Certainty and Doubt in Islamic Religious Education toward a Dialogue between Islamic and Cartesian Epistemology

Rizal Fathurrohman
Universitas Alma Ata, Yogyakarta
rfathurrohman@almaata.ac.ic

Abstract
This study explores the epistemological relationship between certainty and doubt in Islamic Religious Education through a philosophical dialogue between Islamic and Cartesian epistemology. The problem of knowledge in education concerns how certainty is attained, justified, and internalized within the learning process. In Islamic epistemology, certainty is expressed through the concept of yaqīn, which integrates revelation, rational reflection, and spiritual intuition as interconnected sources of valid knowledge. Conversely, Cartesian epistemology begins with methodological doubt as a critical foundation for establishing indubitable certainty grounded in rational self awareness. This study employs a qualitative philosophical approach using conceptual and epistemological analysis, drawing on the epistemological perspectives of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Rene Descartes. The findings demonstrate that doubt and certainty function as complementary epistemic processes rather than contradictory states. Doubt serves as a methodological tool to examine the limits and validity of knowledge, while certainty represents the culmination of rational inquiry and spiritual realization. This epistemological dialogue contributes to reconstructing the philosophical foundation of Islamic Religious Education by integrating rational and spiritual modes of knowing, thereby enhancing its epistemic legitimacy, intellectual depth, and transformative educational purpose.
Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, epistemology, certainty, doubt, *yaqīn*, cogito, al-Ghazali, Descartes

Abstrak
Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan epistemologis antara kepastian dan keraguan dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam melalui dialog filosofis antara epistemologi Islam dan epistemologi Cartesian. Persoalan pengetahuan dalam pendidikan berkaitan dengan bagaimana kepastian diperoleh, dibenarkan, dan diinternalisasi dalam proses pembelajaran. Dalam epistemologi Islam, kepastian diwujudkan melalui konsep yaqīn, yang mengintegrasikan wahyu, refleksi rasional, dan intuisi spiritual sebagai sumber pengetahuan yang sah. Sebaliknya, epistemologi Cartesian berangkat dari keraguan metodis sebagai fondasi kritis untuk mencapai kepastian yang tidak dapat diragukan, yang berakar pada kesadaran rasional diri. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif filosofis melalui analisis konseptual dan epistemologis, dengan merujuk pada pemikiran Abu Hamid al-Ghazali dan Rene Descartes. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keraguan dan kepastian merupakan proses epistemik yang saling melengkapi, bukan bertentangan. Keraguan berfungsi sebagai metode kritis untuk menguji validitas pengetahuan, sedangkan kepastian merupakan puncak dari refleksi rasional dan realisasi spiritual. Dialog epistemologis ini berkontribusi dalam merekonstruksi fondasi filosofis Pendidikan Agama Islam melalui integrasi rasionalitas dan spiritualitas, sehingga memperkuat legitimasi epistemik, kedalaman intelektual, dan fungsi transformatif pendidikan.
Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Agama Islam, epistemologi, kepastian, keraguan, *yaqīn*, cogito, al-Ghazali, Descartes

INTRODUCTION

Epistemology constitutes a fundamental philosophical foundation that determines how knowledge is acquired, justified, and transmitted within educational systems. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, epistemology assumes a particularly significant role because religious knowledge is not solely derived from empirical observation and rational reflection, but also from revelation and spiritual experience. Consequently, Islamic Religious Education cannot be reduced to the transmission of doctrinal information; rather, it represents a process of epistemic formation through which learners attain certainty and meaningful understanding of religious truth. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that religious education must be understood as an epistemic and transformative process that shapes not only cognitive comprehension but also existential awareness and spiritual orientation (Sahin, 2018; Jackson, 2021). This perspective highlights the importance of examining the epistemological foundations of Islamic Religious Education in order to understand how certainty is constructed and internalized.

The question of certainty and doubt has long been central to philosophical investigations of knowledge. In modern philosophy, Rene Descartes established methodological doubt as the starting point for achieving indubitable certainty. By systematically doubting all sources of knowledge that could be subject to error, including sensory perception and inherited beliefs, Descartes arrived at the foundational certainty expressed in the cogito ergo sum. This proposition demonstrated that the act of thinking itself provides an undeniable basis for knowledge, thereby establishing rational self awareness as the foundation of epistemic certainty (Descartes, 1998). Contemporary interpretations suggest that Cartesian doubt should not be understood as skepticism for its own sake, but as a critical epistemological method aimed at securing reliable knowledge through rational autonomy and reflective inquiry (Newman, 2019; Smith, 2021). In this framework, doubt functions as a constructive epistemic tool that enables the subject to distinguish between uncertain belief and genuine knowledge.

A similar epistemological concern can be found within the Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly in the thought of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. In his autobiographical and philosophical reflections, al Ghazali described an epistemic crisis in which he questioned the reliability of sense perception and rational knowledge. However, rather than leading to permanent skepticism, this epistemic doubt became the pathway toward a higher form of certainty known as yaqīn, which was attained through spiritual illumination and divine guidance (Al Ghazali, 2000). In this epistemological framework, certainty is not limited to rational demonstration but includes an inner

experiential dimension grounded in spiritual realization. Recent scholarship has emphasized that al Ghazali epistemology represents an integrative model of knowledge that synthesizes reason, revelation, and spiritual intuition as complementary sources of epistemic validity (Griffel, 2021; Kukkonen, 2020). This integrative structure reflects a broader understanding of knowledge as both intellectual and existential.

The comparison between Cartesian epistemology and al Ghazali epistemology reveals both convergence and divergence in their approaches to certainty and doubt. Both thinkers recognize doubt as an essential epistemic stage in the pursuit of certainty. However, they differ significantly in their understanding of the ultimate foundation of certainty. Cartesian epistemology locates certainty within rational self awareness, whereas al Ghazali locates certainty in spiritual illumination that transcends purely rational cognition. Contemporary philosophical discourse has interpreted these differences as representing two distinct epistemological paradigms, namely rational epistemology and spiritual epistemology (Taylor, 2018; Gazis, 2022). Rational epistemology emphasizes logical coherence and reflective reasoning, while spiritual epistemology emphasizes inner transformation and existential realization. These two paradigms offer complementary insights into the nature of human knowledge and its ultimate foundations.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this epistemological dialogue becomes particularly relevant. Islamic Religious Education aims not only to develop intellectual understanding but also to cultivate spiritual awareness and religious certainty. Therefore, the process of learning in Islamic Religious Education must be understood as an epistemic journey that involves both rational reflection and spiritual realization. Contemporary scholars argue that effective religious education must move beyond the mere transmission of doctrinal content and instead facilitate the epistemic and existential development of learners (Sahin, 2018; Halstead, 2022). This perspective suggests that certainty in Islamic Religious Education emerges through an integrative process in which learners engage critically with knowledge while also undergoing spiritual and existential transformation.

However, contemporary educational practices often emphasize the transmission of religious knowledge without sufficient attention to its epistemological foundations. This approach risks producing forms of religious understanding that are intellectually superficial and epistemically unreflective. Without engaging learners in the epistemic process through which certainty is attained, religious education may fail to achieve its transformative purpose. In this regard, the epistemological dialogue between Islamic and Cartesian traditions provides a valuable framework for reconstructing the philosophical foundation of Islamic Religious Education. Such a dialogue

enables the integration of rational inquiry and spiritual experience as complementary pathways toward epistemic certainty (Jackson, 2021; Gazis, 2022).

Furthermore, contemporary philosophy of education has increasingly emphasized the importance of understanding education as a process of epistemic transformation rather than mere knowledge transmission. Knowledge is not simply an object to be acquired but a process through which individuals develop self awareness, critical reflection, and existential understanding (Biesta, 2020). From this perspective, Islamic Religious Education can be understood as a transformative epistemic process that guides learners from doubt toward certainty, from conceptual knowledge toward existential realization. This process reflects the integration of rational and spiritual dimensions within human epistemic development.

Based on these considerations, this study seeks to examine the relationship between certainty and doubt in Islamic Religious Education through a philosophical dialogue between Islamic epistemology and Cartesian epistemology. By analyzing the epistemological perspectives of al Ghazali and Descartes, this study aims to reconstruct the epistemological foundation of Islamic Religious Education as an integrative framework that acknowledges both rational and spiritual sources of knowledge. Such a reconstruction is essential for strengthening the epistemic legitimacy, philosophical depth, and transformative potential of Islamic Religious Education in contemporary intellectual and educational context.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative philosophical research design based on epistemological and conceptual analysis. This approach is appropriate because the primary focus of the study is to examine the philosophical foundations of certainty and doubt in Islamic Religious Education rather than to measure empirical variables. Philosophical inquiry enables the systematic examination of concepts, assumptions, and epistemic structures underlying educational thought and practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Biesta, 2020). The primary sources of this study consist of classical philosophical works, particularly those of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Rene Descartes, which provide the foundational epistemological frameworks of spiritual certainty and methodological doubt (Al Ghazali, 2000; Descartes, 1998). In addition, secondary sources include recent scholarly works in Islamic epistemology, philosophy of education, and religious education. These sources are selected purposively based on their conceptual relevance and philosophical significance to the themes of certainty, doubt, rationality, and spiritual knowledge (Jackson, 2021; Griffel, 2021).

The data analysis is conducted using philosophical methods that include conceptual analysis, comparative analysis, and critical epistemological reflection. Conceptual analysis is used to clarify the meaning, structure, and function of certainty and doubt within both Islamic and Cartesian epistemological traditions (Kukkonen, 2020). Comparative analysis is employed to examine the similarities, differences, and epistemological implications of rational certainty based on cogito and spiritual certainty based on yaqīn (Smith, 2021; Gazis, 2022). Furthermore, critical reflection is applied to synthesize these epistemological perspectives into an integrative framework relevant to Islamic Religious Education. This process aims to reconstruct the epistemological foundation of Islamic Religious Education by demonstrating how rational inquiry and spiritual realization function as complementary pathways toward epistemic certainty, thereby supporting the philosophical legitimacy and transformative purpose of religious education (Sahin, 2018; Biesta, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Doubt as an Epistemological Foundation in Islamic and Cartesian Thought

The findings of this study indicate that doubt occupies a central and constructive role in both Islamic epistemology and Cartesian epistemology, functioning not as an obstacle to knowledge but as a necessary foundation for attaining certainty. In both traditions, doubt represents an epistemological turning point that initiates the transition from uncritical acceptance to reflective and justified knowledge. Rather than undermining the possibility of truth, doubt serves as a methodological and transformative process that purifies the intellect and reorients the knower toward a more secure epistemic foundation. This shared recognition suggests that doubt should be understood not as a sign of epistemological weakness but as a condition of epistemological awakening.

In the Cartesian tradition, doubt is explicitly formulated as a methodological principle designed to establish indubitable certainty. Rene Descartes begins his epistemological inquiry by systematically questioning the reliability of all sources of knowledge that may be subject to error, including sensory perception, empirical experience, and inherited beliefs (Descartes, 1998). Descartes observes that sensory perception can be deceptive, as demonstrated by illusions, dreams, and perceptual distortions. If the senses can deceive even once, then their reliability cannot serve as an absolute foundation for certainty. Consequently, Descartes extends his doubt even further by questioning the certainty of mathematical reasoning through the hypothetical possibility of a deceiving power capable of manipulating human cognition. This radical extension of doubt

illustrates the depth of Cartesian epistemological skepticism, which seeks to eliminate all forms of uncertain knowledge.

However, Cartesian doubt is not an expression of skepticism as a final philosophical position. Rather, it is a methodological strategy aimed at discovering a foundation of knowledge that cannot be doubted. Through this process of systematic doubt, Descartes arrives at the realization that while all external sources of knowledge may be doubted, the act of doubting itself cannot be doubted. This insight leads to the formulation of the cogito ergo sum, which affirms that the thinking subject exists as a necessary condition of doubt itself. The cogito represents the first indubitable certainty because even if all other beliefs are false, the existence of the thinking self remains undeniable. Contemporary philosophical scholarship emphasizes that the cogito establishes epistemic certainty through reflexive self awareness, in which the subject becomes both the knower and the foundation of knowledge (Newman, 2019; Smith, 2021).

From this perspective, doubt functions as a critical epistemological method that enables the knower to distinguish between uncertain belief and certain knowledge. Doubt serves to dismantle false certainty and reveal the underlying structures of knowledge that can withstand rational scrutiny. This process reflects what may be described as epistemological purification, in which the knower frees the intellect from the influence of unexamined assumptions and unreliable sources. Thus, doubt plays a constructive role in establishing epistemological autonomy, allowing the subject to attain certainty through rational reflection rather than reliance on external authority.

A parallel epistemological structure can be observed within the Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly in the thought of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. In his autobiographical and philosophical reflections, al Ghazali describes a profound epistemological crisis in which he began to question the validity of knowledge derived from sensory perception and rational reasoning (Al Ghazali, 2000). Like Descartes, al Ghazali recognized that sensory perception could be deceptive and that rational reasoning could be subject to error. This realization led him to doubt the epistemological reliability of conventional sources of knowledge. However, al Ghazali epistemological doubt was not motivated by a desire to deny the possibility of truth, but rather by a desire to attain certainty that could withstand all forms of epistemic uncertainty.

Al Ghazali epistemological journey illustrates that doubt can function as a process of intellectual and spiritual purification. Through doubt, the knower becomes aware of the limitations of empirical and rational knowledge and becomes open to higher forms of epistemic realization. According to al Ghazali, certainty cannot be attained solely through rational demonstration,

because rational knowledge remains susceptible to doubt and error. Instead, certainty emerges through spiritual illumination, which transforms the inner state of the knower and enables direct experiential knowledge of truth (Al Ghazali, 2000). Contemporary scholars have interpreted this process as a form of epistemological transformation, in which doubt serves as the catalyst for the transition from discursive knowledge to experiential certainty (Griffel, 2021; Kukkonen, 2020).

This epistemological transformation reflects a deeper understanding of doubt as an existential as well as intellectual process. Doubt not only challenges the validity of external knowledge but also transforms the internal structure of the knower. In this sense, doubt serves as a process of epistemic self purification that removes false certainty and prepares the knower for authentic knowledge. This interpretation aligns with contemporary philosophical perspectives that emphasize the role of epistemic crisis in the development of intellectual maturity. Epistemic doubt disrupts the illusion of certainty and creates the conditions necessary for deeper epistemological insight (Taylor, 2018).

The comparison between Cartesian epistemology and Islamic epistemology reveals both convergence and divergence in their understanding of doubt. Both traditions recognize doubt as an essential epistemological stage that initiates the search for certainty. In both cases, doubt functions as a method of epistemological purification that enables the knower to move beyond unexamined belief. However, the two traditions differ in their understanding of the ultimate resolution of doubt. Cartesian epistemology resolves doubt through rational self awareness, whereas Islamic epistemology resolves doubt through spiritual illumination. This difference reflects two complementary models of epistemological realization, one grounded in rational autonomy and the other grounded in spiritual transformation.

Despite these differences, both traditions affirm that doubt is not opposed to certainty but is necessary for its attainment. Doubt functions as the beginning of epistemological awakening, enabling the knower to question assumptions, examine beliefs, and seek deeper understanding. Without doubt, knowledge remains superficial and unexamined. With doubt, knowledge becomes reflective, justified, and authentic. This insight has significant implications for Islamic Religious Education, particularly in its role as a process of epistemological formation.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, doubt should not be understood as a threat to religious belief but as a necessary stage in the development of epistemic maturity. When learners engage in critical reflection, they move beyond passive acceptance toward active understanding. This process enables learners to internalize knowledge at a deeper level, transforming belief into certainty grounded in intellectual and spiritual realization. Contemporary educational philosophy

supports this view by emphasizing that authentic learning involves the transformation of the learner epistemically and existentially (Biesta, 2020; Sahin, 2018).

Furthermore, recognizing the epistemological role of doubt allows Islamic Religious Education to avoid the limitations of purely transmissive educational models. When education focuses solely on transmitting doctrinal information, learners may acquire knowledge without achieving epistemic certainty. By contrast, when education encourages reflective inquiry and epistemological questioning, learners become active participants in the process of knowledge formation. This participatory epistemology enables learners to develop intellectual autonomy and spiritual awareness simultaneously.

Ultimately, the findings of this study demonstrate that doubt functions as the foundation of epistemological development in both Islamic and Cartesian traditions. Doubt initiates the process of epistemic purification, dismantles false certainty, and prepares the knower for authentic knowledge. Whether resolved through rational self awareness or spiritual illumination, doubt serves as the gateway to certainty. This shared epistemological structure provides a powerful philosophical foundation for reconstructing Islamic Religious Education as an integrative epistemic process that guides learners from doubt toward certainty through the integration of rational reflection and spiritual realization.

Certainty as Rational and Spiritual Realization

The findings of this study indicate that certainty represents the culmination of the epistemological process in both Islamic epistemology and Cartesian epistemology. While doubt functions as the critical starting point that destabilizes unexamined beliefs, certainty emerges as the epistemic resolution that establishes justified and authentic knowledge. However, the analysis reveals that certainty is conceptualized differently within these two epistemological traditions. Cartesian epistemology understands certainty primarily as rational self certainty grounded in intellectual clarity, whereas Islamic epistemology understands certainty as an integrative realization that encompasses rational, spiritual, and existential dimensions. Despite these differences, both traditions affirm that certainty is not given immediately but must be attained through a rigorous process of epistemological transformation.

In Cartesian epistemology, certainty is grounded in rational self awareness. Rene Descartes establishes certainty through the cogito ergo sum, which affirms that the thinking subject exists as an indubitable foundation of knowledge (Descartes, 1998). The cogito does not depend on empirical observation, sensory perception, or external authority. Instead, it emerges through

reflexive rational awareness in which the act of thinking confirms the existence of the thinker. This form of certainty is characterized by clarity, distinctness, and indubitability. According to Descartes, knowledge that is perceived clearly and distinctly by the rational intellect possesses epistemic certainty because it cannot be coherently doubted.

Cartesian certainty reflects a foundationalist epistemological structure in which knowledge is built upon self evident truths. The cogito serves as the first principle from which further knowledge can be derived. Contemporary philosophical interpretations emphasize that Cartesian certainty establishes the autonomy of the rational subject as the ultimate foundation of knowledge (Newman, 2019; Smith, 2021). This epistemological model affirms that certainty is achieved through rational reflection and intellectual self awareness. The subject does not passively receive certainty but actively discovers it through the exercise of reason. In this sense, certainty represents the achievement of epistemic autonomy, in which the knower becomes independent from external epistemic authority.

However, Cartesian certainty is not merely an abstract intellectual principle. It also reflects an existential realization in which the subject becomes aware of its own existence as a thinking being. This realization marks a fundamental shift in epistemological orientation, from reliance on external sources of knowledge to reliance on internal rational awareness. Through this process, certainty becomes grounded in the structure of consciousness itself. The thinking subject becomes both the knower and the foundation of knowledge. This epistemological shift has profound implications for education, as it emphasizes the importance of rational reflection as the basis of genuine knowledge.

In contrast, Islamic epistemology presents a broader and more integrative conception of certainty. In the thought of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, certainty is not limited to rational self awareness but extends to spiritual realization and inner transformation. Al Ghazali conceptualizes certainty as yaqīn, a form of knowledge that transcends discursive reasoning and is grounded in spiritual illumination (Al Ghazali, 2000). This certainty is not merely intellectual but experiential, involving the transformation of the knower's inner state. According to al Ghazali, rational knowledge alone cannot provide absolute certainty because rational reasoning remains subject to doubt and error. True certainty emerges when knowledge is illuminated by divine guidance and internalized within the heart.

Al Ghazali epistemology identifies multiple levels of certainty, reflecting a progressive epistemological development. These levels include conceptual knowledge, experiential knowledge, and realized knowledge. Conceptual knowledge involves intellectual understanding derived from

rational reflection. Experiential knowledge involves direct experiential awareness of truth. Realized knowledge represents the highest level of certainty, in which truth becomes fully integrated into the knower's being. Contemporary scholars emphasize that al Ghazali epistemology represents a holistic model of knowledge that integrates rational, spiritual, and existential dimensions (Griffel, 2021; Kukkonen, 2020).

This integrative conception of certainty reflects a fundamentally different epistemological orientation from Cartesian rationalism. While Cartesian certainty is grounded in rational autonomy, Islamic certainty is grounded in spiritual realization and divine illumination. However, this does not imply that Islamic epistemology rejects rationality. On the contrary, al Ghazali affirms the importance of rational reflection as a necessary stage in the epistemological process. Rational inquiry prepares the intellect for higher forms of knowledge by clarifying concepts and eliminating error. However, rational inquiry alone cannot produce absolute certainty. Certainty emerges when rational knowledge is complemented by spiritual realization.

The relationship between rationality and spirituality in Islamic epistemology reflects a complementary rather than oppositional structure. Rational reflection provides intellectual clarity, while spiritual realization provides existential certainty. Together, these epistemological dimensions enable the knower to attain a more comprehensive form of certainty. This integrative epistemological structure recognizes that human knowledge involves both intellectual and existential dimensions. Knowledge is not merely an abstract cognitive representation but a transformative realization that affects the entire being of the knower.

The comparative analysis reveals that Cartesian certainty and Islamic certainty represent two complementary epistemological models. Cartesian epistemology emphasizes rational clarity and intellectual autonomy, while Islamic epistemology emphasizes spiritual illumination and existential transformation. These models reflect different dimensions of human epistemic capacity. Rationality enables the knower to analyze, reflect, and understand, while spirituality enables the knower to internalize and realize truth at an existential level. Both dimensions contribute to the attainment of epistemic certainty.

This insight has important implications for Islamic Religious Education. Certainty in Islamic Religious Education cannot be reduced to intellectual comprehension alone. While rational understanding is necessary, it is not sufficient to produce genuine certainty. Certainty must also involve spiritual internalization and existential realization. Learners must not only understand religious concepts intellectually but also experience their meaning at a deeper level. Contemporary

philosophy of religious education emphasizes that authentic religious knowledge involves both cognitive understanding and existential transformation (Sahin, 2018; Biesta, 2020).

Furthermore, understanding certainty as both rational and spiritual realization enables Islamic Religious Education to move beyond purely doctrinal instruction. Education becomes a process of epistemological formation in which learners develop intellectual clarity and spiritual awareness simultaneously. Rational reflection enables learners to critically examine religious knowledge, while spiritual practice enables learners to internalize and realize that knowledge. This integrative process strengthens epistemic certainty by uniting intellectual understanding with existential conviction.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that certainty represents the culmination of epistemological development in both Islamic and Cartesian traditions. Whether grounded in rational self awareness or spiritual illumination, certainty emerges through a process of epistemological transformation. Cartesian epistemology shows that certainty can be attained through rational reflection and intellectual clarity. Islamic epistemology shows that certainty can be attained through spiritual realization and inner transformation. Together, these epistemological traditions provide a comprehensive understanding of certainty as both a rational and spiritual achievement. This integrative conception of certainty provides a strong philosophical foundation for reconstructing Islamic Religious Education as a transformative epistemological process that guides learners toward intellectual clarity, spiritual realization, and authentic knowledge.

Toward an Integrative Epistemology of Islamic Religious Education

The dialogical engagement between Islamic epistemology, as articulated by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, and Cartesian epistemology, as formulated by Rene Descartes, provides a compelling philosophical foundation for reconstructing the epistemological framework of Islamic Religious Education. This integration does not aim to collapse the distinctiveness of each epistemological tradition but rather to develop a complementary synthesis that integrates rational inquiry and spiritual realization. Contemporary philosophy of education increasingly acknowledges that knowledge cannot be reduced solely to empirical verification or logical reasoning but must also account for existential, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of human understanding (Biesta, 2020; Peters, 2021). In this context, Islamic epistemology offers a metaphysical and spiritual grounding of certainty, while Cartesian epistemology contributes a rigorous methodological foundation for epistemic justification. Together, they form a multidimensional epistemological model capable of addressing both intellectual and spiritual aspects of education.

The need for such integration arises from the epistemological fragmentation that characterizes modern educational systems. Modern epistemology, shaped largely by post Cartesian rationalism and empiricism, tends to privilege analytical reasoning while marginalizing spiritual and metaphysical sources of knowledge (Gazis, 2022; Smith, 2021). This epistemological reductionism has influenced religious education, often transforming it into either a purely doctrinal enterprise lacking critical engagement or a purely rational discourse lacking spiritual depth (Sahin, 2018). Islamic epistemology offers a corrective to this fragmentation by affirming that knowledge involves not only rational cognition but also spiritual realization. Al Ghazali argues that certainty (yaqīn) is attained when rational inquiry is complemented by spiritual purification and inner transformation (Al Ghazali, 2000; Griffel, 2021). This perspective affirms that epistemic certainty is not merely a logical condition but also an existential state that reflects the harmony between intellect ('aql) and heart (qalb).

Cartesian epistemology contributes an equally important dimension by emphasizing methodological doubt as a means of attaining epistemic certainty. Descartes' method of doubt demonstrates that certainty must be grounded in rational clarity and indubitable foundations rather than unexamined assumptions (Descartes, 1998; Newman, 2019). This methodological skepticism fosters intellectual autonomy and critical reflection, which are essential for authentic learning. Within the context of Islamic Religious Education, Cartesian doubt can function as a pedagogical tool that encourages students to engage critically with religious knowledge, examine the rational foundations of belief, and develop epistemic responsibility. Rather than undermining faith, rational inquiry strengthens belief by transforming it from inherited assumption into consciously realized conviction (Jackson, 2021). This aligns with contemporary educational theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning requires active intellectual engagement rather than passive acceptance (Biesta, 2020).

At the same time, Islamic epistemology ensures that rational inquiry does not become epistemologically self sufficient or spiritually detached. Al Ghazali's epistemological journey demonstrates that rational reasoning alone cannot attain ultimate certainty without spiritual illumination (Griffel, 2021). While reason can identify contradictions and clarify concepts, ultimate truth requires inner transformation and divine guidance. This introduces a hierarchical epistemology in which rational knowledge serves as a necessary but incomplete stage in the process of attaining certainty. Spiritual realization completes the epistemic process by transforming knowledge from conceptual understanding into existential awareness. This perspective provides a

critical balance to Cartesian rationalism by affirming that knowledge involves not only epistemic justification but also existential realization (Kukkonen, 2020).

The integration of these epistemological traditions has significant implications for Islamic Religious Education. First, it establishes a dual epistemological framework that integrates rational clarity and spiritual illumination. Rational inquiry enables students to develop analytical thinking, evaluate arguments, and understand the logical coherence of religious teachings. Spiritual realization enables students to internalize knowledge, cultivate moral awareness, and experience existential certainty. This integrative approach reflects the holistic nature of Islamic education, which seeks to develop the intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the learner simultaneously (Sahin, 2018; Halstead, 2020).

Second, this integration provides a philosophical foundation for overcoming the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Cartesian epistemology represents the intellectual foundations of modern rationality, emphasizing methodological rigor and epistemic autonomy (Newman, 2019). Islamic epistemology represents the spiritual foundations of traditional Islamic knowledge, emphasizing divine guidance and inner realization (Griffel, 2021). Rather than viewing these traditions as mutually exclusive, an integrative epistemology demonstrates that they can function as complementary frameworks. Rational methodology strengthens intellectual rigor, while spiritual epistemology ensures ethical orientation and existential depth. This synthesis enables Islamic Religious Education to engage modern intellectual challenges without compromising its spiritual foundations (Jackson, 2021).

Third, this integrative epistemology redefines the purpose of Islamic Religious Education itself. Education is not merely the transmission of doctrinal information but the cultivation of epistemic certainty that integrates rational understanding and spiritual realization. This reflects the Islamic concept of knowledge as a transformative process that shapes both the intellect and the soul (Al Ghazali, 2000; Sahin, 2018). Cartesian doubt initiates the epistemic process by encouraging critical inquiry and eliminating unexamined assumptions. Ghazalian certainty completes the epistemic process by grounding knowledge in spiritual realization and existential conviction. This dynamic process reflects the epistemological movement from doubt to certainty, from rational inquiry to spiritual realization, and from conceptual understanding to existential knowledge (Smith, 2021).

Furthermore, this integrative epistemology contributes to contemporary philosophical discussions concerning the nature of knowledge and education. Recent developments in epistemology and philosophy of education emphasize the importance of holistic and integrative

approaches that recognize multiple dimensions of knowing, including rational, experiential, and existential forms of knowledge (Biesta, 2020; Peters, 2021). Islamic epistemology provides a comprehensive framework that integrates these dimensions within a coherent metaphysical structure. Cartesian epistemology contributes methodological rigor and epistemic discipline. Together, they offer a balanced epistemological model that addresses both the intellectual and spiritual needs of learners.

Ultimately, the integration of Islamic and Cartesian epistemology provides a robust philosophical foundation for Islamic Religious Education. It demonstrates that rational inquiry and spiritual realization are not contradictory but complementary pathways toward certainty. Cartesian doubt strengthens epistemic rigor by eliminating false assumptions and encouraging intellectual autonomy. Ghazalian epistemology ensures that knowledge culminates in spiritual realization and existential certainty. This integrative framework restores the unity of knowledge by reconciling reason and revelation, intellect and heart, and inquiry and realization. In doing so, it affirms that Islamic Religious Education is not merely a process of information transmission but a transformative epistemological journey toward certainty, truth, and spiritual fulfillment (Griffel, 2021; Sahin, 2018; Biesta, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that doubt and certainty constitute two fundamental and complementary dimensions within the epistemological framework of Islamic Religious Education. Through a dialogical analysis of the epistemological perspectives of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Rene Descartes, this research finds that doubt is not an obstacle to knowledge but rather an essential methodological and existential starting point for attaining certainty. Cartesian methodological doubt functions to purify knowledge from false assumptions and establish rational clarity, while Al Ghazali's epistemological skepticism serves as a transformative stage that leads to spiritual realization and inner certainty (yaqīn). Both perspectives affirm that certainty cannot be achieved through passive acceptance or imitation, but must emerge through a rigorous process of epistemic struggle involving critical reflection and existential transformation. This finding confirms that doubt plays a constructive epistemological role in strengthening the foundations of belief and knowledge within Islamic Religious Education.

Furthermore, this study concludes that an integrative epistemology that synthesizes rational inquiry and spiritual realization provides a coherent and holistic foundation for Islamic Religious Education. Cartesian epistemology contributes methodological rigor, critical thinking, and rational

justification, while Ghazalian epistemology contributes spiritual depth, existential awareness, and metaphysical grounding. The integration of these epistemological traditions enables Islamic Religious Education to transcend the dichotomy between rational and spiritual knowledge by affirming their complementary roles in the process of attaining certainty. Such an integrative framework redefines Islamic Religious Education not merely as the transmission of religious doctrines, but as a transformative epistemological process that cultivates intellectual clarity, spiritual certainty, and existential awareness. Ultimately, this synthesis restores the unity of knowledge by harmonizing reason and revelation, intellect and heart, thereby establishing a philosophically robust and educationally meaningful foundation for contemporary Islamic Religious Education.

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