

Decolonizing Malay-Islamic Epistemology: Revitalizing the Intellectual Tradition in the Nusantara through a Philosophy of Science Perspective

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Abstract

The Malay-Islamic scholarly tradition once served as a crucial foundation for the development of knowledge in the Nusantara through the harmonious integration of revelation, reason, and lived experience. However, colonialism has constructed a hierarchy of knowledge that positions Western epistemology as the center of rationality, while reducing the Malay-Islamic intellectual heritage to non-scientific local knowledge. This article aims to dismantle the structures of coloniality of knowledge that continue to be reproduced through modern education systems in the Malay-Islamic world and to offer the Transformative Islam framework as a more emancipatory epistemic alternative. Employing an interpretive textual analysis grounded in decolonial theory and the Islamic philosophy of science, this study traces epistemic subordination in the history of education, revitalizes the Malay-Islamic intellectual genealogy, and formulates a postcolonial pedagogical praxis to build the scientific autonomy of Malay Muslims. The findings show that colonial epistemological models have produced a disconnection from manuscripts, language, and the core values of *adab*, *tawhīd*, and *hikmah* within Malay-Islamic epistemology. These findings are translated into a postcolonial pedagogical praxis with direct implications for contemporary education, including curriculum redesign, integrative teaching approaches that bridge religious and scientific knowledge, and community-engaged research to strengthen scientific agency. The article argues that such educational transformation is essential for restoring epistemic sovereignty and revitalizing Malay Islam as a knowledge civilization in the modern era.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Nusantara region, Islam has not only shaped the spiritual and social dimensions of society but has also functioned as an epistemic foundation for the development of knowledge (Narulita, 2021). From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Malay-Islamic scholarly tradition emerged as a vibrant intellectual center, sustained by transregional networks of ulama, the widespread production of Jawi manuscripts, and the integration of religious and scientific inquiry within a unified *tawhīd*-based worldview. Prominent scholars such as Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, and Nuruddin al-Raniri exemplify how metaphysics, theology, ethics, and practical sciences were articulated as part of a coherent epistemological horizon (Aljunied, 2025; Leaman & Adamson, 2019). However, since the onset of colonial rule, this scholarly tradition has undergone systematic epistemic delegitimization, with enduring consequences that persist into the present (Barnawi, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Knowledge forms that once constituted the mainstream of intellectual life were gradually reclassified as marginal cultural heritage, increasingly regarded as irrelevant to the production of modern scientific knowledge.

Globally, colonialism has produced a hierarchy of knowledge that positions Western science as the universal standard of rationality, while relegating non-Western epistemologies to the status of the particular and traditional (Sharma, 2021). Consequently, the dichotomy between “religious sciences” and “worldly/general sciences,” which was unknown in classical Islamic history, has been

imposed onto the educational structures of Muslim societies (Sahin, 2018). In the Malay–Islamic world, this has generated epistemic inferiority, namely a deep-seated doubt about the capacity of one’s own tradition to produce legitimate knowledge, rendering Muslims more consumers of Western theories than independent epistemic producers (Jafari, 2022).

Various efforts to address this condition have been undertaken through diverse projects associated with the Islamization of knowledge (Chande, 2023). These initiatives, however, are not monolithic. While some strands adopt a critical and transformative orientation that seeks to rethink the epistemic foundations of modern science, other approaches remain largely sanctification-oriented and apologetic, treating the Qur’an primarily as an additional source of legitimacy for Western scientific theories. It is this latter strand that risks leaving intact the deeply rooted colonial structure of knowledge, and in some cases, inadvertently reinforcing the dominance of Western epistemology within Malay Muslim academic frameworks (Ideland, 2018). Consequently, epistemic decolonization cannot be reduced to the symbolic inclusion of religious elements within existing scientific paradigms, but must instead confront the structural inequalities and hierarchies of knowledge inherited from colonialism.

In the context of today’s global challenges, a new epistemic framework is needed, one that restores the role of revelation as the compass of knowledge and positions science as a means of empowering the ummah, rather than merely validating Western rationality (Fouz Mohamed Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024). Through the Transformative Islam approach, the revival of Malay–Islamic epistemology can be directed toward the reconstruction of knowledge that is contextual, culturally rooted, yet still adaptive to developments in modern scholarship (Fouz Mohamed Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024). This vision repositions Islam not only as a system of belief but also as a source of intellectual inspiration and social praxis for building epistemic independence in the Nusantara.

Although studies on Islam and modernity have grown extensively, there is still a limited body of work that examines how epistemic coloniality shapes contemporary structures of knowledge in the Malay–Islamic world, and how the Malay intellectual tradition can be reconstructed as a basis for an emancipatory revival of knowledge (Al-Shuqairat & Aldajah, 2025; Chande, 2023; Mohamad, 2008a). In addition, studies on postcolonial pedagogy grounded in Malay-Islamic values have yet to be integrated into higher education systems in Indonesia or in the broader Malay region.

Based on these gaps, this article aims to: uncover the structures of epistemic coloniality in the construction of knowledge in the Malay–Islamic world; revitalize the Malay–Islamic intellectual genealogy as a civilizational memory that is strategically important for the renewal of knowledge; formulate a postcolonial pedagogical model based on Transformative Islam that is oriented toward empowerment and scientific self-reliance; and articulate a postcolonial pedagogical praxis for a Malay–Islamic renaissance. To achieve these aims, the study employs an interpretive textual analysis grounded in decolonial theory and the Islamic philosophy of science. The author’s positionality as a Malay Muslim is an integral part of a self-decolonizing inquiry process that shapes the construction of arguments in this study.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using an interpretive textual analysis method, oriented toward tracing, critical reading, and conceptual reconstruction of texts that represent the Malay–Islamic scholarly tradition and the practices of coloniality of knowledge in the region (Al-Shuqairat & Aldajah, 2025). The analysis is conducted through thematic and deconstructive examinations of three analytically distinct bodies of texts: (1) *classical* Malay–Islamic texts, defined as pre-colonial manuscripts and scholarly works produced prior to European colonial intervention, particularly those written in Jawi and reflecting the integrated epistemology of revelation, reason, and lived experience; (2) *colonial* texts, consisting of colonial archives, orientalist writings, and educational policies produced under colonial administration that restructured knowledge hierarchies and epistemic authority; and (3) *postcolonial* texts, including

contemporary scholarly literature, educational reforms, and policy documents that either reproduce or critically engage with inherited colonial epistemologies. These textual corpora are analyzed within the theoretical framework of epistemic decolonization and the Islamic philosophy of science. To ensure analytical consistency and methodological transparency, the study integrates the researcher's reflexivity as a Malay Muslim situated within the historical tension between tradition and modernity. This approach constitutes a self-decolonizing inquiry that explicitly positions the researcher's subjectivity as an epistemic instrument rather than a source of methodological bias. Overall, the research design is presented systematically in Table 1.1, which outlines the components of the approach, data sources, analytical techniques, reflexivity, and analytical outputs, all of which are directly linked to the structure of argumentation in the results and discussion sections.

Table 1 Research Design of the Analytical–Interpretive Textual Method in Malay-Islamic Studies

| Method Component | Content & Detailed Explanation |
|---------------------------|--|
| Research Approach | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Qualitative – Analytical–Interpretive Textual Method 2. Analysis and interpretation of texts as the primary sources of knowledge and as the arena where coloniality operates 3. Focus on relations of epistemic power in historical narratives of Malay Islam and in contemporary scholarly discourse |
| Purpose Of The Analysis | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To uncover the coloniality of knowledge in the history and educational structures of the Malay–Islamic world 2. To revitalize the intellectual genealogy of Malay Islam 3. To formulate the epistemic framework of Transformative Islam and its pedagogical praxis |
| Theoretical Framework | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decolonial Epistemology: (Ramón Grosfoguel, 2007) critique of colonial knowledge hierarchies 2. Islamic Philosophy of Science: (Zaelani, 2016) integration of revelation–reason–experience; <i>tawhīdic</i> epistemology |
| Data Sources | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Classical Malay–Islamic Manuscripts & Texts <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jawi script (creed, fiqh, taṣawwuf, cosmology, astronomy/‘ilm al-falak, medicine, navigation) 2. Used to trace the unity of science–religion–culture B. Colonial & Postcolonial Literature <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Colonial archives, Orientalist writings, colonial ethnography 2. Decolonial critiques, Islamization of knowledge C. Contemporary Educational Documents <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curricula of Islamic Higher Education (PTKI) and general universities, education policies, models of scientification 2. Used to identify current reproductions of coloniality |
| Data Collection Technique | Purposive literature selection based on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relevance to the coloniality of knowledge 2. Historical trajectory of Malay–Islamic epistemology 3. Constructions of scientification and knowledge integration |
| Analysis Procedure | Using Thematic Deconstruction, which includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Initial Discourse Mapping <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repeated readings to identify discursive patterns 2. Identification of constructions of epistemic inferiority and the science/religion dichotomy B. Thematic Coding → three main themes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Epistemic subordination & epistemic violence 2. Pre-colonial intellectual genealogy of Malay Islam 3. Transformative Islam & the reconstruction of scientification C. Critical Deconstruction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unpacking colonial assumptions in texts and policies 2. Rereading revelation, reason, and culture within Malay– |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| | Islamic epistemology |
| | D. Conceptual Synthesis |
| | 1. 1. Integrating the findings into the argumentative structure of the Results & Discussion section |
| Researcher Reflexivity | 1. The researcher is a Malay Muslim → simultaneously part of the problem and the solution |
| | 2. Approach: Self-Decolonizing Inquiry → Critically examining internal biases produced by colonial education → Testing the religion/general, tradition/modernity dichotomies → Positioning subjective standpoint as an epistemic instrument for analysis |

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Coloniality of Knowledge in the Malay–Islamic World

The coloniality of knowledge in the Malay–Islamic world manifested not only in territorial domination but also in the reordering of knowledge hierarchies (Choong et al., 2025). Knowledge born from the Malay-Islamic tradition, ranging from exegesis, fiqh, and tasawwuf to cosmology and practical sciences such as medicine and navigation, was systematically reduced to “local knowledge,” deemed less rational, less scientific, or merely cultural heritage (Yanou et al., 2023). Colonialism shifted the center of epistemic authority from ulama, scholars, and Islamic educational institutions to colonial administrators, missionaries, and Western-oriented modern schools (Gamal, 2020).

Historically, there are various indications that Malay-Islamic knowledge was pushed to the margins (Hijjas, 2017). Jawi manuscripts containing works on theology, law, astronomy, and ethics of governance were stored under categories such as “oriental manuscripts” or “folklore,” rather than being recognized as part of the canon of universal knowledge. This classification was not merely technical; it reflected a worldview that regarded these texts as closer to traditional belief than to the products of scientific rationality. At the practical level, forms of expertise emerging from the Malay-Islamic tradition, for example, nautical science that combined observations of the stars, ocean currents, and certain supplications (du‘ā’), were replaced by modern navigation, without any recognition of local epistemic contributions (Ribeiro, 2023; Walker & Walker, 2012). Traditional medicinal knowledge, rooted in a synthesis of classical Islamic medical sciences and the empirical experience of Malay communities, was frequently labeled “village remedies” (obat kampung) and seen as lacking credibility compared with Western biomedicine.

This situation shows that colonialism did not merely bypass Malay knowledge but actively reorganized its status so that it appeared irrelevant to the project of modernity. Malay knowledge became residual knowledge: it may persist as cultural heritage or as an object of anthropological study, but it is not acknowledged as a legitimate source of theory or methodology for understanding the modern world. The marginal placement of Malay knowledge produces what can be termed epistemic inferiority, a sense of epistemic self-doubt experienced by Malay Muslim subjects (Suddahazai, 2024). Through colonial schools, ethnographic reports, and administrative discourse, societies were taught that the “modern” way of thinking was the European way (Samier & Samier, 2017). At the same time, their own traditions are something to be abandoned, or at least suspended, when speaking about science and progress.

One crucial practice in this process was regulating language. Malay Jawi, which for centuries had served as the medium of knowledge and administration, was sidelined and replaced by colonial languages and the Latin script (Abdullah et al., 2020; Yahaya, 2016). This shift in script gradually severed the new generations from the corpus of Malay-Islamic manuscripts, making this knowledge tradition appear “obsolete” and challenging to access. In addition, academic discourse on the Malay world was produced primarily through orientalist lenses. The intellectual tradition of Islam in this region was read as derivative of the Middle East, lacking originality, and characterized mainly by a

“confusing” syncretism. Such narratives reinforced the idea that Malay societies were merely passive recipients of civilization, not agents capable of formulating their own epistemologies.

The internalization of this colonial discourse led many postcolonial Malay Muslim intellectuals to doubt the capacity of their own tradition to serve as a foundation for knowledge development (Mohamad, 2008b; Muhd & Aljunied, 2011). They tend to position themselves as consumers of Western theories, subsequently apologetically attaching Qur’anic verses or Islamic terminology (Nuruzzaman, 2018). Here, coloniality operates in subtle ways: even after formal colonization has ended, structures of epistemic subordination continue to persist.

Modern education introduced by colonial powers became one of the most effective instruments in the process of de-Islamization of knowledge (Fajri, 2025). Curricula were designed on the basis of a sharp division between “religious sciences” and “general sciences.” Religious sciences were narrowed to rituals and the jurisprudence of worship (Irham, 2025). In contrast, general sciences, mathematics, science, and history were drawn almost entirely from Western traditions, without critical dialogue with the Islamic scholarly heritage (Sahin, 2018). In many parts of the Malay world, government or mission schools became symbols of social mobility. To climb the social ladder, a Malay Muslim had to internalize colonial modes of thinking and speaking. Meanwhile, traditional educational institutions such as surau, pesantren, or madrasah were positioned as alternative paths that were “less modern.” As a result, the integration of revelation, reason, and lived experience, which once marked classical Islamic epistemology, was no longer cultivated within formal educational settings.

This separation has produced two equally problematic types of graduates: (1) modern secular graduates, who are proficient in science and technology but regard religion merely as a private matter; and (2) traditionally religious graduates, who master the religious sciences but feel estranged from science and contemporary issues. Both are products of an educational structure that inherits a colonial logic: religion is placed at the margins, modern science at the center, and local tradition is included only as an accessory to identity. In this context, sanctification efforts that merely seek “correspondence between Qur’anic verses and Western theories” in fact reinforce the subordination of Malay-Islamic epistemology, because they reduce revelation to a mere footnote to the forms of knowledge recognized as valid by the West.

At this point, it becomes clear that the coloniality of knowledge in the Malay–Islamic world is not simply a legacy of the past (Muhd & Aljunied, 2011). However, reality is continuously reproduced through language, curricula, and the ways society evaluates epistemic authority (Antoniades, 2010). The following sections of this article demonstrate how the Transformative Islam framework can be used to dismantle these colonial structures and reweave Malay Islam as an autonomous and emancipatory epistemic foundation.

Intellectual Genealogy of Malay Islam: Reclaiming Civilizational Memory

To understand the possible futures of Malay Islam, we must first trace its intellectual genealogy. Prior to colonial intervention, science, religion, and culture did not exist as three separate domains in the imagination of the Malay–Islamic world. The works of Malay ulama and scholars show that knowledge was understood as a single cosmic unity centered on *tawhīd*: the recognition that all reality, both empirical and metaphysical, originates from and returns to God (Huda et al., 2016; Yusof, 2012). Within this horizon, studying the movement of the stars, the dynamics of the sea, or the properties of plants was not a “secular” activity, but part of the effort to read the *āyāt kauniyyah* (signs in creation) that complement the *āyāt qauliyyah* (revealed verses).

This unity is reflected in the way Malay manuscripts weave theological, philosophical, and practical themes into a single text. In one manuscript, readers may encounter discussions of creed, social ethics, the conduct of those in power, and explanations of natural phenomena and principles of healing. Such a structure shows that knowledge was not fragmented into isolated compartments but placed within a web of meanings connected to an ultimate purpose: cultivating a refined human being who knows God and is capable of managing the world wisely (Bruni et al., 2007; Sadgrove &

Sadgrove, 2015). For this reason, the sharp dichotomy between “religious sciences” and “worldly/general sciences” that appears in modern curricula is in fact a recent phenomenon born of colonial logic, not a reflection of the original Malay–Islamic tradition.

Within the epistemic system of Malay Islam, the values of *adab*, *tawhīd*, and *hikmah* occupy a central position (Fouz & Zacky, 2024). *Adab* is understood not merely as interpersonal politeness, but as the act of placing things in their proper place, putting things where they properly belong, in one’s relationship with God, with fellow human beings, and with nature. *Adab* becomes a prerequisite for the validity and blessedness of knowledge: knowledge acquired without *adab* can cause harm, even if it is technically “correct.” *Tawhīd*, at the same time, functions as an ontological and ethical framework. It affirms that there is no final dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, because every dimension of life becomes a sphere of devotion. This gives rise to a worldview in which managing natural resources, developing technology, or engaging in trade are all seen as forms of religious practice, insofar as they are grounded in sincere intention and just governance.

Hikmah then becomes the pinnacle of the process of acquiring knowledge: not merely the accumulation of data and concepts, but the capacity to discern connections between phenomena, weigh the consequences of actions, and choose paths that lead to the common good (Albareda & Jose, 2020). In the Malay–Islamic tradition, *hikmah* is often associated with the wisdom of leaders, ulama, and elders who are “ripened” by experience. However, behind these figures lies an epistemic ethos that weaves together revelation, reason, and experience as mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive sources.

Malay manuscripts stand as concrete evidence that the civilization of knowledge in this region is deeply rooted in revelation (Denisova, n.d.). Works of Qur’anic exegesis and ḥadīth commentary show how sacred texts were read and interpreted in local contexts, complete with references to villages, ports, and indigenous customs. Legal manuscripts elaborate detailed rulings that take into account the socio-economic realities of Malay societies, for instance, in the management of waqf, maritime trade, or intergroup relations. Meanwhile, treatises on medicine and astronomy (‘ilm al-falak) illustrate how empirical data and mathematical calculations were situated within a conviction that the cosmos moves according to sunnatullāh, and thus can be studied and utilized without losing its spiritual dimension.

The existence of these manuscripts refutes the assumption that Malay Islam was merely a passive recipient of knowledge from other centers (Meyer, 2019). On the contrary, they reveal a creative process of reworking the global Islamic intellectual heritage and integrating it with lived experience in the Nusantara (Firdaus & Rahman, 2017). This process produced distinctive articulations of the human–God–nature relationship whose nuances differ from those found in other regions, yet remain firmly within the orbit of *tawhīd* (Arslan, 2025). Herein lies the importance of reclaiming civilizational memory: restoring the community’s collective awareness that it once developed a holistic knowledge tradition deeply grounded in revelation.

The recovery of this civilizational memory is not merely an exercise in nostalgia, but a foundation for the project of epistemic decolonization (Sarmiento et al., 2025). Without recognizing that science, religion, and culture once formed a unified horizon within Malay Islam, it becomes difficult to imagine alternative forms of education and knowledge development beyond the Western modern model that currently dominates (Sahin, 2018). By retracing this intellectual genealogy, we open space to reformulate a non-apologetic approach to scientification: science is situated within the amānah of vicegerency (*khilāfah*), while revelation serves as the compass that orients its purposes and ethical use (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025). In turn, recognizing Malay manuscripts and scholarly traditions as part of the global Islamic civilizational heritage can strengthen the epistemic self-confidence of the new generation, reminding them that they are not starting from zero but continuing a long trajectory of knowledge obscured by coloniality.

Beyond Apologetic Scientification: Toward Transformative Islamization

One of the responses that has emerged to the dominance of Western epistemology in the Malay–Islamic world is the project of "scientification" or the "Islamization of science (Dhona, 2024)." In practice, however, many scientification initiatives become trapped in a narrow and apologetic approach. The Qur'an is often treated as if it were a modern science textbook: verses are used to "prove" theories in physics, biology, or cosmology that originate in Western traditions (Saputro et al., 2024). Within this pattern, the status of revelation is reduced to a legitimizing appendix to contemporary scientific findings; if a Western theory appears to correspond to a fragment of a verse's translation, it is promoted as evidence of the "scientific truth" of the Qur'an (Rashwan, 2024).

Such an approach is problematic on several levels. First, it elevates Western science as the gold standard of truth, while revelation serves merely as a footnote reinforcing that science's authority (Kelly et al., 2018). Second, it is vulnerable to shifts in scientific paradigms: when theories change, the artificially constructed links between verses and those theories become fragile and risk generating theological confusion (Ugboh et al., 2025). Third, this narrow form of scientification fails to address the core issue of the coloniality of knowledge, because it does not alter the hierarchical structure that places Western expertise at the center and the Islamic tradition at the margins. It merely changes the rhetorical packaging, not the underlying logic.

As an alternative, this article proposes the framework of Transformative Islam, which positions revelation not as a "science textbook" but as an epistemic compass that orients the direction, ethics, and purposes of knowledge use. Revelation offers a vision of the nature of the human being, the cosmos, and history: that the world is created with purpose, that humans are *khalīfah* who bear a sacred trust, and that knowledge is a path toward self-knowledge and knowledge of God (Ziyaei et al., 2025). Within this framework, science is understood as a systematic effort to read the *āyāt kauniyyah* (signs in creation), rather than as an authority against which revelation must be measured (Malik, 2025). The guiding question shifts from "is this theory found in the Qur'an?" to "are the practices of this science aligned with the values of justice, mercy, and the flourishing of the earth as outlined by revelation?"

Thus, science is positioned as an agent of empowerment rather than merely a tool for religious justification (Ecklund, 2011). Knowledge and technology are viewed as means to liberate society from poverty, backwardness, and epistemic dependency, while also serving as instruments to strengthen civilizational dignity (Arowosegbe, 2016). In the context of Malay Islam, this implies developing science and technology that are attuned to local ecologies, social structures, and cultural heritage, rather than simply copying developmental models that neglect sustainability and justice (Saad, 2024). This transformation shifts the focus from "finding matching verses" to "using knowledge as a trust (*amānah*) to cultivate the earth and protect the vulnerable."

Concrete examples of the Transformative Islam framework can be seen in several strategic fields. In higher education in the natural sciences, for instance, physics, biology, or environmental science programs cannot suffice with merely adding a stand-alone course on "Islam and Science" (Peels, 2023). A deeper level of integration is required: students are guided to understand that studying energy, biodiversity, or climate change is directly related to humans' responsibilities as *khalīfah* on earth (Alsulami, 2024; Majhab & Amiri, 2025; Qureshi & Ali, 2024). Research projects are directed not only toward achieving citation indices, but also toward addressing concrete problems such as environmental degradation, unequal access to clean water, or food crises in Malay–Islamic communities. Here, revelation functions as a source of values and orientation, while scientific methodology continues to be applied rigorously and professionally.

In the realm of technology research grounded in Malay–Islamic values, Transformative Islam encourages the development of innovations that take into account *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and local wisdom (Harun et al., 2025). Agricultural technologies, for instance, are not assessed solely in terms of economic productivity, but also in relation to their impact on soil sustainability, the livelihoods of fishermen and farmers, and the social interdependence within communities (Bui et

al., 2025). The use of digital technology for education and da'wah is evaluated not only from the perspective of efficiency, but also in light of its potential for dehumanization, excessive surveillance, or the commodification of religion (Fatmawati & Diponegoro, n.d.; Monahan & Monahan, 2017). In this way, technological research becomes a space where the values of *tawhīd*, *adab*, and *hikmah* are put into practice rather than mere slogans.

This framework also calls for the reconstruction of integrative curricula in Malay-Islamic educational institutions (Saputra & Latipah, 2024). Instead of maintaining a rigid dichotomy between "religious tracks" and "general tracks," curricula are designed to shape graduate profiles capable of moving fluidly between revealed texts, local traditions, and global challenges. Qur'anic exegesis is linked to issues of social, ecological, and economic justice in the contemporary world; conversely, the study of economics or environmental science is enriched with discussions on Islamic ethical values and the historical experience of Malay civilization (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Sawani et al., 2025). Integration here does not mean "Islamizing" terminology, but reorganizing the structure of knowledge so that all disciplines are oriented toward building a society that is just, refined in conduct, and epistemically sovereign.

Thus, moving beyond narrow scientification means shifting the focus from symbolic proof to substantive transformation. Transformative Islam does not place revelation and science in a mutually negating relationship, but rather in a dialogical one, positioning revelation as the compass and science as the vehicle (Alivia & Siregar, 2018). Within this framework, the project of epistemic decolonization in the Malay-Islamic world does not stop at critiquing the West, but is realized through the construction of a living, creative knowledge tradition that is committed to the welfare of the ummah and the preservation of nature.

Postcolonial Pedagogic Praxis for a Malay-Islam Renaissance

Suppose the coloniality of knowledge in the Malay-Islamic world has marginalized local intellectual traditions and fractured the relationship between revelation, reason, and culture. In that case, one of the urgent agendas of the 21st century is to formulate a postcolonial pedagogic praxis capable of reviving Malay Islam (Aruan, 2024; Boisselle, 2016). This praxis requires an epistemological model that is not merely abstract but truly operational across education, research, and policy (Omodan, 2025). Within the framework of Transformative Islam, such an epistemological model must possess at least three key characteristics: it is contextual and rooted in Malay culture, adaptive to modernity, and capable of generating the scientific agency of Malay communities.

First, an epistemological model that is contextual and rooted in Malay culture means that knowledge is not understood as something neutral and floating without history, but as always embedded in place and collective experience (Yusof, 2012). Oral traditions, Jawi manuscripts, customary law (*adat*), and the socio-religious practices of Malay communities are not merely objects of study, but sources of epistemic inspiration. Recognizing these cultural roots is not an exercise in romanticizing the past; rather, it is an effort to avoid the alienation that often arises when external theories are applied without dialogue with local realities. In pedagogical practice, this may take the form of using local examples in teaching science and social studies, involving communities in learning processes, and integrating the works of Malay ulama and scholars as core references rather than mere footnotes (Mahrus, 2025).

Second, an epistemological model that is adaptive to modernity rejects the false dichotomy between "tradition" and "progress" (Korab-karpowicz, 2019). Malay Islam does not have to choose between being "authentic but left behind" or "modern but uprooted." Adaptivity here refers to the ability to critically engage with contemporary advances in science and technology, from artificial intelligence to biotechnology, through the lens of *tawhīd*, *adab*, and *hikmah* (Hamid & Bukhari, 2025). This requires the courage to critique destructive aspects of modernity, such as extreme consumerism or ecological exploitation, while also being ready to harness its positive potential for the common good. In education, this adaptivity is reflected in curriculum renewal, the critical use of

digital technologies, and the development of new literacies that enable young Malay–Islamic generations to participate actively in global scholarly conversations without losing their identity (Ambya et al., 2025).

Third, an epistemological model that confers scientific agency on Malay communities positions society not as a passive recipient of knowledge produced in Western academic centers, but as a subject capable of formulating research questions, developing methods, and making its own theories. This scientific agency is realized when educational and research institutions in the Malay–Islamic world do not merely pursue accreditation and external recognition, but also prioritize issues arising from their own social realities: structural poverty, ecological vulnerability in coastal areas, cultural shifts in the digital age, and so forth (Bennett et al., 2016). From this perspective, success is measured not only by the number of publications in international journals but also by the extent to which the knowledge produced strengthens community autonomy, justice, and well-being.

However, implementing such a postcolonial pedagogical praxis faces multiple challenges in the 21st century (Gupta, 2020). Economic and cultural globalization tends to standardize education and research according to neoliberal models that emphasize competition, the commodification of knowledge, and quantitative metrics such as citation indices and university rankings (Welsh, 2020). In many Malay-Islamic educational institutions, institutional success is often gauged by how quickly they can "catch up" with these global standards, pushing epistemic decolonization to the margins under the weight of administrative and bureaucratic demands. In addition, there is internal resistance from some who view critiques of Western paradigms as anti-science or anti-modernity, as well as resistance from conservative groups who are suspicious of any form of pedagogical reform.

Another set of challenges arises from infrastructural and resource constraints. Curriculum transformation, the development of interdisciplinary research, and the strengthening of manuscript repositories or local knowledge databases require substantial investment, both financial and human. Amid political and economic pressures, it is often easier for institutions to adopt off-the-shelf educational models from outside than to build their own epistemological frameworks, which demand long-term processes of reflection and experimentation (Hartley, 2025).

To respond to these challenges, more systematic policy and institutional strategies are required. At the policy level, states and educational authorities in the Malay–Islamic region need to explicitly acknowledge the importance of decolonizing knowledge and integrating Islamic values into the development of science and technology (Kashif & Rahman, 2025). This can be realized through national policy frameworks that promote research grounded in local needs, programs to revitalize Malay-Islamic manuscripts and archives, and support for alternative educational models that combine the strengths of pesantren, madrasah, and modern universities.

At the institutional level, universities and research institutes can establish centers explicitly dedicated to Malay-Islamic epistemology, curriculum decolonization, and pedagogical innovation. Partnerships among academics, ulama, educators, and grassroots communities are crucial to ensure that epistemic transformation does not stop at seminars but extends to classroom practice, pesantren, and community spaces. Incentive mechanisms also need to be reformed: lecturers and researchers should be recognized not only for international publications but also for their contributions to strengthening society's intellectual and cultural capacities. Thus, a postcolonial pedagogic praxis for the renaissance of Malay Islam is not merely a theoretical project, but a practical agenda that demands political courage, institutional creativity, and fidelity to the value heritage discussed in the preceding sections. If successful, this praxis can give rise to a new generation of Malay–Islamic scholars who are no longer trapped between imitation and rejection, but are capable of articulating an alternative modernity rooted in *tawhīd*, refined in their relations with others and with nature, and sovereign in the production and governance of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This article affirms that the coloniality of knowledge has left a long-lasting imprint on the educational structures and mindsets of Malay Muslims, creating an epistemic hierarchy that places Western science at the center of rationality while regarding the Malay–Islamic scholarly tradition as inferior. This condition has produced a rupture with an intellectual heritage that once integrated revelation, reason, and experience within a unified epistemological system. Through interpretive textual analysis, the article shows that revitalizing the genealogy of Malay Islam is a crucial step toward overcoming epistemic inferiority and restoring intellectual autonomy in the Nusantara. The Transformative Islam approach is offered as an emancipatory framework that orients science toward community empowerment, rather than mere normative justification. By building a postcolonial pedagogic praxis rooted in the values of *adab*, *tawhīd*, and *hikmah*, Malay Muslims can reconstitute a knowledge civilization that is both responsive to the challenges of modernity and epistemically sovereign.

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