

ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY AND SURAU EDUCATION IN MINANGKABAU: RECONSTRUCTING THE *BAYĀNĪ*, *BURHĀNĪ*, AND *ʿIRFĀNĪ* DIMENSIONS

Muhammad Zaid Iqbal* 

*Correspondence:

Email:

iqbalmugiwara@gmail.com

Author Affiliation:

Universitas Islam Negeri Sjeh
M. Djamil Djambek
Bukittinggi, Indonesia

Article History:

Submission: February 12, 2026

Revised: April 29, 2026

Accepted: June 25, 2026

Published: June 30, 2026

Keywords:

Islamic
Epistemology;
Minangkabau; Surau
Education.

Kata Kunci:

Epistemologi
Islam; Minangkabau,
Pendidikan Surau.

Abstract

The transformation of traditional Islamic education raises questions about how local educational institutions preserve religious knowledge while responding to changing social and cultural contexts. This study examines the epistemological foundations of surau education in Minangkabau through the *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and *ʿirfānī* perspectives and asks how these modes of knowing are reflected in its educational practices. Employing qualitative historical and library research, the study analyzes relevant historical sources, scholarly literature, and accounts of surau education in Minangkabau. Its novelty lies in reconstructing surau not merely as a traditional institution for transmitting Islamic teachings, but as an epistemological space in which textual, rational—empirical, and spiritual—intuitive modes of knowledge interact with Minangkabau cultural values. The findings indicate that surau education historically integrates *bayānī* reasoning through Qurʾanic and religious instruction, *burhānī* reasoning through intellectual discussion and engagement with social realities, and *ʿirfānī* reasoning through spiritual practice, ethical formation, and experiential learning. This integration is embedded within the principle of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*, which connects Islamic teachings with Minangkabau customary values. The study argues that the surau tradition offers an indigenous model of integrative Islamic education that can contribute to contemporary discussions on contextual, character—oriented, and culturally grounded religious education.

Abstrak

Transformasi pendidikan Islam tradisional memunculkan pertanyaan mengenai bagaimana lembaga pendidikan lokal mempertahankan transmisi pengetahuan keagamaan sekaligus merespons perubahan sosial dan budaya. Penelitian ini mengkaji landasan epistemologis pendidikan surau di Minangkabau melalui perspektif *bayānī*, *burhānī*, dan *ʿirfānī* serta menganalisis bagaimana ketiga corak pengetahuan tersebut tercermin dalam praktik pendidikannya. Penelitian menggunakan studi historis dan kepustakaan kualitatif dengan menganalisis sumber-sumber sejarah, literatur ilmiah, dan berbagai kajian mengenai pendidikan surau di Minangkabau. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada rekonstruksi surau bukan sekadar sebagai lembaga tradisional transmisi ajaran Islam, tetapi sebagai ruang epistemologis yang mempertemukan pengetahuan tekstual, rasional-empiris, dan spiritual-intuitif dengan nilai-nilai budaya Minangkabau. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan surau mengintegrasikan penalaran *bayānī* melalui pengajaran Al-Qurʾan dan ilmu-ilmu keislaman, penalaran *burhānī* melalui diskusi intelektual dan keterlibatan dengan realitas sosial, serta penalaran *ʿirfānī* melalui praktik spiritual, pembentukan etika, dan pengalaman keagamaan. Integrasi tersebut berkelindan dengan prinsip *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* yang mempertautkan ajaran Islam dengan nilai-nilai adat Minangkabau. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa tradisi surau menawarkan model pendidikan Islam integratif berbasis kearifan lokal yang relevan bagi pengembangan pendidikan agama yang kontekstual dan berorientasi pada pembentukan karakter.

INTRODUCTION

Epistemology is a core component of philosophy, alongside ontology and axiology. Epistemology is better known among thinkers as the theory of knowing. In theory, epistemology examines human knowledge, the origins of knowledge, the nature of knowledge, and the validity of knowledge. There are several fundamental questions in the discussion of epistemology: "How, where, and under what circumstances is human knowledge acquired?" Thus, epistemology addresses the issue of how methodology and the subject matter of science relate to one another (Mujahidin 2013).

Epistemology also addresses the ways and methods of acquiring knowledge and the sources of knowledge itself. In Western epistemology, for example, the sources of knowledge are broadly divided into two categories: human reason and human experience. These two categories have given rise to numerous schools of thought regarding the sources and methods of knowledge. Initially, Western epistemology incorporated spirituality when discussing religion as one of its sources; however, as time progressed, particularly during the Modern Western era, the influence and consideration of religion were largely set aside and excluded from knowledge. Consequently, Western epistemology appears imbalanced between the rational and the spiritual, between the material and the immaterial, between physics and metaphysics, and between the mind and the soul. Western epistemology seeks to separate itself from the influence and role of religion in the advancement of science (Sari and Rohman 2011).

Unlike Western thought, Islamic epistemology is grounded in the teachings of Islam as a religion and a faith. Every human being is born in a state of *fitrah* and comes into the world knowing nothing. Then Allah blesses humans with reason, which distinguishes them from other creatures; humans are also blessed with the senses as tools and means for acquiring knowledge; and finally, humans are blessed with the heart as a confirmation of their faith. In this regard, Islamic epistemology draws upon reason and empirical observation as the primary sources of knowledge, with Islamic teachings serving to reinforce what is grasped by reason and what has been experienced. Islamic epistemology examines God, the role of the prophets, and the universe, all of which are linked to Islamic teachings as the foundation for logical and systematic thinking. The scope of Islamic epistemology is somewhat narrower than that of Islamic philosophy, which broadly encompasses discussions of ontology, delving into space, time, matter, and life. In this sense, Islamic epistemology is a part of Islamic philosophy, which seeks to unify revelation and reason, faith and wisdom, and religion and philosophy (Sulaiman 2016).

Islamic epistemology emphasizes the importance of knowledge that attains the status of absolute certainty as the ultimate goal in understanding something with absolute truth. Such truth must possess elements whose truth is believed in without the slightest doubt, ambiguity, or prejudice. In other words, something accepted as true is based on *'ilmul yaqin*, whereas that which is untrue contradicts the characteristics mentioned above. The concept of *'ilmul yaqin* is knowledge that renders everything clear, leaving no room for doubt, and those who possess it never entertain the possibility of doubt or ambiguity (*al-wahm*) surrounding it. *'Ilmul yaqin* also refers to knowledge that cannot possibly contain elements of error, mistake, or ambiguity; one cannot deny such knowledge or think that it can be denied (Harahap, 2020).

In Islamic epistemology, there are three key concepts: *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani*. These three concepts were developed by the Moroccan Muslim thinker Muhammad

Abid Al-Jabiri. By conceptualizing these three terms, al-Jabiri aimed to critique the Muslim community of his time, which he viewed as experiencing a decline. Regarding the epistemologies of bayani, irfani, and burhani, al-Jabiri strongly emphasized contemporary Arab thought as a path to confronting modernity (Hardiono 2020). When compared to the golden age of Islam. By analyzing the factors behind the decline of the Muslim community, which is divided into three subtopics. First, regarding bayani, al-Jabiri refers to it as aql bayani, encompassing disciplines whose primary focus is on Arabic linguistics as a central theme, and emphasizing the authority of the text (nas) whether directly or indirectly which is then justified by reason based on its linguistic context. However, this does not mean that reason can freely determine the meaning of the text, but must still rely on the text itself (Damanik, 2019). Some Islamic disciplines are formed from a unified framework that binds their foundational principles of reasoning, and al-Jabiri identifies this in linguistic factors, such as fiqh, usul al-fiqh, nahw (Arabic grammar), balaghah (the science of rhetoric), and ilmu al-kalam.

In this context, one region in Indonesia, located in West Sumatra, is better known as the Minangkabau region. Minangkabau is a region that upholds Islamic values; at the same time, it possesses principles and a philosophy that reflect Islamic values, namely, "Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah, Syarak Mangato, Adat Mamakai" To date, there is no accurate, scientifically verified evidence regarding the exact time, location, or originator of ABS-SBK in Minangkabau. However, generally speaking, several historical periods shed light on the early history of ABS-SBK, as outlined by the Minangkabau historian Sutan Mahmud, whose account was previously published in the daily newspaper Singgalang. He stated that ABS-SBK was established as a compromise between the Sufi and Fiqh factions, who were initially at war, in 1640 AD, long before the Padri War.

According to an article written by M. Rizal on the detikNews website, Sheik Burhanuddin reached an agreement with Minangkabau traditional leaders to establish religious and customary laws as the governing principles for the matrilineal Minangkabau society. The ABS-SBK concept was developed in 1668 CE as a result of this agreement, which is viewed as an integration process. Furthermore, according to another source, in Tanah Rajo, Bukit Marapalam, around 1680 CE, Sheik Burhanuddin, the Penghulu of the 12 Ulakan, and the Yang Dipertuan of Pagaruyung reached an agreement that gave birth to ABS-SBK. Later, in a study, Syafinir Abu Naim added that Tuanku Nan Tuo's initiative from 1720 to 1830 to return to Sharia law to reform religious practices gave rise to the ABS-SBK oath. Meanwhile, the Bukik Marapalam Agreement was the result of an agreement between indigenous and religious communities that took place in the 1820s, according to Sheik Sulaiman Arrasuli (1871 – 1970), also known as Inyia Canduang (Yelmi Eri Fardius, 2017).

Regardless of the debate over when and by whom the ABS-SBK was first conceived, behind it all, the ABS-SBK contains lessons presented in the form of the poem "Alam Takambang Jadi Guru" This poem serves as a form of instruction for the Minangkabau people, demonstrating that Minangkabau possesses a distinct form and system of education for teaching Islam, which is closely tied to Islamic epistemology. It incorporates educational methods and methodologies infused with traditional values. In Minangkabau, this is known as the Surau. Linguistically, based on the geographical scope across regions in Sumatra and other Malay areas, the term shares the same meaning: a place of worship. Initially, before Islam arrived in Minangkabau, suraus were built and used to worship ancient ancestors. For this reason, suraus are typically built on elevated ground and may even be constructed higher than surrounding structures.

After Islam spread throughout the Minangkabau region, the function of the surau gradually changed. Originally used as a place of worship for ancient beliefs, the surau transformed into a place of worship for Muslims. Whereas in pre – Islamic times suraus were typically located in high, remote areas, the arrival of Islam brought about a change, so that suraus are now more commonly found near rural settlements. Surau in the pre – Islamic era had unique characteristics, particularly in the form of their tiered roofs with peaks resembling horn – shaped *gonjong*, reflecting symbols of Minangkabau tradition. Over time, the surau became not only part of traditional customs but also integrated into Islamic life in Minangkabau, making it an important element in the local community's culture and religion (Afdayeni, 2017; Ahmad, 2015; Azra, 2017; Mawangir, 2015).

Based on the explanation above, this paper will focus on examining Islamic epistemology in Surau education in Minangkabau. In this regard, this paper employs a qualitative approach using a historical – philosophical form of library research. The historical approach is used to reconstruct the educational practices of the surau in Minangkabau as a socio – religious phenomenon that developed over a specific period of time, while the philosophical approach is used to analyze the epistemological structure underpinning these practices by referring to the framework of Islamic epistemology formulated by Muhammad Abid Al – Jabiri namely, Bayani, Burhani, and Irfani in his work "*Bunyah Al-'Aql al-'Arabi*" (The Structure of Arab Reason), as well as supporting writings on the surau category, such as Azyumardi Azra's essay on the surau "traditional Islamic education in transition and modernization" (Azra 2017) and several other references covering both of the above topics.

ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY: *BAYĀNĪ*, *BURHĀNĪ*, AND *IRFĀNĪ*

Three concepts of Islamic epistemology are closely associated with a Moroccan thinker who critiqued contemporary Arab rationalism from an epistemological perspective, grounding his analysis in three concepts: bayani, burhani, and irfani. Bayani is a mode of thinking rooted in the *nas*, *ijma'*, and *ijtihad* all of which pertain to Islamic texts. In epistemological discourse, bayani is a discipline of Islamic philosophy that centers its discussion on textual knowledge or revelation as an unalterable truth. Interpreting the text is the role of reason. The study of various disciplines with language as their primary focus including *nahwu*, *kalam*, *fiqh*, and *usul al-fiqh*, as well as *balagha* falls within the scope of Islamic epistemology (Al – Jabiri 1990).

Furthermore, Burhani epistemology prioritizes reason, so the methods used to conceptualize knowledge are analysis (*tahliliyah*) and discourse. According to al – Jabiri, Burhani epistemology is the Arab way of thinking that relies on human natural faculties namely, empirical experience and rational judgment to acquire knowledge about everything. Knowledge depends on cause and effect relationships (Samsul Bahri, 2015).

Irfani is better known as a mystical term that specifically refers to knowledge of God. Although Bayani is followed by irfani, these two types of knowledge are not the same. Bayani bases its knowledge on texts, whereas irfani bases its knowledge on *kasyf*, which is the revelation of secrets by or through God. Therefore, irfani is not obtained through textual analysis, but rather from a pure conscience, so that God reveals a certain knowledge (Khairina, 2016). Irfan, which means "knowledge" in Arabic, is the masdar form of the verb *arafa*. *Al-'ilm* defines *al-'irfan* in the Arabic dictionary. Sufis use the term *irfan* to refer to the highest form of knowledge, which is conveyed to the heart through inspiration, or *kasyf* (Sari et al., 2023).

THE SURAU AS AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

A surau is a simple, fairly large building typically located near residential areas, often situated near water sources such as rivers and *baruah* (ponds). Each clan or community in Minangkabau generally has its own surau. The existence of the surau has been an integral part of Minangkabau life even before the arrival of Islam. In addition to serving as a place of worship, the surau also functions as a gathering place for adolescent boys to spend the night and study various subjects and skills. In Minangkabau, boys do not have their own rooms at home, unlike girls. They only stop by the house to eat and wash up, then return to the surau to study, socialize, worship, and sleep. When Islam arrived, the function of the surau was retained, but its use was expanded to include the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and the practice of worship in accordance with Islamic teachings (Alfurqan, 2020).

From pre-Islamic times until after Islam arrived in Minangkabau, the surau has played a vital role as a center for learning and skill development. Additionally, the surau served as a resting place for travelers and merchants passing through the region. Their presence allowed the young men living in the surau to gain information about the outside world and insights into life abroad. With its various roles, the surau became a multifunctional space. It was not only used for worship but also served as temporary housing and a hub for social interaction among the youth.

Suraus in Minangkabau are often considered similar to pesantren in Java. However, there are actually fundamental differences between the two. According to Azyumardi Azra, the similarities lie only in certain characteristics shared by suraus and pesantren. Nevertheless, the differences between them remain evident, particularly in the relationship between a Syekh in a surau and the position of a Kyai in a pesantren, especially in Java. The unique socio-cultural and religious conditions of Minangkabau, as well as the dynamics of its society, give a central role to a Syekh in a surau. This also influences the existence and overall function of the surau.

Students who study at the surau are referred to as "orang siak." The religious scholar who serves as the leader, owner, and religious teacher at the surau is known as a Syekh. This title reflects the highest level of religious authority and scholarship. Studying at the surau requires no payment whatsoever, whether for tuition, accommodation, or meals. The orang siak very rarely give money to the Syekh. If they do, the gift usually comes from their families as a gesture of sincerity and gratitude. According to Azyumardi Azra, the daily needs of the orang siak are generally met by the community surrounding the surau, who donate food. This assistance is sometimes collected directly by the orang siak or delivered by their families (ZAINIMAL, 2020).

For example, in the Payakumbuh area, the local community plays a major role in meeting the daily needs of the Siak people. Every Sunday, they routinely deliver food items such as rice, vegetables, and other basic necessities by cart (*pedati*). Meanwhile, people from Siak who come from distant areas typically make their rounds through the villages around Batuhampar every Thursday. They carry cloth rice sacks, similar to flour sacks, and in the afternoon return to the surau with enough rice and money to cover their needs for the week. Practices like this can still be found in some Islamic boarding schools in West Sumatra to this day. The Sheikh, as the leader of the surau, has no other job besides teaching religion. His family's living expenses are fully covered by donations and alms from the community that keep flowing in. In fact, this support is often more than enough, allowing a Sheikh to perform the Hajj. The students are exempt from tasks that might disrupt their learning process, such as maintaining

cleanliness, preparing meals, or managing water supplies. All these responsibilities are handled by daily staff appointed directly by the Sheikh to ensure the students' comfort while pursuing their studies (ZAINIMAL, 2020).

Based on the above discussion, it can be seen that the surau serves two primary functions: as a social institution and as an educational institution. The fact that Muslim brotherhoods emerged in the early centuries of Islam in response to a widespread desire for guidance and ways to draw closer to God, as well as the establishment of Islamic rules taught by the ulama, reflects the status of this institution as an educational institution. According to Dobbin, the members of these brotherhoods, known as Sufis, sought out a tarekat founded by a teacher known as a sheikh, where they often studied for several years. The tarekat and its schools were readily accepted as an addition to village life because they could easily integrate into the structure of the surau in Minangkabau (Maimunah, 2012). It seems that the traditional culture of the time was more receptive to the Sufi orders that emerged in Minangkabau through the surau. This was because they placed greater emphasis on the individual than on actions, and on spiritual development rather than moral requirements for their followers. Reciting the name of Allah is said to bring a person closer to God through deep meditation.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY IN SURAU EDUCATION

The epistemological framework of Islam can be examined from various perspectives, including historical factors and the contributions of Muslim thinkers. First, from a historical perspective, the development of science and knowledge flourished significantly in the Islamic world during its golden age. A prime example is the Abbasid era, specifically the city of Baghdad, which became a highly advanced and renowned center of learning at the time a destination for Muslim thinkers, researchers, scholars, and intellectuals seeking knowledge. During this period, established scientific disciplines, such as those from Greece, were adapted by Muslim scholars using an Islamic approach and translated into Arabic. The intense and rapid scientific activities and intellectual development taking place in Baghdad at that time gave rise to Islamic intellectuals such as al-Kindi and al-Farabi (Salminawati, 2021).

Islamic epistemology relies on the Qur'an and Hadith as the sources for the establishment and development of knowledge, thereby enhancing the quality of life. It aims to study all phenomena in the natural world as manifestations of Allah's verses or divine speech. Islam integrates all disciplines of knowledge into a single, cohesive whole for this reason. The universe serves as an example of how the One Being manifests in various ways through different symbols. Knowledge is fundamentally a method or stage of understanding that involves various deductive, empirical, philosophical, and intuitive efforts to comprehend God's will and recognition of him (Salminawati, 2021).

In this context, when applied to Islam in Minangkabau, this relates to the philosophy of "Alam Takambang Jadi Guru." This philosophy is based on the ABS-SBK principle, which refers to the teachings and worldview of the Minangkabau people, often cited in proverbs, gurindam, and other texts concerning the nature, form, and existence of the natural world itself. For example, it is stated:

*Panakiak pisau sirauik,
Ambiak galah batang lintabuang,*

*Salodang ambiak ka niru.
Satitiak jadikan lauik,
Sakapa jadikan gunuang,
Alam takambang jadi guru.*

According to Minangkabau tradition, the term "alam" can mean many things. For the Minang people, alam is everything. Alam has a philosophical meaning: it is not only a place to live and grow, but also a place of birth and death. The term "nan ampek" refers to the fact that alam and all its components are always composed of, or can be divided into, four parts, ado matoari ado bulan, ado bumi ado langit, ado siang ado malam, ado aie ado api, ado tanah ado angin, and so on. Similarly, the formation of a village must meet certain requirements: there must be four clans, kato nan ampek, ampek of roads, and so on.

The philosophy of "Alam Takambang Jadi Guru" embodies Burhani's rational approach, as it positions the empirical natural world as a source of knowledge to be understood through observation, reasoning, and logical deduction, not merely through rote memorization of texts. This principle teaches that laws, customs, and life values can be derived from natural phenomena such as agricultural cycles, animal behavior, or social phenomena, which are then rationally analyzed to yield wisdom and rules for living. This way of thinking aligns with the Burhani framework, which relies on demonstrative reasoning, cause – and – effect relationships, and empirical verification, as formulated by Al–Jabiri. The convergence of these two epistemes within the surau demonstrates that Minangkabau education does not stand at a single extreme but rather undergoes a dialectic between textual adherence and rational – empirical openness, both of which proceed hand in hand in shaping the scholarly character of its society.

Thus, the Minangkabau society, which adheres to the ABS–SBK philosophy, exhibits the characteristics of a traditional and civilized society grounded in Islamic teachings. The traditional approach offers teachings and strategies for their application, as evidenced by the prioritization of the principle of balance and the understanding of the vastness of the universe established by Allah SWT. This is clearly evident in our civilized society, where customs are grounded in sharia and sharia is grounded in the Book of Allah (adat bersendikan syara' dan syara' bersendikan kitabullah) (Yelmi Eri Fardius, 2017).

Returning to the surau. The Minangkabau people have adapted the surau as a place of education. Although surau education is considered traditional, it is through this education that the Minangkabau people are known as a community deeply rooted in their culture and Islam; they use adat as a guide for living, as well as Islamic values as a guide and principle for life. Surau education teaches the application of Islamic values in daily life. It is generally regarded as an essential part of the process by which the Minangkabau become devout Muslims, law – abiding citizens, and enlightened members of the community. A person who pursues surau education stays at the surau as long as they are not yet satisfied with the knowledge they have acquired; conversely, they may leave the surau as an educated and well – informed individual (Azra 2017).

CHARACTERISTICS OF SURAU EDUCATION

The surau is the oldest and first Islamic educational institution in Minangkabau. It possesses distinctive features that set it apart from other educational institutions commonly found in Indonesia. The surau is often considered similar to the pesantren in

Java. According to Azyumardi Azra, this similarity stems from several shared characteristics between these two types of institutions.

Nevertheless, the surau differs fundamentally from the pesantren. One of the distinctive features of the surau can be seen in its form, which generally fell into two categories following the arrival of Islam in Minangkabau: the surau gadang (large surau) and the surau ketek (small surau) (Duski Samad, 2003). The *surau gadang* serves as the main hub for several smaller suraus in the surrounding area. At the *surau gadang*, a sheikh holds regular religious study sessions with his students, who are then tasked with teaching at the smaller suraus nearby. The name of the *surau gadang* is typically derived from the name of the sheikh who teaches there or the name of the region where the surau is located. Examples include the *Surau Gadang* Tanjung Medan in Ulakan, the Surau Koto Tuo Ampek Angkek, the Surau Inyiah Candung in Bukittinggi, the Surau Inyiah Jaho in Padang Panjang, and the Surau Inyiah Parabek. Over time, some surau gadang have evolved into mosques, madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools, or places of religious study, expanding their functions within the community (Duski Samad, 2003).

Surau ketek, sometimes referred to as a family surau, is typically owned by a small group of specific families and is also known as a surau mangaji (a surau where people learn to read the Quran and perform congregational prayers). This type of surau is essentially the same as a mushalla or langgar, as these terms are known in Melayu. Usually, there is only one teacher in this type of surau, who also serves as the surau's imam. On the other hand, large and medium-sized suraus are specifically built to provide more comprehensive religious instruction. In other words, medium and large suraus function as centers for religious education where students are taught the teachings of Islam more comprehensively across all aspects, rather than merely serving as places of worship like a surau mangaji. Based on the typical classification of suraus by size and number of students, a "ketek" surau usually accommodates about 20 students, a 'saday' surau around 80, and a "gadoang" surau can accommodate 100 to 1,000 students (Juliwansyah & Iswantir, 2022).

SURAU EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The curriculum in surau education remains a subject of debate to this day, as the exact form of the curriculum and teaching materials in suraus has not yet been definitively established. This is because suraus in the past did not have a systematic curriculum like those found in pesantren and madrasahs. However, the education taught in suraus can generally be inferred from the wide variety of books found there in manuscript form, scattered across suraus in Minangkabau, such as the surau pondok in Ulakan, the Bitungan Tinggi surau in Pariaman, the Lubuk Andur surau, the Lubuk Ipuah surau in Pariaman, and other suraus (Alfurqan 2020). Based on the books found, they can be classified according to their fields of study, including: *Fiqh*, *Nahwu*, *Sharaf*, Logic (*Mantiq*), Logic of *Usul al-Fiqh*, *Tafsir* books, *Hadith* books, *Qiraat*, *Tawhid*, *Kalam*, *Akhlak*, *Sirah*, and *Tasawuf* (Putri et al., 2022). In this regard, some of book titles discussed above are listed in the table below:

Table 1. Table Format

No	Book Title	Academic	Author
1	<i>Manhaj al-Thalibin</i>	Fikih	Imam Nawawi

2	<i>Hadi al-Muhta fi Syarh al-Minhaj</i>	Fikih	Muhammad bin Abdurrahman
3	<i>Mihaj al-A'immah</i>	Fikih	Faqih in Limau Manis
4	<i>Al-Jurumiyah</i>	Nahwu	Imam Shanhaji
5	<i>Al-'Awamil</i>	Nahwu	Imam al – Jurjani
6	<i>Bina' wa Tashrif</i>	Sharaf	Anonymous
7	<i>Sulam al-Munawaraq</i>	Logika/Mantiq	Syekh Abdurrahman al – Akhdari
8	<i>Waraqat</i>	Logika/Ushul Fiqh	Imam Jalaluddin Mahalli
9	<i>Tafsir Jalalain</i>	Tafsir	Jalaluddin Mahali and Jalaluddin Suyuti
10	<i>Ummul Bahrain</i>	Tauhid	Sayid Abu 'Abdillah Muhammad Ibn Yusuf al – Sanusi
11	<i>Jawharat al-Tauhid</i>	Tauhid	Abdussalam Ibn Ibrahim al – Maliki al – Laqani
12	<i>Al-Tashawur wa al-Tashdiq</i>	Kalam	Anonymous
13	<i>Burhan Qadimullah</i>	Kalam	Anonymous
14	<i>Al-Hikam</i>	Tasawuf	Ibnu Athaillah
15	<i>Minhaj al-Abdin</i>	Tasawuf	Imam al – Ghazali
16	<i>Kifayat al-Muhtajin</i>	Tasawuf	Syekh Abdurrauf Singkel
17	<i>Bayan Tajalli</i>	Tasawuf	Syekh Abdurrauf Singkel
18	<i>Jawahir al-Haq'a'id</i>	Tasawuf	Syekh Abdurrauf Sumatrani
19	<i>Hikayat Ratu Balqis</i>	Akhlak	Anonymous
20	<i>Syaraf al-Anam</i>	Sirah Nabawi	Imam Abdurrahman bin Muhammad
21	<i>Umtad al-Ansab</i>	Sirah Nabawi	Syekh Abdurrauf Singkel
22	<i>Hidayat al-Habib fi Taghrib wa Tahrir</i>	Hadits	Syekh Nuruddin Al – Raniri

Source: The books listed above are drawn from several sources, including: Ahmad Taufik et al., on the Catalog of Pasaman Manuscripts and the heritage collection of Sheikh Burhanuddin Ulakan; M. Yusuf et al., on the cataloging of manuscripts in Minangkabau; and, finally, from Chairullah's personal manuscript collection and manuscripts from suraus that have not yet been cataloged (Azra 2017).

SURAU TEACHING METHODS AND THEIR EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

The *surau* has historically served as an important institution of Islamic education in Minangkabau, West Sumatra. Its educational activities employed the *halaqah* system, in which students gathered around a teacher to study the Qur'an and other Islamic disciplines. In addition to religious instruction, suraus played an important role in transmitting Islamic beliefs, moral values, and religious practices within the community. Before 1900, Qur'anic instruction constituted the primary component of surau education,

with lessons generally conducted in the evening and, in some cases, continued after the dawn prayer (Zein, 2011).

According to the classification attributed to Mahmud Yunus, the educational materials taught in Minangkabau suraus before 1900 could be divided into basic and advanced levels. At the basic level, students learned to recognize and pronounce the *ḥurūf al-hijā'iyyah* (Arabic letters) and to read the Qur'an. They also received instruction in fundamental religious practices, including ablution (*wuḍū'*) and prayer (*ṣalāh*), as well as the principles of Islamic theology (*tawḥīd*). The theological curriculum included the Twenty Attributes of God and the classification of rational judgments into the necessary (*wājib*), impossible (*mustahīl*), and possible (*jā'iz*). Moral education was also an integral part of the learning process. Teachers conveyed ethical and religious values through stories about the Prophet Muhammad and other righteous figures, as well as through their own exemplary conduct. These practices demonstrate that surau education involved not only the acquisition of religious knowledge but also the cultivation of religious commitment and moral character.

The *halaqah* system was conducted in a relatively simple learning environment, without the desks, chairs, and formal classroom arrangements commonly associated with modern education. Students sat around the teacher, who guided them through reading, explanation, repetition, and memorization. The teacher occupied a central position in the transmission of religious knowledge, while students learned through direct engagement with the teacher and the texts being studied. This arrangement reflects the importance of teacher guidance and the continuity of established scholarly traditions in traditional Islamic education.

At the advanced level, surau education included additional subjects and specialized forms of religious instruction. These included Qur'anic recitation with proper pronunciation and intonation (*tilāwah* and *tajwīd*), the recitation of *qasidah*, the reading of *Barzanji*, and the study of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Specialized teachers, particularly those recognized for their ability to recite the Qur'an accurately and melodiously, played an important role in this level of instruction. Such teachers were known as *qāri'*. The original account identifies Sheikh Burhanuddin of Batu Hampar, Payakumbuh, as a notable figure renowned for his proficiency in Qur'anic recitation.

The teaching of Qur'anic literacy followed a gradual process using the *Qā'idah Baghdādiyyah* method. Students first learned the Arabic letters, including *lām-alif*, and subsequently studied the vowel marks *fathah*, *kasrah*, and *ḍammah*. They then learned *tanwīn*, *sukūn*, and *tashdīd*, together with their application in reading. According to the account provided by Zein (2011), this introductory stage generally took approximately two to three months. Once students had mastered the letters and vowel marks, they progressed to reading *Juz 'Ammā*, beginning with Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, followed by Sūrat an-Nās, Sūrat al-Falaq, and other short chapters up to Sūrat aḍ-Ḍuḥā. After completing this stage, they proceeded to read the Qur'an from the *muṣḥaf*, beginning with Sūrat al-Fātiḥah and continuing through the subsequent chapters.

These instructional practices indicate that the initial objective of Qur'anic education was to enable students to read the Qur'an accurately and fluently. The original account suggests that understanding the meaning and content of the text was not always the primary concern at this elementary stage. However, this description should be understood in relation to the specific level of instruction discussed rather than as a general conclusion about the entire surau educational tradition. Advanced instruction

also included other Islamic disciplines, particularly jurisprudence, while the broader functions of the surau encompassed religious and moral education.

The teaching methods and the study of classical Islamic texts, commonly known as *kitab kuning*, can be examined through the perspective of *bayānī* epistemology. In the framework associated with Mohammed Abed al-Jabiri, *bayānī* reasoning emphasizes the authority of revealed texts and established methods of interpretation, including transmitted reports (*riwāyah*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). Within the context of surau education, this perspective is relevant to the central role of the Qur'an, Islamic religious texts, and the teacher in the transmission of knowledge. The *tuanku* guides students in reading and understanding texts, while students learn through listening, repetition, and memorization. The teacher's position is also associated with the continuity of scholarly transmission through the *sanad*, where applicable. These characteristics provide a basis for interpreting traditional surau instruction as reflecting important elements of *bayānī* reasoning.

Nevertheless, this epistemological interpretation should not be taken to mean that every aspect of surau education can be reduced to textual learning. The curriculum included practical religious instruction and moral education, while suraus also functioned as spaces for social interaction and community life. The *bayānī* perspective therefore helps explain the importance of textual authority and religious transmission without necessarily accounting for every dimension of the educational experience.

In terms of their institutional functions, Minangkabau suraus can be distinguished into three categories: traditional community suraus, *suluk* suraus, and suraus preserved as cultural heritage sites. Traditional community suraus continue to perform functions beyond worship. They serve as places for religious learning, social interaction, community gatherings, and, in some cases, accommodation for young people. These functions reflect the historical role of the surau as an institution closely connected to the religious and social life of Minangkabau communities. Through their educational and communal activities, traditional suraus contribute to the transmission of Islamic teachings and local cultural values.

The relationship between Islam and Minangkabau customary traditions is commonly expressed through the principle *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*, meaning that custom is founded upon Islamic law and Islamic law is founded upon the Qur'an (Taufik, 2024). This principle provides an important cultural framework for understanding the relationship between religious teachings and customary practices in Minangkabau. Within the context of surau education, it reflects the connection between the transmission of Islamic values and the preservation of local cultural traditions. The surau can therefore be understood as an institution through which religious knowledge and customary values are transmitted within community life.

A second category comprises *suluk* suraus, which provide instruction in Islamic religious sciences and, in some cases, the spiritual disciplines associated with the Sufi path. *Suluk* refers to a spiritual journey directed toward a deeper understanding of oneself and a closer relationship with God. It involves self-discipline and adherence to Islamic law in both its outward and inward dimensions, with the aim of cultivating spiritual awareness and purifying the heart. As described by Hariadi (2017), *suluk* encompasses the pursuit of self-knowledge, an understanding of life, and the search for divine truth through disciplined religious practice.

The educational practices of *suluk* suraus can be examined through the perspective of *irfānī* epistemology, which emphasizes the spiritual and experiential dimensions of

knowledge. This perspective is relevant because *suluk* involves more than the acquisition of religious information; it also concerns the cultivation of inward awareness and spiritual discipline. Through these practices, religious learning is associated with efforts to deepen one's understanding of God and to develop a more disciplined spiritual life. Nevertheless, the '*irfānī*' perspective is used here as an analytical lens for understanding the spiritual orientation of *suluk*, rather than as evidence that all educational activities within these institutions are exclusively based on experiential knowledge.

The third category consists of suraus that are no longer actively used for worship or education but retain their original buildings and furnishings. These institutions are preserved as cultural heritage sites because of their historical significance. Although they no longer perform the same functions as active suraus, their surviving structures and material remains provide evidence of the historical development of Islamic education and community life in Minangkabau. Their preservation also maintains a connection with the region's religious and cultural heritage.

The three categories illustrate the diversity of surau functions in Minangkabau. Traditional community suraus emphasize religious instruction and communal activities, *suluk* suraus provide a setting for spiritual learning and religious discipline, while heritage suraus preserve the material traces of earlier educational and religious traditions. These categories describe the predominant functions of the institutions and should not necessarily be interpreted as mutually exclusive classifications.

Viewed through the perspectives of *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and '*irfānī*' epistemology, surau education provides a context for examining different dimensions of Islamic knowledge. The *bayānī* perspective is particularly relevant to the transmission and interpretation of religious texts, while the '*irfānī*' perspective helps explain the spiritual orientation of *suluk* practices. The *burhānī* perspective, which emphasizes rational inquiry and the use of reasoned arguments, may provide an additional framework for examining how religious knowledge is related to practical questions and social realities. However, the available descriptions of surau teaching methods and institutional categories do not, by themselves, establish that *burhānī* reasoning constituted a distinct or systematic pedagogical method in these institutions. Its application therefore requires further investigation of the actual teaching materials, methods, and intellectual practices of particular suraus.

Overall, surau education in Minangkabau represents a traditional educational institution whose functions extend from Qur'anic instruction and the transmission of Islamic knowledge to moral formation, spiritual discipline, community interaction, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Its teaching methods and institutional diversity demonstrate the importance of understanding Islamic education in relation to its historical and cultural context. The perspectives of *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and '*irfānī*' can contribute to this understanding, provided that they are employed carefully and supported by evidence concerning the educational practices being examined. Such an approach allows the surau to be studied not only as a place of religious instruction but also as an important institution in the history of Islamic learning and Minangkabau cultural life.

CONCLUSION

Surau education represents an important tradition of Islamic knowledge transmission in Minangkabau, West Sumatra, where religious learning has historically been closely

connected to communal life, moral formation, spiritual practice, and local cultural values. Rooted in a social and religious environment that predates the institutional development of Islamic education, the surau gradually incorporated Islamic teaching into its established community functions. It became not only a place of worship but also a space for learning the Qur'an, studying Islamic beliefs and practices, cultivating ethical conduct, and transmitting knowledge across generations. The surau thus illustrates how Islamic education developed through the interaction between religious teachings and the historical and cultural context of Minangkabau society.

The educational practices examined in this chapter demonstrate the importance of the *halaqah* system, teacher—guided instruction, recitation, repetition, memorization, and the gradual acquisition of religious knowledge. At the foundational level, students learned the Arabic alphabet, Qur'anic recitation, and essential aspects of Islamic belief and worship. At more advanced levels, instruction could include *tajwīd*, *fiqh*, *qasidah*, *Barzanji*, and other religious subjects, depending on the expertise of the teacher and the orientation of the surau. These practices reveal an educational tradition in which the transmission of textual knowledge was closely associated with religious discipline, exemplary conduct, and the formation of personal character. Although the emphasis and scope of instruction varied across institutions, the surau provided an important setting for integrating religious learning with everyday life.

The relationship between Islamic teachings and Minangkabau cultural identity is expressed in the principle *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*—custom is grounded in Islamic law, and Islamic law is grounded in the Qur'an (Taufik, 2024). Together with the cultural expression *alam takambang jadi guru* (nature unfolds as a teacher), this principle provides a framework for understanding how religious and local knowledge may inform one another. Nevertheless, their relationship should not be understood as an automatic or entirely harmonious integration. The interpretation of customary practices in relation to Islamic norms may vary across historical and social contexts. Surau education is therefore significant not only as a means of transmitting religious teachings but also as a setting in which cultural values, communal responsibilities, and religious commitments are interpreted and practiced.

The analysis also identifies three broad categories of surau according to their predominant functions: traditional community suraus, *suluk* suraus, and suraus preserved as cultural heritage sites. Traditional community suraus combine religious instruction with communal interaction and, in some cases, accommodation for young people. *Suluk* suraus emphasize spiritual discipline and Sufi practices alongside instruction in Islamic religious sciences. Heritage suraus, meanwhile, preserve architectural structures and material traces of earlier educational and religious life, providing resources for historical inquiry and cultural preservation. These categories are analytical distinctions rather than mutually exclusive types, as the functions of individual suraus may overlap or change over time.

The epistemological perspectives of *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and *ʿirfānī*, associated in this study with textual interpretation, rational inquiry, and spiritual experience respectively, offer a framework for examining the different dimensions of surau education. The *bayānī* perspective is particularly relevant to the study of Qur'anic instruction, religious texts, and the transmission of established scholarly traditions. The *ʿirfānī* perspective illuminates the spiritual discipline and inward transformation emphasized in *suluk* practices. The *burhānī* perspective is useful for examining rational engagement and, in the study of heritage suraus, for reconstructing historical educational practices through

critical interpretation of documentary and material evidence. However, these perspectives should not be treated as rigid classifications of surau institutions. Their relevance must be established through evidence of actual curricula, teaching methods, spiritual practices, and institutional histories. In particular, the use of *burhānī* analysis by contemporary researchers does not necesly indicate that a historical surau employed *burhānī* reasoning as an explicit pedagogical method.

Taken together, these findings suggest that surau education cannot be reduced to a single epistemological orientation. Rather, it represents a diverse educational tradition in which textual authority, practical reasoning, spiritual cultivation, and cultural experience may intersect in different ways. The significance of the surau lies precisely in this capacity to connect Islamic knowledge with the formation of individual character and participation in communal life. An epistemological reading of surau education consequently offers a way to investigate how religious knowledge is transmitted, interpreted, experienced, and situated within a particular cultural context. It also provides a basis for further research into the contemporary relevance of surau traditions for Islamic education, especially in developing context – sensitive learning, strengthening ethical and spiritual formation, and preserving Minangkabau's Islamic intellectual heritage.

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