



REVITALIZING ILM AL-KALAM IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: FOSTERING CRITICAL REASONING AMID THE CRISIS OF RELIGIOUS RATIONALITY

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Abstract :

The crisis of rationality and the decline of critical thinking among students have become urgent challenges in contemporary Islamic education. Phenomena such as blind obedience to religious figures, emotional fanaticism in public discourse, and the lack of reflective reasoning among learners indicate the need for a reorientation of Islamic educational paradigms. This article aims to revitalize the function of Ilm al-Kalam as the foundation for strengthening rationality and theological consciousness within Islamic education. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach and a review of classical and contemporary literature, this study explores the rational, argumentative, and ethical dimensions of Ilm al-Kalam that can be integrated into the curriculum and learning process of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The findings reveal that applying the principles of Ilm al-Kalam fosters critical thinking, reasoned faith, and a balanced understanding of creed in the modern socio-religious context. The revitalization of Ilm al-Kalam thus represents not only theological reinforcement but also an epistemological transformation toward a rational, dialogical, and civilized Islamic education.

Keywords : *Ilm al-Kalam, Islamic Education, Rationality, Critical Thinking, Religious Crisis*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in the modern era faces complex challenges, not only regarding curriculum and learning technology but also in nurturing the intellectual and spiritual awareness of students. Social phenomena within educational spaces—such as student strikes against school policies, cult-like devotion to religious figures in pesantren, and emotional reactions to public issues without rational grounding—reflect a crisis of religious rationality. This crisis highlights not only a weak theological understanding but also the loss of balance between faith and reason, a foundational principle in the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Historically, Ilm al-Kalam has emerged as a discipline that upholds the rationality of faith by integrating logical argumentation with theological conviction. It functions both to safeguard the purity of creed from deviation and to cultivate critical, reflective, and ethical thinking. However, in contemporary educational practice, Ilm al-Kalam is often treated merely as a historical study, separated from the social realities of students' lives. As a result, its rational and



argumentative values have not been fully internalized in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum.

Revitalizing Ilm al-Kalam is essential for restoring rationality and ethical reasoning in Islamic education. By understanding its foundational principles – such as freedom of opinion, responsibility in reasoning, and the balance between revelation and intellect – Islamic education can transform into a space that nurtures intelligent and critically minded faith. This effort goes beyond mere curricular reform; it represents an epistemological movement aimed at reestablishing reason as both a spiritual and scientific instrument in the pursuit of truth. Thus, Ilm al-Kalam remains highly relevant as a paradigm for strengthening critical reasoning amid the ongoing crisis of religious rationality in Islamic education. Its integration into modern teaching can empower students to engage with faith critically and responsibly, bridging the gap between spiritual devotion and rational understanding. By fostering this balance, Islamic education can respond effectively to contemporary intellectual and social challenges while preserving the ethical and theological integrity of its tradition.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing library research to analyze classical and contemporary literature related to Ilm al-Kalam and Islamic education. The research focuses on examining the theoretical foundations and practical implications of rational theology within educational contexts. Primary data sources include seminal works by scholars such as Al-Ash'ari, Al-Maturidi, and Al-Ghazali, alongside modern thinkers like Muhammad Abduh and Harun Nasution. These are complemented by contemporary articles and research addressing religious rationality and the crisis of critical reasoning among students. Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation techniques, which involved identifying, reading, and recording key concepts and arguments from relevant sources. This process ensured a comprehensive understanding of both historical and contemporary perspectives on Ilm al-Kalam, highlighting its potential role in modern Islamic pedagogy. The method prioritizes accuracy and contextual relevance in capturing the core principles of rational theology.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and interpretative techniques, following the stages of reduction, presentation, and verification. Reduction involved selecting and focusing on concepts most relevant to critical reasoning and theological rationality. Presentation entailed organizing the data systematically to identify patterns and insights, while verification ensured the reliability and consistency of the findings. Through this methodological framework, the study explores the relevance of Ilm al-Kalam for enhancing critical thinking and moral reasoning in contemporary Islamic education. The approach bridges classical rationalist thought with modern pedagogical needs, demonstrating how traditional scholarship can inform the intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development of students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Role of Ilm al-Kalam

The study found that Ilm al-Kalam has historically played a central role in establishing theological rationality and critical thinking in Islamic education. Initially, it emerged as a systematic effort to preserve the purity of Islamic creed through rational argumentation. It addressed challenges posed by Greek philosophy and internal theological debates, emphasizing the balance between revelation and reason. This approach enabled Muslims not only to believe dogmatically but also to comprehend the foundations of their faith rationally. The analytical and reflective orientation of Kalam thus provided a framework for intellectual engagement. Its historical function demonstrates why Kalam remains relevant for revitalization in modern Islamic pedagogy.

In modern education systems, various phenomena indicate a decline in rationality and religious awareness among students. This crisis manifests in blind adherence to religious figures, emotional responses to differences, and symbolic fanaticism that rejects dialogue. When religious education focuses solely on ritualistic and cognitive aspects, learners risk reactive and superficial thinking. Ilm al-Kalam offers a paradigm that cultivates rational and argumentative thinking. It emphasizes critical reasoning, the balance between faith and intellect, and moral responsibility. By doing so, Kalam addresses the gaps in contemporary Islamic pedagogy.

Revitalization of Ilm al-Kalam in Islamic education seeks to revive the spirit of logical and methodological reasoning developed by the classical *mutakallimun*. Principles such as *tahqiq al-'aqidah*, the pursuit of truth in creed through reasoning, encourage students to engage with foundational theological questions analytically. *Al-hurriyah al-fikriyah*, or intellectual freedom within the framework of Sharia, allows learners to explore ideas critically while remaining rooted in faith. *Al-mas'uliyah al-'aqliyah*, or rational responsibility, teaches students the ethical consequences of their reasoning. Incorporating these principles into pedagogy creates a learning environment where dialogue, inquiry, and reflection are central.

Through applying Kalam principles, educators can guide students to critically engage with new ideas without abandoning their commitment to core Islamic values. Education transforms from mere transmission of dogma into a dialectical space where faith and knowledge coexist. Students learn to reason ethically and responsibly, evaluating arguments rather than accepting them passively. This fosters intellectual resilience, moral discernment, and the capacity to navigate complex social and religious issues. Such an approach strengthens both cognitive and spiritual dimensions, preparing learners for contemporary challenges. The integration of Ilm al-Kalam also addresses the epistemological demands of the 21st century. In an era of information overload, technological disruption, and polarized religious discourse, students require a framework that harmonizes revelation and reason. Kalam's rational and argumentative orientation equips learners with critical tools to assess ideas, resolve conflicts thoughtfully, and make informed decisions. It encourages independent thinking

while maintaining fidelity to Islamic theological principles. As a result, Kalam provides a bridge between tradition and modernity in Islamic education.

Ultimately, the findings underscore that Ilm al-Kalam is more than a historical discipline; it is a living paradigm capable of cultivating critical reasoning, moral responsibility, and reflective faith. Its revitalization within modern curricula can produce students who are intellectually competent, ethically aware, and spiritually grounded. By integrating Kalam into teaching and learning practices, Islamic education can foster a generation of believers capable of balancing reason and faith, navigating contemporary societal challenges, and contributing thoughtfully to public discourse. This demonstrates Kalam's enduring relevance and transformative potential.

Relevance of Ilm al-Kalam in Modern Education

The findings emphasize that Ilm al-Kalam is not merely a historical discipline but a relevant educational paradigm for the 21st century. Amid the overwhelming flow of information, technological disruption, and polarization in religious thought, Islamic education requires an epistemological foundation integrating revelation and reason. Incorporating Kalam into curricula and teaching practices can cultivate a generation of critical, rational, and morally upright believers. Its methodological approach promotes analytical thinking while grounding students in theological understanding. This integration prepares learners to navigate contemporary challenges responsibly.

Revitalization of Ilm al-Kalam strengthens students' ability to think reflectively and act ethically. By engaging with rational theology, learners develop a sense of moral responsibility alongside intellectual maturity. The integration of critical and reflective thinking into Islamic education ensures that faith is understood and practiced consciously. Students learn to balance reason and belief, fostering ethical decision-making in personal and societal contexts. This approach aligns with humanistic and transformative goals of modern Islamic education. Kalam, therefore, provides a framework for nurturing informed and conscientious Muslim citizens.

Integrating Ilm al-Kalam into modern pedagogy also encourages open dialogue and intellectual curiosity. Students are guided to question, analyze, and justify beliefs within the framework of Islamic theology, fostering a learning environment that values reasoned debate. This cultivates resilience against dogmatism and blind imitation, equipping learners with tools to navigate complex ethical and social issues. By promoting inquiry alongside spiritual development, Kalam strengthens both the intellectual and moral dimensions of education. The methodological principles of Kalam, such as *tahqiq al-'aqidah* (critical investigation of belief) and *al-hurriyah al-fikriyah* (freedom of thought within Sharia), provide practical strategies for classroom implementation. Teachers can design learning activities that stimulate reasoning, debate, and ethical reflection, bridging classical theological insights with contemporary contexts.

This ensures that students internalize rational and moral values rather than merely memorizing doctrinal knowledge. Revitalizing Kalam also

addresses the observed decline in rational engagement among students in modern Islamic education. By embedding critical thinking and reflective practices, education can counter emotional reactions, dogmatic adherence, and symbolic fanaticism. Students learn to evaluate religious and social phenomena with balanced judgment, integrating intellectual reasoning with spiritual understanding. Kalam thus functions as a corrective tool for cultivating thoughtful, discerning believers.

Ultimately, the integration of Ilm al-Kalam into Islamic education reaffirms the balance between faith and reason, providing a framework for moral and intellectual growth. It prepares students to engage responsibly with contemporary challenges while preserving theological integrity. By emphasizing analytical reasoning, ethical reflection, and spiritual awareness, Kalam equips learners with the skills necessary to become critically minded, ethically responsible, and spiritually grounded members of modern society.

Integration Into Curriculum

Incorporating Kalam into the modern curriculum extends far beyond mere theoretical discussion; it demands the deliberate integration of its principles into everyday teaching practices and structured learning activities. This approach ensures that students are not only exposed to rational theological concepts but also encounter them in ways that are relevant, practical, and applicable to their daily intellectual and spiritual experiences. By embedding Kalam in lesson planning, educators create opportunities for students to see the interplay between reason and revelation, allowing them to connect classical Islamic thought with contemporary societal and ethical challenges.

Introducing Kalam into the classroom enables educators to actively cultivate critical thinking skills while remaining aligned with core Islamic values. Students are encouraged to approach theological concepts analytically, asking questions about the rationale behind beliefs and exploring multiple perspectives. This method moves away from rote acceptance of doctrines and toward a reflective engagement that emphasizes understanding, debate, and logical reasoning. In doing so, learners develop the capacity to discern, evaluate, and apply knowledge in a manner consistent with both intellectual rigor and spiritual integrity.

The classroom transforms into a dynamic and interactive space where students are empowered to analyze, question, and reflect upon the material presented. Rather than passively memorizing religious texts or theological statements, learners are invited to engage with ideas critically, considering their implications, coherence, and relevance. This participatory model encourages intellectual curiosity, nurtures independent thought, and fosters an environment where dialogue, debate, and constructive questioning are normalized as part of the learning process.

Through the integration of Kalam, students are better prepared to navigate complex ethical and theological issues that arise in both personal and societal contexts. The curriculum provides them with frameworks for reasoning through dilemmas, evaluating competing claims, and making informed

decisions grounded in ethical principles. By balancing intellectual inquiry with spiritual understanding, learners develop the capacity to approach challenges thoughtfully and responsibly, embodying the holistic vision of Islamic education that values both faith and reason.

Moreover, the application of Kalam within modern pedagogy emphasizes the development of moral responsibility alongside cognitive skills. Students are taught that understanding theological concepts is not only an intellectual exercise but also a foundation for ethical action. This dual focus encourages learners to internalize principles of justice, compassion, and accountability while applying critical reasoning to real-life situations. As a result, the curriculum fosters reflective and morally conscious individuals capable of contributing positively to their communities.

Ultimately, integrating Kalam into modern Islamic education nurtures learners who are both intellectually sophisticated and spiritually grounded. It equips them with analytical tools, critical perspectives, and ethical frameworks necessary to interpret and respond to contemporary issues thoughtfully. By fostering reflective, independent, and morally responsible students, the integration of Kalam ensures that Islamic education remains relevant, transformative, and capable of preparing the next generation to uphold a balanced harmony between reason, faith, and social responsibility.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study conclude that the revitalization of Ilm al-Kalam in Islamic education is a crucial step in fostering critical reasoning and religious rationality amid modern challenges. Ilm al-Kalam, historically developed to preserve the purity of Islamic creed through logical argumentation, proves highly relevant as an educational paradigm capable of harmoniously integrating faith and reason. This renewal provides an epistemological innovation by positioning the principles of rational theology as the pedagogical foundation of learning, ensuring that Islamic education cultivates not only dogmatic belief but also reflective thinking and moral responsibility toward truth. Consequently, the study addresses the urgent need in contemporary Islamic education for a teaching model that is dialogical, critical, and intellectually rigorous while remaining aligned with the spirit of Islamic scholarship.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that educators, curriculum designers, and Islamic educational institutions integrate the rational principles of Ilm al-Kalam into teaching and learning processes. Strengthening competencies in critical, reflective, and argumentative thinking should be combined with spiritual development, so that students become not only intellectually capable but also theologically and morally mature. Further research may focus on developing practical, classroom-based models of Kalam-centered learning and empirical studies on their impact on students' character formation and cognitive patterns in the digital era, thereby ensuring that Islamic education remains relevant, transformative, and responsive to contemporary societal needs.

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