

# Integrating Critical Qur'anic Discourse In A Pesantren-Based University:

## A Study of ISQI Sunan Pandanaran, Yogyakarta

### **Abdul Kadir**

STAI DDI Maros, Indonesia  
abdulkdiribrahim.aa@gmail.com

### **Muhammad Alwi HS**

STAI AGH Sanusi Baco Maros, Indonesia  
muhalwihs2@gmail.com

### **Ni'mah Afifah**

Universitas Alma Ata Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
nikmah\_afifah@alma.ata.ac.id

## **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara kritis bagaimana wacana orientalisme diintegrasikan ke dalam kurikulum formal kampus berbasis pesantren di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada ISQI Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta. Argumentasi utama penelitian ini adalah bahwa perguruan tinggi Islam, bahkan berbasis pesantren sekalipun, memungkinkan terjadinya perjumpaan produktif antara iman dan rasionalitas kritis dalam ruang akademik. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi kelas dan wawancara terhadap ketua program studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir (IAT) dan 54 mahasiswa ISQI, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa materi orientalisme justru mendorong rekoneksualisasi studi Al-Qur'an yang memadukan iman dan nalar kritis secara seimbang. Resepsi mahasiswa menunjukkan peningkatan dalam kemampuan reflektif, argumentatif, dan keterbukaan terhadap pendekatan interdisipliner. Implikasi penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pesantren memiliki potensi besar untuk menjadi ruang dialog epistemik global jika disertai struktur pedagogis yang inklusif dan reflektif. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan eksplorasi lebih lanjut pada dinamika kurikuler lintas wacana dalam pendidikan Islam kontemporer. .

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This study aims to critically examine how Orientalist discourse is integrated into the formal curriculum of pesantren-based Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, with a specific focus on ISQI Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta. The main argument of this research is that Islamic universities—even those rooted in pesantren tradition—are capable of facilitating a productive encounter between faith and critical rationality within the academic sphere. Using a qualitative approach and data collection techniques such as classroom observation and interviews with the head of the Qur'anic Studies program and 54 ISQI students, the study finds that Orientalist materials actually encourage a recontextualization of Qur'anic studies that balances faith with critical reasoning. Student reception indicates growth in reflective, argumentative skills and openness to interdisciplinary approaches. The findings suggest that pesantren have significant potential to become spaces for global epistemic dialogue when supported by inclusive and reflective pedagogical structures. The study recommends further exploration of cross-discursive curricular dynamics in contemporary Islamic education. .

**Keywords:** integrasi, ISQI Sunan Pandanaran, kampus berbasis pesantren orientalisme

## Introduction

Amid the enduring current of religious conservatism deeply rooted in many pesantren-based campuses across Indonesia, the encounter between Islamic studies and Western (orientalist) discourse is often seen as a clash between two mutually exclusive epistemological worlds. Numerous studies tend to show that higher education institutions, especially Islamic universities and pesantren-based campuses, generally maintain a traditional approach to Islamic studies and resist Western discourses perceived as threats to scriptural authority and the authenticity of faith.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zainal Abidin, "Islamic Studies dalam Konteks Global dan Perkembangannya di Indonesia," *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 20, no. 1 (2015): 69–84; Majid Daneshgar, *Studying the Qur'an in the Muslim Academy* (United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2020); Nuril Hidayah, "Pesantren: Antara Orientalisme Dan Oksidentalisme," *IMTIYAZ: Jurnal Ilmu Keislaman* 3, no. 2 (2019): 116–28, doi:<https://doi.org/10.46773/imtiyaz.v3i2.52>; M Falikul Isbah, "Pesantren in the Changing Indonesian Context: History and Current Developments," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies (QIJIS)* 8, no. 1 (2020): 65–106, doi:<https://doi.org/10.21043/QIJIS.V8I1.5629>; Ronald A Lukens-Bull, "Two sides of the same coin: Modernity and tradition in Islamic education in Indonesia," *Anthropology & education quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2001): 350–72, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2001.32.3.350>; Ali Mas'ud, Ah Zakki Fuad, dan Achmad Zaini, "Evolution and Orientation of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 13, no. 1 (2019): 21–49, doi:[10.15642/JIIS.2019.13.1.21-49](https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2019.13.1.21-49); Gonda Yumitro dan Dion Maulana Prasetya, "Pesantren's Resistance Against Cultural Globalization," *Miqot* 41, no. 2 (2017): 335–60, doi:<https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v41i2.391>.

However, STAI (now ISQI) Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta presents a striking intellectual anomaly. The course “*Orientalism and the Qur'an*” is not only officially integrated into the curriculum structure but also functions as a critical space for negotiating faith and contemporary academic reasoning.<sup>2</sup>

The phenomenon at ISQI Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta is a significant subject of study because it challenges the prevailing assumption that pesantren-based institutions tend to be closed off to academic discourses considered sensitive or even taboo—especially those touching on Western epistemologies.<sup>3</sup> The integration of the course “*Orientalism and the Qur'an*” into this institution's curriculum demonstrates institutional courage in opening a critical negotiation space between faith and contemporary scientific rationality. This is worth noting as an indicator of a paradigm shift in Islamic education within pesantren-based settings—from a traditionally reproductive model to one that is more reflective and dialogical.<sup>4</sup> Thus, examining ISQI is not merely about affirming the importance of preserving classical scholarly authority, but also about recognizing the preparedness of pesantren-based universities to engage with global dynamics through more open-ended discourse and approaches.

Penelitian The above phenomenon, both concerning ISQI and the treatment of Orientalism in higher education, has in fact been previously examined from various angles. However, most studies remain sectoral and normative in nature. Research by Barirotus Sa'adah and Mushawir,<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Rifai et al.,<sup>6</sup> and Muhammad Mu'tamid Ihsanillah et al.<sup>7</sup> tends to focus on the internal dynamics of ISQI students in areas such as entrepreneurship, linguistics, and Qur'anic memorization, without addressing global discourse issues such as Orientalism. Meanwhile, works

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Ahmad Nur Kholis, via Google Form, August 12, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Muhamad Arif, Sulaiman Dorloh, dan Shuhairimi Abdullah, “A systematic literature review of Islamic boarding school (Pesantren) education in Indonesia (2014-2024),” *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 35, no. 2 (2024): 161–80, doi:<https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v35i2.5330>; Riswadi Riswadi dan Zen Amrullah, “Transformation of Pesantren Academic Traditions (A Study of Ma'had Aly Learning Innovations),” *Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education* 6, no. 1 (2023): 31–43, doi:<https://doi.org/10.21093/sajie.v6i1.7521>.

<sup>4</sup> Imam Mujahid, “Islamic orthodoxy-based character education: creating moderate Muslim in a modern pesantren in Indonesia,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 185–212, doi:<https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.185-212>.

<sup>5</sup> Barirotus Sa'adah dan Mushawir Mushawir, “Implementasi Nilai-Nilai Kewirausahaan Syariah Pada Mata Kuliah Edupreneur Program Studi PGMI STAI Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta,” *MIDA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Islam* 7, no. 1 (2024): 98–116, doi:<https://doi.org/10.52166/mida.v7i1.6002>.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Rifaâ dkk., “Pengaruh Bahasa Ibu (Interferensi) Terhadap Kesalahan Tulisan (Kitabah) Mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta,” *Ihtimam: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 7, no. 1 (2024): 146–63, doi:<https://doi.org/10.36668/jih.v7i1.738>.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Mu'tamid Ihsanillah, Khayatun Nisa, dan Latiefah Khoerunnisa, “Problematika Tahfiz Al-Qur'an bagi Mahasiswa Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Sunan Pandanaran,” *Al-Wihdah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 2 (2024): 77–91.

by Itah Miftahul Ulum<sup>8</sup> and Cecep Sobar Rochmat et al.<sup>9</sup> present more of a counter-narrative against Orientalism through a defensive approach aimed at correcting or rejecting Western thought. Studies by Agus Salim and Mohd. Arifullah,<sup>10</sup> as well as Ade Pahrudin,<sup>11</sup> begin to touch on academic responses to Orientalism, but these are mostly limited to student and scholar attitudes without exploring curricular aspects at the institutional level. In contrast to these, this study critically examines how orientalist discourse is integrated into the curriculum structure of a pesantren-based campus, and how such encounters give rise to epistemic negotiations between tradition and modernity within the context of Qur'anic interpretation classes.

The purpose of this study is to critically examine how orientalist discourse is integrated into the formal curriculum of a pesantren-based university, particularly at ISQI Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta. It argues that Islamic higher education, even those rooted in pesantren, can facilitate a productive encounter between faith and critical rationality within the academic sphere. The course "*Orientalism and the Qur'an*" at ISQI exemplifies an institutional effort to negotiate between two epistemological realms that have long been considered oppositional. This study contributes by asserting that pesantren-based campuses are not only capable of upholding the authority of tradition but also of actively cultivating students' critical reasoning in addressing the complexities of global discourse, scientifically, yet firmly grounded in Islamic values.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design focused on the Qur'anic Studies and Exegesis (Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir) program at ISQI Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta, representing a pesantren-based campus. Primary data were collected through interviews using Google Forms with the head of the Qur'anic Studies program and 54 ISQI students, both those who have taken and those currently enrolled in the "*Orientalism and the Qur'an*" course. The researcher's own experience (Muhammad Alwi HS) is also utilized in gathering and reflecting upon the available data. Classroom observations and curriculum documentation were conducted to understand the institutional context. Data analysis was carried

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<sup>8</sup> Itah Miftahul Ulum, "Peranan Pendidikan dalam Meluruskan Pemikiran Orientalis dalam Kebudayaan Islam," *Al-Tsaqafa: Jurnal Ilmiah Peradaban Islam* 13, no. 01 (2016): 1–10, doi:<https://doi.org/10.15575/al-tsaqafa.v13i01.1826>.

<sup>9</sup> Cecep Sobar Rochmat, Putri Adinda Ayudiyanti, dan Sherly Dian Novitasari, "Implikasi Pengaruh Pemikiran Orientalisme Terhadap Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia," *Edu Global: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (2023): 13–25, doi:<https://doi.org/10.56874/edb.v4i2.39>.

<sup>10</sup> Agus Salim dan Mohd Arifullah, "Sikap Calon Intelektual Muslim terhadap Orientalisme: Respons Mahasiswa Prodi KPI Fakultas Ushuluddin IAIN STS Jambi," *Media Akademika* 27, no. 4 (2012).

<sup>11</sup> Ade Pahrudin, "Kontribusi Orientalis terhadap Studi Hadis Kontemporer Di Indonesia: Teori, Respons dan Sikap Sarjana Hadis," *Refleksi: Jurnal Kajian Agama dan Filsafat* 22, no. 2 (2023): 257–78.

out thematically using an interpretative framework, allowing the researcher to uncover the underlying meanings behind academic narratives and practices related to orientalist discourse. Through this approach, the study aims to illustrate how the interaction between Islamic scholarly tradition and Western discourse unfolds epistemically, and what its implications are for shifts in the paradigm of contemporary Islamic education.

## **ISQI and the Teaching of “Orientalism and the Qur'an”**

The Institute for Qur'anic and Islamic Studies (ISQI) Sunan Pandanaran, officially established in 2012 in Sleman, Yogyakarta, is a pesantren-based higher education institution with the status of an institute. ISQI offers five undergraduate programs: Qur'anic Studies and Exegesis (Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir), Sufism Studies, Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, Arabic Language Education, and Primary School Teacher Education.<sup>12</sup> The concept of the “*santri mahasiswa*” (student-santri) makes this campus unique, integrating the pesantren tradition (live-in programs and *kyai* mentorship) with a modern academic curriculum ([isqisunanpandanaran.ac.id](http://isqisunanpandanaran.ac.id)). Through research, publication, and community service, ISQI contributes to the development of Islamic knowledge, the strengthening of religious character, and the production of graduates who not only memorize and interpret the Qur'an, but are also able to translate its values into social life and cross-cultural dialogue. Its vision emphasizes the synergy between tradition, intellectualism, and social engagement, supported by academic facilities, scholarships, and research programs aimed at the welfare of the ummah.<sup>13</sup>

Since its founding, the course “*Orientalism and the Qur'an*” has been a compulsory part of the curriculum in the Qur'anic Studies and Exegesis (IAT) program. Its purpose is not merely to introduce students to the historical interaction between Islam and the West, but also to shape a critical and integrative framework for Qur'anic studies. This reflects an epistemological orientation that is open to non-traditional approaches while remaining rooted in Islamic scholarship. Such a model aligns with contemporary trends in Islamic education, which increasingly adopt multidisciplinary approaches in teaching exegesis, as discussed by Abdullah Saeed in *Interpreting the Qur'an*.<sup>14</sup> Saeed emphasizes the importance of curricula that promote methodological openness without losing the authenticity of Islamic tradition.

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<sup>12</sup> [isqisunanpandanaran.ac.id](http://isqisunanpandanaran.ac.id).

<sup>13</sup> [isqisunanpandanaran.ac.id](http://isqisunanpandanaran.ac.id).

<sup>14</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2005), doi:10.4324/9780203016770.

The course content includes the history and development of Orientalism, the scope of orientalist studies on the Qur'an, and the thoughts of key figures such as Goldziher, Noldeke, and Watt. Students are also introduced to orientalist theories and the responses of Muslim scholars to these approaches. This approach aims to broaden students' intellectual horizons, not by outright rejecting Orientalism, but by engaging with it critically and in a balanced manner. In this context, the study of Orientalism is seen as part of a global intellectual history that must be addressed through reasoned argumentation rather than mere apologetics.<sup>15</sup> Enhancing understanding of diverse approaches also resonates with Mohammed Arkoun's idea<sup>16</sup> of the need for epistemological deconstruction in Islamic studies to encourage more reflective and inclusive intellectual renewal.

The course is not designed to lead students to either extreme—total critique or full acceptance. Instead, students are trained to recognize various methodological approaches used by Orientalists—from historical-critical and philological to sociological. This strategy creates academic space for evaluation that nurtures initial appreciation for “other” perspectives, while sharpening analytical thinking skills. It reflects a dialogical approach increasingly normalized in Islamic higher education, as argued by Farid Esack,<sup>17</sup> who advocates for interpretive frameworks that are context-sensitive and open to critique without losing normative commitment to the Qur'an as a sacred text. In this way, the learning process is not merely a transfer of knowledge but also a formation of resilient and visionary academic character.

Ahmad Nurkholis also notes the potential tension between the conservative values of pesantren and openness to orientalist critique. However, he emphasizes that this tension is not structural but depends on the subjects involved, namely, students, lecturers, or the academic community. Those open to diverse perspectives and scholarly developments can in fact utilize epistemological tension as a space for dialogue. In ISQI's context, this course has not provoked significant resistance; instead, it has served as a platform to develop students' critical reasoning. This approach can be analyzed as a form of *epistemological pluralism* in Qur'anic studies, which, according to Ziauddin Sardar,<sup>18</sup> is essential for addressing contemporary complexities without falling into a binary opposition between East and West.

To support the course's effectiveness, ISQI selectively appoints instructors with “dual qualifications” deep mastery of traditional Islamic

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<sup>15</sup> Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (New York: Brill, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *The unthought in contemporary Islamic thought* (London: Saqi Books, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A user's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Ziauddin Sardar, *Orientalism* (London: Open University Press, 1999).

studies combined with critical understanding of Orientalism. This qualification serves as an important bridge to deliver the material in an objective and moderate manner and is a prerequisite for teaching that avoids both apologetic and reductionist biases. A similar approach is applied in the philology course, reinforcing ISQI's consistency in fostering methodological integration across traditions. Nurkholis affirms his hope that this course cultivates a hermeneutic reasoning that is adaptive, critical, and globally competitive, while remaining firmly rooted in the Islamic tradition. This model aligns with Duderija's perspective on the importance of constructive engagement between traditional studies and modern critique in shaping a transformative contemporary Islamic scholarship.<sup>19</sup>

At this point, the design and implementation of the "*Orientalism and the Qur'an*" course at ISQI Sunan Pandanaran represents a systematic effort to develop a tafsir tradition that is critical, adaptive, and contextual. Through an integrative curriculum and pedagogical strategies that foster dialogue between Islamic scholarship and Western approaches, this course not only expands students' academic horizons but also equips them with cross-paradigmatic analytical skills. The dual qualifications of the instructors ensure objectivity and moderation in teaching. Amid epistemological challenges and varied responses from the pesantren community, ISQI demonstrates that methodological openness can go hand in hand with commitment to traditional values.

### **Student Reception of Orientalism**

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>Initial Perception</b>	<b>Response to the Material</b>	<b>Strategies for Managing Doubt</b>	<b>Dialogue between Faith and Academic Critique</b>
Ma'unatul Latifah, Farisha Nurul Azizah, Dedek Fitriya	Curious and open-minded, yet accompanied by caution.	The material broadens perspectives and is academically relevant.	Balancing emotional responses with academic reasoning; comparing with traditional exegesis.	Criticism is understood as an opportunity to strengthen faith through cross-perspective understanding.

<sup>19</sup> Adis Duderija, "Neo-traditional Salafi Qur'an-Sunnah hermeneutic and the construction of a normative Muslimah image," *Hawwa* 5, no. 2–3 (2007): 289–323, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1163/156920807782912526>.

Student Group	Initial Perception	Response to the Material	Strategies for Managing Doubt	Dialogue between Faith and Academic Critique
Rahadiarto Sumakmur, Ikfi Zulfa Karimah, Latiefah Khoerunnisa	Initially skeptical or concerned, then gradually open-minded.	Understanding the context, history, and motivations of Orientalists more rationally.	Distinguishing between theological and methodological dimensions; focusing on the scientific approach.	Faith identity is not disrupted; rather, it is enriched by a critical academic approach.
Anwar Mufid, Syafa Zahrotul Maulidiyah, Arda Satria Pramudita	Open and appreciative toward critical approaches.	The material enriches interpretive methods, such as hermeneutics and historical analysis.	Utilizing class discussions to develop objectivity and methodological openness.	Islamic tradition and modern approaches can synergize in the development of reflective exegesis.
Lu'lul' Atussuhairiyah, Noorazana Siti Maryam	Curious and interested in external approaches.	The material helps develop a critical and reflective attitude.	Integrating traditional thought with contemporary theories.	Knowledge and faith can be developed harmoniously and without negating each other.
Achmad Islachul Mustofa, Muhammad Afnan 'Abdillah, Mokhamad Khatimul Fauzi	Cautious yet appreciative of the scholarly value of Orientalism.	Criticism is seen as a means of reflection and the intellectual revival of Islamic exegesis.	Avoiding an apologetic attitude; turning criticism into a source of research and intellectual strengthening.	Criticism is not a threat, but an opportunity to develop contextual and progressive exegetical thought.

The mapping table above shows a transformation in students' attitudes from initial curiosity accompanied by theological anxiety to a more critical and scholarly acceptance. Students in the first and second groups generally experienced a dilemma between maintaining their faith and being open to Western academic approaches. However, rather than rejecting them, they

tended to develop strategies to balance academic reasoning with spiritual conviction. This pattern shows that Muslim students respond to Orientalist approaches with a combination of epistemological caution and a desire to understand the context of such critiques fairly. This demonstrates that when the learning environment supports open and reflective dialogue, students do not perceive criticism as a threat, but as part of the maturation process of religious reasoning.

Other student groups showed greater capacity in managing the tension between faith and scholarly critique. They began to utilize orientalist material as an opportunity to enrich interpretive approaches, developing thematic, historical, and hermeneutical understandings. Students in the third to fifth groups were not only open-minded but also intellectually productive, creatively integrating Western critical methods with the legacy of Islamic exegesis. These findings reinforce the argument of Yusuf Rahman,<sup>20</sup> who states that a non-reactive approach to orientalist critique can promote epistemological integration between Islamic tradition and modern knowledge, producing graduates who are critical, open, and not trapped in the dichotomy of apologetics versus skepticism.<sup>21</sup> Thus, student reception of this course reflects a productive and constructive intellectual dynamic.

To understand this dynamic further, in-depth interviews were conducted. For example, Ikfi Zulfa Karimah, a 2022 student from Lampung, stated that:

In my view, the presence of the *Orientalism and the Qur'an* course in the Qur'anic Studies and Exegesis program at ISQI is extremely important. It shows that the department isn't only focused on internal Islamic matters but is also open to understanding external perspectives on the Qur'an. Through this course, we learn how Orientalists—who are generally Western and non-Muslim—study the Qur'an, whether from historical, methodological, or exegetical perspectives. This course has broadened my understanding, making me realize that not everyone views the Qur'an the same way Muslims do. Some consider it a historical product, while others examine it from cultural or literary angles. That's where we learn to respond critically, yet scientifically and wisely. What I've felt most from taking this course is that we're trained not to be easily provoked emotionally when faced with perspectives that differ from—or even contradict—our faith. Instead, we are encouraged to first understand them and then respond in a scholarly and well-argued manner, not reactively. I think this is especially important for us as *santri* and future Muslim intellectuals so that we can engage in dialogue with the outside world without losing our Islamic identity. So, even though it was quite difficult at first due to the many unfamiliar Western terms and

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<sup>20</sup> Yusuf Rahman, "Indonesian Muslim Responses to Non-Muslim Approaches to Qur'anic Studies," dalam *New trends in Quranic studies: Text, context, and interpretation*, ed. oleh Mun'im Sirry (United States of America: Lockwood Press, 2019); Yusuf Rahman, "Theological And Polemical Reception On Western Scholarship In Al-Qur'ān And Tafsīr Studies In Indonesia," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 27, no. 1 (2019): 1–13, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.24014/jush.v27i1.5184>.

<sup>21</sup> Rahman, "Theological And Polemical Reception On Western Scholarship In Al-Qur'ān And Tafsīr Studies In Indonesia."

approaches, over time I've come to feel grateful for having taken this course. In today's world, challenges to the Qur'an come not only from within but also from outside, and we must be intellectually prepared to face them.<sup>22</sup>

The statement by Ikfi Zulfa Karimah above shows that, for her, the course "*Orientalism and the Qur'an*" plays a significant role in shaping students' critical awareness of the plurality of approaches to the Qur'an. Students not only come to understand that perspectives on the Qur'an outside of Islam can differ radically, but also learn to respond to them in a scholarly and reasoned manner. From an initially emotional stance, students develop into more reflective thinkers, capable of distinguishing between methodological critique and ideological attack.

### Reception Categorization: From Appreciative to Ambivalent

Reception Category	Main Characteristics of the Viewpoint	Student Name
<b>Appreciative and Strengthening of Faith</b>	Considers orientalist material as broadening their perspective and actually strengthening faith through a scientific approach and lecturer guidance.	Ma'unatul Latifah, Rahadiarto Sumakmur, Ikfi Zulfa Karimah, Khayatunnisa, Arda Satria Pramudita, Farisha Nurul Azizah, Latiefah Khoerunnisa, Noorazana Siti Maryam, Elisa May Lestari, Romadhoni Mukminatul Lutfiyah, Siti Anisa Patma, Upi Uswatun Khasanah, Muhammad Yu'an Arif, Silvi Ashari, Aulia Pratiwi Alza
<b>Cautious, but not dismissive</b>	Welcoming orientalist material with a critical, open, and reflective attitude. Viewing it as a means of intellectual training and epistemological resilience amid global discourse.	Ahmad Ajmal Rizki Rojabi, Arwa Aniqoh, Muhimmatul Aliyah, M. Malik Syukron, Fakihan Munadhiron, Fani Kurniawati

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Ikfi Zulfa Karimah, via google form, 23 Agustus 2025.

Reception Category	Main Characteristics of the Viewpoint	Student Name
<b>Cautious with Limited Concern</b>	Aware of the potential risks if the material is accepted without a strong foundation in creed, guidance, or deep understanding. Emphasizes the importance of filters and a solid Islamic grounding.	Pramesti Diaz Wardani, Dedeck Fitriya, Muhammad Afnan 'Abdillah, Beauty Arifatun, Dela Putri Firnanda, Ira Nur Jannah, Hanif Fajar Al Husni, Ayasi Seana Lestari, Fina Mazidatul Chusna
<b>Passive and Defensively Apathetic</b>	Not concerned due to lack of deep engagement with the material or viewing it merely as additional information.	Aida Nurul Isma, Muthiah Abidati, Silvia Indah
<b>Firm Rejection with Concern</b>	Rejects the notion that this material could harm one's faith, as they have already been equipped with strong religious knowledge and a solid pesantren (Islamic boarding school) environment.	Ahmad Mursalin, Muhammad Zainal 'Abidin, Muhammad Munir Mawardi, Taufik Akbar Dwi Putra, Fatimatuzzahro, Ayyu Sania P, Auliya, Muhammad Khoirul Anam
<b>Ambivalent or Dualistic</b>	Acknowledges the potential danger if absorbed uncritically, but still sees positive value when approached critically and with sufficient scholarly preparation.	Baistul Chaq, Muhammad Kamal Fikri

Reception Category	Main Characteristics of the Viewpoint	Student Name
<b>Appreciative and Strengthening of Faith</b>	Considers orientalist material as broadening their perspective and actually strengthening faith through a scientific approach and lecturer guidance.	Ma'unatul Latifah, Rahadiarto Sumakmur, Ikfi Zulfa Karimah, Khayatunnisa, Arda Satria Pramudita, Farisha Nurul Azizah, Latiefah Khoerunnisa, Noorazana Siti Maryam, Elisa May Lestari, Romadhoni Mukminatul Lutfiyah, Siti Anisa Patma, Upi Uswatun Khasanah, Muhammad Yu'an Arif, Silvi Ashari, Aulia Pratiwi Alza

The mapping above shows that ISQI students exhibit a strong sense of confidence in engaging with the subject of Orientalism. Most of them, such as Ma'unatul Latifah, Rahadiarto Sumakmur, Ikfi Zulfa Karimah, and Khayatunnisa, state that, with proper guidance from lecturers and a solid pesantren-based scholarly foundation, this subject actually strengthens both their faith and intellectual capacity. Critical engagement with Western narratives—including critiques of revelation or the codification of the *muṣṭafād*—is viewed as a valuable exercise in critical reasoning and scholarly dialogue. These findings indicate that religious education that encourages reflective and open-minded thinking can enhance cognitive skills and spiritual resilience in the face of global informational complexity

Meanwhile, a small number of students, such as Pramesti Diaz Wardani, Dede Fitriya, and Muhammad Afnan 'Abdillah, express initial concerns that the material could be problematic if not accompanied by a strong foundation in Islamic knowledge. They worry that the skeptical critiques of Orientalists might lead to doubt if not critically framed. However, the majority believe that the pesantren culture and the faith-strengthening ISQI curriculum serve as primary safeguards against spiritual fragmentation. A study by Mudzakkir et al. emphasizes that Orientalism in the modern context, if studied critically and historically, is not a threat but rather enhances understanding of the interaction between Islamic and Western thought.<sup>23</sup> Thus, most students do not view Orientalism as a threat, but rather as a space for epistemic dialogue, so long as it is approached critically and within a firm Islamic framework. At the same time, others underscore the importance of the

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Mudzakkir dkk., "History of the Development of Orientalism: Its Influence on the Modern Islamic World," *Journal of Indonesian Islamic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2024): 51–58, doi:<https://doi.org/10.24256/jiis.v4i1.6145>.

lecturer's role, the learning context, and the strength of faith as key factors determining whether the material strengthens or weakens one's beliefs.

### **Implications of Orientalist Discourse on Students' Reasoning**

<b>Category of Implications</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Student Name</b>
<b>Broadening Horizons and Analytical Approaches</b>	Orientalist material opens new horizons, encouraging contextual and interdisciplinary approaches in Qur'anic studies.	Arda Satria Pramudita, Ma'unatul Latifah, Rahadiarto Sumakmur
<b>Improvement in Critical Thinking and Academic Research Skills</b>	Students are trained to distinguish bias and prejudice in critiques of the Qur'an and to strengthen scholarly arguments.	Ikfi Zulfa Karimah, Syafa Zahrotul Maulidiyah
<b>Critical Reflection through Initial Tension</b>	Initial tension caused by the non-traditional approach transforms into an understanding of the importance of synthesizing classical and modern methods.	Pramesti Diaz Wardani, Muhamad Saepudin
<b>Strengthening Epistemic Resilience and Readiness for Cross-Discourse Dialogue</b>	Insights from external perspectives enrich the reading of the Qur'an and strengthen the ability to filter and respond to critical narratives scientifically.	Noorazana Siti Maryam, Mokhamad Khatimul Fauzi
<b>Integration of Traditional and Modern Critical Approaches</b>	Students shift their study orientation from a primarily textual focus to a contextual-critical approach to bridge tradition with contemporary scientific methodology.	Faiz Firdaus, Arwa Aniqoh, Ayyu Sania P
<b>Academic Maturity and Intellectual Resilience</b>	An open attitude toward external approaches actually strengthens academic identity and enhances the ability to engage in discussions within academic forums.	Ayasi Seana Lestari, Silvia Indah

Category of Implications	Description	Student Name
<b>Academic Maturity and Intellectual Resilience</b>	Critical discourse precisely catalyzes the reinforcement of faith and Islamic scholarly identity among students.	Ira Nur Jannah, Muhammad Munir Mawardi
<b>Constructive Epistemic Tension</b>	Apprehension toward Western skepticism provides the impetus for substantiating the Qur'an's validity through rigorous and systematic inquiry.	M Malik Syukron, Fakihan Munadhiron

The mapping above shows varied impacts of the *Orientalism and the Qur'an* course material on the development of students at ISQI Sunan Pandanaran. Students such as Arda Satria Pramudita, Ma'unatul Latifah, and Rahadiarto Sumakmur reported that the inclusion of Orientalism and Qur'anic studies significantly broadened their intellectual horizons. Through exposure to Western critiques and methodologies, they began to adopt more critical, contextual, and interdisciplinary approaches. This aligns with pedagogical frameworks for developing critical thinking skills in Islamic education, which, according to Saepudin, require reflection, discussion, and scientific problem-solving.<sup>24</sup> This impact is also evident in the improvement of the quality of their arguments and their readiness for academic Qur'anic exegesis research, as demonstrated by Ikfi Zulfa Karimah and Syafa Zahrotul Maulidiyah. The study indicates that the integration of Orientalism, when presented with adequate scholarly guidance, serves as a catalyst for students' intellectual development.

Some students, represented by Pramesti Diaz Wardani and Muhamad Saepudin, noted that their initial encounter with Orientalist discourse generated "inner tension" and confusion due to Western methods that appeared contradictory to classical exegetical approaches. However, they emphasized that this critical reflection ultimately led to an awareness of the need to formulate a synthesis between the classical pesantren tradition and modern contextual approaches. Noorazana Siti Maryam and Mokhamad Khatimul Fauzi even stated that an understanding of Orientalist critiques actually enriched the context of Qur'anic reading and strengthened scholarly resilience. These findings show that complex materials can

<sup>24</sup> Aep Saepudin, "Critical Thinking in Islamic Education: Developing A Pedagogical Framework for Promoting Analytical Skills Among Students," *Journal of Community Service* 4, no. 2 (2022): 217–29, doi:<https://doi.org/10.56670/jcs.v4i2.238>.

reinforce scholarly identity, provided they are accompanied by systematic and exploratory learning structures.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the impact of Orientalist discourse varied: for Faiz Firdaus, Arwa Aniqoh, and Ayyu Sania P., the material triggered a methodological transformation from direct textual reading to critical contextual analysis. Ayasi Seana Lestari and Silvia Indah observed that openness to external perspectives strengthened their epistemic resilience and academic maturity in exegetical discussions. Meanwhile, M. Malik Syukron and Fakihan Munadhirah described a form of constructive internal tension: a skeptical response to Western skepticism, coupled with a determination to demonstrate the truth of the Qur'an through scholarly means. This underscores that Orientalism is not merely an epistemic challenge but also a space for the formation of Muslim intellectuals prepared to engage in debate within the global arena. These findings are consistent with Muniroh's research,<sup>26</sup> which states that interdisciplinary and critical approaches enrich the epistemological framework of Islamic education.

## **Faith-Critical-Based Recontextualization of Qur'anic Studies**

The explanations presented in the preceding sections demonstrate that the learning process of the course "*Orientalism and the Qur'an*" at ISQI Sunan Pandanaran reflects a significant paradigmatic shift in Islamic studies within the pesantren environment. Students who initially experienced theological anxiety due to exposure to Orientalist approaches gradually began to find a new balance between spiritual commitment and scholarly inquiry. This process did not occur instantaneously, but rather through a dialogical, open learning dynamic, carefully guided by lecturers. They came to understand that critiques originating outside Islam are not necessarily an absolute threat to faith, but can instead serve as a means to deepen understanding of the Qur'an in a more contextual and methodological manner. Accordingly, the transformation of attitudes—from defensive to reflective and productive—demonstrates students' capacity to integrate the legacy of classical exegesis with modern academic discourse in a proportional and critical way.

This transformation marks the emergence of a new approach to Qur'anic studies that is recontextual in nature, combining faith-based values with critical reasoning within a unified epistemic framework. ISQI students, equipped with a strong pesantren background and access to contemporary academic literature, do not perceive Orientalism as a threat to tradition, but rather as a field of intellectual testing that enriches religious reasoning.

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<sup>25</sup> Saepudin, "Critical Thinking in Islamic Education: Developing A Pedagogical Framework for Promoting Analytical Skills Among Students,"

<sup>26</sup> Nunung Muniroh, "Critical Thinking and Attitude in Islamic Education: A Literature Review," BESTARI: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Islam 21, no. 2 (2024): 164–75, doi:<https://doi.org/10.36667/bestari.v21i2.682>.

Supported by an inclusive curriculum and a classroom atmosphere that encourages the exchange of ideas, they are increasingly prepared to engage in open discussion, examine Western perspectives argumentatively, and deepen exegetical exploration through thematic and hermeneutical approaches. This demonstrates that Islamic studies built upon the integration of tradition and cross-cultural discourse are capable of producing learners who are mature, critical, and at the same time firmly grounded in their spiritual convictions.

More profoundly, the process taking place at ISQI is not merely academic, but also touches upon the formation of students' worldviews regarding the relationship between Islam and the broader world. They no longer regard Orientalist criticism as an expression of hostility, but rather as a space for learning and reflection. Material that initially generated confusion has, for most students, become a point of departure for developing more adaptive and contextual approaches to Qur'anic exegesis. A curriculum that allows room for such intellectual exploration demonstrates that Islamic higher education does not have to choose between safeguarding orthodoxy and opening itself to modern methodologies.<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, when both are juxtaposed critically and proportionally, students discover new ways of understanding the Qur'an—not as a closed doctrine, but as a living discourse that continues to evolve.

Classroom learning in this context has also moved beyond the reactive approach often found in conventional Islamic studies. Students no longer merely reject or refute Orientalist views, but begin to employ them as analytical tools. They develop more structured arguments, broaden their methodological horizons, and demonstrate the courage to participate in global academic discussions. This process does not erode faith; instead, it strengthens their scholarly identity as santri-intellectuals who are ready to engage with diverse paradigms without losing their traditional roots. The ISQI experience proves that Islamic religious education framed in a reflective and open manner can give rise to a generation of thinkers who are not only academically critical, but also spiritually and ethically consistent in responding to the challenges of the times.

In comparison with previous studies that tend to portray responses to Orientalism in normative or defensive terms, this research offers a novel approach. It highlights that integrating critical material such as Orientalism into the pesantren curriculum is not only feasible, but can also generate significant epistemological transformation. The focus is not merely on acceptance or rejection, but on how students actively construct new perspectives that combine modern scientific methods with the foundations

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<sup>27</sup> M Zainal Arifin, "The Traditionalism of the Islamic Boarding School Education System in the Era of Modernization," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 4, no. 1 (2022): 286–396, doi:<https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v4i1.1367>.

of classical exegesis. This study underscores the importance of a synthetic rather than dichotomous approach in bridging Islamic scholarly traditions with Western discourse. These findings expand the methodological scope of Qur'anic studies and demonstrate the relevance and readiness of pesantren institutions in engaging with global academic discourse.

These findings also provide policy directions that may be adopted by other Islamic educational institutions. Integrating courses such as *"Orientalism and the Qur'an"* into the curriculum requires pedagogical guidelines that are sensitive not only to the pesantren background, but also capable of accommodating the intellectual needs of contemporary students. Lecturer training is needed to guide students in engaging with complex issues in a reflective and argumentative manner. At the same time, inter-university networking is essential for building an inclusive and collaborative academic ecosystem. ISQI serves as an example that pesantren-based Islamic education does not have to be closed to criticism; rather, it can become a pioneer in building bridges between faith and knowledge, between tradition and modernity, and between the local context of pesantren and the global horizon of scholarly discourse.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that integrating Orientalist discourse into the curriculum of a pesantren-based higher education institution such as ISQI Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta is not only theoretically feasible but also epistemologically productive. Through the course *"Orientalism and the Qur'an,"* students are not merely exposed to critical approaches originating outside Islam; they are also trained to frame scholarly responses that remain rooted in pesantren values. The findings reveal a transformation in perspective, from reactive attitudes to reflective and analytical ones, as well as the emergence of Qur'anic exegetical approaches that are more contextual, interdisciplinary, and open to scholarly critique. This challenges the long-standing assumption that pesantren-based institutions are closed to Western discourse and opens space for a model of Islamic education that is adaptive without losing its scholarly identity.

The implications of these findings point to the importance of formulating more progressive curricular policies in Islamic educational institutions, particularly in creating space for dialogue among intellectual traditions. The ISQI experience can serve as a reference in designing pedagogical approaches that balance critical rigor with steadfast faith. Nevertheless, this research is limited to a single institution and a specific course, and therefore does not yet represent the broader dynamics of other pesantren-based universities. Consequently, further research is needed to expand the range of cases, compare similar integration models across different contexts, and

evaluate their long-term impact on the formation of students' Islamic thought.

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