

Epistemic Agent Model for Inclusive Islamic Education in Elementary School

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to formulate an Epistemic Agent Model for inclusive Islamic education at the elementary school level. The challenge of inclusive Islamic education in elementary schools lies in recognizing students as epistemic agents whose voices, experiences, and diverse capacities must be valued in the learning process rather than marginalized by uniform pedagogical models. The concept of the epistemic agent emphasizes the role of teachers and students as active subjects in the construction, negotiation, and dissemination of knowledge, rather than as passive recipients. Within the context of Islamic education, the Epistemic Agent Model integrates Qur'anic values, prophetic pedagogy, and contemporary educational theories to promote inclusivity, justice, and epistemic empowerment in the classroom. Using a qualitative approach through literature review, this research identifies key indicators of epistemic agency: dialogical learning, recognition of diverse voices, integration of local wisdom, and inclusive pedagogy. The findings highlight that inclusive Islamic education requires not only structural and physical support but also epistemic recognition, where every learner is acknowledged as a contributor of knowledge. The proposed model contributes to the development of Islamic education by offering a framework that aligns epistemological justice with pedagogical practice, thereby supporting the broader agenda of Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: elementary school, epistemic agent, inclusive education, Islamic education.

Introduction

Islamic education at the elementary school level plays an important role in shaping the religious, moral, and intellectual foundations of students. However, educational practices in many schools still face fundamental challenges related to how students are positioned in the learning process. The dominant pedagogical approach often centers the authority of knowledge on the teacher, while students are placed as passive recipients of information. A uniform learning model that is often oriented towards memorization means that students' voices, life experiences, and diverse abilities are not given equal space in classroom interactions. In the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society, this condition poses a serious problem for efforts to build Islamic education that is inclusive, humanistic, and responsive to the needs of each student.

Amidst these challenges, the concept of epistemic agency offers a new framework for restructuring the knowledge relationship between teachers and students. Epistemic agency refers to the position of individuals—both teachers and students—as subjects who actively produce, interpret, and give meaning to knowledge. Epistemic agency also known as the capability to evaluate, produce, use and transform knowledge agentially (Nieminen & Ketonen, 2024). This paradigm rejects the assumption that students lack meaningful epistemic capacity, instead affirming that every child brings valuable experiences, questions, and worldviews that can be constructed into sources of learning. Thus, the epistemic agency approach shifts the learning pattern from mere knowledge transfer to dialogue, co-construction of meaning, and active participation of all learners.

In the realm of Islamic education, the idea of epistemic agents actually has a strong theological and ethical foundation. Qur'anic values such as *karamah al-insan* (human dignity), *syura* (consultation), *'adl* (justice), and *rahmah* (compassion) describe human relationships that are mutually respectful, open, and equal. These principles are in line with prophetic pedagogy, which encourages a dialogical, liberating, and empowerment-oriented learning process. The Prophet Muhammad SAW did not only convey knowledge to his companions in a one-way manner, but invited them to discuss, ask questions, provide alternative views, and build understanding collectively. This spirit is an important source of inspiration for the development of a pedagogical model that recognizes students as complete epistemic subjects.

In addition to theological foundations, developments in contemporary educational theory have also made a significant contribution to the formulation of an epistemic agent model for inclusive Islamic education. The perspectives of social constructivism, critical pedagogy, and inclusive education emphasize that students learn through social interaction, reflection on experience, and opportunities to express their opinions freely. Providing space for the diversity of student experiences—whether cognitive, emotional, social, or cultural—is a key requirement for creating an inclusive learning ecosystem. By integrating these principles, Islamic education can move beyond a normative-doctrinal approach towards learning that is more adaptive, deliberative, and relevant to real life.

At the elementary school level, the formation of epistemic agents becomes increasingly important because at this stage children are building basic cognitive structures, social identities, and value orientations that will influence their learning process in the long term. Neglecting students' epistemic capacities can hinder the development of critical thinking skills, self-confidence, and the ability to participate in social dialogue. Conversely, early epistemic empowerment will encourage the growth of a generation that not only understands Islamic teachings textually, but is

also able to interpret and apply them reflectively, creatively, and inclusively in the diversity of everyday life.

Considering these various aspects, this study aims to formulate an Epistemic Agent Model for inclusive Islamic education in elementary schools. This model is expected to integrate the values of the Qur'an, prophetic pedagogical principles, and modern educational theory to produce a more equitable, participatory, and epistemic empowerment-oriented approach for students. Furthermore, this study also aims to identify practical obstacles in the field, offer operational principles, and provide implementable recommendations that can be applied in the classroom context. Thus, Islamic education in elementary schools not only functions as a means of transmitting teachings and values, but also becomes a medium for the formation of critical, empathetic epistemic agents who are able to coexist in a pluralistic society.

Methods

This study used a qualitative approach with a literature review to formulate a model of epistemic agency in inclusive Islamic education in elementary schools. This approach was chosen because the research objectives focused on conceptual analysis, theoretical exploration, and the integration of various scientific findings relevant to the topics of epistemic agency, inclusive pedagogy, and Islamic education. Through the literature review, this study identified patterns, core concepts, and pedagogical principles that served as the foundation for developing the theoretical model.

The data sources in this study are relevant academic literature, namely international and national journal articles that discuss epistemic agency, dialogical learning, inclusive pedagogy, Islamic education, and contemporary learning theories. Data were collected through: (1) identifying literature using systematic searches in databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Scopus, and national journal portals, (2) literature selection was based on inclusion criteria, namely thematic relevance, theoretical contribution, novelty of argumentation, and relevance to research indicators, and (3) data extraction through close reading to identify concepts, models, or findings related to epistemic agents and inclusive Islamic education.

Results

The results of the literature review indicate that inclusive Islamic education at the elementary school level does not solely depend on structural support such as policies, curricula, or the availability of supporting facilities. While these aspects are important, the research findings emphasize that true inclusivity can only be realized if students are viewed and treated as epistemic agents—individuals with

the ability to think, interpret, make sense of, and contribute to the process of knowledge production. In other words, inclusive Islamic education demands epistemic recognition, namely providing space, legitimacy, and respect for the voices, experiences, and diverse knowledge that each student brings.

Thematic analysis shows that this epistemic recognition is manifested through four main indicators that consistently appear in the literature: dialogic learning, respect for diverse student voices, integration of local wisdom, and the application of inclusive pedagogy. First, dialogic learning enables students to engage in meaningful conversations, so that the learning process focuses not only on conveying information but also on negotiating shared meaning. Second, respect for diverse voices requires teachers to open up space for students' diverse life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and ways of thinking, thus making the classroom a more democratic and responsive arena. Third, the integration of local wisdom strengthens the relevance of learning to students' social contexts while demonstrating that knowledge is not singular or centralized. Fourth, inclusive pedagogy emphasizes the importance of adaptive, participatory, and equitable learning strategies for all students, including those with special needs or from socially or epistemically marginalized groups.

The following is a formula for the epistemic agent model that can be applied to basic education to achieve inclusive education.

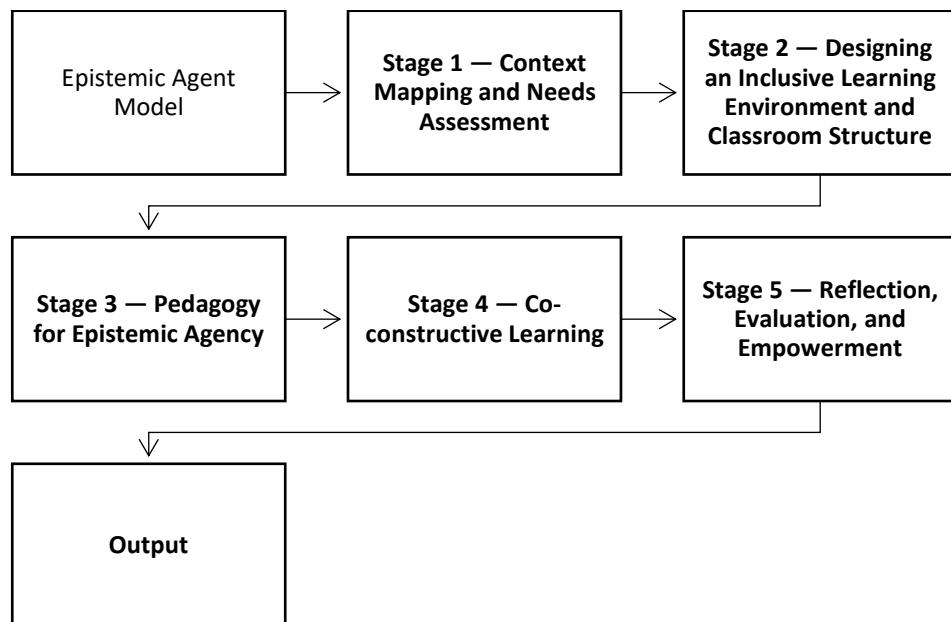


Figure 1 Epistemic Agent Model

Discussion

The Context of Epistemic Agency in Elementary Education

The concept of epistemic agency refers to students' ability to take an active role in the process of constructing knowledge, evaluating information, and participating critically in learning communities. In the context of elementary education, developing epistemic agency is crucial because elementary school children's development is a time for the formation of character, thinking patterns, and social skills (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Children need guidance not only to understand knowledge, but also to produce, process, and apply it.

Stage 1 — Context Mapping and Needs Assessment

The first stage involves mapping the social, cultural, and local contexts of students. Teachers need to understand the diversity of languages, family backgrounds, local traditions, and special needs of students. This context serves as the foundation for inclusive learning. Ladson-Billings (1995) calls it culturally relevant pedagogy, which positions students' cultures as a learning resource. In elementary education, context mapping helps teachers: identify local values that can be integrated, understand students' aspirations and challenges, build a sense of safety and acceptance in the classroom. This contextual approach fosters a sense of belonging, which is a prerequisite for the emergence of epistemic agency.

The primary goal of epistemic agency is to enable students to become autonomous, reflective learners capable of engaging in inclusive dialogue. In Indonesian education, this need aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), which emphasizes independent learning, active engagement, and context-based learning.

Stage 2 — Designing an Inclusive Learning Environment and Classroom Structure

A classroom design that is dialogic, representative, and safe is crucial to the quality of epistemic interactions. The classroom environment should allow all students to voice their opinions without fear of being wrong or ridiculed. Vygotsky (1978) stated that social interaction is the primary driver of cognitive development; therefore, an open learning space encourages the development of critical and collaborative thinking skills. Inclusive classroom design can include: flexible seating arrangements, the use of diversity-based learning media, classroom rules that emphasize respect for differences.

A supportive environment will facilitate students' courage to work autonomously on epistemic tasks. This model is also influenced by the principles of ecopedagogy, critical pedagogy, and multicultural education, which emphasize critical awareness and sensitivity to diversity (Freire, 1970; Gadotti, 2010).

Stage 3 — Pedagogy for Epistemic Agency

The core stage of the model includes four main strategies: 1) Dialogical learning; Dialogical learning positions students as those entitled to ask questions, provide arguments, and evaluate the ideas of others. Freire (1970) emphasized that education must enable students to become subjects of dialogue, not objects of instruction. 2) Recognition of Diverse; Voices Recognition of diverse voices encompasses not only ethnic, religious, or linguistic diversity, but also differences in ways of thinking. Banks (2009) explains that multicultural education must provide space for each group to participate in the construction of knowledge. 3) Local Wisdom Integration; The integration of local wisdom strengthens the relevance of learning. UNESCO (2019) identifies local wisdom as an important epistemic resource for sustainable education, including the values of mutual cooperation, tolerance, and harmony with nature. 4) Inclusive Pedagogy; Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) state that inclusive pedagogy is not about tailoring learning to specific students, but rather about designing activities that are accessible to all students from the start (design for all learners).

All of these strategies strengthen students' positions as epistemic agents capable of critically and inclusively assessing, producing, and disseminating knowledge.

Stage 4 — Co-constructive Learning

Co-constructive learning allows teachers and students to work as partners. The teacher acts as a facilitator, while students act as meaning-builders. This model draws on the theory of social constructivism, where knowledge is constructed through interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Palincsar, 1998). Activities that support this stage include: group discussions, collaborative projects, peer teaching, problem-based inquiry. Through co-construction, students learn to negotiate meaning and exercise epistemic responsibility.

Stage 5 — Reflection, Evaluation, and Empowerment

Reflection helps students understand their own thinking processes (metacognition). According to Schraw & Dennison (1994), metacognition enhances independent learning and the quality of epistemic decision-making. Evaluation focuses not only on outcomes but also on processes, for example through: portfolios, reflective journals, two-way feedback. This stage culminates in empowerment, which empowers students to feel capable and entitled to participate in the investigation of knowledge. Empowerment is the core of epistemic agency.

Conclusion

This research confirms that developing inclusive Islamic education at the elementary school level requires an approach that relies not only on structural improvements but also on epistemological transformation. Through the framework of epistemic agency, students are understood as subjects of knowledge with the capacity to interpret, participate, and contribute to the process of constructing knowledge, rather than simply recipients of curriculum content. Recognition of students' epistemic roles is the foundation for creating equitable, participatory, and diversity-sensitive learning.

The Epistemic Agency Model proposed in this research demonstrates that dialogic learning, recognition of diverse voices, integration of local wisdom, and inclusive pedagogy are four key pillars that can strengthen the inclusivity of Islamic education. These four pillars are not only aligned with Quranic values and the prophetic education paradigm but also correspond to contemporary educational theories that emphasize classroom democratization and learner empowerment. Thus, this model offers a comprehensive conceptual framework for connecting Islamic educational values with more epistemologically just pedagogical practices.

In addition to contributing to the body of knowledge in Islamic education, this model also has strategic relevance to global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 on quality and inclusive education. Strengthening students' epistemic agency has direct implications for creating a more dialogical and humanistic school ecosystem, capable of nurturing a critical generation prepared to live in a pluralistic society.

Overall, this study concludes that inclusive Islamic education requires a paradigm shift from a transmissionist pedagogy to a dialogical, reflective, and participatory pedagogy. The Epistemic Agency Model serves as a conceptual framework to support this transformation, while also providing a foundation for further research and educational practices that are more responsive to the needs of students in elementary schools.

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