

Beyond Quoting the Ancients: Integrating Critical *Baḥth* into *Naql*-Based Research in Islamic Studies

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Abstract

Islamic Studies has long been characterized by a deep reverence for *naql*—the faithful transmission of Qur’ānic teachings, Prophetic traditions, and classical scholarly opinions. While this commitment to preservation safeguards the integrity of revelation, it often results in research that privileges compilation and citation over analytical discovery. This study, titled “*Beyond Quoting the Ancients: Integrating Critical Baḥth into Naql-Based Research*,” investigates how the dominance of *naql* in Islamic scholarship has shaped research practices and limited methodological innovation within Nigerian universities. Using a **mixed-method research design**, the study combined **quantitative surveys, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis** of undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan. The data were analyzed thematically and statistically to identify trends in students’ understanding and application of *naql* and *baḥth*, as well as the implications for employability and academic relevance. Findings reveal that over two-thirds of research projects are *naql*-based, with minimal integration of analytical or

empirical tools. While *naql* remains essential for preserving authenticity, its dominance constrains intellectual creativity and limits the development of transferable skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. The paper draws on **classical Islamic epistemology** and **modern research theory** to propose a balanced framework that integrates *baḥth*—critical investigation—into *naql*-based methodologies. It argues that embedding hypothesis-driven inquiry, interdisciplinary perspectives, and digital humanities tools can revitalize Islamic Studies research without compromising its textual and spiritual foundations. By reuniting transmission with investigation, Islamic scholarship can reclaim the spirit of *ijtihād* and position itself as both authentic and relevant in addressing contemporary intellectual and societal challenges.

Introduction

The intellectual tradition of Islam has always placed a premium on the preservation and transmission of authentic knowledge. From the earliest generations of Muslims, scholars devoted their lives to safeguarded the Qur’ān, meticulously and documented the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), and establishing rigorous systems of isnād (chains of transmission) to

verify reports. This culture of transmission—*naql*—became the hallmark of Islamic scholarship, ensuring that divine revelation and the legacy of the Prophet were preserved unaltered for successive generations. As Islamic civilization flourished, disciplines such as tafsīr, ḥadīth, fiqh, and kalām developed highly structured methodologies that prioritized fidelity to transmitted sources. In many respects, this orientation protected the ummah from distortion, innovation, and the erosion of religious identity. However, it also cultivated a scholarly environment in which the highest measure of academic excellence was often equated with mastery of previous authorities and faithful citation of their works. By contrast, the spirit of *baḥth*—critical inquiry and discovery—was never absent from Islamic intellectual history. Classical scholars engaged in *ijtihād*, developed new schools of thought, debated philosophical ideas, and made groundbreaking contributions in fields such as medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and linguistics. Yet, over time, particularly in religious studies, the emphasis on transmission began to overshadow the culture of analytical exploration. The gate of *ijtihād* was perceived by some to have closed, and scholarship increasingly took the form of commentaries (*shurūḥ*), super-commentaries (*hawāshī*), and compilations rather than original investigations. In the modern era, this historical legacy has produced a double-edged effect. On one hand, Islamic studies programs in universities and seminaries remain unrivaled in their ability to preserve and transmit authentic religious knowledge. On the other hand, much of the research within the discipline continues to be dominated by descriptive compilations and textual reproductions. While these works ensure continuity, they often fall short of the methodological standards of contemporary academia, where originality, analysis, and evidence-based argumentation are valued. This has created a tension: Islamic Studies risks being perceived as overly insular, while global scholarship calls for more critical engagement with pressing intellectual, social, and technological questions. Therefore, a pressing need exists to re-examine the

methodological foundations of Islamic Studies. The challenge is not to abandon *naql*—which remains essential—but to integrate it meaningfully with *baḥth*, so that research in the field is both faithful to tradition and responsive to the demands of modern scholarship. Statement of the Problem Despite Islam’s rich intellectual heritage, contemporary research in Islamic Studies continues to be overwhelmingly dominated by *naql*—the preservation, transmission, and quotation of authoritative texts. While this emphasis has ensured the safeguarding of the Qur’ān, ḥadīth, and classical scholarly contributions, it has also led to several methodological challenges. First, much of the research produced in the field tends to be compilatory and descriptive rather than analytical. Theses, dissertations, and journal articles often reproduce established interpretations without offering fresh insights, critical analysis, or engagement with contemporary realities. Such works, though valuable for preservation, rarely meet the expectations of originality and discovery that characterize modern academic research. Second, the predominance of *naql* has contributed to a lack of methodological diversity. Students and researchers in Islamic Studies are often insufficiently trained in empirical methods, hypothesis testing, or interdisciplinary approaches. As a result, they may struggle to engage meaningfully with pressing issues such as bioethics, artificial intelligence, gender relations, or socio-political transformations, which demand both fidelity to Islamic tradition and critical, contextualized analysis. Third, this imbalance risks marginalizing Islamic Studies within the broader academic community. In an era where research is increasingly judged by its capacity to generate new knowledge and provide solutions to contemporary problems, Islamic Studies may be perceived as stagnant or overly insular if it remains confined to quotation-driven scholarship. The central problem, therefore, is not the presence of *naql*—which is indispensable for preserving authenticity—but its dominance at the expense of *baḥth*. Without a deliberate effort to integrate critical inquiry into the transmission-based model, Islamic Studies risks

diminishing both its intellectual vitality and its relevance in addressing the evolving needs of Muslim societies and the global academic community. Literature Review Islamic scholarship has historically operated along two interrelated dimensions: *naql* (transmission) and *bahth* (critical investigation or inquiry). *Naql* emphasizes the faithful conveyance of authoritative texts—such as the Qurʾān and authenticated ḥadīth—and values rigorous chains of transmission and preservation of traditional knowledge (Oxford Reference, 2024; Spawi & Norfadhilah, 2017). *Bahth*, by contrast, underscores the necessity of critical inquiry: reasoning, contextualization, and reinterpretation when responding to new intellectual or social challenges. Scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah, for example, argue that while revelation (*naql*) holds primacy, ‘aql (reason) plays a crucial complementary role in interpreting texts, understanding legal and theological issues, and ensuring adaptability of tradition to changing times (Reason and Revelation..., 2025). Together, these twin pillars—*naql* and *bahth*—constitute the foundation of the Islamic intellectual tradition, balancing preservation and innovation. *Naql* as Transmission The concept of *naql* is deeply embedded in the Islamic intellectual tradition, serving as the foundation upon which religious sciences are preserved and authenticated. It denotes the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another, primarily through texts, oral reports, and chains of authority. In the Qurʾānic sciences, *naql* has been central to ensuring the accuracy of the Qurʾān’s text and recitations. It also underpins ḥadīth scholarship, where the isnād system functions as a rigorous mechanism to verify authenticity (Brown, 2009).

Beyond technical transmission, *naql* carries a normative dimension: it represents loyalty to the past and continuity with authoritative sources. Zaman (2012) notes that classical Muslim scholars considered themselves heirs to a living tradition, whose task was to preserve, transmit, and, where necessary, defend the intellectual heritage of Islam. This approach underscores the role of *naql* not only as a technical tool of preservation but also as a

marker of epistemic legitimacy in Islamic Studies. Despite the many benefits of *naql*, it has also faced criticism for its tendency to privilege rote transmission over originality. Boyle (2006) argue that in traditional Qurʾānic and Islamic schooling, emphasis on memorization and repetition sometimes constrains creativity, questioning, and interpretative thinking. Similarly, the collection *Islam and Education: Myths and Truths* (Kadi & Billeh, 2007) include essays that critique certain Islamic educational traditions for maintaining conservative pedagogies that can limit innovation. Nevertheless, most agree that without *naql*, key components of Islamic heritage—from *tafsīr* to *fiqh* and *kalām*—would not have survived intact. Thus, while *naql* may pose some scholarly challenges, it remains the indispensable backbone of Islamic scholarship. *Bahth* as Critical Investigation In contrast, *bahth* represents the investigative and analytical spirit within Islamic Studies. Rather than limiting scholarship to transmission, *bahth* emphasizes critical engagement, questioning, and reinterpretation of inherited knowledge. Ahmad and Tayyab (2017), for instance, demonstrate how Muslim scholars critiqued Joseph Schacht’s negative assessment of ḥadīth transmission by exposing methodological flaws in his analyses. Their study shows that *bahth* operates as a defense of the tradition through reasoned scrutiny. Similarly, Azhar (2024) in *Hadith Isnād Study in the Discovery of Islamic Law* offers a comprehensive critique of both Schacht and Goldziher, arguing that the *isnād* method was in use much earlier than some Orientalist scholars assume, and that many criticisms rest on incomplete or biased use of historical evidence. Thus, while *naql* preserves, *bahth* ensures that the tradition remains intellectually robust and capable of responding to new challenges.

Similarly, Ellias, Norazmi, Kamaruzaman, and Haidhar (2025) explore *takhrīj al-ḥadīth* as an exercise in scholarly investigation that combines transmission with critical scrutiny. Their study emphasizes that *takhrīj* goes beyond merely reporting isnād chains—it demands evaluation of narrators’ integrity, coherence of narrative themes,

and the historical plausibility of reports. Further, in the Qur'ānic sciences, Harsono, Syagif, and Junaidin (2022) highlight how hermeneutic approaches enable reinterpretations of Qur'ānic verses related to education, showing that *baḥth* allows scholars to engage with the text dynamically in response to contemporary educational concerns. Likewise, Ash-Shufi (2024) examines gender-sensitive tafsīr methodology through a critical lens in the reflections of Husein Muhammad, demonstrating how exegetical tools can reframe scripture in socially relevant ways while retaining fidelity to the text. Beyond textual criticism, *baḥth* also functions as methodological self-reflection. Sabo & Hassan (2023), for example, highlight stagnation in Islamic research methodology—pointing to vague disciplinary boundaries, limited literature in method, and declining interest among students in methodological innovation. In response, Houshisadat (2025) proposes an Islamic-based research methodology model that integrates taḥqīq (verification) with dialectical interactions between subject and object in knowledge production. These contributions show that *baḥth* does more than critique external frameworks; it also reforms internal methodological practices within Islamic scholarship.

Integrating Naql and Baḥth Taken together, the literature suggests that naql and *baḥth* should not be seen as opposing forces but as complementary dimensions of Islamic scholarship. Naql safeguards continuity with the tradition by ensuring authenticity in transmission (Brown, 2009; Zaman, 2012), while *baḥth* ensures relevance, renewal, and methodological integrity through critical inquiry and reinterpretation (Ahmad & Tayyab, 2017; Harsono, Syagif, & Junaidin, 2022). Both are indispensable: without naql, the intellectual heritage of Islam would lose its reliability; without *baḥth*, it would risk stagnation and irrelevance. Despite the clear significance of *baḥth*, challenges remain, including limited empirical applications, reluctance among traditionalist circles to embrace critical tools (Kadi & Billeh, 2007), and uneven institutional support in contemporary contexts (Sabo & Hassan, 2023). Yet, as recent contributions

demonstrate, scholars are increasingly showing the necessity of integrating *baḥth* into the transmission-based framework of Islamic Studies (Houshisadat, 2025). The future of the discipline may therefore depend on a careful balance between naql as preservation and *baḥth* as critical innovation.

Theoretical Framework The debate between *naql* (transmission) and *baḥth* (critical investigation) in Islamic Studies can be understood through several theoretical lenses that clarify how knowledge is produced, transmitted, and critiqued. This section outlines the theoretical orientations that inform the present study.

1. **Traditionalist Epistemology** The Islamic intellectual tradition has long held that knowledge must be traced back to authoritative sources. This epistemology privileges naql, in line with Al-Ghazālī's view that revelation and authenticated transmission are foundational sources of knowledge. In his epistemological works, Al-Ghazālī insists that revelation (*naql*) and the transmission through reliable chains are essential for arriving at certainty, even while reason has a role in interpreting and validating transmitted knowledge (Purifying the Heart, Unveiling the Truth: Understanding Al-Ghazālī's Epistemology, 2022). He holds that knowledge from sacred sources, when properly transmitted and preserved, serves as a benchmark for truth. This framework underlies naql as the backbone of Islamic scholarship—guarding against distortion and preserving continuity with early authorities.

2. **Critical Rationalism** In contrast, the theory of *baḥth* resonates with elements of critical rationalism, which emphasizes the need to interrogate, test, and reinterpret received ideas. Ibn Khaldūn exemplifies this: in his *Muqaddimah*, he critiques earlier historical narratives, points out errors in accepted sources, and advances explanations grounded in social cohesion (*'asabiyyah*), economic conditions, and political power dynamics rather than purely religious or mythic accounts (Halim et al., 2018; Britannica, 2025). Within this framework, *baḥth* is not a rejection of transmission but a method of ensuring that transmitted knowledge remains relevant and intellectually sound.

3. **Integrationist Model of Knowledge** Several contemporary scholars argue for integrative models that bridge *naql* and *baḥth*. For example, Al-Attas's Islamization of Knowledge movement seeks to harmonize revelation-based knowledge with critical inquiry, as seen in comparative analyses of his and Al-Faruqi's work (Hashim & Rossidy, 2021). More recently, Houshisadat (2025) developed an Islamic research methodology in his article "Islamic-Based Model of Research Methodology: Trinity of Taḥqīq in Four Dialectics", which embeds taḥqīq (verification) into a dialectical framework that brings together transmitted (*naql*) and rational inquiry (*a'ql*). These integrationist models offer a balanced theoretical foundation for this study, emphasizing that preservation of knowledge (*naql*) and critical re-examination (*baḥth*) are mutually reinforcing rather than antagonistic.

4. **Hermeneutical Approaches** Hermeneutics also provides a useful theoretical perspective for understanding the role of *baḥth*. Contemporary Qur'ānic studies increasingly use hermeneutical tools to re-examine the meaning of revelation in light of social and historical contexts. For instance, Harsono, Syagif, and Junaidin (2022) highlight how hermeneutic methods enable scholars to interpret educational verses of the Qur'ān more dynamically—connecting text, context, and reader subjectivity (Harsono, Syagif & Junaidin, 2022). Philosophical hermeneutics, as formulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, complements this by insisting that meaning emerges through dialogue between the interpreter, text, and tradition; meaning is not static but evolves with interpretation across time and context (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Relevance to this Study The theoretical frameworks outlined above justify this study's central claim: that Islamic Studies requires a shift beyond reliance on *naql* toward an integrated approach where *baḥth* plays a central role. Traditionalist epistemology explains the primacy of transmission, critical rationalism underscores the need for inquiry, the integrationist model bridges the two, and hermeneutical theory provides practical interpretive tools. Together, they offer a multidimensional

framework for rethinking research methodology in Islamic Studies.

Empirical Literature While conceptual and theoretical works highlight the tension and complementarity between *naql* and *baḥth*, empirical studies show how these approaches manifest in actual research practices across Islamic scholarship. **Qur'ānic Studies** Empirical research on Qur'ānic interpretation demonstrates the co-existence of transmission (*naql*) and critical investigation (*baḥth*). For example, Harsono, Syagif, and Junaidin (2022) apply a hermeneutic approach to Qur'ānic verses on education, demonstrating how social context, historical period, and reader subjectivity inform interpretive choices—thus showing that contemporary scholarship often transcends pure transmission by engaging in interpretive *baḥth*. Likewise, Ash-Shufi (2024) conducts a critical study of gender-sensitive tafsir in Indonesia, showing how exegetes like Husein Muhammad use linguistic, socio-historical, and maqāṣid-based tools to reinterpret verses on women's rights. These empirical examples illustrate how *baḥth* operates within Qur'ānic studies to address modern intellectual and social challenges.

Ḥadīth Scholarship Empirical research in ḥadīth sciences reveals the intersection of transmission (*naql*) and critical investigation (*baḥth*). Ahmad and Tayyab (2017) critically examined Joseph Schacht's arguments about the late fabrication of ḥadīth, demonstrating methodological flaws in his work by rigorously analyzing isnād data (Ahmad & Tayyab, 2017). Likewise, Ellias, Norazmi, Kamaruzaman, and Haidhar (2025) studied takhrīj al-ḥadīth in Malaysian academic settings and found that students do more than merely transmit narrators' chains; they also evaluate thematic coherence, reliability of narrators, and consistency of transmitted reports (Ellias et al., 2025). These findings confirm that *baḥth* enriches the traditional role of *naql* in safeguarding authenticity while enabling deeper critical engagement.

Islamic Law and Jurisprudence Empirical research in fiqh also reflects tension and interplay between *naql* and *baḥth*. For example, Zaman (2002) documents how South Asian 'ulamā' navigated between strict adherence to transmitted

rulings and the need to engage colonial legal reforms—responding to new socio-political contexts without abandoning their traditional foundations. Similarly, Sabo & Hassan (2023) in their study Analisis Kedudukan Terkini Kaedah Penyelidikan Islam report that in many Nigerian Islamic research settings, lecturers and students frequently rely heavily on quoting classical jurists (*naql*), sometimes at the expense of critical questioning or contextualization. However, their findings also indicate growing efforts by younger scholars to use comparative jurisprudence and interdisciplinary approaches (*baḥth*) in dealing with contemporary issues such as Islamic finance, governance, and bioethical questions. These examples show that *baḥth* enriches traditional *naql* and contributes to making Islamic fiqh scholarship more responsive and intellectually dynamic. Education and Research Practices Studies of Islamic education further illustrate how transmission (*naql*) and critical investigation (*baḥth*) interact in contemporary practice. Houshisadat (2025), for example, develops an Islamic-based research methodology that embeds *taḥqīq* and dialectical engagement between revelation and reason. In Nigeria, Oluwatosin et al. (2024) investigate entrepreneurial strategies in Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula and find that universities are increasingly seeking to integrate critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation into program design—signs of *baḥth* complementing *naql*. Also, in a recent study of e-learning centres for Arabic and Islamic Studies in North-Central and South-Western Nigeria, Adebayo & Qamorudeen (2025) report that while many instructors still rely heavily on traditional transmission methods, there is rising interest in using digital tools and interactive pedagogies to engage students in more investigative inquiry. Synthesis of Findings Across these studies, a consistent pattern emerges: *naql* remains the backbone of Islamic scholarship, but *baḥth* is increasingly necessary to ensure its relevance in modern contexts. The empirical literature suggests that institutions that rely solely on transmission risk intellectual stagnation, while those that incorporate critical investigation foster innovation and

contextual engagement. This balance highlights the central argument of the present study—that Islamic Studies must move “beyond quoting the ancients” toward a synthesis of *naql* and *baḥth*. Methodology This study adopts a mixed-methods design, which combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. The choice of this design is informed by the need to capture both measurable trends and deeper interpretive insights concerning the balance of *naql* (transmission) and *baḥth* (critical investigation) in Islamic Studies research at the University of Ibadan. The quantitative aspect of the study is aimed at collecting structured responses from students and recent graduates, while the qualitative component focuses on eliciting richer perspectives from lecturers and graduates through interviews and document analysis. The population of the study comprises undergraduate and postgraduate students of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, alongside graduates of the department within the last five years, and lecturers who serve as supervisors and researchers. The respondents were chosen because they represent different stages of involvement in the production, supervision, and evaluation of Islamic Studies research. Sampling was carried out purposively to ensure that only those with direct experience in Islamic Studies research at UI were included. Within the student group, stratification was used to guarantee representation across different levels of study (undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral). A total of 120 students and recent graduates were targeted for the survey, while ten key informants, including five lecturers and five graduates, were selected for interviews. This combination allowed the study to draw from a sufficient number of respondents for statistical analysis, while also gaining in-depth accounts from those with extensive research experience. Data collection employed three instruments. A structured questionnaire was administered to students and graduates, divided into three domains: knowledge of *naql* and *baḥth*, attitudes toward balancing transmission and investigation, and practices of research methodology as reflected in student projects and dissertations.

Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with lecturers and graduates, focusing on the challenges of integrating *bahth* into student research, the supervisory expectations within the department, and the employability implications of methodological choices. In addition, document analysis was carried out on selected undergraduate projects, master's dissertations, and doctoral theses stored in the departmental library, in order to identify prevailing methodological patterns.

The validity of the questionnaire was ensured through expert review by senior academics in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan. A pilot test involving ten students was used to refine the items, while internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 as the acceptable standard. Quantitative data were collected in hardcopy format within classrooms and departmental gatherings, while qualitative data were obtained through face-to-face interviews conducted on the UI campus, with participants' consent for audio recording and transcription. The document review was based on departmental archives and library holdings.

Data analysis combined both statistical and interpretive techniques. Descriptive statistics such as mean scores, frequencies, and percentages were used to summarize responses from the questionnaire, while multiple regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance was employed to test the relationships between knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts using NVivo software, which assisted in coding and clustering responses under emerging themes. Document analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which research outputs reflected *naql*-based, *bahth*-based, or hybrid methodological orientations. The integration of findings from these three sources of data provided a holistic picture of methodological practices in Islamic Studies research at the University of Ibadan.

Results for Objective One

Table 1: Students' Knowledge of *Naql* and *Bahth* (n = 120)

Item	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Remark
I understand the meaning of <i>naql</i> in Islamic Studies research	4.35	0.62	High Knowledge
I can define <i>bahth</i> as critical investigation in research	2.84	0.91	Moderate Knowledge
I know the difference between <i>naql</i> and <i>bahth</i> in research writing	2.67	1.02	Low Knowledge
My training has exposed me to both <i>naql</i> and <i>bahth</i> approaches	2.45	0.97	Low Knowledge

Discussion

The results in Table 1 indicate that students of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan possess **strong knowledge of *naql*** ($\bar{x} = 4.35$), confirming its dominant place in their academic formation. However, their understanding of *bahth* is only moderate ($\bar{x} = 2.84$), while the ability to distinguish between the two approaches is weak ($\bar{x} = 2.67$). Moreover, students reported little exposure to both methodologies in combination ($\bar{x} = 2.45$), suggesting that the departmental curriculum has not effectively integrated *bahth* as a methodological complement to *naql*. This finding aligns with **Sabo and Hassan (2023)**, who observed that research outputs in Nigerian Islamic Studies departments tend to emphasize quotation and commentary on classical sources rather than analytical investigation. It also resonates with **Salihu and Yakubu (2022)**, who argued that the emphasis on transmission limits students' capacity for problem-solving and creative engagement with contemporary issues. From an Islamic epistemological perspective, the dominance of *naql* is understandable, since the Qur'an

commands: “So ask the people of knowledge if you do not know” (Qur’an 16:43). This verse affirms the legitimacy of relying on transmitted authority as a source of guidance. However, the Qur’an also repeatedly encourages reflection and investigation. For instance: “Do they not reflect upon themselves? Allah created the heavens and the earth and everything between them in Truth and for an appointed term” (Qur’an 30:8). Here, the emphasis shifts from mere reception (*naql*) to active reflection (*baḥth*). Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: “The superiority of the scholar over the worshipper is like the superiority of the moon over the rest of the stars” (Abu Dawud, Hadith 3641). This hadith highlights that knowledge involves not just transmission but also understanding, analysis, and application — all central features of *baḥth*.

Thus, while the results confirm the strength of *naql* in students’ knowledge, they also reveal a **methodological gap** that runs contrary to both the Qur’anic call to reflection and the historical legacy of Islamic scholarship. Scholars like Ibn Khaldun, whose *Muqaddimah* employed socio-historical analysis, demonstrated that *baḥth* has always been part of the Islamic intellectual tradition. The current imbalance at UI therefore represents a narrowing of that heritage rather than its full realization.

Objective Two: To assess students’ attitudes toward balancing *naql* and *baḥth*

Results for Objective Two

Table 2: Students’ Attitudes toward Naql and Baḥth (n = 120)

Item	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Remark
I believe <i>naql</i> is the most reliable method of research	4.21	0.68	Strong Agreement
I believe <i>baḥth</i> can complement <i>naql</i> in modern Islamic research	3.75	0.74	Positive Attitude
Critical inquiry may weaken faith if applied excessively	3.62	0.81	Moderate Agreement

Islamic research should integrate both <i>naql</i> and <i>baḥth</i> equally	3.91	0.71	Positive Attitude
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Discussion

The results in Table 2 show that students demonstrate a **strong preference for *naql*** as the most reliable approach to Islamic research (\bar{x} = 4.21). This reflects the deep-rooted perception of transmission as a safeguard of authenticity and orthodoxy. At the same time, students expressed a **positive attitude toward integrating *baḥth*** as a complementary methodology (\bar{x} = 3.75), and a notable proportion agreed that both approaches should be equally balanced (\bar{x} = 3.91).

However, there remains a degree of **caution and suspicion toward critical inquiry**, with a mean of 3.62 for the statement that excessive *baḥth* could undermine faith. This ambivalence suggests that while students are open to methodological innovation, they remain protective of the spiritual boundaries of Islamic knowledge.

This finding resonates with **Abubakar (2021)**, who noted that students in Nigerian universities often regard critical methods with skepticism, fearing that Western-style inquiry may lead to liberal interpretations of sacred texts. Similarly, **Hassan (2018)** observed that Muslim students in Africa prefer methodologies that preserve theological integrity, even when these limit analytical depth. From a Qur’anic perspective, the balance between preservation and inquiry is repeatedly emphasized. Allah says: “Will they not then ponder on the Qur’an? If it had been from other than Allah, they would have found therein much contradiction” (Qur’an 4:82).

This verse validates *baḥth* as a tool for affirming truth rather than undermining it. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also encouraged questioning and reflection when he allowed companions to ask about meanings and contexts of revelation, as seen in the hadith of Ibn Mas‘ūd who frequently inquired about reasons behind certain rulings.

Therefore, while the students' attitudes reflect loyalty to *naql*, they also reveal a willingness to accept *baḥth* as long as it is framed within the boundaries of faith. This duality highlights the opportunity for curriculum reform at the University of Ibadan: *baḥth* can be introduced not as a foreign intrusion but as a continuation of the Qur'anic call to reflection and the prophetic encouragement of inquiry.

Objective Three: To analyze actual practices of *naql* and *baḥth* in student research projects

Results for Objective Three

Table 3: Document Analysis of Student Research Projects (n = 40)

Research Orientation	Frequency	Percentage
Naql-based (compilatory, quoting classical sources)	28	70%
Mixed (integration of <i>naql</i> with some analytical tools)	8	20%
<i>Baḥth</i> -based (critical and investigative approaches)	4	10%

Discussion

The findings in Table 3 reveal that **70% of student research projects** in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan are primarily *naql*-based, relying heavily on compilation and citation of classical authorities. A smaller proportion, **20%**, reflects a mixed orientation, incorporating limited critical analysis alongside transmission. Only **10%** of the works demonstrate a predominantly *baḥth*-oriented approach, engaging critically with texts, contemporary debates, or applying investigative tools. This distribution confirms that while students recognize the concept of *baḥth*, it is rarely applied in practice. Most projects continue to prioritize preservation and reproduction over innovation. These findings are consistent with **Sabo and Hassan (2023)**, who documented that Islamic Studies dissertations across Nigerian universities tend to be descriptive and compilatory, and with **Abubakar (2019)**, who warned that without a stronger emphasis on analysis, Islamic scholarship in Africa risks intellectual stagnation.

The imbalance also diverges from the rich legacy of Islamic intellectual history. Classical scholars often balanced *naql* with *baḥth*. For example, Imam al-Ghazālī combined transmission of Qur'an and Hadith with philosophical reasoning in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, while Ibn Khaldūn employed historical and sociological *baḥth* in his *Muqaddimah*. Their works demonstrate that transmission and critical investigation are not mutually exclusive but complementary dimensions of authentic Islamic knowledge.

From the Qur'anic perspective, this imbalance suggests that the **command to investigate and reflect is being neglected**. Allah says:

"Say, travel through the land and observe how He began creation" (Qur'an 29:20). This verse is a call to empirical *baḥth*, requiring observation, analysis, and reasoning. Similarly, the Prophet (peace be upon him) encouraged critical reflection when he approved different interpretations of whether the Companions should pray 'Asr before reaching Banū Qurayzah (Bukhārī, Hadith 946). This incident shows that *baḥth*—questioning, reasoning, and applying judgment—is a legitimate part of the Sunnah. Thus, the dominance of *naql* in UI student research projects demonstrates **methodological continuity with tradition but an incomplete realization of Islamic epistemology**, which requires both preservation and inquiry. By underutilizing *baḥth*, students risk producing research that is safe but disconnected from the contemporary needs of Muslim societies in Nigeria, such as Islamic finance, gender justice, and technological ethics.

Results for Objective Four

Table 4: Perceived Employability Skills Linked to Research Orientation (n = 60)

Research Orientation	Critical Thinking Skills	Analytical Skills	Communication Skills	Job Market Relevance
Naql-based	Low (15%)	Low (20%)	Moderate (35%)	Low (25%)

Mixed (Naql + <i>Baḥth</i>)	Moderate (45%)	Moderate (50%)	Moderate (55%)	Moderate (50%)
<i>Baḥth</i> -based	High (70%)	High (75%)	High (80%)	High (85%)

Discussion

The results in Table 4 reveal a clear pattern, graduates whose research projects were *baḥth*-oriented reported higher levels of employability-linked skills compared to those whose work was primarily *naql*-based. **Critical thinking, analytical ability, communication skills, and job market relevance** were strongest among the *baḥth*-based group, while the *naql*-dominant group scored the lowest. The mixed orientation showed moderate outcomes. This suggests that **methodological choices in student research are not neutral**; they directly shape the intellectual and professional capacities of graduates. When research relies predominantly on *naql*, it fosters respect for tradition and accuracy in transmission, but it does not sufficiently develop analytical or problem-solving skills that employers demand. In contrast, *baḥth*-oriented research cultivates independence of thought, the ability to evaluate evidence, and the capacity to apply knowledge to new contexts—all of which are vital in diverse sectors such as education, policy analysis, Islamic finance, and media.

Nigerian Islamic Studies graduates face unemployment partly because their training emphasizes memorization and compilation rather than transferable skills. Similarly, **Adebayo and Ibrahim (2021)** noted that Islamic Studies research rarely addresses societal challenges, limiting its applicability in public and private sectors.

From the Islamic intellectual tradition, this outcome reflects a partial fulfillment of the **Prophetic injunction to combine faith with reasoning**. The Qur'an repeatedly calls believers to ponder:

“Will you not use your reason?” (Qur'an 2:44).

And the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“The superiority of the scholar over the worshipper is like the superiority of the moon over the stars” (Tirmidhī, Hadith 2682). This hadith shows that the

value of knowledge is not in rote worship or mere citation (*naql*), but in scholarship that illuminates, guides, and solves problems—qualities nurtured through *baḥth*. In the Nigerian context, therefore, the implications are clear: unless Islamic Studies programs strengthen the role of *baḥth*, graduates will continue to struggle in the labor market. Balancing *naql* with *baḥth* ensures that students preserve tradition while acquiring the analytical and employability skills needed to thrive in modern society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that research in Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan is overwhelmingly dominated by *naql* (transmission), with relatively little emphasis placed on *baḥth* (critical investigation). While *naql* safeguards the authenticity of Islamic tradition and ensures fidelity to the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical scholarship, its dominance has left little room for analytical innovation and independent reasoning. The findings demonstrate that students often equate authenticity with faithful quotation of earlier authorities, thereby neglecting the complementary role of *baḥth*. As a result, research projects tend to be compilatory in nature, with limited engagement in hypothesis testing, interdisciplinary application, or problem-solving. The implications of this methodological imbalance are significant. Graduates whose projects are predominantly *naql*-based emerge with weaker critical thinking and analytical skills, and this limits their employability and societal relevance. In contrast, those who adopt *baḥth*-oriented or mixed approaches demonstrate stronger intellectual independence, communication ability, and market-driven competencies. This pattern reflects what scholars like Adebayo and Ibrahim (2021) observed in Nigeria that Islamic Studies graduates face unemployment partly because their training has not sufficiently prepared them for contemporary challenges. From the Islamic intellectual tradition, the marginalization of *baḥth* represents an incomplete fulfillment of Islamic epistemology. The Qur'an constantly calls the believer to reflect, reason, and observe—“Will you not use your reason?”

(Qur'an 2:44)—while the Sunnah affirms that true scholarship involves illumination and guidance beyond rote memorization. Classical figures such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn Khaldūn exemplify a balance between transmission and critical inquiry, showing that the two are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing. To address this imbalance, students need to be encouraged to integrate *baḥth* into their projects by going beyond quotation to engage critically with classical sources, employ interdisciplinary methods, and build transferable skills. Departments and supervisors should design methodology courses that explicitly train students in both *naql* and *baḥth*, while also demanding analytical rigor in projects. Curriculum planners and policymakers ought to revise Islamic Studies programs so that they promote a balance between preservation of tradition and relevance to modern realities. Training workshops for lecturers and partnerships with industries such as Islamic finance, publishing, and education will further ensure that graduates' research is linked to labor market needs. At the broader level of the Muslim community, there must be a shift in perception to see *baḥth* not as a challenge to tradition but as a Qur'anic and Prophetic command to reflect and reason. Such a reorientation will revive the legacy of *ijtihād*, positioning Islamic Studies as a dynamic field that contributes both to the continuity of tradition and to addressing pressing contemporary issues.

In conclusion, moving “beyond quoting the ancients” does not mean abandoning *naql*. Rather, it means strengthening it with *baḥth* so that Islamic Studies research can be both faithful to its sources and impactful in today's world. Only by balancing transmission with investigation can graduates be prepared to serve the Ummah and wider society in meaningful and relevant ways.

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