



## The Educational Thought Of KH. Imam Zarkasyi In Contemporary Islamic Education

Bintang Arif Samudra<sup>1✉</sup>, Wahyudin Nur Nasution<sup>2</sup>, Solihah Titin Sumanti<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia

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### ✉ Correspondence

bintang0331244039@uinsu.ac.id

### Abstract:

Contemporary Islamic education faces critical challenges, including the dichotomy of knowledge, moral degradation, and the weakening of educational authority amid unfiltered globalization. This study aims to analyze the educational thought of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi as an alternative solution and to formulate an integrative conceptual model for contemporary Islamic education. Specifically, it examines curriculum conceptualization, teaching methods, and the repositioning of educators' roles. The research is situated within Islamic educational thought, particularly pesantren-based education, focusing on the Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) system. It employs a qualitative approach using a library research model, drawing on primary and secondary sources. Data are collected through documentation and analyzed descriptively to construct a systematic understanding. The findings reveal that Imam Zarkasyi developed an integrative curriculum based on the principle of "100% religious and 100% general knowledge," effectively eliminating the dichotomy of science. His pedagogical approach emphasizes holistic learning through exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*) and a continuous educational environment (*bi'ah tarbawiyah*). Moreover, educators are repositioned not merely as instructors, but as *mu'allim*, *murabbi*, and *mu'addib* grounded in the values of the *Panca Jiwa*. These findings underline the relevance of his thought in addressing contemporary educational challenges and fostering intellectually and morally grounded Muslim generations.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar in building human civilization through the development of intellectual potential, morality, and social character aligned with transcendent values. In the Islamic perspective, education is not merely a process of knowledge transmission, but a holistic effort to instill *adab* (proper conduct) and cultivate moral integrity, enabling individuals to fulfill their roles as servants of God (*'abd*) and stewards (*khalifah*) on earth. However, contemporary Islamic education faces complex and multidimensional challenges at both global and

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national levels.

At the global level, the persistence of educational secularization and the dichotomy of knowledge has led to curriculum fragmentation, separating religious sciences from modern disciplines. This condition is further exacerbated by moral degradation and a growing character crisis among younger generations, often influenced by hedonistic lifestyles and the erosion of Islamic identity. As noted by Rohman, there is a widening gap between the ideal vision of Islamic education and its practical implementation, which tends to be confined to administrative formalities rather than substantive value formation (Noer, 2023). These challenges indicate the urgency of reconstructing Islamic education on a more integrative and value-oriented foundation.

In response, strengthening the philosophical and practical framework of Islamic education becomes imperative. The integration of knowledge cannot be achieved merely by increasing the proportion of religious subjects, but requires a paradigm shift toward a holistic educational model. This perspective resonates with Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, who emphasizes *ta'dib* as a solution to the loss of *adab*, as well as Fazlur Rahman, who proposes the double movement approach to contextualize Islamic teachings without losing their essential values. In the Indonesian context, scholars such as Azyumardi Azra and Abuddin Nata advocate an integrative-interconnective model to eliminate the dichotomy between religious and general sciences. Within this framework, the synthesis between pesantren traditions and modern educational demands emerges as a strategic solution.

Previous studies have contributed significantly to the discourse on knowledge integration and curriculum reform. However, most remain theoretical or focus on higher education, leaving a gap in practical implementation at the secondary level, particularly models that sustain pesantren values in the face of globalization. This study addresses that gap by examining the educational thought of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi, one of the founders of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, whose ideas represent a concrete and sustained model of integrative Islamic education.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on primary sources that reflect the originality of his thought, particularly the integration principle of “100% religious and 100% general education” implemented in the Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) system. This concept serves as an antithesis to the dualistic colonial education model and is grounded in the principle of *al-muḥāfaẓah 'alā al-qadīm al-ṣāliḥ wa al-akhdhu bi al-jadīd al-aṣlah*—preserving valuable traditions while adopting beneficial modern innovations. Through this framework, Islamic education is positioned as a dynamic system capable of maintaining its identity while responding to contemporary challenges.

Based on this background, the study focuses on two main aspects of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's educational thought. First, it analyzes the construction of an integrative curriculum that eliminates the dichotomy between religious and general sciences. Second, it examines the learning methods he developed, particularly the creation of a comprehensive educational environment (*bi'ah tarbawiyah*) as a continuous character-building process. Furthermore, this study explores the relevance of these concepts in addressing the challenges of contemporary Islamic education.

Through this analysis, the research is expected to contribute to the development of integrative and applicable models of Islamic education, capable of producing intellectually competent individuals with strong moral foundations, and firmly rooted in pesantren values in the midst of ongoing global transformation.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design. This approach is selected to explore and analyze the educational thought of KH Imam Zarkasyi through various written sources as the primary data. The research design focuses on a descriptive-analytical examination of key aspects, including curriculum construction, learning methodology, and the repositioning of educators. The data in this study are categorized into two types. Primary data sources consist of the original works of KH Imam Zarkasyi, which represent the core of his educational ideas. Secondary data sources include relevant literature such as academic journals, books, and previous studies that discuss his thought as well as broader issues in contemporary Islamic education.

Data collection is conducted through documentation techniques, involving the identification, classification, and systematic recording of information related to the research focus. The main instrument of this study is the researcher as a human instrument, who functions as planner, executor, data collector, and analyst. Data validity is ensured through source triangulation and persistent engagement with the literature to maintain the authenticity and credibility of interpretations. The data analysis technique applied in this research is content analysis. The analytical process follows an interactive model consisting of data reduction (selecting relevant data), data display (organizing findings into coherent conceptual narratives), and conclusion drawing or verification.

Furthermore, this study adopts a synchronic-comprehensive analytical model, in which the educational thought of KH Imam Zarkasyi is examined alongside contemporary educational challenges to identify points of relevance. In this framework, the variables of his thought—curriculum and methodology, and the role of educators—are positioned as alternative solutions to modern challenges such as the dichotomy of knowledge, moral degradation, and the crisis of educator authority. The synthesis of these elements results in an integrative-applicative model of Islamic education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

#### **The Meaning of an Integrative Curriculum within a Tauhidic Framework**

The findings reveal that K.H. Imam Zarkasyi conceptualizes an integrative curriculum that unifies religious and general sciences within a single epistemological framework. This idea is encapsulated in the well-known principle of “100% religious and 100% general education,” which reflects not only a structural integration of subjects but also a deeper philosophical commitment to overcoming the dichotomy of knowledge that has long characterized Islamic education.

From an analytical perspective, this curriculum is grounded in a tauhidic worldview that positions all forms of knowledge as interconnected and ultimately

oriented toward divine truth. Knowledge is not divided into sacred and secular domains; rather, it is understood as a unified system that serves the holistic development of human beings. This perspective resonates with the Islamization of knowledge proposed by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, who emphasizes that knowledge must be infused with ethical and spiritual values to avoid epistemological fragmentation.

Furthermore, the integrative curriculum developed by Imam Zarkasyi can be seen as an antithesis to the dualistic colonial education model, which separated religious instruction from modern scientific disciplines. By integrating both domains, the curriculum aims to produce individuals who are intellectually competent while maintaining strong moral and spiritual foundations. This approach is particularly relevant in addressing the current crisis of knowledge fragmentation, where students often experience a disconnect between scientific reasoning and ethical values.

In the context of contemporary curriculum theory, this model aligns with the concept of an integrated curriculum that emphasizes interdisciplinary learning and coherence among different fields of study. However, its distinctive feature lies in its theocentric orientation. Unlike many modern curriculum models that are primarily pragmatic or utilitarian, Imam Zarkasyi's approach places divine values at the core of all educational processes. As a result, the curriculum functions not only as a pedagogical tool but also as an instrument for civilizational development, integrating intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions simultaneously.

The academic contribution of this finding lies in reinforcing a value-based integrative curriculum paradigm. It offers a conceptual framework that can be used to reconstruct Islamic education systems in a way that eliminates the dichotomy of knowledge while maintaining relevance to contemporary challenges.

### **The Meaning of Learning Methods as Value Internalization**

In addition to curriculum, the findings highlight that Imam Zarkasyi's educational thought places strong emphasis on learning methods as a process of value internalization. His approach is based on several key principles, including *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct), habituation, discipline, and the creation of a comprehensive educational environment (*bi'ah tarbawiyah*). Learning is not confined to classroom instruction but extends into all aspects of students' daily lives, forming a continuous and holistic educational process.

Interpretatively, this reflects a fundamental shift from a teaching-oriented paradigm to an education-oriented paradigm. In conventional models, learning is often limited to the transfer of knowledge, focusing primarily on cognitive outcomes. In contrast, Imam Zarkasyi's approach emphasizes the formation of character through the internalization of values. Education is therefore understood as a transformative process that shapes not only what students know but also how they think, behave, and interact with others.

This perspective is supported by contemporary educational research, which suggests that character formation is more effectively achieved through habituation and environmental conditioning than through purely cognitive approaches. The emphasis on discipline and repetition reflects elements of

behaviorism, where consistent practice leads to the formation of stable behavioral patterns. At the same time, structured learning activities correspond to cognitivist principles, while social interaction within the educational environment reflects aspects of social constructivism.

The integration of these theoretical perspectives demonstrates the holistic nature of Imam Zarkasyi's methodology. It does not rely on a single educational theory but combines multiple approaches to achieve a comprehensive educational outcome. The ultimate goal is the formation of *habitus*, a deeply internalized system of values and behaviors that becomes an integral part of the individual's identity.

Moreover, the concept of *bi'ah tarbawiyah* plays a crucial role in this process. By creating an environment that consistently reinforces positive values, education becomes a lived experience rather than a mere instructional activity. Students are continuously exposed to norms, practices, and interactions that shape their character, making learning an ongoing and immersive process.

The academic contribution of this finding lies in strengthening the concept of holistic learning within Islamic education. It provides an alternative to modern educational systems that often prioritize academic achievement at the expense of moral and character development. By emphasizing value internalization, this approach offers a more balanced and sustainable model of education.

### **Synthesis: Education as an Integrative System**

Taken together, the findings on curriculum and learning methods indicate that the educational thought of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi represents a coherent integrative system in which structural and methodological dimensions are inseparably linked. The curriculum functions as an epistemological framework that unifies religious and general sciences, while learning methods operate as the practical mechanism through which this integration is internalized and lived by students. In this sense, integration is not limited to curriculum design, but is continuously reinforced through pedagogical processes and the overall educational environment.

More deeply, this integrative system reflects a tauhidic paradigm that places unity (*tawhid*) at the center of all educational activities. Knowledge is not treated as fragmented or value-neutral, but as a unified body oriented toward divine purpose. This aligns with the broader intellectual tradition articulated by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, where the crisis of modern education is rooted in the loss of *adab* and the separation between knowledge and values. Within this framework, Imam Zarkasyi's model can be understood as a practical embodiment of a value-based epistemology that bridges the gap between theory and implementation.

Furthermore, the interconnection between curriculum and methodology creates a dynamic educational ecosystem. The integrative curriculum ensures that students are exposed to a balanced body of knowledge, while holistic learning methods—such as habituation, discipline, and environmental conditioning—transform this knowledge into character and behavior. This process results in the formation of *habitus*, where values are not merely understood cognitively but are deeply embedded in daily practice. As a result, education transcends the boundaries of formal instruction and becomes a continuous

process of personal and social transformation.

This synthesis also highlights that education, in this perspective, is not merely an institutional or administrative activity, but a comprehensive civilizational project. The goal is not only to produce academically competent individuals, but to form human beings who are intellectually grounded, morally upright, and socially responsible. Intellectual development, moral formation, and social awareness are therefore integrated as mutually reinforcing dimensions, rather than treated as separate or competing objectives. Such an approach challenges modern educational systems that often prioritize measurable academic outcomes while neglecting character and ethical development.

In the context of contemporary Islamic education, this integrative system demonstrates strong relevance in addressing persistent challenges such as the dichotomy of knowledge, moral degradation, and the erosion of value-based education. Many modern educational institutions struggle to reconcile scientific advancement with ethical and spiritual considerations, leading to fragmented learning experiences. Imam Zarkasyi's model offers a balanced alternative by ensuring that intellectual progress is always accompanied by moral and spiritual grounding.

Additionally, this integrative paradigm provides a sustainable framework for educational reform in the era of globalization and rapid technological change. Rather than rejecting modernity, it selectively adopts beneficial innovations while preserving essential Islamic values, in line with the principle of *al-muḥāfaẓah 'alā al-qadīm al-ṣāliḥ wa al-akhdhu bi al-jadīd al-aṣlah*. This adaptive yet principled approach enables Islamic education to remain relevant without losing its identity.

Ultimately, the synthesis of curriculum and learning methods in Imam Zarkasyi's thought leads to a holistic vision of education as an integrative system that unites knowledge, values, and practice. It positions education as a transformative force capable of shaping individuals and society simultaneously. Therefore, the primary contribution of this model lies not only in its conceptual clarity but also in its practical applicability as a framework for developing Islamic education that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to contemporary demands.

### **Alignment with Research Objectives and Contribution**

The findings directly address the research objectives by demonstrating that the educational thought of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi is fundamentally centered on two interrelated pillars: an integrative curriculum and holistic learning methods. The integrative curriculum functions as a strategic response to the longstanding epistemological problem of knowledge dichotomy by unifying religious and general sciences within a tauhidic framework (Zarkasyi, 2020). This unification is not merely structural, but also philosophical, as it reorients all forms of knowledge toward divine values and ethical purpose (Noer, 2023). In parallel, the holistic learning methodology ensures that this integrated knowledge is not only understood at the cognitive level but is also internalized through continuous practice, habituation, and environmental reinforcement, thereby shaping students' character and worldview (Kamaluddin et al., 2024).

More importantly, the relationship between these two aspects is not partial but systemic. The curriculum provides the conceptual foundation, while the

methodology acts as the operational instrument that translates abstract ideas into lived educational experiences. This interconnectedness strengthens the effectiveness of the educational process, ensuring that intellectual development is always accompanied by moral and behavioral transformation. As such, the findings confirm that the success of Islamic education lies not only in what is taught, but also in how it is taught and experienced in everyday life (Widat & Wulandari, 2023).

Compared to previous studies, this research offers a more focused, analytical, and applicative contribution. While earlier works have largely emphasized theoretical discussions on knowledge integration or have concentrated on macro-level educational policies, this study highlights a concrete and sustained model implemented at the secondary education level. This is a critical contribution, considering that the secondary level represents a formative stage in shaping students' intellectual orientation and character development (Sahriandi Setiawan et al., 2025).

Furthermore, this study bridges the gap between normative discourse and practical implementation by demonstrating how integrative principles are operationalized within an institutional framework. It does not merely conceptualize integration as an abstract ideal but shows how it can be systematically embedded in curriculum design and reinforced through daily learning practices. In doing so, the research provides a replicable model that can be adapted by contemporary Islamic educational institutions seeking to overcome fragmentation and enhance educational quality (Asroriah et al., 2023).

In addition, the findings contribute to strengthening the discourse on integrative Islamic education by positioning Imam Zarkasyi's thought within a broader intellectual context. His ideas resonate with the epistemological integration proposed by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, particularly in emphasizing the unity of knowledge and the importance of value-based education (Noer, 2023). However, this study goes further by demonstrating the practical applicability of such ideas, thereby offering a bridge between philosophical formulation and educational practice.

Another significant contribution lies in the contextual relevance of the findings. In the era of globalization, digital transformation, and rapid social change, Islamic education faces increasing pressure to remain relevant while preserving its identity. The integrative and holistic model presented in this study offers a balanced approach that accommodates modern knowledge and technological advancement without compromising moral and spiritual values (Elyunusi et al., 2024). This makes it particularly suitable as a framework for contemporary educational reform.

Ultimately, this research not only fulfills its objectives but also contributes to the broader effort of reconstructing Islamic education as an integrative, value-oriented, and contextually responsive system. It provides both theoretical insight and practical direction, reinforcing the idea that sustainable educational reform must be grounded in the harmonious integration of knowledge, values, and lived experience (Fera Zihan Fadilah et al., 2024).

## DISCUSSION

### Implications and Limitations

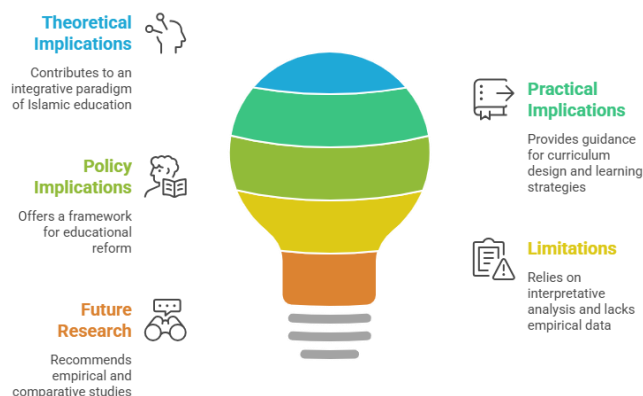
The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of an integrative paradigm of Islamic education that unites knowledge and values within a tauhidic framework. This finding reinforces the argument that the crisis of contemporary Islamic education is rooted in the separation between knowledge and ethics, and therefore requires a holistic reconstruction of its epistemological foundation (Noer, 2023). In this context, the integrative curriculum concept developed by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi strengthens the discourse on the unity of knowledge, which is also emphasized by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas in his concept of value-based education (Al-Attas, 1995).

From a practical perspective, this study provides concrete guidance for the development of curriculum design and learning strategies in Islamic educational institutions. The integrative curriculum model encourages the elimination of disciplinary fragmentation by connecting religious and general sciences in a coherent structure (Zarkasyi, 2020). Meanwhile, the emphasis on holistic learning methods—through habituation, discipline, and the creation of a conducive educational environment (*bi'ah tarbawiyah*)—offers an applicable framework for strengthening character education alongside intellectual development (Kamaluddin et al., 2024). This is particularly relevant in the contemporary era, where education is often dominated by cognitive achievement while neglecting moral and affective dimensions (Widat & Wulandari, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings have broader implications for educational policy and reform. The integrative and holistic model proposed in this study can serve as an alternative framework for addressing major challenges in modern education, including knowledge dichotomy, moral degradation, and the erosion of value-based learning. By integrating epistemological, pedagogical, and practical dimensions, this model provides a strategic direction for developing sustainable and contextually relevant Islamic education systems (Elyunusi et al., 2024).

However, this study also has several limitations. First, as a qualitative library research, the findings rely heavily on interpretative analysis of textual sources, which may introduce a degree of subjectivity (Prastowo, 2016). Second, the absence of empirical field data limits the ability to measure the practical effectiveness of the proposed concepts within real educational settings. As such, the conclusions drawn remain at the level of conceptual and theoretical analysis rather than empirical validation. Third, the scope of the study is primarily focused on a specific educational model, which may limit its generalizability across diverse institutional and cultural contexts.

Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt empirical or mixed-method approaches in order to validate and expand the findings of this study. Field-based research involving observations, interviews, and quantitative measurements would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the integrative curriculum and holistic learning methods are implemented in practice. Additionally, comparative studies across different Islamic educational institutions are needed to assess the adaptability and scalability of this model in various socio-cultural settings (Sahriandi Setiawan et al., 2025).



Picture 1. Illustrative Image Implications and Limitations

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the educational thought of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi presents an integrative paradigm of Islamic education centered on two main pillars: an integrative curriculum and holistic learning methods. These components are interconnected and function as a unified system aimed at addressing the challenges of contemporary Islamic education. The integrative curriculum effectively eliminates the dichotomy of knowledge by positioning all disciplines within a tauhidic framework. Meanwhile, the holistic learning methodology emphasizes that education is fundamentally a process of value internalization achieved through habituation, exemplary conduct, and environmental conditioning. The key synthesis of this study is that Islamic education should be understood as an integrative system that combines intellectual, moral, and social dimensions. Such an approach is essential for developing individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also possess strong character and ethical awareness. Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges its limitations, particularly the lack of empirical validation. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt mixed-method approaches and conduct field studies to further examine the effectiveness and adaptability of this model in various educational contexts.

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