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From Tradition to Modernity: Negotiating Continuity and Change in Indonesia's Islamic Education

Dari Tradisi ke Modernitas: Negosiasi Kesinambungan dan Perubahan dalam Pendidikan Islam Indonesia

Amilatul Fadhilah *[1] Syifa Amelia Permata [2] Zidni Nafiatul Rizqi [3]

Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri, Purwokerto, Indonesia [1 2 3]

*Corresponding Author: amilatulfadhilah78@gmail.com

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Abstract

The transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia reflects efforts to balance the continuity of Islamic traditions with the demands of educational modernization. This study aims to analyze the drivers, processes, and implications of the transformation from traditional Islamic education to modern madrasahs. It employs a qualitative library research approach using historical-critical analysis and the interactive data analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman. The findings indicate that madrasah modernization has been shaped by socio-political changes, Islamic reformist ideas from the Middle East, colonial educational inequalities, and the contributions of Muslim scholars and Islamic organizations. The transformation has involved institutional restructuring, classroom-based instruction, and the integration of religious and general knowledge, although disparities in educational quality and resource limitations remain significant challenges. This study contributes an integrated historical perspective that explains madrasah modernization as an ongoing process of negotiating Islamic traditions, intellectual change, and institutional adaptation.

Keywords: Transformation; Islamic Education; Modernization; Curriculum Integration; Pesantren

Abstrak

Transformasi pendidikan Islam di Indonesia mencerminkan upaya menyeimbangkan kesinambungan tradisi keislaman dengan tuntutan modernisasi pendidikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis faktor pendorong, proses, dan implikasi transformasi pendidikan Islam dari sistem tradisional menuju modernisasi madrasah. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi kepustakaan dengan analisis historis-kritis dan model analisis interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa modernisasi madrasah dipengaruhi oleh perubahan sosial-politik, gagasan pembaruan Islam dari Timur Tengah, ketimpangan pendidikan kolonial, serta peran ulama dan organisasi Islam. Transformasi berlangsung melalui penataan kelembagaan, penerapan sistem klasikal, dan integrasi kurikulum agama dengan ilmu umum, meskipun masih menghadapi tantangan berupa kesenjangan kualitas pembelajaran dan keterbatasan sumber daya. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan menjelaskan modernisasi madrasah sebagai proses historis yang mempertemukan tradisi, perubahan intelektual, dan adaptasi kelembagaan.

Kata Kunci: Transformasi; Pendidikan Islam; Modernisasi; Integrasi Kurikulum; Pesantren

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia developed through traditional institutions such as *pesantren*, *surau*, and *langgar*, which played important roles in transmitting religious knowledge and shaping the moral character of Muslim communities. Krisdiyanto et al. demonstrate that *pesantren* have remained resilient amid modernity and gradually expanded their educational orientation from religious sciences to general subjects.[1] However, the resilience of these traditions did not eliminate the need to adapt education to social change and evolving knowledge demands. Ridlo and Pratama et al. explain that Islamic educational reform in Indonesia has unfolded at both ideological and practical levels, producing diverse institutional models and responses to change.[2] In this context, modernization emerged as an effort to reorganize educational objectives, curricula, and institutional structures so that Islamic traditions could be preserved while education responded to changing societal needs across different regions and historical periods.

The transformation of Islamic education became increasingly visible in the early twentieth century, when reformist ideas from the Middle East interacted with scholarly networks, print media, and educational institutions across the Indonesian archipelago. Through an examination of Muhammad Abduh's thought, Irfindari et al. emphasize the need to reconcile worldly and religious knowledge so that Islamic education can address contemporary challenges without losing its divine foundations.[3] In a more specific context, Hidayat and Rohman found that Pan-Islamism influenced the modernization of Islamic education in Minangkabau through the dissemination of ideas in newspapers and magazines,[4] the transformation of *surau* into madrasahs, and the establishment of educational organizations such as Perti. These findings indicate that reform was driven not only by individual thinkers but also by media, institutional change, and organizational initiatives. Hidayat and Rohman likewise situate modernization within a dialectical relationship between classical Islamic traditions and the needs of modern society.

The modernization of madrasahs marked a significant shift as Islamic education began integrating religious and general subjects through classroom-based instruction, graded educational levels, and more structured curricula. This transformation broadened educational objectives beyond the transmission of religious knowledge toward the development of competencies needed for participation in social life. Chairiyah and Ulum and Ekaningrum are

1 Gatot Krisdiyanto et al., "Sistem Pendidikan Pesantren Dan Tantangan Modernitas," *Tarbawi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan* 15, no. 1 (2019): 11–21, https://doi.org/10.32939/tarbawi.v15i1.337.

2 S Ridlo, "Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia," *Syaikhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pranata Islam* 11, no. 1 (2020): 79–104, https://doi.org/10.36835/syaikhuna.v11i1.3846; Muhammad Yusuf Pratama, Abidah Khoirunna'imah, Nazilatul Aisyiah, Muhammad Syauqurrobi, Rikza Afiful Amna, Ananda Pramesthi Yunita Sari, Syifaunnisa Af'idatus Safira, Zida Haniatus Syifa, and Lutfiyah, "Transformasi budaya anti-bullying berbasis moderasi beragama: Model partisipatif di sekolah dasar," *Mimbar Integritas: Jurnal Pengabdian* 5, no. 1 (2026): 30–48, https://doi.org/10.36841/mimbarintegritas.v5i1.7104; Muhammad Yusuf Pratama, Desy Nataliya, Siti Nur Aisyah, Luthfan Nursyamsul Ahfi, Ibnu Nuzul Murtadlo, Lailani Sarafina Aulia, Fatima Noor Aulia, Maulana Hakim Cahyono, and Lutfiyah, "Peningkatan nilai moderasi dan karakter anak melalui peringatan Hari Anak Nasional di SDN 1 Sidomulyo, Kendal," *Mimbar Integritas: Jurnal Pengabdian* 5, no. 1 (2026): 13–29, https://doi.org/10.36841/mimbarintegritas.v5i1.7096..

3 A A Irfindari, A A Al Jannah, and Z Ridhani Abwi, "Perspektif Muhammad 'Abduh Dalam Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia* 2, no. 8 (2021): 1306–12, https://doi.org/10.59141/japendi.v2i08.247.

4 Fahri Hidayat and Mujibur Rohman, "Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam Di Minangkabau: Studi Tentang Interaksi Dengan Pan-Islamisme (1909–1945)," *At-Tarbawi: Jurnal Kajian Kependidikan Islam* 9, no. 2 (2024): 169–86, https://doi.org/10.22515/attarbawi.v9i2.10955.

used in this study to examine the development of madrasahs and curricular integration,[5] while Puspasari provides a reference for discussing challenges associated with modernization.[6] Nevertheless, institutional change has not automatically eliminated tensions between preserving religious traditions, accommodating general knowledge, and improving instructional quality. The modernization of madrasahs should therefore be understood as an ongoing process of negotiation shaped by social conditions and educational policies. This perspective is important because modernization concerns not only curricular content but also educational objectives, institutional governance, and graduates' opportunities.

Research on Islamic educational reform has approached the subject from various perspectives. Idris discusses reform as a response to changing educational needs,[7] while Krisdiyanto et al. examine how *pesantren* respond to modernity and broaden the scope of their educational activities.[8] Sumarno investigates reform through the educational thought of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan,[9] whereas Irfindari et al. highlight Muhammad Abduh's ideas on reconciling worldly and religious knowledge.[10] Hidayat and Rohman identify the influence of Pan-Islamism on changes in educational thought, institutions, and organizations in Minangkabau.[11] Sabila and Albina discuss the role of reformist figures and Islamic organizations in the shift toward classroom-based and collective learning.[12] Harlina and Sarwadi are also included in the initial literature reviewed.[13] Although these studies provide important foundations, they do not collectively offer an integrated historical-critical explanation of the relationship between educational traditions, the drivers of reform, and the modernization of madrasahs.

Addressing this gap, this study aims to analyze how Islamic education in Indonesia transformed from traditional systems toward the modernization of madrasahs, why these reforms emerged, and through what processes the transformation unfolded. The analysis focuses on traditional educational institutions, the influence of reformist thought from the Middle East, colonial dynamics and educational policies, the contributions of Muslim scholars and Islamic organizations, and changes in curricula and institutional structures. Academically, this study is significant because it connects dimensions that are often examined separately within a more comprehensive historical explanation. Practically, it situates contemporary challenges facing

5 Y Chairiyah, "Sejarah Perkembangan Sistem Pendidikan Madrasah Sebagai Lembaga Pendidikan Islam," *MA'ALIM: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (2021): 49–60, https://doi.org/10.21154/maalim.v2i01.3129; M Samsul Ulum and Ifada Retno Ekaningrum, "Lahirnya Madrasah Dan Integrasi Kurikulum," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmiah Multidisipliner* 2, no. 2 (2025): 215–23, https://ojs.ruangpublikasi.com/index.php/jpim/article/view/719.

6 Maria Dwi Puspasari, "Penerapan Kepemimpinan Transformasional Dalam Pengelolaan Madrasah Modern," *Refresh: Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 2 (2023): 40–47, https://doi.org/10.59064/rmpi.v1i2.32.

7 Syarifuddin Idris, "Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia," *Kreatif: Jurnal Pemikiran Pendidikan Agama Islam* 13, no. 2 (2015): 148–65, https://doi.org/10.52266/kreatif.v13i2.90.

8 Krisdiyanto et al., "Sistem Pendidikan Pesantren Dan Tantangan Modernitas."

9 Sumarno, "Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia: Studi Pemikiran KH Ahmad Dahlan," *Al-Murabbi: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan Dan Keislaman* 3, no. 2 (2017): 227–51, https://jurnal.stiti-kp.ac.id/index.php/murabbi/article/view/2603.

10 Irfindari, Al Jannah, and Abwi, "Perspektif Muhammad 'Abduh Dalam Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam."

11 Hidayat and Rohman, "Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam Di Minangkabau: Studi Tentang Interaksi Dengan Pan-Islamisme (1909–1945)."

12 D Sabila and M Albina, "Model Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia," *Socius: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 2, no. 6 (2025): 236–41, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14753675.

13 H Harlina and Sarwadi, "Relevansi Pemikiran Ibnu Khaldun Dengan Konsep Pendidikan Dalam QS. Al-Mujadilah Ayat 11," *Imanu: Jurnal Hukum Dan Peradaban Islam* 1, no. 3 (2025): 90–106, https://risetcendikia.com/index.php/jurnal-imanu/article/view/140.

madrasahs, including the integration of religious and general knowledge and the demands of social change, within their historical trajectories and the broader need for sustained improvements in educational quality. In doing so, the study also examines how Islamic values have been maintained amid institutional transformation.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach using library research and historical-critical analysis to examine the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia from traditional systems to the modernization of madrasahs.[14] The research data are drawn from relevant academic literature, including scholarly journal articles, academic books, previous research findings, and historical documents and educational policy records. Data collection is conducted through documentation by identifying, locating, and examining sources based on their thematic relevance, academic credibility, and contribution to the research objectives. The collected literature is then organized into several main themes: the characteristics of traditional Islamic education, the factors driving educational reform, the influence of Islamic thought from the Middle East, the roles of Muslim scholars and Islamic organizations, the development of madrasahs, and the challenges of modernizing Islamic education in Indonesia.

Data analysis follows the interactive model of Miles et al., which comprises data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.[15] Data reduction involves selecting information relevant to the research objectives, while data display organizes the findings thematically to identify developmental patterns and relationships among the factors influencing the transformation of Islamic education. Historical-critical analysis is then employed to examine continuities and changes in the Islamic education system, particularly in institutional structures, curricula, and educational orientations. Conclusions are drawn by interpreting and comparing findings across sources to explain the factors driving reform, the processes through which Islamic education has been transformed, and the implications of this transformation for the modernization of madrasahs in Indonesia. The consistency of the interpretations is maintained by comparing information across sources and considering the historical context of each finding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Emergence of the Islamic Education Reform Movement in Indonesia

The emergence of the Islamic education reform movement in Indonesia was part of a long and complex historical process shaped by the interaction of global developments, colonial conditions, and internal changes within Muslim society in the Indonesian archipelago. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, advances in science, technology, economics, and modern thought brought significant changes to various aspects of life. Intellectual connections between the Indonesian archipelago and the wider Muslim world also exposed Indonesian Muslims to new debates concerning religion, education, and social progress. In this context, Idris situates the reform of Islamic education in Indonesia within broader changes in intellectual thought and the Muslim community's efforts to respond to changing circumstances.[16] Education consequently became a major concern because it was closely linked to Muslims' access to knowledge and their capacity to participate in modern society.

14 Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2008).

15 Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (California: Sage Publications, 2014).

16 Idris, "Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia."

Awareness of educational disadvantages did not merely generate calls to improve educational institutions; it also prompted a reassessment of educational objectives and teaching methods. As Fahri Hidayat discusses, Islamic education reform must be understood in relation to changing intellectual perspectives and the social dynamics within which they developed.[17] Reform, therefore, did not simply entail adopting modern educational systems. It also involved strengthening the Islamic intellectual tradition and adapting educational provision to the evolving needs of society. From this perspective, educational reform represented an effort to reconcile the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions with the demands of changing social conditions.

One important dimension of this process was the reassessment of traditional Islamic education, particularly the *pesantren*. These institutions have historically played a significant role in preserving Islamic scholarly traditions through the study of classical Islamic texts, character formation, and the transmission of religious authority. Teaching methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan* formed part of an established pedagogical tradition through which students studied religious texts intensively under the guidance of teachers. However, as social needs became increasingly diverse, calls emerged to complement these methods with more systematically organised instruction and the teaching of general subjects. The discussion by Krisdiyanto et al. of pesantren education and the challenges of modernity provides a useful point of reference for understanding this issue.[18] The challenge was not simply to replace traditional education, but to develop educational models that preserved the strengths of Islamic scholarly traditions while responding to emerging needs.

Dutch colonial education policies also helped shape the conditions that encouraged reform. Access to modern education during the colonial period was unevenly distributed, reflecting social hierarchies and the interests of the colonial administration. Such inequalities limited many indigenous Indonesians' opportunities to obtain an education that could improve their social mobility and access to modern knowledge. Establishing Islamic educational institutions can be understood as one means of expanding educational opportunities and strengthening Muslim communities' capacity for self-reliance amid the inequalities of the colonial education system.[19]

Intellectual developments in the Middle East also constituted an important influence on the evolution of Islamic reform in Indonesia. Intellectual connections between the Indonesian archipelago and Islamic centres of learning, including Mecca and Cairo, enabled scholars and students to engage with religious debates taking place across the Muslim world. The ideas of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and Rashīd Riḍā addressed the use of reason, the advancement of education, and efforts to respond to the perceived decline of Muslim societies. In the context of educational reform, Ridha and Sahroni provide a reference for examining reformist ideas associated with the thought of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā.[20] These intellectual influences strengthened debates about the relationship between Islamic teachings, the development of knowledge, and the need to reform educational systems.

17 Fahri Hidayat, "Gagasan Pendidikan Dalam Perspektif Priyayi Dan Santri: Kajian Pemikiran Ki Hadjar Dewantara Dan KH Ahmad Dahlan," *Matan: Journal of Islam and Muslim Society* 5, no. 1 (2023): 1–14.

18 Krisdiyanto et al., "Sistem Pendidikan Pesantren Dan Tantangan Modernitas."

19 M. Syukri Azwar Lubis et al., "Understanding Curriculum Transformation Towards Educational Innovation in The Era of All-Digital Technology," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (May 18, 2022): 526–42, https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v5i2.2110.

20 M R Ridha and E Sahroni, "Konsep Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Perspektif Muhammad Rasyid Ridha," *Jurnal Penelitian Tarbawi: Pendidikan Islam Dan Isu-Isu Sosial* 8, no. 1 (2023): 19–30, https://doi.org/10.37216/tarbawi.v8i1.1011.

The development of reformist thought was subsequently connected to the emergence of Islamic organisations with different educational orientations and strategies. Muhammadiyah, for example, pursued reform by establishing schools and educational institutions that combined religious instruction with general subjects. Nahdlatul Ulama, meanwhile, placed considerable emphasis on the scholarly traditions of the *pesantren* and the authority of the *ʿulamāʾ*. Nevertheless, these organisations should not be understood as absolute representatives of a binary opposition between modernity and tradition. Puspasari, through a discussion of transformational leadership in the management of modern madrasas, offers a perspective for contextualising the importance of institutional management in responding to educational change.[21] The differing orientations of Islamic organisations demonstrate that educational reform developed through diverse approaches shaped by their respective social backgrounds and needs.

Beyond educational institutions and Islamic organisations, the dissemination of reformist ideas was also influenced by advances in printing technology and communication media. Newspapers, magazines, and books enabled Muslim intellectuals to communicate their ideas to wider audiences. Print media also created spaces for intellectual exchange, religious debate, and the circulation of information about educational developments in different regions. Hidayat and Rohman examine the modernisation of Islamic education in Minangkabau in relation to intellectual interaction and historical dynamics.[22] Their perspective helps situate reform within broader social and intellectual processes, although specific claims about the role of print media require evidence that directly addresses this medium.

Indonesia's sociocultural diversity also shaped the direction of Islamic education reform. The development of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago involved prolonged interaction with local traditions, producing diverse religious practices and interpretations of Islam. Some reformist groups emphasised the purification of religious teachings, whereas others stressed the continuity of local traditions provided that they did not contradict fundamental Islamic principles. Sarwadi, in a study of models of Islamic education reform from the classical to the modern period, offers a reference for examining changes in educational orientations across history.[23] These differing perspectives demonstrate that Islamic education reform did not take place within a uniform social environment. Rather, it developed through processes of negotiation and debate shaped by cultural diversity and local intellectual traditions.

The rise of nationalism and resistance to colonial rule also provided an important context for the development of Islamic education reform. Education increasingly came to be regarded as a means of raising social awareness, expanding intellectual capabilities, and strengthening self-reliance in the face of colonial power structures. Alhidayahtillah, through a study of reformist thought in Islam, provides a point of reference for situating these developments within broader changes in religious thought.[24] However, the direct relationship between educational reform and nationalist movements requires further explanation supported by historical sources that specifically examine the involvement of Islamic educational figures or institutions in the struggle against colonialism.

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21 Puspasari, "Penerapan Kepemimpinan Transformasional Dalam Pengelolaan Madrasah Modern."

22 Fahri Hidayat and Mujibur Rohman, *Pendidikan Islam Modern Di Nusantara: Dialektika Pemikiran Dan Dinamika Sosial Pada Awal Abad Ke-20* (Wawasan Ilmu, 2025), https://wawasanilmu.co.id/product/pendidikan-islam-modern-di-nusantara-dialektika-pemikiran-dan-dinamika-sosial-pada-awal-abad-ke-20-penulis-dr-fahri-hidayat-m-pd-i-mujibur-rohman-m-s-i/.

23 Sarwadi, "Model Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Dari Masa Klasik Sampai Modern," *QuranicEdu: Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 2 (2023): 155–78, https://doi.org/10.37252/quranicedu.v2i2.390.

24 Nur Alhidayahtillah, "Pembaharuan Pemikiran Dalam Islam," *An-Nida'* 42, no. 1 (2018): 87–100, https://doi.org/10.24014/an-nida.v42i1.9340.

Overall, the Islamic education reform movement in Indonesia emerged through the interaction of multiple factors, including global change, internal reassessments of educational systems, colonial policies, intellectual influences from the Middle East, the development of Islamic organisations, advances in print media, sociocultural diversity, and the growth of nationalism. Lenggono, in a study of K. H. Ahmad Dahlan's thought and Islamic education reform, provides one perspective on how reformist ideas were translated into educational institutions.[25] Islamic education reform should therefore not be understood as a linear process in which modernity simply replaced tradition. Rather, it represented an ongoing effort to negotiate the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions with emerging needs in curricula, teaching methods, and educational institutions.

Factors Driving the Emergence of Modern Education in Indonesia

The emergence of modern education in Indonesia cannot be separated from the social, political, and intellectual changes that took place in the early twentieth century. In Minangkabau, increasing Dutch colonial pressure in the economic and political spheres coincided with the growing influence of religious reformist ideas, prompting Muslim communities to reassess existing educational systems. These developments fostered an awareness of the need for Islamic educational institutions to adopt more systematic structures capable of addressing increasingly complex social needs. Whereas the *surau* had previously served as one of the principal centres of religious learning, subsequent developments saw the emergence of educational models based on classroom instruction, graded classes, and organised curricula. Ulum and Ekaningrum discuss the emergence of madrasas in relation to curriculum integration, highlighting the importance of institutional change in the development of Islamic education.[26] The emergence of modern education can therefore be understood as a response to the need for a more organised learning system without entirely abandoning its religious orientation.

These changes were also reflected in the development of Islamic educational institutions in Minangkabau. Mahmud Yunus identified Adabiyah School, established by Haji Abdullah Ahmad in Padang in 1907, as one of the pioneers of the classroom-based educational system. The school introduced a mode of instruction that differed from earlier educational traditions and initially encountered resistance before reopening in 1909. This development illustrates that educational modernisation did not occur automatically; rather, it involved processes of acceptance, adaptation, and debate within society. At the same time, Islamic education continued to fulfil its fundamental functions of transmitting knowledge, shaping individual character, and cultivating moral values. Zahro et al. examine the factors that influenced intellectual movements and the emergence of Islamic educational institutions.[27] Their perspective is relevant to understanding the relationship between intellectual developments and institutional formation, although specific historical claims concerning Adabiyah School require support from sources that directly document its establishment.

Beyond institutional change, the development of modern education was also associated with the emergence of Islamic reform movements. In this context, modernisation did not simply mean abandoning religious traditions. It also involved reassessing established ideas, practices,

25 Wahyu Lenggono, "Lembaga Pendidikan Muhammadiyah: Telaah Pemikiran K. H. Ahmad Dahlan Tentang Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia," *Islamadina: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 19, no. 1 (2018): 43–62, https://doi.org/10.30595/islamadina.v19i1.2897.

26 Ulum and Ekaningrum, "Lahirnya Madrasah Dan Integrasi Kurikulum."

27 I M Fatimah Zahro et al., "Faktor-Faktor Yang Memengaruhi Gerakan Intelektual Dan Lahirnya Institusi Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Multidisiplin Dehasen (MUDE)* 4, no. 3 (2025): 377–86, https://doi.org/10.37676/mude.v4i3.8878.

and institutions in order to respond to changing circumstances. Reform could entail reinterpreting intellectual heritage, advancing knowledge, and adapting teaching methods to society's evolving needs. Harun Nasution's thought on Islamic reform provides a framework for understanding the relationship between intellectual change and social transformation. In education, this orientation encouraged greater attention to rational inquiry, the advancement of knowledge, and the reform of instructional systems. Ahmadi and Syafaah, in their study of Harun Nasution's thought, provide a reference for examining reformist ideas within Islamic intellectual discourse.[28]

The influence of these reform movements was subsequently reflected in the development of Islamic organisations that prioritised education and social change. Muhammadiyah, for example, became known for its commitment to *tajdīd* (renewal), promoting educational institutions that combined religious instruction with general subjects. This approach demonstrated how educational modernisation could be pursued through institutional reform and curriculum development. Nevertheless, Islamic reform in Indonesia did not follow a single pattern. Nahdlatul Ulama, for instance, has deep roots in the scholarly traditions of the *pesantren* and the authority of the *ʿulamāʾ*, while also developing within a changing social and political environment. Sabila and Albina discuss models of Islamic education reform in Indonesia, providing a reference for situating these diverse approaches within the broader development of Islamic education.[29] These differences should not be understood as an absolute opposition between tradition and modernity, but rather as diverse responses to changing circumstances.

The relationship between Islamic reform and institutional dynamics is also evident in the development of religious organisations in Indonesia. Subandi examines reformist and modernist religious movements through Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, including the dynamics surrounding these organisations. Islamic organisations have not confined their activities to education; they have also engaged with social, cultural, economic, and political issues.[30] Their involvement in these areas has influenced the direction and strategies of reform movements. In education, religious organisations can serve as institutional providers, intellectual contributors, and intermediaries between community needs and changes in educational systems. The emergence of modern education in Indonesia should therefore be understood as part of a broader process of social transformation rather than merely a change in teaching methods or the replacement of traditional institutions with modern schools.

Alongside these social and institutional changes, advances in science and technology became an important factor in educational transformation, particularly as information technology became more widely used in Indonesia towards the end of the twentieth century. The arrival of the internet expanded access to information and created new opportunities for communication, economic activity, and learning. These developments were accompanied by the spread of email, online communication applications, mobile phones, computers, and various digital communication infrastructures. Sari and Hamidah, in their discussion of educational innovation in the millennial era, provide a reference for examining the relationship between technological

28 Ahmadi and Syafaah, "Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia: Studi Pemikiran Harun Nasution," *Al-Fikrah: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Keislaman* 5, no. 2 (2022): 1–23, https://www.jurnal.alhamidiyah.ac.id/index.php/al-fikrah/article/view/266.

29 Sabila and Albina, "Model Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia."

30 Y Subandi, "Gerakan Pembaharuan Keagamaan Reformis-Modernis: Studi Terhadap Muhammadiyah Dan Nahdlatul Ulama," *Resolusi: Jurnal Sosial Politik* 1, no. 1 (2018): 54–66, https://doi.org/10.32699/resolusi.v1i1.158.

change and the need for educational innovation.[31] Technology has enabled learning to take place through a wider range of media and information sources, making education less dependent on face-to-face interaction in the classroom. Nevertheless, technology does not automatically guarantee improvements in educational quality. Its effective use still requires teacher preparedness, adequate infrastructure, and students' ability to access and critically evaluate information.

Technological advances have also encouraged educational institutions to adapt their teaching methods and institutional management. Digital devices, internet connectivity, and electronic learning resources have expanded opportunities for delivering instructional materials and facilitating interaction between teachers and students. These changes require educational institutions to develop digital competencies while maintaining the quality of the learning process. For Islamic education, this challenge includes integrating technology with the objectives of developing knowledge, character, and religious values. Advances in science and technology are therefore better understood as factors accelerating the transformation of modern education in the contemporary period, rather than as direct causes of the emergence of madrasas in the early twentieth century.

Demographic factors must also be considered when examining the development of modern education in Indonesia. Population growth can occur naturally, when births exceed deaths, or through migration, involving the movement of people into and out of a particular area. Changes in population size and distribution can affect demand for schools, madrasas, teachers, classrooms, and educational facilities. When the school-age population increases, educational institutions must expand their capacity to provide adequate access to learning. Conversely, population movements can alter the distribution of educational needs across regions. Demographic factors should therefore be taken into account in educational planning and the development of modern education systems, particularly to ensure that expanded access is accompanied by adequate facilities and quality instruction.

Nevertheless, population growth does not automatically lead to more modern education. Its effects depend on government policies, funding capacity, the distribution of teachers, and the readiness of educational institutions to respond to community needs. Growing demand for education must be accompanied by the development of institutions capable of reaching broader segments of society and providing quality services. Demographic change is therefore more appropriately understood as a driver of educational expansion and adaptation, while the modernisation of institutions, curricula, and teaching methods requires coordinated policies and sustained innovation.

Overall, the emergence and development of modern education in Indonesia have been shaped by the interaction of social and political change, Islamic reform movements, the development of religious organisations, advances in science and technology, and growing educational needs. These factors operated in different historical contexts. In the early twentieth century, institutional changes and intellectual reform movements played important roles in the development of classroom-based systems, madrasas, and modern schools. By contrast, technological developments and demographic changes have been more prominent in expanding access, transforming learning practices, and increasing demand for educational services in subsequent periods. Distinguishing between these historical contexts is essential to avoid conflating the origins of modern education with the factors influencing its contemporary development.

31 Aprillia Sari and Hamidah, "Makna Pembaharuan Pendidikan, Usaha, Dan Bentuk Inovasi Pembaharuan Pendidikan Era Milenial," *Jurnal Eksplorasi Pendidikan* 8, no. 3 (2025): 1–10, https://ojs.co.id/1/index.php/jep/article/download/2836/3488/6283.

The Historical Development of Modern Education as a Reform of Islamic Education in Indonesia

The development of modern Islamic education in Indonesia has been marked by a gradual institutional transformation, particularly through the emergence and development of madrasahs. Unlike *pesantren* and *surau*, which have their own distinctive educational traditions, madrasahs began adopting a more structured educational system through the organization of classes, graded levels of instruction, and curriculum development. Etymologically, the term *madrasah* derives from the Arabic word *darasa*, which relates to the activity of learning. In the Indonesian context, the term refers to an educational institution that combines Islamic religious instruction with, over time, various general subjects. This transformation became increasingly apparent in the early twentieth century, when society's demand for a more organized educational system converged with the influence of Islamic reformist thought from the Middle East. One important figure in this development was Shaykh Abdullah Ahmad, who established Madrasah Adabiyah in Padang in 1909. The establishment of this institution reflected an effort to develop a more systematic form of Islamic education in response to social change and the educational needs of the community.[32]

Historically, the development of madrasahs can be examined through two major periods: before and after Indonesia's independence. Before independence, madrasah education generally placed religious sciences at the center of the curriculum, although some institutions gradually began incorporating general subjects. These curricular changes reflected efforts to broaden the scope of Islamic education without abandoning its religious orientation. Following independence, the institutional consolidation of madrasahs gained momentum with the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs on 3 January 1946, which subsequently played a role in supervising and developing religious education. Another significant milestone was the issuance of the Joint Decree of Three Ministers in 1975, which strengthened the position of madrasahs within the national education system by regulating the equivalence of their certificates and opportunities for further education. This policy encouraged madrasahs to improve the quality of general education while maintaining their distinctive Islamic character. Accordingly, the recognition of madrasahs concerned not only their administrative status but also efforts to expand their graduates' access to subsequent levels of education.[33]

The transformation of madrasahs was also inseparable from the role of Muslim scholars and Islamic organizations in developing educational models suited to the needs of their respective communities. Madrasah Adabiyah in Sumatra, Madrasah Tawalib, and educational institutions established by Muhammadiyah and Al-Irsyad illustrate the diverse forms of reform undertaken in the organization and orientation of Islamic education. In Java, educational reform also took place within the *pesantren* tradition, including through the development of a classroom-based system at Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School under K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari. These developments demonstrate that the modernization of Islamic education did not occur exclusively through the establishment of madrasahs; it also involved adjustments to teaching systems within traditional educational institutions. In terms of curriculum, religious sciences were increasingly combined with general subjects, such as languages, history, and arithmetic, although the composition and implementation of these subjects varied across institutions. Nevertheless, this reform process unfolded within a political environment that was not always supportive. During Dutch colonial rule, the supervision of Islamic education through policies such as the Teacher Ordinance and

32 Ridlo, "Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia."

33 Muhammad Aldian Syah, Muhammad Zalnur, and Fauza Masyudi, "Sejarah Dan Dinamika Pembaharuan Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Di Nusantara: Surau, Pesantren Dan Madrasah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Nusantara* 2, no. 1 (2025): 12–20, https://doi.org/10.61722/jinu.v2i1.3087.

the Wild School Ordinance restricted the activities of various educational institutions. By contrast, during the Japanese occupation, the approach toward Islamic organizations and education changed as the occupying government sought to secure support from the Muslim population. These dynamics demonstrate that the development of madrasahs was shaped by the interaction between initiatives undertaken by Muslim communities and the political policies implemented during each historical period.[34]

The reform of Islamic education has not been limited to the introduction of classroom-based instruction or the integration of general subjects into the curriculum. Rather, it has continued through institutional adjustments and the reorientation of educational goals in response to social change. Fadhilah et al. conceptualizes the reform of Islamic educational institutions as an effort involving reform, restructuring, and innovation while remaining grounded in religious values.[35] This perspective emphasizes that modernization should not be understood as a rejection of Islamic tradition, but rather as an evaluation of practices and institutional systems that are no longer adequate to address contemporary needs. In the context of madrasahs in Indonesia, this principle is reflected in efforts to improve educational quality, broaden curricular content, and strengthen institutional capacity to respond to social change and global developments. The central challenge of Islamic educational reform, therefore, lies in developing an adaptive educational system without losing its Islamic orientation. Ultimately, the modernization of madrasahs constitutes an ongoing process that brings the continuity of religious values into dialogue with the need to reform educational systems and institutions.

The Transformation of Islamic Education from Traditional Systems to the Modernization of Madrasah's

Islamic education in Indonesia has undergone a lengthy historical transformation from traditional systems toward modern educational models. In its early development, Islamic education was rooted in institutions such as *pesantren*, *surau*, and *langgar*, which served as centers for transmitting classical Islamic knowledge and fostering the moral development of Muslim communities. Their educational systems emphasized the mastery of religious sciences, the study of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), and the cultivation of intellectual and moral relationships between *kiai* and *santri*. Teaching methods such as *sorogan*, *bandongan*, lectures, discussions, and memorization played important roles in the learning process. Beyond transmitting religious knowledge, these institutions contributed to preserving Islamic scholarly traditions, disseminating religious teachings, and shaping students' moral character.[36] Although traditional Islamic education was instrumental in maintaining the continuity of Islamic intellectual traditions, it faced growing pressure to adapt as society increasingly demanded a more structured educational model capable of accommodating developments in general knowledge.

The differences between traditional and modern education primarily concern learning objectives, institutional organization, curricula, and teaching methods. Traditional education tends to emphasize the transmission of religious knowledge, moral development, and the preservation of scholarly traditions, whereas modern education places greater emphasis on structured learning systems, the integration of various disciplines, and competencies relevant to changing social conditions. These differences do not mean, however, that traditional education

34 Chairiyah, "Sejarah Perkembangan Sistem Pendidikan Madrasah Sebagai Lembaga Pendidikan Islam."

35 Nadya Fadhilah et al., "Masa Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Keguruan* 3, no. 11 (2026): 1676–89, https://jutepe-joln.net/index.php/JURPERU/article/view/1147.

36 Denis Ridho Nur Huda et al., "Pendidikan Islam Tradisional Dan Modern," *Al-Riwayah: Jurnal Kependidikan* 15, no. 2 (2023): 262–72, https://doi.org/10.47945/al-riwayah.v15i2.949; Ahmad Mudzakkir et al., "Sejarah Pendidikan Islam: Karakter Pendidikan Islam Klasik Dan Modern," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Educational Review* 1, no. 3 (2024): 176–86, https://doi.org/10.58230/ijier.v1i3.268.

entirely neglects general knowledge or that modern education abandons character formation. Rather, the two approaches can complement each other when developed proportionately. Moh Hasibuddin and Mahfida identify several characteristics of traditional education, including grouping students by age, the dominant role of teachers, reliance on books as primary learning resources, and relatively strict institutional rules.[37] Modern education, meanwhile, emphasizes learning that is more responsive to students' abilities and interests and recognizes the importance of educational experiences both inside and outside school. The principal differences between the two systems are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Traditional and Modern Islamic Education

Aspect	Traditional Education	Modern Education
Orientation	Transmission of religious knowledge and moral formation	Integration of religious knowledge, general knowledge, and competencies
Curriculum	Predominantly focused on classical Islamic sciences	Structured curriculum encompassing religious and general subjects
Teaching methods	*Sorogan*, *bandongan*, lectures, and memorization	Classroom-based instruction, discussions, and more varied teaching approaches
Learning organization	Flexible in some traditional institutions and centered on teacher–student relationships	Generally structured through educational levels, class divisions, and formal administration
Role of educators	Instructors and mentors who serve as moral authorities	Teachers, mentors, and facilitators of learning
Educational objectives	Mastery of religious knowledge and development of religious character	Knowledge acquisition, character development, and multidimensional competencies

Source: Compiled by Authors (2026)

The transition toward modern Islamic education did not occur spontaneously but was influenced by social and political changes during the colonial period. Unequal access to education under Dutch colonial rule restricted opportunities for much of the Muslim population to obtain modern education, while Islamic educational institutions faced limitations in accessing developments in scientific knowledge and more organized educational administration.[38] This situation revealed a dualistic educational system that separated religious education from general education. According to Majiid and Hidayat, Islamic educational reform emerged in response to this separation and as an effort to develop an educational system capable of integrating religious values with the needs of modern society.[39] Modernization, therefore, involved more

37 Moh Hasibuddin, Mahfida Inayati, and Mohammad Hasan, "Studi Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam Tradisional Dan Modern," *Jurnal Lentera: Kajian Keagamaan, Keilmuan Dan Teknologi* 22, no. 2 (2023): 137–47, https://doi.org/10.29138/lentera.v22i2.1137.

38 S Rahmadina et al., "Evolusi Pendidikan Klasik Dan Modern Serta Kajian Terhadap Faktor-Faktor Pendidikan," *NUSRA: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Ilmu Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (2025): 39–47, https://doi.org/10.55681/nusra.v6i1.3381.

39 Muhammad Luthful Majiid and Fahri Hidayat, "Peran Pemikiran Pendidikan K. H. Hasyim Asy'ari Dalam Dinamika Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia* 5, no. 8 (2024), https://doi.org/10.59141/japendi.v5i8.3283.

than institutional restructuring; it also represented an attempt to overcome the separation between religious and general knowledge.

The introduction of Islamic reformist ideas from the Middle East also influenced the direction of Islamic educational development in Indonesia. The thought of Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani encouraged the development of an educational paradigm that was more rational, open, and responsive to changing circumstances.[40] These ideas spread through networks of Indonesian Muslim scholars who studied in Mecca and Cairo, as well as through Islamic organizations and print media. Such intellectual interactions broadened awareness of the importance of reforming curricula, teaching methods, and educational institutions as part of the broader revival of Muslim communities.[41] Over time, reformist ideas influenced not only the content of education but also perspectives on the relationship between religion, scientific knowledge, and social progress. The modernization of Islamic education can therefore be understood as an intellectual adaptation shaped by encounters between local Islamic traditions, reformist thought from the Middle East, and the challenges of modernity.

One of the most tangible manifestations of this transformation was the development of modern madrasahs, which adopted classroom-based instruction, graded educational levels, structured curricula, and the integration of religious and general subjects. Madrasahs became spaces in which the continuity of Islamic educational traditions met the need for a more organized learning system. Their curricula expanded beyond Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to include mathematics, natural sciences, languages, history, and other fields of knowledge. Ulum and Ekaningrum identify curricular integration as an important element in efforts to reduce the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge.[42] This development was also supported by Islamic organizations, particularly Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, which pursued educational reform through different approaches. Muhammadiyah promoted modern Islamic schools with more structured administrative and instructional systems, whereas Nahdlatul Ulama contributed to educational reform through the modernization of *pesantren* while preserving classical scholarly traditions.[43] These different approaches demonstrate that the modernization of Islamic education in Indonesia developed contextually, reflecting the distinct social, cultural, and religious orientations of the organizations involved.

The development of print media and technology subsequently expanded the circulation of ideas concerning Islamic educational reform. Newspapers, Islamic magazines, and reformist books in the early twentieth century provided important channels for introducing Islamic modernist thought and stimulating public discussion about education and social change.[44] These developments strengthened the circulation of ideas beyond formal educational institutions and connected scholarly debates with the changing needs of society. In contemporary contexts, the transformation of Islamic education has become increasingly associated with digital technology, the strengthening of literacy, and the development of competencies needed to navigate global

40 Andi Hidayat, "Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Menurut Muhammad Abduh," *Jurnal Mandiri: Ilmu Pengetahuan, Seni, Dan Teknologi* 2, no. 2 (2018): 369–84, https://doi.org/10.33753/mandiri.v2i2.49.

41 Farah Zakia Badriati et al., "Sejarah Gerakan Sosial Keagamaan Di Indonesia Melalui Kiprah Muhammadiyah Dan Nahdlatul Ulama," *Keraton: Journal of History Education and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2025): 136–43, https://doi.org/10.32585/keraton.v7i2.7739.

42 Ulum and Ekaningrum, "Lahirnya Madrasah Dan Integrasi Kurikulum."

43 Hidayat, "Gagasan Pendidikan Dalam Perspektif Priyayi Dan Santri: Kajian Pemikiran Ki Hadjar Dewantara Dan KH Ahmad Dahlan"; Subandi, "Gerakan Pembaharuan Keagamaan Reformis-Modernis: Studi Terhadap Muhammadiyah Dan Nahdlatul Ulama."

44 Jajang Jahroni, "Ritual, Bid'ah, and the Negotiation of the Public Sphere in Contemporary Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 25, no. 1 (April 30, 2018): 1–35, https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v25i1.5308.

change. Nevertheless, the integration of religious and general knowledge has not always been implemented effectively. Some madrasahs continue to face challenges involving limited human resources, disparities in instructional quality between religious and general subjects, and insufficient innovation in technology-based learning.[45] These challenges indicate that curricular reform and technological adoption must be accompanied by improvements in educators' capacities, infrastructure, and institutional governance if modernization is to produce meaningful improvements in educational quality.

The modernization of Islamic education has also generated ideological debates concerning the relationship between tradition and modernity. Some groups have expressed concern that adopting modern educational models could weaken the authority of classical scholarship and displace the identity of *pesantren*, particularly when modernization is equated with the imitation of Western educational systems.[46] The transformation of madrasahs in Indonesia, however, demonstrates that reform does not necessarily require the abandonment of Islamic traditions. Instead, scholarly traditions can be preserved while being critically evaluated and developed to meet contemporary needs. Following independence, the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the introduction of various educational regulations further strengthened the position of madrasahs within the national education system.[47] This institutional recognition expanded opportunities for madrasah graduates to pursue further education and participate in broader social life. The modernization of madrasahs can therefore be understood as an ongoing intellectual and institutional negotiation that seeks to reconcile Islamic identity with the requirements of national education and social development.

Overall, the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia has been shaped by interactions among Islamic scholarly traditions, colonial policies, reformist ideas from the Middle East, the contributions of religious organizations, and developments in technology and globalization. The transition from traditional educational systems to the modernization of madrasahs has involved not only changes in institutional structures and curricula but also shifts in how Islamic education responds to societal needs. In contemporary contexts, the principal challenges include developing adaptive learning approaches, improving educators' competencies, strengthening digital literacy, and maintaining a balance between religious and general knowledge. Modernization should therefore not be understood as a break with tradition, but as an effort to develop the Islamic intellectual heritage so that it remains relevant amid changing circumstances. The success of this transformation depends on the capacity of Islamic educational institutions to combine the continuity of Islamic values with innovation in curricula, teaching practices, and educational governance.

45 Hizamuddin Syah and Badrul Mudarris, "The Implementation of Coaching and Mentoring in Enhancing Teacher Performance in Madrasah," *Journal of Educational Management Research* 4, no. 6 (December 3, 2025): 2817–31, https://doi.org/10.61987/jemr.v4i6.1530.

46 Imam Mujahid, "Islamic Orthodoxy-Based Character Education: Creating Moderate Muslim in a Modern Pesantren in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (December 8, 2021): 185–212, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.185-212; Muhammad Yusuf Pratama, Ahmad Nabil Annuha, Ahmad Farid Fanani, and Muhammad Azlan Lubis, "Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia: Roles, Implementation, and Methods in Shaping Islamic Character in the Modern Era," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Educational Review* 2, no. 3 (2025): 282–92, https://doi.org/10.58230/ijier.v2i3.422.

47 Quratul Aini and Adiyono, "Implementation of an Independent Curriculum in Supporting Students' Freedom to Create and Learn," *Journal of Scientific Research, Education, and Technology (JSRET)* 2, no. 3 (July 9, 2023), https://doi.org/10.58526/jsret.v2i3.187.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia from traditional systems to modern madrasahs was not merely an institutional transition, but a historically situated response to changing social needs, colonial educational inequalities, intellectual reform, and the growing demand for integration between religious and general knowledge. The central finding is that the modernization of madrasahs developed through the interaction of local Islamic scholarly traditions, reformist ideas from the Middle East, the initiatives of Islamic organizations, and the gradual incorporation of structured curricula and classroom-based instruction. This transformation occurred because traditional educational institutions, despite their significant contributions to religious knowledge and moral formation, faced increasing pressure to respond to the demands of modern society. The process unfolded through curricular integration, institutional restructuring, organizational initiatives, and the adaptation of educational practices to changing circumstances. However, modernization did not necessarily require the abandonment of Islamic traditions. Rather, the Indonesian experience illustrates how Islamic educational institutions negotiated continuity and change by maintaining their religious foundations while expanding their educational scope. The modernization of madrasahs can therefore be understood as an ongoing process of institutional and intellectual adaptation rather than a linear transition from tradition to modernity.

This study contributes to the historical understanding of Islamic educational reform by conceptualizing madrasah modernization as an interaction between institutional change, intellectual developments, and socio-political dynamics, rather than as a purely administrative or curricular process. It also highlights the importance of examining the relationship between religious identity and educational adaptation when evaluating the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on a literature-based approach and the secondary sources examined; it does not provide direct empirical evidence from particular madrasahs or systematically compare their experiences across different regions and historical periods. Future research should therefore incorporate archival materials, interviews with educators and institutional leaders, and comparative case studies to investigate how modernization has been implemented in practice. Further studies could also examine differences in curriculum integration, digital learning adoption, teacher competencies, and educational outcomes across madrasahs. Such investigations would provide a more detailed understanding of the conditions under which Islamic educational institutions can strengthen their academic quality and global competitiveness while preserving their distinctive religious and ethical foundations.

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