



INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMANITIES THROUGH ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY: RETHINKING JAPANESE CURRICULUM REFORM

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reconstruct and reinterpret the reform of the interdisciplinary humanities curriculum in Japan through the perspective of Islamic thought and science. Rather than positioning Japanese educational reform as a secular model that stands alone, this study places it as a comparative mirror to reexamine the principles of Islamic epistemology, particularly the concepts of the unity of knowledge (*tawḥīd al-‘ilm*), the integration of revelation and reason (*naql-‘aql*), and the orientation of education based on *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*. This study uses a qualitative-analytical and comparative approach by analysing curriculum documents, previous empirical findings, and classical and contemporary Islamic thought. The results of the analysis show that the reform of the Japanese humanities curriculum implicitly reflects values that are in line with the Islamic intellectual tradition, such as the rejection of the fragmentation of knowledge, the affirmation of the ethical dimension in learning, the strengthening of cultural-global awareness, and transformative learning that shapes the perspectives and social responsibilities of students. These findings confirm that the integration of the humanities is not a foreign concept in Islam, but rather has strong epistemological roots in the Islamic scientific tradition

Keyword: *Islamic Epistemology, Interdisciplinary Humanities, Curriculum*



A. Introduction

In the last two decades, global education has undergone a significant paradigm shift, from a knowledge-based approach to the development of critical thinking skills, public ethics, and global awareness (Brachuli, 2024; Lukianova & Symela, 2025). In various parts of the world, education systems are required not only to produce technically competent individuals, but also individuals who are able to understand social complexities, cultural diversity, and moral challenges that arise alongside globalisation, digitalisation, and sustainability crises (Hajebi & Bälter, 2024; Müller et al., 2025; Rudenko et al., 2025). In this context, strengthening humanities education has regained serious attention as the foundation for shaping reflective, empathetic, and responsible global citizens (Figuerola & Leyton, 2022; Giménez, 2025). A number of recent studies show that integrating the humanities plays an important role in improving psychosocial well-being, decision-making quality, and capacity for cross-cultural dialogue in an increasingly polarised world (Nakamura et al., 2025; Westgate & Oishi, 2022; Zhang & Noels, 2024).

This issue becomes even more relevant when education is no longer understood as a value-neutral space, but rather as an arena for shaping perspectives, ethical orientations, and social responsibility. In various international discourses, education is positioned as a strategic instrument to bridge the tension between scientific and technological progress and the need for meaning, morality, and the sustainability of civilisation (Biesta, 2015; Jia et al., 2023; Laidlaw, 2025; Pritchard, 2018). Therefore, curriculum reform that emphasises the integration of knowledge, ethics, and global awareness cannot be separated from the broader debate on the relationship between science, values, and humanitarian goals.

In the field of Islamic education and contemporary Islamic thought, this debate has found strong resonance. Islamic education scholars generally highlight the problem of fragmentation of knowledge inherited from the modern education system, in which religious sciences are sharply separated from social sciences and humanities (Halstead, 2004; Kosim et al., 2020; Nasr, 2002). The main focus of research in this field is the reconstruction of the Islamic education curriculum, the integration of Islamic values in modern learning, and the strengthening of students' character and morality (Sahin, 2017). However, most of these studies still depart from the internal context of the Muslim world, placing Western or non-Islamic education primarily as an object of criticism, rather than as a reflective mirror for epistemological enrichment.

A number of previous studies can be grouped into several main clusters. First, studies that discuss the integration of science in Islamic education conceptually, emphasising the principle of unity of knowledge (*tawhīd al-ʿilm*) and the relationship between revelation (*naql*) and reason (*ʿaql*) (Hidayatullah & Arif,

2022; Nasr, 2002). Second, research focusing on the reform of the Islamic education curriculum in response to modernity, globalisation, and contemporary challenges, including the issues of pluralism and global citizenship (Hefner, 2023; Sahin, 2017). Third, studies on humanities and interdisciplinary education in non-Islamic contexts, which emphasise the development of critical thinking, empathy, and cultural competence (Ho et al., 2023; Solodikhina & Odintsova, 2025). Although these three clusters developed in parallel, systematic conceptual dialogue between humanities reform in non-Islamic contexts and Islamic epistemology remains relatively limited.

However, empirical and analytical research that explicitly reinterprets modern non-Islamic curriculum reform through the lens of Islamic epistemology remains very rare. Existing studies tend to stop at the normative or apologetic level, without examining how contemporary educational practices beyond the Islamic world can be critically and productively reinterpreted to advance Islamic thought. In addition, few studies combine interdisciplinary analysis of humanities education with the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* as an ethical framework and educational goal (Ahmad et al., 2020; Akmansyah et al., 2025; Kosasih et al., 2025).

As a result, the epistemological potential of Islam to contribute to the global discourse on humanities education and knowledge integration has not been fully explored. Based on this gap, this article aims to reinterpret the reform of the interdisciplinary humanities curriculum in Japan through the perspective of Islamic thought and science.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the question: how can the principles of science integration, ethics, and transformative learning in Japanese curriculum reform be understood and enriched through Islamic epistemology? To answer this question, the study uses a qualitative-analytical and comparative approach by analysing curriculum documents, previous empirical findings, and key literature on classical and contemporary Islamic thought.

This study offers several important contributions. Theoretically, this study expands the discourse of contemporary Islamic thought by presenting a conceptual dialogue between modern educational reform and Islamic epistemology, particularly the concepts of the unity of knowledge and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. Empirically and conceptually, this study shows that the practice of humanities education in a non-Islamic context can be a valid and productive source of reflection for the development of Islamic education, without falling into epistemic imitation. Methodologically, this article introduces a reinterpreted-comparative approach that places Islam as an epistemological subject, not merely an object of comparison. Thus, this research contributes to strengthening the position of Islamic thought in the global discourse on education, humanities, and science.

This study uses a qualitative-analytical approach with a comparative-reflective design rooted in the tradition of Islamic thought and humanities studies

(Bearman, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This approach was chosen because the study's main objective was not to test causal relationships or to measure the effectiveness of policies statistically, but rather to interpret, reconstruct, and reinterpret contemporary educational phenomena through an Islamic epistemological framework. The reform of the interdisciplinary humanities curriculum in Japan is treated as a *case of reflection*, namely an empirical case analysed conceptually to re-examine the principles of integrating science, ethics, and transformative learning. The analysis was conducted by combining a critical reading of education policy documents, curriculum reports, and empirical findings from previous validated studies, then linking them to classical and contemporary Islamic thought, particularly related to the concepts of the unity of knowledge (*tawhīd al-ʿilm*), the relationship between *naql*–*ʿaql*, and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*.

The data analysis procedure was carried out in three main stages. First, the descriptive interpretation stage, which identified the key principles in the Japanese humanities curriculum reform related to disciplinary integration, ethical dimensions, and learning orientation. Second, the comparative-epistemological analysis stage, in which these principles are re-examined through the lens of Islamic epistemology to find common ground, tensions, and potential for conceptual enrichment. Third, the reflective synthesis stage, which formulates an integrative conceptual framework that places Islamic thought as an epistemological subject, not merely an object of comparison (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2025; Yusof & Mohamed, 2025). The academic validity of the research is maintained through theoretical consistency, the use of reputable primary and secondary sources, and transparency in analytical argumentation.

B. Integration of Knowledge as the Epistemic Foundation of Humanities Education

The main findings of this study show that the reform of the humanities curriculum in Japan positions interdisciplinary integration as the epistemic foundation of learning, rather than merely a pedagogical strategy. This integration is evident not only in the combination of history, geography, civics, and ethics into a thematic framework but also in a shift in the curriculum's approach that rejects the fragmentation of knowledge and encourages a holistic understanding of social reality.

The integration of knowledge is positioned as a prerequisite for equipping students to face the complexities of a global society characterised by identity crises, technological disruption, and sustainability challenges. Empirical evidence for these findings was obtained from an analysis of Japanese national curriculum documents, reports on the implementation of humanities education, and a synthesis of previous research examining interdisciplinary practices in modern education.

The curriculum documents show that learning outcomes are formulated around cross-disciplinary social-humanitarian themes, such as human-environment relations, global social dynamics, and civic responsibility, and are studied through inquiry- and project-based learning approaches.

Research by Repko and Szostak (2020) confirms that this type of interdisciplinary model improves students' ability to integrate concepts, analyse complex issues, and avoid disciplinary reductionism (Rashid, 2024; Zhu et al., 2025). An OECD study (2018) also reports that integrated curricula correlate with increased systemic understanding and reflective capacity in students in reading global issues (Bawa et al., 2025; Piazza et al., 2025; Rennie, 2022).

Internally, these findings indicate an epistemic shift from a segmented knowledge paradigm to a relational knowledge paradigm. Knowledge is no longer understood as a collection of stand-alone facts, but as a network of interconnected, contextually meaningful elements. The internal implication is a shift in students' roles from recipients of information to subjects who actively construct cross-perspective understanding. The integration of knowledge thus functions as a pedagogical and epistemological mechanism that shapes a holistic view of social reality.

From a theoretical point of view, this phenomenon can be explained by critiquing modern epistemology, which separates knowledge into autonomous disciplines, as Klein (2017) and Edgar (2001) argue. This fragmentation is considered no longer adequate to answer the complex problems of the 21st century. Within the framework of Islamic thought, this criticism resonates strongly with the concept of *tawḥīd al-ʿilm*, which views knowledge as a unity originating in divine truth and directed toward human welfare (Al-Attas, 2023; Nasr, 2003). The integration of knowledge in the Islamic perspective is not merely a combination of disciplines, but a unification of epistemic, ethical, and ultimate goals of knowledge.

Compared with previous research, these findings show both similarities and significant differences. A number of studies in Islamic education emphasise the importance of integrating religious and general knowledge, but most remain at the normative and conceptual levels, without engaging in empirical dialogue with global educational practices (Halstead, 2004; Sahin, 2017). Conversely, studies on interdisciplinary education in Western and East Asian contexts tend to ignore the metaphysical and transcendent ethical dimensions, treating knowledge integration solely as a pragmatic response to social complexity (Repko & Szostak, 2020). This study lies between these two currents by combining empirical readings and Islamic epistemological reflections.

The micro contribution of this theme lies in articulating the integration of knowledge as an epistemic meeting point between modern educational practices and the Islamic scientific tradition.

This article not only shows that integrating knowledge is a global necessity but also asserts that Islamic epistemology has the conceptual capacity to provide a deeper philosophical and ethical foundation for this practice. Thus, the integration of knowledge is not understood as a pragmatic adaptation, but as an expression of a holistic worldview.

To clarify the conceptual novelty offered, Table 1 below presents a comparative synthesis of the approach to integrating knowledge in modern curricula and the perspective of Islamic epistemology.

Aspect	Modern Humanities Curriculum	Islamic Epistemology	Novelty of This Study
Basis of Integration	Social complexity	Unity of knowledge (<i>tawhīd al-‘ilm</i>)	Epistemic dialogue across traditions
Orientation	Cognitive–pragmatic	Ethical–teleological	Integration of values and purposes
Ultimate Goal	Problem-solving	Human well-being (<i>maṣlaḥah</i>)	Reinterpretation of educational aims

Table 1. Comparison of Knowledge Integration in the Curriculum

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study reinforces the argument that Islamic epistemology is relevant for reading and critiquing global educational practices. In practice, these findings provide a conceptual basis for developing an Islamic education curriculum that is more integrative, contextual, and responsive to global challenges, without losing its orientation towards values and spirituality.

C. The Ethical Dimension and the Formation of Moral Consciousness in Humanities Education

The results and discussion sections can be written in more than one chapter, depending on the number of research objectives the author wants to explain.

The second finding of this study shows that the reform of the humanities curriculum in Japan consciously places the ethical dimension and the formation of moral consciousness at the core of the learning process, rather than as an additional element or peripheral subject. Ethics education is integrated into humanities learning through themes of social, civic, and humanitarian issues, so that moral values are studied contextually and reflectively in relation to the realities of everyday life. These findings indicate an institutional awareness that education cannot be separated from the moral responsibility of shaping ethical and civilised citizens.

Empirical evidence for these findings can be seen in analyses of curriculum documents and implementation reports, which show that issues such as social justice, collective responsibility, cross-cultural empathy, and environmental sustainability are the main focus of learning. Dialogical approaches, case studies, and critical reflection are used to encourage students to assess moral issues rationally and empathetically.

Biesta's (2015) study confirms that an ethical orientation in modern education is increasingly seen as an urgent need amid a crisis of values and rising individualism. The OECD report (2018) also shows that the integration of ethics education into the curriculum contributes to an increase in students' social awareness and civic responsibility.

Internally, these findings signify a shift in the understanding of education's purpose from mere academic achievement to the formation of moral orientation and ethical awareness. Education is no longer positioned as a process of value-neutral knowledge transfer, but rather as a space for character building and normative orientation of students. The internal implication is a change in the indicators of educational success, from mere cognitive mastery to a balance between knowledge, attitude, and moral responsibility.

This phenomenon can be explained theoretically by critiquing the old modern educational paradigm, which disregarded the ethical dimension in favour of objectivity and efficiency. Biesta (2015) refers to this condition as the *learnification* of education, in which education is reduced to a purely technical learning process devoid of any value orientation. From an Islamic perspective, education has always been normative-ethical and oriented towards achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, particularly the protection of reason (*ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), and human dignity (*ḥifẓ al-karāmah*) (Auda, 2008; Kamali, 2012). Thus, the integration of ethics into the modern humanities curriculum can be interpreted as a return to awareness of the normative dimension of education, which has long been the foundation of the Islamic scientific tradition.

When compared with previous research, these findings reveal interesting similarities and differences. Studies in Islamic education consistently emphasise the importance of character building as the main goal of education, but often stop at the ideal and normative level without showing how ethical values are operationalised in modern curricula (Halstead, 2004; Sahin, 2017; Taufikin, Supa'At, et al., 2024).

Conversely, modern educational research in the West and East Asia tends to examine ethical education within the framework of citizenship or social competence, with limited involvement in the transcendent dimension (OECD, 2018). This article bridges these two tendencies by showing that ethical education can be analysed empirically and deepened epistemologically through an Islamic framework.

The micro contribution of this theme lies in the reinterpretation of ethics education as a meeting point between modern humanities education practices and the concept of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. This study adds conceptual strength by showing that ethics education not only shapes socially compliant citizens but also moral human beings with long-term value orientations. Thus, the ethical dimension is understood not merely as curriculum content, but as an epistemic orientation of education. To emphasise the novelty of this approach, Table 2 below summarises the differences in the orientation of ethics education in existing literature and the contribution of this study.

Aspect	Modern Ethical Education	Islamic Ethical Education	Novelty of This Study
Value Basis	Social–civic	Transcendent–ethical	Integration of social and spiritual values
Aim	Compliance and empathy	<i>Maṣlaḥah</i> and moral character (<i>akhlāq</i>)	Reinterpretation of ethical aims
Approach	Contextual–pragmatic	Normative–theological	Empirical–epistemological synthesis

Table 2. Educational Orientation

The implications of these findings are broad. Theoretically, this study reinforces the argument that ethics education is at the heart of humanities education and is grounded in Islamic epistemology. In practice, these findings provide direction for developing Islamic education curricula that can integrate ethical values contextually without losing their normative and spiritual depth.

D. Transformative Learning and Changes in Student Awareness

The third finding of this study shows that humanities curriculum reform in Japan does not stop at the integration of knowledge and internalisation of ethical values, but also systematically encourages transformative learning that changes students' perspectives, self-awareness, and orientation toward social reality.

Learning is presented as a reflective process that enables students to reconstruct their initial understanding, review basic assumptions, and develop a new awareness that is more critical, empathetic, and responsible. Thus, education not only produces individuals who are knowledgeable and ethical, but also individuals who experience a profound change in consciousness.

Empirical evidence for these findings can be seen in learning designs that emphasise critical reflection, cross-perspective dialogue, and analysis of complex global issues. Curriculum documents include social case studies, moral dilemma-

based discussions, and collaborative projects that require students to reflect on their position in society.

Studies by Mezirow and Taylor (2017) show that this reflective practice is a key feature of transformative learning, with the potential to change learners' frames of reference (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Jones, 2020). Recent studies also confirm that transformative learning contributes to increased critical awareness, social empathy, and students' reflective abilities in the context of humanities education (Herman, 2024; Jones, 2020; Taufikin, Supa'At, et al., 2024).

Internally, these findings indicate that learning is no longer understood as the accumulation of knowledge or the formation of normative attitudes alone, but as a process of continuous change in consciousness. Students play an active role as subjects of reflection, interpreting their own learning experiences in leading a shift from instructional to transformative learning. The internal implication is a shift in the pedagogical relationship between teachers and students toward a dialogical one, placing experience and reflection as the main sources of learning.

This phenomenon of transformative learning can be explained theoretically through transformative learning theory, which emphasises the role of critical reflection in changing an individual's thinking framework (Jones, 2020). However, this theory is often criticised for focusing too much on the cognitive and rational dimensions. In the Islamic perspective, consciousness change involves not only the cognitive dimension but also the moral and spiritual dimensions, integrated in the concept of tazkiyah al-nafs. Education is understood as a process of purifying and shaping human consciousness as a whole, which includes the mind, heart, and actions (Bolandhematan, 2019; Nasr, 2003). Thus, transformative learning in the modern humanities curriculum can be reinterpreted as a form of educational praxis that approximates the concept of tazkiyah in Islam.

Compared with previous research, these findings reveal a significant gap. Studies on transformative learning in modern education generally emphasise changes in cognitive and social perspectives, but rarely relate them to deeper spiritual dimensions or moral consciousness (Herman, 2024; Taufikin, Supa'at, et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2017).

Conversely, Islamic education research often discusses tazkiyah al-nafs as an educational goal, but it is rarely articulated within the framework of contemporary learning theory. This article fills that gap by bringing together two scientific traditions that have been running parallel without adequate dialogue.

The micro contribution of this theme lies in conceptualising transformative learning as a space for dialogue between modern learning theory and the concept of tazkiyah al-nafs in Islam. This article adds a new analytical dimension by showing that changes in learners' consciousness can be better understood when cognitive, ethical, and spiritual dimensions are analysed in an integrated manner.

Thus, transformative learning is not reduced to a pedagogical technique, but is understood as a process of holistic human formation. To emphasise the novelty of the construction, the following Table 3 presents a comparison between transformative learning in modern literature and the Islamic perspective.

Aspect	Modern Transformative Learning	Islamic Perspective	Novelty of This Study
Focus of Change	Frames of reference	Holistic self-awareness	Integration of cognitive, ethical, and spiritual dimensions
Core Dimension	Critical reflection	<i>Tazkiyah al-nafs</i>	Reinterpretation of transformative learning theory
Ultimate Goal	Critical consciousness	Cultivated human being (<i>insān adabī</i>)	Conceptualization of the whole person

Table 3. Comparison of Learning Transformation

The implications of these findings are conceptual and practical. Conceptually, this study expands the theory of transformative learning by incorporating the spiritual dimension, which has been marginalised. In practice, these findings provide a basis for developing Islamic and humanities education practices that emphasise reflection, dialogue, and the formation of holistic awareness as the main objectives of learning.

The main novelty of this research lies in its attempt to position Islamic epistemology not as an object of normative comparison but as a reflective subject in the reading and interpretation of contemporary humanities education practices. Unlike previous studies, which generally separate modern educational studies and Islamic thought discourse, this study shows that the integration of science, ethical education, and transformative learning that has developed in modern curriculum reform can be reinterpreted epistemologically through the concepts of *tawhīd al-ilm*, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, and *tazkiyah al-nafs*.

Using a comparative, reflective, qualitative-analytical approach, this article offers a new conceptual synthesis that bridges two scientific traditions that have run in parallel without in-depth dialogue. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in enriching global humanities education theory through a holistic and ethically oriented Islamic framework of thought; its empirical contribution is manifested in a systematic reading of contemporary curriculum practices as a mirror of epistemic reflection; while its methodological contribution is evident in the use of a case of reflection design that is rarely applied in the study of Islamic

thought. Thus, this study not only broadens the horizon of Islamic education studies but also affirms its relevance in the global scientific discourse on civilised, conscious, and sustainable human education.

E. Conclusion

This study concludes that contemporary reforms in the humanities curriculum, when approached through reflective and critical analysis, open a productive epistemological dialogue with Islamic intellectual traditions. Using a comparative qualitative-analytical framework, the study demonstrates that principles such as knowledge integration, ethical affirmation, and transformative learning are deeply rooted in Islamic concepts including *tawḥīd al-‘ilm*, *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, and *tazkiyah al-naḥs*. By framing modern educational practices as objects of reflection rather than opposition, the article rejects the dichotomy between “Islamic” and “modern” education and proposes a mutually enriching relationship within a shared scientific and ethical horizon. In doing so, it positions Islamic epistemology as an adaptive and reflective framework capable of responding to modern challenges such as epistemic fragmentation and ethical decline.

This study contributes an integrative conceptual framework that elevates Islamic thought from a purely normative stance to a critical participant in global educational discourse. Practically, the findings suggest that curricula grounded in integrated knowledge, ethical internalisation, and transformative learning can foster not only academic excellence but also social responsibility and moral maturity. While the study is limited by its conceptual nature and lack of empirical data, it opens avenues for future research to test this framework across diverse Islamic educational settings and cultural contexts. Such efforts are expected to strengthen the role of Islamic thought in shaping a holistic, ethical, and sustainable vision of education worldwide.

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