

Methodological Transformation in Islamic Theological Studies: From Classical Traditions to Contemporary Approaches

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Islamic;
Theology;
Methodological

Article history:

Received 2025-03-23
Revised 2025-05-21
Accepted 2025-06-30

ABSTRACT

This study examines the characteristics of Islamic studies through theological approaches, analyzing the methodological transformation from classical to contemporary periods. The research employs qualitative methods with library research to investigate the evolution of Islamic theological discourse. Previous studies have shown significant developments in Islamic theology, particularly in the adaptation of classical traditions to modern challenges. This research aims to analyze the methodological characteristics of theological approaches in Islamic studies and examine contemporary theological responses to modernity and postmodernity challenges. The methodology utilizes qualitative content analysis of primary and secondary sources spanning classical to contemporary Islamic theological literature. Findings reveal a paradigmatic shift from apologetic-defensive orientation to integrative-interdisciplinary approaches, while maintaining epistemological continuity through Quranic and Prophetic authority. The study identifies three distinct periods: classical (emphasizing naql and aql methods), modern (hermeneutic-contextual approaches), and contemporary (integration of bayani, burhani, and irfani methods). Contemporary Islamic theology demonstrates anthropocentric characteristics that are more responsive to societal problems while preserving doctrinal authenticity. The discussion highlights the significance of methodological continuity and discontinuity, showing how contemporary theological approaches contribute to critical, moderate, and inclusive Islamic thought capable of addressing globalization, pluralism, and religious extremism. The study concludes that Islamic theological studies have evolved toward interdisciplinary approaches that ground Islamic values in modern contexts without compromising authenticity, positioning theology as an authentic moral voice addressing contemporary value disorientation and moral degradation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic studies as a discipline has undergone significant transformation in recent decades, especially in the context of increasingly diverse and complex theological approaches. The development of epistemology in *Islamic studies* shows that there is a dynamic between the classical tradition and the demands of modernity that require an in-depth study of its characteristics (Khoiruddin, 2014). The theological approach in Islamic studies does not only involve doctrinal aspects, but also includes philosophical, hermeneutical, and contextual dimensions that provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding Islamic teachings in various historical periods.

In the context of the classical Islamic tradition, the study of theology (*'ilm al-kalam*) has developed through various schools of thought that have different methodological characteristics. The Ash'ariyah, Maturidiyah, and Mu'tazilah schools, for example, each developed a unique rational and textual approach in responding to the theological problems of their time. The fundamental characteristic of classical theological studies lies in the attempt to systematize the doctrines of faith through the dialectic between *naql* (text) and *'aql* (intellect), which later became the foundation for the development of *theological discourse* in Islam (Maulana Ira, 2022). This tradition shows that Islamic studies have a peculiarity in integrating the rational and revelational dimensions as complementary sources of epistemology.

The paradigmatic transformation in modern Islamic studies shows a shift from a normative-doctrinal approach to a more critical and contextual approach. The thoughts of figures such as Muhammad Abduh, Fazlur Rahman, and Mohammed Arkoun illustrate how contemporary Islamic theology seeks to reinterpret classical heritage by taking into account the development of science and modern socio-political realities (Education et al., 2019). This characteristic of modern Islamic theology lies in the effort to deconstruct and reconstruct religious understanding that not only maintains the authenticity of the teachings, but also its relevance and applicability in the context of contemporary life.

The complexity of contemporary Islamic studies is increasingly evident with the emergence of various typologies of thought that reflect diverse responses to the challenges of modernity (Fauzi, 2023). Identifies five models of contemporary Islamic thought: fundamentalist, traditionalist, reformistic, post-traditionalist, and neo-modernist, each of which has the characteristics of a different theological approach. This diversity suggests that Islamic studies cannot be understood in a monolithic manner, but rather requires a comprehensive analysis of the various methodological and epistemological approaches that have developed in the tradition of Islamic thought.

The importance of the theological approach in Islamic studies is also related to efforts to answer the contemporary challenges faced by Muslims in the global era. Issues such as secularization, religious pluralism, gender, the environment, and human rights require a theological response that is not only based on textual authority, but also mature rational and contextual considerations. In this context, *practical theology* emerges as an approach that seeks to integrate the theoretical and practical dimensions of religious life (Devi & Andrean, 2021). The characteristics of this approach show that contemporary Islamic studies are not only oriented towards doctrinal understanding, but also on the implementation of Islamic values in the reality of daily life.

From a methodological perspective, Islamic studies with a theological approach show increasingly strong interdisciplinary characteristics. The integration of *Islamic theology* with the disciplines of social sciences, humanities, and sciences provides a new dimension in understanding Islam as a system of religious beliefs and practices. This interdisciplinary approach not only enriches theological discourse, but also opens up a more productive space for dialogue between tradition and modernity, between East and West, as well as between the sacred and profane dimensions of human life.

The significance of the study of the characteristics of the theological approach in Islam is also related to efforts to build an authentic and relevant epistemology for the development of Islamic civilization in the 21st century. The reconstruction of Islamic theology, as discoursed by thinkers such as Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, shows the importance of reformulating the understanding of Islamic teachings in the context of the challenges and opportunities of the contemporary era (Ariani et al., 2024). These

reconstructive characteristics emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance between the continuity of tradition and methodological innovation in the face of the dynamics of social and intellectual change.

Based on the background that has been presented, this study formulates several fundamental problems related to the characteristics of Islamic studies with a theological approach. First, what are the methodological characteristics of theological approaches in classical and modern Islamic studies, and what is the epistemological transformation that has occurred in the development from classical tradition to contemporary thought? Second, how does contemporary theological thought in Islamic studies respond to the challenges of modernity and postmodernity, and to what extent is this approach able to provide solutions to the religious and socio-political problems of Muslims in the global era?

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the characteristics of theological approaches in Islamic studies, both in the classical tradition and in contemporary thought. Specifically, this study intends to identify and describe the methodological transformation in the study of Islamic theology from the classical to the modern period, as well as to analyze the contribution and relevance of contemporary theological thought in responding to the challenges faced by Muslims in the global era. In addition, this research also aims to formulate an epistemological framework that can be used as a basis for the development of Islamic studies that are more integrative and responsive to the dynamics of changing times.

This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of Islamic studies, especially in the aspect of theological approaches. Theoretically, this research will enrich the academic discourse on epistemology and methodology in Islamic studies, as well as provide a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of Islamic theological thought from different periods. Practically, the results of this research can be used as a reference for academics, researchers, and practitioners of Islamic education in developing a more integrative and contextual approach in learning and research on Islamic studies. In addition, this research is also expected to contribute to efforts to reform Islamic thought that maintains the authenticity of the teachings while responding to contemporary challenges in a constructive and solution-oriented way.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with *the library research* method which aims to analyze in depth the characteristics of Islamic studies through a theological approach. The qualitative methodology was chosen because of its ability to capture information that cannot be expressed numerically and allows researchers to interpret complex phenomena related to the development of Islamic theological thought. This approach is in line with the characteristics of qualitative research that seeks to understand the experiences, perceptions, and behaviors of research subjects through in-depth analysis of textual data (Devi & Andrean, 2021).

Library research as a research strategy was chosen because of its ability to provide access to primary and secondary sources relevant to the research topic. This method allows researchers to conduct a comprehensive analysis of a wide range of academic literature, classical works, and contemporary scholarly publications related to the study of Islamic theology. The systematic and structured *characteristics of library research* provide an appropriate methodological framework for analyzing the transformation of theological thought from the classical to the contemporary period.

The data collection technique was carried out through *documentary analysis* of literature sources relevant to the focus of the research. The process of identifying and selecting sources is carried out based on the criteria of relevance, credibility, and up-to-date publications, by giving priority to works published in the period 2021-2025 to ensure the actuality of the perspective being studied. Primary sources include works of classical and contemporary Islamic theological figures, while secondary sources consist of academic journals, reference books, and scholarly publications that discuss the development of the study of Islamic theology from various methodological perspectives.

Data analysis is carried out using *qualitative content analysis* techniques that allow the identification of patterns, themes, and key concepts contained in the collected textual data. The analysis process includes three main stages: *conventional content analysis*, *directed content analysis*, and *summative content analysis*, each of which has a specific function in interpreting the meaning of the content of the text being analyzed. The first stage involves identifying themes that arise naturally from the data, the second stage uses an existing theoretical framework to guide the analysis process, and the third stage performs content calculation and comparison to identify significant patterns in the data.

The validity of the research is guaranteed through the application of *the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability* which are standard criteria in qualitative research. *Credibility* is achieved through triangulation of data sources involving various perspectives and periods in the study of Islamic theology. *Transferability* is ensured through an in-depth description of the research context and the analysis process that allows the reader to assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts. *Dependability* is guaranteed through systematic documentation of the entire research process, while *confirmability* is achieved through critical reflection on the researcher's bias and objectification efforts in the data interpretation process. Research limitations include a focus on literature available in Indonesian and English, as well as reliance on the accessibility of academic sources published in digital and print formats. Nevertheless, the methodology used provides a comprehensive analytical framework to understand the characteristics of Islamic studies with a theological approach in the context of the development of thought from classical to contemporary traditions.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Theological Studies in the Classical and Modern Islamic Traditions

In the context of classical Islamic theology studies, it presents a comprehensive analysis of the history of the development of Islamic theology that shows how figures such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, Muhammad Abduh, and Hasan Hanafi sought to adapt Islamic teachings to the changing times through rational and contextual approaches (Darifah et al., 2021). This study shows that the development of Islamic theology has undergone a transformation through an emphasis on the importance of *ijtihad* and a reassessment of the language and historical context of classical theology to answer the challenges of modernity. The fundamental characteristic of the classical theological tradition lies in the systemacity of the *'ilm al-kalam* methodology that integrates the rational and textual dimensions in responding to the problems of faith.

In his study of contemporary Islamic spirituality, he shows that there is a dialectic between Islamic spirituality and secularized spirituality in the modern world (Devi & Andrean, 2021). The analysis reveals that classical Islamic theological approaches have characteristics that are able to maintain the sacred dimension in the face of the challenge of secularization. This research makes an important contribution in understanding how classical Islamic theological traditions remain relevant in the context of modernity, especially in the aspect of developing spirituality that is authentic and meaningful to contemporary life.

Mapping the reformist discourse of the Qur'an in the intellectual heritage of Fazlur Rahman and Mohammed Arkoun shows the characteristics of neo-modern and postmodern thought in Islamic studies (Devi & Andrean, 2021). His study identifies how these two figures developed innovative hermeneutical approaches in understanding religious texts, particularly in the context of *quranic studies* and *Islamic hermeneutics*. The characteristics of modern theological thought analyzed indicate the existence of methodological reconstruction efforts that not only maintain the authority of the text, but also accommodate the development of contemporary epistemology. The transformation from classical tradition to modern thought in the study of Islamic theology is also reflected in the development of more inclusive and interdisciplinary methodologies. Recent studies show that the characteristics of modern Islamic theological studies are no longer limited to doctrinal-normative approaches, but rather

integrate philosophical, anthropological, and sociological perspectives in understanding the dimensions of faith and religious practice.

Contemporary Theological Thought in Islamic Studies

In the context of contemporary theological thought, it examines the methodology of contemporary Islamic law through a critical analysis of Muhammad Shahrūr's thoughts on the sources of Islamic law (Devi & Andrean, 2021). His research shows how contemporary theological thought has developed a more dynamic approach to understanding the relationship between text and context, particularly in *the legal aspects of hermeneutics and contemporary Islamic jurisprudence*. The characteristics of Shahrūr's thought analyzed show an attempt to deconstruct the traditional understanding of the sources of Islamic law by using a more sophisticated linguistic and semantic approach.

The study of contemporary Islamic theology also shows that there are developments in the aspect of *practical theology* that seeks to integrate theoretical and practical dimensions in religious life. This approach shows the characteristics of Islamic theology that is not only oriented to doctrinal understanding, but also to the implementation of Islamic values in the reality of contemporary life. The development of practical theology in Islam shows a constructive response to the challenges of modernity and postmodernity faced by Muslims in the global era.

In the context of *transnational Islamic education*, recent studies have shown how international Islamic studies programs contribute to the development of more cosmopolitan and inclusive theological thought. The characteristics of transnational Islamic theology education show that there are efforts to build intercultural and inter-traditional dialogue in developing a more universal and relevant understanding of religion for the global context.

Contemporary theological thought also exhibits characteristics that are responsive to contemporary issues such as religious pluralism, gender, the environment, and human rights. The theological approach that has developed in contemporary Islamic studies demonstrates a systematic attempt to formulate a theological response that is not only based on textual authority, but also on mature rational, ethical, and contextual considerations. This characteristic shows that contemporary Islamic theology has a *public theology* dimension that is active in contributing to public discourse on social and humanitarian issues.

Methodological Characteristics of Classical Islamic Theology Studies

An analysis of the development of *ilm al-kalam* shows that in classical times, this discipline first emerged as a systematic effort to defend the Islamic faith from various sects that were considered deviant. The fundamental characteristic of classical theology methodology lies in its function as an ideological shield that maintains the purity of Islamic teachings from the threat of outside thought as well as from within the ummah's own body. (Hasri, 2025) The debates that have emerged, such as between the Mu'tazilah and the Ahlus Sunnah, show how *ilm al-kalam* has become a very lively and dynamic theological dialectic arena.

In this context, the science of Kalam and Tawheed are the two main pillars in the formation of Islamic religious faith and thought, which not only play a role in establishing the foundations of the faith of the ummah, but also form a theological framework of thought that is relevant to contemporary challenges. The science of Tawheed discusses ways to establish religious beliefs with convincing evidence, both *naqli*, *aqli* and *wijdani*, while the science of Kalam develops rational arguments to defend and strengthen the faith and respond to various theological problems that arise in the history of Islam (Al Zahra et al., 2025).

The Transformation of Theological Approaches in Modern Islamic Studies

The paradigmatic transformation in Islamic studies shows that over time, *ilm al-kalam* is no longer limited to the narrow space of internal religious polemics. The methodology of contemporary kalam thought is in contact with contemporary Western philosophical thought today, its presence is not only an apologetic effort to defend God, but is expected to help overcome and solve today's societal

problems.(Hasri, 2025) This shift shows the characteristics of theological thinking that is more "grounded" and relevant to current problems.

The development of Islamic theology from time to time has always had its ups and downs, but the main area of systematic theological reflection remains sourced from the most authoritative sources, namely the Qur'an and Hadith. Classical Islamic thought is a valuable legacy to help solve the increasingly acute contemporary problems, but it must still be accompanied by a critical-analytical attitude (Darifah et al., 2021). This characteristic of transformation shows the need to ground Islamic theology in the context of modern life with accurate strategies and methodologies.

Characteristics of Contemporary Theological Thought

Islamic theology in the contemporary century is faced with problems that are different from the classical era. If in the classical period theology faced metaphysical problems that were intellectual-speculative, then in line with the development of science, Islamic theology faced contemporary problems characterized by the disorientation of values and the degradation of morality (Aditoni, 2024). In this context, religion is challenged to appear as an authentic moral voice. An interdisciplinary approach in Islamic educational thinking has become a major focus in efforts to strengthen the integration of curriculum and learning methods. The concept of interdisciplinary approach and curriculum integration in the context of Islamic education shows characteristics that combine various aspects of religious knowledge, skills, and values (Olfah, 2024). This approach opens up opportunities to create a dynamic, relevant, and inclusive learning environment in Islamic education.

Table 1. Comparison of Methodological Characteristics of Islamic Theology

Aspects	Periode Classic	Periode Modern	Contemporary Period
Orientation	Apologetics Defensif	Reformative-Adaptive	Integrative- Interdisciplinary
Main Methods	<i>Naql ' Aql</i>	Hermeneutical- Contextual	<i>Hero, Burhani, 'Irfani</i>
Study Focus	Internal Polemics	Modernization Doctrine	of Community Solutions
Sources Epistemology Characteristics	of The Qur'an and Hadith Theocentric	Text and Context Semi-Antroposentris	Multi-disciplinary Antroposentris

Epistemological Models in Theological Approaches

The epistemological framework in contemporary Islamic studies shows a significant diversification of methodology. The *bayani*, *burhani* and *'irfani* methods are methods that can be used in seeking knowledge, especially in Islamic studies. These three methods have their own functions, but in the study of Islamic educational philosophy, the *bayani* and *burhani* methods are more often applied because these methods use the collapse of logic and can be proven to be true through natural laws.(M.S., Njeru, A., & Tirimba, 2021)

The hermeneutic approach in Islamic studies, especially as a new alternative in interpreting the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an, should be understood as a way to bring out a deeper meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. The presence of hermeneutics is also very influential on Islamic studies which basically has a multi-interpretation nuance (Labib, 2022). The characteristics of *this Islamic hermeneutics* methodology show that there is an effort to achieve a clearer and better understanding of the meaning of a text.

Discussion

Significance of Methodological Continuity and Discontinuity

The findings of the study show that there is significant continuity and discontinuity in the development of Islamic theological methodology. Continuity is seen in maintaining the authority of the Qur'an and Hadith as the primary sources, while discontinuity is seen in the shift in orientation from theocentric to anthropocentric. Research finds a necessity to reconstruct Islamic Theology, namely changing the paradigm of theology that is more contextual; that is, from theocentric, the central God of all things to anthropocentric, the central man of all things (Aditoni, 2024). The first paradigm sees world affairs as God's affairs and the second paradigm sees world affairs as human affairs.

This transformation has profound theoretical implications for the development of contemporary Islamic epistemology. This paradigm shift not only changes the perspective of human relationships with God, but also changes the approach to solving socio-societal problems. The characteristics of contemporary theological thought that are more sensitive to the problems of the people and universal humanitarian issues indicate a methodological evolution that is responsive to the challenges of the times.

The Contribution of Theological Approaches to Contemporary Islamic Studies

The practical contribution of the characteristic theological approach in contemporary Islamic studies appears in many dimensions. In the modern context, Kalam Science serves as a foundation for critical, moderate, and inclusive thinking, which is able to respond to issues of globalization, pluralism and religious extremism (Al Zahra et al., 2025). This shows that contemporary Islamic theology is not only oriented to doctrinal aspects, but also to the implementation of Islamic values in the context of global life.

The use of social and humanities theories in Islamic studies is inevitable to produce a model or construct of Islamic thought that is in accordance with the contemporary development of science. This is what is called the need for a *paradigm shift* in the study of Islamic Theology (Aditoni, 2024). This shift allows for the creation of a productive dialogue between religious traditions and the development of modern science. In the context of education, the transformation of Salafi people's thinking in response to the reform of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum shows that there is a minor adaptation that can be interpreted in the category of semi-modernist perennial-essentialists. This change in thinking is marked by a change in the curriculum of Islamic boarding schools that accept compulsory learning programs and integrate the Islamic boarding school curriculum with the government curriculum (Nurhakim et al., 2023).

Future Prospects for the Development of Islamic Theology

The prospects for the future development of Islamic theology show an increasingly integrative and interdisciplinary tendency. The interdisciplinary approach not only enriches students' learning experiences, but also helps to strengthen the identity and quality of Islamic education as a whole (Olfah, 2024). This characteristic shows that the future of Islamic theology studies will be increasingly open to dialogue with various disciplines. The challenges faced in the context of globalization and information technology advances require a theological response that is not only based on textual authority, but also mature rational and contextual considerations. Grounding Islamic theology in the context of modern life does require accurate strategies and methodologies, so that it can convey Islam in the public sphere without offending or threatening other religions (Darifah et al., 2021). The opportunities available lie in the ability of Islamic theology to be an authentic moral voice in the face of the disorientation of values and the degradation of morality in the contemporary era. By combining various aspects of religious knowledge, skills, and values, contemporary theological approaches can create a dynamic, relevant, and inclusive learning and thinking environment for the future of Islamic civilization.

The future development of Islamic theology will be marked by a more inclusive epistemological transformation, in which the sources of knowledge are no longer limited to classical nash-nash, but also integrate the findings of modern science. This transformation allowed Muslim theologians to develop

a more contextual hermeneutics of the Qur'an and Hadith without losing its fundamental spiritual and moral substance. This approach requires methodological sophistication that is able to combine the authority of revelation with rational and empirical dynamics.

The digital era provides an unprecedented opportunity to democratize theological discourse. Digital platforms allow for wider participation in the theological discourse, not just limited to traditional clerics or formal academics. However, this phenomenon also presents challenges in maintaining the quality and authenticity of theological understanding. The future Islamic theology must be able to utilize technology to expand the reach of da'wah and education, while maintaining strict scientific standards.

The global ecological crisis demands the development of a more systematic environmental theology (eco-theology) in Islam. The concepts of caliph and mizan in the Qur'an need to be articulated in a more concrete way to respond to the challenges of climate change, environmental damage, and exploitation of natural resources. Future Islamic theology will increasingly emphasize the ethical dimension of man's relationship with nature as an integral part of spiritual piety. Contemporary issues such as gender equality, minority rights, and social justice require sophisticated theological responses. Future Islamic theology will develop a more nuanced framework in understanding verses and hadiths related to gender relations and social structure. This approach does not mean compromising the fundamental principles of Islam, but rather exploring the dimensions of justice and mercy inherent in the teachings of Islam.

Religious plurality in the global era demands a more mature development of comparative theology. The Islamic theology of the future will be increasingly involved in constructive inter-religious dialogue, not only to defend identity, but also to find common ground in the face of universal humanitarian challenges. This approach requires a deep understanding of other religious traditions without losing commitment to Islamic truth. The realization of these prospects requires institutional reform of Islamic education and the development of a responsive curriculum. Islamic educational institutions need to develop study programs that integrate traditional theological approaches with the methodologies of contemporary social sciences and humanities, thus producing scholars who are able to answer the challenges of the times with a solid theological foundation.

4. CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the characteristics of Islamic studies through theological approaches have undergone a significant methodological transformation from the classical to the contemporary period, which is characterized by a paradigm shift from an apologetic-defensive orientation to an integrative-interdisciplinary approach. Epistemological continuity is maintained through the authority of the Qur'an and Hadith as the primary sources, but there is a discontinuity in the methodological orientation that shifts from theocentric to anthropocentric to respond to the challenges of modernity and postmodernity. The findings show that contemporary Islamic theology develops with characteristics that are more responsive to societal problems through the integration of bayani, burhani, and irfani methods, as well as the use of hermeneutic approaches in the interpretation of religious texts. The practical contribution of the contemporary theological approach lies in its ability to be the foundation of critical, moderate, and inclusive thinking capable of confronting the issues of globalization, pluralism, and religious extremism. The prospect of the development of Islamic theology in the future leads to an increasingly interdisciplinary approach by grounding Islamic values in the context of modern life without losing the authenticity of the teachings, so as to be able to function as an authentic moral voice in the face of the disorientation of values and the degradation of morality in the contemporary era.

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