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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 within Islamic educational settings. This study investigates how Nurcholis Madjid's thought contributes to integrating science and religion at this institution. Employing a qualitative method 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 integration within the curriculum. The findings reveal that applying integration concepts at UIN Sunan Ampel enriches Islamic knowledge and fosters adaptive students responsive to modern developments. In conclusion, integrating science and religion enhances the relevance of Islamic education today 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 a topic of debate, with the prevailing view that they belong to separate realms and do not necessarily need to be connected. However, this relationship does not imply a merging or blending of the two; each must preserve its own identity. The integration of science and religion is rooted in the concept of <code>tawhīd</code> (the oneness of God). Like other fields of knowledge, science and the study of nature are also integral to the holistic Islamic worldview. Nature is not a separate entity but an inseparable part of Islam's understanding of God, humanity, and the universe. From the Islamic perspective, science and nature are aligned with religion and the Divine (Aji, 2023). Islam does not recognize a dichotomy between science and religion, as both are seen as complementary and unified. Allah has endowed human beings with reason so that they may observe and analyze natural phenomena. Based on this foundation, science functions as a means to explore the majesty of His creation and serves as a guide for humanity in navigating life.

Russell argued that finding a balanced position in uniting social science and religion is essential. This is necessary because social science can play a role in analyzing religion (Russell, B. 1935). According to Nurcholish, the middle ground between social science and religion lies in the individual's researching religion. Ideally, religious researchers should possess a deep understanding of religious aspects and strong competencies in social science research. If research is conducted only by religious scholars, the results will be limited to theological interpretations; conversely, if it is undertaken solely by social scientists, the outcomes will be confined to measurable realities. Therefore, Nurcholish argues that scientific institutions must act as pioneers in producing researchers who have a firm grasp of religion and are proficient in social science methodologies (Iswanto & Mawardi, 2024). Russell and Nurcholish offer valuable insights into bridging the dichotomy between religion and social science. The multidisciplinary approach they propose allows for more nuanced and balanced religious research—research that avoids being reduced to either purely dogmatic studies or purely empirical analyses devoid of spiritual depth.

The integration between religion and science remains a significant focus for many Islamic institutions. Some continue to uphold this integration, while others are still working toward achieving it. Courses related to the intersection of science and religion are not new in the realm of intellectual thought. For example, with the establishment of general faculties—one of which is at *UIN Sunan Ampel*—the concept of the *Twin Towers* paradigm has emerged. The *Twin Towers* paradigm at *UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya* can be considered an innovative and solution-oriented scientific framework to bridge the gap between religious and scientific knowledge. (M. S. Huda, 2017), in his article entitled *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*, with its *Twin Towers Integration Paradigm* that aims to support renewal and academic advancement.

First, a study conducted by (Riwanda, 2024) reveals that the implementation of the integration of science and religion in the curriculum at UINSA still faces challenges, especially in the preparation of the curriculum, which does not yet fully reflect the integration of the two fields of knowledge. This obstacle is caused by lecturers' lack of understanding and readiness to develop learning materials that combine science and religion effectively. Second, a study by (Firdaus et al., 2022) indicates that the *Integrated Twin Towers* paradigm has not been fully realized in the curriculum development process at UINSA. Although the paradigm has been established as the primary epistemological foundation, its implementation still encounters significant challenges, particularly in the operational aspects of the curriculum and in developing multidisciplinary competencies among lecturers.

Third, research conducted by Suprapto & Sumarni (2022) highlights that the symbolization of scientific integration has not been fully realized within the academic design and implementation of interdisciplinary learning at UINSA. The primary obstacle lies in the insufficient strengthening of lecturer capacity and the suboptimal preparation of a curriculum grounded in an integrative approach. This situation indicates the need for a more robust conceptual framework to support the integration of both substantive and applicable sciences. In this context, the thoughts of Nurcholish Madjid are crucial to explore, as they provide philosophical and methodological foundations capable of reinforcing the paradigm of integration between religious knowledge and science within Islamic higher education institutions.

Several studies show that the discourse on the integration of science at UIN Sunan Ampel has been extensively explored. However, few have specifically examined the contribution of Nurcholish Madjid's thinking as a conceptual and practical framework in 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 contribute to the development of more inclusive and applicable Islamic education policies. In addition, it aims to assess the extent to which Nurcholish Madjid's thought has influenced academic policies at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya and how the concept of knowledge integration that he developed can serve as a foundation for building 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, which is chosen due to its growing relevance in contemporary Islamic education, especially at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. Combining these two fields is highly important because it

helps address the challenges students and educators face in reconciling scientific inquiry with religious beliefs. This integration is essential for enriching the academic curriculum and fostering 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 developing a more holistic educational framework that aligns with Islamic values while embracing scientific progress. This focus is highly relevant in light of the philosophical contributions of *Nurcholis Madjid*, who advocated for a harmonious relationship between faith and knowledge.

This study uses a qualitative approach. According to Hendryadi *et al.* (2019) in Yulianto (2024), it is a naturalistic investigation process that seeks a deep understanding of social phenomena in a natural setting, utilizing a literature review as the primary method for data collection. This type of study is appropriate because it allows an in-depth exploration of existing theories and practices related to integrating science and religion. The data used in this study includes scholarly articles, books, and other academic publications that discuss the concept of *knowledge integration*, particularly those referring to the thoughts of Nurcholish Madjid. By analyzing these sources, this research aims to identify key themes and insights that can inform the implementation of an integrated curriculum at UIN Sunan Ampel. The qualitative nature of this study enables a comprehensive understanding of the nuances involved in the integration process, which are often overlooked in quantitative studies.

Conclusion 6 Drawing insights on Nurcholish Madjid's impact Theme Synthesis 5 ক্ষ্য Theme Identification 4 Identifying key themes in the literature Thematic Analysis 3 Applying Braun and Clarke's framework **Literature Collection** 2 Gathering academic papers and repositories **Data Selection** 1 Choosing relevant sources for analysis

Figure 1. Analyzing Nurcholish Madjid's Integrative Thinking

From Figure 1, the data sources were selected based on their relevance to the topic and contribution to the discourse on integrating science and religion. The data selection process was carried out systematically by searching academic databases (e.g., Google Scholar, JSTOR, DOAJ), library catalogs, and institutional digital repositories. The selection criteria included relevance to the topic, academic validity, and contribution to the scientific integration discourse. The collected literature was then analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun & Clarke (2006) approach, which consists of six stages: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) searching

for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the analytical report. During the analysis process, several key themes were identified, such as (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 then 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 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 line of thinking is driven by the need to develop an understanding of Islam that is more relevant to contemporary developments and that provides space for dialogue and the cultivation of critical thinking.

Islamic thought in Indonesia has undergone significant renewal in the last two decades. This can be seen **in** the orientation and spirit of more progressive thinking, adapting to social change and scientific progress. Nurcholish Madjid sees that differences in views and thoughts in Islam are a blessing for the *ummah* (Muslim community). With this in mind, he invites Muslims to be more open to differences, avoid extremism, and not be easily influenced by radical ideologies.

Nurcholish Madjid's thinking demonstrates that Islam in Indonesia has been undergoing a process of renewal. He offers an educational approach emphasizing healthy secularization, openness to new ideas, and freedom of thought. In this regard, Islamic education must adapt to the developments of the time and accommodate critical thinking. Nurcholish Madjid also emphasized the principle of 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 through the symbolic concept of the Twin Towers, which illustrates the symbiotic relationship between science and faith. Each tower represents a distinct domain—one symbolizes science, while the other symbolizes religion. These two domains are seen as complementary rather than contradictory. This reflects the understanding that pluralism, in all its dimensions, is an inevitable part of social reality and that existing differences should not obstruct the formation of a harmonious unity.

There is a clear vision to respond to contemporary challenges that demand an interdisciplinary approach to education. UIN Sunan Ampel integrates Islamic knowledge and modern science equally, ensuring that both are developed without dominating the other. The rapid advancement of science and technology is expected to progress in parallel with strengthening Islamic values within the higher education curriculum.

In the ontological dimension, the foundation beneath the towers symbolizes

unity, which is also reflected in the connecting structure at their peak. This serves as the basis for constructing multidisciplinary knowledge, which the academic community aspires to realize in forming $ul\bar{u}$ al- $alb\bar{a}b$ -individuals who embody a balance between dhikr (spiritual contemplation), fikr (rational thought), and a mature, integrated character. The following is the illustration referred to (Hidayah et al., 2024).

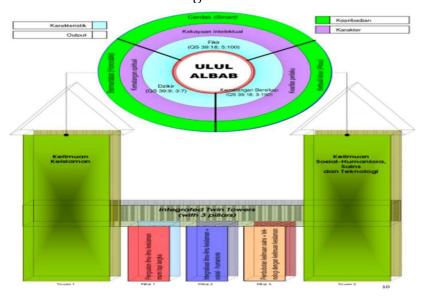


Figure 2. Twin Tower Scientific Integration

The division of knowledge enriches the substance of Islamic learning and leads to the emergence of various academics who contribute to the advancement of Islamic sciences. Thus, the division of knowledge provides two main benefits: the diversification of Islamic scholarship and the rise of experts across different fields.

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

- 1. Strengthening traditional Islamic sciences, even as their presence becomes increasingly rare.
- 2. Integrating Islamic scholarship with the social and human sciences broadens the scope of academic inquiry.
- 3. Promoting science and technology from an Islamic perspective to establish a balanced mastery of knowledge.

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

This approach has an impact on the development of a curriculum that integrates religious knowledge with science in various study programs, such as that carried out in the Faculty of *Ushuluddin* and Philosophy, through the introduction of the hermeneutic method in the Al-Qur'an and Tafsir Study Program. UIN Sunan Ampel strives to form individuals who have intellectual intelligence, piety, and integrity. This integration also supports the development of individuals who are able to adapt to the development of science without losing the essence of religion. 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 highly progressive understanding of how these two domains can complement rather than contradict each other. He emphasizes that, in Islam, worldly matters do not need to be separated from spiritual or eschatological values; instead, the two should engage in a harmonious dialogue. In his view, Islamic education should create space for free and innovative intellectual development, opening the door to new ideas that have the potential to enrich the lives of Muslims. In general, the face of 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. Moreover, this phenomenon has 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 deviation from the teachings practiced during the time of the Prophet and his companions. This phenomenon reflects a broader trend within the Islamic world, indicating a continuous dynamic of evolving thought. Over the past two decades, the spirit and orientation of Islamic thought in Indonesia have been significantly updated, adapting to social changes and advances in scientific knowledge.

The concept of Islamic education renewal proposed by Nurcholish Madjid focuses on healthy secularization, which allows science and religion to develop side by side. From his perspective, Islam must remain relevant in the face of contemporary developments and support intellectual freedom in exploring the world through scientific methods. According to him, worldly aspects do not always need to be associated with *hereafter* values. He referred to the words of the Prophet, which state that diversity of views and thoughts is a form of grace for the people. Therefore, he argued that Islam should promote intellectual freedom and encourage innovative learning methods. This approach reflects his belief that education must adapt to the changes of the times and provide space for critical thinking, discussion, and exploration (Aswandi et al., 2024). Nurcholish Madjid also emphasized the importance of religious moderation, which enables Muslims to be more open to differences of opinion, thereby avoiding extremism and radical ideologies. The concept of *pluralism* that he promoted aims to enrich the understanding of religion and social life while preventing acts of violence often associated with religious beliefs (Nendissa et al., 2025).

This view is in line with the findings of Putra et al. (2023), who state that Islamic *aqidah* should serve as the foundation for scientific development, while Islamic *sharia* functions as a moral and ethical standard for the use of science. 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. This is also supported by (Riwanda, 2024), who sees the integration of religion and science as an effort to construct a new paradigm in understanding the relationship between the two. Science grounded in Islamic principles can serve as an alternative to modern science, which often tends to be secular and disconnected from spiritual values.

In his research, Irham (2025) also demonstrated that several Islamic universities in Indonesia have systematically carried out this integration by combining core and

supplementary knowledge—both religious and general—through an integrated pattern of faculty work and curriculum development from themes and references to philosophical foundations. Thus, Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on the integration of science and religion offer clear direction on the importance of building an Islamic education system that excels in science and embodies universal and contextual Islamic values.

Thus, Nurcholish Madjid's ideas on integrating science and religion offer clear guidance on the importance of developing an Islamic education system that excels in scientific knowledge and embodies universal and contextual Islamic values. The epistemological approach proposed by Nurcholish Madjid is not merely conceptual but also practical. He advocates for Islamic universities to establish an academic tradition integrating the humanities, natural sciences, and theology. Through this approach, students acquire technical competencies and 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 will cultivate a generation of Muslims who are critical, tolerant, and capable of competing in the global arena (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 general sciences. Each tower symbolizes a distinct domain—religious studies and scientific disciplines—that, while separate, complement and enrich each other. This paradigm aligns with Nurcholish Madjid's perspective on pluralism and diversity as inherent aspects of social reality that should be acknowledged and respected. He emphasized that existing differences should not impede unity and harmonious cooperation (Huda, 2017). UIN Sunan Ampel adopts this model to establish an interdisciplinary educational approach that integrates Islamic knowledge and modern science on equal footing. Within this framework, the two types of knowledge are not seen as competitors but as mutually reinforcing entities. 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). According to Nurcholish Madjid, ideal education is one that fosters critical thinking and intellectual freedom. He emphasized that individuals must become independent in understanding and interpreting knowledge. In his view, if Islamic educational systems and institutions focus solely on moral aspects without advancing knowledge and technology, their relevance will gradually diminish, become less recognized, or even risk disappearing altogether (Syaifuddin, 2011).

The Integrated Twin Towers with Three Pillars concept implemented at UIN Sunan Ampel aims to strengthen three main pillars: enhancing Islamic knowledge, integrating Islamic knowledge with the social and humanities sciences, and advancing science and technology from an Islamic perspective. This model seeks to establish a balance that enables students to master various disciplines without compromising religious values.

This approach is also reflected in curriculum development incorporating interdisciplinary studies, as seen in introducing the *hermeneutic method* in the Qur'anic Studies and Tafsir Science Study Program. This demonstrates how science and religion can be integrated within a deep and comprehensive framework (Khozin & Umiarso, 2019). The curriculum must be designed based on the standards of the Twin Towers Integration paradigm. To support this curriculum framework, three main programs have been developed. First, Islamic sciences are strengthened, although, in current practice, this knowledge is rarely applied on a broad scale. Second is integrating religious knowledge with general sciences, which is realized through an integrative approach in various fields of study. One example is the development of studies at the Faculty of *Usuluddin* and Philosophy, particularly in the Qur'anic and Tafsir Studies Program, which includes hermeneutics as part of the curriculum. This hermeneutic study is introduced as a new methodological approach in interpretation studies. Third, the introduction of basic religious sciences in general faculties and study programs to shape intelligent, religiously observant (pious), and morally upright (honorable) students (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 the ideas of Nurcholish Madjid on the importance of 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 they apply different methodologies, both institutions aim to integrate the science curriculum with religious values, as envisioned by Madjid. However, the integration practice is not without its challenges Fitriyawany et al. (2022) revealed that at PTKIN Aceh, the integration of Islamic values into science education still faces obstacles such as 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 the formation of an integrative paradigm in Islamic higher education. He emphasized the need to eliminate the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge and advocated for a reformed 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 and reflects a holistic and contextual paradigm of Islamic education. This approach aligns with the idea that Islamic religious education must foster a more comprehensive understanding of the world and human existence. The deep integration of religion and science in education can help 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 the realities of life and the world. This shows that integration is symbolic in nature and has a tangible impact 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. One of the key insights 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 the substance of Islamic knowledge and better prepares students to be adaptive and responsive to contemporary challenges. Furthermore, the study reveals that fostering dialogue between science and religion can lead to 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 align more closely with modern realities and the needs of students in a pluralistic society.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by comprehensively analyzing the integration of science and religion within the context of Islamic education. It identifies the need for a multidimensional approach that combines both disciplines, enriching students' educational experience. The research methodology, which employs a qualitative literature review, 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, this research reinforces the relevance of integrating science and religion. It encourages further exploration of this vital dialogue in educational practice.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that should be addressed in future research. One notable limitation is its reliance on secondary sources, which may not fully capture the practical challenges and lived experiences of educators and students engaged in the integration process. Future studies would benefit from incorporating 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 into specific pedagogical strategies that effectively facilitate this integration would be valuable for educators aiming to enhance their teaching practices.

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