

Integrating social sciences and islamic values in IHEIS ((*Islamic Higher Education Institutions*)): A multi-case study

Integrasi ilmu-ilmu sosial dan nilai-nilai islam di institusi pendidikan tinggi islam (IPTI): Sebuah studi multi-kasus

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Received: 2026-03-08 | Reviewed: 2026-04-16 | Accepted: 2026-04-24 | Published: 2026-04-30

Article URL: <https://www.journal.geutheeinstitute.com/index.php/JG/article/view/457>

ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of social sciences and Islamic values in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) as an effort to harmonize Islamic intellectual traditions with modern knowledge. The integration of sociology, anthropology, psychology, and political science is considered essential for developing graduates with analytical competence and strong moral foundations. This research employs a qualitative multi-case study approach investigates three IHEIs in Aceh, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that integration is driven by two motivations: primary addressing complex social issues and strengthening academic competitiveness. However, the process faces challenges including epistemological tensions between traditions, methodological differences, and limited interdisciplinary faculty capacity. Despite these constraints, integration contributes to students' critical thinking, moral awareness, and societal engagement. The study concludes that interdisciplinary integration can enhance the relevance of Islamic higher education while preserving its ethical and intellectual foundations.

Keywords: Curriculum; Islamic higher education; Knowledge integration; Social sciences.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji integrasi ilmu sosial dan nilai-nilai Islam di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam (PTKI) sebagai upaya mengharmonisasikan tradisi intelektual Islam dengan pengetahuan modern. Pengintegrasian sosiologi, antropologi, psikologi, dan ilmu politik dianggap krusial untuk menghasilkan lulusan yang memiliki kompetensi analitis dan landasan moral yang kuat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif studi multikasus yang menelaah tiga PTKI di Aceh, Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, analisis dokumen, dan observasi, serta dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi didorong oleh dua motivasi: mengatasi isu-isu sosial kontemporer yang kompleks dan memperkuat daya saing akademik. Namun, proses ini menghadapi beberapa tantangan, termasuk ketegangan epistemologis antara tradisi keilmuan Islam dan sosial, perbedaan metodologis, serta terbatasnya kapasitas dosen interdisipliner. Terlepas dari kendala tersebut, proses integrasi berkontribusi pada pengembangan berpikir kritis, kesadaran moral, dan keterlibatan sosial mahasiswa yang lebih luas. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi interdisipliner dapat meningkatkan relevansi pendidikan tinggi Islam sambil mempertahankan landasan etis dan intelektualnya.

Kata kunci: Kurikulum; Pendidikan tinggi Islam; Integrasi ilmu; Ilmu sosial

Journal homepage: <https://www.journal.geutheeinstitute.com/index.php/JG/index>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic higher education Institutions (IHEIs) are confronted with the imperative of harmonizing Islamic traditions with the demands of modernity. This challenge has been a subject of discussion in the broader discourse on the Islamization and integration of knowledge, emphasizing the necessity to harmonize classical Islamic intellectual traditions with contemporary scientific advancements (Butterworth, 2019; Muhibuddin, 2022; Syihabuddin et al., 2023). One approach to addressing this challenge is to integrate social sciences into the Islamic education curriculum while maintaining the central role of Islamic values as its primary foundation. Islamic values should be considered relevant not only to academic ethics but also to the cultivation of a generation that possesses adequate intellectual competence while demonstrating sensitivity to ethical and moral principles (Abubakar et al., 2024). In this context, the integration of social sciences must align with the fundamental objectives of Islamic education, which are to produce individuals who balance knowledge, morality, and intellectual insight, enabling them to confront increasingly complex global challenges (Sundowo et al., 2024).

Sociology, anthropology, psychology, and political science are some of the social science subjects that have been integrated into the instructional frameworks of Islamic Higher Education Institutions. Scholars claim that these disciplines are critical for understanding social structures, cultural dynamics, and political realities in contemporary Muslim nations (Syihabuddin et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is predicted that when grounded in an Islamic framework, these disciplines have tremendous potential to improve students' understanding of social relationships and the difficulties of modern life (Syihabuddin et al., 2023). However, in the context of Islamic education, separating these disciplines from their theological roots risks producing intellectuals who lack a concept of justice, empathy, and social responsibility—values inherent in Islamic teachings (Tahqiq, 2003).

The integration of social sciences into the academic framework of IHEIs enables students to recognize the relevance of moral values in contemporary contexts. For instance, the study of Islamic sociology offers insights into the significance of social justice in establishing a harmonious society—a concept widely emphasized in Islamic thought (Mufid et al., 2022; Zakariya, 2020). Similarly, Islamic anthropology has the potential to cultivate respect for cultural diversity, viewing it as a manifestation of the richness of human civilization (Tapper, 1995; Williams et al., 1998). Furthermore, Islamic psychology assists students in comprehending the importance of emotional and spiritual equilibrium in preserving mental well-being (Nashori et al., 2020).

Furthermore, qualitative methodologies based on moral principles offer a useful framework for academic study. Honesty, transparency, and respect for study participants are critical in ensuring that research advances knowledge while maintaining human dignity (Ebrahimi & Yusoff, 2017; Haneef & Agrawal, 2024). As a result, the integration of social sciences and Islamic beliefs provides a huge potential to construct a holistic educational strategy aimed at simultaneously developing students' moral character and intellectual capacity.

This pedagogical method has the potential to develop a generation of academics who are not only academically competent but also ethically devoted to promoting society (Mills et al., 2025; Nsengimana et al., 2025). Given the multifaceted challenges of today's global context, this approach is especially relevant in ensuring that students can navigate modern dynamics while remaining firmly rooted in traditional values that strengthen their identity and moral integrity (Miller & Schlenker, 2011).

Despite substantial studies demonstrating the importance of adding social sciences within Islamic higher education, several scholarly gaps remain. While conceptual discussions about the integration of social sciences and Islamic values have received a lot of attention, empirical research on the impact of such integration on student learning outcomes, moral development, and resilience in dealing with contemporary challenges is still limited (Husni et al., 2025). A large body of research favors theoretical discourse above the development of practical, implementable models for Islamic higher education institutions (Aminah et al.,

2025; Deng, 2025; Zhang, 2025). As a result, further empirical research is required to develop and assess appropriate integration frameworks customized to the Indonesian educational setting.

The current research presents a novel empirical methodology for investigating the integration of social sciences and Islamic values in Indonesian IHEIs. This analysis is primarily focused on Aceh's distinctive educational context, where the formal adoption of Islamic Law (Sharia) creates a different socio-legal backdrop for institutional practice. The approach assesses the effects of global issues on students' moral growth, learning results, and adaptive capacity by combining quantitative analysis and contextual interpretation. Furthermore, the paper develops an operational framework for transforming abstract integration principles into quantitative indicators. This initiative aims to bridge the existing gap between normative discourse and institutional practice in Aceh's different sociocultural contexts. The suggested paradigm provides useful insights for policy-making processes including curriculum reform and implementation in regions seeking a balanced blend of religious identity and modern scientific investigation.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a rigorous qualitative case study design to investigate the incorporation of social sciences into IHEI curriculum. Data were gathered using document analysis, curriculum mapping, and semi-structured interviews with faculty members from the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, the Faculty of Tarbiyah, and Teacher Training at three Aceh institutions, including IAIN Langsa and IAIN Lhokseumawe. Triangulation was utilized to establish validity, and thematic analysis was used methodically to uncover patterns in multidisciplinary practices. This methodology enables a thorough examination of course structures within their unique institutional contexts, assuring methodological robustness and analytical depth (Crowe et al., 2011; Noor, 2008).

This methodological approach enables a more in-depth evaluation of institutional practices while also supporting a contextual understanding of how social sciences are integrated into the Islamic higher education system.

Thematic analysis was used to find repeating themes across the three cases (Christou, 2023), resulting in a more systematic interpretation of the qualitative data. The synthesis of evidence from various sources enables a thorough understanding of how multidisciplinary integration affects student academic growth and intellectual engagement (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thompson, 2022).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings emphasize several significant themes related to the integration of social sciences into Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs), including the reasons for integration, obstacles that were encountered, and the perceived benefits for students and faculty. Using a diverse approach that includes case studies, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, this study sheds light on the complex and dynamic environment of interdisciplinary education in Aceh. These IHEIs' courses incorporate the following social science disciplines:

Table 1. The subject of social science integrating into curricula at IHEIs

No.	Course	Social Sciences	Focus of Study	Integration of Islamic Perspectives
1	Sociology Education	of Sociology	Social structure, social interaction, social change in education	Analysis of Muslim society and the value of social justice in Islam
2	Educational	Anthropology	Culture, Traditions, and Local Wisdom in the Education System	The Acehese Approach to

No.	Course	Social Sciences	Focus of Study	Integration of Islamic Perspectives
	Anthropology			Islamic Education
3	Educational Psychology	Psychology	Cognitive development, learning motivation, student behavior	The concepts of fitrah, akhlak, and character building in Islam
4	Political Science and Education Policy	Political Science	Political systems, public policy, and education governance	Perspectives on Islamic political science and Islamic leadership ethics
5	Education Economics	Economics	Education resource management, education financing	Islamic economic principles, distributive justice, and philanthropy
6	Civic Education	Education	Democracy, citizens' rights and obligations	Integration of Islamic values with the concept of civil society
7	Social Research Method	Methodology	Qualitative and quantitative research methods in social sciences	Research ethics from an Islamic perspective
8	Community Empowerment	Applied Sociology	Community development and social development	The principle of encouraging good and forbidding evil, and the welfare of the people

Table 1 highlights the integration of social science disciplines with Islamic perspectives in education. In these curricula, sociology of education highlights social structure and justice within Muslim society, and educational anthropology emphasizes the interaction of culture and Acehese traditions. Educational psychology investigates the relationship between cognitive development, fitrah, akhlak, and character formation (Croitoru et al., 2025). Furthermore, political science and education policy study governance in connection with Islamic leadership ethics, and education economics integrates resource management to distributive justice and philanthropy. Civic education combines democratic values with the concepts of Islamic civil society. Finally, sociological research methodologies are founded on Islamic ethical values, and community empowerment, as represented through applied sociology, is governed by the concepts of moral responsibility and public welfare (maslaha).

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Integrating Social Sciences: Between Social Relevance and Institutional Legitimacy

Across all three educational institutions, informants consistently identified two interconnected reasons that serve as primary motives for integrating the social sciences. While there is widespread agreement on the fundamental relevance of classical Islamic studies, the current study reveals a perceived gap in conventional analytical methods, which frequently impedes a thorough comprehension of modern social events. A senior faculty member at Site Three elucidated: *"It is not feasible to address issues such as poverty, inequality, or post-conflict reconstruction in Aceh through the lenses of fiqh and tafsir. A comprehensive understanding of social structures and economic behavior is imperative to address these issues. The social sciences provide the conceptual tools necessary for the analysis of these phenomena. The objective is to achieve a state of equilibrium, in which the individual's actions*

and values are aligned with Islamic principles, while also maintaining a sense of groundedness and practicality."

This perspective aligns with the observations of faculty members from the investigated schools, who refer to these phenomena as a "contextual imperative." This concept refers to the importance of generating graduates who can interact meaningfully with their immediate surroundings. Acehnese society, in particular, faces complex challenges as a result of the simultaneous legacy of long-standing conflict and the devastating 2004 tsunami. As a result, the integration of social sciences is viewed as critical for achieving three core institutional goals: navigating the post-conflict reconstruction process, maintaining peacebuilding efforts, and updating the execution of Islamic teachings within a contemporary context.

Secondly, a review of institutional papers reveals a parallel motivation rooted in strategic positioning within the national and global higher education landscapes. The strategic plans of all three institutions precisely relate to the Ministry of Religious Affairs' (MoRA) goal for converting IAINs into UINs, which requires Islamic higher education institutions to generate graduates with multidisciplinary competency. For example, Site One's strategic plan lists "integration of knowledge" as a fundamental objective, which is necessary for "enhancing institutional competitiveness at the national level." Similarly, the institutional restructuring at Site Three is characterized as a critical step towards achieving "international recognition" and "contributing to global knowledge production."

This dual motivation responding to local social demands while achieving legitimacy in broader academic fields reflects what institutional theorists refer to as the concurrent operation of efficiency and legitimacy logics in organizational transformation (Butterworth, 2019). However, further research has revealed that these incentives frequently vary in practice. The underlying conflict between locally grounded relevance and internationally focused legitimacy creates considerable paradoxes, limiting the practical implementation of multidisciplinary integration in institutional settings.

3.1.2 Epistemological Tensions: The Challenge of Negotiating Knowledge Traditions

Despite strong consensus on the significance of integration, faculty members at all three institutions noted considerable challenges in harmonizing Islamic and social scientific epistemologies. A study of interview data reveals three important aspects of this tension, each appearing differently among institutions. The main difficulty discovered was methodological difference. Faculty specializing in Islamic studies raised qualms about social science research, which they believe prioritizes empirical observation over textual authority (revelation). Faculty with social scientific backgrounds, on the other hand, expressed dissatisfaction with traditional Islamic studies for lacking methodological rigor and relying too heavily on normative rather than analytical approaches. A junior faculty member at Site Two made the following observation: *"In the context of teaching research methods to students from Islamic studies backgrounds, it has been observed that these students often encounter difficulties in accepting the notion that knowledge can be produced through systematic observation rather than textual interpretation. They endeavor to employ classical texts as substantiation for empirical assertions concerning contemporary society, a practice that, from a methodological perspective, is simply untenable."*

Faculty members at Site Three, where institutional restructuring has allowed for more structured multidisciplinary involvement, reported more sophisticated methods for managing this discrepancy. These initiatives include collaborative, team-taught methodology classes that openly compare evidential standards between the two traditions. In contrast, at Sites One and Two, such activities were mainly ad hoc and directed by individual faculty members rather than institutional policy.

The second source of dispute was the distinction between normative and analytical approaches, which frequently hindered the curriculum development process. Traditionally, Islamic studies has operated within a normative framework focused on moral formation and religious obligation. In contrast, the social sciences take an analytical position that neglects normative judgment in favor of empirical description and explanation. Faculty members noted continuous discussions about how to balance various approaches in interdisciplinary courses. A comparative analysis of course syllabi found significant differences between the locations, with Site Three syllabi having a higher frequency of learning objectives that combined normative formation and analytical skill development. In contrast, syllabi at Sites One and Two tended to contrast these perspectives without reaching a consistent synthesis.

Thirdly, substantial discrepancies were discovered in the authoritative systems that support these various knowledge traditions. Islamic knowledge has traditionally derived its legitimacy from three basic sources: chains of transmission (*sanad*), academic consensus (*ijma'*), and interpretive groups based on classical texts. In contrast, the authority of social scientific knowledge is founded on methodological transparency, empirical confirmation, and rigorous peer review. These various authority arrangements frequently lead to "jurisdictional disputes" during faculty discussions about curriculum design and research objectives, according to one department head at Site One.

At Site Two, disagreements occasionally delayed the development of collaborative courses. In contrast, Site Three's leadership has established formal forums to address these competing authority structures. Despite these efforts, resolution was only partial, demonstrating that such tensions are deeply ingrained and appear in unique ways across institutional cultures. Notably, faculty at Site Three reported better levels of systemic support for navigating these epistemological discrepancies, which was supported by regular interdisciplinary seminars and collaborative research projects.

Faculty members at Sites One and Two observed that these tensions were primarily addressed through individual initiative rather than a formal institutional plan. This reliance on personal effort, combined with insufficient structural support, reveals a fundamental weakness in the integration process. As a result, these findings indicate that, while institutional restructuring, such as the transfer from IAIN to UIN, may allow for more systematic engagement with epistemological problems, it is not a panacea in itself.

3.1.3 Institutional Capacity: The Faculty Development Challenge

A consistent finding across all three sites is the gap between institutional ambitions for integration and faculty capacity to accomplish them. An review of academic backgrounds reveals that the vast majority of faculty members were educated in specific discipline silos. Of the 18 informants interviewed, only 5 (28%) had degrees in both Islamic studies and social sciences. Notably, the majority of these individuals earned their dual certifications by personal initiative rather than traditional institutional programs. Significant site-specific variations were found: Site Three had the highest concentration of interdisciplinary expertise, with four of nine faculty members (44%) matching these requirements, compared to much lower proportions at Sites One and Two.

On the contrary, Sites One and Two reported significantly lower proportions of interdisciplinary competence, with only one out of nine faculty members meeting this criterion. This ability gap presents itself in a number of practical obstacles, the most notable of which is the difficulty faculty members have expressed in structuring courses that synthesis multiple perspectives rather than just opposing them. Without the necessary multidisciplinary expertise, integration frequently stays "additive" where social science and Islamic notions coexist rather than "integrative," where they are woven into a cohesive analytical framework.

Classroom observations reveal that many interdisciplinary courses use "additive integration." While Islamic and social science themes are presented simultaneously, they lack meaningful synthesis and act as parallel discourses. This "dual-track" strategy fails to provide a cohesive perspective, leaving pupils to bridge the epistemological gap on their own. A

faculty member at Site Two acknowledged: *“I was trained in Islamic education, but I didn't study sociology. Now I have to teach a course on how Muslims see social problems. I try my best, but to be honest, I'm learning along with my students. The sociology parts come from reading on my own, not from formal training.”*

Observational analysis at Site Three revealed a shift toward more integrated instructional techniques, especially at the graduate level, where faculty expertise is focused. However, even in this sophisticated environment, integrated courses are the exception rather than the rule. Institutional responses to this capacity gap have varied; while Sites One and Three have recently signed Memorandums of Agreement (MoAs) with external partners to prioritize faculty development and curriculum strengthening, Site Two has pursued similar networking through programs designed to foster cross-provincial academic collaboration. Despite these endeavors, faculty members were skeptical of the effectiveness of such periodic interventions. They suggest that short-term seminars cannot address what is basically a structural issue that necessitates ongoing investment in doctorate education and strong research infrastructure.

A senior faculty member at Site One offered the following commentary: *“Workshops are good for teaching people about something, but they don't actually teach them how to do it. To successfully combine different subjects, teachers need to have doctoral training that combines these subjects. Our current system produces specialists, not integrators.”*

3.1.4 Emerging Benefits: Student Development and Institutional Relevance

Despite these limitations, research from all three sites suggests that integration efforts benefit both students and institutions. Students regularly indicated an improvement in their analytical skills, citing their exposure to varied disciplinary viewpoints. This interdisciplinary method allows students to move beyond rote memorization and develop a more nuanced grasp of complicated social situations by combining Islamic heritage with social scientific study. A student in their final year at Site Three elucidated: *“before taking courses in sociology, I understood Islam as a set of beliefs and practices. I understand how Islamic principles interact with social structures, how economic systems shape religious practice, and how political dynamics influence interpretation. I haven't left Islam; I understand it more deeply because I understand the world it engages with.”*

This testimony exemplifies what educational theorists refer to as the acquisition of higher-order cognitive skills through multidisciplinary learning. This requires the ability to synthesize information from several domains and apply it to complex real-world issues (Suyadi et al., 2022). While focus groups in all locations showed similar developmental tendencies, students at Site Three were more likely to identify specific pedagogical methods aimed to assist this synthesis, implying that intentional methods of teaching are essential for advancing beyond surface-level integration.

At the institutional level, integration improves social relevance by aligning academic outputs to regional requirements. Faculty at Site Two reported a significant rise in their the employability of graduates notably in government organizations and NGOs focused on regional development (Priestley & Minty, 2025). A analysis of alumni records verifies this trend, indicating that graduates are increasingly venturing beyond traditional religious careers. Instead, many choose to pursue jobs in public policy, social campaigning, and community development, where their ability to integrate religious and secular frameworks is highly recognized. A university administrator at Site Three said: *“Ten years ago, our graduates became teachers, and religious court officials. Today, they work in planning agencies, environmental organizations, and peacebuilding initiatives.”*

3.2 Discussion

The findings from Sites One, Two, and Three address fundamental questions regarding knowledge production in Islamic higher education that extend far beyond the Indonesian

context. This discussion interprets the data through four theoretical lenses: the Islamization of Knowledge debate, epistemological border work, institutionalization theory, and postcolonial critiques of disciplinary knowledge. Engaging with these frameworks has resulted in the concept of "epistemic hybridity," which is suggested here as an analytical framework for understanding knowledge integration in Islamic higher education. Furthermore, this study critically investigates how institutional variety between sites reveals unique approaches and modalities for achieving integration.

The epistemological tensions documented across all three sites resonate with a discourse that has shaped Islamic higher education since the 1970s (Ilaina et al., 2022). This era was defined by the seminal contributions of scholars such as al-Faruqi and al-Attas, who articulated divergent visions for integrating Islamic principles into modern knowledge systems. While al-Faruqi's project sought to reconstruct academic disciplines from Islamic first principles, al-Attas emphasized the primacy of *ta'dib* (proper discipline/education) as the spiritual and moral foundation of any knowledge enterprise. Despite decades of theoretical elaboration, the empirical evidence from these three institutions suggests that this core problematic remains unresolved: the question of how institutions rooted in revealed epistemological traditions can engage productively with knowledge systems developed within secular, Western frameworks remain a live and urgent challenge.

The faculty experiences documented here reveal that this struggle is not merely an abstract philosophical inquiry, but a practical dilemma negotiated daily through curriculum design, classroom instruction, and research supervision. When a faculty member at Site Two grapples with reconciling textual authority with empirical methodology, or when a department chair at Site One arbitrates disputes between normative and analytical orientations, they are effectively translating the Islamization of Knowledge debate into institutional practice. These micro-negotiations demonstrate that the lofty theoretical goals of the 1970s have transformed into the lived, professional challenges of the modern Indonesian university.

However, a critical examination of these findings suggests that the Islamization of Knowledge framework may be insufficient for capturing contemporary institutional dynamics. The term "Islamization" implies a unidirectional process—whereby secular disciplines are transformed by Islamic principles—yet the evidence from these sites reveals a more complex, multidirectional exchange. Faculty and students reported not only the integration of Islamic values into the social sciences but also a profound transformation of Islamic studies through its engagement with social scientific inquiry. This reciprocal transformation necessitates analytical frameworks capable of accounting for mutual, rather than unidirectional, influence.

Furthermore, the Islamization paradigm often presupposes a static, unified "Islamic epistemology" to serve as the foundation for this project. Conversely, faculty interviews revealed significant divergence regarding what constitutes an "authentic" Islamic epistemological approach. At Site Three, for instance, the discourse surrounding the potential of *maqashid al-shariah* (the higher objectives of Sharia) to bridge Islamic law and social science mirrors a broader internal debate concerning the very essence of Islamic knowledge. The inherent plurality within Islamic intellectual traditions poses a significant challenge to any monolithic Islamization project, suggesting that integration is as much an internal negotiation as an external one.

4. CONCLUSION

The integration of social sciences across Sites One, Two, and Three reveals a dynamic interplay of motivation, constraint, and possibility. Rather than being mere obstacles, persistent epistemological tensions function as generative spaces that enrich learning and enhance institutional relevance. The lens of epistemic hybridity captures this complexity, while site-specific analysis underscores how institutional history, local context, and faculty composition shape distinct integration trajectories.

Beyond their immediate settings, these cases illuminate a broader global challenge: fostering meaningful engagement between diverse knowledge systems in an increasingly interconnected world. The experiences of these three institutions demonstrate that productive interaction does not have to result in either hegemony or isolation. Instead, it can evolve into dialogical and context-sensitive forms of knowledge integration. This suggests that the future of higher education lies in the ability to create spaces where different epistemologies can coexist and inform one another without losing their unique identities.

Crucially, success should not be measured by the elimination of epistemological tension, but by the capacity to navigate it constructively. While the evidence remains mixed, it is cautiously promising: Site Three demonstrates that sustained institutional commitment enables substantive progress, whereas Sites One and Two reflect the persistence of common structural and capacity constraints. Collectively, these cases highlight the agency of faculty and students in actively negotiating epistemic boundaries. Through strategic investment and collaborative practice, these institutions can cultivate emergent intellectual traditions that are both contextually grounded and responsive to contemporary complexities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors express sincere gratitude to the research participants and institutions in Aceh for their cooperation and support. All researchers contributed fully to this study, from conception to completion, and were equally involved in data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation.

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