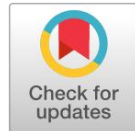


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The Epistemological Basis Of The Heart As An Instrument Of Science From The Perspective Of The Qur'an And Tasawuf

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ABSTRACT

Background. Modern epistemology often emphasizes rationality and empirical observation as the primary foundations of knowledge, whereas Islamic epistemology recognizes additional dimensions of knowing that involve spiritual and transcendental faculties. Within this framework, the qalb (heart) occupies an important position as a means of apprehending realities that cannot be fully reached through reason and sensory experience alone.

Purpose. This study aims to examine the epistemological foundations of the qalb as an instrument of knowledge from the perspective of the Qur'an through the maudhu'i (thematic exegesis) paradigm, complemented by the thoughts of prominent Sufi scholars, particularly Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi.

Method. This study employs a qualitative-philosophical approach based on library research. Qur'anic verses related to the qalb, knowledge, understanding, and spiritual awareness are examined thematically and interpreted in relation to relevant concepts developed in classical Sufi thought. The analysis focuses on identifying the epistemological function of the qalb and its relationship with rational, spiritual, and transcendental dimensions of knowledge.

Results. The findings demonstrate that, from a Qur'anic perspective, the qalb is not merely associated with emotion but also functions as an epistemological faculty capable of understanding, reflecting, and apprehending spiritual and transcendent realities.

Conclusion. The study concludes that the qalb constitutes an important epistemological instrument in Islam that complements rational and empirical faculties. Its integration into Islamic epistemology provides a holistic framework that unites intellectual, spiritual, and transcendental dimensions in the pursuit of knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, is one of the important fields in Islamic philosophy. Unlike Western epistemology, which predominantly relies on rationalism and empiricism, Islamic epistemology integrates other sources of knowledge such as intuition, the qalb (heart),



and revelation (Elashry dkk., 2026; Taha Thomure dkk., 2025). This indicates that Islam possesses a broader perspective on how human beings acquire knowledge and truth.

The discourse on knowledge occupies a central position in the intellectual tradition of Islam because knowledge is closely connected with the understanding of human existence, religious responsibility, and the relationship between human beings and God. Islamic epistemology does not regard knowledge merely as the accumulation of information or the product of rational and empirical investigation (Aditia & Széll, 2025; Sariyar, 2026). Rather, knowledge encompasses various dimensions of human existence, including reason, sensory perception, revelation, intuition, and spiritual consciousness. Within this comprehensive epistemological framework, the qalb (heart) occupies a distinctive position. In Islam, the qalb is not merely understood as the center of emotions and feelings, but also as an inner faculty through which human beings understand truth, receive divine guidance, develop faith, and attain spiritual awareness. This understanding distinguishes the Islamic conception of knowledge from epistemological frameworks that restrict valid knowledge primarily to rational deduction and empirical verification.

The Qur'an repeatedly presents the qalb as a faculty associated with cognition, understanding, faith, reflection, and moral discernment. One of the most significant Qur'anic indications can be found in Qur'an 22:46, which refers to hearts by which human beings may understand (Moufakkir, 2026; O'Donohue, 2027). This formulation demonstrates that the Qur'anic concept of cognition cannot be reduced exclusively to the intellectual activity of the brain or abstract rational reasoning. Similarly, Qur'an 7:179 describes people who possess hearts but do not use them to understand, indicating that the failure of the qalb to function properly may result in epistemological as well as spiritual blindness. These verses imply that the qalb has an important cognitive dimension: it enables human beings not only to recognize observable realities but also to interpret the deeper meanings underlying existence (Choudhary dkk., 2025; Hu & Iqbal, 2026). The Qur'anic conception of the heart therefore provides an important foundation for examining the possibility of a specifically Islamic epistemology in which knowledge involves an interaction between intellectual, ethical, and spiritual faculties.

The epistemological significance of the qalb becomes even clearer when the Qur'an associates the condition of the heart with a person's ability to receive truth. The Qur'an speaks of a healthy or sound heart (qalb salim), a diseased heart (qalb marid), a hardened heart, a tranquil heart, and a heart that becomes receptive to faith and divine remembrance (Abadi, 2026; Raimi, 2026). These different states suggest that the ability to know cannot be separated entirely from the moral and spiritual condition of the knowing subject. Qur'an 26:88–89, for instance, emphasizes that neither wealth nor children will ultimately benefit a person except one who comes before Allah with a sound heart. In this perspective, the qalb functions not only as a locus of belief but also as a determinant of the quality of human perception and understanding. Knowledge in the Qur'anic worldview is consequently linked with the transformation of the subject who knows, rather than being regarded as an entirely neutral or value-free intellectual process.

This epistemological perspective challenges the sharp separation between knowledge and spirituality that often characterizes modern discussions of epistemology (Ameraldo dkk., 2026; Yilmaz, 2024). Modern scientific development has produced extraordinary achievements through observation, experimentation, mathematical reasoning, and systematic verification. Nevertheless, a purely empirical and rational epistemology encounters limitations when dealing with metaphysical questions, religious experience, moral meaning, ultimate purpose, and the human relationship with transcendence. Questions concerning God, revelation, spiritual experience, and the purpose of existence cannot always be adequately addressed through sensory observation alone. Islamic

epistemology does not necessarily reject empirical or rational modes of knowing; instead, it places them within a broader hierarchy of knowledge in which revelation and spiritual perception also have significant roles (D'Agostino & Asadullah, 2025; Sholihin & Annisa, 2024). The qalb, in this sense, may serve as a conceptual bridge connecting rational inquiry with the spiritual and transcendental dimensions of reality.

Understanding the qalb as an epistemological faculty also requires attention to the relationship between the heart and reason in Islamic thought (Firhath, 2026; Mulla & Coupe, 2026). A common assumption is that reason belongs exclusively to the intellect while the heart represents emotion and subjective feeling. Such a dichotomy does not fully correspond to the conceptual structure found in the Qur'an. Several Qur'anic expressions associate understanding, reflection, and comprehension directly with the heart, suggesting a more integrated anthropology of knowledge. The qalb is capable of interacting with reason rather than simply opposing it. Human knowledge can therefore be understood as emerging from the harmonious operation of sensory experience, rational reflection, revelation, and purified spiritual perception. From this perspective, the Islamic theory of knowledge does not demand the abandonment of rationality but seeks to prevent reason from becoming detached from ethical responsibility and spiritual orientation.

The discussion of the qalb reaches a particularly sophisticated level within the intellectual and spiritual tradition of Sufism. Sufism emphasizes the purification of the inner self as a fundamental prerequisite for attaining deeper knowledge of reality (Anwar dkk., 2026; Surjanto, 2026). The problem of knowledge, according to many Sufi scholars, is not simply a lack of information but also the presence of spiritual obstacles that prevent human beings from perceiving truth accurately. Pride, greed, envy, attachment to worldly desires, excessive self-interest, and other spiritual diseases may obscure the heart and distort human judgment. Consequently, the purification of the qalb (tazkiyat al-qalb) becomes an epistemological process as well as a moral and spiritual discipline. Through repentance, remembrance of God, self-examination, worship, and ethical discipline, the heart is gradually prepared to receive deeper insight into divine realities.

Among the major Muslim scholars who developed the concept of the heart in relation to knowledge, Imam Al-Ghazali occupies a particularly important position. His writings consistently emphasize the centrality of the qalb in human spiritual and intellectual life (Aljohani, 2026; Irham, 2026). In Minhaj al-'Abidin, the heart is described metaphorically as a king who is followed and a leader who is obeyed, illustrating the determining influence of the inner condition upon human actions and orientations. In his broader intellectual project, Al-Ghazali distinguishes between knowledge obtained through ordinary learning and deeper forms of knowledge associated with spiritual realization. For him, the purification of the heart is essential because divine truths cannot be apprehended properly by a heart dominated by worldly attachments and moral corruption. His epistemological framework therefore connects the acquisition of knowledge with ethical transformation, demonstrating that knowing the truth requires not only intellectual competence but also spiritual readiness.

Al-Ghazali's conception of the qalb is significant because it does not advocate an irrational form of spirituality. His intellectual journey demonstrates serious engagement with jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, logic, and Sufism. Rather than rejecting rational knowledge, he identifies the boundaries of rational inquiry and argues that certain dimensions of religious knowledge require spiritual experience and divine illumination (Rosemary dkk., 2026; Sofyan dkk., 2026). The qalb thus becomes the locus in which rational understanding, revelation, moral consciousness, and spiritual experience can converge. This perspective is relevant to contemporary epistemological debates because it provides an alternative to both extreme rationalism and forms of spirituality that

disregard intellectual discipline. Within Al-Ghazali's thought, authentic knowledge demands a balanced relationship between intellectual investigation and the purification of the knowing subject.

A further development of the epistemological role of the heart can be observed in the thought of Ibn Arabi. His mystical philosophy places considerable emphasis on the capacity of the human heart to receive and reflect diverse manifestations of divine reality. For Ibn Arabi, knowledge of ultimate reality cannot be fully attained through discursive reasoning because divine reality exceeds the limitations of conceptual categories. The heart possesses a dynamic capacity to receive spiritual disclosure (*kashf*) and divine manifestation (*tajalli*), enabling the knower to apprehend realities beyond the limits of ordinary sensory perception. This does not imply that every subjective experience constitutes valid knowledge. Rather, Sufi epistemology generally emphasizes spiritual discipline, conformity with revelation, and purification of the self as conditions for authentic spiritual realization. Ibn Arabi's thought therefore expands the discussion of the *qalb* from a moral and religious faculty into a sophisticated epistemological concept related to the human capacity to encounter transcendent reality.

Despite the important position of the *qalb* in the Qur'an and the extensive discussion of spiritual knowledge within the Sufi tradition, contemporary studies of Islamic epistemology frequently place greater emphasis on the relationship between revelation and reason than on the epistemological status of the heart itself. Discussions often focus on the compatibility between Islam and science, the classification of knowledge, the relationship between rational and transmitted sciences, or the Islamization and integration of knowledge. These themes remain important, but they may leave insufficient attention to the anthropological question of the faculty through which human beings receive and interpret knowledge. The epistemological function of the *qalb* is particularly important because it introduces the moral and spiritual condition of the knower into the structure of knowledge. Examining this dimension can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic epistemology and prevent it from being reduced merely to the integration of religious propositions with modern scientific disciplines.

A thematic Qur'anic approach (*tafsir maudhu'i*) provides an appropriate methodological framework for investigating this issue because the concept of the *qalb* appears in different Qur'anic contexts and carries interconnected epistemological, theological, ethical, and spiritual meanings. Instead of interpreting a single verse in isolation, the thematic approach enables relevant verses to be collected, classified, and analyzed according to their conceptual relationships. References to hearts that understand, hearts that become hardened, hearts affected by disease, hearts strengthened by faith, and sound hearts can thus be understood as components of a broader Qur'anic anthropology. When these Qur'anic insights are placed in dialogue with the intellectual contributions of Sufi thinkers such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi, a richer epistemological framework emerges. Such an approach also helps distinguish the Qur'anic foundations of the concept from later theoretical elaborations developed within the Sufi tradition.

The present study therefore examines the epistemological foundation of the *qalb* as an instrument of knowledge from the perspectives of the Qur'an and Sufism. It specifically seeks to identify the Qur'anic characteristics and functions of the *qalb*, analyze its capacity as a faculty of understanding and spiritual perception, and explore how Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi elaborate its role in the attainment of deeper and transcendent knowledge. The novelty of this study lies in positioning the *qalb* not merely as an object of ethical or mystical discussion but as a central category within the construction of Islamic epistemology. By integrating Qur'anic thematic analysis with selected Sufi perspectives, this study argues for an epistemological model in which sensory perception, rational inquiry, revelation, and spiritual purification operate in a complementary

relationship. Such a framework is expected to contribute to contemporary discussions on Islamic knowledge by reaffirming that the pursuit of truth involves not only the development of intellectual capacities but also the formation and purification of the human inner self.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a philosophical and interpretive orientation based on library research (Alam dkk., 2025; Bonang dkk., 2026). The primary data consist of Qur’anic verses related to the *qalb*, understanding, faith, spiritual awareness, guidance, and inner perception, as well as selected works of Imam Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi that discuss the heart as an instrument of spiritual knowledge. Secondary data are obtained from classical and contemporary Qur’anic commentaries, books, journal articles, and other scholarly works related to Islamic epistemology, Sufism, and the concept of the *qalb*.

The Qur’anic data are analyzed using the *tafsir maudhu’i* (thematic exegesis) method. Relevant verses are identified, collected, classified according to their themes, and interpreted in relation to their linguistic, contextual, theological, and epistemological meanings (Çağlayan & Taner Derman, 2025; Qorib, 2025). Particular attention is given to verses that present the *qalb* as a faculty of understanding, reflection, faith, and spiritual perception. These findings are then examined alongside the thoughts of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi to identify similarities, developments, and distinctive characteristics in their explanations of the role of the heart in attaining knowledge and *ma’rifatullah*.

The data analysis is carried out through descriptive, interpretive, and comparative analysis. The descriptive stage identifies the main characteristics and functions of the *qalb*, while the interpretive stage examines its epistemological significance within the Islamic theory of knowledge. The comparative stage places Qur’anic concepts in dialogue with Sufi perspectives in order to construct a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the *qalb*, reason, revelation, and spiritual experience. The credibility of the analysis is strengthened through source comparison and careful contextual interpretation of the primary and secondary literature.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Qur’anic verses and selected Sufi perspectives reveals that the *qalb* occupies a multidimensional position within Islamic epistemology. The Qur’anic data indicate that the *qalb* is associated not only with emotional and spiritual states but also with understanding, faith, moral discernment, and the reception of guidance. The thematic reading of the selected verses further demonstrates that the epistemological function of the *qalb* cannot be separated from its spiritual and ethical condition. Sufi thought, particularly that of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi, develops this Qur’anic foundation by emphasizing purification of the heart as a prerequisite for obtaining deeper spiritual knowledge. These findings can be summarized as follows.

Table 1. Epistemological Functions of the *Qalb* in the Qur’an and Sufi Thought

Dimension	Main Source/Concept	Function of the <i>Qalb</i>	Epistemological Implication
Cognitive	QS. Al-Hajj [22]: 46	Understanding and comprehending truth	The <i>qalb</i> functions as a faculty of cognition, not merely emotion
Spiritual	QS. Al-Fath [48]: 4	Receiving tranquility and strengthening faith	Spiritual receptivity influences the process of knowing
Moral	QS. Al-Shu‘ara [26]:	Becoming a <i>qalb salim</i>	Authentic knowledge is related

	88–89	(sound heart)	to moral and spiritual purity
Interpretive-reflective	QS. Al-Hajj [22]: 46 and exegetical interpretations	Reflecting upon history, reality, and divine signs	Empirical observation requires inner reflection to reach deeper meaning
Purificatory	Al-Ghazali	Purification of the heart from spiritual diseases	The validity of spiritual knowledge is related to the condition of the knower
Illuminative	Al-Ghazali	Receiving <i>nur ilahi</i> and <i>ma'rifah</i>	Knowledge may involve illumination beyond discursive reasoning
Intuitive-spiritual	Ibn Arabi	Receiving <i>kashf</i> and divine manifestation	A purified heart may apprehend transcendent dimensions of reality
Integrative	Qur'an and Sufism	Connecting reason, revelation, morality, and spirituality	Islamic epistemology operates through complementary instruments of knowledge

The table demonstrates three foundational Qur'anic functions of the *qalb*: epistemological, spiritual, and moral. The Qur'an presents the heart as capable of understanding, receiving faith, and determining the moral quality of human beings. These dimensions indicate that knowing, believing, and acting cannot be completely separated within the Qur'anic worldview. The Sufi tradition subsequently develops these dimensions into a more systematic spiritual epistemology in which purification of the *qalb* enables deeper forms of understanding.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that the Qur'an attributes a cognitive function to the *qalb*. Surah Al-Hajj [22]: 46 associates the heart explicitly with the ability to understand, while describing the failure to recognize truth as the "blindness" of the hearts within the breasts. This formulation is epistemologically important because it challenges the assumption that knowledge in Islam is produced exclusively through rational reasoning or sensory perception. The verse does not negate the senses or reason, but indicates that outward perception requires an inner faculty capable of apprehending the meaning of what is perceived.

The interpretations of Ibn Kathir, Al-Maraghi, and M. Quraish Shihab reinforce this understanding from different perspectives. Ibn Kathir connects "blindness of the heart" with an inability to accept truth despite the presence of sufficient evidence, indicating that epistemological failure can arise from arrogance and spiritual resistance rather than a lack of intellectual capacity. Al-Maraghi places greater emphasis on the relationship between observation and spiritual understanding; studying history and natural phenomena provides knowledge, but such knowledge requires an enlightened heart in order to generate wisdom. Quraish Shihab similarly interprets the verse as an integration of rational reflection and inner consciousness, arguing that a hardened heart may prevent a person from recognizing the moral and spiritual meaning behind empirical reality.

These interpretations reveal an important characteristic of Qur'anic epistemology: knowledge is influenced not only by the availability of evidence but also by the condition of the knowing subject. A person may possess sensory information and rational ability while remaining incapable of recognizing the ethical or spiritual implications of that information. The concept of "blindness of the heart" therefore represents an epistemological limitation caused by an internal condition.

Knowledge, from this perspective, involves more than possessing factual information; it also involves the capacity to recognize meaning, value, and truth.

This finding should not, however, be interpreted as meaning that the *qalb* replaces reason. A more defensible interpretation is that the *qalb* functions together with rational and sensory faculties. The Qur'anic invitation to travel through the earth, observe previous civilizations, and understand their fate demonstrates the importance of empirical experience and historical reflection. The epistemological role of the *qalb* lies in transforming such observations into meaningful understanding. Consequently, the Qur'anic model is integrative rather than oppositional: the senses provide access to observable reality, reason analyzes it, while the *qalb* enables the human being to perceive its deeper ethical and spiritual significance.

The second major finding concerns the close relationship between purification of the *qalb* and the attainment of knowledge in Sufi epistemology. Within Sufism, the heart is understood as the center of spiritual consciousness and is cultivated through worship, *dhikr*, *mujahadah*, and other forms of spiritual discipline. This perspective implies that certain forms of knowledge cannot be separated from the transformation of the knower. The epistemological process therefore involves not only intellectual training but also ethical and spiritual purification.

Al-Ghazali provides a particularly systematic formulation of this perspective. His understanding distinguishes between the physical heart and the spiritual *qalb*. The physical heart is a bodily organ, whereas the spiritual heart refers to the subtle human faculty capable of knowing and comprehending. The source material also associates the *qalb* with *al-fu'ad* and with the intellectual faculty of *'aql*, showing that classical Islamic terminology does not rigidly separate cognition, inner awareness, and spirituality. This distinction is crucial because the epistemological discussion of the *qalb* concerns primarily its spiritual and cognitive dimensions, not its physiological function.

A significant contribution of Al-Ghazali lies in his analogy of the heart as a king whose condition determines the conduct of the rest of the human being. In *Minhaj al-'Abidin*, the heart is described as the center of divine attention, a leader followed by the bodily members, and a treasury containing reason, aspiration, *ma'rifatullah*, and spiritual insight. The analogy implies that the heart performs both epistemic and ethical functions. When the heart is purified, perception, judgment, and action are directed toward truth; when it is corrupted by uncontrolled desires and spiritual diseases, the same faculties can become distorted.

This conception introduces an important epistemological principle: the moral character of the knower may influence the process of knowing. Modern epistemological frameworks often emphasize procedures, evidence, and logical consistency, whereas Al-Ghazali adds the spiritual integrity of the subject as an important dimension. This does not imply that personal piety alone guarantees factual correctness. Rather, in the context of spiritual and metaphysical knowledge, Al-Ghazali maintains that arrogance, excessive desire, and attachment to worldly interests can obstruct receptivity to truth. Purification of the *qalb* therefore serves as epistemic preparation for *ma'rifah*, rather than as a replacement for reason or revelation.

The findings also indicate that Ibn Arabi expands the concept of the *qalb* toward a more explicitly mystical epistemology. In the source material, Ibn Arabi associates the purified heart with the capacity to reflect divine reality and receive divine knowledge. Within this framework, the *qalb* is characterized by receptivity. Its epistemological importance does not arise merely from analytical reasoning but from its capacity to receive spiritual disclosure and perceive levels of reality inaccessible to ordinary sensory experience.

This perspective can be understood in relation to the Sufi classification of certainty into *'ilm al-yaqin*, *'ayn al-yaqin*, and *haqq al-yaqin*. The first refers to certainty based on knowledge or reliable information, the second to certainty strengthened by direct witnessing, and the third to the deepest experiential realization of truth. These categories illustrate an epistemological progression from propositional knowledge toward experiential certainty. They suggest that Islamic spiritual epistemology recognizes differences not only in the objects of knowledge but also in the degree and mode through which certainty is attained.

However, spiritual experience should not automatically be equated with universally verifiable knowledge. This distinction is necessary to maintain epistemological rigor. Mystical experience is deeply significant within the experiential framework of Sufism, but its claims require interpretation within revelation and the established intellectual tradition of Islam. Thus, the contribution of Ibn Arabi is better understood as expanding the range of epistemological experience rather than eliminating rational and revelatory standards. In this sense, the *qalb* functions as a receptive spiritual faculty operating within an epistemological hierarchy rather than as an unrestricted source of subjective truth.

The analysis further demonstrates that Islamic epistemology cannot adequately be represented through a binary opposition between reason and spirituality. The material examined in this study presents reason, the *qalb*, and revelation as complementary rather than mutually exclusive sources or instruments within the process of knowing. Reason provides analytical and conceptual understanding; sensory experience supplies empirical information; the *qalb* facilitates moral, intuitive, and spiritual apprehension; while revelation provides authoritative guidance concerning realities that exceed the independent reach of human faculties. The source material explicitly formulates this relationship by positioning rational knowledge, intuitive-spiritual knowledge, and revelation within a holistic epistemological structure.

Table 2. Integration of the Sources and Instruments of Knowledge in Islamic Epistemology

Epistemological Element	Primary Function	Type of Knowledge	Potential Limitation When Isolated
Senses	Observing empirical reality	Empirical knowledge	Limited to observable phenomena
Reason (<i>'aql</i>)	Analysis, abstraction, and logical reasoning	Rational-conceptual knowledge	Cannot independently encompass all transcendent realities
<i>Qalb</i>	Inner understanding, moral discernment, and spiritual perception	Intuitive-spiritual knowledge	Vulnerable to desire and spiritual impurities when not purified
Revelation (<i>wahy</i>)	Providing divine guidance and transcendent truth	Revealed knowledge	Requires interpretation and human understanding in its application
Integrated approach	Harmonizing empirical, rational, spiritual, and revelatory dimensions	Holistic knowledge	Requires methodological balance among the different faculties

The integrated model presented in Table 2 avoids two epistemological extremes. The first is reductionism, which recognizes only empirical and rational forms of knowledge. The second is uncritical spiritualism, which may treat every inner experience as epistemically authoritative. The

Qur'anic-Sufi framework examined in this study provides an alternative by acknowledging the legitimacy of rational investigation while simultaneously affirming that human beings possess spiritual capacities requiring moral cultivation and guidance from revelation.

This synthesis also allows for a more precise distinction between sources of knowledge and instruments of knowledge. Revelation may appropriately be regarded as a source of divine knowledge, whereas reason, senses, and the qalb function primarily as human faculties through which knowledge is received, interpreted, and understood. Therefore, describing the qalb simply as an independent "source of knowledge" may be conceptually imprecise. It is more accurate to describe it as an epistemological faculty or instrument capable of apprehending moral and spiritual dimensions of reality, particularly when it has been purified and remains oriented toward revelation. This distinction strengthens the conceptual consistency of Islamic epistemology.

The epistemology of the qalb has significant relevance to contemporary intellectual and educational contexts (Ahmed, 2026; Bavlı & Özdemir, 2025; Suranta dkk., 2026). The source material identifies education, science and technology, and social life as three areas in which the concept may contribute to balancing intellectual development with spirituality and morality. In education, this perspective implies that the formation of knowledgeable individuals should not be limited to cognitive achievement. Education must also cultivate ethical awareness, spiritual responsibility, and the capacity to use knowledge for beneficial purposes.

In science and technology, the role of the qalb can be framed as an ethical and transcendental orientation rather than as an alternative to scientific methodology (BaHammam, 2026; Ercanbrack & Ali, 2024; Tarip, 2024). Scientific claims remain dependent on evidence, observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. The epistemology of the qalb contributes at a different level by addressing questions concerning the purpose, ethical direction, and responsible use of scientific knowledge. This distinction is important because integrating spirituality into science should not mean replacing scientific evidence with subjective intuition. Instead, it provides an ethical framework through which scientific achievements can be evaluated in relation to human dignity, responsibility, and broader purposes.

In social life, purification of the qalb also has implications for human relationships. A heart dominated by arrogance, greed, hatred, and uncontrolled desire may influence not only individual spirituality but also social behavior. Conversely, a purified heart is expected to produce justice, compassion, honesty, humility, and responsibility (Akbar, 2026; Al-Kandari dkk., 2025). The epistemology of the qalb therefore connects knowledge with moral action. Knowledge is not considered complete merely because something is intellectually understood; its value becomes evident when understanding contributes to virtuous conduct.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the qalb occupies a central but complementary position in Islamic epistemology. The Qur'an presents it as a faculty capable of understanding, receiving faith, and developing moral consciousness, while Sufi thinkers elaborate its role through the concepts of purification, spiritual illumination, and ma'rifah. Al-Ghazali emphasizes purification of the knowing subject, whereas Ibn Arabi highlights the receptive and experiential capacity of the heart in encountering transcendent reality. These perspectives converge on the principle that authentic knowledge involves more than the accumulation of rational or empirical information. Islamic epistemology therefore emerges as an integrated structure in which sensory perception, reason, revelation, morality, and the purified qalb contribute to different yet interconnected dimensions of human knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the *qalb* occupies an important epistemological position in Islamic thought. From the Qur'anic perspective, the *qalb* is not merely associated with emotions, but also functions as a faculty of understanding, faith, moral discernment, and spiritual awareness. The analysis of relevant Qur'anic verses shows that the ability to recognize truth is influenced not only by sensory and rational capacities, but also by the spiritual condition of the heart. Therefore, the *qalb* may be understood as an epistemological instrument that complements reason and the senses in apprehending the deeper moral and transcendental dimensions of reality.

The perspectives of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi further strengthen this understanding by emphasizing purification of the *qalb* as a prerequisite for attaining deeper knowledge. Al-Ghazali highlights the heart as the center of spiritual consciousness, moral orientation, and *ma'rifah*, while Ibn Arabi emphasizes its receptive capacity toward *kashf*, *tajalli*, and experiential knowledge of transcendent reality. These perspectives indicate that Islamic epistemology does not separate knowledge from the ethical and spiritual quality of the knower. Rather, authentic knowledge requires an integration of intellectual inquiry, revelation, spiritual discipline, and purification of the inner self.

The main contribution of this study lies in positioning the *qalb* as a central epistemological faculty within an integrated Islamic theory of knowledge. This framework offers an alternative to epistemological models that reduce knowledge solely to rational or empirical processes, while also avoiding an uncritical dependence on subjective spiritual experience. The study remains limited to a thematic reading of selected Qur'anic verses and the thoughts of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi; therefore, further research may compare the concept of the *qalb* across broader Islamic philosophical, theological, and Sufi traditions, as well as explore its relevance to contemporary education, ethics, and the development of knowledge.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language refinement, grammatical correction, academic phrasing, and improving the clarity and organization of the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed, verified, and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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