

Islamic Religious Education Students' Perceptions of the Origin of Humans, the Creation of the Universe, and the Shape of the Earth from the Perspective of Science and Islam

Harun Harosid

Universitas Islam KH Ruhiat Cipasung
E-mail: harosid2002@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the perceptions of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students on three main issues that are the subject of debate between science and religion: the origins of humans, the creation of the universe, and the shape of the earth. Using a quantitative method with a descriptive approach, this study involved 70 new students of the PAI Study Program at KH. Ruhiat Cipasung Islamic University, Tasikmalaya Regency, who were selected purposively. The instrument used was a closed-ended Likert-scale questionnaire, with descriptive statistics as the data analysis technique. The results showed that all respondents believed that Prophet Adam was the first human, although 12.9% of them were open to the possibility of integration with the theory of evolution. As many as 75.7% stated that the Big Bang theory does not contradict the concept of creation in the Qur'an, while 90% believed the shape of the earth is spherical, in accordance with a non-literal interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an. These findings indicate an integrative and moderate tendency among PAI students in addressing the differences between science and Islam. This study has important implications for the development of an PAI curriculum that can bridge science and religion critically and harmoniously.

Keywords: : student perception, human origins, big bang, shape of the earth, integration of Islam and science

INTRODUCTION

Debates about the origins of humanity, the creation of the universe, and the shape of the Earth have long been debated throughout the history of human thought. In the Islamic context, the Quran provides a clear narrative of creation, while modern science offers explanations based on observation and scientific theories. Islamic Religious Education students, as future religious educators, have a strategic role in bridging this understanding with the public.

The debate about the origins of humans, the creation of the universe, and the shape of the earth has been a long and complex discourse in the history of human thought, involving theological, philosophical, and scientific dimensions (Sutoyo & Annada, 2024). Since ancient times, humans have tried to understand their existence and the universe through various narratives, ranging from ancient cosmogonic myths to modern rational explanations (Metera & Puger, 2025). In the Islamic context, the Quran presents explicit and doctrinally valuable creation narratives, such as the creation of the Prophet Adam as the first human, the concept of "kun fayakun" as the mechanism of the creation of the universe, and the description of the earth as a place for human life. These narratives are not only spiritual in nature but also have epistemological implications in shaping the people's perspective on reality.(Daeli et al., 2025)Meanwhile, modern



science is based on empirical observations, experiments, and ever-evolving scientific theories, such as the theory of evolution, the Big Bang theory, and the geodetic model of the Earth as an oblate spheroid (Zulva et al., 2024).

The tension between these two approaches often arises due to differences in basic paradigms—revelation as the source of absolute truth in religion, and evidence as the basis of knowledge in science (Herawati et al., 2024). However, the two do not actually have to be contradictory, but can complement each other in understanding the miracle of creation from two sides: faith and reason (Syaridawati et al., 2025).

In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students play a strategic role as future educators and agents of religious literacy, responsible for explaining and integrating religious and scientific understanding with the wider community. They are not only required to understand sacred texts in depth, but also to possess adequate scientific literacy and critical thinking skills to respond to the challenges of the times in a moderate, inclusive, and rational manner. With a balanced understanding, they are expected to bridge the gap between modern challenges without sacrificing their faith and to create a constructive and enlightening space for dialogue between religion and science.

Social media has become a primary platform for the dissemination of various information, including views that contradict mainstream science. One narrative that has resurfaced concerns the creation of humans, the origins of the universe, and the flat Earth theory.

In Islamic teachings, the creation of the first human is part of the fundamental beliefs of the articles of faith, particularly belief in God and His book. According to Islam, the first human was the Prophet Adam (peace be upon him), created directly by God from dust, and then breathed into him a spirit. The Quran explicitly states that Adam (peace be upon him) was the first human, the caliph on earth, and the origin of mankind.

"(Remember) when your Lord said to the angels: 'Indeed, I will make a caliph on earth.'..." (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 30).

"Indeed, the parable (creation) of Jesus in the sight of Allah, is like (the creation of) Adam. He created him from clay, then He said to him: 'Be,' and he became." (QS. Ali 'Imran [3]: 59).

According to Ibn Kathir's interpretation, the creation of the Prophet Adam occurred through a process full of will and glory, where Allah created Adam from turab (earth), thin (mud), shalshal (dry land) which are the levels of creation of the human physical body before the spirit was breathed into it.

Allah stated that Adam was created from the earth (turab), indicating the biological origin of humanity. However, what makes humans noble creatures is that Allah breathed His spirit into them.

"Then He perfected it and breathed into it His spirit (creation) and He made for you hearing, sight and hearts..." (QS. As-Sajdah [32]: 9)

This instillation of the spirit is what distinguishes humans from other creatures, because it is through it that humans are given reason, freedom of choice, and responsibility as vicegerents on earth. The creation of Adam was not merely a biological process, but also a divine project to create a vicegerent on earth—a being who would prosper and protect nature based on revelation and reason.

"And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: 'Indeed, I will make a caliph on the face of the earth.'..." (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 30)

In Islamic tradition, there is no concept that humans emerged from animal evolution. Adam was created as a perfect human from the beginning, both physically and spiritually. Islam does not recognize the concept of human evolution from animals.

Although some modern Muslim scholars have interpreted the possibility of stages of creation (such as metaphorical interpretations), the majority of scholars maintain that Adam was created directly by God without undergoing a biological evolutionary process from another creature.

However, Islam still encourages the use of reason and the development of knowledge, as long as it does not deviate from monotheism and faith in revelation.

From a modern scientific perspective, human creation is understood through a biological evolutionary approach, specifically through the theory of human evolution within the branches of paleoanthropology and genetics. This theory explains that modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) are the result of a long evolutionary process that has taken place over millions of years.

The theory of evolution by natural selection was first proposed by Charles Darwin in his book *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Although the book emphasized the evolution of species in general, this concept was later developed by scientists to explain human origins. According to research, *Homo sapiens* evolved from a common primate ancestor with chimpanzees around 5–7 million years ago. Early human species such as *Australopithecus afarensis* (e.g., Lucy) lived around 3.2 million years ago. Then, species such as *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, and finally *Homo sapiens* emerged around 300,000 years ago in Africa.

The human journey from early forms to modern humans involved major changes in brain volume, body shape, gait, tool use, and language development. Scientific evidence drawn from fossil finds of early humans in Africa, Asia, and Europe demonstrates the stages of human evolutionary development. Genome studies have shown that modern humans share 98-99% of their DNA with chimpanzees, supporting the theory that we share a common evolutionary ancestor. Archaeologically, ancient artifacts have been found that demonstrate the development of stone tools, art, and early culture, reflecting the evolving human intellect.

In Islam, the origin of the universe is part of faith in Allah as Al-Khaliq (the Creator). The Quran explains that the universe was created by Allah from nothing (*ex nihilo*), through His absolute and infinite will and word.

One of the verses that explains the creation of the universe is:

"It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six ages, then He sat on the 'Arsh..." (QS. Al-A'raf [7]: 54)

This verse demonstrates that creation occurred in stages, yet remains under the power and will of Allah SWT. In Islam, the universe had a beginning and will experience destruction (the apocalypse), followed by an afterlife as a continuation of creation's existence. Islam also contains verses that bear similarities to the concept of the "Big Bang," such as:

"Have not the disbelievers known that the heavens and the earth were of one piece, then We parted them..." (QS. Al-Anbiya [21]: 30)

This verse is often interpreted by contemporary commentators as indicating creation from a single entity which then underwent separation or expansion, similar to the Big Bang theory in modern cosmology.

In the interpretation, the creation of the heavens and the earth is explained with a spiritual approach and a deep purpose, namely to show the power, wisdom and wisdom of Allah, and as signs (verses) for people who think.

Modern science views the origins of the universe as a cosmic event that occurred approximately 13.8 billion years ago, known as the Big Bang Theory. This is the primary scientific model used to explain how the universe began, evolved, and continues to expand today.

According to the Big Bang theory, the universe began as a single, extremely hot and dense point (a singularity) that then suddenly expanded in a massive cosmic event known as the Big Bang. In the first few seconds, elementary particles formed, followed by the formation of atoms, galaxies, stars, and planets.

Key Evidence for the Big Bang Theory Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB): the thermal energy left over from the Big Bang that is detectable to this day. Observations of the redshift of galaxies indicate that the universe is expanding (discovered by Edwin Hubble, 1929). The distribution of light elements such as hydrogen and helium, which is consistent with the predictions of the Big Bang theory. After the Big Bang, cosmic inflation—an incredibly rapid expansion in the first fraction of a second—occurred, explaining the uniform temperature across the universe. Over time, gravity pulled matter together to form large structures such as galaxies and star clusters.

Some scientists have developed advanced theories, such as the multiverse theory, which suggests that our universe may be just one of many. However, this theory remains speculative and lacks strong empirical evidence to date.

Islam, as a religion revealed through revelation, provides a number of clues regarding the creation and shape of the Earth, although they are not presented in the technical terms of modern science. The Quran contains numerous verses discussing the Earth from various aspects: its shape, stability, function, and the regularity of its orbit.

One important verse is:

"And after that He spread the earth." (QS. An-Nazi'at [79]: 30)

In Arabic, the word used in this verse is "dahāhā" (دَحَاهَا). This word comes from the root word "dahā", which some commentators and linguists believe means "to spread out" or "to spread out". However, according to Dr. Zaghloul El-Naggar (a Muslim scientist and geologist), the word "dahāhā" can also mean "rounded like an ostrich egg", which is an oblate spheroid—similar to the shape of the Earth in modern astronomy.

Another verse:

"Allah created the heavens and the earth with truth. He formed you and made your appearance beautiful, and to Him you will return." (QS. At-Taghabun [64]: 3)

These verses do not explicitly state that the Earth is spherical, but they do not contradict the scientific view that the Earth has an oblate spheroid shape. Even some classical scholars, such as Imam Fakhruddin al-Razi (d. 1209 CE) and Imam Ibn Hazm, accepted the Earth's spherical shape based on astronomical observations of their time. Islam also recognizes the regularity of the Earth's orbit and rotation, as in the verse:

"It is not possible for the sun to catch up with the moon, nor for the night to overtake the day. And each moves in its own orbit." (QS. Yasin [36]: 40)

In modern science, the Earth's shape is not perfectly spherical like a ball, but is instead referred to as an oblate spheroid or oblate ellipsoid. This means the Earth bulges slightly at the equator and flattens at the poles, due to the Earth's rotation on its axis.

Some scientific evidence confirming the Earth's shape as an oblate spheroid includes images taken from space by satellites and space missions (e.g., NASA and ESA), which show the Earth is spherical but not perfectly symmetrical. Further evidence is that as a ship sails away, the hull disappears before the mast, indicating a curvature of the ocean surface. Gravitational force is slightly stronger at the poles than at the equator, because the poles are closer to the center of the Earth—supporting the oblate shape at the poles.

Geodetic measurements and modern GPS technology state that the Earth's radius at the equator is about 6,378 km, while at the poles it is about 6,357 km.

Earth's rotation causes a centrifugal effect at the equator, which pushes matter away from the Earth's center. This causes the Earth to bulge slightly at the equator. This phenomenon was first scientifically understood in the 18th century by Isaac Newton and Christiaan Huygens.

Scientists use a model called the geoid to depict the Earth's shape more accurately than an ellipsoid. The geoid is an imaginary surface that represents global mean sea level and is affected by local gravity.

The flat-earth theory states that the Earth is not round but flat, and this theory is supported by various visual "evidence," common sense, and even religious interpretations. Although scientifically disproven, this narrative continues to attract attention and spark widespread discussion on social media.

The narrative pattern on social media is a global conspiracy, claiming that institutions like NASA and global scientists are hiding the truth for political or economic gain. Visual evidence, including images showing flat horizons from drone and flight videos, is being widely posted on various social media platforms.

Quotations from scriptures (especially the Quran or the Bible) that literally refer to the Earth as "spread out" or "made like a spread out expanse" are used to promote the notion that the Earth is flat. Sensational headlines like "NASA's Lies Exposed" are used as clickbait strategies to spread this ideology.

The Big Bang theory is the most dominant scientific theory in modern cosmology regarding the creation of the universe. A fundamental belief system in Islam holds that the universe was created absolutely by God's direct and absolute will, "kun Fayakun." While both approaches speak of a beginning from nothing, their understandings are potentially different.

Another narrative that has become a controversial topic on social media is the non-literal interpretation that Adam (Prophet Adam AS) was not the first human. In QS. Al-Baqarah: 30, translated as "I intend to make a caliph on earth," the angels asked, "Are you intending to place there a creature that will cause corruption?" This narrative is interpreted to mean that the angels already knew about the existence of a previous corrupt creature (not Adam). Archaeological claims that ancient humans were found to be much older than the time of Prophet Adam's life. Also, claims of genetics of human ancestors, mitochondrial Eve and Y-chromosome Adam, from DNA studies, indicate the existence of genetic variations before 200,000 years ago.

Previous studies have shown that tensions arise between scientific and religious approaches if not understood within an integrative framework. Therefore, it is important to understand Islamic Education students' perceptions of these issues in order to formulate a relevant and moderate learning approach.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative method with a descriptive approach to systematically describe students' perceptions of scientific and religious issues. The population in this study were students of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program at the Islamic University of KH. Ruhiat Cipasung, Tasikmalaya Regency, with a purposively selected sample of 70 new students in the 2025/2026 Academic Year. The instrument used was a closed questionnaire with a Likert scale designed to reveal students' perceptions on three main topics, namely: human origins (between the view of the creation of the prophet Adam and the theory of evolution), the process of the creation of the universe (between the big bang theory and the concept of kun fayakun), and the shape of the earth (between spherical and flat shapes). The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, which included calculating

percentages, average scores, and presenting them in the form of visual graphs to provide a clear picture of the tendencies of students' perceptions.

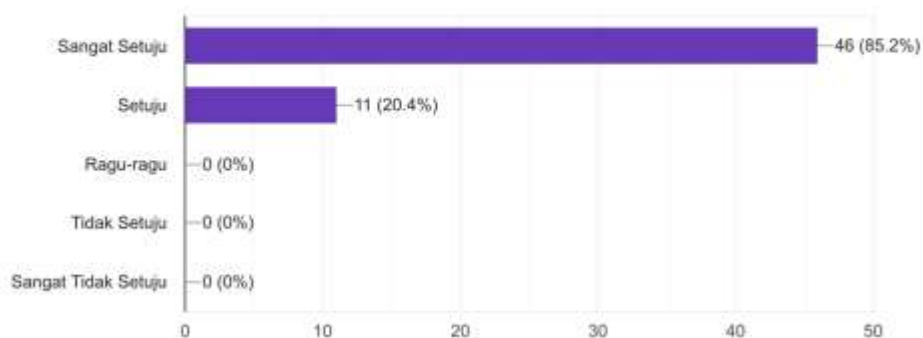
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

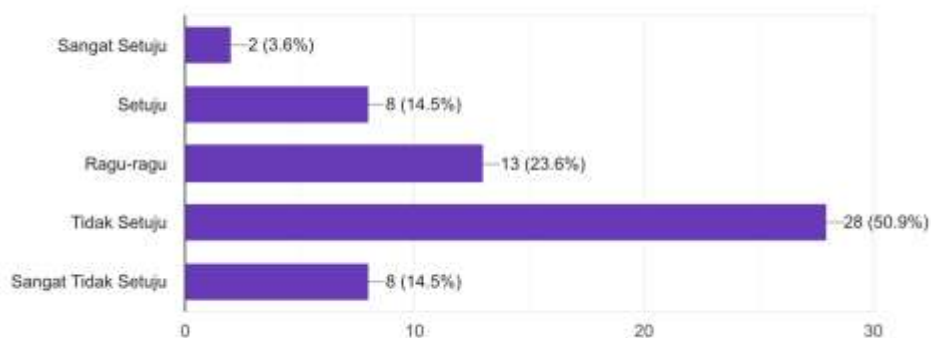
1. Perceptions of Human Origins.

100% of students stated that they believe the first human was the Prophet Adam, as described in the Quran. However, 12.9% of students stated that the theory of evolution could be reconciled with Adam's creation as a manifestation of God's will through scientific processes.

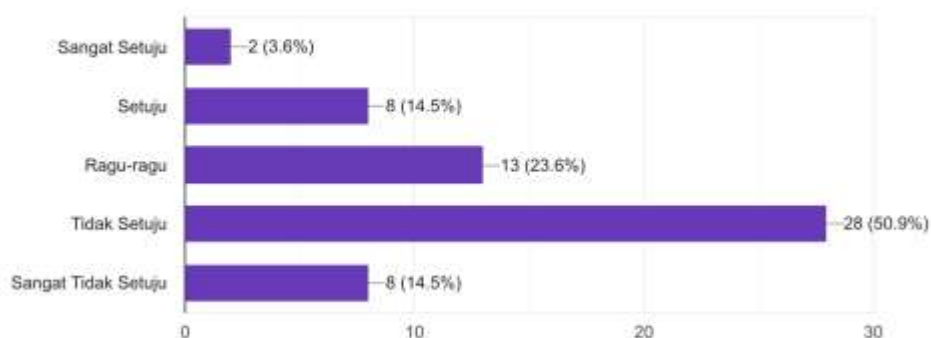
1. Saya meyakini bahwa Nabi Adam adalah manusia pertama yang diciptakan langsung oleh Allah.
54 responses



6. Saya terbuka dengan kemungkinan bahwa manusia purba hidup sebelum Nabi Adam.
55 responses



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55 responses

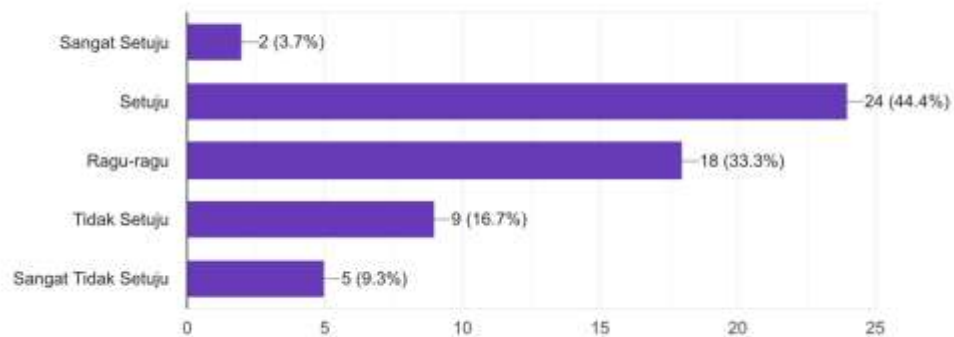


2. Perceptions of the Creation of the Universe.

As many as 75.7% of students stated that the concept of the "big bang" is in accordance with the Qur'an's statement about the creation of the heavens and the earth from a unified whole (QS. Al-Anbiya: 30). This indicates an integrative tendency in understanding the verses of Kauniyah.

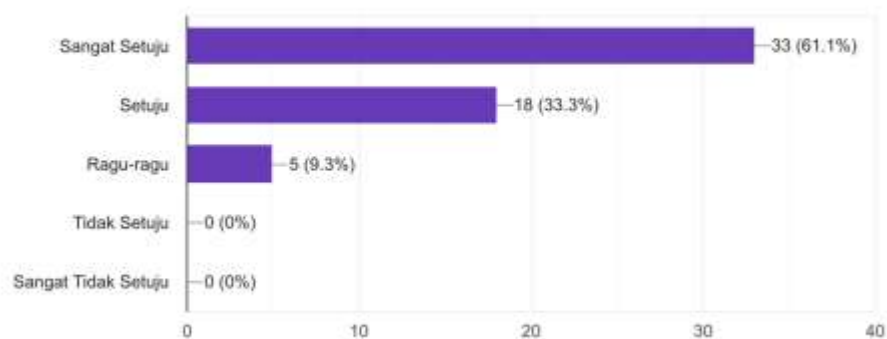
12. Saya memilih konsep Big Bang sebagai teori ilmiah tentang awal mula alam.

54 responses



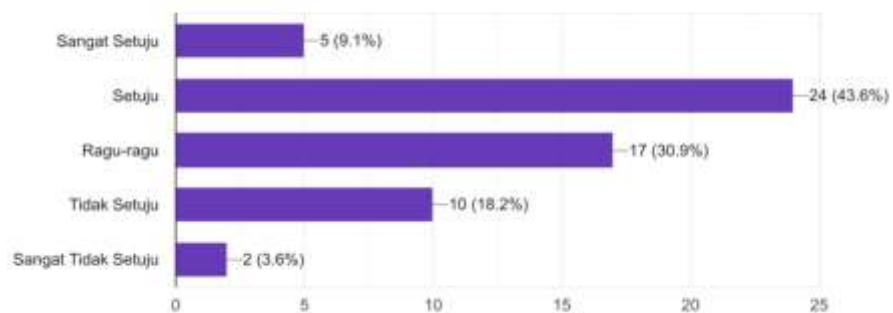
11. Saya yakin bahwa alam semesta diciptakan dengan perintah "kun fayakun".

54 responses



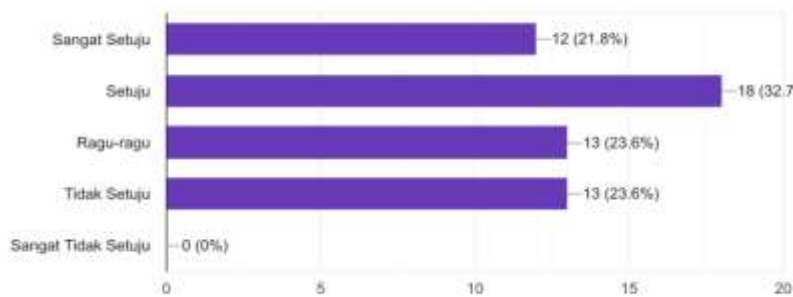
13. Saya percaya bahwa tidak ada kontradiksi antara konsep Big Bang dan "kun fayakun".

55 responses



16. Saya menilai bahwa sains modern memperkuat keimanan saya kepada Tuhan sebagai Pencipta.

55 responses

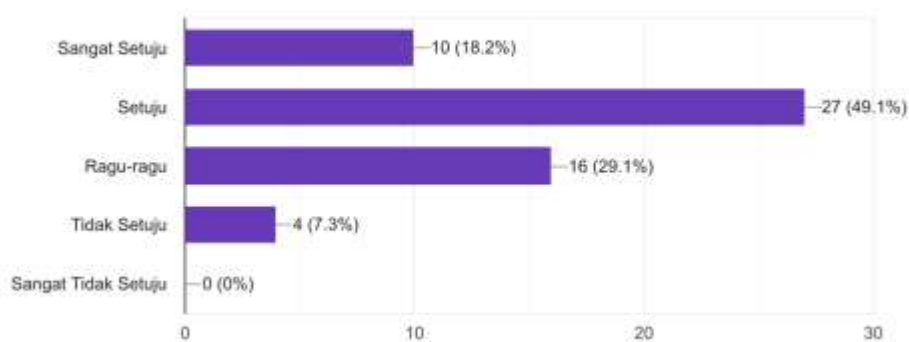


3. Perception of the Shape of the Earth

Around 90% of students believe the Earth is round, and this doesn't contradict the Quran. However, the remaining 10% showed the influence of the flat-Earth narrative circulating on social media.

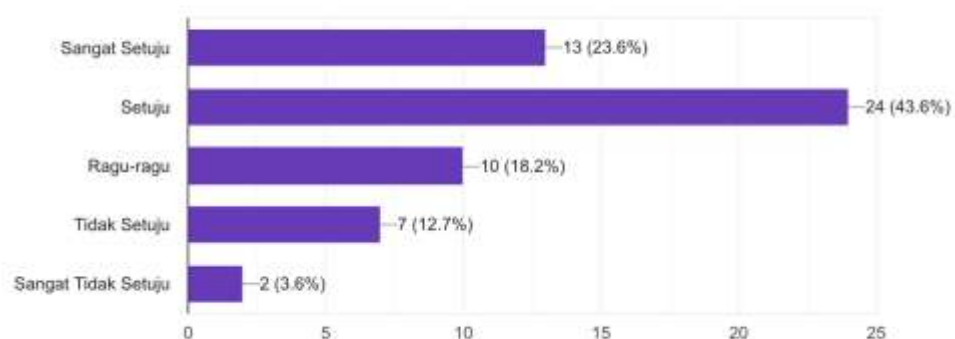
25. Teori bumi datar bertentangan dengan ilmu pengetahuan modern.

55 responses



27. Saya percaya bahwa bumi bulat adalah konsensus ilmiah dan tidak bertentangan dengan Al-Qur'an

55 responses



Discussion

These findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education students tend to have moderate and open perceptions of science, as long as it does not directly conflict with Islamic theological principles. Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in instilling scientific literacy while maintaining Islamic faith (Ginanjari et al., 2024).

The discussion section in this article highlights how students of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program interpret controversial scientific issues such as the origin of humans, the creation of the universe, and the shape of the earth, within the framework of their Islamic beliefs (Ramadhan et al., 2022). These three main issues are the meeting point and potential conflict between religious knowledge (revelation) and scientific knowledge (empirical).

Human Origins: Between Revelation and Evolution

Islamic Religious Education students absolutely believe that the Prophet Adam was the first human, as stated in the Quran. However, a small proportion (12.9%) expressed openness to the possibility of evolutionary theory as a scientific mechanism that could align with divine will. This indicates the seeds of integrative thinking that do not outright reject science but instead seek to understand the role of religion in explaining the creation process (Rezaei et al., 2024).

The majority of Islamic Religious Education students in this study showed a strong belief that the Prophet Adam was the first human being, in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an (Fauzin et al., 2024). This reflects a strong internalization of faith in the narrative of human creation directly by Allah SWT, which did not involve a process of biological evolution as proposed by Charles Darwin and evolutionary anthropologists. Interestingly, however, 12.9% of respondents expressed openness to the possibility of integrating evolutionary theory within the framework of divine will.

This means that there is an awareness that science can be part of God's creation scenario, as long as it does not conflict with the principle of monotheism. (Choudhury, 2019) This view reflects the efforts of some students to engage in constructive dialogue between faith and reason, and to foster critical thinking that remains based on religious belief. (Choudhury, 2024). This also marks the potential for the development of an integrative approach in religious studies, where scientific narratives are understood as part of the kauniyah verses that can strengthen the understanding of the qauliyah verses (revelation).

Creation of the Universe: Synchronization of the Big Bang Theory and the Kun Fayakun Concept

The majority of respondents (75.7%) believe that the Big Bang theory does not contradict verses of the Qur'an, particularly Surah Al-Anbiya: 30, which mentions that the heavens and the earth were once united and then separated. This indicates that students see the possibility of bridging the narrative of modern science with divine revelation, using a contextual interpretation approach. (Daruhadi, 2024).

The majority of students (75.7%) believe that the Big Bang theory can be understood in line with the Qur'anic narrative about the creation of the universe, particularly verse 30 of Surah Al-Anbiya, which states that the heavens and the earth were once united and then separated. This indicates a tendency toward an understanding that is not antagonistic to modern science (Pratama et al., 2022).

In this regard, students display a progressive, syncretic tendency—they do not reject scientific theory outright, but instead attempt to interpret it within the framework of faith. The Islamic concept of "kun fayakun," meaning God's absolute will, can be understood in line with the idea that the creation of the universe could have occurred suddenly through a cosmic explosion (the Big Bang). This openness is important as a form of understanding that the Quran does not contradict science but can instead inspire the development of science. It also reflects the need for a contextual and scientific interpretive approach in understanding verses related to natural phenomena and cosmology (Zuhriyandi & Alfannajah, 2023).

The Shape of the Earth: Scientific Literacy and the Challenge of Disinformation

The majority of students (90%) believe that the Earth is round, and this view does not conflict with Islam. However, a small minority (10%) are still influenced by the flat-Earth conspiracy narrative circulating on social media. This phenomenon demonstrates the need for digital and scientific literacy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) education so that students can filter information and avoid being easily influenced by speculative, unscientific views (Alanazi, 2025).

Overall, this discussion emphasizes the importance of an integrative approach in Islamic education, particularly for prospective religious educators. They are expected to not only master religious texts but also be able to critically understand science and convey it in a moderate manner to the public. An open attitude toward science that does not conflict with one's faith is a crucial asset in developing a generation of knowledgeable, rational, and religious Muslims (Isaac, 2025).

As many as 90% of students stated that they believe the Earth is spherical, and this does not conflict with Islamic teachings (Mubarak, 2019). This indicates a fairly good level of scientific understanding among Islamic Religious Education students. They also understand that terms like "hamparan" in the Quran should not be taken literally as flat, but can be interpreted as a metaphor for the Earth's function as a habitat for humans. However, 10% of students still expressed doubt or were influenced by the flat-Earth theory narrative circulating on social media (Erlaine, 2020).

This is a serious concern, as it demonstrates a lack of digital literacy and critical thinking skills regarding widely circulated information sources that are not based on scientific evidence (Phippen et al., 2021). This phenomenon demonstrates a real challenge in education: that in addition to strengthening religious and scientific content, media literacy and critical thinking skills are also needed to combat hoaxes and conspiracy theories. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) education must equip students with the ability to select and analyze fact-based information, not just dogma.

Overall, these three discussions show that Islamic Education students are in a strategic position to build a bridge between science and religion. (Brasa et al., 2025) An open attitude toward knowledge, while maintaining Islamic faith and values, is key to addressing contemporary issues that often involve the dichotomy of "faith vs. science." The role of religious higher education is crucial in shaping a narrative that is integrative, rational, and relevant to the challenges of the times.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Islamic Religious Education students tend to have moderate and integrative perceptions regarding issues related to human origins, the creation of the universe, and the shape of the earth. The majority of students adhere to Islamic religious narratives but are able to accept science as long as it does not directly contradict their beliefs. This perception demonstrates the importance of strengthening scientific literacy aligned with Islamic values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) education. These results provide an important foundation for designing a contextual, critical learning approach that is responsive to contemporary challenges, particularly in addressing speculative or conspiratorial narratives circulating on social media.

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