

The Integration of Islamic Epistemology and Science in Nurcholis Madjid's Thought: A Conceptual Study

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Abstract :

Integrating science and religious knowledge is crucial in Islamic higher education, especially at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, amid contemporary challenges that demand holistic approaches. While previous studies have addressed knowledge integration, few have explored its practical implementation in Islamic educational settings. This study investigates how Nurcholis Madjid's thought contributes to integrating science and religion at this institution. Employing a qualitative approach with a literature review, data were collected from scholarly articles, books, and academic publications related to science-religion integration, focusing on Nurcholis Madjid's perspectives. Data collection involved systematic searches across academic databases and libraries, followed by thematic analysis through coding, categorization, and synthesis to identify patterns supporting curriculum integration. The findings reveal that applying integration concepts at UIN Sunan Ampel enriches Islamic knowledge and cultivates students who are adaptive and responsive to modern developments. In conclusion, integrating science and religion enhances the relevance of Islamic education and promotes a more tolerant and inclusive society.

Keywords: *Islamic education, Nurcholis Madjid, Religious knowledge, Science integration, UIN Sunan Ampel*

Abstrak:

Integrasi ilmu pengetahuan dan pengetahuan agama merupakan isu penting dalam pendidikan tinggi Islam, khususnya di UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, di tengah tantangan kontemporer yang membutuhkan pendekatan holistik. Meskipun studi sebelumnya telah membahas integrasi ilmu pengetahuan, sedikit yang mengeksplorasi implementasi praktisnya dalam lingkungan pendidikan Islam. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana pemikiran Nurcholis Madjid berkontribusi pada integrasi ilmu pengetahuan dan agama di institusi tersebut. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui tinjauan pustaka, data dikumpulkan dari artikel ilmiah, buku, dan publikasi akademik yang berkaitan dengan integrasi ilmu pengetahuan dan agama, khususnya yang berfokus pada perspektif Nurcholis Madjid. Proses pengumpulan data melibatkan pencarian sistematis di basis data akademik dan perpustakaan, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik melalui pengkodean, pengkategorian, dan sintesis untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola yang mendukung integrasi dalam kurikulum. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penerapan konsep integrasi di UIN Sunan Ampel memperkaya ilmu Islam dan membentuk mahasiswa yang adaptif terhadap perkembangan zaman. Kesimpulannya, integrasi ilmu pengetahuan dan agama meningkatkan relevansi pendidikan Islam masa kini dan mendorong masyarakat yang lebih toleran serta inklusif.

Kata Kunci: *Integrasi sains, Ilmu agama, Nurcholis Madjid, Pendidikan Islam, UIN Sunan Ampel.*

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Introduction

The relationship between science and religion is often debated, with the prevailing view that they belong to separate realms and do not need to be connected. However, this relationship does not entail merging the two; each must preserve its own identity. The integration of science and religion is rooted in the concept of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God). Like other fields of knowledge, science and the study of nature are integral to the holistic Islamic worldview. Nature is not a separate but inseparable part of Islam's understanding of God, humanity, and the universe. From an Islamic perspective, science and nature are aligned with religion and the Divine (Aji, 2023). Islam does not recognize a dichotomy between science and religion, viewing them as complementary and unified. Allah has endowed humans with reason to observe and analyze natural phenomena. Based on this foundation, science serves both to explore the majesty of His creation and serves to guide humanity in navigating life.

Russell argued that finding a balanced approach to uniting social science and religion is essential, as social science can play a role in analyzing religion (Russell, B. 1935). According to Nurcholish, the middle lies in individuals researching religion. Ideally, religious researchers should possess a deep understanding of religious aspects and strong competencies in social science research. If research is conducted solely by religious scholars, results are limited to theological interpretations; if undertaken solely by social scientists, outcomes are confined to measurable realities. Therefore, Nurcholish argues that scientific institutions should pioneer the development of researchers proficient in both religion and social science methodologies (Iswanto & Mawardi, 2024). Russell and Nurcholish offer valuable insights for bridging the dichotomy between religion and social science. Their multidisciplinary approach enables more nuanced and balanced religious research – avoiding purely dogmatic or purely empirical analyses devoid of spiritual depth.

The integration between religion and science remains a significant focus for many Islamic institutions. While some have achieved this integration, others are still striving toward it. Courses exploring the intersection of science and religion are not new in intellectual discourse. For instance, with the establishment of general faculties – including at UIN Sunan Ampel – the *Twin Towers* paradigm has emerged. At UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, this paradigm represents an innovative, solution-oriented scientific framework to bridge the gap between religious and scientific knowledge. (M. S. Huda, 2017), in his article *Integration of Religion and Science Through the Philosophical Meaning of the Integrated Twin Towers of UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya*, explains that the concept of integration holds three different meanings. As a verb, *integration* refers to combining or uniting two entities into a single unity. As a noun, it denotes the result of that unification process. Meanwhile, as an adjective, it describes something whole, complete, and inseparable (Firdaus et al., 2022). Integrating scientific disciplines is essential, as no field of knowledge can progress in isolation. This perspective underlies

the transformation from *IAIN* (State Institute for Islamic Studies) to *UIN* (State Islamic University), including *UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya*, whose *Twin Towers Integration Paradigm* aims to support renewal and academic advancement.

First, (Riwanda, 2024) reveals that implementing the integration of science and religion in the UINSA curriculum still faces challenges, especially in curriculum design, which does not yet fully reflect this integration. This is due to lecturers' limited understanding and readiness to develop learning materials that combine science and religion effectively. Second, (Firdaus et al., 2022) indicates that the *Integrated Twin Towers* paradigm has not been fully realized in curriculum development at UINSA. Although the paradigm serves as the primary epistemological foundation, its implementation faces significant challenges, particularly in operationalizing the curriculum and fostering multidisciplinary competencies among lecturers.

Third, Suprpto & Sumarni (2022) highlights that the symbolization of scientific integration has not been fully realized in the design and implementation of interdisciplinary learning at UINSA. The primary obstacles are insufficient lecturer capacity and suboptimal preparation of a curriculum based on an integrative approach. This highlights the need for a more robust conceptual framework to support the integration of both substantive and applied sciences. In this context, Nurcholish Madjid's thought is crucial, as they provide philosophical and methodological foundations to reinforce the integration between religious knowledge and science within Islamic higher education institutions.

Several studies show that the discourse on integrating science at UIN Sunan Ampel has been extensively explored. However, few have specifically examined Nurcholish Madjid's thinking as a conceptual and practical framework for implementing the *Integrated Twin Towers* paradigm. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by critically examining the relevance and contribution of Nurcholish Madjid's ideas to the model of knowledge integration at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya.

The findings of this study are expected to inform the development of more inclusive and applicable Islamic education policies. In addition, it aims to assess the influence of Nurcholish Madjid's thought on academic policies at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya and how his concept of knowledge integration can serve as a foundation for a more holistic and contextually relevant model of Islamic higher education in response to contemporary developments.

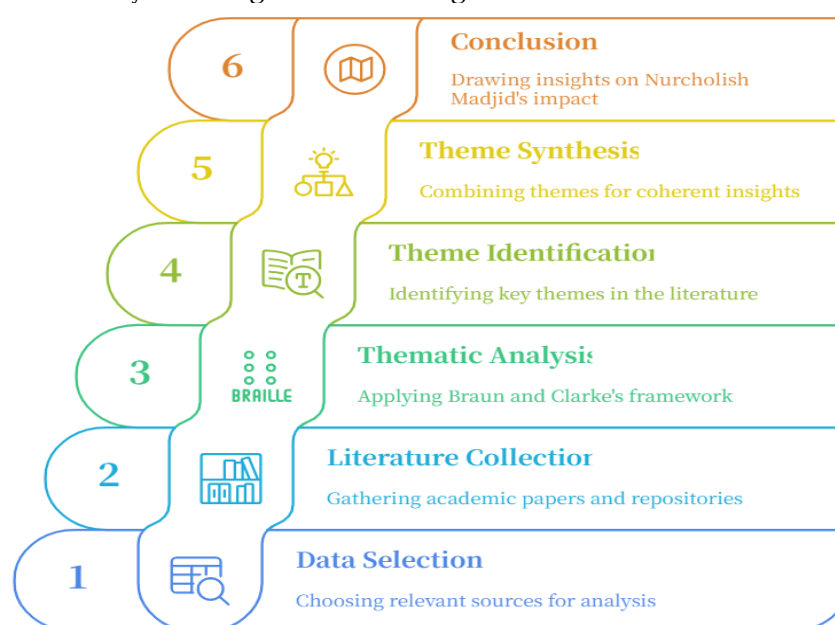
Method

This research focuses on integrating knowledge and religion, a topic of growing relevance in contemporary Islamic education, especially at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. Combining these fields is highly important for addressing the challenges students and educators face in reconciling scientific inquiry with religious beliefs. This integration enriches the academic curriculum and fosters a more inclusive and tolerant society. The complexity of modern challenges requires ongoing dialogue between science and religion, which are often seen as opposing forces. By exploring this integration, the research aims to contribute to a more holistic educational framework that aligns with Islamic values while embracing scientific progress. This focus is highly relevant given Nurcholis Madjid's advocacy for a harmonious relationship between faith and knowledge.

This study employs a qualitative approach. According to Hendryadi et al. (2019)

in Yulianto (2024), qualitative approach is a naturalistic process that seeks a deep understanding of social phenomena in a natural setting, utilizing a literature review as the primary data collection method. This approach is appropriate because it allows an in-depth exploration of existing theories and practices related to integrating science and religion. The data include scholarly articles, books, and other academic publications discussing *knowledge integration*, particularly those addressing Nurcholish Madjid's thought. By analyzing these sources, this research aims to identify key themes and insights to inform the implementation of an integrated curriculum at UIN Sunan Ampel. Its qualitative nature enables a comprehensive understanding of the nuances involved in the integration process, which are often overlooked in quantitative studies.

Figure 1
Analyzing Nurcholish Madjid's Integrative Thinking



Note. The thematic analysis process was used to identify key patterns in Nurcholish Madjid's integrative thinking

As shown in Figure 1, data sources were selected for their relevance to the topic and contribution to the discourse on integrating science and religion. The data selection process was conducted systematically through searches in academic databases (e.g., Google Scholar, JSTOR, DOAJ), library catalogs, and institutional digital repositories. The criteria included topic relevance, academic validity, and contribution to the integration discourse. The collected literature was analyzed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which involves six stages: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) theme identification, (4) theme review, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the analytical report. The analysis identified key themes: (1) *Tawhid* as the epistemological foundation of integration, (2) the role of Islamic institutions in developing an integrative curriculum, and (3) the contribution of Nurcholish Madjid's thought in bridging the dichotomy between science and religion. These themes were synthesized to conclude how Nurcholish Madjid's thinking can strengthen the integrative approach in academic policies and curriculum at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya.

Results and Discussion

Results

Integration of Science and Religion in the Thoughts of Nurcholish Madjid

Nurcholish Madjid proposed a concept of Islamic educational reform based on secularization, emphasizing the importance of openness to new ideas. He believed that worldly matters do not always need to be linked to *afterlife* values. In Madjid's view, Islam should support intellectual freedom and promote innovative approaches to learning. This perspective reflects the need to develop an understanding of Islam that is more relevant to contemporary developments while fostering dialogue and critical thinking.

Islamic thought in Indonesia has undergone significant renewal in the last two decades, marked by a more progressive orientation that adapts to social change and scientific progress. Nurcholish Madjid regarded differences in Islamic views and interpretation as a blessing for the *ummah* (Muslim community). On this basis, he encouraged openness to differences, avoiding extremism, and resilience against radical ideologies.

Nurcholish Madjid's thought reflects the ongoing renewal of Islam in Indonesia. He offers an educational approach emphasizing healthy secularization, openness to new ideas, and intellectual freedom. Accordingly, Islamic education must adapt to contemporary developments and foster critical thinking. He also emphasized religious moderation and tolerance in a pluralistic society, highlighting the importance of interfaith dialogue to prevent violence and extremism.

The Integration of Science and Religion at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya

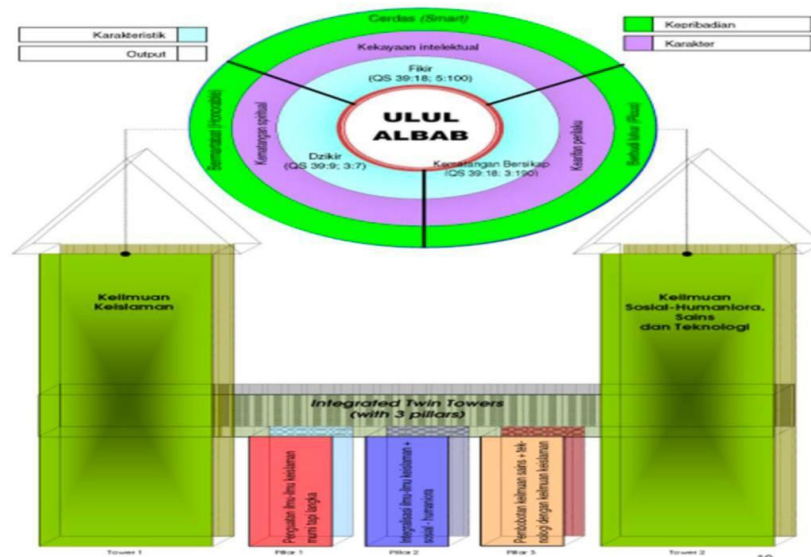
The integration of science and religion at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya is implemented in the symbolic concept of the Twin Towers, illustrating the symbiotic relationship between knowledge and faith. One tower represents science and the other religion, viewed as complementary rather than contradictory. This reflects the understanding that pluralism is an inevitable part of social reality and that differences should not obstruct the formation of a harmonious unity.

There is a clear vision to address contemporary challenges that demand an interdisciplinary approach to education. UIN Sunan Ampel integrates Islamic knowledge and modern science equally, ensuring that neither dominates the other. The rapid advancement of science and technology is expected to progress in parallel with the reinforcement of Islamic values within the higher education curriculum.

In the ontological dimension, the foundation beneath the towers symbolizes unity, mirrored by the connecting structure at their peak. This symbolizes the basis for constructing multidisciplinary knowledge, which the academic community aspires to realize in forming *ulū al-albāb*—individuals who embody balance between *dhikr* (spiritual contemplation), *fikr* (rational thought), and a mature, integrated character. The following illustration refers to this concept (Hidayah et al., 2024).

Figure 2

Twin Tower Scientific Integration



Note. The Twin Towers scientific integration concept at UIN Sunan Ampel, where two interconnected towers symbolize the symbiotic relationship between religious knowledge and science

The division of knowledge enriches Islamic learning and fosters the emergence of scholars who advance Islamic sciences. It provides two main benefits: the diversification of Islamic scholarship and the development of expertise across different fields.

In practice, *UIN Sunan Ampel* develops three academic pillars that define its institutional identity:

1. Strengthening traditional Islamic sciences, despite their declining presence.
2. Integrating Islamic scholarship with the social and human sciences to broaden academic inquiry.
3. Promoting science and technology from an Islamic perspective to establish a balanced mastery of knowledge.

This concept, known as the "Integrated Twin Towers with Three Pillars," serves as the foundation of academic development at *UIN Sunan Ampel* (Zainiyati, 2015).

This approach shapes curriculum development that integrates religious knowledge with science in various study programs, such as the Faculty of *Ushuluddin* and Philosophy, where the hermeneutic method is introduced in the Al-Qur'an and Tafsir Study Program. UIN Sunan Ampel strives to cultivate individuals with intellectual intelligence, piety, and integrity. The integration also supports graduates capable of adapting to scientific progress without compromising religious essence. This model shows how Islamic education can accommodate various disciplines within a comprehensive Islamic framework.

Discussion

Integration of Science and Religion in Nurcholish Madjid's Thoughts

Nurcholish Madjid's perspective on integrating science and religion reflects a progressive understanding of their complementary rather than contradiction. He emphasizes that, in Islam, worldly matters do not need to be separated from spiritual or eschatological values but should engage in a harmonious dialogue. In his view,

Islamic education should foster free and innovative intellectual development, opening space for new ideas that enrich Muslim life. In general, Islam in Indonesia has transformed – through modification, deviation, and reinterpretation – by referring to the model of Islam during the time of the Prophet and his companions. Similar phenomena have also occurred in various parts of the Islamic world. In the past two decades, the spirit, orientation, and character of Islamic thought in Indonesia have experienced significant renewal (S. Huda et al., 2022). Islam in Indonesia has undergone substantial changes through modification, reinterpretation, and divergence from practices of the Prophet and his companions. This reflects a broader trend within the Islamic world, marked by continuous evolution of thought. Over the past two decades, the spirit and orientation of Islamic thought in Indonesia have been significantly renewed, adapting to social changes and advances in scientific knowledge.

Nurcholish Madjid's concept of Islamic education renewal emphasizes healthy secularization, enabling science and religion to develop side by side. He argued that Islam must remain relevant to contemporary developments and support intellectual freedom in exploring the world through scientific methods. In his view, worldly aspects do not always need to be associated with *hereafter* values. Citing the Prophet's words that diversity of views is a blessing, he maintained that Islam should promote intellectual freedom and encourage innovative learning methods. This approach reflects his belief that education must adapt to changing times and foster critical thinking, discussion, and exploration (Aswandi et al., 2024). Nurcholish Madjid also emphasized religious moderation, which encourages openness to differing opinions and helps prevent extremism and radical ideologies. His concept of *pluralism* aims to enrich the understanding of religion and social life while curbing violence often associated with religious beliefs (Nendissa et al., 2025).

This view aligns with the findings of Putra et al. (2023), who state that Islamic *aqidah* should serve as the foundation for scientific development, while Islamic *sharia* provides the moral and ethical standard for its application. Furthermore, Islamic education must protect society from the negative impacts of science by instilling the values of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* and strengthening faith in Allah. Similarly, (Riwanda, 2024), regards the integration of religion and science as an effort to construct a new paradigm for understanding their relationship. Science grounded in Islamic principles can offer an alternative to modern science, which often appears secular and disconnected from spiritual values.

Irham (2025) demonstrated that several Islamic universities in Indonesia have systematically pursued integration by combining core and supplementary knowledge – both religious and general – through integrated faculty work and curriculum development, from thematic design to philosophical foundations. Thus, Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on integrating science and religion offer clear direction for developing an Islamic education system that advances science while embodying universal and contextual Islamic values.

Nurcholish Madjid's epistemological approach is both conceptual and practical. He advocates for Islamic universities to establish an academic tradition that integrates humanities, natural sciences, and theology. This model equips students with technical competencies as well as ethical and spiritual foundations. This concept aligns with the *integration-interconnection* paradigm developed by M. Amin Abdullah, who

underscores the need to eliminate the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge in Islamic higher education. Such an educational model cultivates a generation of Muslims who are critical, tolerant, and globally competitive (Sofia & Dinata, 2025).

Integration of Science and Religion at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya

At UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, the integration of science and religion is embodied in the symbolic concept of the Twin Towers, representing the harmonious relationship between Islamic knowledge and the general sciences. Each tower symbolizes a distinct domain—religious studies and scientific disciplines—that, while separate, complement and enrich one another. This paradigm reflects Nurcholish Madjid's view of pluralism and diversity as inherent aspects of social reality that should be acknowledged and respected. He emphasized that differences should not impede unity and harmonious cooperation (Huda, 2017). UIN Sunan Ampel adopts this model to promote an interdisciplinary educational approach that integrates Islamic knowledge and modern science on equal footing, viewing them not as competitors but as mutually reinforcing. This approach supports the university's mission to develop *Ulul Albab* individuals—those who embody a balance of spirituality, intellectual depth, and strong moral character. Education at UIN Sunan Ampel is thus designed to produce graduates who are not only academically proficient but also religiously grounded and ethically sound (Huda, 2017). Nurcholish Madjid emphasized that ideal education must foster critical thinking and intellectual freedom. He emphasized that if Islamic education systems focus solely on moral aspects while neglecting the advancement of knowledge and technology, their relevance will gradually decline, risk losing recognition, or even disappear altogether (Syiafuddin, 2011).

The Integrated Twin Towers with Three Pillars concept at UIN Sunan Ampel aims to strengthen three main pillars: enhancing Islamic knowledge, integrating it with the social and humanities sciences, and advancing science and technology from an Islamic perspective. This model promotes balance, enabling students to master various disciplines while upholding religious values.

This approach is reflected in curriculum development that incorporates interdisciplinary studies, such as the introduction of the *hermeneutic method* in the Qur'anic Studies and Tafsir Science Program. This demonstrates how science and religion can be integrated within a comprehensive framework (Khozin & Umiarso, 2019). The curriculum must be designed based on the standards of the Twin Towers Integration paradigm and supported by three main programs. First, Islamic sciences are strengthened, even though their application in practice remains limited. Second, religious knowledge is integrated with general sciences through an interdisciplinary approach in various fields of study. An example is the Qur'anic and Tafsir Studies Program at the Faculty of Usuluddin and Philosophy, which incorporates hermeneutics as a new methodological approach in interpretation studies. Third, basic religious sciences are introduced in general faculties and study programs to cultivate students who are intelligent, religiously observant (*pious*), and morally upright (*honorable*) (Firdaus et al., 2022).

This perspective aligns with the findings of Mohammad (Hidayaturrahman et al., 2021), who found that several Islamic universities in Indonesia and Malaysia have adopted inclusive educational models by establishing study programs without

religious restrictions. This reflects Nurcholish Madjid's emphasis on openness and pluralism in education. Similar conclusions were also drawn by [Jalil et al. \(2022\)](#), who showed that Islamic boarding schools in Madura and Selangor have developed integrative approaches, combining both traditional and modern elements. Although employing different methodologies, both institutions aim to integrate the science curriculum with religious values, as envisioned by Madjid. However, the integration practice face several challenges [Fitriyawany et al. \(2022\)](#) revealed that at PTKIN Aceh, the integration of Islamic values into science education still faces obstacles, including differences in lecturers' understanding, the lack of written Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and limited educational resources. Overall, Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts have significantly contributed to shaping an integrative paradigm in Islamic higher education. He emphasized the need to eliminate the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge and advocated for an education system grounded in rationality, inclusiveness, and spirituality.

Thus, the integration of science and religion at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya is symbolic through the Twin Towers model, reflecting a holistic and contextual paradigm of Islamic education. This approach aligns with the idea that Islamic education must foster a comprehensive understanding of the world and human existence. Integrating religion and science in education helps students prepare to face the complexities of the modern world in a balanced and integrated manner. As [Hajita \(2024\)](#) explains, the integration paradigm in Islamic Religious Education promotes a holistic understanding of life and the world. This shows that integration is symbolic in nature and impactful in shaping a generation capable of harmoniously merging Islamic values with scientific knowledge.

Conclusion

These findings highlight the significant role of integrating science and religion in enhancing the educational framework at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. A key insight is that the philosophical foundations provided by Nurcholis Madjid advocate a harmonious relationship between faith and scientific inquiry, suggesting that these domains can complement rather than contradict each other. Implementing an integrated curriculum enriches Islamic knowledge and better equips students to be adaptive and responsive to contemporary challenges. Furthermore, the study reveals that fostering dialogue between science and religion creates a more inclusive educational environment, promoting tolerance and mutual understanding among diverse perspectives within the academic community. These findings underscore the importance of re-evaluating traditional educational approaches to better align with modern realities and the needs of students in a pluralistic society.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by analyzing the integration of science and religion within Islamic education. It identifies the need for a multidimensional approach that combines both disciplines to enrich students' educational experience. The qualitative literature review employed offers a framework for future studies to explore similar themes in different educational settings. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration among educators, researchers, and policymakers in effectively implementing an integrated curriculum. By drawing on Nurcholis Madjid's and other scholars' insights, it reinforces the relevance of integrating science and religion and encourages further exploration of this vital dialogue in educational practice.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that should be addressed in future research. A limitation is its reliance on secondary sources, which may not fully reflect the practical challenges and lived experiences of educators and students engaged in the integration process. Future studies should incorporate primary data through interviews or surveys to gain deeper insights into the actual implementation of integrated curricula. Additionally, as this study primarily focuses on UIN Sunan Ampel, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other Islamic educational institutions. Expanding the scope to include a broader range of institutions could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how science and religion are integrated across different contexts. Finally, further investigation of specific pedagogical strategies that effectively facilitate this integration would be valuable for enhancing teaching practices.

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