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Epistemic Sovereignty and The Decolonization of Islamic Education: Rethinking Pesantren Within Global Knowledge Hierarchies

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In education, global regimes of knowledge tend to privilege Western-modern standards as universal benchmarks while often marginalizing tradition-based knowledge systems. This study discusses pesantren epistemology as an autonomous knowledge system, the mechanism of its marginalization, and its possible contribution to the decolonization of Islamic education. Based on qualitative secondary data and a conceptual normative approach, drawing on decolonial theory, the sociology of knowledge, and critical discourse analysis, the study reveals that epistemic legitimacy is derived from sanad, turats, adab, and deliberative traditions in pesantren, which constitute a coherent and enduring knowledge regime. They are marginalized not because they are epistemically deficient, but because they do not fit global standards that are based on standardization, metrics and discursive hierarchies. The study proposes a decolonial repositioning with conceptual translation, pluralistic curricula, the fusion of spirituality and rationality, and strategic engagement without epistemic assimilation. This contributes to debates on the coloniality of knowledge and supports greater recognition of epistemic diversity in Islamic education.

Keywords: Coloniality of knowing; epistemic wrong; symbolic legitimisation; epistemic sovereignty; pluriversality

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INTRODUCTION

The influence of global knowledge regimes on quality and academic legitimacy is growing, including curriculum standards, accreditation schemes, quality metrics and publication infrastructures. These mechanisms enable comparability across diverse educational settings but also universalise Western-modern epistemologies as the dominant yardsticks of legitimate knowledge. Accreditation systems in different fields, such as medical education, still rely largely on standards developed in Western contexts (Lepre 2021; Yáñez 2025), while in many countries the main trajectory of educational development is also Western-oriented modernization in curriculum reforms (Ahmed 2022; Enkhtaivan 2023). As a result, the quality of education is increasingly judged by standardized global criteria rather than by the internal intellectual traditions through which different communities produce, validate and transmit knowledge. This process engenders an epistemic homogenization that frequently sidelines local and tradition-based knowledge systems whose forms of authority and validation are not easily gauged through dominant academic metrics (Ismail 2025; Unya 2022). This reifies Western knowledge as the normative and constructs alternative epistemologies as derivative or subordinate. This suggests the need for a critical examination of the ways in which global knowledge regimes shape the legitimacy of diverse educational traditions. Pesantren as traditional Islamic educational institutions are unique knowledge systems based on *turats*, *sanad* and *adab* which are the main bases of scholarly authority and knowledge transmission (Aisyah 2022; Hossain 2023). Unlike the educational models organized around standardization and qualitative performance indicators, the legitimacy of Pesantren is based on epistemic traditions that are established internally rather than evaluative metrics

that are imposed externally. But as educational governance is increasingly subject to accreditation systems and measurable indicators of quality, these forms of relational, ethical, and tradition-based authority are often overlooked or insufficiently recognized as legitimate educational standards (Li 2022). This puts pesantren in a complex situation where they have to negotiate external demands for institutional recognition, while at the same time, they try to maintain their own epistemic foundations intact under continuous pressures for modernization. (Chaka and Ndlangamandla 2022; Kutsi 2024).

Recent scholarship (2022–2025) has increasingly challenged the dominance of Western epistemologies by highlighting the coloniality of knowledge, epistemic injustice, and the need for pluriversal approaches to education (Akbar 2023; Gyamerah 2025; Sultana 2025). Parallel studies have examined how Islamic educational institutions, including pesantren, respond to globalization, curriculum reform, and the growing influence of quality assurance and standardization (Hanafi and Suyadi 2024; Tabroni 2022). Together, these studies have advanced important critiques of Western-centered educational models while documenting the adaptive strategies of Islamic educational institutions. However, they have rarely examined how global knowledge regimes themselves produce the epistemic marginalization of pesantren through accreditation systems, publication practices, curriculum standards, and broader structures of academic legitimacy (Chaka and Ndlangamandla 2022; Golding and Kopsick 2022; Stones and Pearce 2022). As a result, the relationship between pesantren epistemology and global knowledge governance has not been sufficiently theorized. In addition, existing studies of pesantren tend to focus on modernization and curricular hybridisation

in response to contemporary demands (Manathunga 2025). Such analyses are important but they tend to characterize pesantren as objects of adaptation to global standards, rather than as subjects with autonomous epistemological systems. The notion of “pesantren epistemology” and its logics of legitimation, scholarly authority, and knowledge production and transmission practices have not been articulated as a central analytical argument in the global education discourse (Granados-Beltrán 2025; Sultana 2025). Consequently, the theoretical contributions of pesantren to the global debates of education have been limited and marginalized within broader epistemic hierarchies. This situation indicates a more rigorous analytical engagement with the positioning and articulation of pesantren epistemology in global knowledge regimes as a foundation for a more comprehensive reading of the relationship between Islamic education and decolonization of knowledge.

The relationship between the internal legitimacy regimes of pesantren and the external structures of academic recognition has not been explored enough. Hence, the epistemic positioning of pesantren within global education is still largely under-theorized in terms of their positioning by accreditation systems, publication metrics, curriculum standards and broader discursive hierarchies. This study fills this gap by asking three interrelated questions: (1) How does the epistemology of pesantren occur as an autonomous knowledge system? (2) How does this epistemic tradition get marginalised by global regimes of knowledge? (3) How can pesantren be recontextualized in wider projects of decolonizing Islamic education?

This article contributes to the debates on decolonization of education by repositioning pesantren not only as an institution that adapts to global educational standards, but as an autonomous epistemic

system. It develops an analytical framework that links internal regimes of legitimacy of pesantren with external structures through which global knowledge regimes validate, marginalize and recognize educational traditions by integrating decolonial theory with sociology of knowledge. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates about the colonality of knowledge beyond normative critique, by showing how epistemic hierarchies are reproduced through contemporary mechanisms of accreditation, standardisation and academic recognition. Besides its theoretical contribution, the article provides a conceptual basis for educational policies that acknowledge epistemic diversity without requiring tradition-based institutions to fit into hegemonic global criteria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Decoloniality of Knowledge and Pluriversality

Recent scholarship has increasingly challenged the taken-for-granted status of Western epistemologies in contemporary education. Educational institutions are not neutral mechanisms for producing knowledge; they reproduce colonial epistemic hierarchies that privilege Western knowledge and marginalize indigenous and tradition-based epistemologies (Biswas 2023; Sharma 2021). Curriculum design, accreditation systems, research evaluation, and scholarly publishing institutionalize Western standards as the dominant standards of educational excellence, and with it, colonality is reproduced (Gänger 2024; Gyamerah 2025; Merawi 2022). Consequently, non-Western knowledge traditions are often acknowledged as cultural heritage rather than as legitimate systems of thought that contribute to global scholarship.

Decolonial scholars have proposed pluriversality as an alternative epistemic

horizon in response. Instead of discarding universal dialogue, pluriversality requires that multiple knowledge traditions coexist, based on different historical, ontological and epistemological foundations (Cárdenas 2023; Ciófalo 2023). Thus, educational diversity is understood as a source of intellectual enrichment, not as a deviation from modernity, but as a dialogue between different regimes of knowledge, respecting their internal standards of validity.

However, their application to Islamic education is still limited. Existing research mainly looks at pesantren in connection with curriculum modernization, institutional reform, religious moderation, or educational management (Hakim 2021; Marhamah 2024). These perspectives tend to consider pesantren as institutions that respond to modern educational systems, not as independent epistemological traditions. Consequently, the role of pesantren as an alternative knowledge producer in global debates on educational decolonization is under-theorized.

Epistemic Injustice dan Politics of Recognition

The concept of epistemic injustice refers to the reproduction of unequal recognition of knowledge at the social and institutional level. It occurs when individuals or communities are disadvantaged as knowers by dominant systems privilege particular forms of authority over others (Karmakar, G., & Chetty 2023). There are two main kinds in the literature. First, testimonial injustice whereby prejudice harms the credibility of a community. Second, hermeneutical injustice whereby the conceptual resources of marginalized groups are lacking in dominant interpretative frameworks. Recent research suggests these injustices extend from interpersonal to educational governance.

They are sustained through the politics of recognition, where educational institutions set the boundaries of legitimate knowledge. The existing scholarship has generally attributed the marginalization of pesantren to incomplete modernization or institutional constraints. There is relatively less focus on the institutional mechanisms that privilege Western epistemologies. There is too little knowledge about how global educational governance systematically reproduces unequal epistemic recognition.

Sociology of Knowledge and Symbolic Legitimacy

Decolonial theory is complemented by the sociology of knowledge, which explains the institutionalization of epistemic hierarchies. Legitimacy does not come simply from the intellectual merit of knowledge, but from processes of objectivation and institutionalization that determine what counts as credible scholarship (Cárdenas 2023; Lee 2022). Accreditation systems, university rankings, citation indexes and academic publishing together establish the symbolic criteria through which knowledge gains visibility and authority. Recent scholarship has shown how these mechanisms disproportionately privilege Global North academic practices. English-language publishing, international citation networks, impact metrics and institutional prestige are all gatekeeping structures that regulate scholarly recognition, and create linguistic, geographic and methodological inequalities for non-Western epistemologies (Kasstan 2022; Mihaylov 2024; Mutseekwa 2025).

Research on pesantren has focused on leadership, curriculum, and institutional transformation. However, sociological concepts such as symbolic legitimacy, cultural capital, and academic fields are rarely applied. Following Bourdieu, pesantren may be understood as actors with distinctive epistemic capital based on *kiai*

authority, sanad, turats and adab (Akib 2025; Cahyadi 2025; Hidayati 2025; Triatmo et al. 2020). Rather than merely adjusting to external standards, pesantren strategically negotiate competing regimes of legitimacy within broader educational fields (Basori 2023; Yuningsih 2023). Rather than a simple tradition-modernity dichotomy, this view moves the analytical focus to the contestation of competing systems of knowledge legitimacy.

These three strands of scholarship collectively provide complementary insights into the historical production of epistemic hierarchies, institutional mechanisms of unequal recognition, and symbolic structures through which academic legitimacy is reproduced. But they have rarely been combined to look at pesantren as an autonomous epistemic system negotiating global knowledge regimes. To fill this gap, the present study synthesizes decoloniality, epistemic injustice and the sociology of knowledge to analyze both the internal logic of pesantren epistemology and the external structures that shape its recognition in contemporary Islamic education.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study develops an integrated conceptual framework that brings together decoloniality and pluriversality, epistemic injustice and the politics of recognition, and the sociology of knowledge and symbolic legitimacy, to explain the marginalization and potential repositioning of pesantren within the global educational discourse.

The framework begins with coloniality of knowledge, which explains how global educational governance privileges Western epistemologies through curriculum standards, accreditation, research evaluation, and scholarly publishing, thereby establishing unequal regimes of educational legitimacy (Biswas 2023; Sharma 2021). In this context,

pluriversality provides the normative grounds for the recognition of pesantren as an autonomous epistemic tradition that derives its legitimacy from its own principles of sanad, turats, adab and ethical scholarship rather than the adherence to universalized educational standards.

The second dimension relates to the operation of these hierarchies through epistemic injustice. Testimonial injustice diminishes the intellectual authority of pesantren, as its sources of legitimacy differ from those of the prevailing positivist paradigm, whereas hermeneutical injustice constrains the interpretation of foundational concepts like sanad, adab, and barakah in mainstream academic discourse (Karmakar and Chetty 2023). Such exclusions are furthered by the politics of recognition, whereby educational institutions legitimize and authorize which forms of knowledge are recognized as valid.

The third dimension uses the sociology of knowledge to explain how these inequalities become institutionalized. Accreditation systems, university rankings, citation metrics and English-language publishing function as mechanisms of symbolic legitimacy that privilege Global North epistemologies and constrain alternative knowledge traditions (Cárdenas 2023; Lee 2022; Mihaylov 2024; Müller 2025). In this field pesantren contest competing regimes of legitimacy through mobilization of their epistemic capital based on kiai authority, sanad, turats and adab.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research design based on secondary data. This study uses a conceptual, normative approach with a decolonial theory, sociology of knowledge and Islamic Studies perspective. The analysis combines critical interpretive literature review and critical discourse analysis to explore how pesantren epistemology is constructed, legitimised

and represented in global knowledge regimes (Creswell and Creswell 2023; Denzin 2017). This design is appropriate for exploring competing regimes of knowledge and educational legitimacy rather than for testing causal relationships. The study is based on journal articles, scholarly monographs, policy documents, research reports, official pesantren publications and selected turats texts. These materials capture the institutional mechanisms that govern global educational legitimacy as well as the internal epistemic foundations of pesantren, permitting comparison between external regimes of evaluation and local systems of knowledge validation (Bloor and Wood 2006; Given 2008). The literature was identified through a systematic search on the Scopus database with keywords of decoloniality, epistemic injustice, pesantren, Islamic education, and global knowledge regimes. Relevant studies were found through searches of official repositories for policy documents and institutional materials and through citation chaining to find additional relevant studies. Sources were selected based on their conceptual relevance, quality of publication and contribution to the analytical framework (Richards and Morse 2013).

Data were analysed thematically, guided by the study's analytical framework. The analysis identified recurrent themes of epistemic legitimacy, validation of knowledge and standardization and marginalization and analysed the representation of these themes in academic, policy and pesantren texts. Then, critical discourse analysis was employed to interpret the construction and reproduction of competing regimes of knowledge legitimacy in global educational discourse (Braun and Clarke 2006; Miles and Saldaña 2020).

The study triangulates several categories of documentary evidence, including academic publications, policy

documents, and pesantren texts, to increase analytical rigor and interpret them consistently through a unified theoretical framework. This study used publicly available secondary sources and therefore did not require formal ethical approval. However, all the materials were used in accordance with the principles of academic integrity, by accurate citation, transparent selection of sources and faithful interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Epistemology of Pesantren as Autonomous Knowledge Systems

The epistemology of pesantren has an autonomous structure for knowledge verification, through the mechanism of sanad as a system of scholarly authorization. Sanad is an authority-continuity verification mechanism, where the legitimacy of knowledge is determined by the reliability of transmitters and the consistency of transmission chains, rather than by empirical replicability as insisted upon in positivism (Akib 2025; Rakhman 2025; Siregar 2025). These findings suggest that the standards of truth in pesantren are based on relationality and communal recognition. The CariUstadz.ID platform exemplifies how digital transformations are leading to a rearticulation of sanad into mechanisms of centralized curation and reputation-based legitimacy, while also opening up space for a shift toward algorithm-driven logics (Faradila 2025; Siregar 2025). Sanad is therefore adaptive, not static, but adheres to the principle of accountable transmission as its epistemic base.

If verification is through sanad then turats is an epistemological archive that guarantees intellectual continuity. The syarah and hasyiyah system are intertextuality patterns that allow the meaning to be elaborated and deepened without breaking the continuity of the

tradition (Faradila 2025; Hidayati 2025). The study on these practices shows that pesantren innovation is not disruptive but dialogical and accumulative. The collective memory is connected to the textual documentation through the oral transmission that accompanies the written texts, authenticating them via the *sanad* (Akib 2025; Inayatillah 2023). The dual structure posits that the legitimacy of Turats is grounded in historical continuity and hermeneutic rigor, even in the face of the pressures of digital diffusion. The ethical dimension of pesantren epistemology is manifested in the concept of *adab* that sees knowledge not as a body of knowledge, but as a process of forming a subject. Here, the validity of knowledge is linked to the moral integrity and intellectual discipline of the knower (Akib 2025; Rakhman 2025; Sofanudin 2021). Truth is not separated from ethical responsibility. The combination of rational and moral dimensions indicates that the epistemic legitimacy in pesantren is at the same time normative and reflective (Cahya and Askar 2025; Faradila 2025). This analysis reinforces the argument that the epistemology of pesantren is based on an axiological horizon that is different from paradigms that place the main criterion of objectivity on value-neutrality (Hidayati 2025).

These authority structures are concretely manifested in the *kiai-santri* relationship based on embodied knowledge and situated learning. The authority of the *kiai* derives not only from mastery of texts, but also from lived example and experiential wisdom that informs scholarly *habitus* (Aisyah 2022; Nurdin and Hafidzi 2023). Knowledge transmission is an intensive interaction process across classrooms, dormitories and communal practices that produces an integration of spiritual, intellectual and social dimensions (Nasith 2024; Robaeah 2023). Such a model defies quantification, because its triumph is

in the change of character and moral growth (Hidayati 2025). Therefore, the qualitative approach employed in this study is methodologically suitable to capture the relational complexity of authority in pesantren.

Pesantren also produces knowledge through collective practices such as *halaqah* and *musyawarah*. These mechanisms show that argumentative rationality and normative reasoning are two sides of the same coin within deliberative processes (Hidayat 2024; Syamsudin 2025). The consultative forum of *musyawarah* shows that scholarly decisions are made based on consensus, through the strength of reasoning rather than authoritarian imposition (Suryo 2024; Toedien 2025). Such practices blur the boundaries between “religious” and “scientific” knowledge by showing that theological reflection can be dialogical and critical (Imamah 2025). Therefore, the epistemology of pesantren reflects a rationality that is integrative rather than compartmentalized.

The findings regarding the autonomous nature of pesantren epistemology are summarized in Table 1, which compares the internal elements of pesantren legitimation with the validation logics of positivist-modernism. This table seeks to clarify the difference between regimes of legitimacy undergirding the decolonial analysis of this study. The comparison is based on the basis of the data elaborated in the preceding paragraphs.

Table 1. Comparison of Legitimacy Regimes: Pesantren Epistemology and Positivist-Modern Epistemology

Aspect	Pesantren Epistemology	Positivist-Modern Epistemology
Verification Mechanism	<i>Sanad</i> (authoritative transmission and continuity)	Empirical replication and measurable observation

Aspect	Pesantren Epistemology	Positivist-Modern Epistemology
Source of Legitimacy	Relational of authority and communal recognition	Methodological and procedural validation
Knowledge Archive	<i>Turats</i> (syarah-hasyiyah, intertextuality)	Indexed scientific publications and databases
Dimension of Validity	Integration of ethics and intellect (<i>adab</i>)	Value-neutrality and objectivity
Learning Model	Embodied and situated learning (kiai-santri)	Standardized instructional model
Knowledge Production	Deliberative <i>halaqah</i> and <i>musyawarah</i>	Metric-based and formal academic discourse

Source: personal notes, 2026

As shown in Table 1, the difference between the two regimes is not whether or not rationality is present but how the legitimacy is arranged through which rationality is performed. Pesantren epistemology constructs validation on relational, historical and ethical dimensions. On the other hand, the positivist paradigm emphasizes proceduralism and quantification as the key criteria. This comparison shows that the marginalization of pesantren in the global regimes is not because of the absence of standards but the incommensurability of standards.

The results show that pesantren can be regarded as an epistemic community with coherent and sustainable internal rules of validation. Knowledge systems such as authority, sanad, *adab* and deliberative practices are interconnected structures that uphold legitimacy. (Cahyadi 2025; Hidayati 2025). The claims that reduce pesantren to being “traditional” and thus inferior are better understood as conflicts between different regimes of legitimation (Carrigan, C., & Bardini 2021; Rois 2026). The analysis shows that the epistemology of pesantren is not just a historical relic, but a rational

system with its own logic of validation. This reflection constitutes the conceptual foundation for the discussion of how such conflicts of legitimacy become mechanisms of marginalization within global knowledge regimes, to be discussed in the following subsection.

The Mechanism of Marginalization of Pesantren within the Global Knowledge Regime

Continuing the findings on the epistemic autonomy of pesantren in the previous subsection, the following analysis is about the negotiation and at the same time marginalization of that autonomy in global knowledge regimes. While the previous discussion described the internal coherence of the pesantren’s system of legitimation, the present discussion describes the external mechanisms constraining its recognition. Marginalization does not arise from a lack of standards but from the incommensurability between the internal regime of legitimacy of pesantren and globally institutionalized standards. This subsection maps the concrete forms in which such mechanisms operate by using the frameworks of decoloniality, epistemic injustice, and the sociology of knowledge.

Curriculum standardization and accreditation systems operate as governing technologies that transform the epistemic diversity of pesantren into administrative uniformity. The implementation of Formal Diniyah Education (PDF) in accordance with national standards shows how tiered structures and learning outcomes are defined according to state frameworks rather than pesantren’s internal epistemic logic (Hamzah and Rosyada 2024). The standardization models are also indicated by the institutionalization of Madrasah Diniyah in the national regulation which is subject to formalization (Yaqin and Norlaila 2024). The dual curriculum model, consisting of the Merdeka Curriculum and

the pesantren-specific curriculum, is a response to adaptive strategies as well as structural pressures to align with government reforms (Bistomy 2025). This is objectivation in the sociology of knowledge, with quality to be defined by external standards. The dominance of English and the ecology of global publishing reinforce gate-keeping mechanisms that restrict knowledge production based in pesantren. In some pesantren the traditional ethos has been preserved as a resistance to normative modernization, under the pressure of conforming to Western educational axiologies (Sulton 2023). However, the necessity of formal recognition tends to direct research orientation to global epistemic preferences and local frameworks to contextual case studies. In the economic field of pesantren, entrepreneurial stories that fit the global capitalist model further strengthen this instrumentalist orientation (As-Salafiyah and Rusydiana 2022). From an analytical point of view, linguistic hegemony and publishing formats are not only technical issues but also symbolic mechanisms that determine scholarly visibility and legitimacy. Such mechanisms are further reinforced by ranking systems, indexation and citation metrics that function as symbolic capital within the global academic field. Epistemological appropriation occurs when non-Western knowledge is reframed within dominant paradigms so that it can be accepted, because of the pressure to conform to Western epistemic standards (R'boul and Dervin 2024). Geographic bias in the production of urban knowledge shows the uneven weight of the Global North in setting the research agenda (Müller 2025). These epistemic inequalities are sustained through dependence on datasets and methods embedded within colonial legacies (Mate 2025). The privileging of English and impact metrics further entrenches hierarchies

marginalising tradition-based regimes of legitimacy (Shi 2023).

The 'traditional-modern' divide It is a discursive device that reduces the complex nature of pesantren epistemology into simple evaluative categories. In the media and the public sphere, pesantren are often portrayed as needing to be reformed to fit modern paradigms (Syah 2025). This construction enables assumptions of Western superiority in knowledge production (Mamun 2024). As a result, pesantren are positioned as objects of modernization rather than epistemic subjects with their own logics of legitimacy. In the perspective of epistemic injustice, this dichotomy is a form of hermeneutical injustice that narrows the interpretive horizon in understanding the contribution of pesantren.

Moreover, the use of positivist methodologies in quality assessments further invalidates the pesantren's validation methods, such as sanad and adab. Contemporary academic evaluation favors quantitative metrics that are considered universally applicable (Panosso 2024). Models of peer review in some disciplines reinforce preferences for standardized empirical procedures (Thai 2022). Such methodological standards are considered "neutral" and "universal" when oral transmission and relational authority structures are described as "non-scientific." Such methodological reflection indicates the need to incorporate multiple epistemological perspectives in educational research (Korzhuev 2026).

Selective representation in international literature further limits the understanding of pesantren by focusing on themes such as moderation, extremism or modernization. Religious moderation studies are mostly concerned with particular features of the phenomenon and ignore the internal epistemic structures that give shape to the pesantren practice

(Surawan 2022). Likewise, the scholarship on the spiritual dimensions of pesantren is often disconnected from the study of larger frameworks of legitimacy that undergird them (Mayanti and Badriyah 2021). This fragmentation leads to epistemic reductionism which understands pesantren thematically rather than as a whole knowledge system. In theory, this representational practice reproduces marginalization through a selective politics of recognition.

Table 2 groups these mechanisms together in a taxonomy of the forms of marginalization and the institutional instruments through which they operate. The table shows how conflicts between regimes of Legitimacy are played out in concrete practices. The classification is based on the results described in the previous paragraphs.

Table 2. Mechanisms of Marginalization of Pesantren within the Global Knowledge Regime

Mechanism	Institutional Instrument	Impact on Pesantren
Curriculum standardization	PDF, national regulations, dual curriculum	Reduction of epistemic diversity into administrative uniformity
Linguistic and publishing dominance	English language, high-impact global journals	Decreased visibility and pressure for epistemic conformity
Academic metrics	Rankings, indexation, citation metrics	Delegitimation of tradition-based legitimacy frameworks
Discursive dichotomy	Traditional–modern framing	Objectification of pesantren as subjects of reform
Methodological bias	Quantitative evaluation, positivism	Stigmatization of <i>sanad</i> and <i>adab</i> as non-scientific
Selective representation	Moderation/modernization narratives	Fragmentation of pesantren epistemology

Source: Personal notes, 2026

As Table 2 demonstrates, marginalization is not singular but structurally constituted through the interplay of regulation, metrics and representation. Each mechanism operates at different levels -curriculum, publishing, methodology and discourse- but mutually reinforces hierarchical regimes of legitimacy. Hence the conflict between pesantren and global regimes is not just a matter of technical adaptation but of competing legitimacy structures. “Marginalization is systemic and institutionalized.

The findings in this subsection, in general, indicate that the marginalization of pesantren is caused by the dominance of global regimes of legitimacy that standardize quality through positivist, symbolic, and discursive metrics. This tension reflects the contradiction between the epistemic autonomy described in the previous finding and hegemonic external legitimacy structures. In this way, this discussion not only reveals the instruments of marginalization, but also clarifies how the mechanism of epistemic injustice and institutional objectivation works concretely in Islamic education. This analysis further enhances the conceptual contribution of the research by showing that the decolonization of Islamic education is an upheaval of the structures of legitimacy rather than simple curricular change or administrative reform.

Islamic Boarding Schools as a Model for Decolonizing Islamic Education

On the basis of the identification of epistemic autonomy and the structural mechanisms of marginalization, this subsection advances a constructive analytical step by examining how pesantren may function as a model for decolonizing Islamic education. The focus here is not on restating the internal logic of legitimacy or the instruments of exclusion, but on strategic rearticulation within global

knowledge regimes. In this sense, decolonization is not a matter of exiting global structures, but of changing epistemic positioning. Thus, the analysis focuses on conceptual translation, curricular pluralism, integrative subject formation, accountability models, epistemic sovereignty and negotiated hybridity as interrelated dimensions of repositioning. Conceptual translation strategies are required to reposition turats as a global epistemic resource, and these strategies go beyond linguistic transfer and address ontological and methodological depth. A translation that simply translates terminology into English risks epistemicide by stripping local epistemological categories of the meanings embedded within them (Bennett 2023). A cultural translation approach questions the neutrality of translation and reveals the contextual narratives that underlie knowledge systems. This necessitates an engagement with the historical, theological and pedagogical structures that constitute turats as an epistemic archive. Thus, mapping indigenous epistemologies in a global discourse is an important move towards advancing epistemic justice and avoiding reductive assimilation (Mwansa and Kiuppis 2021). Conceptual translation thus becomes a decolonial strategy of protection of epistemic integrity, while promoting transnational dialogue.

Beyond translation, a second strategic dimension is curricular reconstruction. An epistemologically pluralistic curriculum combines traditional means of validation (like sanad and adab) with modern academic methods, without subservience of one to the other. Integrative Islamic epistemology shows how the reconciliation of classical knowledge with modern disciplines can resolve dichotomous paradigms that fragment Islamic education (Rafsanjani 2025). Interdisciplinary approaches further demonstrate that convergence of scientific, technological and

traditional knowledge can enhance analytical rigor while preserving epistemic specificity (Frogeri and Júnior 2025; Joseph and Uzundu 2024). In this configuration, coexistence replaces hierarchy, and dialogue replaces assimilation. Curriculum becomes a site of epistemic negotiation rather than compliance.

A third dimension is the redefinition of competence through the integration of spirituality and reason. The educational practices in pesantren extend the competence beyond instrumental skill to holistic subject formation based on the ethical and intellectual development. The convergence of traditional Islamic epistemology with modern methods of pedagogy illustrates that epistemic integration can address tensions between secular and religious paradigms (Syakur 2025). The model challenges reductive models of competence that focus on quantifiable outcomes but exclude moral reasoning. Pesantren provide an alternative paradigm of educational evaluation through a holistic conception of intellectual and ethical formation. Such integration does not negate rational inquiry but places it in a broader axiological context.

The reconstruction of authority through sanad also offers an alternative model of epistemic accountability. The transmissional chain stands for responsibility, traceability and scholarly integrity, requiring ethical commitment from both transmitter and recipient (Allès and Seeth 2021). This relational accountability is renewedly relevant in the context of digital misinformation and fragmented knowledge circulation. The continuity of sanad principles in today's educational engagement highlights the need for contextualized and ethically grounded knowledge transmission (Halimah 2024). This is not an impersonal metric-based model of validation, but one that foregrounds communal responsibility and intellectual continuity. Thus, Sanad

provides a framework for rethinking academic integrity beyond procedural compliance.

Pesantren in the discourse of Global South could be considered a form of epistemic sovereignty. Epistemic sovereignty is the ability of a knowledge community to set its own standards of validity while strategically engaging with global regimes. Decolonial work involves epistemic humility and recognition of plural knowledge systems, not uncritical acceptance of dominant frames (Ewuoso 2023). The pesantren implements this sovereignty by having its own logics of validation while simultaneously engaging in wider scholarly conversations. Local epistemic authority embedded in public intellectual engagement further strengthens plural participation in global discourse (Erdocia and Soler 2023). In so doing, pesantren offer contributions not as marginal cases, but as producers of theoretical insight. To clarify the interconnection of these dimensions, Table 3 summarizes the strategic elements of pesantren as a model for decolonizing Islamic education. The responses of each dimension to the identified mechanisms of marginalization are summarized in the table. It does not add new data but consolidates the analytical trajectory of this sub-section.

Table 3. Strategic Dimensions of Pesantren as a Model for Decolonizing Islamic Education

Strategic Dimension	Core Principle	Decolonial Function
Conceptual translation <i>turats</i>	Ontological and of cultural depth in translation	Prevents epistemicide and reductive assimilation
Pluralistic curriculum design	Integration without subordination	Enables dialogical coexistence of legitimacy regimes

Strategic Dimension	Core Principle	Decolonial Function
Integration of spirituality and rationality	Holistic subject formation	Redefines competence beyond positivist metrics
<i>Sanad</i> -based accountability	Relational scholarly responsibility	Offers alternative model of epistemic integrity
Epistemic sovereignty	Autonomous standard-setting with strategic engagement	Reclaims agency within global discourse
Field negotiation (hybrid epistemology)	Strategic convergence without assimilation	Sustains visibility while preserving epistemic coherence

Source: Personal notes, 2026

Table 3 shows that decolonization is not through epistemic isolation, but through strategic engagement with global knowledge systems. In each dimension, the discussion is about a different mechanism of marginalization: translation bias, curricular standardization, metric dominance, and discursive reduction. The internal coherence of pesantren epistemology is maintained. This model demonstrates that epistemic autonomy and global engagement are complementary rather than contradictory within a pluriversal framework.

Hybrid epistemology can be understood as a process of field negotiation. It allows pesantren to maintain the epistemic basis of *sanad* and *adab* and to build a productive dialogue with global academic practice. Rather than resulting in assimilation or isolation, this negotiated engagement strengthens intellectual traditions and positions pesantren as active contributors to global knowledge production. Thus decolonization is conceptualized as negotiated epistemic repositioning that is both theoretically grounded and practically relevant.

In sum, the findings re-position pesantren from marginalization to epistemic transformation. Pesantren offer ways to reconfigure contemporary regimes of knowledge legitimacy through conceptual translation, curricular pluralism, holistic subject formation, relational accountability, epistemic sovereignty, and negotiated hybridity. The study therefore advocates decolonization as a transformation of epistemic relations, not as a rejection of global engagement. But it does not argue that pesantren epistemology or any epistemology of education alone can guarantee morally exemplary graduates. Character formation is still a multidimensional process shaped by institutional culture, family, leadership, socio-political contexts and individual agency. Meanwhile, pesantren epistemology offers a unique ethical and normative framework that enhances character education and complements broader institutional and social efforts to foster integrity, responsibility, and human values.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the pesantren knowledge system is an autonomous and coherent knowledge system built on the *sanad*, *turats*, *adab*, and deliberative pedagogical traditions. These principles create a specific regime of epistemic legitimacy radically different from the globally dominant standards based on standardization, metrics and positivist evaluation. The findings indicate that the marginalization of pesantren is not due to epistemic deficiency but to the dissonance between its relational and ethical logic of knowledge validation and the institutionalized mechanisms through which global knowledge regimes determine academic legitimacy. Pesantren are not passive objects of exclusion but have the intellectual capital to negotiate their place through conceptual translation, curricular

pluralism, epistemic sovereignty and hybrid forms of engagement that preserve epistemic integrity yet facilitate a global dialogue.

In theory, this study contributes to decolonial scholarship by demonstrating how current systems of accreditation, scholarly publishing and symbolic legitimation reenact the coloniality of knowledge. It also contributes to the sociology of knowledge by reinterpreting the marginalization of pesantren as a struggle between competing regimes of legitimacy rather than a limitation of tradition-based education. Hence, the study relocates pesantren as an epistemic subject that can enrich global debates on Islamic education and epistemic diversity. Practically, the findings offer a conceptual foundation for pedagogical governance and quality assurance structures which are sensitive to different kinds of epistemic legitimacy. However, the research is limited to secondary sources and conceptual analysis. Future research needs to adopt ethnographic, comparative and mixed-methods approaches to study how pesantren negotiate accreditation, curriculum reform and global knowledge infrastructures and thus contribute to the institutionalization of more pluralistic models of knowledge governance. This article does not cover the role of the *Majelis Masyayikh* as an institution responsible for formulating and establishing the quality assurance system for pesantren education in Indonesia. In the development of the pesantren institution has developed an accreditation system.

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