

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF *RIYĀDAH* IN PESANTREN: A PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION FOR ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

Rizal Fathurrohman¹, Abdul Munip², Muh. Wasith Achadi³
¹²³Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta; Indonesia
Correspondence Email; 22304011005@student.uin-suka.ac.id

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Abstract

This study examines how *riyādah* in the pesantren tradition is understood not only as a spiritual discipline but also as an epistemological foundation shaping the essence, sources, methods, and validation of knowledge. It arises from the need for a holistic and transformative paradigm of Islamic education beyond Western epistemology, often limited to rationalism and empiricism. The purpose is to explore the epistemology of *riyādah* in intellectual formation within Islamic education, with Pesantren Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean, Kediri, East Java, as the research locus for its strong scholarly tradition and integration of spiritual discipline with intellectual development. The study employs qualitative research with an ethnographic approach to capture lived experiences and epistemological perspectives of the pesantren community. Data are obtained primarily from direct engagement with subjects as primary sources, complemented by secondary sources from classical Islamic texts. Data collection uses participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Analysis follows the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Validity is ensured through source triangulation. Findings show that in pesantren, knowledge is conceived as divine light attained through purification of the soul. Its sources and methods integrate texts, reason, empirical experience, and *riyādah*, while its validation rests on benefit and blessing. The significance of this research lies in its theoretical contribution to Islamic epistemology, its practical model for integrating spiritual discipline with intellectual formation, and its enrichment of Islamic education discourse by positioning *riyādah* as a foundation for both character building and knowledge production.

Keywords

Islamic Education, Islamic Epistemology, Pesantren, *Riyādah*.



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INTRODUCTION

The epistemological concept of *riyāḍah* is understood not only as an individual spiritual practice, but also as an educational method that guides students in their intellectual journey, especially for students at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Pesantren (Muhammad Salim Abdurrahman, Interview, 10 Januari, 2024). *Riyāḍah* becomes an instrument that connects the inner dimension with the learning process, because students believe that it is not enough to just use reason to understand Islamic texts, but they must also undergo purification of the soul, so that their hearts are clean to receive the light of knowledge (Abdullah et al., 2025). In general, *riyāḍah* at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Pesantren can be seen in the form of wirid, prayers, practicing religious discipline, to full involvement in the pesantren's life order which is strictly regulated by the kiai (Özkan, 2022). The *riyāḍah* carried out in the Pesantren shows the existence of a unique construction of knowledge, namely a combination of rationality, empirical experience, and spirituality (Khasawneh, 2022).

In its implementation, the concept of *riyāḍah*, believed in by students and then practiced, has been proven to have a significant contribution to the intellectual development of students, but this contribution is often not understood academically (Muhammad Salim, Interview, 3 Desember, 2024). Students who consistently carry out *riyāḍah* are believed to be more capable of grasping the deepest meaning of Islamic texts than students who only rely on logic (Muhammad Zaky Mubarok, Interview, 10 Januari, 2024). This process gives birth to an intellectuality that is not dry of spirituality, but is based on a balance between critical reasoning and sincerity (Bhutto, 2025). From this practice, it can be assumed that the process of intellectual formation of students includes mastery of knowledge as well as character formation, where knowledge is not only seen as information, but as a light that provides guidance in life.

On the other hand, the integration of the epistemology of *riyāḍah* into the curriculum and learning activities of *Pesantren* faces complex dynamics (Hanif, 2024). Supporting factors are clearly visible in the strong Pesantren culture that instills good manners, intensive relationships between teachers and students, and the legitimacy of classical texts that emphasize the unity of knowledge, deeds, and spirituality. However, at the same time, *Pesantren* are also faced with the demands of educational modernization, such as adjustment to the national curriculum, the need to obtain formal recognition, and a pragmatic orientation towards academic achievement measured administratively (Zailani & Aziz, 2022). These conditions have the potential to weaken the role of *riyāḍah* as an epistemology if not managed properly. This is the academic problem that arises: how *riyāḍah* can

become a unique epistemology that transcends Western epistemology and can maintain its relevance amidst the currents of modernization without sacrificing the authenticity of its tradition. In other words, this research attempts to answer the academic dilemma regarding the position of *riyāḍah* as the intellectual foundation of students, as well as how *riyāḍah* can be understood not only as a spiritual discipline, but also as an epistemological foundation that forms the nature, sources, methods, and validation of knowledge.

A number of recent studies emphasize the importance of *riyāḍah* in the Pesantren tradition, but its epistemological dimension is still rarely addressed. Research (Nashuddin, 2020) with the result that *riyāḍah* functions as a spiritual tradition to maintain the character and morality of students, emphasizing the cultural-ethical aspect rather than the philosophical foundation of knowledge. This research gap is the absence of discussion on how *riyāḍah* forms an epistemic mechanism in the Pesantren scientific process. Research (Birsyada, 2020) with the results of tracing the historical roots of *riyāḍah* from the practice of asceticism Walisongo, provides an important historical contribution, but does not explain its epistemic function in the intellectual formation of students. This research gap lies in the absence of analysis of the historical relationship with the epistemological dimension of Islamic education.

Research (Sholikhin et al., 2023) found that *riyāḍah* can be placed within the framework of prophetic intelligence, providing an understanding of the psychological-spiritual contribution to the development of the personality of students. The gap in this research is that the study stops at the psychological aspect, without formulating *riyāḍah* as an epistemic structure that unites reason, text, and spirituality. Research (Elqaweliya et al., 2023) The findings show that *riyāḍah* has an impact on improving students' learning outcomes through metaphysical influences, opening up discussions about the relationship between spiritual practice and academic achievement. The research gap lies in the absence of an explanation of how these learning outcomes are positioned within the framework of knowledge validation that is typical of the *Pesantren* tradition.

The four studies show a tendency to emphasize cultural, historical, psychological, and practical aspects, while the epistemological function of *riyāḍah* remains underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by formulating *riyāḍah* as a unique epistemic mechanism of *Pesantren*, uniting the inner dimension, rationality, religious texts, and scientific authority. The novelty of this research lies in its approach, which not only describes the practice of *riyāḍah* but also defines its position as the foundation for the intellectual development of students in Islamic educational institutions.

Focusing on the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean *Pesantren* in Kediri, this study provides a new contribution in the form of a philosophical-empirical analytical framework that demonstrates how *riyāḍah* serves as a means of intellectual development for students as well as an instrument for validating knowledge oriented toward blessings.

In the framework of *ta'allum rabbānī* al-Ghazali, true knowledge is not only obtained through reason, but through the purification of the soul (*riyāḍah*) so that the heart is ready to receive the Divine light that transforms knowledge into wisdom (Al-Ghazali, 2018); (Sa'ari, 2023); (Subandi, 2023). The intellectual process in *Pesantren* is therefore inseparable from the spiritual dimension, because *riyāḍah* functions as an epistemological mechanism to achieve *ta'allum rabbānī*, namely learning with divine guidance (Al-Ghazali, 2021). Similarly, Henri Bergson's intuition theory emphasizes knowledge gained through direct experience over rationality (Bergson, 2022); (Zimmermann, 2022). In the context of *Pesantren*, *riyāḍah* sharpens the intuition of students so they can grasp the essential meaning of religious texts. By combining the views of al-Ghazali and Bergson, *riyāḍah* at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Kediri *Pesantren* becomes an epistemological foundation that integrates rationality, spirituality, and intuition.

The concept of problem-solving in this research stems from academic anxiety regarding the dominance of modern epistemological models, which often reduce knowledge to empirical or logical boundaries (Gettier, 2016). In the practice of Islamic education in *Pesantren*, especially in Kwagean, it is seen that *riyāḍah* is an important key that complements intellectual learning methods (Muhammad Sa'din Tamami, Interview, 25 Januari 2025). *Riyāḍah* is not a substitute for reason but a support that enables the mind to function clearly (Fauziyah, 2021). Through *riyāḍah*, religious texts are not merely understood cognitively but also internalized, resulting in wisdom. Therefore, this research aims to formulate *riyāḍah* as a unique epistemology of *Pesantren*, oriented not only toward achieving rational knowledge but also toward the usefulness and blessings of knowledge.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative study with an ethnographic approach conducted at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean *Pesantren* in Kediri. The choice of this method is based on the research's character, which seeks to deeply understand the epistemological practice of *riyāḍah* in the *Pesantren* as a social, cultural, and spiritual phenomenon. The ethnographic approach allows researchers to enter the life world of students and kiai through direct involvement in daily activities, so that the reality being

studied can be understood from the perspective of the actors (Savard, 2024). The research data consists of the experiences, practices, and perspectives of students and teachers regarding *riyāḍah* in intellectual development. Primary data sources come from students, ustadz, and teachers of *Pesantren* as direct subjects who undergo *riyāḍah* practices. Secondary data sources include classical Islamic texts used in teaching, curriculum documents, archives of *Pesantren* activities, and relevant historical records of *Pesantren*.

Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. In the observation stage, researchers conducted participant observation by participating in *Pesantren* activities, both academic (*pengajian kitab*, *sorogan*, *syawir*) and spiritual (daily *riyāḍah*, *wirid*, *dhikr*, *sunnah fasting*, and *khidmah*). Observations were carried out from November 2024 to January 2025 at the Fathul 'Ulum *Pesantren* in Kwagean, Kediri. In the interview stage, informants consisted of the *pesantren* supervisor, several teaching ustadz, and senior and junior students to obtain diverse data. Interviews were conducted in-depth with general guidelines to explore their experiences, views, and beliefs regarding *riyāḍah*. In the documentation stage, data were collected from the yellow book used as a learning reference, the daily *Pesantren* schedule, activity notes, and internal *Pesantren* documents describing the practice of *riyāḍah*.

Data analysis uses the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes four stages, data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification (Miles et al., 2014). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, simplified, and focused on relevant data related to the practice of *riyāḍah* in *Pesantren*. In the data presentation stage, the researcher compiled a narrative, matrix, and categorization regarding the contribution of *riyāḍah* to the intellectual development of students. In the analysis stage, the researcher conducted a critical review using Al-Ghazali's *ta'allum rabbānī* theory and Henri Bergson's intuition theory, and compared them with previous research. In the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the data were verified through source triangulation (students, ustadz, and caregivers) and method triangulation (observation, interviews, and documentation) to ensure the validity of the findings. With this procedure, the research results are expected to be able to describe the epistemology of *riyāḍah* at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Kediri *Pesantren* in a complete, in-depth, and accountable manner.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Riyāḍah in the pesantren tradition is not merely a spiritual practice oriented towards increasing personal piety, but also has a deep philosophical dimension in the intellectual formation of students. Through *riyāḍah*, the learning process in pesantren is directed to train perseverance, patience, and clarity of heart so that the knowledge gained does not stop at the cognitive-instrumental level, but can foster existential awareness. The Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Kediri Pesantren is one concrete example of how *riyāḍah* is practiced integrally with the tradition of book study, sorogan, deliberation, and interaction of scientific chains. Thus, the epistemology of *riyāḍah* emphasizes that knowledge is not only the result of rational accumulation, but a light that guides humans towards *mukāsyafah* (revelation of reality) and *ma'rifah* (knowledge of God), so that knowledge functions as a spiritual energy that transforms life.

To emphasize the contribution of *riyāḍah* in building the epistemology of Islamic education, this study presents its findings in a table designed to provide a systematic and analytical overview. The table summarizes three main aspects that are at the core of epistemological studies: the nature of knowledge, the sources and methods of acquiring knowledge, and the validity of knowledge. Through this structure, it is clear that *riyāḍah* plays a crucial role as a philosophical basis that affirms the balance between intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Presenting the results in a table format not only facilitates concept mapping but also emphasizes the relevance of *riyāḍah* as an epistemological model that can address the challenges of contemporary Islamic education, which is often trapped in technical rationality and neglects the depth of spirituality.

Table 1. Philosophical Basis for Intellectual Formation through *Riyāḍah* at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Kediri Pesantren

No	Study Aspects	Research Findings	Academic Analysis
1.	The Essence of Knowledge	In Kwagean, Kediri, knowledge is understood as a spiritual-transformational energy that transcends the sensory, rational, and intuitive dimensions. This understanding is based on al-Ghazali's <i>Ihya 'Ulumiddin</i> , which also serves as the argument underlying every <i>riyāḍah</i> conducted at the pesantren. From this, the students believe that the essence of true knowledge is that which leads to <i>mukāsyafah</i> (revelation of reality) and <i>ma'rifah</i> (direct knowledge of God).	This demonstrates that Pesantren epistemology is integrative-transcendental. By combining rational and spiritual dimensions, it rejects the reduction of knowledge to the empirical-positivistic realm. The function of knowledge is not merely informative, but also existential and transformational.

2. Sources and Methods of Knowledge Acquisition	The primary sources of knowledge are revelation (the Qur'an and Hadith) and turats (<i>kitab kuning</i>), with strong legitimacy of the sanad of knowledge. The methods of acquisition at the Fathul 'Ulum Pesantren include recitation of the scriptures, <i>sorogan</i> (prayer), deliberation, and the practice of <i>riyāḍah</i> (spiritual training). <i>Riyāḍah</i> is practiced as a means of cleansing the heart so that students can receive clearer knowledge, including intuition (<i>kashf</i>).	This method emphasizes multiple epistemologies: empirical (formal learning experiences), rational (discussion and logical analysis), and transcendental (inspiration and intuition). Thus, the pursuit of knowledge in <i>Pesantren</i> takes place both intellectually and spiritually, forming a holistic educational pattern.
3. Validity of Knowledge	The validity of knowledge in this Pesantren is measured through three dimensions: rational-argumentative (logical coherence), intersubjective (the authority of the teacher's chain of transmission and the legitimacy of tradition), and spiritual-practical (the usefulness of the knowledge, blessings, and inner peace). Students judge knowledge to be true if it is beneficial (<i>al-'ilm al-nāfi'</i>) and has implications for the formation of morals.	This validation approach expands the epistemological standards of truth. Knowledge is tested not only logically but also through social and spiritual benefits. This model rejects the reduction of truth to a purely empirical paradigm and emphasizes the importance of the performative and transformative aspects of knowledge in the lives of students.

The Nature of Knowledge

The essence of knowledge at the Fathul 'Ulum Pesantren in Kwagean, Kediri, is understood as something more than mere cognitive accumulation. Knowledge is seen as a light that provides inner enlightenment and guides daily life. For students and teachers, knowledge is not merely information to be mastered, but rather a spiritual energy that guides them toward wisdom. Mastery of knowledge is considered incomplete if it is limited to mastering texts or propositions; what is more important is the extent to which knowledge fosters faith, manners, and self-awareness. Therefore, every learning activity at the Pesantren is always accompanied by the awareness that knowledge must bring one closer to God and develop noble character. In this way, learning is seen not only as an intellectual activity, but also as an act of worship oriented toward spiritual closeness.

In everyday life, this understanding is evident in the close relationship between *riyāḍah* and learning. Spiritual practices such as *wirid* (religious practice), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), fasting, and service are carried out to cleanse the heart to better receive knowledge. These activities are believed to make the learning process clearer and more meaningful. Students not only interpret the meaning of texts, but also open their hearts so that the knowledge they learn can illuminate their inner selves and form a deeper awareness. This understanding of the nature of knowledge makes

the Pesantren's scientific tradition holistic. Knowledge is not separated into rational, empirical, and spiritual aspects, but rather combined into a unified whole. Knowledge is not only understood as the result of the work of reason, but also as part of an inner journey that connects humans with transcendental reality. In this way, *Pesantren* shape individuals with a balance between intellectual intelligence and spiritual depth.

This understanding of the nature of knowledge in *Pesantren* extends beyond the informative dimension, but is directed toward transformational impact. True knowledge is beneficial, bringing about positive behavioral changes in its possessors, fostering inner peace, and bringing blessings to its possessors' lives. This understanding is a hallmark of the epistemology of *riyāḍah* at the Fathul 'Ulum Pesantren in Kwagean, Kediri, where the essence of knowledge is viewed as a divine light that illuminates both the mind and the heart, and serves as the primary foundation for the intellectual development of students.

Source of Knowledge Acquisition

The primary sources of knowledge at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Pesantren in Kediri are the Quran and Hadith, which serve as the foundation of all learning processes. These two sources are understood not only as normative texts but also as life guidelines that must be deeply internalized. Furthermore, classical texts by previous scholars serve as primary references in developing students' understanding. These texts are not only studied textually but also positioned as a scholarly legacy with strong authority because they are connected to the pesantren's tradition of scientific chains. Thus, knowledge at this pesantren is rooted in revelation, reinforced by tradition, and practiced in the students' real lives.

In terms of acquisition methods, students undergo a multi-layered learning process. The book study method, whether in the form of *bandongan* (recitation) or *sorogan* (recitation), is the primary pathway to mastering classical texts. Through this method, students not only listen to the *kiai*'s explanations but are also required to actively read, understand, and discuss the text's contents. Discussions in the form of *musyawarah* (consultation) complement this process by providing space for students to test arguments, practice critical thinking, and deepen their understanding. This means that the learning method used in *Pesantren* indirectly combines the authority of the teacher with the students' active participation in analyzing the textual material in specific books.

All sources and methods of acquiring knowledge at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Kediri Pesantren demonstrate a holistic approach. Students acquire knowledge from sources of revelation, classical texts, social experiences, the example of teachers, and spiritual practices that shape their personality. The methods used include text mastery, reasoning development, moral strengthening, and inner purification. With this approach, the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Kediri Pesantren positions the learning process as a comprehensive effort to develop both intellectually and spiritually, so that the knowledge gained is not only academically valid but also serves to shape character and provide direction in life.

Validity of Knowledge

The validity of knowledge at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Pesantren in Kediri is understood more broadly than modern academic standards. The truth of knowledge is determined not only by logic or empirical evidence, but also by its spiritual dimension and the practical benefits it yields. Knowledge is considered valid if it can provide spiritual enlightenment, improve the behavior of its owner, and bring goodness to its owner's life. This means that the validity of knowledge in *Pesantren* does not stop at the formal verification level but must be demonstrated through tangible changes experienced by individuals and the Pesantren community.

The process of testing the truth of knowledge occurs through rational coherence carried out in discussions and deliberations among students. In this forum, arguments and understanding are tested logically, so that only consistent and accountable opinions are accepted. However, this is always linked to the scholarly authority of the kiai (Islamic scholars) and the sanad (Islamic chain of transmission), so that the truth of knowledge is determined by a combination of the strength of rational arguments and the legitimacy of the scholarly tradition. An understanding is deemed correct when it is accepted within the pesantren circle, by both teachers and fellow students. This recognition not only reflects social agreement but also serves to maintain the continuity of the pesantren's scholarly tradition. This means that knowledge does not exist individually, but is embedded in social networks and traditions passed down from generation to generation.

Another prominent dimension in determining the validity of knowledge through riyadhah is the benefits and blessings of the knowledge. Students and educators believe that true knowledge is knowledge that brings peace of mind, improves morals, and can be applied in daily life. If knowledge does not impact behavior and does not provide goodness, then it is not considered valid. Blessings serve as an additional measure that confirms that true knowledge is that which brings

humans closer to God and is beneficial to others. Thus, the validity of knowledge at the Fathul 'Ulum Pesantren in Kwagean, Kediri, is built on three main foundations: rationality, which ensures consistency of argument, the authority of tradition, which maintains the continuity of the chain of knowledge, and blessings, which guarantee benefits and spiritual transformation.

Discussion

The Essence of Knowledge Through Riyāḍah in Pesantren's

Research findings on the nature of knowledge at the Fathul Ulum Pesantren in Kwagean, Kediri, show that knowledge is not understood merely as a collection of cognitive information or data. In the view of the teachers and students, knowledge is a light that comes from God and serves to illuminate the human heart and mind. Knowledge is understood as something that guides, mentors, and gives direction to life, not merely material mastered for academic purposes. Within this framework, the learning process at the Pesantren is never separated from the spiritual dimension. Mastery of the yellow book texts, the ability to interpret the Quran and Hadith, and skill in discussion are not considered sufficient if they are not accompanied by self-control, etiquette, and purification of the soul. True knowledge is understood as a unity between the intellectual and spiritual aspects that gives rise to noble behavior and closeness to God.

In daily life, this understanding of the essence of knowledge is evident in the habits of students who combine learning activities with the practice of *riyāḍah*. Diligence in reading scriptures, attending religious studies, and participating in deliberations is always accompanied by voluntary fasting, dhikr, wirid, and devotion to the kiai. Students realize that rational intelligence alone is insufficient to uncover the truths contained in religious texts. The heart must first be cleansed of blameworthy traits to receive the light of knowledge. Thus, knowledge is understood as the result of an integration of reason, learning experience, and spiritual readiness. This view distinguishes *Pesantren* from modern educational systems that tend to emphasize aspects of rationality and empiricism alone.

This finding has strong relevance to the concept of *ta'allum robbani* formulated by al-Ghazali. Within the framework of *ta'allum robbani*, knowledge cannot be achieved solely through intellectual effort, because true knowledge is a gift from God given to a purified heart (Jenuri, 2025). The process of purifying the heart can only be achieved through the practice of *riyāḍah*, a spiritual endeavor that cleanses the soul of lust and reprehensible traits. Al-Ghazali emphasized that reason is indeed important, but reason without a pure heart will tend to give birth to intellectual arrogance (Al-

Ghazali, 2021). Conversely, a heart that submits to God will become a vessel for the descent of the light of knowledge. In the context of *Pesantren*, the tradition of *riyāḍah* becomes a path to actualize this concept. By practicing dhikr, *wirid*, *khidmah*, and voluntary fasting, the students prepared their hearts to be worthy of receiving knowledge (Al-Ghazali, 2010). The process of studying the scriptures and discussing them was then seen as a continuation of this spiritual preparation. This demonstrates a close continuity between al-Ghazali's classical theory and educational practice in Kwagean.

In addition to the classical Islamic perspective, Henri Bergson's theory of intuition also helps explain the phenomena occurring in *Pesantren*. Bergson emphasized that there are forms of knowledge that cannot be achieved through rational, discursive reasoning (Bagby, 2024). According to him, there is knowledge that comes through intuition, namely the direct grasp of reality through deep inner involvement (Stich, 2023). Intuition allows humans to understand something comprehensively without going through a lengthy process of analysis (Theisen, 2023). In *Pesantren* life, many students experience a deeper understanding after undergoing *riyāḍah*. For example, their understanding of the meaning of a book extends beyond the literal meaning of the words, but also encompasses an inner meaning that is difficult to explain through logic alone. This phenomenon can be understood as a form of intuition that emerges after the inner purification. Thus, *riyāḍah* serves to sharpen the students' intellectual intuition, enabling them to comprehend religious texts more fully and deeply.

Findings regarding the nature of knowledge in *Pesantren* also enrich the broader discourse on Islamic epistemology. In modern Western epistemology, knowledge is often understood as *justified true belief*, that is, belief that is true and justified logically or empirically (Gettier, 2016). However, *Pesantren* epistemology rejects such a reduction, because true knowledge is not only proven by logical coherence or conformity to empirical facts, but also by how the knowledge fosters faith, morality, and closeness to God. Knowledge that does not provide benefits and blessings oriented towards God is considered not yet valid. This antithesis demonstrates that *Pesantren* epistemology offers a new paradigm that is transcendental and transformative.

Furthermore, the essence of knowledge in *Pesantren* can be understood as a form of integration between cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects, all three of which are integratively inseparable because they reinforce each other (Colicol, 2024). Cognition gained through studying the scriptures will be more meaningful if accompanied by inner experience through *riyāḍah*.

Affection built through the teacher's example will deepen when accompanied by control of desires through spiritual practice. With this integration, knowledge in *Pesantren* not only fills the mind but also shapes the heart and behavior. This paradigm is highly relevant to the needs of Islamic education, which demands a balance between knowledge, faith, and good deeds.

More broadly, understanding the nature of knowledge based on *riyāḍah* in *Pesantren* also has implications for Islamic education in general. *Pesantren* demonstrate that Islamic education should not only teach intellectual skills but also emphasize character development and spirituality (Pamungkas et al., 2024). This also serves as a critique of modern educational models that tend to prioritize solely cognitive aspects. *Pesantren* offer an alternative by placing the heart as the center of knowledge, so that education produces not only intelligent individuals but also individuals with morals and faith (Husni, 2024).

Thus, the discussion on the nature of knowledge from the perspective of *riyāḍah* epistemology at the Fathul Ulum *Pesantren* in Kwagean, Kediri, is a science that is transcendental, integrative, and transformative. Knowledge is not merely the result of the work of reason, but rather a light that enters the heart through the purification of the soul. This concept aligns with al-Ghazali's view of *ta'allum robbani*, as well as Bergson's theory of intuition from a perspective, and simultaneously fills the gaps in previous research. This paradigm emphasizes that true knowledge must originate from a pure heart, be guided by sound reason, be transmitted through scientific tradition, and be proven through its usefulness and blessings in life. Therefore, the nature of knowledge in *Pesantren* can serve as an alternative model for the development of a more holistic contemporary Islamic epistemology.

Sources and Methods of Acquiring Knowledge in the Practice of Riyāḍah in Pesantren

Research findings regarding the sources and methods of acquiring knowledge at the Fathul Ulum Kwagean *Pesantren* in Kediri indicate that the primary sources of knowledge for students and educators are the Qur'an and Hadith. These two sources are not merely treated as normative texts to be read, but are also understood as life guidelines that must be internalized and practiced. In an effort to understand the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, there are supporting sources, namely classical books by previous scholars known as *kitab kuning*, which also serve as the primary source of knowledge at this *Pesantren* (Bruinessen, 1994). These books are taught from generation to generation, maintaining the tradition of the sanad of knowledge that ensures the continuity of the authority of knowledge from generation to generation. This means that knowledge in *Pesantren* is

not only seen as the result of reading texts, but also as an authoritative legacy that has spiritual and historical legitimacy (Saefumillah, 2021).

Knowledge acquisition in Pesantren occurs through various channels. First, through the study of religious texts using the *bandongan* and *sorogan* methods. In the *bandongan* method, the *kiai* (Islamic teacher) reads the text while providing explanations, while the students take notes and listen attentively. This method allows students to understand the meaning of the text while simultaneously absorbing the teacher's explanations. In the *sorogan* method, students individually read the text in front of the teacher and receive corrections on their reading and understanding. This method trains students' accuracy, discipline, and courage in mastering the text (Rinaningsih, 2018). Both methods develop intellectual skills while strengthening the teacher-student relationship, so that the transmission of knowledge is not only cognitive but also affective and spiritual.

Furthermore, knowledge is acquired through disciplined time management, adherence to rules, *devotion* to the *kiai* (Islamic teacher), and social interaction among students. Students learn a great deal from the example of the *kiai* and *ustadz* (Islamic teachers), not only in academic matters but also in behavior, manners, and attitudes. This process demonstrates that the method of acquiring knowledge in *Pesantren* is not limited to mastering religious texts, but also encompasses moral and social education. There is also spiritual practice or *riyāḍah* in the form of *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *wirid* (religious fasting), and asceticism (*tirakat*) as a means of purifying the heart to better prepare to receive knowledge. Students believe that without spiritual practice, understanding of the text will remain superficial. *Riyāḍah* allows students to grasp deeper meanings and internalize them in their lives. In this way, *riyāḍah* is seen not only as additional worship but also as a unique method of acquiring knowledge.

When viewed from the perspective of *ta'allum robbani* echoed by al-Ghazali, this method is very relevant for a student who is deepening Islamic religious knowledge (Jenuri, 2025). Al-Ghazali emphasized that true knowledge can only enter a pure heart (Al-Ghazali, 2018). Purification of the heart is carried out through *riyāḍah*, which is integrated into the student's learning activities and manifested in daily practices through various forms of *riyāḍah*. This means that the method of acquiring knowledge in *Pesantren* that combines mastery of texts, social experiences, and spiritual practice is an actualization of the concept of *ta'allum robbani*. Students do not only learn from texts, but also from experience and heart training. This process makes knowledge more than just information, namely as a light that guides life.

Within Henri Bergson's theoretical framework, the method of acquiring knowledge in Pesantren can also be understood through the concept of intuition. Bergson explains that some knowledge can only be acquired through a deep inner engagement with reality (Baker, 2023). The spiritual practice undertaken by students is a way to hone this intuition. Through dhikr, wirid, and voluntary fasting, students train themselves to feel and understand the deeper meaning of the text. Sharpened intuition enables students to understand knowledge holistically, not just the fragmentary notions that emerge momentarily during learning (Hirai, 2025). In this case, *riyāḍah* functions as a method that connects rationality and intuition in the process of acquiring knowledge.

An authentic argument that can be put forward is that *Pesantren* offers a holistic paradigm for acquiring knowledge. While modern education systems tend to emphasize cognitive aspects and academic achievement, *Pesantren* presents a model that combines rational, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions. With this approach, *Pesantren* not only produces intellectually intelligent students but also individuals with noble character and deep spiritual awareness. This paradigm can be an alternative for the development of a more balanced and transformative contemporary Islamic education.

Thus, the overall discussion in this section confirms that the sources and methods of knowledge acquisition at the Fathul Ulum Kwagean Pesantren in Kediri are rooted in revelation, the traditions of scholars, social experience, teacher role models, and spiritual practice. The methods employed include textual mastery, critical discussion, daily experiences, and purification of the heart. All of this demonstrates that the epistemology of the Pesantren is comprehensive and does not fall into the trap of rational or empirical reduction. This distinguishes the Pesantren learning system from other educational systems and constitutes an important contribution to the discourse on contemporary Islamic epistemology.

Validation of Knowledge Through Benefits and Blessings in Riyadhah Epistemology

Research findings on knowledge validation at the Fathul Ulum Kwagean Pesantren in Kediri show that the validity of knowledge is understood within a framework distinct from modern epistemology. In the view of the teachers and students, valid knowledge is not only that which can be proven through logic or empirical experience, but also that which provides tangible benefits, improves behavior, and brings the owner closer to God. Knowledge is considered true when it serves as a light that guides its owner to good deeds and brings blessings to both the owner and the wider community. Therefore, the validity of knowledge in Pesantren encompasses intellectual,

social, moral, and spiritual dimensions in an integrative manner.

This construct of validity is clearly evident in the dimensions of blessing and benefit. Students view valid and true knowledge as that which brings about real change in life. For example, Islamic jurisprudence is considered valid not only because it aligns with the text of the scriptures, but also because it guides students in performing their religious duties correctly and consistently. Likewise, Sufism is considered true if it produces inner peace and encourages noble moral behavior. This criterion of blessing distinguishes pesantren epistemology from modern epistemology. For students, knowledge that does not bring goodness is not yet fully true.

This concept of validity is also in line with al-Ghazali's theory of *ta'allum robbani*. According to him, true knowledge is only valid if it leads its owner to God and results in righteous deeds (Al-Ghazali, 2004). Knowledge is not sufficiently proven by rational arguments, but must shape morals and improve behavior. The validity of knowledge lies in its function as a means of drawing closer to God. Findings in *Pesantren* demonstrate the actualization that the knowledge learned does not stop at the cognitive level, but must produce real deeds. In other words, the validity of knowledge in *Pesantren* is existential validity, where knowledge is measured by its impact on life.

Henri Bergson's theory of intuition also provides additional explanations regarding how *Pesantren* validate knowledge. Bergson emphasized that some knowledge cannot be tested through logic or empirical means, but rather through intuition, namely, direct experience felt by the subject (Harfouche, 2023). In the context of *Pesantren*, intuition emerges after students consistently undergo *riyāḍah*. Many students feel that their understanding of the texts becomes deeper and clearer after undergoing the *riyāḍah* process. The belief that the knowledge is true arises not only because it can be explained logically, but also because it is felt to bring inner peace. This means that intuition becomes an indicator of the validity of knowledge in *Pesantren*, something rarely considered in modern epistemology.

Knowledge validation at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Pesantren is also carried out through a multidimensional approach encompassing three main aspects: rational-argumentative, intersubjective, and spiritual-practical. This approach forms a unique epistemological framework in Islamic education, differing from modern education systems that tend to emphasize empirical or logical truth alone (Merino, 2022). In Islamic education, knowledge is not only assessed based on cognitive or logical abilities, but also through the resulting moral, social, and spiritual impact. Therefore, knowledge validation at the Fathul 'Ulum Kwagean Pesantren reflects the integration of

reason, scientific tradition, and Islamic spiritual values, while emphasizing the holistic, ethical, and transformative character of Islamic education.

The first dimension, rational-argumentative, emphasizes logical coherence, consistency of thought, and orderly argumentation as indicators of scientific truth. Knowledge is considered valid when it has a clear logical basis, is not contradictory, and can be understood through reason. This rationality reflects that *Pesantren* values critical and systematic thinking skills, while remaining within the corridors of Islamic scientific tradition. In the context of Islamic educational epistemology, this rationality is crucial because knowledge must be in accordance with sharia principles and not contradict revelation (R'boul et al., 2024). Thus, students do not merely receive knowledge dogmatically but are required to understand concepts deeply and rationally, so they can internalize Islamic educational values in their daily practices.

Furthermore, rationality in *Pesantren* serves as an initial filter for complex knowledge. The epistemology of Islamic education deeply emphasizes that true knowledge must be accountable, both intellectually and morally (Doroudi, 2024). Rationality in Islamic education not only develops analytical skills but also ensures that the knowledge gained can bring goodness and be applied in real life. This demonstrates that Islamic education, while emphasizing spiritual aspects, still places reason as a crucial instrument in the learning process and knowledge validation.

The second dimension, intersubjective, emphasizes social legitimacy and tradition as part of the validation of knowledge. In *Pesantren*, teachers and kiai possess epistemic authority recognized through sanad (traditional chain of transmission) and community legitimacy. Knowledge is accepted not solely through logic, but also through recognition of the teacher's credibility and the continuity of the scholarly tradition. In the context of Islamic education, this dimension emphasizes the importance of *ta'lim wa ta'allum* (Islamic study and teaching) as a collective and interactive learning process, where teachers are not merely transmitters of material but also moral and spiritual role models for students (Hanif, 2024).

The intersubjective aspect also serves as a quality control mechanism for knowledge in Islamic education. Students learn not only to understand theory but also to emulate the teacher's practices and scientific ethics, so that the knowledge gained is internalized morally and socially. The epistemology of Islamic education in *Pesantren* emphasizes that the validity of knowledge is always inherent in the social relationships, traditions, and morals that accompany it (Warsah, 2021). The knowledge received in Islamic education is not only individual but also collective, rooted in the

community and continuously passed down to maintain the pesantren's scientific and spiritual identity.

The third dimension, spiritual-practical, is a characteristic of knowledge validation in Islamic education in Pesantren. Knowledge is considered true when it brings benefits (*al-'ilm al-nāfi'*) and blessings (*barakah*) (Al-Ghazali, 2004). This dimension shows that knowledge is not merely a cognitive object, but must have a real impact on the formation of morals, quality of life, and inner peace. In Islamic education, knowledge that is not practiced or does not produce moral and spiritual changes is considered less valid (Ahmadizade, 2024). Validation through this dimension emphasizes that knowledge is transformative, shaping the behavior, morals, and spiritual qualities of students as a whole.

Beneficial and blessed knowledge, in the context of Islamic educational epistemology, refers to the ability of knowledge to be applied in daily life and have a positive impact on both individuals and society. Beneficial knowledge helps students understand religious practices, social ethics, and moral behavior, enabling learned theories to become practical applications (Huda, 2021). Meanwhile, the blessing of knowledge emphasizes the spiritual dimension: true knowledge is knowledge that soothes the heart, fosters noble morals, and encourages good social actions in its possessors (Al-Ghazali, 2010). Thus, the validation of knowledge in *Pesantren* does not only assess rational or social aspects, but also emphasizes that knowledge must bring spiritual and social good, which is the core of Islamic education.

The implications of this validity paradigm are crucial for the development of contemporary Islamic education. Education should not only emphasize logical and empirical aspects, but must also ensure that knowledge brings benefits and blessings. If education only produces individuals who are intellectually intelligent but morally poor, then the true purpose of knowledge will not be achieved. *Pesantren* demonstrate that the validity of knowledge must be measured by its success in forming individuals who are faithful, moral, and beneficial to society. Thus, the validity of knowledge must be understood holistically, not limited to logical and empirical measures, but also spiritual and social. *Pesantren* present a richer validity paradigm, capable of addressing the limitations of modern epistemology. This antithesis paves the way for the birth of a transformative Islamic epistemology, which positions knowledge not merely as a tool for understanding the world, but also as a means of drawing closer to God and bringing widespread benefits and blessings.

CONCLUSION

Riyāḍah at the Fathul 'Ulum *Pesantren* in Kwagean, Kediri, is not merely an additional spiritual practice, but rather the foundation of a unique *Pesantren* epistemology that positions knowledge as a divine light that can only be achieved through the integration of the mind and a purified heart. The essence of knowledge is understood transcendentally and integratively, so that the process of acquiring it does not stop at mastering the text of the book, studying, or deliberation, but is enriched with social experience, the example of teachers, and spiritual exercises that serve to sharpen the intellectual intuition of students. Thus, the epistemology of *riyāḍah* makes the sources and methods of knowledge more comprehensive because it combines revelation, reason, scientific tradition, and *riyāḍah* as a mechanism for inner purification. Furthermore, the validity of knowledge in *Pesantren* is not only measured by rational consistency, but also by the authority of the sanad, community acceptance, and usefulness and blessings as evidenced by changes in behavior, inner peace, and improved moral quality. This formulation shows that *riyāḍah* functions as a transformative epistemology of Islamic education.

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