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WORD COUNT

9287

TIME SUBMITTED

06-MAY-2026 05:08AM

PAPER ID

121469140



ISSN Online: 2442-5605



Editorial Office: Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

Phone: +62781365280889

E-mail: [potensia.ftk@uin-suska.ac.id](mailto:potensia.ftk@uin-suska.ac.id)

Website: <https://ejournal.uin-suska.ac.id/index.php/potensia>

## One Pesantren Tradition, Two Epistemic Configurations: A Comparative Documentary Analysis

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<sup>2</sup><http://dx.doi.org/xxxxx/potensia.v1i12.38415>

### Abstract

This article examines how two Islamic higher education institutions rooted in the same pesantren tradition, namely Pondok Tremas Pacitan, form different epistemic configurations. This study uses a structured evidence-based document analysis with Framework F.1, which operationalizes the *bayānī–burhānī–‘irfānī* al-Jabiri trilogy into 27 empirical indicators on a scale of 0–3. A total of 50 institutional documents were analyzed, consisting of 21 documents of Ma’had Aly and 29 documents of the IAIT. Percentage scores are interpreted as the strength of comparative evidence in a document, not as an inferential statistical measure. The results showed that Ma’had Aly had a *bayānī*-integrative profile, with a *bayānī* score of 90.7%, *burhānī* 59.3%, and *‘irfānī* 38.9%. In contrast, IAIT showed a *burhānī*-integrative profile, with a *bayānī* score of 46.3%, *burhānī* 72.2%, and *‘irfānī* 37.0%. These differences demonstrate an epistemic differentiation based on institutional mission: Ma’had Aly maintains textual-turats authority through a model of *sanad*-based meritocracy, while IAIT reinforces academic rationality within the framework of integration-transcendence. The stability of the *‘irfānī* dimension in both institutions indicates its role as a frame of shared spiritual legitimacy. These findings are limited to institutional documents as an epistemological representation that the institution wants. This study contributes to the study of Islamic higher education by showing that epistemic diversification and tradition cohesion can take place simultaneously in one pesantren ecosystem.

### Keywords

Islamic epistemology; epistemic configuration; Islamic higher education; pesantren; comparative study; document analysis; Pondok Tremas; al-Jabiri

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## Introduction

Tradition-based Islamic educational institutions are faced with a fundamental epistemological challenge: how to maintain the continuity of the *turats* (classical Islamic intellectual heritage) while responding to contemporary demands that are often assumed to negate each other (Arkoun, 2002; Kersten, 2015; Rahman, 1982). This question is not only pedagogical in nature, but touches on the root of the way of knowing, the parameters of the validity of knowledge, and the mechanism of epistemic authority in the traditional Islamic scientific community (Bruinessen, 2015; Goldman, 1999). In the Indonesian context, pesantren can be understood as a rich empirical laboratory to study this problem. As an epistemic community, pesantren do not simply transmit knowledge, but form a way of knowing through the *sanad* (chain of transmission) system, the *sorogan-bandongan* (individualized learning method-collective learning method), and the practice of *Bahts al-Masā'il* (collective legal deliberation forum) that are rarely found in formal education (Dhofier, 2011; Gusmian, 2022; Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022).

The discourse of contemporary Islamic educational reform is often caught up in a binary choice between tradition preservation and epistemic modernization. On the one hand, criticism of traditional education systems highlights the risk of intellectual stagnation and inability to respond to contemporary rational challenges (Arkoun, 2002; Rahman, 1982). On the other hand, unmanaged modernization flows have the potential to sacrifice the typical epistemic reservoir that becomes the identity of tradition-based institutions (Kersten, 2015; Nurtawab, 2019). But a number of recent studies have shown that this dichotomy oversimplifies the truly complex institutional reality. Rayyes points out that contemporary Islamic epistemology operates in a dialectic between openness to revelation and openness to rationality (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020). Romlah identifies a pattern of structured negotiation in the strategic management of Islamic educational institutions, where adaptation does not replace traditional identities but rather adds a new layer on top of them (Romlah, 2025). Ishaq et al. found that Ma'had Aly Situbondo developed an endogenous integrative epistemological model that maintains the *turats* methodology while opening itself up to more systematic rational demonstrations (Ishaq et al., 2025).

In the midst of the richness of pesantren studies, one dimension that is still very understudied is the internal epistemic profile of institutions that fall under the same pesantren tradition. Previous studies tend to analyze one institution individually or view pesantren as an epistemically homogeneous entity (Malisi, 2024; Romlah, 2025; Sofi, 2025). Previous studies of Ma'had Aly in Indonesia show a tendency to study single per institution: Gazali and Malik examine Ma'had Aly Sukorejo from the perspective of intellectual freedom (Gazali & Malik, 2009); Juandi and Yasid analyze the *fiqh* discourse between *taqlid* and *ijtihad* (Juandi & Yasid, 2016); Sulthon et al. examine the dynamics of *istinbāth al-aḥkām* (Sulthon et al., 2024); and Ishaq et al. examine the integrative epistemology of Ma'had Aly Situbondo (Ishaq et al., 2025). These studies make important contributions, but no one has yet compared the epistemic configurations of two institutions of higher education from the same genealogical foundation in a systematic and measurable manner (Dahlan et al., 2025; Murdianto, 2021).

An analytical framework that has the potential to bridge this gap is the *bayānī–burhānī–irfānī* trilogy developed by Mohammed Abed al-Jabiri in *Takwīn al-‘Aql al-‘Arabī* (al-Jabiri, 2009b) and *Bunyah al-‘Aql al-‘Arabī* (al-Jabiri, 2009a). Al-Jabiri identifies three epistemic modalities operating in the Arab-Islamic intellectual tradition: *Bayānī* (text-based knowledge with *sanad* as legitimacy), *burhānī* (verifiable rational-empirical demonstration), and *irfānī* (inner experience and spiritual transmission) (al-Jabiri, 2011; El Shakry, 2021; Kassab, 2025). It is important to note that al-Jabiri's project is normative-critical in nature by encouraging the dominance of the *burhānī* as a prerequisite for the modernization of Arabic reason. In this study, the framework is used descriptive-analytically as an instrument for mapping the epistemic profile as it is, not as a basis for normative assessment (Amril et al., 2023; Zohdi, 2017). Based on previous systematic literature reviews of the Arabic and English Scopus corpus on classical Islamic epistemology (339 records for the period 1980–2025, with 227 records included after title/abstract screening), no studies have been found that operationalize the *bayānī–burhānī–irfānī* al-Jabiri trilogy into empirical indicators based on Islamic higher education institutions (Latif, 2025b; Ngindana Zulfa & Himawati, 2019).

The operationalization of this framework in the analysis of the curriculum documents of the *Takhasus Fiqh wa Ushuluhu* Ma'had Aly At-Tarmasi program as a single-program study has been carried out (Latif, 2025a). But the analysis of one program cannot answer a more fundamental question: is the configuration found unique to the program, or part of a broader pattern within the Pondok Tremas ecosystem? And how do the second institutions of the same tradition express an epistemic foundation that shares the same genealogical roots? The study responds to this gap by extending the analysis to the two institutions comparatively, while at the same time confronting empirical findings with the framework of al-Jabiri critically.

The use of al-Jabiri as an analytical framework invites its own epistemic responsibility. Al Walid et al. show that al-Jabiri's influence in Indonesian Islamic discourse tends to be adopted selectively without fully confronting its normative critical agenda, especially in its epistemic trilogy: that a truly autonomous *burhānī* is a prerequisite for intellectual emancipation, and that *irfānī* that is not subject to rational control is the source of stagnation (Al Walid et al., 2025). This article uses the al-Jabiri framework not as a validation of the profiles found, but as an instrument that actually opens up questions about the structural limitations of the two institutions. With this position, the research question posed is: How does one same pesantren tradition (Pondok Tremas) produce two different epistemic configurations in its two institutions of higher education, and what can be said descriptively and critically about the mapped patterns?

The two institutions compared are: (1) Ma'had Aly At-Tarmasi as a higher education institution based on *tafaqquh fī al-dīn* (in-depth study and mastery of religious sciences) and (2) the Institut Agama Islam Atarmasi Pacitan (IAIT) which is a formal university in the national accreditation system. Both have their roots in Pondok Tremas, a more than two-century-old pesantren in Pacitan, East Java (Latif, 2019; Mukodi, 2020; Ratnasari et al., 2026).

The contribution of this article is three-layered. First, methodologically, this article expands the corpus from a single-program analysis (Latif, 2025a) to a full two-institution comparison involving 50 institutional documents covering the institutional architecture as a whole. Second, empirically, this article documents a divergence pattern that reflects a layered epistemic ecosystem with identifiable internal logic. Third, conceptually, these findings open a discussion on how one epistemic tradition can produce diverse expressions without losing its genealogical cohesion (Ma'arif, 2019; Romlah, 2025; Sabc-El-Rayess, 2020).

## Method

### Research Design

This study uses structured evidence-based document analysis, an approach that combines the rubric of systematic assessment with a qualitative interpretation of the context of the document. Unlike purely quantitative content analysis that processes the frequency of word occurrences, this approach assesses the strength of the evidence in the document against indicators that have been operationalized previously. Numerical scores (0–3 per indicator; percentages per dimension) serve as a representation of the strength of comparative evidence, rather than as a statistical measure in the conventional quantitative sense. These figures allow for systematic comparisons while maintaining the interpretive considerations inherent in document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

This approach was chosen because it allows for triangulation between documents: the consistency of scores from different categories of documents (curriculum, governance, recruitment, scientific products) provides a convergent validity that is impossible to obtain from a single document type.

### Analytical Framework F.1: *Bayānī–Burhānī–ʿIrfānī Trilogy*

This study uses Framework F.1 (Framework 1) which operationalizes the *bayānī–burhānī–ʿirfānī* al-Jabiri trilogy into 27 empirical indicators that can be examined based on institutional documents (9 indicators per dimension). Each dimension is operationalized through three analytical sub-clusters, each containing three indicators. The score per indicator uses a scale of 0–3: 0 = no evidence; 1 = weak/partial evidence; 2 = moderate evidence; 3 = strong and consistent evidence (Latif, 2025b, 2025a). Table 1 presents the operational structure of this framework.

**Table 1. Operational Structure of the F.1 Framework in Institutional Document Analysis**

Dimensions	Sub-kluster	Key Questions for Documents	Example of Indicators
<i>Bayānī</i>	(1) Authoritative sources of knowledge	What is the proportion of <i>turats</i> -based curriculum? Is the reference to the book of <i>mu'tabar</i> a formal requirement for scientific products?	Proportion of <i>turats</i> allocation in the curriculum
	(2) Text validation procedure	Is the <i>naṣṣ</i> postulate a valid condition for argument? Does the hierarchy of <i>al-naqlu</i> (direct textual citation) → <i>ilhāq</i> (analogical extension) → <i>istinbāṭ</i> (independent legal	Methodological hierarchy of <i>Bahts al-Masā'il</i>

		derivation) operate?	
	(3) Genealogical legitimacy	Is <i>sanad</i> actively operating in recruitment and <i>ijazah</i> ? Is the <i>masyayikh</i> positioned as an epistemic authority?	<i>Sanad</i> in teacher recruitment
<i>Burhānī</i>	(1) Demonstrative sources of knowledge	Is the curriculum logic, philosophy, or epistemology formal? Is rational proof recognized as a mode of validation?	Formal logic/philosophy curriculum
	(2) Demonstrative validation procedure	Does evaluation require internal coherence of arguments? Are methodological innovations institutionally facilitated?	Argumentation-based evaluation mechanism
	(3) Legitimacy of verified competencies	Is a formal academic degree a requirement for teaching? Is cross-disciplinary integration codified?	Competency-based recruitment model
<i>ʿIrfānī</i>	(1) The inner source of knowledge	Are spiritual experiences recognized as a source of knowledge? Is there the practice of <i>tazkiyah</i> (purification of the soul) in the official calendar?	Institutionalized <i>tazkiyah</i> practice
	(2) Spiritual validation procedure	Is spiritual transformation a competency criterion? Is there a recognition of <i>kashf</i> (mystical disclosure or intuitive spiritual unveiling) as a mode of knowing?	Spiritual dimension in the evaluation criteria
	(3) Legitimacy of spiritual transmission	Is <i>barakah</i> (spiritual blessing transmitted through a qualified teacher) a formal component of knowledge transmission? Does <i>kiai</i> authority go beyond textual competence?	<i>Barakah</i> in <i>ijazah/shahadah</i>

Note: 27 operational indicators were developed from the above sub-clusters (9 per dimension), with a score of 0–3 based on the strength of the document evidence.

It is important to emphasize that this framework is used in a descriptive-analytical, not normative manner. The profiles found are not evaluated evaluatively in this article.

### Corpus Document

This article analyzes 50 of the 97 documents; 47 other documents (Pondok Foundation and MA) are used as a reference context. Details of the 50 documents referred to in this study: 21 documents from Ma'had Aly and 29 from IAIT. This difference in number reflects a structurally relevant difference: IAIT as a formal university in the national accreditation system produces more strategic and normative documents (RIP, Renstra, Renop, RPS per study program, SPMI) than Ma'had Aly who operates outside the BAN-PT accreditation system. These differences are recorded as data on institutional architectural differences, not as methodological artifacts. Table 2 presents the document inventory.

**Tabel 2. Document Code Index and Corpus Coverage**

Code range	Institution / analytical unit	N	Main document types	Analytical function
MAT-Doc-01–MAT-Doc-21	Ma'had Aly	21	Institutional profile, statute, academic guidelines, curriculum and <i>RPS</i> , academic calendar, lecturer appointment decree, examination documents, <i>syahadah</i> , <i>Dokumen Bahts</i> as research documentation set, sample scholarly works, accreditation and <i>SPME</i> documents, <i>khidmah</i> documents, and <i>Bahts al-Masā'il</i> -related	Main comparative corpus; included in F.1 scoring

			documents	
IAIT-Doc-01-IAIT-Doc-29	IAIT	29	Curricula and <i>RPS</i> across five study programs, statute, strategic planning documents ( <i>RIP</i> , <i>Renstra</i> , <i>Renop</i> ), organizational and governance documents, academic guidelines, ethics document, lecturer decrees, recruitment instruments, student admission document/test ( <i>PMB</i> ), reporting document ( <i>LPJ</i> ), and student/organizational documents	Main comparative corpus; included in F.1 scoring
FND/MA documents	Pondok Tremas foundation and MA	47	Foundation-level and Madrasah Aliyah documents	Referential context only; not included in comparative F.1 scoring

Note. Document codes cited in the findings section function as internal evidence markers rather than bibliographic citations. MAT-Doc refers to Ma'had Aly documents, whereas IAIT-Doc refers to IAIT documents. The original terms *RPS*, *RIP*, *Renstra*, *Renop*, *SPME*, *LBM*, *PMB*, *SK*, and *LPJ* are retained to preserve the institutional evidence-tracing system. Doc-01 refers to the methodological reference document consisting of the research proposal and F.1 coding framework; it was not counted as part of the 50 institutional documents analyzed in the comparative corpus. Learn more in [Full Institutional Document Inventory](#).

### Analysis Procedure

Five methodological principles are applied consistently. First, the score is only based on traceable documentary evidence, not general knowledge of the pesantren or the researcher's personal observations. Second, the absence of documents is not claimed as the absence of practice. Third, discrepancy between documents is recorded as data on institutional complexity. Fourth, a three-dimensional asymmetric profile is analytical, not a single aggregate score. Fifth, indicators with partial evidence are assessed conservatively (Abdullah, 2012; Latif, 2025a).

Reflexivity and insider positioning. The author is a teaching staff at the institution studied. This engagement is managed through three strategies: (1) all scores are based strictly on third-party traceable and verifiable document evidence; (2) the absence of documents is not compensated by insider knowledge, but is recorded as a gap; and (3) scores that potentially reflect bias are conservatively lowered rather than raised. The discrepancy between written standards and actual practice is deliberately excluded from this analysis, because the object of the analysis is an institutional document, not an actual practice.

### Finding

#### The Epistemic Configuration of Ma'had Aly At-Tarmasi

Ma'had Aly At-Tarmasi is a higher education institution based on *tafaqquh fi al-dīn* under Pondok Tremas, with *Mumtaz* Accreditation (highest accreditation rating) from the Majelis Masyayikh (MAT-Doc-17). Analysis of 21 institutional documents yielded F.1 profiles: *Bayānī* 24.5/27 (90.7%), *burhānī* 16/27 (59.3%), and *'irfānī* 10.5/27 (38.9%).

This profile is an extension of Latif's findings that analyze the *Takhassus Fiqh wa Ushuluhu* program in a single manner (Latif, 2025a). An important difference between the two studies: the previous study analyzed a single program's curricular document and found very high

*burhānī* in that context (M=2.52 on a scale of 3.0) (Latif, 2025a); this article analyzed 21 institutional documents in full and found a more moderate *burhānī* (59.3%) when the overall institutional architecture, including governance, recruitment, and legitimacy documents, was included in the calculations. This difference in itself is an analytical finding: the *burhānī* orientation in Ma'had Aly is stronger in the curricular domain than in the domain of institutional governance.

### **Bayānī: An Open Constitution**

The foundation of the *bayānī* Ma'had Aly is manifested in four mutually reinforcing mechanisms. First, the principle of *al-ḥaqq lā yazūl* (literally 'truth does not perish') as the foundation of the curriculum philosophy, which makes *turats* texts as a reference center in the process of *talaqqī* (direct face-to-face transmission of knowledge from teacher to student), *taḥqīq* (critical verification and authentication of classical texts), and scientific deliberation (MAT-Doc-05). Second, the written provision of a 60% *turats* ratio in the guidelines for writing scientific treatises (MAT-Doc-13). Third, the Code of Ethics of *Lajnah Bahtsul Masail* (Legal Deliberation Committee) which contains the most explicit epistemic statement in the entire corpus: "Convey opinions based on the evidence and references of the book that are *mu'tabar*, not just personal opinions." (MAT-Doc-20). Fourth, the *Syhadah 'Ilmiah* that institutionalizes *sanad* is actively connected to Imam Shaf'i'i through *Kifāyat al-Mustafid* in the formal diploma of each graduate (MAT-Doc-12).

What distinguishes the *bayānī* in Ma'had Aly from the exclusive *burhānī* is the way in which it relates to demonstrative methodology. The statute formulates the principle of *al-muḥāfaẓah 'alā al-qadīm al-ṣāliḥ wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadīd al-aṣlah* (preserve the valid old, adopt the better new; a guiding principle balancing tradition and reform), a formula that explicitly recognizes two poles at once (MAT-Doc-03). *Bayānī* in Ma'had Aly is a constitution that is open to methodology.

### **Burhānī: Two Document Findings**

The two findings in the curriculum document together form an accountable claim about the character of the *burhānī* in Ma'had Aly. The first finding is the official description of the course *Ṭarīqat al-Ḥuṣūl*: "A methodological study of *bayānī-burhānī* reason in *istinbath* logic", which is the only document in the entire corpus that explicitly mentions the relationship between the two epistemic traditions of al-Jabiri as the object of formal study. The second finding is a reference list of Philosophy of Science courses that lists al-Jabiri's *Bunyah al-'Aql al-'Arabī*, a work that criticizes the dominance of *bayānī*, alongside two *Routledge Companions* of contemporary epistemology (MAT-Doc-06-07).

The *Burhānī* dimension is also seen in the recruitment model called *sanad*-based meritocracy: two legitimacies are required at the same time, namely a formal academic S2/S3 degree and a documented Islamic boarding school scientific *sanad* (MAT-Doc-19). The Decree for the Determination of Extraordinary Lecturers confirms this model by listing 11 *Muḥadlir Luar Biasa* (Adjunct/External Lecturers) who have international academic competence as well as

scientific *sanad* (MAT-Doc-09). Further methodological innovations can be seen in the CPL which explicitly lists the ethics of using AI in Islamic studies (MAT-Doc-05).

#### ***ʿIrfānī: Transmission-Formal***

The *ʿirfānī* dimension in Maʿhad Aly (38.9%) is present in three complementary forms: (1) *Syahadah Ilmiah* (formally documents the student's *sanad* lineage) as a formalization of *barakah* transmission (MAT-Doc-12); (2) lectures at *ndalem* (the private residence of the kyai) which are officially scheduled; and (3) *Takhassus Maʿhady* as a unit of scientific manners development outside of formal lectures. The foundations of psychology the curriculum explicitly lists *tazkiyah al-nafs*, *tahdzīb al-akhlāq*, and intrinsic motivation as learning objectives (MAT-Doc-05).

#### **Epistemic Configuration of the Attarmasi Pacitan Institute of Islamic Religion**

IAIT is a formal university in the national accreditation system under the auspices of the Pondok Tremas. Analysis of 29 institutional documents yielded F.1 profiles: *Bayānī* 12.5/27 (46.3%), *burhānī* 19.5/27 (72.2%), and *ʿirfānī* 10/27 (37.0%). This profile is a fairly visible reversal of Maʿhad Aly. But this reversal needs to be read carefully: it does not mean that IAIT abandons the Tremas tradition, but rather expresses the same foundation through a different institutional identity.

#### ***Burhānī: A Declared Institutional Identity***

*Burhānī* at IAIT is not just a profile that emerges from quantitative analysis, it is an identity that is consciously claimed. The academic guidelines define the Integration-Transcendence paradigm as a rejection of the science-religion dichotomy: true knowledge does not have to choose between empirical rationality and spiritual belief (IAIT-Doc-18).

Two *Burhānī* indicators achieved the highest score (3.0): first, cross-disciplinary integration through a curriculum that brings together *turats*, science, philosophy, language, and technology across five study programs; second, openness to innovation, RIP, Strategic Planning, and Renop documents repeatedly encouraged OBE, LMS, and SPMI as strategic programs, which was confirmed in the 2025/2026 Odd Semester LPJ. Additional indicators: rational proof (2.5) through the courses of Philosophy of Science, *Tauhidik* Cosmology, and Integrative-Contextual Islamic Studies in all study programs; and empirical observation (2.0) through MBKM, PPL, and Community Service Lecture programs (IAIT-Doc-07-11).

#### ***Bayānī: From Constitution to Structural Horizon***

The decline in the *bayānī* score from 90.7% (Maʿhad Aly) to 46.3% at IAIT reflects a fundamental change in function. In Maʿhad Aly, *bayānī* is the constitution that organizes the entire epistemic life. At IAIT, it is the horizon, the principle that frames the direction without closing the space for a more autonomous demonstrative rationality.

*Bayānī* as a horizon operates through three mechanisms: (1) *turats* curriculum across study programs (Arabic Integration-*Turats* and *Qirāʿat Kutub Turāthiyyah* across the five study programs) (IAIT-Doc-02-06); (2) The RIP document which affirms that IAIT is rooted in the tradition of the scientific *sanad* of Pondok Tremas (IAIT-Doc-13); and (3) the PMB test which tests Islamic literacy as an epistemic gatekeeping (IAIT-Doc-25).

### ***'Irfānī: Ethics-Transcendental***

The IAIT *'irfānī* profile (37.0%) was the most conservative in the corpus, with four indicators closing conservatively at 0.5. A score of 0.5 is not a statement that the dimension does not exist, it is a statement that the evidence of the available documents is too weak to support a higher score without the risk of overclaiming. *'Irfānī* is most strongly present in three forms: *barakah* and transmission (2.0); spiritual transformation (1.5) required in the Statute (IAIT-Doc-12); and the primacy of spiritual experience (1.5) through the courses of Ethics & Sufism and *Tauhidik* Cosmology across study programs (IAIT-Doc-12; IAIT-Doc-02-06).

### **Comparative Profile**

Table 3 presents a comparative profile of epistemic configurations, and Table 4 presents a comparative synthesis of cross-institutional patterns. Figure 1/figure 1 below visualizes the continuum of configuration across three analytical positions within the Pondok Tremas ecosystem. The two most striking visual patterns are: (a) the *bayānī* line forms a curve with a peak in Ma'had Aly (90.7%) before descending sharply to IAIT (46.3%); and (b) the *'irfānī* line runs almost flat throughout the position (42.6% → 38.9% → 37.0%), illustrating stability in contrast to other two-dimensional fluctuations.

**Table 3. Comparative Profile of Epistemic Configuration F.1**

Dimensions	Pondok Tremas Foundation	Ma'had Aly	IAIT
<i>Bayānī</i>	19,5/27 (72,2%) Constitutive	24,5/27 (90,7%) Integrative	12,5/27 (46,3%) Structural-curricular
<i>Burhānī</i>	11,5/27 (42,6%) Deliberative	16,0/27 (59,3%) Methodological	19,5/27 (72,2%) Institutional identity
<i>'Irfānī</i>	11,5/27 (42,6%) Transmissional-Devotional	10,5/27 (38,9%) Transmission-Formal	10,0/27 (37,0%) Ethics-Transcendental
Profile	<i>Bayānī</i> -Constitutive	<i>Bayānī</i> -Integrative	<i>Burhānī</i> -Integrative

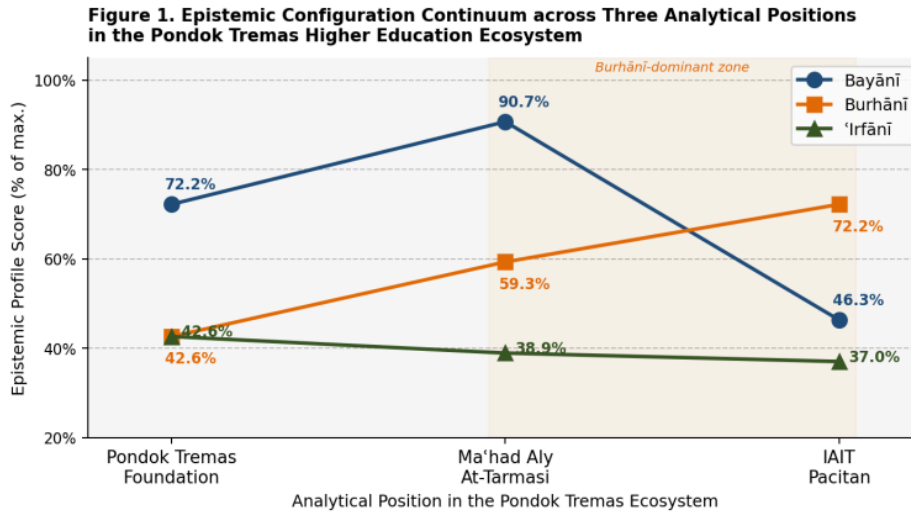
Note: The foundation of Pondok Tremas is a supra-arena, a genealogical layer that houses the two institutions, not an equally comparable arena. Scores are presented as a continuous reference point.

**Tabel 4. Sintesis Komparatif: Pola Lintas Lembaga**

Analytical Dimension	Ma'had Aly	IAIT	Pattern Classification
<i>Bayānī</i> function	The epistemic constitution that organizes the entire scientific life	Structural-curricular horizons that frame without closing demonstrative rationality	Convergence with function divergence
<i>Burhānī</i> quality	Methodological: demonstration in the <i>frame of bayānī</i>	Institutional identity: the organizer of the main curriculum	Strategic divergence
<i>'Irfānī</i> profile	Transmissional-Formal ( <i>syahadah</i> , ndalem, <i>takhassus</i> )	Ethical-Transcendental (IT paradigm, <i>adab</i> , <i>Tauhidik</i> Cosmology)	Strong convergence (37–39%)
<i>Sanad</i> mechanism	Formal-documented ( <i>syahadah ilmiah</i> , recruitment muhadlir)	Structural ( <i>Dwwan</i> <i>Penyantun</i> , interview assessment)	Operational divergence

Recruitment model	<i>Sanad</i> -based meritocracy (S2/S3 + <i>sanad</i> , both are mandatory)	Formal competence + pesantren grades via interview	Divergensi struktural
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Source: Developed from an analysis of 50 institutional documents.



**Figure 1. Epistemic Configuration Continuum across Three Analytical Positions in the Pondok Tremas Higher Education Ecosystem.**

Note. Pondok Tremas Foundation = supra-arena position; scores represent proportion of maximum per dimension (27 points). *'Irfānī* stability (37–43%) contrasts with the sharp *bayānī*–*burhānī* inversion across positions.

## Discussion

### Strategic Divergence, Not Fragmentation: Reading One Ecosystem

The most fundamental finding of this analysis is that two seemingly contrasting profiles, *bayānī*-integrative (Ma'had Aly) and *burhānī*-integrative (IAIT), operate simultaneously in a single ecosystem rooted in a common genealogical foundation. The question that arises is: how can this condition occur without producing fragmentation?

The key to reading this phenomenon is the distinction between strategic divergence and epistemic fragmentation. Fragmentation means that two institutions operate without a common frame of reference, contradicting each other in fundamental epistemic principles. Strategic divergence means that two institutions express the same foundation differently according to different institutional missions, while maintaining connections to the same traditions (Romlah, 2025; Sofī, 2025).

Some document patterns support the reading of strategic divergence. First, the commitment to *bayānī* as an irreplaceable principle is present in both institutions, only the way it operates is

different: the constitution in Ma'had Aly, the horizon in IAIT. None of the 50 documents advocate the exclusion of *turats* as authoritative sources of knowledge. Second, *sanad* operates as a mechanism of legitimacy in both, albeit in different forms: formal *sanad* in the *Syahadah Ilmiah* (Ma'had Aly) versus structural *sanad* via the *Dewan Penyantun* (Board of Patrons/Benefactors) and lecturer recruitment gatekeeping (IAIT). Third, the different missions resulted in different orientations that could be identified documentally: Ma'had Aly was established to deepen the specialization of *tafaqquh fī al-dīn* based on the *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic manuscripts used as primary learning texts in pesantren); IAIT entered the national higher education system with all accreditation requirements and formal scientific standards (Gusman, 2022; Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022).

This pattern is in line with what is called tradition-modernity negotiation structured in the context of pesantren, not surrender to external pressure, but a calculated response (Ma'arif, 2019). Each institution expresses how far *burhānī* is permissible based on its mission without abandoning the foundation of *bayānī* as a principle of common organization. This is consistent with Murdianto's observation about the genealogical dynamics of Indonesian Islamic education: adaptation occurs not through the replacement of old layers, but the addition of new dimensions on top of them (Murdianto, 2021). Ishaq et al. found a similar pattern in Ma'had Aly Situbondo, showing that this pattern is not unique to Pondok Tremas alone (Ishaq et al., 2025).

It should be noted that this reading of strategic divergence is based on the analysis of institutional documents and is an interpretation that invites further verification. The document discloses the institutional intentions; Whether these divergences are perceived and operated as such by the perpetrators is a separate question that can only be answered through ethnographic research.

One critical question that needs to be asked against this reading is: is the so-called 'cohesion of ecosystems' really an epistemic coherence, or is it simply an institutional coordination maintained by a common authority (the Masyayikh Council) and a common genealogy? Al-Jabiri distinguishes between an epistemic system that is internally coherent because its validation principle is consistent, and a system that appears coherent because it is controlled by a single authority. The documents analyzed do not allow the drawing of definitive conclusions about these differences, as affirmed within methodological limitations. However, this question needs to be put as an open agenda, not solved by available data.

#### ***Burhānī* Continuum as a Mission Response**

The mapped *burhānī* continuum, 42.6% (Pondok Foundation) → 59.3% (Ma'had Aly) → 72.2% (IAIT), is not just a quantitative gradation. Each point reflects the characteristics of the *burhānī* categorically: Deliberative (Pondok Foundation), methodological (Ma'had Aly), and institutional identity (IAIT). Figure 1 shows an X-pattern between the *Bayānī* and *Burhānī* lines that visually captures the strategic inversion between the two compared institutions.

In Ma'had Aly, *burhānī* operates as a methodology within the framework of *bayānī*: reason is allowed to demonstrate, yet remain within the framework of textual validation. The *Bahtsul*

*Masail* forum, which discussed the law of marrying humanoid robots with AI technology, wills via telephone in the context of Covid-19, and the treatment of monotheism as attributes of a forbidden organization, were all answered using the hierarchy of *al-naqlu* → *ilhāq* → *istinbāt jamā'ī* (collective legal derivation) (MAT-Doc-20-21). It is *burhānī* that operates within the *bayānī*, not outside of it, it uses demonstrative rationality to reinforce the reach of the textual tradition, not to test it (Ansori, 2022; Hallaq, 2005).

At IAIT, the *burhānī* operates as an identity: it becomes the organizing principle of the curriculum itself, although it is still framed by the paradigm of Integration-Transcendence that does not allow the *burhānī* to escape the transcendental dimension. Academic freedom that is recognized is always framed with the word "the responsible", suggesting that transcendence remains the upper limit (Mufid, 2014; Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020). This pattern is similar to that found by Ishaq et al. in Ma'had Aly Situbondo, in which integrative epistemology operates as an endogenous reform that uses the internal parameters of tradition to guide how far adaptation is allowed (Ishaq et al., 2025).

It is important to note that at all points of the continuum, the *burhānī* never attained full autonomy from *naṣṣ* or transcendence. This is consistent with Rayess's observation that contemporary Islamic epistemology operates in a dialectic between openness to revelation and openness to rationality (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020), as well as Surajudeen's finding that the Islamic intellectual tradition develops a variety of modes of knowledge that cannot be reduced to one universal formula (Surajudeen, 2022).

This continuum also provides context for the differences between the findings of this article. When the corpus includes only the curriculum of the *tafaqquh fī al-dīn* program, *burhānī* appears very high because the program is the arena in which methodological integration is codified most explicitly. When the corpus encompasses the entire institutional architecture including governance and legitimacy documents, the proportion of *burhānī* is more moderate. This is not an inconsistency, but rather a finding about the distribution of epistemic orientations within different layers of institutional architecture.

From a policy perspective, this continuum provides evidence that Islamic higher education institutions need not operate in a binary choice logic between *turats* orientation and formal academic orientation. Nevertheless, this analysis also requires us to ask a more critical question: is the *burhānī* that never achieves full autonomy along the continuum a deliberate epistemic choice, or is it a closure that has never been questioned? El-Fadl warns about the risk of epistemic locking, a condition in which the parameters of knowledge validation are locked to a particular era or authority thus closing the possibility of correction from outside that frame (Abou El Fadl, 2015). The documents analyzed do not show any procedural mechanism that allowed the *burhānī* to question the foundation of the *bayānī* itself, either in Ma'had Aly or in the IAIT. In Ma'had Aly, the 60% *turats* ratio in scientific treatises is a non-negotiable limit. At IAIT, 'responsible academic freedom' is not equipped with a procedure to determine who decides the boundaries of 'responsible' and through what mechanism. This is not a normative assessment

of the agency's choices, but rather a factual record of what was not found in the 50 documents analyzed.

### **Sanad-based meritocracy: A Plotted Pattern**

One of the most distinctive findings of this comparative analysis is the identification of a model *sanad*-based meritocracy in the Ma'had Aly, a model not found in the IAIT document nor the Madrasah Aliyah document in the Tremas ecosystem.

The *sanad*-based meritocracy model assumes that epistemic legitimacy requires two conditions that must be met at the same time: formal academic competence (S2/S3 degrees) and documented scientific *sanad* of the pesantren. It differs from the two models identified in other arenas. Genealogical model (as in Madrasah Aliyah Tremas): genealogy is a prerequisite, competence is complementary. Formal competency model (in the majority of PTKI and IAIT documents): academic competence is the main requirement, the connection of traditions is assessed through subjective assessment. In Ma'had Aly, the two are concurrent prerequisites (Bruinessen 2015; Gusmian, 2022).

From the perspective of institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012), this model represents an attempt to integrate two logics of legitimacy that are often considered to be in competition, academic logic (merit-based based on verified competence) and communal-traditional logic (merit-based on genealogical connectedness), in one concurrent, rather than alternative, system of requirements. In this theory, when two logics operate in a single domain, the result can be conflict, compromise, or stable hybrid integration. The *sanad*-based meritocracy seems to be an example of the latter form: it does not compromise one logic for the sake of another, but rather stipulates that both must be fulfilled at the same time.

The absence of this model at IAIT does not mean that IAIT does not respect genealogical traditions. The connection to the Tremas tradition is maintained through structural channels (Masyayikh orbit Trustee Council) and the assessment of the value of the pesantren in the recruitment of lecturers. The differences are significant: in Ma'had Aly, genealogical connections are explicitly and documented verified; at IAIT, he was assessed through interviews that were subjective assessments. This distinction has implications for how new members of the epistemic community are integrated into existing traditions (Asad, 1993; Goldman, 1999).

This is an analytically interesting recruitment pattern. However, it should be emphasized that claims about their significance in a broader context require more comprehensive cross-institutional verification and that is beyond the scope of this study.

On the other hand, the *sanad*-based meritocracy model also contains structural implications that need to be noted factually. The *sanad* requirement documented as a teaching prerequisite effectively creates access limits for scholars who do not have a pesantren background, regardless of their formal academic competence. These are characteristics that can be noted descriptively without judging them normatively: the system is coherent in its own logic, yet it limits the circulation of knowledge from outside its genealogical ecosystem. Turner notes that both traditionalism and Islamic rationalism, respectively, are not entirely adequate in managing

epistemic differences, precisely because they tend to construct mechanisms that reinforce the boundaries of existing epistemic communities, rather than open dialogue with those outside of them (Turner, 2024). The model of *sanad*-based meritocracy documents appears to be in this pattern.

#### ***ʿIrfānī* as a Frame of Shared Legitimacy**

A fourth analytically significant finding was the stability of the *ʿirfānī* profile in both institutions: 38.9% at Maʿhad Aly and 37.0% at IAIT. This consistency (difference of only 1.9 percentage points) differs sharply from the divergence patterns in *bayānī* (difference of 44.4 points) and *burhānī* (12.9 points). This stability is not a coincidence; it is a consistent pattern across the entire Pondok Tremas ecosystem, including the Pondok Foundation (42.6%) and Madrasah Aliyah (37.0%) in the larger research data. Figure 1 shows this visually: the *ʿIrfānī* line runs almost horizontally in all three positions, different from the other two lines that form a cross.

This *ʿirfānī* stability does not mean that the two institutions have an identical spiritual dimension. It takes a different form: in Maʿhad Aly, *ʿirfānī* is transmissional-formal (*Scientific Shahadah*, lectures in the *ndalem*, *Takhasus Maʿhady*); in IAIT, it is ethical-transcendental (paradigm of Integration-Transcendence, *Tauhidik* Cosmology courses, emphasis on manners in recruitment). Yet the internal asymmetry patterns found in both are identical: the indicators of spiritual teacher authority and *barakah*/transmission are always high, while the indicators of autonomous mystical experience are always low.

This asymmetrical pattern has a deeper meaning than just methodological consistency. He shows that *ʿirfānī* serves as an anchor of the legitimacy of the *bayānī* system, not as an autonomous mystical epistemology. Its function is to answer a fundamental question that *bayānī* alone cannot answer: why is certain chains of transmission more authoritative than others? Without this anchor, the *bayānī* system loses its differentiation from mere arbitrary textual traditions (Al Maʿmun, 2022; Inati, 1998; Surajudeen, 2022).

The implications of this finding go beyond the context of Pondok Tremas. In tradition-based epistemic systems, the spiritual-transmissional dimension does not function as an alternative to the textual or rational dimension, but rather as a foundation of legitimacy that answers questions that neither the *bayānī* nor the *burhānī* themselves can answer. This has implications for the way we understand the resilience of tradition-based institutions in the face of modernization pressures: as long as the anchor of *ʿirfānī* legitimacy remains in operation, tradition has a mechanism of cohesion that goes beyond textual arguments or rational competence alone.

The stability of *ʿirfānī* across two institutions with very different epistemic profiles suggests that this dimension serves as a common language of the Tremas ecosystem, a mechanism that maintains genealogical cohesion even among institutions with different epistemic orientations. This is consistent with the observation of Amril et al. that *ʿirfānī* did not disappear in the era of modernization, but rather transformed from a source of mystical

knowledge to an anchor of transmission legitimacy (Amril et al., 2023). The consistency of this pattern with the findings in Ma'had Aly Situbondo suggests that this may be structural in the tradition of *turats*-based pesantren in Indonesia.

But it was precisely at this point that al-Jabiri raised the sharpest objection. Al-Walid et al. in their study of al-Jabiri's influence on Indonesian Islamic epistemology, note that one of the fundamental weaknesses of al-Jabiri's framework is its antipathy to *'irfānī* as a source of knowledge: al-Jabiri considers *'irfānī* to be an unfalsified epistemology that makes it immune to rational correction (Al Walid et al., 2025). The findings of this study suggest that the pattern of asymmetry of *'irfānī* in both institutions (the authority of the teacher and *barakah* is always high, the autonomous mystical experience is always low) does indeed indicate a controlled *'irfānī*, not an autonomous mystical *'irfānī*. But from al-Jabiri's perspective, it is not enough: as long as epistemic legitimacy depends on *barakah* and transmission authority that cannot be rationally verified, the system has a mechanism for accepting claims that are not transparent to the public intellect. This is not the conclusion that this article offers as a normative evaluation, but as a descriptive note, it needs to be present so that the analysis does not stop at affirmations.

### Rereading Findings Through the Eyes of al-Jabiri

The previous four sub-sections present a mapped pattern of document data. This sub-section uses al-Jabiri not to assess the identified profiles, but to identify structural stresses that are not visible from the data alone, i.e. what operates under the different profiles between the two institutions.

Al-Jabiri argues that the fundamental problem of Arab-Islamic reason is not the absence of *burhānī*, but its inability to operate autonomously, *burhānī* is always present, but always within the frame set by *bayānī* (al-Jabri, 2011). If this claim is confronted with the findings of this article, what emerges is not a simple confirmation, but a nuance: the two institutions manage the same tension: between the need to maintain genealogical legitimacy and the pressure to respond to the demands of contemporary rationality, but with different institutional strategies.

Ma'had Aly managed that tension by strengthening the *bayānī* while integrating the *burhānī* into it: the *sanad* was institutionalized in the *Syahadah Ilmiah*, the 60% *turats* ratio was codified, and the *burhānī* was given space through methodological courses and the *sanad*-based meritocracy model. The remaining tension is that the *burhānī* was never given a mechanism to question the boundaries of *bayānī* itself. IAIT manages the same tension by extending the *burhānī* to the level of institutional identity while maintaining *bayānī* as a genealogical horizon: the Integration-Transcendence paradigm becomes an umbrella, and the connection to Pondok Tremas is maintained through structural, not procedural, channels. The remaining tension is that the limit of "responsible academic freedom" does not have a transparent procedural mechanism in any of the documents analyzed.

In other words, the two profiles are not representations of two opposing epistemic positions, but rather two modes of tension management that are the same and both are institutionally successful within their respective limits. What al-Jabiri's framework reveals is that the tension is not lost; it is managed, reformulated, and in some ways codified but not yet settled.

Whether the settlement is possible, necessary, or even desired by the epistemic community concerned is a question that is beyond the scope of institutional document analysis and requires a different approach.

## Conclusion

This article shows that one common genealogical foundation (Pondok Tremas Pacitan) can produce two epistemic configurations that are profileally different but coherent in an ecosystem. Ma'had Aly At-Tarmasi developed an *bayānī*-integrative profile (*bayānī* 90.7%; *burhānī* ,59.3%; *'irfānī* 38.9%), while the Institut Agama Islam Attarmasi Pacitan developed a *burhānī*-integrative profile (*bayānī* 46.3%; *burhānī*, 72.2%; - 37.0%). These differences, based on an analysis of 50 institutional documents, reflect differentiations that respond to different institutional missions within a single ecosystem rooted in the same tradition.

Four main conclusions can be formulated. First, *bayānī* is an irreplaceable principle present in both institutions, as an epistemic constitution in Ma'had Aly and as a structural-curricular horizon in IAIT, suggesting that commitment to *turats* is not monolithic but can take different forms. Second, the *burhānī* continuum (42.6% → 59.3% → 72.2%) reflects different responses to different institutional missions, with the important note that at all points the *burhānī* never escapes the frame of transcendence. Third, the model of *sanad*-based meritocracy in Ma'had Aly that integrates formal academic legitimacy and genealogical legitimacy as concurrent prerequisites, is a recruitment pattern not found at IAIT in this analysis, with implications for the way epistemic communities are reproduced. Fourth, the stability of *'irfānī* (37–39%) across the two institutions with a sharp *bayānī*-*burhānī* divergence indicates its function as an anchor of mutual legitimacy that maintains ecosystem cohesion.

The theoretical implications of this finding are twofold. At the first level, the categorization of traditional vs. modern or *bayānī* vs. *burhānī* is insufficient to understand the epistemic complexity of contemporary pesantren teachings. A single tradition can produce a diverse spectrum of epistemic expression without losing its genealogical identity. At the second level, these findings suggest that *'irfānī* serves as a cross-profile cohesion mechanism in the pesantren ecosystem, a finding that has implications for how we understand the resilience of tradition-based institutions in the face of modernization pressures.

The methodological contribution of this article is also worth noting. The F.1 framework that operationalizes the al-Jabiri trilogy into 27 document-based empirical indicators shows that institutional epistemic analysis does not have to be speculative or abstract, it can be based on documented, auditable and verifiable evidence. The structured evidence-based document analysis approach used in this study can be applied to other Islamic educational institutions to build a broader comparative base.

The limitations of this article need to be honestly acknowledged. First, the analysis is limited to institutional documents as representations of the epistemic architecture desired by the institution, rather than the pedagogical practices that actually take place in daily interactions. The divergence between institutional intentions and actual practice is a question that can only be

answered through ethnographic research. Second, the findings apply to the context of Pondok Tremas; Transferability to other Islamic boarding schools requires contextual verification by considering the similarity of traditions, missions, and historical contexts. Third, the researcher's insider position, although methodologically managed, is a potential source of bias that readers need to consider.

Further research is suggested to explore three directions. First, ethnographic research to examine whether these differences in epistemic configurations produce different epistemic dispositions in students. Second, a comparative study across pesantren to test whether the patterns found in Pondok Tremas, in particular the stability of *'irfānī* and the *sanad*-based meritocracy model, can be replicated in other pesantren traditions. Third, normative evaluation uses the criteria of classical Islamic epistemology and general epistemology to assess the strengths and limitations of the profiles found, an agenda that is beyond the scope of this descriptive article but is a natural next step in a larger research program.

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