



International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS)
Conference Proceedings 2025
Yogyakarta, November 21-23, 2025
E-ISSN: 2985-7392
Published by: FORDIPAS PTKIN

Actualizing the Virtue of Knowledge in Strengthening Islamic Educational Awareness: A Perspective from the Book *Irshadul 'Ibad*

Isnaini Prasetiyaningtias¹

¹UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung

¹isnainiprasetiyaningtias@gmail.com

ABSTRACT :

This study examines the virtue of knowledge in *Irshad al Ibad* by Shaykh Zayn al Din ibn Abd al Aziz al Malibari and its relevance to contemporary Islamic education. Using qualitative textual and conceptual analysis, the research focuses on the discussion of knowledge as its primary source within the Islamic scholarly tradition. The findings show that knowledge is understood not merely as intellectual attainment, but as a moral and spiritual force that shapes faith, ethical behavior, and social responsibility. Knowledge is presented within an integrated hierarchy of creed, jurisprudence, and ethics, forming a unified educational vision oriented toward character development. The study further demonstrates that the realization of this virtue is guided by normative educational principles influencing curriculum orientation, learning processes, and assessment practices, rather than technical instructional models alone. This perspective offers a critical response to contemporary Islamic education that often emphasizes instrumental rationality and competency-based outcomes. By reaffirming the virtue of knowledge as an epistemological and pedagogical foundation, this study supports a more holistic model of Islamic education integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions.

Keywords: *Virtue of knowledge; Islamic education; Irshad al Ibad; epistemology; pedagogy; character education*

INTRODUCTION

From its formative phase, education in Islam has been conceptualized as an epistemic foundation for the development of civilization, in which knowledge is understood not merely as the accumulation of rational information but as a scholarly praxis that integrates cognitive engagement, devotion, and ethical responsibility. Within this framework, Al-Ghazali locates the virtue of knowledge in its transformative capacity to shape the orientation and quality of human action rather than in the quantitative mastery of information.¹ In a similar vein, Ibn Khaldun regards knowledge as a structural element that determines the sustainability of civilization and the formation of human beings as social-historical subjects.² Collectively, these perspectives indicate that the Islamic intellectual tradition has, from its inception, rejected any form of separation between rationality, ethics, and spirituality.

¹ Galuh Dianita, "Al-Ghazali 's Knowledge Classification System in Modern Education : An Analysis of Ihyâ Ulûm Al-Dîn" 11, no. 2 (2023): 207–17.

² Enggal Bagas, Nova Saputra, And Raha Bistara, "Ibnu Khaldun Dan Pendidikan Islam : Telaah Atas" 5, no. 1 (2024): 1–18.

However, when this epistemic orientation is brought into dialogue with Paulo Freire's humanistic-critical theory of education, complex epistemological tensions emerge.³ In particular, Freire's concepts of emancipation and critical consciousness both intersect with and challenge the authority of revelation and the normative pedagogical structures that underpin Islamic education. These tensions cannot be resolved through a simplistic synthesis; rather, they require a more reflective re-examination of how knowledge is conceptualized, transmitted, and operationalized within contemporary Islamic educational practice.

In the context of modern Islamic education especially within formal institutions integrated into contemporary educational systems the integral conception of knowledge has undergone structural and institutional narrowing. Educational practices are increasingly governed by the logic of measurable academic outcomes, competency standardization, and labor-market relevance. As a result, knowledge has shifted from functioning as a means of cultivating intellectual piety and transcendental ethics toward serving as an instrument of social mobility and professional legitimation. This reorientation not only obscures the devotional dimension of learning but also contributes to the erosion of academic ethics and the reduction of educators' roles to technical implementers of curricular demands. Such conditions reveal a fundamental contradiction between the normative ideals of Islamic education and pedagogical practices shaped by instrumental rationality, bureaucratic efficiency, and systemic competition.

A number of studies in the field of Islamic education have sought to respond to this condition by reaffirming the centrality of moral and spiritual dimensions in learning processes. Hadith-based studies on the virtue of knowledge emphasize piety and ethical practice as the primary indicators of scholarly excellence.⁴ Research on *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* highlights the continued relevance of scholarly ethics such as sincerity of intention, respect for teachers, and perseverance in learning within modern educational contexts.⁵ Previous studies on *Irsyadul 'Ibad* likewise underscore asceticism, simplicity, and moral integrity as foundational elements of knowledge.⁶ Nevertheless, much of this literature remains confined to a normative-descriptive level, tending to treat classical texts as sources of ethical legitimation without critically examining

³ Muhamad Restu Fauzi, "Freire's Praxis, Democracy, and Critical Consciousness in Islamic Education" 34, no. 2 (2024): 278–306.

⁴ Revi Yulianti et al., "Ilmu Pengetahuan Dan Keutamaan Orang Berilmu Menurut Perspektif Hadits," *MARAS: Jurnal Penelitian Multidisiplin* 2, no. 2 (2024): 645–55.

⁵ Jeysika Armaya et al., "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Akhlak Dalam Perspektif Kitab *Ta'lim Muta'allim Karya*" 4, no. 2 (2023): 215–28.

⁶ Rohmadi Muhammad Riki, Abu Mansyur, "Analisis Nilai-Nilai Zuhud Dalam Kitab *Irsyadul 'Ibad Karya Zainuddin Ibnu Abdul Aziz Al-Malybari*" 1, no. 3 (2021): 345–53.

how their epistemic values can be reconceptualized and operationalized within contemporary Islamic educational structures shaped by modernity.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses specifically on *Irsyadul 'Ibad* by Shaykh Zainuddin bin Abdul Aziz al-Malibari, a text that has received relatively limited attention in Islamic educational discourse compared to works such as *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* or *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*. Rather than functioning merely as a prescriptive manual of individual piety, *Irsyadul 'Ibad* articulates an integrative framework that brings together jurisprudence, ethics, and Sufism within a coherent and praxis-oriented conception of knowledge. Accordingly, this study does not approach the text solely as a moral treatise but positions it as a conceptual resource for reconstructing an Islamic epistemological paradigm capable of responding to the epistemological and pedagogical challenges of modern Islamic education.

The novelty of this research lies in its effort to reposition *Irsyadul 'Ibad* as an alternative conceptual framework that critically challenges the competency-based reductionism dominant in contemporary Islamic education. Rather than reproducing a purely normative reading, this study reconstructs the concept of the virtue of knowledge as an ethical and spiritual project embedded within modern educational structures. Specifically, it examines the intellectual background of the author, articulates the conceptual architecture of the virtue of knowledge as developed in *Irsyadul 'Ibad*, and analyzes its epistemological and pedagogical implications for contemporary Islamic educational practice. In doing so, this research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Islamic educational thought while offering a coherent conceptual foundation for strengthening an educational paradigm that integrates intellectual rationality, spiritual depth, and moral responsibility.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative textual–conceptual analysis to examine how the virtue of knowledge is constructed and potentially actualized in *Irsyadul 'Ibad* by Shaykh Zainuddin bin Abdul Aziz al-Malibari. This approach is employed because the research is oriented toward conceptual reconstruction rather than the measurement of empirical phenomena.⁷ Accordingly, the study seeks to explore the epistemological, ethical, and pedagogical structures embedded in a classical Islamic text while situating them in critical dialogue with contemporary issues in Islamic education.

The primary data source of this research is the Chapter on Knowledge (*Bab al-'Ilm*) in *Irsyadul 'Ibad*. This chapter is purposively selected due to its central position within the overall

⁷ M Mustofa et al., *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Get Press Indonesia, 2023). p.189.

structure of the text and its explicit discussion of the nature of knowledge, the ethics of seeking knowledge, and the moral–spiritual orientation of learners. Secondary data are drawn from curated and relevant literature, including classical works on Islamic education, contemporary academic books, and peer-reviewed journal articles addressing Islamic epistemology, scholarly ethics, and pedagogy. These sources function as materials for theoretical dialogue and analytical comparison rather than as instruments of normative validation.

Data collection is conducted through systematic library research with an emphasis on close reading of the primary text. The analytical process involves identifying key terms, tracing principal arguments, and documenting normative statements related to the virtue of knowledge. The collected data are subsequently organized through thematic mapping to ensure conceptual coherence and to clarify the interrelations among the ideas presented in the text.

Data analysis follows a staged analytical framework designed to ensure methodological transparency and analytical rigor. The stages consist of: (1) contextual analysis, which examines the intellectual background of the author and the position of the Chapter on Knowledge within the overall conceptual structure of *Irsyadul ‘Ibad*; (2) conceptual extraction, involving the identification of core themes of the virtue of knowledge as articulated through Qur’anic references, hadiths, and ethical narratives in the text; (3) analytical classification, whereby the extracted concepts are organized into epistemological categories (the function and purpose of knowledge), ethical dimensions (adab, intention, and moral responsibility), and pedagogical implications (learning relations and character formation); and (4) critical actualization analysis, which reflects on the relevance of these values for contemporary Islamic education through their conceptual translation into discussions of curriculum design, learning strategies, and adab-based assessment, without claiming direct empirical implementation.

Methodologically, the data are analyzed using a descriptive–analytical approach combined with a critical–interpretive reading. This approach enables the researcher to articulate the internal coherence of the text’s arguments while simultaneously engaging them reflectively with the challenges of modern education.⁸ Through this framework, the study moves beyond normative exposition toward a systematic conceptual reconstruction of the virtue of knowledge as an educational paradigm that is both contextually relevant and theoretically grounded within contemporary Islamic educational discourse.

Result

1. Structural Position and Educational Function of *Bab al-‘Ilm* in *Irsyadul ‘Ibad*

⁸ I N Sari et al., *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Malang: Unisma Press, 2022). p.92.

The textual analysis reveals that *Bab al-Ilm* occupies a structurally and conceptually strategic position within *Iryadul Tbad*, as it is placed immediately after the discussion on faith (*iman*). This positioning is not merely editorial, but reflects the author's normative assumption that knowledge constitutes the foundational prerequisite for both religious practice and moral formation. Knowledge is thus framed not as a supplementary element of devotion, but as a constitutive condition for the validity and direction of religious life.

At the structural level, *Bab al-Ilm* consistently follows a pedagogical pattern in which Qur'anic verses are presented first, followed by Prophetic traditions, and subsequently reinforced through ethical narratives or illustrative anecdotes. This arrangement indicates that the discourse on knowledge is intentionally oriented beyond cognitive acquisition toward the internalization of values and the cultivation of *adab*. The findings suggest that *Iryadul Tbad* functions not only as a normative religious text, but as an educational framework that integrates epistemic authority with moral pedagogy.

2. Educational Values of the Virtue of Knowledge Based on Qur'anic and Prophetic Sources

Close reading of the Qur'anic verses and hadiths cited in *Bab al-Ilm* demonstrates that the virtue of knowledge is consistently articulated through its ethical, social, and transformative implications. Knowledge is not valued for its accumulation, but for its capacity to elevate moral status, guide action, and sustain communal responsibility. The educational values derived from these sources are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The Virtue of Knowledge and Its Educational Values in *Bab al-Ilm*

Textual Source	Core Meaning	Educational Value
Q. al-Mujadilah (58): 11	Knowledge elevates the rank of believers	Moral dignity and responsibility
Hadith on the obligation of seeking knowledge	Knowledge as a universal duty	Lifelong and inclusive education
Hadith of Ibn 'Abbas on the superiority of knowledge	Knowledge surpasses supererogatory worship	Social and collective impact of knowledge
Narrative of Prophet Sulayman	Knowledge preferred over wealth and power	Knowledge-based leadership

These findings indicate that *Iryadul Tbad* conceptualizes knowledge as an ethical force that shapes personal conduct, social relations, and leadership orientation. The virtue of knowledge is therefore inseparable from its educational consequences.

3. Classification of Knowledge and Educational Orientation

Further analysis reveals an implicit but coherent classification of knowledge within *Bab al-Ilm*. This classification is both hierarchical and functional, emphasizing the role of knowledge in shaping belief, regulating practice, and cultivating character. The identified categories are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Classification of Knowledge and Educational Orientation

Type of Knowledge	Scope	Educational Orientation
Knowledge of Creed (‘Aqidah)	Faith, divine attributes	Formation of theological conviction
Jurisprudential Knowledge (Fiqh)	Worship and social transactions	Regulation of religious practice
Ethical Knowledge (Adab/Akhlaq)	Inner vices and social ethics	Character and moral formation

This classification demonstrates that knowledge in *Iryadul Tbad* is not fragmented into isolated disciplines, but organized as an integrated educational system linking belief, action, and character. The hierarchy reflects an educational logic in which intellectual understanding must culminate in ethical transformation.

4. Patterns of Conceptual Actualization in Islamic Education

Although *Bab al-‘Ilm* does not prescribe formal institutional models, it offers a coherent value framework that can inform educational practice. The actualization of knowledge in the text operates at the level of principles that guide curriculum orientation, learning processes, and evaluation criteria. These patterns are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Conceptual Actualization of Knowledge in *Iryadul Tbad*

Educational Dimension	Emphasis in the Text	Analytical Implication
Curriculum	Integration of faith, knowledge, and character	Holistic curriculum orientation
Learning Process	Knowledge as worship and moral trust	Ethical learning relations
Assessment	Intention and adab as evaluative criteria	Moral-based educational evaluation

These findings suggest that the actualization of knowledge in *Iryadul Tbad* is normative–conceptual rather than technical. However, the principles articulated in the text provide a structured value orientation that can be translated into contemporary educational contexts without claiming direct empirical implementation.

5. Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the results of this study indicate that *Bab al-‘Ilm* in *Iryadul Tbad* constructs a distinctive educational paradigm characterized by three central features. First, knowledge is positioned as the moral and spiritual foundation of faith and religious practice. Second, the virtue of knowledge is articulated through Qur’anic and Prophetic sources that emphasize its ethical and social consequences. Third, the actualization of knowledge is framed through the internalization of *adab* across curriculum orientation, learning processes, and educational evaluation.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that *Iryadul Tbad* does not merely reproduce normative exhortations on knowledge, but formulates an integrated educational logic in which epistemology, ethics, and pedagogy are inseparably connected. This construction

of knowledge constitutes a coherent educational paradigm that remains conceptually relevant for contemporary Islamic education and provides a critical foundation for further discussion in the subsequent section.

Discussion

1. Biography of the Author of *Irsyadul 'Ibad*

Irshad al-'Ibad ila Sabil al-Rashad is a monumental work by a prominent scholar from the southern coastal region of India, Shaykh Zayn al-Din ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Malibari. The title of this book may be rendered as "*Guidance for Servants toward the Right Path*," which conceptually reflects the author's moral, spiritual, and pedagogical orientation.⁹ The work was composed by drawing upon and elaborating the ideas found in two significant texts, namely *al-Zawajir* by Shaykh Shihab al-Din Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-Haytami and *Murshid al-Ṭullab* by Shaykh Zayn al-Din ibn 'Ali al-Ma'bari. Accordingly, *Irshad al-'Ibad* did not emerge in an intellectual vacuum but rather stands within a strong continuum of classical Islamic scholarly tradition, particularly in the fields of jurisprudence (fiqh), ethics (akhlaq), and Sufism (taṣawwuf).

Shaykh Zayn al-Din ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Malibari, whose full name is al-'Alim al-'Allamah Shaykh Zayn al-Din ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Zayn al-Din ibn Abi Yaḥya al-Malibari al-Fanani al-Shafi'i, was born in the Malabar region of southern coastal India in the month of Sha'ban 871 AH/1466 CE.¹⁰ The nisbah *al-Malibari* refers to his geographical origin, a region that had been known since the medieval period as a center of trade and Islamic transmission through maritime routes. This socio-cultural context is significant, as it contributed to shaping al-Malibari's scholarly character, which was open, practical, and responsive to the social realities of the Muslim community.

He was raised in a family of scholars. His father, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz, was a productive intellectual figure and the author of educational works such as *Irshad al-Alba'* and *Maslak al-Adhkiya'*, the latter being a commentary on *Hidayat al-Adhkiya'*. This intensive intellectual environment laid the early foundation of al-Malibari's thought and explains why attention to knowledge and education became central themes in his writings. The education he received

⁹ H. M. Ali, *Terjemah Irsyadul 'Ibad (Penuntun Manusia Ke Jalan Yang Benar)*, (Surabaya: Mutiara Ilmu, 2019), p.1.

¹⁰ Fina Setiani, "Konsep Pembinaan Birrulwalidain Dalam Kitab Irsyadul 'Ibad Karya Syekh Zainuddin Bin Abdul Aziz" (Universitas Islam Negeri Profesor Kiai Haji Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, 2022), p.30.

from an early age, covering the Qur'an and the foundational Islamic sciences constituted an essential capital in shaping his epistemological orientation.

In his adulthood, Shaykh Zayn al-Din ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Malibari undertook an intellectual journey (*riḥlah 'ilmiyyah*) to Mecca. In addition to performing the pilgrimage, he pursued advanced religious studies under leading scholars, including Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytami, Shaykh Zayn al-Din al-Zamzami, Shaykh Wajh al-Din 'Abd al-Raḥman ibn Ziyad, Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Shafawi, Shaykh Shams al-Din al-Ramli al-Azhari, and al-Khaṭīb al-Shirbini.¹¹ This scholarly journey broadened his intellectual horizons and affirmed his position within the transregional network of Shafi'i scholars. Such intellectual experience also explains why *Irshad al-'Ibad* integrates normative, ethical, and practical dimensions in a relatively balanced manner.

The epithet *al-Fanani* attributed to him derives from Masjid Jami' Ponani (Fanani Mosque), the first mosque he established in Fannon, an ancient port city in present-day Kerala. This mosque functioned not only as a place of worship but also as an educational institution where al-Malibari taught Islamic sciences and Arabic for approximately six decades. The mosque's architecture, which assimilated local and Hindu elements, reflects a contextual approach to da'wah and education—presenting Islam as a set of values that engages with local culture without compromising its normative substance.

As a Shafi'i jurist, al-Malibari was known for his firmness, critical attitude, and consistency in scholarly principles. He served as a judge, royal advisor, and diplomat, demonstrating his active engagement in the public sphere and socio-political structures. This involvement underscores his conviction that knowledge should not be confined to individual piety and ritual practice but must carry social and communal implications. His works span various disciplines, including theology, jurisprudence, Sufism, history, and literature, indicating both the breadth of his scholarship and the integrative nature of his intellectual vision.

The life and intellectual career of Shaykh Zayn al-Din ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Malibari reveal a perspective in which knowledge functions as a means of forming faithful, ethical, and civilized human beings. Knowledge is understood not merely as an instrument for comprehending religious law, but as a pathway toward personal refinement and social order. This perspective is key to understanding why discussions on knowledge are positioned at the beginning of *Irshad al-'Ibad* and emphasized with strong moral significance.

Conceptually, al-Malibari's views intersect with al-Ghazali's emphasis on knowledge as that which nurtures humility before God and improves moral conduct. His thought also

¹¹ Ibid, p.31.

resonates with Ibn Khaldūn's conception of knowledge as the foundation of civilization and a shaper of social character. Nevertheless, al-Malibari articulates his own distinctive approach through a strong emphasis on *adab* (proper conduct) and the social responsibility of knowledge within the context of coastal Muslim societies in India.

When read in dialogue with modern educational theory, al-Malibari's approach also demonstrates certain affinities with Paulo Freire's concept of education as a process of conscientization. Despite their differing theological foundations, both view education as a means of liberation from ignorance and the formation of critical awareness. The difference lies in the fact that al-Malibari situates such awareness within a spiritual and moral framework oriented toward devotion to God.

Thus, the biography of Shaykh Zayn al-Din ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Malibari serves not merely as historical background, but as a conceptual foundation for the subsequent discussion of the virtue of knowledge in *Irshad al-'Ibad*. An understanding of his life context, scholarly networks, and intellectual orientation provides an essential bridge for examining the concept of knowledge he articulates, as well as its actualization within the framework of Islamic education. On this basis, the following subsection will examine more deeply how the virtue of knowledge is formulated normatively and epistemologically in *Irshad al-'Ibad*.

2. The Virtue of Knowledge in *Irshad al-'Ibad*

At the beginning of his discussion on knowledge, Shaykh Zayn al-Din ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Malibari grounds his argument in *naqli* evidence, particularly Qur'an Surah al-Mujadilah [58]: 11, which affirms that Allah elevates the ranks of those who believe and possess knowledge.¹² This verse is understood as a clear affirmation that knowledge holds a strategic position in Islam, as it strengthens faith while guiding human beings toward a dignified and meaningful life. From al-Malibari's perspective, faith accompanied by knowledge encourages continuous and earnest pursuit of learning, whereas faith without knowledge risks producing erroneous religious practices.

This view resonates with Hamka's explanation in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, which emphasizes that faith constitutes the core of human life, while knowledge functions as its essential support.¹³ Faith devoid of knowledge may lead to misguided religious conduct, whereas knowledge without faith has the potential to become a destructive force. Therefore, the virtue

¹² H. M. Ali, *Terjemah Irsyadul 'Ibad (Penuntun Manusia Ke Jalan Yang Benar)*, (Surabaya: Mutiara Ilmu, 2019). p.31.

¹³ Dewi Fatimah Putri Arum Sari and Diah Ayu Retnaningsih, "Keutamaan Orang Berilmu Dalam Al-Qur'an Surat Al-Mujadalah Ayat 11," *Jurnal Tarbiya Islamica* 10, no. 2 (2022): 118–29.

of knowledge can only be fully realized when it is governed by faith and oriented toward divine consciousness.

In addition to the Qur'an, al-Malibari strengthens his argument by citing the Prophetic tradition that declares the pursuit of knowledge an obligation for every Muslim. This hadith is interpreted in a universal sense, encompassing both men and women and transcending limitations of space and distance, as implied in the expression "even unto China."¹⁴ Consequently, seeking knowledge is positioned as a fundamental obligation (*fariḍah*) intrinsically tied to one's Islamic identity.

The virtue of knowledge is further emphasized through a hadith stating that seeking knowledge for a short period is more meritorious than engaging in supererogatory acts of worship that are primarily personal in nature, such as prolonged night prayers or voluntary fasting.¹⁵ Al-Malibari interprets this narration not as diminishing the value of worship, but as highlighting the broader impact of knowledge, both individually and socially. Knowledge not only cultivates personal piety but also contributes to the collective well-being of the community.

Furthermore, al-Malibari refers to the narrative of Prophet Solomon (Sulayman), who was given a choice between wealth, power, and knowledge, and chose knowledge.¹⁶ This choice ultimately led him to attain both authority and wealth as well. This narrative serves to emphasize that knowledge constitutes the primary source of true honor and success, as it enables individuals to manage worldly affairs wisely while maintaining a balanced orientation toward the hereafter.

The placement of the chapter on knowledge at the very beginning of *Irshad al-'Ibad* reflects al-Malibari's conviction that knowledge forms the moral and spiritual foundation of religious life. Knowledge does not merely function as a means of understanding legal rulings of the Shari'ah, but also serves as a tool for purifying the heart, cultivating proper conduct (*adab*), and improving moral behavior. Accordingly, the measure of one's scholarship lies not in the quantity of knowledge acquired, but in the extent to which that knowledge brings one closer to Allah and benefits society.

The conception of the virtue of knowledge in *Irshad al-'Ibad* strongly corresponds with al-Ghazali's thought in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, which asserts that beneficial knowledge is that which fosters self-awareness, devotion to Allah, and righteous action. Similarly, Ibn Khaldūn's view

¹⁴ H. M. Ali, *Terjemah Irsyadul 'Ibad (Penuntun Manusia Ke Jalan Yang Benar)*, (Surabaya: Mutiara Ilmu, 2019). p.31.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.31.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.32.

of knowledge as a pillar of civilization finds relevance in al-Malibari's perspective, which regards knowledge as a moral and social force for the revival of the Muslim community.

Within the context of modern thought, Paulo Freire's concept of education as a process of liberation provides an additional analytical framework for understanding the values of knowledge articulated in *Irshad al-'Ibad*. Education is viewed as a process of conscientization that liberates human beings from ignorance and cultivates critical as well as spiritual awareness. This perspective aligns with al-Malibari's vision, which positions knowledge as a means of human emancipation and ennoblement.

Thus, the virtue of knowledge in *Irshad al-'Ibad* encompasses epistemological, moral, and transcendental dimensions. Epistemologically, knowledge functions as a path toward truth and self-awareness; morally, it serves as the foundation for the cultivation of proper conduct and character; and transcendentally, knowledge is positioned as a medium of devotion to Allah. This paradigm reflects a holistic model of Islamic education that integrates cognitive, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, offering a critical corrective to modern educational orientations that tend to be reductive and overly focused on academic achievement alone.

3. Actualizing the Virtue of Knowledge in *Irshad al-'Ibad* and Its Implications for Contemporary Islamic Education

In *Irshad al-'Ibad*, knowledge is not positioned merely as an epistemic instrument for the accumulation of information, but rather as a formative force that shapes faith, ethical conduct, and social responsibility. Shaykh Zayn al-Din Ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Malibari situates knowledge within a moral-spiritual framework, in which the value of knowledge is ultimately determined by its capacity to guide human beings toward obedience to Allah, the refinement of character (akhlaq), and responsible action in social life. This conception demonstrates that the virtue of knowledge cannot remain at a purely conceptual or normative level; instead, it must be concretely realized within educational theory and practice. Accordingly, this subsection examines the epistemological and pedagogical implications of the virtue of knowledge in *Irshad al-'Ibad* for contemporary Islamic education.

a. Epistemological Implications (Knowledge as Moral-Spiritual Authority)

From an epistemological perspective, *Irshad al-'Ibad* proposes an integrative conception of knowledge grounded in the interrelationship between revelation, reason, and spiritual discipline. Knowledge is understood as divine light (nūr) that enables human beings to discern truth, correct behavior, and purify the heart.¹⁷ Consequently, epistemic validity is

¹⁷ Mahmudulhassan and Abuzar. "Ethical Curriculum Development: Insights from Islamic Epistemology." *Jurnal Pedagogy* 17, no. 2 (2024): 169-178.

not assessed solely through rational coherence or empirical verification, but also through the extent to which knowledge cultivates humility before Allah and contributes to the well-being of individuals and society. Al-Malibari constructs a hierarchical yet functional structure of knowledge. Theological knowledge ('ilm al-tawḥīd) serves as the foundational orientation of learning, legal knowledge ('ilm al-sharī'a) provides normative guidance for concrete action, while ethical knowledge ('ilm al-akhlaq) constitutes the ultimate aim that directs the entire learning process. This hierarchy is not fragmented but forms an integrated epistemic order in which intellectual mastery is inseparable from moral responsibility. Within this framework, knowledge that does not result in self-restraint and constructive practice is regarded as epistemologically incomplete. This epistemological position implicitly critiques contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize technical competence and value-neutral cognition. In contrast, *Irshad al-'Ibad* views knowledge as a form of moral-spiritual authority that obligates the knowing subject to act ethically and responsibly. For Islamic education, this underscores that the learning process should not be limited to the transmission of knowledge, but must also cultivate learners who are intellectually competent while firmly grounded in moral and spiritual values.¹⁸

b. Pedagogical Implications for Contemporary Islamic Education

This epistemological orientation carries concrete pedagogical consequences for contemporary Islamic education, particularly in curriculum design, instructional strategies, and assessment practices. The actualization of the virtue of knowledge requires an educational structure that systematically integrates cognitive development with ethical formation and spiritual awareness.¹⁹

c. Curriculum Design: Integrating Knowledge, Ethics, and Spiritual Formation

A curriculum grounded in the virtue of knowledge as articulated in *Irshad al-'Ibad* emphasizes the integration of intellectual content with ethical and theological orientations. Moral education is not positioned as a separate subject, but functions as an organizing principle that permeates all disciplines, both religious and general.²⁰ Operationally, this approach requires the formulation of learning outcomes that explicitly link mastery of subject matter with moral responsibility and social awareness. Such a curricular framework

¹⁸ Muhlis, Munir Yusuf, and Kaharuddin. "Islamic Education 4.0: Integration of Moral Education Values in the Learning Process." *At-Tarbawi: Jurnal Kajian Kependidikan Islam* (2023): 131-144.

¹⁹ Mahmudulhassan et al. "The Integration of Islamic Epistemology in Ethical and Multicultural Education: Pedagogical Strategies and Challenges." *Multicultural Islamic Education Review* 2, no. 2 (2025): 123-134.

²⁰ Ainal Gani et al. "Pendidikan Agama Islam: Fondasi Moral Spiritualitas Bangsa." *Al-I'tibar: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* (2025): 289-297.

encourages learners to understand knowledge as an activity oriented toward worship (*'ibada*), social engagement, and personal integrity. By aligning curricular objectives with the epistemological hierarchy proposed by al-Malibari, Islamic education can avoid the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge and affirm learning as an integrated intellectual-moral endeavor.

d. Instructional Strategies: Learning as an Ethical and Reflective Practice

At the level of instructional strategies, the actualization of the virtue of knowledge demands pedagogical approaches that emphasize intention (*niyyah*), exemplarity, and critical reflection. Educators function not only as intellectual facilitators but also as moral exemplars who embody the ethical dimension of knowledge. Accordingly, learning activities are designed to foster reflection, ethical dialogue, and awareness of the moral significance of the knowledge being studied. Dialogical learning, reflective writing, and guided discussions on the ethical implications of instructional content enable learners to internalize the virtue of knowledge in a critical manner. While this approach shares certain features with critical pedagogical traditions that emphasize reflection and learner agency, its defining characteristic lies in its explicit spiritual foundation. In this context, learning is understood as an act of worship that unites intellectual inquiry with moral and spiritual discipline.²¹

e. Assessment Practices: Evaluating Cognitive and Ethical Development

The virtue-based conception of knowledge articulated in *Irshad al-'Ibad* also necessitates a reorientation of assessment practices. Evaluation cannot be confined to cognitive achievement alone, but must encompass indicators of ethical engagement, learning responsibility, and the application of knowledge within academic and social contexts.²² This approach does not imply subjective moral judgment, but rather the use of transparent and structured instruments to capture the formative dimensions of learning. Assessment strategies may include systematic observation of learning behavior, structured self-reflection, and documentation of the application of knowledge in real-life contexts.²³ By emphasizing the learning process alongside final outcomes, assessment functions as a

²¹ Wakib Kurniawan, Siti Rohmaniah, and Faisal Saputra, "Integrasi Prespektif Teologis Dan Pedagogis Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Untuk Optimalisasi Pembentukan Karakter Peserta Didik," *TAUJIH: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 01 (2025): 109–22.

²² Titin Yuniartin et al., "Evaluation of Islamic Education: Integrating Cognitive, Moral, and Spiritual Aspects Based on The Qur'an and Hadith," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Indonesia (JPAII)* 5, no. 4 (2024): 161–69.

²³ Bagas Mukti Nasrowi, "Reflective Learning Model in Moral Education: The Relevance of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari's Thoughts in the Modern Era," *Tadibia Islamika* 5, no. 1 (2025): 42–51.

formative mechanism that reinforces accountability and ethical awareness. Within this framework, assessment is no longer merely a technical measurement tool, but becomes an integral component of moral education.

Overall, these epistemological and pedagogical implications demonstrate that the virtue of knowledge in *Irshad al-'Ibad* offers a coherent conceptual and operational framework for contemporary Islamic education. By translating moral-spiritual values into curriculum design, instructional strategies, and assessment practices, Islamic education is strategically positioned to respond critically to modern educational challenges, such as moral fragmentation, the instrumentalization of learning, and the reduction of education to purely technical performance.²⁴ In this regard, the thought of Shaykh Zayn al-Din al-Malibari remains intellectually and practically relevant for efforts to renew Islamic education in the modern era.

Conclusion

Sheikh Zainuddin ibn Abdul Aziz al-Malibari, in his book *Iryadul 'Ibad*, emphasizes that knowledge plays a primary role in shaping human faith, morality, and spiritual awareness. Knowledge is not merely a means of understanding religious teachings but also a path to attaining honor and happiness in this world and the hereafter. The virtue of knowledge taught by Sheikh Zainuddin ibn Abdul Aziz al-Malibari reflects the integration of intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions within Islamic education. Thus, the actualization of the virtue of knowledge in Islamic education is essential for producing a generation that is faithful, knowledgeable, and noble in character, capable of contributing positively to both themselves and society. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of strengthening the value of knowledge as the foundation for character building and the development of Islamic educational awareness in the modern era.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the supervising lecturers and colleagues for their continuous support, valuable input, and encouragement throughout the process of completing this research. Appreciation is also extended to the institutions that have provided facilities and resources, which greatly contributed to the successful completion of this study. Finally, the author wishes to thank all those who have contributed, either directly or indirectly, to the realization of this work.

²⁴ Najib Aulia Rahman, "Competency-Based and Ethical Assessment Models in Contemporary Islamic Pedagogy," *Sinergi International Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): 57–69.

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