

ISLAMIC EDUCATION REFORM HISTORY PATTEND AND CHALLENGES OF DUALISM

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Abstract

This article examines the trajectory of Islamic education reform as a critical response to the challenges posed by modernity, Western colonialism, and internal intellectual stagnation within the Muslim world. Tracing the historical roots of reform movements from the post-Baghdad era to the contemporary period, the study identifies diverse patterns of educational renewal, including traditionalist, modernist, synthetic-integrative, and transformative-critical approaches. The central problematic addressed is the persistent dualism or dichotomy between religious and secular sciences, a legacy of colonial education systems that has fragmented Muslim intellectual identity and hindered civilizational progress. Through a qualitative historical-analytical review of key reformist figures, institutions, and epistemological frameworks, the article argues that meaningful reform requires more than curricular adjustment; it demands an epistemological reconstruction grounded in the integration and interconnection of knowledge (*tawḥīd*). Strategic solutions such as the Islamization of knowledge, the integrative-interconnective paradigm, and institutional restructuring are discussed as viable pathways to overcome dualism. The findings affirm that Islamic education reform is an ongoing, multifaceted project aimed at producing a generation that embodies both intellectual piety and spiritual intelligence, capable of contributing to global civilization without sacrificing Islamic identity. Ultimately, the article posits that the future of Islamic education lies in a holistic vision where religious and general sciences are unified, enabling the Ummah to reclaim its role as a dynamic agent of knowledge and moral guidance.

Keywords: *Tajdid*, dualism of knowledge, modernization, modernist and traditionalist, Islamization of knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the primary pillar in the construction of human civilization. In Islam, the position of knowledge and education is fundamental, as the first revelation bestowed upon Prophet Muhammad PBUH was the command to read (*iqra'*), epistemologically signifying a mandate to research, contemplate, and comprehend the realities of divinity and the universe. However, history reveals a sharp paradox: the Islamic world, which once spearheaded global civilization through centuries of scientific and philosophical achievement, fell into a prolonged phase of intellectual stagnation following the fall of Baghdad in 1258 CE, reaching its nadir during the era of Western colonialism. This intellectual anxiety became the starting point for the emergence of Islamic educational reform movements, which

arose not merely from a desire to imitate the West, but rather as a form of self-defense and an existential effort by the Muslim Ummah to break free from the shackles of *taqlid* (uncritical imitation) and intellectual rigidity.¹

The advent of colonialism introduced secular modern educational systems which, while offering technological progress, simultaneously threatened the religious identity of the Ummah, birthing a "historical wound" known as educational dualism a profound split between schools that glorified rationality devoid of religious morality, and madrasas that preserved spirituality but remained inept at facing modern challenges. Consequently, the renewal of Islamic education has become a monumental project to reconstruct the edifice of Islamic thought, ensuring it can address the challenges of modernity without losing its core identity as servants of God. This article will dissect in depth how these historical dynamics unfolded, the various patterns adopted by Muslim thinkers, and the strategic solutions to the problematic dichotomy of knowledge that remains a subject of intense debate within Islamic academic circles today.²

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative historical-analytical approach, utilizing library research (*library research*) as its primary method of data collection. The data sources consist of classical and contemporary scholarly works, including books, journal articles, and historical documents pertaining to Islamic education reform, the history of Muslim intellectual development, and the dichotomy between religious and secular sciences.³ The gathered data are analyzed using descriptive-analytical and historical-hermeneutical methods, aiming not only to describe the historical facts and patterns of reform movements but also to interpret their underlying epistemological, sociological, and pedagogical implications. This approach allows the study to critically trace the evolution of Islamic educational thought, identify recurring problems such as dualism, and formulate strategic solutions for the integration of knowledge within the contemporary Muslim context.

¹ Nasution, Harun. *Reform in Islam: History of Thought and Movement*. (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1975) hlm. 11-12.

² Nata, Abuddin. *History of Islamic Education*. (Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media Group, 2012) hlm. 172.

³ John W. Creswell & J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (California: Sage Publications, 2018), 41.

DISCUSSION RESULTS

A. History of Islamic Education Reform

The roots of Islamic educational renewal can be traced back to the growing anxiety of Muslim thinkers who witnessed the rapid military and scientific expansion of the West. A pivotal moment came with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, which served as a profound "wake-up call" for the Islamic world, exposing the technological and organizational superiority of European powers. This awareness was further reinforced in the Ottoman Empire through the Tanzimat policies, which marked the beginning of the empire's gradual adoption of Western military and technical education systems. In response to these pressing challenges, pioneering figures such as Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, who championed reform at Al-Azhar, and Sayyid Ahmad Khan in India, who founded the Aligarh Movement, emerged as key leaders urging the Muslim Ummah to embrace modern sciences without abandoning their religious heritage.⁴

Historically, Islamic education reform emerged as a reaction to two factors: the internal weaknesses of the Muslim community and the hegemony of Western colonialism. During the classical period, Islamic education reached its peak through the integration of revelation and reason.⁵ However, following the fall of Baghdad, educational orientation narrowed solely toward eschatological aspects, causing the natural sciences to be marginalized.⁶

The modern reform movement began in Egypt through figures like Muhammad Ali Pasha, who sent students to Europe, and was continued by Muhammad Abduh, who reformed the curriculum of Al-Azhar University.⁷ In India, Sayyid Ahmad Khan founded the MAOC (Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College) to bridge Islamic education with Western science.⁸ In Indonesia, reform was pioneered by organizations such as Muhammadiyah, which introduced the classical system into madrasah.⁹

⁴ Azra, Azyumardi. *Islamic Education: Tradition and Modernization Amidst the Challenges of the Third Millennium*. (Jakarta: Kencana, 1999) hlm. 1.

⁵ Makdisi, George. *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981) hlm. 280-281.

⁶ Shalabi, Ahmad. *History of Muslim Education*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kashshaf, 1973) hlm. 242.

⁷ Abduh, Muhammad. *Risalah Tauhid* (Transl. Firdaus). (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1994) hlm. 7-10.

⁸ Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) hlm. 72-74.

⁹ Daulay, Haidar Putra. *History of Growth and Renewal of Islamic Education in Indonesia*. (Jakarta: Kencana, 2007) hlm. 112.

B. Patterns of Islamic Education Reform

The renewal of Islamic education has not unfolded uniformly; rather, diverse socio-political contexts across various Islamic regions have given rise to multifaceted patterns. One such pattern is the traditionalist-conservative approach, which emphasizes the preservation of classical Islamic intellectual traditions, considered definitive and established. Adherents of this view believe that the decline of the Muslim Ummah stemmed not from a lack of Western science, but from the abandonment of pure religious teachings. Their vision is to restore Islamic glory by strengthening the understanding of classical texts (*kitab kuning*) and purifying creed (*aqidah*), while their strategy involves maintaining traditional institutions such as *madrasas* or *pesantren* with a purely religious curriculum. They tend to reject Western educational methods, perceiving them as carriers of secularism and de-Islamization, as exemplified by the Darul Uloom Deoband Madrasa in India, established in 1866.¹⁰

In stark contrast, the modernist-Westernization pattern stands as the polar opposite of the traditionalist approach. This group views the key to Western power as lying in its rational and scientific educational system, and thus aims to catch up with the Muslim world's lag through the total adoption of Western models. Their strategy involves establishing schools that fully follow European systems, employing foreign languages as the medium of instruction, and prioritizing natural and social sciences, while religious education is often marginalized to the private sphere or reduced to a minor curricular supplement. This pattern is clearly visible in the educational reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, which shifted the orientation from religious-oriental to secular-occidental.¹¹

Beyond these two opposing poles, the synthetic-integrative and transformative-critical patterns have also emerged as alternative pathways, offering middle-ground solutions that attempt to synthesize traditional and modern systems while addressing social justice and epistemological reconstruction. These diverse patterns reflect the complexity of Islamic educational reform, demonstrating that there is no single approach suitable for all Muslim societies, but rather a spectrum of responses shaped by local historical conditions, intellectual traditions, and political circumstances.

¹⁰ Dhofier, Zamakhsyari. (2011). *The Pesantren Tradition: A Study of the Kyai's Outlook on Life*. (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2011) hlm. 1-2.

¹¹ Abdullah, M. Amin. *Islamic Studies in Higher Education: An Integrative-Interconnective Approach*. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006) hlm. 95

C. Educational Dualism: Problems and Solutions

Educational dualism is one of the most enduring and problematic legacies of the encounter between Islamic civilization and Western modernity. At its core, this phenomenon refers to a sharp and artificial separation between religious sciences, rooted in revelation and spiritual values, and general or secular sciences, grounded in human reason and empirical inquiry. Historically, this division manifested in the coexistence of two parallel yet disconnected educational systems: traditional religious institutions such as mosques and *pesantren*, which preserved Islamic teachings but largely neglected natural and social sciences, and modern public schools, which embraced scientific and technological progress but increasingly marginalized religious and ethical formation.¹² The result has been a deeply fractured intellectual landscape, producing graduates who are either spiritually literate but scientifically incompetent, or scientifically proficient but ethically and spiritually impoverished.

1. The Root Causes of Dualism

The roots of this dualism run deeper than curricular differences. Epistemologically, it rests on the false assumption that religious knowledge is absolute and fixed, while scientific knowledge is relative and value-free a dichotomy that contradicts the holistic worldview of Islam, which sees all truth as ultimately derived from God. Sociologically, dualism is reinforced by a persistent quality gap, where general schools enjoy superior facilities and better career prospects, while religious institutions are often relegated to the status of a second-rate alternative. This disparity not only undermines the dignity of religious education but also fuels an identity crisis, generating intellectuals estranged from their spiritual heritage and religious scholars alienated from the realities of the modern world.

2. The Negative Impacts of Dualism

The consequences of this dualism are severe and far-reaching. Without the guidance of religious ethics, science and technology risk becoming instruments of exploitation and moral decay. Conversely, without the support of rational inquiry and empirical method, religious teachings risk becoming irrelevant and incapable of addressing contemporary challenges. In short, dualism perpetuates civilizational stagnation and facilitates a latent secularization, where Islamic values are confined to

¹² Muhaimin. *Separation of Knowledge: A Critique of the Dichotomy of Islamic Education*. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2011) hlm. 8-10.

ritual and worship but fail to inform economic, political, and social life. The Ummah thus suffers from a "split personality," producing intellectuals who are blind to spiritual values and religious scholars who are out of touch with the developments of the modern world.

3. Strategic Solutions to Overcome Dualis

To overcome this deeply rooted problem, contemporary Muslim thinkers have proposed several strategic solutions:

a. Islamization of Knowledge

Championed by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, this approach seeks to redefine modern scientific disciplines from an Islamic epistemological perspective, so that science no longer operates in a secular vacuum but becomes a means of knowing God and serving humanity. The goal is to eliminate the secular character of modern knowledge and reorient it toward Islamic values.

b. Integrative-Interconnective Approach

Advanced by M. Amin Abdullah, this model likens knowledge to an intricate web in which no discipline stands alone. It pursues two interconnected strategies: Integration: Unifying religious and general curricula within a single institutional framework, as exemplified by Indonesia's State Islamic Universities (UIN). And Interconnection: Fostering ongoing dialogue between scriptural texts and social-scientific contexts to enrich both domains and enable mutual illumination.

c. Institutional Restructuring

This solution calls for abolishing the rigid barriers between general schools and madrasas. Madrasas must be equipped with modern science laboratories and facilities, while general schools are required to offer substantive, not superficial, instruction in ethics and spirituality. Such restructuring aims to create a unified educational ecosystem where religious and general sciences are no longer seen as opposing forces but as complementary dimensions of a single, integrated worldview.¹³

4. Conclusion

Ultimately, overcoming educational dualism is not merely a technical adjustment but an epistemological and civilizational project. It demands a fundamental reorientation of how knowledge is conceived, taught, and practiced, so that Muslim educational institutions can once again produce graduates who embody both intellectual excellence

¹³ Abdullah, M. Amin. *Islamic Studies in Higher Education: An Integrative-Interconnective Approach*. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006) hlm. 101-103.

and moral integrity, and who are capable of contributing meaningfully to the progress of humanity while remaining firmly rooted in their Islamic identity. Only through such comprehensive efforts can the Ummah break free from the shackles of colonial dualism and reclaim its role as a dynamic agent of knowledge and moral guidance in the modern world.¹⁴

D. Strategic Analysis: Towards the Integration of Knowledge

The solution to educational dualism lies in the Integration of Knowledge, often referred to as the Islamization of Knowledge. However, renewal in the contemporary era is no longer about simply "sticking" religious lessons into public schools or inserting general subjects into *pesantren* as a superficial gesture. Rather, it demands a more fundamental and profound transformation: building a new epistemological foundation where all knowledge is intrinsically connected to the principle of *tawhid* (the Oneness of God). This means that science and religion are no longer viewed as opposing or separate domains, but as complementary pathways toward understanding the same divine reality one through revelation (*qauliyah*) and the other through the natural universe (*kauniyah*).¹⁵

The most fundamental problem in post-colonial Islamic education is precisely this persistent dualism or dichotomy, which sharply separates religious sciences from secular sciences. This division is not merely academic; it has produced a deep intellectual crisis within the Muslim Ummah. On one hand, graduates of religious institutions emerge with a strong command of classical Islamic texts but remain unfamiliar with technology and the natural sciences. On the other hand, Muslim scientists and graduates of general school master modern disciplines but become increasingly alienated from their religious and ethical values. This fragmentation has resulted in a generation of intellectuals who are either spiritually literate but technologically inept, or scientifically competent but morally and spiritually hollow neither of whom is fully equipped to address the complex challenges of the modern world.¹⁶

In response to this crisis, Muslim thinkers have championed the "Islamization of Knowledge" movement, which seeks to overcome the dichotomy by redefining modern disciplines from an Islamic worldview. Thinkers in this tradition argue that educational

¹⁴ Al-Faruqi, Ismail Raji. *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*. (Herndon: IIIT, 1982) hlm. 12-13.

¹⁵ Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. *The Concept of Education in Islam*. (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991) hlm. 44-45.

¹⁶ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*. (London: Kegan Paul International, 1987) hlm. 125-127.

curricula should no longer be separated into religious and secular compartments, but rather integrated both philosophically and methodologically, so that every field of study is infused with Islamic ethical and epistemological principles. This integrative model has found its most concrete institutional expression in Indonesia's State Islamic Universities (UIN), which have adopted the "integration-interconnection" paradigm. Through this approach, religious and general sciences are taught side by side, interconnected in a web of mutual enrichment, aiming to produce graduates who are not only experts in their respective fields but also deeply rooted in Islamic values—truly embodying the ideal of *ulama* who master both spiritual wisdom and worldly knowledge.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Islamic educational reform is not merely a technical project concerning curriculum changes or the modernization of infrastructure; it is an epistemological revolution aimed at restoring the wholeness of the human vision within Islam. From the historical trajectory, we understand that the decline of the Muslim Ummah was rooted in intellectual stagnation and the loss of the spirit of *ijtihad*, which was further exacerbated by the penetration of colonialism that introduced secular educational systems.

The analysis of various reform patterns demonstrates that each approach possesses its own strengths and challenges. The traditionalist pattern succeeded in preserving authenticity but remained inept at addressing modern realities, while the modernist pattern succeeded in material mastery but risked losing spiritual identity. Therefore, the synthetic-integrative paradigm emerges as the most relevant future direction. This paradigm demands that knowledge no longer be viewed dichotomously. The dualism between "religious sciences" and "general sciences" must be immediately terminated, as in the Islamic view, all scientific truths are essentially the signs of Allah (both *qauliyah* in scripture and *kauniyah* in the universe).

As a strategic step, the integration and interconnection of knowledge must be substantively implemented at the institutional level. This aims to birth a generation characterized by pious intellectuality and intelligent spirituality. Islamic education in the future must be capable of answering the challenges of the age without shedding its mantle of faith. Only through this path can Islamic educational institutions return to being centers of

¹⁷ Madjid, Nurcholis. *Bilal in Islamic Education*. (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1997) hlm. 118.

civilizational excellence that provide tangible contributions to global humanity (Rahmatan lil 'Alamin).

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