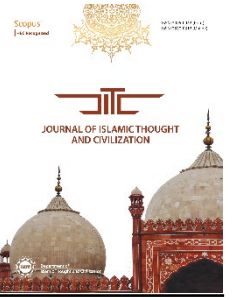
Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)
Volume 15 Issue 2, Fall 2025
ISSN$_{(P)}$: 2075-0943 ISSN$_{(E)}$: 2520-0313
Homepage: https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC



Title:	**Bridging Tradition and Modernity:Comparative Study of Master's Programs in Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy in Indonesia**
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DOI:	https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.152.19
History:	Received: February 18, 2025, Revised: August 27, 2025, Accepted: September 05, 2025, Published: October 17, 2025
Citation:	Faishal, Muhammad., Amroeni Drajat, Ryandi, et al. "Bridging Tradition and Modernity: Comparative Study of Master's Programs in Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy in Indonesia." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 15, no. 2 (2025): 348–364. https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.152.19
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Conflict of Interest:	Author(s) declared no conflict of interest

A publication of
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Bridging Tradition and Modernity:Comparative Study of Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study provides a comparative investigation of the Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy in Indonesia, focusing on Darussalam University (UNIDA) Gontor and Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (UIN Sunan Kalijaga). The study examines how institutional frameworks, epistemological paradigms, and curriculum design shape the development of scholarship in these institutions. A qualitative comparative approach was employed, combining document analysis, semi-structured interviews with faculty and students, and field observations conducted in 2023, complemented by desk research in 2024–2025. The analysis used institutional theory, Kuhn's paradigm concept, and curriculum design perspectives. The results showed distinct orientations alongside areas of convergence. UNIDA represented a pesantren-based model grounded in moral-spiritual authority and a *tawḥīdic* worldview, which outlined Islamization of knowledge and classical epistemology preservation. UIN reflected a state-affiliated model influenced by bureaucratic governance and accreditation demands. It advanced the integration–interconnection paradigm that promoted interdisciplinary dialogue and openness to contemporary scholarship. Curriculum practices reinforced these approaches with UNIDA adopting a rational-linear model centered on textual mastery. While UIN applied flexible frameworks which integrated hermeneutics, critical theory, and multidisciplinary methods. These models exhibited the richness of Indonesian Islamic higher education in negotiating tradition and modernity. UNIDA safeguarded epistemological continuity rooted in revelation, with UIN concentrated on adaptability and global engagement. These insights provided meaningful implications for policymakers and educators in designing Islamic higher education that was contextually grounded, epistemologically coherent, and responsive to global academic currents.

***Keywords*:** *Aqidah* and Islamic philosophy, curriculum design, Indonesia, integration-interconnection paradigm, Islamic higher education, Islamization of knowledge, Master's Programs

Introduction

The evolution of Islamic higher education in Indonesia is presumed to reflect broader global trends in religious studies. Furthermore, the transition from IAIN (State Institutes of Islamic Studies)

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to UIN (State Islamic Universities), such as UIN Sunan Kalijaga, marks a significant shift in the positioning of Islamic education in the global academic landscape.[1] Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at Darussalam University (UNIDA) Gontor and UIN Sunan Kalijaga[2] serve as typical examples of two distinct higher education models, with one deeply rooted in traditional Islamic thought and the other engaged in modern academic frameworks. These institutions represent conflicting responses to the global phenomena of integrating Islamic thought with modernity, each navigating a complex interplay of local traditions, state regulations, and international academic expectations.

The institutional framework adopted at UNIDA Gontor, grounded in its pesantren-based model, is profoundly shaped by the religious authority and classical heritage of the pesantren tradition.[3] This orientation bears strong resemblance to Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which has historically derived its academic legitimacy from the sustained authority of the ulama and the preservation of classical Islamic sciences. As demonstrated in the study on the intellectual genealogy between Darussalam Gontor and Al-Azhar,[4] both institutions emphasize continuity of tradition, the centrality of revelation, and the integration of moral-spiritual authority into academic governance. Thus, UNIDA Gontor's pesantren-based framework can be situated within a broader global lineage of Islamic higher education that upholds epistemological continuity through classical heritage. Moreover, UNIDA Gontor's focus on Islamization of knowledge is reflective of broader global intellectual revival movements, such as the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). The movements aim to reclaim and reintegrate intellectual traditions that were sidelined by colonial influences and secular academic paradigms. For UNIDA, this approach centered on Islamizing the terminology used in modern disciplines, and restructuring the entire epistemological foundation of knowledge to ensure that it is grounded in an Islamic worldview.[5] The curriculum used, particularly in Master's Program in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy, outlined the primacy of divine revelation, ethical clarity, and the integration of classical Islamic metaphysics in academic inquiry.

[1]Hamruni, et al, "Transformation of Islamic Religious Institutes (IAIN) Become Islamic University (UIN) in the Ministry of Religion, Indonesia," *American Research Journal of Humanities & Social Science* 3, no. 12 (2020): 54–59; Khoirun Niam Hayadin, Ronald Munawiroh, and Ronald Lukens-Bull, "Contemporary Changes in Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia: Dynamic Encounter between Modernisation and Tradition," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 20, no. 1 (2025), https://doi.org/10.22452/jat.vol20no1.14.

[2]The selection of UNIDA Gontor and UIN Sunan Kalijaga as case studies is based on four key factors: (1) both institutions hold high accreditation from the National Accreditation Board, with their Master's programs in Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy being well-recognized; (2) they are reputably distinct, with UNIDAs pesantren -based approach and UINs focus on interdisciplinary dialogue; (3) both have strong graduate outcomes, with alumni in education, religious leadership, and policy-making, and (4) UIN Sunan Kalijaga outperformed UNIDA Gontor in research productivity, as reflected in its higher SINTA (Science and Technology Index) score during 2022–2024, https://sinta.kemdiktisaintek.go.id/

[3]Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi et al., "Value Management in Pesantren-Based University (Grounded Research on AKPAM System of UNIDA Gontor)," *QALAMUNA: Journal of Education, Social Studies, and Religion* 15, no. 2 (2023): 113–1126, https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v15i2.4018.

[4]Muh Arifin et al., "The Intellectual Genealogy of Darussalam Gontor Islamic Boarding School and Al-Azhar University, Cairo," *TADRIS: Journal of Islamic Education* 16, no. 2 (2021): 351–63, https://doi.org/10.19105/tjpi.v16i2.4836.

[5]Fitri Rahmawati et al., "Adab and Akhlaq in the Islamic Scientific Tradition: Reflection on Curriculum at UNIDA Gontor," in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Business, Law and Pedagogy (ICBLP 2019),* Sidoarjo, Indonesia, February 13–15, 2019 (EAI, 2019), http://dx.doi.org/10.4108/eai.13-2-2019.2286203.

Based on the description above, UIN Sunan Kalijaga exemplifies a different trajectory that conforms with the global model of public universities. The state-affiliated structure places it under the purview of national regulations and accreditation standards, similar to public universities worldwide. As Indonesia's leading state institution for Islamic studies, UIN was subjected to a transformation that reflected the global trend of integrating modern academic disciplines with religious studies. This was evident in the curriculum used, which focused on interdisciplinary dialogue between classical Islamic knowledge and modern sciences, such as sociology, philosophy, and the natural sciences. UIN integration-interconnection paradigm, which facilitated a dialogue between *naqli* (revealed) and *'aqli* (rational) sciences, positioned the institution in a broader global discourse. The university participated in international academic discourse in Islamic, religious, and postcolonial studies, drawing from both Western intellectual traditions and Islamic heritage.[6]

UIN approach to Islamic education was in line with the trajectory of many public universities globally, where academic freedom, research productivity, and accreditation standards had become central to the development process. Similar to other public universities worldwide, UIN Sunan Kalijaga is deeply interested in international academic collaborations, maintaining its position in global networks. The incorporation of outcomes-based education (OBE) principles and global disciplinary dialogues into its curriculum reflects efforts to reconcile Islamic intellectual heritage with modern academic demands. The approach enabled the university to participate in interdisciplinary discourses in the broader academic sphere while still maintaining its Islamic identity.[7]

The comparison between UNIDA Gontor and UIN Sunan Kalijaga resonates with broader global phenomena in higher education and religious studies. UNIDA pesantren-based model parallels traditional religious seminaries that uphold the integrity of classical Islamic scholarship. Meanwhile, UIN reflects the evolving landscape of public universities worldwide that strive to balance local intellectual traditions with global academic expectations. Both institutions are engaged in the global trend of integrating Islamic thought with modernity. UNIDA and UIN realized this objective through Islamization and interdisciplinary dialogue, respectively.

Apart from reflecting global academic trends, these contrasting models of Islamic higher education showed the tension between tradition and modernity, local and universal intellectual movements, including religious identity and flexibility. The intellectual revival movements, particularly those associated with the IIIT, have contributed to a renewed focus on Islamization, which appears to reintegrate Islamic epistemology into the modern academic framework. However, UIN engagement with interdisciplinary discourse reflects global movements in religious studies, where academic flexibility and interactions with multiple traditions, both religious and secular were clarified.

The discourse on Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at UNIDA and UIN provided valuable insights regarding how higher education institutions in the country navigated complex dynamics. It shows how each institution adapted to both local needs and global pressures, contributing to the ongoing development of scholarship in the broader context of higher education.

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[6]Ahmad Izudin, "Applying the Integration-Interconnection Paradigm in the Teaching and Learning Process of the Postgraduate Program at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta," *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 13 (2017): 110–140, https://doi.org/10.18196/AIIJIS.2017.0069.110-140; M. Iqbal Lubis, Ilyas Husti, and Bisri Mustofa, "Implementasi Konsep Integrasi Islam dan Sains UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta," *At-Tarbiyah Al-Mustamirrah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 1 (2023): 15–28, https://doi.org/10.31958/atjpi.v4i1.8605.

[7]Ibid.

However, through the comparative analysis, the current research contributed to the larger discourse on the role of Islamic higher education in the 21st century, particularly in Indonesia, where the intersection between tradition and modernity consistently shaped the future of academic inquiry.

This research further analyzed how Islamic higher education navigated the challenges associated with maintaining religious identity while engaging with global academic trends. The concept was realized by examining the intersections of institutional frameworks, epistemological commitments, and curriculum design. The results are expected to inform policymakers, educators, and scholars interested in the future direction of Islamic higher education in Indonesia and beyond.

2. Theoretical Framework

The current research was grounded in three interrelated theoretical frameworks, namely institutional, scientific paradigms, and higher education curriculum design theories. These frameworks were adopted to analyze the structural, epistemological, and pedagogical dimensions of Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at UNIDA and UIN Sunan Kalijaga.

2.1. Institutional Theory

Richard W. Scott stated that institutional theory provided an analytical framework to understand how organizations, including higher education institutions, were formed, sustained, and transformed. This process was driven by functional efficiency, including normative, cultural, and regulatory pressures from the surrounding environment.[8] Additionally, institutions were more than administrative or structural entities. These social constructions embedded with values, norms, beliefs, and practices, became institutionalized over time. Berger and Luckmann stated that institutions evolved and persisted through social construction processes. In this context, repeated behavioral patterns were objectified and legitimized in a given social order.[9]

Powell and DiMaggio reported that institutional theory outlined the significance of isomorphism mechanisms. These refer to processes through which institutions become increasingly similar in response to external pressures. However, there are three primary forms of isomorphism:[10] (1) Coercive isomorphism, originating from external pressures exerted by authoritative bodies, such as the state or donor agencies, (2) Normative isomorphism, arising from professionalization processes, as well as the adoption of accreditation standards, and (3) Mimetic isomorphism, including the imitation of other institutional models perceived as successful or legitimate.

The use of this theory enabled the exploration of how institutional orientation, power relations, and historical foundations of UNIDA and UIN influenced the direction of academic policies. This also included curriculum design, and development of scientific paradigm in Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy. The analysis showed that epistemological approaches and curriculum policies were not neutral, rather, these were shaped by the social, regulatory, and ideological structures embedded in each institution.

[8]Richard W Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 57.

[9]Peter L Berger, and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 70–75.

[10]Walter W Powell, and Paul J DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 66–70.

2.2. Theory of Scientific Paradigms

Scientific paradigm refers to a set of beliefs, values, and methods collectively accepted by a scientific community as the foundation for knowledge development in a specific historical period. This concept was popularized by Thomas S. Kuhn in the book entitled "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions". Kuhn stated that scientific progress occurred through revolutionary transformations, or paradigm shifts. Furthermore, crises in an existing paradigm gave rise to new ones that effectively addressed anomalies and evolving challenges.[11]

In the context of Islamic higher education, variations in epistemological paradigms manifested through diverse conceptualizations of knowledge sources, methods, and educational objectives. These ranged from the integration of reason and interdisciplinary approaches rooted in worldviews, to re-anchoring method in *tawḥīdic* revelation including the synthesis of *naqli* and *'aqli* in moral formation. Debates on epistemological paradigms in Indonesian Islamic scholarship have developed along two major aspects:

(1) Islamization of knowledge— This originated in the 1970s and was pioneered by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (b. 1931), including Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1921-1986).[12] In Indonesia, it was further promoted by al-Attas's students, including Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi.[13] Islamization is a process of liberating knowledge from the influence of secularism and dualism, re-integrating Islamic worldview into the epistemological structure of science. Furthermore, the

[11]Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 66-76.

[12]Khasib Amrullah et al., "From the Liberation of the Soul to the Islamization of Knowledge (Interpreting the Thought of Al-Attas)," *Kalimah: Journal of Religious Studies and Islamic Thought* 19, no. 2 (2021), 280–295, https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v19i2.6655; Mohammad Muslih, et al., "An In-Depth Analyisi of Al Faruqi's Theory of Islamization of Knowledge: A Perspective from Thomas Kuhn's Paradigm Shift Theory," *Hamdard Islamicus* 47, no. 1 (2024): 27–49, https://doi.org/10.57144/hi.v47i1.436.

[13]Based on the researcher's analysis of Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi's publications listed on Google Scholar (https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=m-8GUUAAAAAJ&hl=de), it is evident that he consistently articulates the Islamic worldview as the epistemological foundation for the Islamization of knowledge, following the intellectual legacy of Syed M. Naquib al-Attas (*Worldview as the Epistemological Basis of Islam*, 2005). He further underscores the urgency of Islamization within higher education and the sciences (*The Islamization of Science and the Campus*, 2010; *Islamic Science: Paradigm, Facts, and Agenda*, 2016), and applies this framework to critique Western epistemology and capitalism, as demonstrated in *The Islamic Worldview and Western Capitalism* (2013). His comparative works explicitly connect al-Attas's framework with the thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (*Knowledge and Knowing in Islam: A Comparative Study between Nursi and al-Attas*, 2018; *Reading Al-Attas' Ta'dīb as the Purpose of Islamic University*, 2019; At the same time, Zarkasyi also engages with Ismail Raji al-Faruqi's project, as in *Al-Faruqis Islamization of Science in Sardars Critical Perspective* (2025), reflecting his awareness of the broader genealogy of the Islamization discourse beyond al-Attas. Moreover, his efforts to modernize pesantren while preserving their epistemological foundations—such as in *Modern Islamic Boarding School: Maintaining Tradition in a Modern System (2015) and Imam Zarkasyi's Modernization of Pesantren in Indonesia* (2020)—represent a concrete institutionalization of the Islamization of knowledge within the Indonesian educational context.

paradigm assumed that modern knowledge was subjected to secularization, mandating Islamization to support the values of *tawḥīd* and *adab*.[14]

(2) Integration–interconnection—This was developed by M. Amin Abdullah as a response to the fragmentation of knowledge in UIN. Unlike Islamization, the paradigm did not start from the premise of secularization, rather it focused on epistemological dialogue between *turāth* (classical Islamic knowledge), the modern natural, and social sciences, including humanities. Integration in this context, entailed methodological openness, as well as critical, productive interconnection across disciplinary boundaries.[15]

The current research adopted the scientific paradigm framework to examine the epistemological orientation and intellectual vision in Master's Programs at UNIDA and UIN. Moreover, UNIDA tended towards Islamization of knowledge, outlining the integration of *turāth* and modernity in an Islamic worldview. UIN promoted a more integrative approach, valuing plurality of methods and interdisciplinary dialogue.

2.3. Curriculum Design Theory in Higher Education

Curriculum design is a core aspect of higher education, reflecting an institution's epistemological orientation, strategic objectives, and responsiveness to societal needs including knowledge advancement.[16]

(1) Ralph Tyler's Rational–Linear Model: This model focused on four core components, namely educational objectives, learning experiences, organization, and evaluation.[17] This goal-oriented systematic model is often criticized for overlooking contextual, historical, and transcendental aspects critical to value-based education.

(2) Hilda Taba's Grassroots Model: Builds on Tyler's approach, outlining faculty participation in curriculum development. This included advocating for a bottom-up model grounded in learner needs, social relevance, and diagnostic assessment.[18]

(3) Outcomes-based Education (OBE): This approach centered on graduate learning outcomes as the foundation for instructional content, pedagogy, and assessment. In Indonesia, OBE is in line with the National Standards for Higher Education and national accreditation requirements.[19]

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[14]Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995), 45–46; Ismail R al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon: IIIT, 1982), 27–34.

[15]Amin Abdullah, *Islamic Studies in the Paradigm of Integration--Interconnection: An Anthology* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2007); Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 2 (2017): 391–426, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.391-426.

[16]Allan C. Ornstein, and Francis P. Hunkins, *Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues*, 2nd ed., (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1993).

[17]William Wraga, "Understanding the Tyler Rationale: Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction in Historical Context," *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* 4, no. 2 (2017): 227–252, https://doi.org/10.14516/ete.156.

[18]Hilda Taba, *Curriculum Development; Theory and Practice* (New York SE: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), https://worldcat.org/title/176063.

[19]Ministry of Education and Culture, *National Standard for Higher Education (SN-Dikti)* (Jakarta: Directorate General of Higher Education, 2020).

Despite the technocratic nature, it allows for epistemological flexibility when integrated with specific paradigms.

This research used curriculum design theory to compare the structures of Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at UNIDA and UIN. It showed how curriculum served as the operational arena for institutional and epistemological commitments.

3. Research Methodology

The current study adopted a qualitative approach using a comparative research design. The objective was to gain in-depth understanding, as well as systematically compare the characteristics of Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at UNIDA Gontor and UIN Sunan Kalijaga. The study mainly focused on institutional framework, epistemological paradigms, and curriculum design.

Apart from conducting the field research in October 2023, the data remained valid for academic analysis in 2025. The paradigmatic orientation of Islamic higher education—particularly in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy evolved gradually. This is because it was rooted in long-standing theological traditions and institutional policies. According to Kuhn, paradigmatic change in scientific or intellectual communities occurred gradually, and not in a short time span.[20] Supplementary desk research conducted in 2024 and early 2025 confirmed that both universities had not introduced fundamental revisions to its curricula or institutional frameworks. The 2023 dataset was still an accurate and reliable basis for comparison.

3.1. Research Design and Data Collection

This research adopted three complementary methods, namely (1) document analysis of curricula, academic handbooks, and official university websites, (2) semi-structured interviews with program chairs, faculty members, students, and alumni. This also included (3) field observations of academic activities and campus culture.

The field research lasted 2 weeks, from October 14th to 28th 2023. While relatively brief, this duration was sufficient because the analysis focused on well-documented institutional programs with accessible stakeholders. Stake reported that in qualitative inquiry, research depth was mainly determined by the intensity and focus of engagement rather than the length of fieldwork.[21]

3.2. Data Analysis

The analysis combined (1) a descriptive-comparative method to systematically contrast institutional frameworks, curriculum structures, and epistemological paradigms. In addition, (2) a thematic analysis was used to capture meaningful recurring patterns in institutional narratives and curriculum philosophy.

3.3. Triangulation for Credibility

The credibility of the results was enhanced by applying multiple triangulation forms. These included (1) Data triangulation: information was obtained from diverse sources, namely documents, interviews, observations, and supplementary desk research, (2) Methodological triangulation: combination of document analysis, interviews, and field observations, and (3) Theoretical

[20]Kuhn, *The Structure of Scintific Revolution*, 111–113.

[21]Robert E Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995), 8–12.

triangulation: interpretation was framed using perspectives from comparative education research and the interpretivist paradigm in qualitative inquiry.[22]

3.4. Philosophical and Paradigmatic Grounding

The current research was grounded in interpretivist paradigm, which focused on contextual meaning-making processes, as well as acknowledged the socially-constructed nature of academic programs.[23] A comparative qualitative design played a relevant role to examine the similarities and differences across higher institutions. Meanwhile, by allowing methods to conform with set objectives, the research ensured both analytical rigor and contextual sensitivity.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Institutional Framework: Pesantren-based vs State-affiliated

Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at UNIDA Gontor were formally introduced in 2010. However, its intellectual genealogy was traced to the Ulama Cadre Program (PKU), a joint initiative between Pesantren Darussalam Gontor and the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI). This initiative evolved as a response to the wave of Islamic thought liberalization in the early 2000s.[24] The program was positioned as part of the pesantren's intellectual mission, under the leadership of Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi. The aim was to preserve its epistemological ethos and affirm revelation (*khabar ṣādiq*) as the main source of knowledge.[25] Based on the perspective of institutional theory, this showed how cultural-cognitive and normative pillars[26], rooted in the pesantren tradition, shaped the identity of the institution.

UIN Sunan Kalijaga had offered Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy since 1983, resulting in one of the earliest of its kind in Indonesia. The program was restructured into three concentrations in 2016, such as (1) Philosophy of Religion, (2) Qur'ānic and Hadīth Studies, including (3) Religious Studies and Conflict Resolution.[27] This restructuring reflected normative isomorphism described by Powell and DiMaggio[28] as a process driven by professional standards and accreditation demands, where UIN was supported with the broader transformation of Islamic higher education under state regulation while responding to global academic expectations.

At UNIDA Gontor, Master's Programs were structurally accommodated under the postgraduate school. However, the programs remained under the direct supervision of the *kyai*, the pesantren leader, who held ultimate authority over academic and institutional policies.[29] This model embodied a pesantren-based governance system, where legitimacy was derived from moral and spiritual authority. In institutional theoretical terms, UNIDA represented an institution the stability of which

[22]Ramakrishnan Vivek, et al, "Beyond Methods: Theoretical Underpinnings of Triangulation in Qualitative and Multi-Method Studies," *SEEU Review* 18, no. 2 (2023): 108–113, https://doi.org/10.2478/seeur-2023-0088.

[23]Nguyen Cao Thanh and T. T. Le Thanh, "The Interconnection between Interpretivist Paradigm and Qualitative Methods in Education," *American Journal of Educational Science* 1, no. 2 (2015): 24–27.

[24]"Master of Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy," Darussalam University Gontor, accessed January 2025, https://unida.gontor.ac.id/postgraduate/academics/master-aqidah-and-islamic-philosophy/

[25]Arif, interview by the author, Head of the Master's Program in Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy, UNIDA Gontor, October 15, 2023.

[26]Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, 67–72.

[27]"Magister Aqidah dan Filsafat Islam," UIN Sunan Kalijaga, accessed August 20, 2025, https://afimagister.uin-suka.ac.id/

[28]Powell and DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, 70–84.

[29]Arif, interview by the author, October 15, 2023.

relied on the cultural-cognitive and normative pillars rather than coercive pressures.[30] Although, UIN Sunan Kalijaga operated under a bureaucratic governance model typical of state universities. Academic policies were formulated by faculty senates and deans, implemented in compliance with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education.[31] In this context, coercive isomorphism was evident, as the institution adapted the academic policies in response to state and regulatory authority.[32]

The relationship between pesantren tradition and academic life represented contrasting institutional logics. At UNIDA Gontor, all Master's students were mandated to reside in pesantren dormitories (*mondok*), participate in the annual *khutbatul 'arsy* orientation, as well as comply with disciplinary codes.[33] Graduation was contingent upon passing the Pesantren Index, a qualitative assessment which measured ethics, discipline, and integrity, as outlined in the official guidelines.[34] These practices described how repeated patterns of pesantren culture had become institutionalized, reaffirming Berger and Luckmann's thesis on the social construction of reality.[35] However, UIN Sunan Kalijaga did not mandate students to live on campus, instead motivated engagement with Yogyakarta's plural and dynamic socio-cultural environment.[36] This reflected a mimetic and normative isomorphism, where the institution supported itself with practices of modern universities, positioning social engagement as a formative academic experience.[37]

4.2. Scientific Paradigm: Islamization vs. Integration-Interconnection

This analysis is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes contextual meaning-making and the socially constructed nature of academic programs. As argued by Thanh & Thành,[38] qualitative methods in education can only be fully understood when framed within an interpretivist paradigm. This philosophical grounding provides the basis for analyzing how epistemological orientations at UNIDA and UIN shape their respective approaches to knowledge production.

Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at UNIDA Gontor were rooted in Islamization of knowledge. This paradigm fundamentally reshaped knowledge through the grounding

[30]Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*, 59–72.

[31]Iqbal, *interview by author*, Head of the Master's Program in Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, October 17, 2023.

[32]Powell and DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, 70–72.

[33]*Khutbatul 'Arsy* is an annual pesantren-wide orientation at Darussalam Gontor, in which the kyai delivers a formal address articulating the pesantren's vision, mission, and educational philosophy for the upcoming year. It serves both as a symbolic reaffirmation of the pesantren ethos—emphasizing sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), simplicity (*basāṭah*), self-reliance (*istiqlāl*), and brotherhood (*ukhūwah*)—and as a practical orientation for students entering the academic and cultural life of the institution. Asep, interview by author, Master's Student in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy, UNIDA Gontor, October 15, 2023.

[34]Directorate of Pesantren Affairs, *Manual Book: Integrated Pesantren Achievement Index (IPKs) Assessment System* (Ponorogo, 2021).

[35]Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, 72–83.

[36]Putra, *interview by author*, Master's Student in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, October 17, 2023.

[37]Powell and DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, 69–72

[38]Thanh and Thành, "*The Interconnection Between Interpretivist Paradigm and Qualitative Methods in Education."*

and integration in revelation and classical Islamic heritage.[39] According to Al-Attas, Islamization centered on Islamizing terminology, and the reconfiguration of knowledge systems to support Islamic worldview.[40] It represented a paradigm shift, where modern knowledge, previously secularized, must be improved with the values of *tawḥīd* and *adab*.[41] The reorientation exemplified Kuhn's theory of scientific paradigms, which stated knowledge systems are subjected to revolutionary changes when new paradigms effectively addressed anomalies or evolving intellectual challenges. For UNIDA, the shift entailed a radical redefinition of knowledge, with Islamic revelation at the core. Moreover, it prompted challenging secular approaches to knowledge and the re-establishment of Islamic intellectual tradition supremacy.

Based on the description above, UIN Sunan Kalijaga's Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy operated under the integration-interconnection paradigm, developed by M. Amin Abdullah, aimed to dismantle the dichotomy between religious and secular sciences.[42] This paradigm focused on the epistemological dialogue between *turāth* (classical Islamic knowledge), modern social and natural sciences. However, rather than viewing these disciplines as separate, UIN promoted a more integrative approach that motivated critical, methodologically-open dialogue across disciplines.[43] The approach was in line with Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts, where UIN integrated knowledge as well as actively transformed the academic landscape. This was realized by fostering a productive and inclusive method that bridged Islamic thought with modern academic frameworks. The hermeneutic approach adopted at UIN placed texts, such as the Qur'ān and Hadīth in its historical and social contexts, thereby producing an interdisciplinary epistemology that connected Islamic tradition with contemporary global thought.[44]

The theological orientations of the two institutions significantly influenced the scientific paradigms. UNIDA Gontor adhered to Ash'arite theology, which placed revelation and divine will at the core of understanding the world. This theological foundation closely supported Islamization approach, where revelation was perceived as the ultimate source of knowledge and academic inquiry. UNIDA resisted secularizing influences, maintaining a traditional intellectual framework that integrated Islamic principles directly into the center of academic life.[45]

UIN Sunan Kalijaga adopted a more pluralistic theological approach, applying diverse related perspectives, as well as outlining critical engagement with both Islamic and secular worldviews. This approach was characterized by academic freedom and interdisciplinary dialogue, where students and

[39]Jarman, interview by author, Lecturer in the Master's Program of *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy, UNIDA Gontor, October 15, 2023.

[40]Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 44–47.

[41]In contemporary Indonesian usage, *adab* often denotes manners or politeness, but in Islamic intellectual tradition, *adab* refers to the broader ethical order of knowledge and conduct that aligns human behavior with divine truth. As al-Attas argues, *adab* is a discipline of body, mind, and soul, serving as the ethical foundation for knowledge. *Ibid*, 105–107

[42]Jarman, *interview by author*, October 15, 2023

[43]Abdullah, *Islamic Studies in the Paradigm of Integration--Interconnection: An Anthology*, 1-5.

[44]Fakhruddin Faiz, interview by author, Lecturer in the Master's Program of Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, October 17, 2023.

[45]This orientation can be seen in the model of Islamization developed at UNIDA Gontor, which is grounded in the thought of al-Attas—a scholar with a strong Ghazalian orientation—and theologically refers to the Ash'arite tradition. This finding is supported by the researcher's direct observation and interview with Jarman, one of the lecturers at UNIDA Gontor, who emphasized that the institution consciously adopts Ash'arite theological principles as the epistemological foundation for its academic practices.

scholars engaged in various theological traditions, including Mu'tazilite rationalism, contemporary critical perspectives, and secular humanism. The openness fostered a more inclusive and flexible academic environment, in line with Kuhn's concept of intellectual pluralism, where the evolving knowledge dynamically addressed global intellectual challenges.[46]

Both UNIDA Gontor and UIN Sunan Kalijaga exemplified Kuhn's theory of scientific paradigms, with institutions adopting revolutionary shifts in the epistemological frameworks responding to evolving intellectual and societal challenges. Islamization of knowledge at UNIDA represented a paradigm shift that supported modern knowledge with an Islamic worldview, essentially reshaping academic practices and intellectual objectives. However, UIN represented a paradigm shift centered on dialogue and interdisciplinary engagement. This transformed the academic landscape by integrating Islamic knowledge with global, modern thought.

These paradigms reflected Kuhn's concept that paradigm shifts occurred when existing frameworks failed to address evolving issues or anomalies. For UNIDA, the shift tended towards re-establishing Islamic epistemology and rejecting secularism. Meanwhile, UIN accepted a shift towards methodological openness and interdisciplinary integration, prompting a broader intellectual dialogue.

4.3. Curriculum Design: *Tawḥidi* Epistemology vs Interdisciplinary Pluralism

Curriculum design served as a concrete manifestation of an institution's scientific paradigm. It also functioned as a strategic instrument in shaping students' academic, methodological, and ideological competencies. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the curriculum design in Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at UNIDA Gontor and UIN Sunan Kalijaga showed significant differences in terms of credit structure, course content, approaches to classical and contemporary sources, including research orientation.

The programs had a total academic load of 45 credits, covering core courses, electives, and master's thesis. At UNIDA Gontor, the program was designed to be completed within four semesters, with a relatively intensive course load in the first and second semesters. The learning model retained the intensive pedagogical style characteristic of the pesantren tradition, outlining deep textual comprehension and consistent academic attendance. Meanwhile, UIN Sunan Kalijaga adopted a four-semester structure, offering greater flexibility in the selection of concentrations and courses. This structural flexibility was in line with the university's policy of promoting an interdisciplinary approach.[47]

Regarding the perspective of curriculum theory, UNIDA Gontor's program resonated with Ralph Tyler's Rational–Linear Model, where educational objectives were clearly predetermined, and learning activities achieved through systematic organization. The pesantren's structured approach was manifested in intensive textual research, regular attendance, and rigid academic sequencing reflecting Tyler's goal-oriented logic. Simultaneously, the program incorporated a strong

[46]Based on the researcher's observation and an interview with Fakhrudin Faiz, one of the prominent lecturers at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, the university deliberately cultivates pluralism as part of its institutional ethos. Faiz emphasized that UIN's academic environment provides space for diverse theological orientations—from Mu'tazilite rationalism to contemporary critical theories—reflecting both its reformist legacy and its commitment to engage constructively with global intellectual discourses.

[47]*Curriculum Document of the Master's Program in Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy*, UNIDA Gontor, 2023; *Curriculum Document of the Master's Program in Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy*, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2023

epistemological commitment to Islamization, ensuring that learning outcomes were firmly grounded in revelation and classical Islamic scholarship.

In terms of course content, the core curriculum adopted at UNIDA Gontor included Qur'ānic and Hadīth Studies, *Mantiq* (Islamic Logic), Islamic Worldview, and Islamization of Knowledge. These were applied to the social, natural, and technological sciences. According to Arif, the courses were designed to construct an Islamic epistemological framework rooted in divine revelation and classical Islamic scholarly tradition. Qur'ānic and Hadīth studies provided an authoritative foundation for knowledge, with Islamic Worldview instilling a *tawḥidi* framework to understand reality. The exploration of *Mantiq* served as a rational tool grounded in Islamic tradition, countering secular and reductionist modes of reasoning. Courses on Islamization of social and natural sciences provided an applied platform to integrate Islamic values into various disciplinary fields. Elective courses, such as Philosophy of Language, Politics, Economy, Education, Law, and History reflected a strategic orientation towards the broader Islamization project. These subjects were not studied through the perspective of Western philosophical paradigms, rather were critically re-examined through a *tawḥidi* paradigm and the rich legacy of Islamic intellectual tradition. For instance, the Philosophy of Economy explored classical and modern economic theories, from the perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*.[48]

The curriculum used at UIN Sunan Kalijaga reflected the institutional paradigm of integration-interconnection. However, in theoretical terms, the curriculum corresponded with Hilda Taba's Grassroots Model and the OBE framework. Taba's model outlined faculty participation and responsiveness to student needs, evident in the flexibility of concentrated choices and interdisciplinary orientation.[49] UIN restructuring of Master's Programs into three areas of concentration also showed a bottom-up, adaptive response to both societal needs and global academic expectations. Simultaneously, the adoption of OBE principles in line with Indonesian higher education standards ensured that graduate profiles and competencies remained the ultimate reference point for curriculum content, pedagogy, and assessment.[50]

The following courses of Qur'ānic and Hadīth Studies which served as Sources of Islamic Epistemology, Philosophy of Science, and Contemporary Islamic Thought exhibited a systematic effort in merging revelation-based knowledge with rational, historical, and contextual approaches. In this context, integration signified the combination of religious and secular disciplines, as well as the cultivation of an epistemological dialogue between Islamic knowledge and contemporary sciences, including humanities and natural sciences. This integrative approach was evident in courses, such as Contemporary Kalam Issues and Islamic Philosophy. This motivated students to reflect critically on modern issues arising from pluralism, secularism, and technology through the perspective of related theology. Additional subjects, such as Research Methodology in *Aqidah*, including Islamic and General Philosophies reinforced UIN Sunan Kalijaga's multidisciplinary orientation. Students were introduced to classical and normative methods, including contemporary approaches, such as hermeneutics, sociology of knowledge, and critical theory. These methods were essential to engage with current religious and philosophical discourses.[51]

A further distinction was observed in the prominence of each institution on textual research, and the treatment of classical versus contemporary thought. At UNIDA Gontor, the curriculum placed significant weight on the analysis and internalization of classical Islamic texts through traditional methods, such as *talaqqi* (oral transmission from teacher to student). This approach outlined mastery

[48]Arif, interview by the author, October 15, 2023.

[49]Taba, *Curriculum Development; Theory and Practice*.

[50]Ministry of Education and Culture, *National Standard for Higher Education (SN-Dikti)*.

[51]Iqbal, interview by author, October 17, 2023; Curriculum Document, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2023.

of key Arabic and English terminologies, as well as followed a deductive, rational-linear model that prioritized comprehension of predetermined content as a core learning outcome. Foundational texts namely *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* by al-Attas were treated as compulsory readings for all students. Classical thought also served as the epistemological foundation from which modern and contemporary discourses, particularly those influenced by secular Western paradigms, were critically evaluated.[52]

UIN Sunan Kalijaga adopted a more contextual and interdisciplinary approach to both scriptural texts (the Qur'ān and Hadīth) and classical Islamic literature. This approach integrated historical-critical methods, including social sciences and humanities tools. The description of contextual and applied analysis conformed with the OBE model, which focused to develop students' ability in order to critically engage with respective intellectual tradition from a reflective and analytical stance. In this framework, religious texts were positioned as objects of inquiry. Meanwhile, theories from social sciences and humanities functioned as analytical tools through which students interpreted and responded to theological and societal challenges in a critical and constructive manner.[53]

5. Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis of Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at UNIDA Gontor and UIN Sunan Kalijaga outlined both convergence and divergence in institutional frameworks, scientific paradigms, and curriculum design. These similarities and differences showed how Indonesian Islamic higher education, particularly at the Master's level responded to local intellectual traditions as well as simultaneously engaged with global academic trends.

Table 1. Similarities and Differences between Master's Programs at UNIDA Gontor and UIN Sunan Kalijaga

Aspect	Similarities	Differences
Institutional Framework	Both were postgraduate programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy, as well as shaped by socio-intellectual contexts of Indonesia.	UNIDA: pesantren-based, kyai authority, students must reside in dormitories, graduation tied to Pesantren Index. UIN: state-affiliated, bureaucratic governance under Ministry regulations, no residency requirement, prompted engagement with Yogyakarta's plural society.
Scientific Paradigm	Both embodied Kuhn's paradigm shift theory by redefining epistemological frameworks to address arising challenges.	UNIDA: Islamization of Knowledge (Al-Attas), revelation-centered, Ash'arite theology, resistance to secularism.UIN: Integration-Interconnection (Amin Abdullah), interdisciplinary, pluralistic theology, openness to secular and modern sciences.
Curriculum Design	Both followed the national regulation of 45 credits (four semesters), including Qur'ānic and Hadīth studies, Philosophy, and contemporary Islamic thought.	UNIDA: Rational–linear model (Tyler), intensive textual study (*talaqqi*, *syarahan*), focused on classical texts, electives reinterpreted through *tawḥidi* paradigm.UIN: Grassroots model (Taba) + OBE, flexible concentrations, interdisciplinary courses (hermeneutics, sociology of knowledge, critical theory), texts treated as objects of inquiry.

[52]*Observation of Postgraduate Student Study Forum*, UNIDA Gontor, October 15, 2023; Thesis and Dissertation Writings Guidelines, UNIDA Gontor, 2023.

[53]*Observation of Postgraduate Student Study Forum*, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, October 17, 2023; Thesis and Dissertation Writings Guidelines, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2023.

UNIDA Gontor's pesantren-based model parallels Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which has historically derived its legitimacy from religious authority and the preservation of classical Islamic sciences. This parallel is further affirmed by Arifin et al.[54], who traced the intellectual genealogy between Darussalam Gontor and Al-Azhar, demonstrating their shared continuity of tradition, the centrality of revelation, and the integration of moral-spiritual authority into academic governance. Its focus on Islamization reflected global Islamic intellectual revival movements including the IIIT. However, UIN Sunan Kalijaga reflected the trajectory of public universities worldwide, conforming with state regulations and international accreditation standards. This institution also participated in global interdisciplinary discourses similar to religious and postcolonial studies in the West.[55]

In curriculum design, UNIDA exemplified the revival of traditional textual education found in seminaries across the globe. Meanwhile, UIN reflected outcomes-based and student-centered approaches typical of international universities, which prioritized critical thinking and employability. These models showed how Islamic higher education in Indonesia navigated the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as local roots and global expectations.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research showed that Master's Programs in *Aqidah* and Islamic Philosophy at UNIDA Gontor and UIN Sunan Kalijaga embodied two distinct yet complementary trajectories in Indonesian Islamic higher education. Considering both were committed to advancing Islamic scholarship at the postgraduate level, its institutional frameworks, epistemological paradigms, and curriculum designs reflected different historical roots, intellectual orientations, and strategic visions.

UNIDA Gontor represented a pesantren-based model, where academic life was deeply intertwined with pesantren traditions, Islamization of knowledge, and *tawḥīdic* epistemology. However, UIN Sunan Kalijaga followed a state-affiliated model, shaped by bureaucratic governance, accreditation standards, and the integration–interconnection paradigm that outlined interdisciplinary dialogue and methodological openness. These conflicting paradigms outlined the broader diverse approaches to knowledge production and dissemination in Islamic higher education.

Curriculum design further described these distinctions, UNIDA adopted a structured, rational-linear model with strong focus on classical texts and textual mastery. However, UIN applied flexible, outcomes-based and interdisciplinary approaches that integrated modern methods, such as hermeneutics and critical theory. Both institutions complied with the national standard of 45 credits, as well as concentrated on the study of Qur'ānic and Hadīth traditions as epistemological foundations.

In global perspective, these results showed that Indonesian Islamic higher education did not operate in isolation. UNIDA paralleled institutions, such as Al-Azhar in Egypt, while UIN reflected international trends in public universities engaging with pluralism and interdisciplinary scholarship. Both showed how Islamic higher education in the country negotiated the tension between tradition and modernity. This offered valuable lessons for policymakers, curriculum developers, and scholars seeking to design programs that were contextually-grounded, epistemologically-coherent, and globally-relevant.

[54]Arifin et al., "The Intellectual Genealogy of Darussalam Gontor Islamic Boarding School and Al-Azhar University, Cairo."

[55]Izudin, "Applying the Integration-Interconnection Paradigm in the Teaching and Learning Process of the Postgraduate Program at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta."; Lubis, Husti, and Mustofa, "Implementasi Konsep Integrasi Islam," 15–28.

Authors' Contribution

Muhammad Faishal: conceptualization, methodology, writing –original draft. **Amroeni Drajat:** supervision, validation, writing – review& editing. **Ryandi:** investigation, data curation; writing –original draft, project administration. **Sumarsih Anwar:** formal analysis, methodology, writing –review & editing. **Shiyamu Manurung:** data curation, validation, writing –review and editing. **Saimroh:** resources, formal analysis, writing –review & editing. **Nursalamah Siagian:** visualization, data collection, writing –review & editing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this manuscript declare that they have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest regarding the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript.

Data Availability

The data associated with this study would be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

Funding Details

This research was funded by the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia, under Decree Number 92 of 2023 on the Collaborative Research Program on Wahdatul Ulum and Religious Moderation.

Generative AI Disclosure Statement

The authors did not used any type of generative artificial intelligence software for this research.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the support of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies, UIN Sumatera Utara for research funding, and the valuable contribution of BRIN in providing analysis from the educational perspective.

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