginary*, *aqli*, *syibhi*, and many others. The epistemology of Islamic education, such as *Bayani*, *Burhani*, and *irfani* is not meant for the dichotomy of

science. Islam does not recognize this. These epistemological differences do not become a barrier to making Islamic education displayed in its entirety. The discourse among the Bayani, Burhani, and irfani is not becoming a problem because the three of them can synergize well which comes from reason or human's mind, revelation, and intuition (kasyf). The integration of these three discourses opens a harmonious relationship of reason or human's mind, revelation, and intuition which is manifested in Islamic epistemology with a metaphysical realism pattern recognizing universal truths that are above the individual and collective objective truths.

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