



Unpacking the Muslim Mindset: History, Epistemology, and the True Purpose of Islamic Universities

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Abstract:

This study examines the concept of the university within Islamic educational thought and its relationship to the aims of Islamic education. It aims to reformulate the orientation of the Islamic university through the concepts of *adab*, *ta'dīb*, and the unity of knowledge within a coherent *tawhīdic* worldview. This qualitative library research employs a historical-philosophical approach combined with critical-hermeneutic analysis of foundational works and recent scholarly articles. Data were analyzed through the reconstruction of the genealogy of Islamic educational institutions, epistemological interpretation of knowledge and *adab*, and critical evaluation of the modern university. The findings indicate that mosques, *kuttāb*, *madrasahs*, and major centers of Islamic learning historically developed within an integrated conception of knowledge that connected intellectual learning, ethical formation, and devotion to Allah. In contrast, the crisis of the modern university involves not only disciplinary fragmentation but also the loss of *adab*, reflected in confusion regarding the proper hierarchy of knowledge, human beings, and reality. The study implies that Islamic universities should function as institutions of *ta'dīb* that cultivate professionally competent, morally responsible, civilization-oriented graduates and produce knowledge grounded in a *tawhīdic* worldview.

INTRODUCTION

The question of what a university is and what it is for has become increasingly important amid the expansion and diversification of contemporary higher education. Universities are expected not only to produce graduates with professional competencies but also to develop intellectual, ethical, and social capacities that enable them to respond responsibly to complex societal challenges. In Islamic education, this responsibility is particularly significant because education is fundamentally connected with the formation of human beings who recognize the relationship between knowledge, morality, and devotion to Allah. Recent studies demonstrate growing efforts to integrate Islamic values with scientific learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and contemporary educational practices (Adiyono et al., 2024; Agung et al., 2025; Sahil et al., 2024). Such developments indicate that higher education cannot be separated from questions of worldview and the purposes of knowledge. Therefore, examining the university from an Islamic educational perspective is important for ensuring that institutional development remains oriented

toward intellectual excellence, ethical formation, and the broader purposes of human and civilizational development.

The general problem concerns the persistence of a conceptual separation between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge within contemporary educational structures. Ideally, Islamic education should develop an integrated understanding of knowledge in which intellectual inquiry, ethical responsibility, and religious consciousness reinforce one another. However, various studies indicate that integration is often pursued through curriculum combinations or interdisciplinary activities without fundamentally reconsidering the epistemological assumptions underlying knowledge production (Albustomi, 2025; Mohlas, 2025; Rofik, 2025). Research on Islamic education has emphasized the importance of Islamic worldview in shaping educational orientation, while other studies have explored the integration of science and religion through interdisciplinary and curriculum-based approaches. The problem is therefore not simply the absence of religious content but the persistence of fragmented structures of knowledge. Curriculum specialization, disciplinary boundaries, and contemporary measures of academic achievement may encourage instrumental understandings of education. Consequently, a deeper examination of the philosophical foundations and purposes of the university is necessary within Islamic educational thought.

The literature reveals a significant conceptual and empirical phenomenon concerning the continuing movement toward the integration of Islam, science, and interdisciplinary knowledge. Studies of Islamic educational settings demonstrate attempts to connect scientific learning with Qur'anic values, Islamic perspectives, and broader interdisciplinary frameworks (Sahil et al., 2024; Sundari & Nasution, 2024). Other research has shown that science literacy can be developed through educational materials incorporating Islamic and Qur'anic dimensions, indicating that scientific competence and religious values need not operate as separate domains (Prihatiningtyas et al., 2025; Wahyuni & Silfianah, 2024). Research on Islamic boarding schools similarly identifies multidisciplinary integration as an important response to globalization and contemporary educational demands (Antika & Muyassaroh, 2025). At the same time, studies of Islamic educational curriculum demonstrate increasing attention to epistemological interpretation, curriculum transformation, and the management of knowledge within Islamic institutions (Adzimah & Jasri, 2025; Fitriani, 2025; Kamil & Jasri, 2025). These findings indicate a growing integrative orientation, yet they also suggest that the deeper institutional meaning and purpose of the university remain insufficiently conceptualized.

Previous scholarship has developed several complementary approaches to understanding the relationship between Islam, knowledge, and education. One strand emphasizes the Islamic worldview as a foundation for educational orientation and the formation of students' intellectual and moral perspectives (Amirudin, 2023). Another focuses on practical models for integrating science and religion through interdisciplinary learning, curriculum development, and educational materials (Adiyono et al., 2024; Sahil et al., 2024; Prihatiningtyas et al., 2025). A further strand examines curriculum management and epistemological transformation within Islamic educational institutions, emphasizing the need to connect educational objectives with broader Islamic intellectual principles (Faizah, 2023; Junaedi et al., 2025). Meanwhile, bibliometric research demonstrates that Islamic studies have become increasingly diverse in terms of theories and methodological approaches (Asyha et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies show a significant movement from disciplinary separation toward integration. Nevertheless,

much of the existing literature concentrates on curriculum, classroom practice, or specific educational settings. The university as an institution that organizes knowledge, academic authority, and human formation requires a more comprehensive philosophical synthesis.

A significant research gap therefore remains in connecting the historical meaning of Islamic educational institutions with the epistemological foundations and institutional purposes of the university. Existing studies provide valuable evidence concerning integration between Islam and science, curriculum transformation, Islamic worldview, and interdisciplinary learning, but they rarely synthesize these dimensions into a broader conception of the university grounded in the concepts of *adab*, *ta'dīb*, and the unity of knowledge. The state of the art of this study lies in moving beyond the practical integration of religious and scientific subjects toward an examination of the university as an institution responsible for ordering knowledge and forming human character. Through library research, this study synthesizes foundational intellectual arguments with recent scholarly findings to reconstruct the relationship between knowledge, ethics, worldview, and institutional purpose. Its novelty lies in positioning the loss of *adab* as an analytical category for understanding epistemic fragmentation and evaluating the organization of curricula, disciplines, research, and academic culture within the broader aims of Islamic education.

Based on this gap, the research problem concerns how the university can be conceptually understood within Islamic educational thought and how its purposes can be reformulated through an integrated conception of knowledge. This study aims to analyze the historical and epistemological roots of the university in Islamic civilization, critically examine the foundations of the modern university through relevant literature, and formulate the implications of *ta'dīb*, *adab*, and *tawhīd al-ʿilm* for the orientation of Islamic higher education. The central argument is that an Islamic university should not merely reproduce modern institutional structures while adding religious subjects, but should function as an institution of *ta'dīb* that orders knowledge according to an Islamic worldview and forms graduates who combine intellectual competence with moral responsibility. As a library research study, this research contributes conceptually by integrating historical, epistemological, and educational perspectives into a coherent understanding of the university. Such a reconstruction is important for informing curriculum development, research orientation, academic culture, and the broader civilizational mission of Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research to examine the university within Islamic educational thought. Library research was selected because the study focuses on concepts, arguments, historical developments, and epistemological relationships that require interpretation and synthesis of scholarly sources rather than measurement of observable behavior (Okoko et al., 2023; Takona, 2024). The research process involved systematically identifying, selecting, reading, and interpreting relevant academic literature to address the research objectives. The sources were selected based on their relevance to Islamic education, Islamic worldview, knowledge integration, university studies, curriculum, and educational philosophy. Recent scholarship concerning Islamic education and the integration of science and religion was used to situate the discussion within contemporary academic debates.

Data were collected through documentation study by identifying, selecting,

classifying, and recording information from relevant books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other academic publications. The selection of literature considered relevance to the research focus, scholarly credibility, conceptual contribution, and publication recency, while foundational works were retained when they provided essential theoretical or historical arguments. The collected literature was organized according to major themes, including Islamic worldview, unity of knowledge, adab, ta'dīb, curriculum integration, interdisciplinary education, and the institutional purposes of Islamic education. Previous studies concerning curriculum management, epistemological transformation, and the integration of Islamic and scientific knowledge were compared to identify conceptual patterns and developments (Faizah, 2023; Hasan, 2023; Junaedi et al., 2025; Sahil et al., 2024; Wahyuni & Silfianah, 2024).

The data were analyzed qualitatively using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation was conducted by selecting and synthesizing arguments relevant to the historical, epistemological, and educational dimensions of the university. Data display was undertaken by organizing findings into thematic categories and comparing perspectives across the selected literature, while conclusion drawing involved identifying relationships among adab, ta'dīb, tawhīd al-'ilm, knowledge integration, and the purposes of higher education. The trustworthiness of the analysis was strengthened through source triangulation and theoretical comparison, supported by evaluation of the credibility, relevance, consistency, and scholarly authority of the literature. Comparative evidence from studies on Islamic education, science-religion integration, and interdisciplinary learning was used to verify the coherence of the resulting conceptual synthesis (Adiyono et al., 2024; Antika & Muyassaroh, 2025; Prihatiningtyas et al., 2025; Sundari & Nasution, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that the university in Islamic educational thought cannot be adequately understood through its institutional form alone. Its historical development, epistemological orientation, and educational purpose are interconnected through a particular conception of knowledge, human beings, and ultimate reality. The literature indicates that Islamic education has historically developed through an integrative relationship between intellectual learning, religious values, ethical formation, and social responsibility. Contemporary studies similarly demonstrate increasing efforts to reconnect scientific knowledge with Islamic values through interdisciplinary education, curriculum transformation, and Islamic worldview frameworks (Adiyono et al., 2024; Amirudin, 2023; Sahil et al., 2024). This finding suggests that the fundamental characteristic of an Islamic university lies not simply in the presence of Islamic subjects or religious symbols but in the worldview that determines how knowledge is selected, organized, evaluated, and applied. Consequently, the university should be understood as an educational institution that simultaneously develops intellectual competence, moral character, and responsibility toward God, society, and the broader creation.

The historical reconstruction indicates that Islamic educational institutions developed through diverse institutional forms, including the *masjid*, *kuttāb*, *madrasa*, and major centers of Islamic learning. Their significance should not be measured by their resemblance to the contemporary university but by the educational principles that structured learning within them. The integration of worship, intellectual inquiry, ethical

formation, and social responsibility demonstrates that education was situated within a broader conception of human life. The development of structured curricula, scholarly communities, and systems of knowledge transmission further illustrates the institutional sophistication of Islamic education. Contemporary research on curriculum management and epistemological transformation reinforces the importance of connecting institutional educational practices with coherent philosophical foundations (Faizah, 2023; Junaedi et al., 2025). From this perspective, the historical genealogy of Islamic education provides an important conceptual basis for reconsidering the contemporary university. The institutional form may change according to historical circumstances, but the fundamental relationship between knowledge, values, and human formation remains central to the Islamic conception of education.

A major finding concerns the epistemological problem underlying the fragmentation of knowledge in contemporary higher education. The integration of Islam and science has become an increasingly important theme in Islamic educational research, with studies proposing interdisciplinary models, Qur'anic approaches to science, and the incorporation of Islamic values into scientific learning (Adiyono et al., 2024; Hasan, 2023; Sahil et al., 2024). However, integration is not necessarily achieved when religious content is simply added to scientific or professional subjects. Meaningful integration requires reconsideration of the assumptions that determine what constitutes valid knowledge, how knowledge is related to values, and what purposes knowledge should serve. Research on Islamic worldview emphasizes that educational orientation is inseparable from assumptions about reality and human purpose (Amirudin, 2023). Similarly, studies of Islamic and scientific integration in educational institutions indicate that interdisciplinary approaches are most meaningful when they establish conceptual relationships between religious and scientific knowledge rather than merely placing them alongside one another (Antika & Muyassaroh, 2025; Sundari & Nasution, 2024). Thus, the central challenge is epistemological rather than merely curricular.

Within this context, the concept of *adab* provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the deeper problem of fragmentation. *Adab* can be interpreted as the recognition of the proper place and relationship of knowledge, human beings, values, and reality. From this perspective, the loss of *adab* is not limited to declining moral behavior among students or academics but reflects a broader disorder in the organization of knowledge and educational priorities. The problem emerges when disciplines are treated exclusively according to their instrumental utility, when professional competence is separated from ethical responsibility, or when knowledge is detached from questions of meaning and ultimate purpose. Contemporary research on Islamic character education supports the importance of integrating values into educational practice rather than treating them as symbolic additions to an otherwise unchanged educational structure (Agung et al., 2025). Likewise, research on Islamic worldview demonstrates that education can contribute to intellectual and moral development when knowledge is situated within a coherent understanding of human existence and responsibility (Amirudin, 2023). Therefore, *adab* can be understood as an organizing principle that connects epistemology, ethics, curriculum, and institutional culture.

The consequences of epistemic fragmentation become particularly visible at the curricular level. When religious education is isolated from professional and scientific disciplines, its capacity to influence the assumptions underlying those disciplines becomes limited. Conversely, when scientific and professional education operates

without ethical and metaphysical reflection, graduates may acquire technical competence without sufficient consideration of the social and moral consequences of their expertise. Recent studies demonstrate that integration between Islamic values and science can be implemented through curriculum design, learning materials, interdisciplinary models, and science-literacy development (Adiyono et al., 2024; Prihatiningtyas et al., 2025; Wahyuni & Silfianah, 2024). These findings strengthen the argument that integration should operate at the level of educational orientation rather than only at the level of classroom content. The university therefore needs to examine how its curriculum defines knowledge, determines educational priorities, constructs graduate competencies, and evaluates academic achievement. An Islamic curriculum should not reject disciplinary specialization but should place specialization within a broader hierarchy of intellectual, ethical, and civilizational purposes.

The findings further indicate that *ta'dīb* offers a comprehensive framework for reconceptualizing the aims of Islamic higher education. Rather than reducing education to the transmission of information or the development of employability, *ta'dīb* emphasizes the formation of persons who recognize the proper relationship between knowledge, self, society, and God. This orientation is consistent with contemporary Islamic educational research that emphasizes character formation, Qur'anic values, curriculum transformation, and Islamic worldview as integral components of educational quality (Agung et al., 2025; Amirudin, 2023; Junaedi et al., 2025). In this framework, professional competence remains important but becomes part of a broader educational purpose. The ideal graduate is not merely employable but intellectually responsible, ethically grounded, socially useful, and capable of applying knowledge for the common good. Consequently, the university becomes an institution of human formation in which intellectual development and moral responsibility are mutually reinforcing rather than separate educational objectives.

The conceptual relationship among *ma'rifah*, *adālah*, *khilāfah*, and *tawhīd al-ilm* provides a framework for translating this philosophical orientation into institutional practice. *Ma'rifah* represents recognition of God, the self, and the proper place of created realities; *adālah* concerns the just use of knowledge and authority; *khilāfah* concerns responsible participation in society and the cultivation of the world; while *tawhīd al-ilm* represents the unity of revealed, rational, and empirical dimensions of knowledge. These dimensions can be connected to curriculum, research, assessment, and academic culture rather than remaining abstract philosophical concepts. The growing literature on interdisciplinary Islamic education demonstrates that such integration can take practical forms through curriculum development, science learning, research, and educational innovation (Adiyono et al., 2024; Antika & Muyassaroh, 2025; Prihatiningtyas et al., 2025).

Table 1. Institutional Dimensions of Ta'dīb in the Islamic University

Dimension	Educational Orientation	Institutional Implication	Illustrative Indicator
<i>Ma'rifah</i>	Recognition of God, self, and the hierarchy of reality	Foundational worldview and ethical reflection inform educational programs	Graduate outcomes include epistemic awareness and moral reasoning
<i>Adālah</i>	Just use of knowledge and authority	Professional curricula integrate ethics, accountability, and public responsibility	Assessment includes ethical judgment and social impact

<i>Khilāfah</i>	Responsible cultivation of society and nature	Research addresses human welfare, sustainability, and public benefit	Research and community projects demonstrate social and ecological responsibility
<i>Tawhīd al-‘ilm</i>	Unity of revealed, rational, and empirical knowledge	Disciplines are connected through shared ontological and axiological foundations	Interdisciplinary research moves beyond the superficial addition of religious texts

The table demonstrates that the philosophical framework of *ta’dīb* can be translated into institutional dimensions. Curriculum development should therefore position Islamic worldview, Qur’anic values, ethical reasoning, and the Islamic intellectual tradition as sources for reflecting on disciplinary purposes rather than as decorative additions. This does not mean that every professional course must simply insert religious quotations. Instead, the assumptions concerning human nature, benefit and harm, professional responsibility, and the ethical limits of knowledge should be critically examined within an Islamic worldview. Evidence from science education and Qur’anic learning materials indicates that integration becomes more meaningful when Islamic values are incorporated into the conceptual structure of learning rather than appended to existing content (Prihatiningtyas et al., 2025; Sahil et al., 2024; Sundari & Nasution, 2024; Wahyuni & Silfianah, 2024).

The same principle applies to research. An Islamic university should not abandon empirical methods, scientific rigor, or disciplinary specialization. Rather, methodological choices should correspond to the nature of the research object while remaining connected to ethical and epistemological reflection. The integration of revealed knowledge, rational inquiry, observation, and disciplined interpretation can provide a broader framework for producing knowledge. Recent studies on Islamic science integration demonstrate that the relationship between religious and scientific knowledge can be developed through interdisciplinary approaches without eliminating scientific procedures or academic rigor (Adiyono et al., 2024; Hasan, 2023; Sahil et al., 2024). The key distinction is therefore between methodological diversity and epistemological fragmentation. Different methods may legitimately coexist, but their purposes and limitations should be critically understood.

Academic culture constitutes another important institutional dimension. If the university is understood as an institution of *ta’dīb*, intellectual honesty, humility, responsibility, scholarly discipline, and service should become part of academic life. This requires more than character education as a separate course. It requires alignment among leadership, curriculum management, assessment, research ethics, academic relationships, and graduate outcomes. Research on curriculum management indicates that educational quality depends on systematic planning, implementation, evaluation, and institutional coordination (Ro, 2024; Zidan & Qamariah, 2023). Similarly, studies of curriculum transformation in Islamic educational settings show that epistemological orientation must be supported by institutional management if it is to produce meaningful educational change (Junaedi et al., 2025). Thus, *ta’dīb* should be understood not only as an individual educational ideal but also as an institutional principle.

The findings also provide a response to the common concern that a hierarchical conception of knowledge may restrict academic freedom or subordinate empirical inquiry to predetermined religious conclusions. Such a concern can arise when epistemological hierarchy is interpreted as institutional censorship. However, the framework developed in this study does not require the rejection of critical reasoning,

scientific investigation, or intellectual disagreement. Instead, it emphasizes the recognition that different forms of knowledge have different objects, methods, purposes, and limitations. Interdisciplinary research should therefore involve critical engagement rather than forced uniformity. Contemporary scholarship on Islamic worldview and science-religion integration demonstrates that Islamic educational institutions can engage with scientific knowledge while maintaining their distinctive philosophical orientation (Amet, 2023; Azizah, 2026; Rahmawati & Al-Rashid, 2025). The objective is consequently not intellectual isolation but epistemological responsibility.

Another important implication concerns the relationship between Islamic higher education and contemporary demands for employability, technological competence, internationalization, and academic productivity. These objectives remain relevant because universities operate within complex social and economic environments. However, they should not become the ultimate determinants of educational purpose. The literature on curriculum transformation and interdisciplinary education suggests that Islamic institutions can respond to contemporary educational demands while maintaining an orientation toward values, knowledge integration, and human formation (Adiyono et al., 2024; Junaedi et al., 2025). From the perspective of *ta'dīb*, professional excellence is not opposed to moral and spiritual development. Rather, professional expertise becomes more meaningful when it is directed toward justice, public benefit, sustainability, and responsible service.

Overall, the synthesis demonstrates that the reformulation of the Islamic university requires a shift from superficial integration toward epistemological and institutional integration. The historical development of Islamic educational institutions illustrates that learning, worship, ethics, and social responsibility were conceptually interconnected. Contemporary research confirms a continuing movement toward integrating Islamic values with science, technology, curriculum, and interdisciplinary learning, but also reveals the need for stronger conceptual foundations (Adiyono et al., 2024; Antika & Muyassaroh, 2025; Prihatiningtyas et al., 2025). The present synthesis extends these discussions by positioning *adab* as an analytical principle for evaluating the ordering of knowledge and *ta'dīb* as an institutional framework for reconstructing educational purpose. Accordingly, an Islamic university should function not merely as a provider of professional qualifications but as an institution that organizes knowledge within a coherent Islamic worldview and forms graduates who are intellectually capable, morally responsible, socially beneficial, and oriented toward civilizational development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the university in Islamic educational thought is fundamentally an institution for organizing knowledge and forming human beings within a coherent tawhīdic worldview. The key insight is that the crisis of the modern university involves not only disciplinary fragmentation but also the loss of *adab*, which disrupts the proper ordering of knowledge, authority, and educational purposes. The study contributes conceptually by connecting the historical development of Islamic educational institutions with *ta'dīb* as a framework for curriculum, research, academic culture, and graduate formation. Its main limitation is its reliance on library sources without empirical validation across contemporary Islamic universities. Future research should therefore operationalize the proposed framework and examine it through comparative empirical studies of curricula, research governance, academic culture, and graduate outcomes.

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