

Islamic Studies Methodological Reform: Answering the Challenges of Globalization and Intellectual Stagnation

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ABSTRACT

Islamic Studies is a multidimensional academic discipline that encompasses not only theological and normative aspects, but also historical, social, cultural, and legal dimensions. Understanding Islam requires a systematic, rational, and scientific methodology to enable an in-depth and contextual analysis of its teachings. This article aims to outline the basic concepts of methodology in Islamic Studies, its scope, and both classical and contemporary approaches. Using a qualitative method through literature review, the article explores the paradigm shift in Islamic scholarship—from a predominantly theological-normative approach to an integrated framework that includes historical, sociological, anthropological, and critical hermeneutical perspectives. The authors also highlight the crucial role of methodology in addressing the challenges of globalization, secularism, and intellectual stagnation among Muslims. Reformist ideas by modern thinkers such as Mohammed Arkoun and Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi offer significant contributions in promoting a more inclusive, contextual, and interdisciplinary understanding of Islam. Therefore, the methodology of Islamic Studies plays a vital role in enhancing scholarly quality and ensuring the relevance of Islamic teachings in contemporary societal dynamics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic studies is a field of study that has a wide scope and multidimensional, covering theological, historical, social, legal, and cultural aspects. As a religion that comes from revelation, Islam is not only understood as a belief system, but also as a value system that governs all joints of human life. Therefore, the approach to understanding Islam cannot be done haphazardly or solely based on individual perceptions, but must go through a methodology that is systematic, rational, and scientifically accountable. This systematic rigor is particularly crucial in navigating the complexities of historical interpretations and contemporary societal challenges, which often necessitate a departure from purely normative readings toward more critical and dynamic analyses (Hidayatulloh, 2024). This involves

integrating various academic disciplines to foster a more holistic comprehension of Islamic thought and practice, moving beyond an exclusively textual or dogmatic approach (Widiyanto, 2022). The increasing complexity of modern society necessitates an interdisciplinary approach to Islamic studies, moving beyond monodisciplinary interpretations to address contemporary issues comprehensively (Aziz & Azizah, 2023). This multi-disciplinary approach positions the Qur'an and Hadith as foundational for scientific development, integrating diverse fields to explore Islam's relevance in various contexts (Ridwan, 2017). Such a methodology aims to bridge the gap between classical religious texts and current global realities, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding Islamic education and its applicability in diverse cultural settings (Bustamam-Ahmad & Jory, 2011) (Elwardiansyah et al., 2025).

The development of the times and contemporary challenges demand a renewal in the approach to Islamic studies. Classical methodologies that emphasize textual and normative approaches are often considered inadequate in answering the complex and dynamic problems of modern life. Therefore, the methodology of Islamic studies needs to be developed through an integrative approach, which combines revelation and reason, text and context, as well as normative approaches with historical-empirical approaches. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings and is relevant to the development of today's society. This integrative strategy acknowledges that Islam presents not only theological tenets but also diverse teachings applicable to various facets of human existence, thereby necessitating a contextual and flexible pedagogical approach rather than a rigid, textual one (Elwardiansyah et al., 2025) (Danil, 2020). This requires an innovative educational system capable of upholding Islamic values while remaining pertinent to modern society, thereby ensuring Islam's continued evolution and significant contributions to educational standards (Fadilah et al., 2025). This necessitates a re-evaluation of traditional Islamic educational paradigms to incorporate modern pedagogical methods, ensuring that graduates are equipped with both spiritual grounding and secular competencies to navigate a rapidly changing world (Elwardiansyah et al., 2025).

In the academic context, the methodology of Islamic studies plays an important role in providing a theoretical and technical framework in the process of scientific study of Islam. Through the right methodology, Islamic studies are not only able to explore the meaning of religious texts in depth, but also can contextualize Islamic teachings in the social and cultural reality of Muslims in various places and times. Thus, Islamic studies is not trapped in textual formalism, but is able to make a real contribution to human civilization. The integration of science and religious values within Islamic education is crucial for fostering critical thinking and equipping learners with a strong scholarly foundation and ethical principles (Fakhrurrazi et al., 2023). This holistic approach ensures that Islamic education transcends mere rote learning, fostering a deep understanding that integrates faith with reason and prepares individuals to address complex modern challenges effectively (Elwardiansyah et al., 2025). Such an approach is essential for cultivating a generation that is not only religiously literate but also scientifically informed and capable of innovative thought, moving beyond the confines of purely fundamentalist or liberal interpretations to embrace hybrid methodologies (Irham & Lubis, 2021). This paradigm shift is crucial for developing a holistic education system that imbues students with moral and ethical values rooted in Islamic teachings, alongside academic knowledge (NUHA et al., 2024). Furthermore, the integration of Artificial Intelligence into Islamic education offers a promising avenue for personalizing learning experiences and digitalizing religious resources, thereby addressing the limitations of conventional teaching methods in the modern era (Salim & Aditya, 2025).

This article aims to outline the nature of methodology in Islamic studies, explain the underlying basic principles, and explore the various approaches used in understanding Islam scientifically. It is hoped that through this discussion, the methodology of Islamic studies can be placed as an important instrument in developing objective, critical, and contextual Islamic studies. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of Islamic values, promoting a holistic and integrative learning environment within social sciences education (NUHA et al., 2024). Moreover, this integration can foster a deep understanding of monotheism (tauhid) that is not only cognitive but also applicable in daily life, allowing for spiritual and moral development through narrative-based learning methods (AL-FARISI et al., 2025).

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method, which aims to examine scientific phenomena in depth through analysis of qualitative data. Data is collected from a variety of sources, including journals, theses, scientific articles, and official documents relevant to the topic of Islamic studies methodology and Islamic education management. This method focuses on text analysis and data synthesis to build a comprehensive conceptual framework.

The qualitative descriptive approach, employing a literature review and curriculum analysis, facilitates an in-depth exploration and synthesis of diverse literary sources. The chosen methodology aims to identify emerging trends, thematic analyses, and challenges within the digitalization of Islamic education. This allows for the identification of innovative pedagogical methods, such as AI-driven chatbots and simulations, that are enhancing the learning experience within Islamic religious education. Furthermore, this approach ensures that all steps of the review process are transparent and systematic, thereby enhancing the quality and credibility of the research findings (Sukiastini et al., 2024).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Basic Concepts of Methodology for Understanding Islamic Studies

a. The Essence of Islamic Studies Methodology

The methodology comes from the Greek word "*meta*" which means *through* and "*hodos*" which means *way* or *way*. This term refers to the systematic study of various methods used in a field, especially in scientific research activities. Methodology is not only concerned with the selection of methods, but also includes the analysis of the relevance and effectiveness of the method in a given context. In other words, methodology is not just a collection of techniques or procedures, but also includes a critical assessment of how those methods work and how well they support the achievement of research objectives. Overall, the methodology includes theoretical and practical dimensions that form the basis of understanding and efforts to improve the scientific research process. (Mi'raj et al., 2024)

Islamic study methodology is a discipline that studies various methods for understanding, analyzing, and interpreting various dimensions of Islam. This study serves as an important tool in studying the history, teachings, practices, and influence of Islam in various parts of the world. (*Islamic Studies Methodology*, 2023)

b. The Meaning and Scope of Islamic Studies

Islamic studies etymologically comes from the Arabic translation of *Dirasah Islamiyah*. This study is a planned and systematic effort to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of various matters related to the religion of Islam, both including teachings, history, and real practices in daily life throughout history. (Firdaus et al., 2022)

2) Scope of Islamic Studies

a) Islam as a doctrine from Allah

The term doctrine comes from the English word *doctrine* which means teaching. In general, doctrine refers to a set of teachings or beliefs that are theoretical in nature and do not necessarily have a scientific or practical basis. For example, in some East Java societies there is a belief that a person who does not wear peci and sarongs is considered invalid in performing prayers — this is an example of the application of doctrine culturally. (Safitri, n.d.)

Doctrine can also be seen in family education, such as when parents teach Islamic values to their children, and the rules applied by the child become a form of internalization of doctrine.

Islam itself is a multidimensional religion, which can be studied from various points of view, including socio-cultural and doctrinal aspects. In the doctrinal context, Islam has fundamental and indisputable teachings, as it has become the most fundamental part of the structure of faith in Islam itself. (Nasution, 2023)

b) As a Cultural Indication

The scope of Islamic Studies in the context of culture includes the analysis of how Islamic teachings, religious practices, symbols, and values influence and are influenced by the culture of society. This confirms that Islam, apart from being a religion that originates from divine revelation, also plays an active role in the process of interaction with local culture, thus giving rise to a variety of unique religious expressions in various places. (Ibrahim, 2021)

c) As an Intersocial Interaction

The study of Islamic Studies in the dimension of social interaction examines the role of Islamic teachings, values, and institutions in forming, maintaining, and directing patterns of social relations between individuals and groups in society. In this perspective, Islam is not only seen as a religion with normative-theological teachings, but also as a dynamic social force that also colors the life of society. (*Pendidikan Islam Sebagai Upaya Memperkuat Integrasi Sosial Dalam Masyarakat Multikultural* | SYAIKHONA: Jurnal Magister Pendidikan Agama Islam, n.d.)

c. The Urgency of Learning Islamic Studies

1) Muslims are currently in a problematic condition

Today, Muslims face various complex problems, both internally and externally. Problems such as divisions between people, radicalism, narrow religious understanding, and low Islamic literacy are serious challenges. On the other hand, the influence of globalization, secular culture, and negative stereotypes against Islam also worsen the condition of the ummah.

This situation shows that Muslims urgently need a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of their religious teachings. Without a strong scientific foundation, the ummah is at risk of experiencing deviations in understanding and practicing Islamic teachings, and can even be trapped in religious practices that are only symbolic without understanding its substantial meaning. (Fajar, 2023)

Therefore, studying Islamic Studies is very important so that the ummah can understand Islam deeply, critically, and relevant to the challenges of the times. With a scientific approach to Islamic teachings, it is hoped that the ummah will be able to rise from the downturn and return to Islam as a source of enlightening value in personal, social, and global life.

2) Muslims Are Currently in a Globalized Condition

Globalization is a process that connects various parts of the world through the development of technology, communication, and an integrated economic system. In this context, Muslims live in the midst of a rapid and massive flow of change, which not only brings progress, but also presents a great challenge to religious values and Islamic identity.

One of the impacts of globalization is the entry of foreign culture that can obscure Islamic identity, especially among the younger generation. A materialistic, secular, and individualistic lifestyle is often at odds with Islamic principles that emphasize spirituality, simplicity, and togetherness. (*Pendidikan Islam Dan Tantangan Globalisasi: Strategi Penguatan Identitas Muslim* | Jurnal Internasional Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Digital (IJEDL), n.d.)

In addition, globalization also strengthens the capitalist economic system that puts many Muslim countries at a disadvantage. Economic dependency and social inequality are still inherent problems. In the political field, Muslims often face negative stereotypes such as Islamophobia, which makes their position in the global arena more vulnerable. (Sulaeman & Sukmana, 2023)

However, the era of globalization also brings opportunities for Muslims to develop. Digital technology allows for the widespread spread of da'wah, access to science is wide open, and communication between Muslims across countries becomes easier. Global interaction also encourages the ummah to re-explore the intellectual heritage of Islam critically and contextually.

Thus, globalization is a challenge as well as an opportunity for Muslims. Therefore, a deep and contextual understanding of Islam is needed so that the ummah is able to maintain its religious identity while remaining relevant in global life.

3) The Position of Diversity in Indonesia Displays More Formalistic Legalistics

Religious diversity in Indonesia is a rich and complex social reality. However, in its management, this diversity is often placed in a framework that emphasizes legal and formal recognition aspects (legalistic-formalistic), rather than an approach based on values, ethics, and deep understanding between religions.

This legalistic-formalistic approach is evident in various state policies that only officially recognize certain religions, while other faith groups or religious minorities still experience limited rights, both in terms of population administration, freedom of worship, and social recognition. Religious practices that are not in line with the mainstream are often considered deviant, even in some cases experiencing negative labeling and social pressure.

The regulation of religious life is more emphasized on legal and administrative aspects, such as permits to establish houses of worship, the number of followers, or environmental approvals, rather than prioritizing the values of tolerance and mutual respect. This causes religious life to become too formal, symbolic, and often removes the spiritual and humanitarian dimensions that are at the core of diversity itself. (Setyabudi, 2022)

d. The Growth of Islamic Studies Then and Now

1) The Growth of Ancient Islamic Studies

Islamic studies in the early days underwent very rapid progress and became an important part of the development of Islamic civilization. From the 7th to the 13th century AD, Islamic studies not only included spiritual and worship aspects, but also extended to various fields of science such as philosophy, language, history, and social sciences. Islamic studies developed as a branch of science that combines theological and rational approaches in understanding religious teachings. (Maharani & Lasmidah, 2025)

1. The Time of the Prophet and the Companions

During the time of the Prophet PBUH, the understanding of Islam was conveyed directly through revelation, life practices, and oral explanations. After his death, the Companions continued their role as a source of religious knowledge. The focus of Islamic studies at that time included memorization and understanding of the Qur'an, the collection of hadiths, and the initial discussion of Islamic law. (Aisyah et al., 2025)

2. Classical Period: Codification of Science (8th–10th centuries AD)

As the Islamic sphere expanded, scholars began to compile Islamic sciences in a more structured form. Disciplines such as tafsir, hadith, fiqh, kalam (theology), and Sufism emerged. It was also during this period that famous schools of Islamic law developed, as well as important figures such as Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Shafi'i, and Imam Bukhari. (*Analisis Atas Terbentuknya Mazhab Fikih, Ilmu Kalam, Dan Tasawuf Serta Implikasinya Dalam Membangun Ukhuwah Islamiyah | Hidayat | AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, n.d.)

3. Islamic Golden Age (9th–13th centuries AD)

This period is known as the peak of the glory of Islamic science. Islamic studies developed along with other sciences such as mathematics, medicine, and philosophy. Centers of knowledge such as *Bayt al-Hikmah* in Baghdad play a major role in translating and developing the knowledge of various civilizations. Figures such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Khaldun show the integration between Islamic thought and philosophy. (Mahmood, 2022)

4. Consolidation Period (Post 13th Century AD)

After the fall of Baghdad, the dynamics of Islamic science began to stagnate. The main focus shifts to the preservation of classical scholarly traditions and the deepening of established sects. Scientific innovation declined, although Islamic educational institutions such as Al-Azhar remained an important center of Islamic studies in the Muslim world. (*Universitas Al-Azhar | Kairo, Sejarah, & Alumni | Britannica*, n.d.)

2) The Growth of Islamic Studies Today

Islamic studies today is experiencing rapid and dynamic progress, in line with the changing times and the complexity of the problems of the ummah. Islamic studies are no longer limited to normative religious aspects alone, but have developed by involving various modern disciplines. This happens due to the influence of globalization, technological advancements, and the increasing awareness of Muslims to understand their religion in a contextual and relevant way to social reality. (*Studia Islamika*, n.d.-a)

1. Expansion of Approaches in Islamic Studies

Different from the classical period which focused on theological approaches, Islamic Studies today utilizes various scientific approaches such as historical, sociological, anthropological, philosophical, and hermeneutical. These approaches provide space to understand Islam in a more deep, critical, and contextual way. The study of contemporary issues such as pluralism, human rights, the environment, and gender roles is now part of the development of Islamic Studies. (*E-Jurnal Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta*, n.d.-a)

2. Development of Educational and Academic Studies Institutions

Various universities, both in the Islamic world and in Western countries, have seriously developed Islamic Studies programs. In Indonesia, institutions such as UIN, IAIN, and various other Islamic universities have become centers of study that combine classical scientific traditions with modern academic approaches. Meanwhile, in the West, Islamic studies are also carried out objectively through well-known institutions such as Harvard, Oxford, and Leiden, which examine Islam from an interdisciplinary perspective. (*Studia Islamika*, n.d.-b)

3. Responding to the Challenges of the Times

Modern Islamic studies was also born as a response to contemporary problems, such as radicalism, moral crises, social inequality, and rampant religious misinformation. Islamic studies today encourages the strengthening of the values of moderation, tolerance, and justice. In addition, there has also emerged Islamic studies that focus on gender equality, democracy, and the environment, which shows Islam's openness to global issues. (*E-Jurnal Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta*, n.d.-b)

4. Digital Transformation in Islamic Studies

The advancement of information technology has also changed the face of Islamic Studies. Now, Islamic science can be accessed through digital platforms such as social media, websites, online classes, and video channels. This expands the reach of da'wah and Islamic education, but it also demands vigilance against the spread of non-authoritative or even deviant teachings. (*E-Jurnal Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta*, n.d.-c)

2. Analysis of Various Approaches in Understanding Islamic Studies

In Islamic studies, there are various commonly used methods and approaches. These approaches can be grouped based on their focus:

- **Theological-Normative Approach:** This approach is normative and often subjective, focusing on understanding religion from the point of view of faith and belief. Sacred texts, such as the Qur'an and Hadith, are the main sources of study to produce norms that govern actions. This approach emphasizes absolute and non-relative truths, as they come from God's revelation. (Bahrol 'Ulum & Mawardi, 2024)
- **Historical Approach:** This approach emphasizes historical aspects to understand the evolution of religious interpretation and practice. Using the diachronic method, this study compares the development of science in Islam to understand cause and effect in the context of a particular time, place, and culture. (Hakim, 2024)
- **Sociological and Anthropological Approach:** This approach focuses on understanding religion through social and cultural perspectives. The sociological approach highlights the impact of religion on social structure and social change, while the anthropological approach focuses on religious practices and social interactions among Muslims. (*Pendekatan Antropologi Dalam Studi Islam | Jurnal Transformatif (Studi Islam)*, n.d.)

In addition to the approach, there are also basic scientific methods used in Islamic studies, including:

- **Deductive Method:** Involves formulating rules logically and philosophically, then applying them to solve the problem at hand.
- **Inductive Method:** On the contrary, this method begins with the preparation of legal rules from specific problems which are then interpreted and associated with the relevant madhhab.
- **Problem Solving Method:** This method focuses more on mastering practical skills to deal with problems from a single branch of science, although it is sometimes limited to a fixed framework.(Asna, 2023)

Contemporary Methodological Discourse: Criticism and Intellectual Renewal

In the modern era, traditional Islamic studies methodologies face significant criticism. One of the main criticisms is the overly strong focus on sacred texts and classical law, which sometimes makes this approach less flexible and difficult to adapt to social contexts or the development of the times. Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi even highlighted the stagnation he found in Islamic studies, where significant renewal did not occur even though Muslims faced new problems.(Syamsuri, 2012)

This inability creates a dichotomy between science and religion. In the traditional view, science can be criticized, while religion is considered to have absolute truths that cannot be challenged, whereas Islam normatively teaches peace and harmony, but a rigid understanding can trigger radicalism. The failure of traditional methods to provide adequate answers to modern challenges, such as pluralism, globalization, and extremism, has led to the emergence of a wave of progressive thought. It is this need to adapt to contemporary realities and overcome the crisis of relevance that is the main driver for thinkers to seek new methodologies that are more inclusive, critical, and interdisciplinary.(Imawan, 2018)

In response to this stagnation, two prominent thinkers, Mohammed Arkoun and Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi, proposed revolutionary new approaches.

- **Mohammed Arkoun's thoughts:** Arkoun is known for his criticism of the authority and normativity of religious traditions. He proposes a historical-critical approach and critical hermeneutics to interpret Islamic texts. Arkoun's proposed critical hermeneutics challenges traditional dogmatic interpretations and encourages researchers to consider historical, cultural, and social contexts in their understanding of sacred texts. The goal is to promote a more contextual and interdisciplinary understanding, as well as to avoid misusing the Qur'anic text for ideological or political gain.(Hidayat, 2024)
- **Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi's thoughts:** Abu Rabi highlights the importance of interaction between subject and object in Islamic studies, as well as advocating an interconnective approach and methodological pluralism. He argues that a comprehensive understanding of Islam requires the collaboration of various disciplines, such as history, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. Through this transdisciplinary approach, researchers can see Islam as a complex and dynamic phenomenon, going beyond traditional boundaries to confront contemporary challenges holistically.(Nugraha, 2017)

While methodological updates offer many opportunities, there are also challenges to face:

- **Limited Access to Primary Sources:** Research in Islamic studies often requires access to classical manuscripts that may be of limited availability in closed libraries or private collections.
- **Bias in Interpretation:** Islamic texts are prone to biased interpretations, both ideological and subjective.
- **Potential Conflict of Approaches:** Aligning the perspectives of different disciplines can lead to difficulties and conflicts in building a solid theoretical foundation.

On the other hand, technological advances and openness of inter-disciplinary dialogue open up great opportunities. The use of digital methods in the analysis of Qur'anic texts and Hadith, for example, can help researchers understand certain linguistic patterns. In addition, an interdisciplinary approach is increasingly important because the problems faced by Muslims today are often complex

and cannot be explained by just one discipline. This suggests that Islamic studies must constantly update their methodologies to remain relevant to global developments and social change.(Yusuf & Faridi, 2024)

Table 1: Comparison of Classical and Contemporary Methodological Approaches

Approach	Description	Study Focus	Relevance
Theological-Normative	It is based on understanding from the point of view of faith and belief.	Sacred texts (Qur'an and Hadith) and religious doctrines.	It builds a foundation of faith and morals, but is susceptible to narrow views if it is not accompanied by other approaches.
Historical	Emphasizing the historical aspect to understand the development of Islamic teachings and interpretations.	The evolution of thought, religious practice, and causation in the context of space and time.	Provides an understanding that Islam is dynamic and varied throughout history, not rigid dogma.
Sociological & Anthropological	Understanding religion through social interactions, rituals, and its impact on the structure of society.	Religious phenomena in society, religious-human relations, and their influence on daily life.	Help explain the diversity of Islamic practices and their role in shaping culture and social cohesion.
Interdisciplinary (Contemporary)	Combining various disciplines (history, sociology, philosophy) for a comprehensive understanding.	Complex issues involving multi-dimensions, such as political, economic, and social, in Islamic studies.	Answering modern challenges that cannot be explained by a single discipline, encourages innovation and methodological pluralism.
Critical Hermeneutics (Contemporary)	Interpret sacred texts taking into account historical, cultural, and social contexts.	Analyze the hidden meanings, motivations, and dominant interpretations.	Challenge dogmatic interpretations, promote contextual understanding, and avoid misusing the text for ideological purposes.

4. CONCLUSION

Islamic studies is a scientific effort to understand the teachings, history, culture, and religious practices in Islam in depth and comprehensively. In the process, various approaches such as theological, historical, sociological, and interdisciplinary are used to interpret Islam not only from the perspective of faith, but also in the ever-evolving social and cultural context. This study is very important in the midst of globalization, the crisis of people's identity, and the rampant abuse of religious teachings due to narrow understanding.

The development of Islamic studies from the classical period to the modern era shows a shift from a normative approach towards a more critical and contextual approach. Thinkers such as Mohammed Arkoun and Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi emphasized the need for methodological reform so that Islamic studies remain relevant, open to the integration of various sciences, and able to respond to the challenges of the times with a more holistic and inclusive approach.

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