Reform of Islamic Education in Indonesia Through the Integration of Knowledge and Moral Formation: An Analysis of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's Thought

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Abstract

This study aims to examine K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought on the reform of Islamic education in Indonesia, particularly through the integration of religious and general knowledge and the moral formation of students. This research employs a qualitative approach using library research by analyzing scholarly works, historical documents, and literature discussing the educational system of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. The data analysis technique uses content analysis to identify the structure of ideas, value orientations, and the relevance of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought to contemporary Islamic education. The findings indicate that Islamic educational reform, according to K.H. Imam Zarkasyi, does not merely lie in curriculum modernization, but also in the formation of a balanced human being characterized by intellectual intelligence, spiritual depth, independence, discipline, and noble morals. The integration of knowledge and the internalization of values constitute essential foundations for developing an adaptive, humanistic, and transformative model of Islamic education.

Keywords: *Islamic Education; Integration of Knowledge; Morality; Imam Zarkasyi*

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2nd International Conference on Islamic Community Studies (ICICS)
Theme: History of Malay Civilisation and Islamic Human Capacity and Halal Hub in the Globalization Era
https://proceeding.pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/ICIE/index

Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia has a long history as a system of human formation that is oriented not only toward mastery of knowledge, but also toward the cultivation of faith, righteous action, and morality. In this context, pesantren occupy a strategic position as Islamic educational institutions capable of preserving scholarly traditions while adapting to social change. However, the dynamics of modernity require pesantren and Islamic educational institutions not to remain confined to classical patterns of religious transmission, but to develop educational systems that remain relevant to the needs of the times. K.H. Imam Zarkasyi was one of the important figures who introduced such reform through the educational system of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. After completing his education at Kweekschool Islam Padang Panjang, he returned to Gontor and, together with his brothers, established Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah in 1937, an institution that later became the core of Gontor's educational modernization (Syari, 2025).

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought is significant because it offers a synthesis between the pesantren tradition and the modern educational system. In his view, Islamic education must not be trapped in the dichotomy between religious knowledge and general knowledge. Education must form individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, independent, disciplined, socially conscious, and capable of facing global challenges. The Gontor curriculum is known for integrating religious and general sciences and for emphasizing mastery of Arabic and English as essential tools for students in facing an increasingly open world. Thus, the reform offered by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi was not merely an administrative change, but a paradigm shift in Islamic education from a partial model toward an integral model (Prastowo, 2023).

The main problem in contemporary Islamic education lies in the tendency to separate mastery of knowledge from character formation. On the one hand, educational institutions attempt to pursue academic achievement, technological competence, and global competitiveness. On the other hand, moral problems, discipline, honesty, responsibility, and students' life orientation often remain inadequately addressed. This situation shows that education that emphasizes only the cognitive aspect is insufficient to develop a complete human being. K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought remains relevant because it positions education as a process of forming the totality of the human person, not merely as the delivery of subject matter (Zahro, 2025).

Another problem is the persistence of a strong dichotomy between religious knowledge and general knowledge in certain practices of Islamic education. This dichotomy can produce two extreme tendencies: religious education that is insufficiently responsive to modern science, or modern education that loses its ethical and spiritual orientation. K.H. Imam Zarkasyi rejected this kind of separation through the idea of education that integrates religious curriculum, general knowledge, language, leadership, discipline, and boarding life. In several studies, K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's curriculum concept is formulated as "100% religious and 100% general," which indicates that the two fields of knowledge are not opposed to one another, but are positioned as a unity in the formation of civilized human beings (Kartanegara, 2012).

The gap between theory and practice appears when the integration of knowledge is often understood merely as the addition of religious subjects to a general curriculum, or conversely, the addition of general subjects to religious institutions. In fact, integration in K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought is more fundamental. It concerns worldview, learning culture, teacher role modeling, life discipline, language use, leadership, and the formation of a twentyfour-hour educational environment. This means that the integration of knowledge cannot be sufficiently carried out only at the level of curriculum structure. It must be embodied within the entire educational ecosystem.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to reformulate a model of Islamic education capable of responding to the moral, intellectual, and social challenges of modern society. An examination of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought provides a conceptual contribution to the

development of Islamic education that is not merely modern in terms of facilities, but also strong in terms of values. By examining the integration of knowledge and moral formation in his thought, this study is expected to enrich the discourse on Islamic educational reform in Indonesia.

Literature Review

This literature review is structured to clarify the theoretical foundation of the study through three main subthemes: Islamic educational reform, integration of knowledge, and moral formation. These three subthemes were selected because they are directly related to the title of the study. Islamic educational reform serves as a macro framework for understanding K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's contribution to the history of education in Indonesia. The integration of knowledge functions as the core concept explaining how religious education and general knowledge are positioned in balance. Meanwhile, moral formation serves as an ethical orientation affirming that the aim of Islamic education does not stop at intellectual development, but also includes the formation of a civilized personality (M. Y. Harahap et al., 2024).

A. Islamic Educational Reform

Islamic educational reform can be understood as a conscious effort to reconstruct educational systems, curricula, methods, management, and orientations so that they remain rooted in Islamic values while responding to the development of the times. Reform is not identical with Westernization, because in the context of Islamic education, modernization must remain grounded in tawhid, adab, and social responsibility. K.H. Imam Zarkasyi presented a distinctive form of reform because he did not reject the pesantren tradition, but reorganized its system to become more disciplined, structured, and productive. The classical system, learning levels, language instruction, leadership activities, and the development of boarding life became part of the reconstruction of modern pesantren education (Zarkasyi, 2023).

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi is known as a reformist figure in pesantren education because he succeeded in combining the pondok system with the madrasah system. The integration of formal and non-formal systems at Gontor created an education that did not take place only in classrooms, but also in the daily lives of students. Other studies also affirm that education, according to K.H. Imam Zarkasyi, was directed toward producing individuals who are balanced intellectually, spiritually, morally, independently, and in terms of leadership. Thus, Islamic educational reform in his thought was comprehensive, covering educational content, management systems, institutional culture, and the formation of students' inner character.

B. Integration of Religious and General Knowledge

The integration of knowledge in Islamic education begins from the assumption that all knowledge is essentially inseparable from divine values. Religious knowledge provides normative, moral, and spiritual foundations, while general knowledge provides rational, empirical, and practical tools for understanding the realities of life. If the two are separated, education may produce imbalance. A person may be religious but less adaptive to scientific development, or technically intelligent but poor in moral orientation. Therefore, the integration of knowledge is both an epistemological necessity and a practical need (Abrianto, 2023).

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought on the integration of knowledge is clearly reflected in the structure of the Gontor curriculum. Studies on the pesantren curriculum according to K.H. Imam Zarkasyi state that, in addition to Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, fiqh, and usul al-fiqh, he included natural science, biology, mathematics, history, civics, geography, education, psychology, and emphasized Arabic and English. This model shows that integration is not merely a compromise between two groups of subjects, but a curriculum arrangement aimed at forming students with broad insight, a strong religious foundation, and global communication competence. Arabic was positioned as a gateway to Islamic scholarship, while English was positioned as a means of accessing modern knowledge and international communication (Fatmawati, 2026).

C. Moral Formation and Character Education

Morality in Islamic education does not only refer to outwardly good behavior, but also to an inner condition that consistently produces good actions. Therefore, moral formation requires habituation, role modeling, practice, supervision, and value internalization. K.H. Imam Zarkasyi understood moral education not as an additional subject, but as the core of educational life. Values such as sincerity, simplicity, independence, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom are known as the Panca Jiwa, which form the foundation of life in the pondok. A study on Islamic education from the perspective of the Trimurti of Gontor notes that the Panca Jiwa consists of sincerity, simplicity, independence, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom, and serves as a value framework supporting educational life in the pondok (Aufin, n.d.).

Moral formation in K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought can also be understood through the concept of the hidden curriculum. The boarding environment, time discipline, student organizations, worship activities, teacher-student interaction, and daily leadership serve as spaces for continuous moral formation. K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's character education has even been examined through the moral philosophy of Ibn Miskawayh, particularly in relation to character development, life values, the Panca Jiwa, and the principle of moderation in Islamic educational modernism. Thus, morality is not merely the result of normative teaching, but the outcome of an educational environment that integrates knowledge, action, discipline, and role modeling (Danny Abrianto, Tumiran, 2024).

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research as its type of inquiry (S. Harahap, 2006). This approach was selected because the object of study consists of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought on Islamic educational reform, the integration of knowledge, and moral formation. The data sources consist of primary sources in the form of works, speeches, ideas, and documents related to K.H. Imam Zarkasyi, as well as secondary sources in the form of journal articles, books, research findings, and academic documents on Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (Akbar, 2009).

Data collection was conducted through documentation, namely by tracing, reading, classifying, and recording data relevant to the research focus. The data analysis technique used content analysis through the stages of data reduction, thematic categorization, meaning interpretation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, adequacy of references, repeated reading, and consistency among data, theory, and interpretation. Through these techniques, this study seeks to produce a systematic conceptual understanding of the relevance of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought to Islamic educational reform in Indonesia. The library research model and content analysis have also been widely used in previous studies on K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's educational thought (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2014).

Results

1) Integration of Knowledge as the Foundation of Islamic Educational Reform The analysis shows that the core of Islamic educational reform according to K.H. Imam Zarkasyi lies in eliminating the dichotomy between religious knowledge and general knowledge. He did not position religious knowledge merely as knowledge that functions to form ritual piety, nor did he position general knowledge as profane knowledge separated from Islamic values. Both were placed as instruments for forming a complete human being. Within this framework, Islamic education must produce individuals who are able to understand revelation, read social realities, master knowledge, and participate actively in society.

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's model of knowledge integration is evident in the curriculum concept, which did not only teach Islamic sciences, but also general knowledge, languages, leadership, and life skills. The formulation "100% religious and 100% general" should not be

read mathematically, but philosophically. Religious knowledge and general knowledge are equally important, equally given space, and equally directed toward forming Muslim individuals with broad knowledge. Studies on pesantren education and curriculum mention that K.H. Imam Zarkasyi included various general subjects in the pesantren curriculum, such as mathematics, history, civics, geography, education, and psychology, without abandoning Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, fiqh, and usul al-fiqh (Ismaraidha et al., 2024).

From the perspective of reform, this integration of knowledge contains three meanings. First, it has an epistemological meaning, namely that knowledge is not viewed in a fragmented manner, but as a means of knowing God, human beings, and nature. Second, it has a pedagogical meaning, namely that learning must form a balance among thinking ability, language ability, practical ability, and moral awareness. Third, it has a social meaning, namely that graduates of Islamic education are not only prepared to become people of worship, but also leaders, educators, community mobilizers, and agents of social change (Nurhasanah, 2026).

2) Moral Formation through a Twenty-Four-Hour Educational System

The second finding shows that moral formation in K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought was not carried out verbally, but through an educational system integrated into students' lives. Education did not occur only when teachers taught in classrooms, but also when students interacted in the dormitory, participated in organizations, observed time discipline, performed worship, spoke foreign languages, and fulfilled daily responsibilities. This is what makes Gontor's education total in nature, because the learning space is expanded to encompass the entire life of the pondok.

The Panca Jiwa serves as the main foundation of moral formation. Sincerity shapes an orientation of action free from self-interest. Simplicity forms the ability to control oneself from luxury and excess. Independence develops individuals who do not depend on others for their lives. Islamic brotherhood builds social solidarity and fraternity. Freedom develops the courage to think and act responsibly. In studies on Islamic education from the perspective of the Trimurti of Gontor, the Panca Jiwa is positioned as the core of pondok life and not merely as a moral symbol (Manshuruddin et al., 2025).

Moral formation is also strengthened through Gontor's educational motto: noble character, sound body, broad knowledge, and free thinking. This sequence is important because it shows the structure of values in K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's education. Freedom of thought is placed after morality, health, and breadth of knowledge. This means that freedom must not become uncontrolled liberalism without moral restraint. Freedom must emerge from a civilized, healthy, knowledgeable, and responsible personality. A study in Rahmatan Lil Alamin Journal affirms that the application of noble character, sound body, broad knowledge, and free thinking constitutes an important formulation in forming an Islamic personality both outwardly and inwardly (Sabrianti, 2026).

3) The Relevance of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's Thought to Islamic Education in Indonesia

The third finding shows that K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought has strong relevance for the development of contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia. This relevance can be seen in three aspects. First, Islamic education today needs an integrative model capable of responding to the development of science without losing moral direction. Second, Islamic education needs a system of character formation that does not stop at theory, but is embedded in institutional culture. Third, Islamic education needs governance that is independent, disciplined, and visionary.

In the Indonesian context, K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's ideas can be read as a critique of education that is too oriented toward diplomas, formal employment, and cognitive achievement. He offered an education that forms independent individuals, leadership-minded persons, and people who are ready to live in society. A study on K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's contribution states that his educational system integrates the family, school, and community environments into a

unified system through discipline, twenty-four-hour education, religious and general curricula, strong Islamic traditions, and education for freedom (Syari, 2025).

Islamic educational reform through K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought cannot be understood merely as changing the form of pesantren to become more modern. More deeply, it represents a reform of the educational paradigm. Islamic education must be able to form human beings who are religious yet rational, moral yet productive, independent yet social, traditional in values yet modern in methods.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Analysis of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's Thought

Focus of Study	Main Idea	Form of Implementation	Implications for Islamic Education
Integration of knowledge	Religious and general knowledge are not separated	A curriculum that is 100% religious and 100% general; Arabic and English; Islamic sciences and modern sciences	Produces graduates who are broadminded, religious, and adaptive
Moral formation	Morality becomes the center of education	Panca Jiwa, pondok motto, discipline, role modeling, student organizations	Forms individuals who are sincere, simple, independent, fraternal, and responsible
Educational system	Education takes place twenty-four hours a day	Dormitory, classroom, worship, language activities, leadership, daily supervision	Education becomes a culture of life, not merely a formal learning process
Pesantren reform	Modernization without losing the spirit of pesantren	Classical system, modern management, structured curriculum	Pesantren can compete with modern institutions without losing Islamic identity
Contemporary relevance	Education must be adaptive and moral	Curriculum integration, character strengthening, institutional independence	Becomes a transformative model of Islamic education in Indonesia

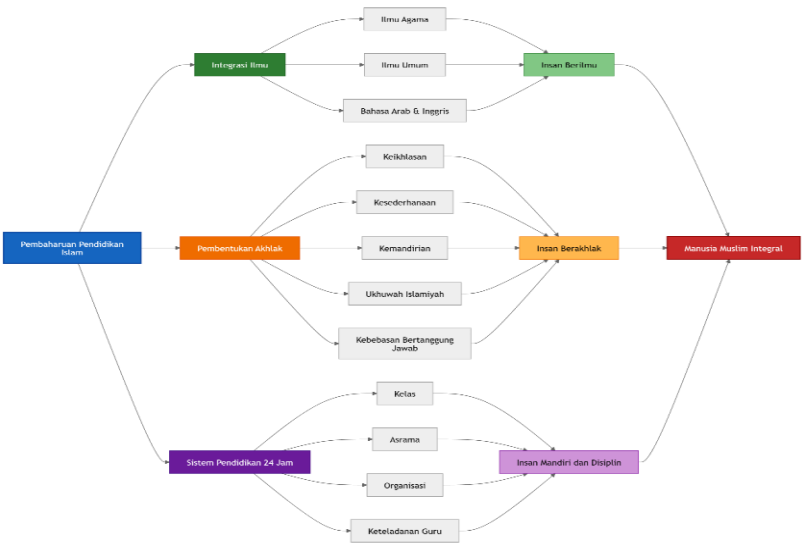

Figure 1. Model Konseptual Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Menurut K.H. Imam Zarkasyi

Conclusion

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought shows that Islamic educational reform must move beyond formal change toward the transformation of educational paradigms, systems, and cultures.

1. Islamic educational reform according to K.H. Imam Zarkasyi is grounded in the integration of religious knowledge and general knowledge.
2. The integration of knowledge is not only curricular, but also epistemological, pedagogical, and social.
3. Moral formation is carried out through the Panca Jiwa, the pondok motto, role modeling, discipline, and twenty-four-hour education.
4. The Gontor educational system demonstrates that pesantren can become modern institutions without losing their Islamic identity.
5. K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's thought remains relevant to Islamic education in Indonesia because it offers a model of integral human formation: faithful, knowledgeable, independent, disciplined, moral, and ready to contribute to society.

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