



Epistemological Problems in Islamic Studies: An Analysis of Paradigms, Methodologies, and Academic Bias

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ABSTRACT

Islamic Studies has evolved from textual and normative inquiries into a multidimensional field engaging with philosophy, social sciences, and the humanities. However, this expansion generates fundamental epistemological questions regarding the validity of knowledge, methodological choices, and the presence of academic bias. This study aims to critically analyze the epistemological problems in Islamic Studies by examining the relationship between paradigmatic plurality, methodological orientations, and researcher positionality. This study employed a qualitative literature-based research design with a critical-interpretive approach. Data analysis was conducted through three interconnected stages: identifying epistemological assumptions, comparing various approaches (normative, historical-critical, social-scientific, and integrative), and critically interpreting the interactions among paradigms, methodology, and researcher positionality. The findings indicate that the epistemological dynamics of Islamic Studies are influenced by tensions between normative-deductive and historical-empirical approaches. Epistemological problems emerge when a single paradigm is treated as absolute and applied without a critical understanding of its analytical boundaries. Furthermore, limited mastery of social science methodologies, alongside the uncritical adoption of either Western analytical frameworks or traditional Islamic scholarly views, can lead to academic bias and apologetic orientations. The study concludes that resolving epistemological issues in Islamic Studies does not require establishing a single universal paradigm, but rather cultivating a reflexive and integrative research culture based on three principles: paradigmatic awareness, methodological reflexivity, and critical recognition of researcher positionality.

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Introduction

Islamic Studies has developed into a multidimensional field of academic inquiry that examines Islam not only as a system of religious teachings but also as an intellectual, historical, social, and cultural phenomenon. The development of the field has expanded the objects, perspectives, and methodological approaches employed in the study of Islam. Consequently, Islamic Studies is no longer confined to the examination of religious doctrines and authoritative texts but increasingly engages with philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, hermeneutics, and other branches of the humanities and social sciences. This expansion has enriched the intellectual landscape of Islamic Studies while simultaneously generated fundamental questions concerning the nature, sources, validity, and justification of knowledge about Islam (Abdullah 2003). Recent scholarship similarly indicates that contemporary Islamic Studies has undergone a significant methodological transformation from predominantly textual and normative approaches toward more multidisciplinary frameworks incorporating epistemology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and empirical approaches (Adiyono, Ni'am, and Akhyak 2024).

The epistemological dimension becomes particularly important because Islamic Studies occupies a distinctive position between religious commitment and academic inquiry. Islam may be approached as revelation and a source of normative religious guidance, but it may also be examined as a historical, intellectual, social, and cultural reality that develops through human interpretation and practice. These dimensions are interconnected but should not be treated as epistemologically identical. The distinction between normative and historical perspectives has therefore become one of the important issues in Islamic Studies. Previous research has shown that Islamic Studies has often experienced tension between normative and historical orientations, particularly when religious texts and traditions are simultaneously regarded as objects of faith and objects of critical academic investigation (Tamin AR and Purnamasari 2020). The source material underlying this study likewise identifies the difficulty of distinguishing the normative and historical domains as one of the factors that may restrict critical inquiry, dialogue, and the development of new understandings in Islamic Studies.

One of the central epistemological problems in this context concerns the plurality of paradigms employed to understand Islam. A normative-theological paradigm generally emphasizes revelation, doctrine, religious values, and normative truth claims, whereas historical-critical approaches place greater emphasis on contextualization, historical development, interpretation, and critical examination. Social-scientific approaches conceptualize Islam through observable religious practices, institutions, communities, and social processes, while philosophical and hermeneutical approaches investigate the assumptions, meanings, and interpretive structures through which Islamic knowledge is constructed. Such paradigmatic plurality should not necessarily be understood as a problem in itself. Rather, it becomes an epistemological problem when the assumptions underlying a particular paradigm remain unexamined, when one paradigm is treated as universally sufficient, or when normative religious claims and historically situated human interpretations are insufficiently differentiated. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that the development of Islamic Studies increasingly requires researchers to understand the relationship among epistemology, paradigm, and methodology rather than treating methodological choices as technically neutral procedures (Adiyono et al. 2024).

The plurality of paradigms consequently has direct implications for methodological choices. Different assumptions about the nature and sources of knowledge lead researchers toward different approaches, including textual and theological interpretation, historical criticism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, sociology, anthropology, and empirical investigation. The central methodological issue is therefore not simply whether Islamic

Studies should employ methods originating outside the traditional Islamic sciences, but how such methods should be selected, justified, adapted, and critically applied to particular research problems. Recent studies indicate that Islamic Studies has increasingly moved toward interdisciplinary approaches that combine traditional Islamic sciences with social sciences and humanities (Irham 2026). Such development requires researchers to possess not only substantive knowledge of Islamic traditions but also sufficient epistemological and methodological competence to understand the assumptions and limitations of the methods they employ. The source material for this article identifies limited mastery of philosophy and social sciences among some Muslim scholars as one factor affecting the development of Islamic Studies, particularly when researchers have difficulty implementing anthropological, sociological, and psychological approaches in their studies.

Another important epistemological problem concerns the position of the researcher and the possibility of academic bias. Knowledge about Islam is not produced independently of the intellectual, cultural, disciplinary, and experiential position of the researcher. The classical distinction between insider and outsider perspectives illustrates this issue. Muslim scholars may approach Islam from within particular religious and intellectual traditions, while external scholars may approach Islam through historical, sociological, anthropological, or other academic frameworks. Nevertheless, neither position can automatically be equated with objectivity or bias. Rather, each position involves particular assumptions, possibilities, and limitations that need to be critically recognized. Research on the development of Islamic Studies from an insider-outsider perspective emphasizes that Islamic Studies can be enriched through dialogue between Islamic epistemological traditions and analytical approaches developed within broader academic disciplines (Hery 2016). This perspective is particularly relevant because the question of objectivity cannot simply be resolved by determining whether a researcher is a Muslim or non-Muslim; it requires critical reflection on the assumptions, interests, methods, and interpretive frameworks through which knowledge is produced (Hasanah 2016).

The issue of academic bias is also related to the relationship between Islamic intellectual traditions and Western academic approaches. The source material identifies a tension in which some Muslim scholars may rely heavily on Western analytical frameworks while becoming detached from Islamic intellectual traditions, whereas an excessive rejection of external academic approaches may also limit the methodological development of Islamic Studies. This tension should not be reduced to a binary opposition between “Islamic” and “Western” knowledge. Instead, it can be approached as an epistemological question concerning the researcher's intellectual position, methodological assumptions, and capacity for critical reflexivity. In this regard, the development of contemporary Islamic Studies in Indonesia demonstrates an increasing movement toward interdisciplinary and intersubjective approaches. A recent study of leading Islamic Studies journals in Indonesian Islamic higher education found that traditional Islamic sciences have increasingly been integrated with social sciences and humanities, creating an interdisciplinary space that challenges a rigid dichotomy between subjective and objective perspectives (Irham 2026).

The development of interdisciplinary Islamic Studies is significant because it provides an alternative to the assumption that knowledge about Islam must be produced exclusively from either an internal religious perspective or an external academic perspective. A 2026 study of Islamic higher education in Indonesia similarly found an integrative or intersubjective model that combines insider and outsider perspectives as well as science and religion. This development suggests that the epistemological future of Islamic Studies may not depend upon choosing one perspective while rejecting another, but upon developing a critical framework capable of recognizing the contribution and limitations of

different epistemological positions. Such an approach also corresponds with the earlier proposal in the source material that Islamic Studies should strengthen inductive inquiry through field research and observation rather than remaining exclusively within normative-deductive approaches.

Although previous studies have extensively discussed epistemological dynamics, the relationship between normative and historical approaches, insider–outsider perspectives, methodological development, and interdisciplinarity in Islamic Studies, these dimensions have largely been examined as separate aspects of epistemological inquiry. Existing studies have provided important insights into individual paradigms, methodological approaches, and researcher positionality, but they have paid comparatively limited attention to the interconnected relationship among these dimensions in the process of producing knowledge about Islam. In particular, insufficient attention has been given to how paradigmatic assumptions shape methodological choices, how methodological choices interact with researcher positionality, and how these interactions may influence the construction and validation of Islamic knowledge. As a result, the epistemological problem is often discussed either at the level of competing paradigms or at the level of methodological debates, without sufficiently explaining how paradigmatic assumptions, methodological decisions, and researcher positionality operate together within the research process. Addressing this gap is important because the validity and reflexivity of Islamic Studies depend not only on the selection of appropriate methods but also on researchers' awareness of the epistemological assumptions and positional positions underlying those methods. Therefore, this study brings paradigmatic plurality, methodological choices, and researcher positionality into a single analytical framework in order to provide a more integrated understanding of epistemological problems in contemporary Islamic Studies.

Based on this gap, this article proposes a reflexive and integrative perspective for understanding epistemological problems in Islamic Studies. This perspective is built upon three interconnected principles: paradigmatic awareness, methodological reflexivity, and critical recognition of researcher positionality. Paradigmatic awareness requires researchers to identify and articulate the epistemological assumptions underlying their research questions and interpretations. Methodological reflexivity requires researchers to justify their methodological choices while recognizing the possibilities and limitations of particular methods. Recognition of researcher positionality requires scholars to acknowledge how their intellectual, cultural, disciplinary, and religious locations may shape interpretation without automatically reducing positionality to bias. Through these principles, Islamic Studies can maintain engagement with Islamic intellectual traditions while remaining open to historical, empirical, philosophical, and interdisciplinary forms of inquiry.

Accordingly, this article aims to critically analyze the epistemological problems encountered in Islamic Studies by examining the interconnected relationship between paradigmatic plurality, methodological choices, and researcher positionality. To achieve this aim, the study pursues three specific objectives. First, it examines how different epistemological paradigms shape the ways in which Islam is conceptualized and studied. Second, it analyzes how paradigmatic assumptions influence methodological choices and, consequently, the production of knowledge about Islam. Third, it examines how researcher positionality may contribute to academic bias and how such positionality can be addressed through critical reflexivity. These objectives are addressed through the following research questions: (1) How do different epistemological paradigms shape the study of Islam? (2) How do paradigmatic assumptions influence methodological choices and the production of Islamic knowledge? and (3) How does researcher positionality contribute to academic bias in Islamic Studies, and how can such positionality be critically addressed? By

systematically connecting these research questions with the corresponding objectives, this article seeks to formulate a reflexive and integrative epistemological perspective that contributes to the methodological development of contemporary Islamic Studies.

Method

This study employed a qualitative literature-based research design with a critical-interpretive approach to examine epistemological problems in Islamic Studies, particularly those related to paradigms, methodologies, and academic bias. The study utilized scholarly literature as its primary source of data, consisting of peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books addressing the epistemology of Islamic Studies, normative and historical approaches, Islamic research methodology, insider-outsider perspectives, interdisciplinarity, researcher positionality, and academic objectivity.

The literature was selected purposively according to predetermined relevance criteria. Sources were included when they (1) directly addressed epistemological, paradigmatic, or methodological issues in Islamic Studies; (2) discussed the relationship between normative, historical-critical, social-scientific, or integrative approaches; (3) examined researcher positionality, insider-outsider perspectives, objectivity, or academic bias; or (4) provided a theoretical or conceptual foundation for understanding the development of contemporary Islamic Studies. Sources were excluded when their discussion of Islam was unrelated to the epistemological, paradigmatic, methodological, or positionality dimensions examined in this study. The final corpus consisted of 11 scholarly sources, comprising 7 peer-reviewed journal articles and 4 academic books. These sources were selected because they provided direct conceptual and analytical relevance to the three dimensions established in the study: epistemological paradigms, methodological orientations, and academic bias. Data collection involved identifying, screening for relevance, reading, and thematically classifying the selected scholarly sources.

The collected literature was analyzed through three interconnected stages: identification, which involved identifying the epistemological assumptions and methodological orientations represented in the literature; comparison, which involved examining similarities, differences, and tensions among normative, historical-critical, social-scientific, and integrative approaches; and critical interpretation, which involved examining how paradigmatic assumptions, methodological choices, and researcher positionality interact in the production and interpretation of knowledge about Islam. The analysis did not seek to establish a single universally valid paradigm or methodology for Islamic Studies. Instead, it critically examined the assumptions, strengths, limitations, and possible points of integration among different approaches. The findings were synthesized thematically and interpreted in relation to previous scholarship to formulate a reflexive and integrative perspective based on three principles: paradigmatic awareness, methodological reflexivity, and critical recognition of researcher positionality. Conclusions were drawn through an interpretive synthesis of the identified patterns and arguments concerning the relationship between epistemological assumptions, methodological practices, and academic bias in contemporary Islamic Studies.

Results and Discussion

1. Epistemological Paradigms in Islamic Studies

Islamic Studies is a field of inquiry characterized by the interaction between revelation, reason, historical experience, and contemporary social realities. Consequently, the production of Islamic knowledge cannot be separated from the paradigm employed by the researcher. A paradigm determines how an object is understood, what is considered

legitimate knowledge, which sources are regarded as authoritative, and how conclusions are constructed. The epistemological problem therefore emerges when a particular paradigm is treated as the only legitimate framework for understanding Islam, while the object of study itself contains theological, historical, social, cultural, and intellectual dimensions. Contemporary discussions of Islamic Studies increasingly emphasize the dynamic relationship between epistemology, paradigm, approach, and methodology. The present analysis extends this discussion by showing that epistemological problems arise not simply from the existence of different paradigms, but from the uncritical use or absolutization of a particular paradigm in explaining multidimensional Islamic phenomena. (Tamin AR and Purnamasari 2020).

The first important paradigm is the normative-theological paradigm, which places revelation and religious teachings at the center of the study of Islam. Within this perspective, the Qur'an and Sunnah constitute fundamental sources for understanding Islamic values, doctrines, ethics, and norms. The normative approach is important because Islamic Studies cannot be completely separated from its religious foundations. However, the epistemological problem appears when normative claims are directly transferred into explanations of historical and social phenomena without sufficiently distinguishing revelation from human interpretation. Amin Abdullah has emphasized the importance of distinguishing between *normativity* and *historicity* in the study of religion, particularly because religious teachings as normative ideals and their historical manifestations do not always operate within the same analytical domain (Abdullah 2002).

This distinction becomes important because the Qur'an, as a source of revelation, occupies a different epistemological position from interpretations produced by human scholars. The interpretation of revelation, the development of Islamic jurisprudence, theological debates, institutional practices, and Muslim social behavior are historically situated processes. When these dimensions are treated as identical, the space for critical examination becomes narrower. As a consequence, Islamic Studies may become apologetic and romantic rather than analytical and critical. Research by Tamin and Purnamasari similarly demonstrates that the tension between normative and historical perspectives remains an important issue in Islamic Studies, particularly when religious texts are examined as objects of historical and academic inquiry.

The second paradigm is the historical-critical paradigm, which views Islamic thought and practice through the contexts in which they emerged and developed. This approach does not necessarily negate the religious significance of Islam. Rather, it seeks to distinguish between Islam as a normative religious tradition and the various historical interpretations, institutions, intellectual developments, and social practices through which Muslims have understood and expressed that tradition. Such a distinction enables researchers to examine Islamic intellectual history, religious institutions, interpretation, and social practices without automatically assuming that every historical manifestation represents the entirety of Islam as a normative tradition (Abdullah 2003).

The third paradigm involves the social-scientific and empirical orientation. Islam is not only a system of doctrines but also a lived social reality. Muslims establish institutions, construct communities, develop traditions, negotiate identities, and interpret religious teachings within particular cultural and historical circumstances. Therefore, sociology, anthropology, psychology, political studies, history, and other social sciences can provide important analytical instruments for examining dimensions of Islam that cannot be sufficiently explained through textual analysis alone. The increasing use of interdisciplinary approaches in Islamic higher education in Indonesia demonstrates the growing recognition that Islamic Studies requires interaction among different disciplines and methodological traditions.

Nevertheless, the incorporation of external disciplines should not be understood as the automatic adoption of every theory or analytical framework. Every methodology carries philosophical assumptions concerning knowledge, reality, evidence, interpretation, and the relationship between researcher and object. Consequently, the use of Western social-scientific approaches, for example, requires critical examination of their epistemological foundations and their suitability for the particular Islamic phenomenon under investigation. The problem is therefore not whether Western methodology should be accepted or rejected, but how it can be critically positioned within a broader epistemological framework of Islamic Studies. Recent discussions on decolonizing Islamic Studies similarly emphasize the importance of critically examining inherited methodological frameworks rather than accepting them without reflection (Huda, Nehodchenko, and Fitriani 2024).

An alternative direction is represented by the integrative-interconnective paradigm, which seeks to establish productive relationships between Islamic sciences and other fields of knowledge. Amin Abdullah's integrative-interconnective approach was developed partly in response to the separation between religious knowledge and modern scientific disciplines. In this perspective, Islamic Studies should not operate in isolation from the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and contemporary intellectual developments. Instead, different forms of knowledge are brought into dialogue while maintaining awareness of their respective epistemological characteristics.

The integrative approach, therefore, should not be interpreted as merely placing Islamic concepts alongside theories from other disciplines. Integration requires an epistemological dialogue in which researchers understand the assumptions, strengths, limitations, and analytical boundaries of each approach. Recent studies of Islamic Studies in Indonesian higher education indicate that interdisciplinary and integrative approaches have increasingly become important in contemporary Islamic scholarship (Irham 2026). Such integration is particularly relevant when Islamic phenomena involve multiple dimensions simultaneously, for example, Islamic education involves theological, pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and technological dimensions.

From this perspective, an epistemological anomaly in Islamic Studies should not be understood merely as deviation from an established religious position. It may also refer to a condition in which the epistemological framework employed by researchers is insufficient to explain the complexity of the object under investigation. A study becomes epistemologically problematic when its paradigm prevents critical dialogue, limits methodological possibilities, or causes one dimension of the object to obscure other relevant dimensions. Thus, the problem is not the existence of different paradigms but the tendency to absolutize a particular paradigm and employ it without sufficient awareness of its assumptions and limitations.

The analysis consequently indicates that the paradigms of Islamic Studies should be understood as distinct but potentially complementary epistemological orientations. The normative paradigm provides access to Islamic values and doctrinal foundations; the historical paradigm enables examination of the development and contextualization of Islamic thought; social-scientific approaches illuminate lived religious realities; while integrative approaches facilitate dialogue among these domains. The epistemological challenge is therefore to establish a critical relationship among these paradigms rather than to declare one paradigm universally superior.

The findings therefore indicate that the methodological problem in Islamic Studies can be understood as a mismatch among epistemological assumptions, methodological choices, and the complexity of the research object. This finding reinforces the argument developed in the preceding section that epistemological problems do not arise from paradigmatic

plurality itself, but from the inability to relate paradigmatic assumptions to the characteristics of the object under investigation.

2. Methodological Tensions in the Production of Islamic Knowledge

The epistemological plurality discussed above directly influences the methodologies used to produce knowledge in Islamic Studies. Methodological problems emerge when the method employed is not sufficiently related to the nature of the object being investigated. Islamic Studies encompasses revelation, texts, intellectual traditions, historical developments, institutions, communities, and lived religious practices. Consequently, a single methodological orientation cannot automatically provide an adequate explanation for every Islamic phenomenon. Methodological appropriateness must instead be determined by the relationship between the research question, object of study, epistemological assumptions, and analytical procedures.

One of the major sources of methodological tension is the background and positionality of the researcher. The researcher's intellectual formation, religious background, academic discipline, and ideological orientation can influence the questions asked, the sources selected, the interpretation of evidence, and the conclusions reached. Amin Abdullah has observed that Islamic Studies in Indonesia has historically been confronted with tendencies toward partiality, romanticism, and apologetic orientations (Abdullah 2002). Such tendencies become problematic when the research process is directed primarily toward confirming conclusions that have already been established by the researcher rather than critically examining the object of study.

This problem is closely related to the dominance of a particular form of normative reasoning. The normative approach views Islam through religious values, rules, ethics, and doctrines derived from revelation. Such an approach has an important position in Islamic scholarship because it preserves the connection between academic inquiry and the normative foundations of Islam. However, when normative assumptions are treated as sufficient explanations for every historical and social phenomenon, methodological flexibility can become restricted. Abuddin Nata, for example, explains that the normative approach tends to position Islamic teachings as absolute religious values, whereas Islamic Studies also requires attention to historical and empirical dimensions (Nata 2011).

The methodological difficulty consequently appears when researchers fail to distinguish between the normative status of revelation and the historical status of human interpretation. Qur'anic revelation possesses a religious status within Islamic belief, while interpretations, legal formulations, theological arguments, and institutional practices are produced through human intellectual processes occurring within particular historical contexts. Failure to distinguish these domains may inhibit criticism and make the development of alternative interpretations difficult. Mujamil Qomar similarly identifies the dominance of normative approaches and limited methodological development as important challenges in contemporary Islamic Studies (Nata 2011).

A second methodological tension concerns the limited mastery of methodologies outside the traditional religious sciences. Islamic Studies requires engagement with philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, and other disciplines when the object of study contains dimensions that cannot be explained through religious texts alone. Hasan Hanafi's critique of Islamic scholarship highlights the importance of social sciences and philosophy in strengthening the intellectual foundations of Islamic Studies (Hanafi n.d.). Philosophical reflection is particularly important because methodology is never independent from epistemology: the way researchers define reality, evidence, truth, and interpretation influences the methods they choose.

The consequences of limited methodological competence can be seen in the relatively

narrow range of research objects and approaches employed in some areas of Islamic scholarship. Contemporary Islamic phenomena such as religious identity, Muslim youth culture, Islamic educational institutions, gender relations, religious authority, Islamic organizations, and changing patterns of religious practice require empirical investigation as well as textual interpretation. Anthropology, sociology, and psychology can provide methodological instruments for understanding these phenomena. The increasing attention to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches in Islamic Studies indicates that methodological diversification is becoming an important part of contemporary scholarship.

A third tension is related to the relationship between Islamic scholarly perspectives and Western academic approaches. The use of Western theories and methodologies is not necessarily problematic. Academic disciplines developed in different intellectual contexts can provide analytical tools that enrich Islamic Studies. However, methodological adoption becomes problematic when a framework is applied without examining its philosophical assumptions or its compatibility with Islamic objects of study. Conversely, the complete rejection of external methodologies can also restrict intellectual development. Therefore, what is required is neither unconditional acceptance nor categorical rejection, but critical methodological engagement.

This position is important because methodological borrowing can produce epistemological tension when analytical categories developed in one intellectual tradition are treated as universally applicable. Researchers need to examine whether the concepts, assumptions, and categories employed adequately represent the Islamic phenomenon under investigation. Recent scholarship on the decolonization of Islamic Studies similarly calls for critical reconsideration of epistemological and methodological dominance while maintaining productive engagement with contemporary academic traditions (Huda et al. 2024).

Another important problem is the dominance of deductive approaches in certain forms of Islamic Studies. Deductive reasoning is valuable when research seeks to examine how general principles operate in particular circumstances. However, Islamic Studies becomes methodologically limited when empirical realities are interpreted exclusively from previously established theological propositions. A stronger inductive orientation allows researchers to begin from observations, field data, historical evidence, and actual religious practices before constructing broader interpretations. Mujamil Qomar identifies the tendency of Islamic Studies to remain heavily normative and deductive, while empirical and field-based approaches require greater development.

The development of inductive research does not mean eliminating normative or textual approaches. Instead, deductive and inductive methodologies can perform complementary functions. Textual and normative approaches can clarify the principles, concepts, and ideals contained within Islamic sources, while inductive and empirical approaches can examine how those principles are interpreted and practiced in concrete contexts. This distinction enables researchers to investigate the relationship between Islamic ideals and Muslim social realities without reducing one to the other.

Field research and observation are particularly important in this regard. Religious life is not limited to written texts but is manifested through institutions, rituals, social relations, educational practices, cultural traditions, and everyday behavior. Empirical research therefore provides an opportunity to investigate how Islamic teachings are interpreted, negotiated, and practiced by Muslim communities. Amin Abdullah's integrative-interconnective perspective provides an important theoretical foundation for connecting textual and empirical dimensions in Islamic Studies (Abdullah 2006).

Methodological development also requires researchers to recognize that no method is

epistemologically neutral. Interviews, observation, textual interpretation, historical criticism, discourse analysis, ethnography, and statistical analysis each involve particular assumptions concerning what constitutes evidence and how knowledge is produced. Consequently, methodological competence should not merely mean the ability to operate a research technique. It should also involve understanding the epistemological assumptions, strengths, limitations, and appropriate fields of application of that technique.

The findings therefore indicate that the methodological problem in Islamic Studies can be understood as a mismatch among epistemological assumptions, methodological choices, and the complexity of the research object. A theological question cannot necessarily be treated in the same way as a sociological question; a classical manuscript requires different analytical procedures from contemporary Muslim communities; and the study of Islamic legal principles requires different methodological considerations from the study of their implementation in society. Methodological reflexivity is consequently essential to ensure that research methods correspond to the characteristics of the object being investigated.

From this analysis, two methodological directions can be identified. First, researchers need to strengthen their mastery of diverse methodologies, particularly those derived from the humanities and social sciences, while maintaining adequate competence in Islamic scholarly traditions. Second, Islamic Studies needs to strengthen inductive and empirical research, including field observation and systematic engagement with social realities. These two directions do not eliminate normative scholarship but create a broader methodological space in which normative, historical, textual, and empirical approaches can interact.

Thus, methodological reform should not seek to replace one dominant methodology with another. Instead, it should cultivate methodological reflexivity, whereby researchers continuously ask why a particular method is selected, what epistemological assumptions it contains, what aspects of the object it can explain, and what limitations remain. This reflexive orientation provides the methodological foundation for overcoming epistemological problems in Islamic Studies and prepares the ground for the subsequent discussion of academic bias and researcher positionality.

Conclusion

This study concludes that epistemological problems in Islamic Studies arise primarily from the complex relationship between paradigmatic orientation, methodological choices, and researcher positionality. The existence of different paradigms is not itself problematic; rather, difficulties emerge when a particular paradigm is treated as the only legitimate framework for understanding Islam, thereby limiting interpretation, academic criticism, and engagement with the historical and social dimensions of Islamic life.

The findings identify three major contributing factors: researcher background and positionality, limited mastery of philosophy and interdisciplinary methodologies, and the uncritical use of either Islamic or Western intellectual perspectives. These factors can produce partial or apologetic orientations and methodological imbalance when the assumptions, strengths, and limitations of the perspectives employed are not sufficiently examined.

The study further finds that the tension between normative-deductive and historical-empirical approaches should not be resolved by privileging one over the other. Normative approaches remain important for examining Islamic teachings and principles, while historical, empirical, and interdisciplinary approaches are necessary for understanding their interpretation and practice within particular contexts. The methodological implication is that researchers should select methods according to the research object and research questions while maintaining critical engagement with both Islamic scholarly traditions and contemporary academic methodologies.

Therefore, overcoming epistemological problems in Islamic Studies does not require a single universally applicable paradigm or methodology. It requires greater epistemological awareness, methodological competence, and researcher reflexivity, allowing normative, historical, empirical, and interdisciplinary approaches to be employed according to their respective purposes and limitations. Further empirical research is needed to examine how these methodological considerations operate in specific fields of Islamic Studies, including Islamic education, Islamic law, Qur'anic studies, and contemporary Muslim communities.

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