

# Tracing the Roles of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah in the Stability of Islamic Education in Indonesia

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## Abstract

Islamic education plays an important role in shaping character, strengthening religious identity, and contributing to social development in Indonesia. The historical development of Islamic education has also been closely associated with Islamic mass organizations, particularly Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, since the early twentieth century. This study traces the historical and institutional trajectories of Islamic education in Indonesia through the roles of NU and Muhammadiyah and discusses how their educational orientations are linked to the continuity of the Islamic education system amid social change and global challenges. This study uses a library research design. The sources include scholarly books, journal articles, selected writings of central NU and Muhammadiyah figures, and organizational documents. The materials are examined using content analysis through close reading and thematic grouping to identify recurrent ideas, institutional strategies, and educational orientations reflected in the literature. The analysis indicates that Muhammadiyah contributes to the renewal of Islamic education through the integration of religious knowledge and modern science within structured educational institutions. NU, meanwhile, maintains pesantren-based traditions and develops formal institutions grounded in moderate values, ethical formation, and classical scholarship. These orientations are discussed as complementary rather than contradictory and are associated with continuity and sustainability in Indonesia's Islamic education landscape. Strengthening educational institutions under NU and Muhammadiyah and re-actualizing the educational ideas of their key figures remain important in responding to the challenges of Islamic education in the context of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0.

**Keywords:** *Islamic education; Nahdlatul Ulama; Muhammadiyah; educational stability*

## Abstrak

Pendidikan Islam berperan penting dalam pembentukan karakter, penguatan identitas keagamaan, dan kontribusinya terhadap perkembangan masyarakat Indonesia. Secara historis, perkembangan pendidikan Islam di Indonesia juga tidak terlepas dari peran organisasi kemasyarakatan Islam, khususnya Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) dan Muhammadiyah, sejak awal abad ke-20. Penelitian ini bertujuan menelusuri jejak historis dan kelembagaan pendidikan Islam di Indonesia melalui peran NU dan Muhammadiyah, serta membahas keterkaitan orientasi pendidikan keduanya dengan keberlanjutan sistem pendidikan Islam di tengah perubahan sosial dan tantangan global. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kepustakaan (library research). Sumber data meliputi buku ilmiah, artikel jurnal, karya tokoh

sentral NU dan Muhammadiyah, serta dokumen organisasi. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis isi (content analysis) melalui pembacaan mendalam dan pengelompokan tema untuk mengidentifikasi gagasan, strategi kelembagaan, dan orientasi pendidikan yang berulang dalam literatur. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa Muhammadiyah berkontribusi pada pembaruan pendidikan Islam melalui integrasi pengetahuan agama dan ilmu pengetahuan modern dalam lembaga pendidikan yang terstruktur. Sementara itu, NU mempertahankan tradisi keilmuan pesantren dan mengembangkan institusi formal yang berlandaskan nilai-nilai moderat, pembentukan etika, serta khazanah keilmuan klasik. Kedua orientasi tersebut dipahami sebagai saling melengkapi, bukan saling menegasikan, dan berkaitan dengan kesinambungan serta keberlanjutan pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. Penguatan kelembagaan pendidikan NU dan Muhammadiyah serta reaktualisasi pemikiran tokoh-tokohnya tetap penting untuk merespons tantangan pendidikan Islam dalam konteks Industri 4.0 dan Society 5.0.

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan Islam; Nahdlatul Ulama; Muhammadiyah; Stabilitas Pendidikan

## A. Introduction

Based on Indonesia's National Education System, education is understood as a planned and deliberate effort to create learning conditions and instructional processes that enable students to actively develop spiritual strength, self-control, character, intellectual capacity, ethics, and the skills needed for personal life as well as for the well-being of society, the nation, and the state.<sup>1</sup> Within this framework, Islamic education has long been a significant component of national education systems in many Muslim-majority contexts. Its position is evident not only in its long historical trajectory but also in the values it transmits, its contributions to social development, and its role in character formation.<sup>2</sup> As the country with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia presents a distinctive educational landscape in which curriculum standardization and the institutionalization of education have also been shaped and supported by Islamic mass organizations (*organisasi kemasyarakatan* / ORMAS).

During the colonial period, Indonesia experienced a dualistic educational system and a sharp dichotomy between the Dutch model of schooling and pesantren-based education.<sup>3</sup> This tension contributed to the rise of reform movements initiated by Islamic organizations. Two major actors that came to dominate Indonesia's educational sphere were Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Muhammadiyah's pedagogical orientation adopted a Western-style

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<sup>1</sup> Nurul Afida, Tanti Elmiah, and Chanifudin, "Keterkaitan Antara Pendidikan Islam Dan Pendidikan Nasional," *INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research* 4, no. 3 (2024): 3362–69, <https://j-innovative.org/index.php/Innovative/article/view/10782>.

<sup>2</sup> Nasimuddin Nasimuddin, Moh. Zaen Hasani, and Muhammad Muhammad, "Kedudukan Pendidikan Islam Dalam Sistem Pendidikan Nasional," *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan* 9, no. 2 (May 28, 2024): 1356–64, <https://doi.org/10.29303/jipp.v9i2.2142>.

<sup>3</sup> Nurul Hidayati, Abdul Muhid, and Iksan Kamil Sahri, "Educational Dualism in Indonesia: Systematic Literature Review," *Jurnal Tarbiyatuna* 14, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 130–46, <https://doi.org/10.31603/tarbiyatuna.v14i2.9621>.

classical system while integrating Islamic values, reflecting its aspiration for “Progressive Islam” (*Islam Berkemajuan*). Founded in 1912 under the leadership of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah focused on education, Islamic outreach (*da‘wah*), and social services, seeking to address religious negligence and practices considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has maintained a traditionalist–moderate orientation through extensive pesantren networks. NU’s traditionalism is reflected in its cultural practices, Sufism, engagement with *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), and enduring social traditions, institutionally coordinated through the NU Ma’arif Education body.<sup>5</sup> Within NU’s perspective, pesantren function not only as sites of learning but also as spaces of character formation shaped by a sacred and hierarchical relationship between *kiai* and *santri*. NU was founded by K.H. Hasyim Asy‘ari and formally established in 1926.

To date, both organizations have successfully strengthened the institutional foundations of Islamic education through the NU Ma’arif Education Institute and Muhammadiyah’s Primary and Secondary Education Council (*Majelis Dikdasmen*). Hamami examines the contributions of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama to strengthening education at the national level. The study suggests that Muhammadiyah’s *Majelis Dikdasmen* and NU’s Ma’arif Institute play important roles in improving educational quality by developing curricula, enhancing teacher professionalism, and strengthening students’ character on the basis of Islamic and national values.<sup>6</sup>

However, in the era often described as Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0, Islamic educational institutions face complex and increasingly existential challenges. Zarkasyi<sup>7</sup> argues that the modernization of Islamic education should move toward integrating Islamic values with science and technology. He emphasizes that Islamic educational institutions need to build a *tawhid*-based epistemological paradigm so they do not become trapped in a dichotomy between religious knowledge and general knowledge. At the same time, contemporary dynamics—including the need for religious modernization amid the currents of radicalism—require a

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<sup>4</sup> Khamam Khosin, “Reformasi Pendidikan Muhammadiyah Di Indonesia,” *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 17, no. 2 (March 19, 2023): 435, <https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v17i2.2003>.

<sup>5</sup> Mamat Rahmatullah and Sunaryanto Sunaryanto, “Membangun Pendidikan Pesantren Neo-Modernisme Berbasis Nahdlatul Ulama: Perspektif Teori Kepemimpin,” *Dinamika Penelitian: Media Komunikasi Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 24, no. 01 (August 10, 2024): 171–86, <https://doi.org/10.21274/dinamika.2024.24.01.171-186>.

<sup>6</sup> Tasman Hamami, “Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama Education: Two Main Pillars of National Education in Indonesia,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 18, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 307–30, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2021.182-06>.

<sup>7</sup> Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, “Imam Zarkasyi’s Modernization of Pesantren in Indonesia (A Case Study of Darussalam Gontor),” *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 8, no. 1 (June 30, 2020): 161, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v8i1.5760>.

careful academic response. For this reason, a deeper understanding of organizational roles and the re-actualization of key Indonesian Islamic thinkers remains essential, particularly for sustaining the intellectual heritage that can inform practical responses to the evolving challenges of national education.

## **B. Research Methods**

This study employed a library research design. The discussion focuses on tracing the historical and institutional trajectories of Islamic education in Indonesia through the roles of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah within the broader national education system. The study relied entirely on documentary sources and did not involve fieldwork or primary data collection through surveys, observations, or experiments. The data consisted of primary and secondary sources, as stated in the manuscript. Primary sources included key writings associated with central figures of NU and Muhammadiyah as well as organizational documents, such as formal decisions from major organizational forums, educational guidelines issued by NU's Ma'arif education body, and policy-related documents associated with Muhammadiyah's Primary and Secondary Education Council (Majelis Dikdasmen). Secondary sources consisted of scholarly books and academic articles relevant to Islamic education and the two organizations.

Data collection was conducted through documentation, meaning that the study compiled and read relevant texts and materials that address the development, educational orientation, and institutional contributions of NU and Muhammadiyah. The collected materials were then examined using content analysis to identify and interpret recurrent ideas and arguments in the texts. In practical terms, the analysis involved close reading, extracting key statements related to each organization's educational approach, grouping them into coherent thematic points, and comparing patterns across NU and Muhammadiyah in order to build an interpretive narrative aligned with the study's focus.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Genealogy of Islamic Education and the Role of Religious Organizations**

The genealogy of Islamic education in Indonesia emerged as a response to the social and educational conditions of society during the colonial era. Early Islamic education developed through traditional institutions such as *surau*, *langgar*, and *pesantren*.<sup>8</sup> The introduction of

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<sup>8</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *THE ORIGINS OF ISLAMIC REFORMISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulamāi in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century, The Origins of Islamic*

Western-style schooling later encouraged the formation and strengthening of Islamic organizations—particularly Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—which played an important role in reshaping Islamic education so it could respond to changing social realities.

Since Islam first spread across the archipelago, educational practices initially took place in informal settings, including mosques, *surau*, and pesantren. These institutions functioned as centers for transmitting Islamic knowledge while also contributing to moral and character formation within Muslim communities.<sup>9</sup> During the colonial period, Islamic education faced pressure from Dutch educational policies that tended to be discriminatory and secular in orientation, producing a sharp divide between Western schooling and Islamic educational traditions.

Islamic education in Indonesia developed within a highly diverse, plural, and dynamic social landscape. Beginning in the early twentieth century, Islamic religious organizations did not function only as vehicles of *da'wah*; they also served as agents of educational and social transformation.<sup>10</sup> Within this context, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) became two prominent organizations shaping the direction of Islamic education. Both can be understood as responses to the challenges faced by Muslim communities under colonialism and the dominance of Western educational models.

Muhammadiyah views education as an instrument for empowering the community through a rational and modern integration of religious knowledge and general knowledge.<sup>11</sup> The school model developed by Muhammadiyah emphasizes a classical classroom system, a structured curriculum, and an orientation toward social progress.<sup>12</sup> In this spirit of renewal (*tajdid*), Muhammadiyah sought to place Islamic education within a more organized and modern schooling framework. Through planned curricula, professional management, and a rational approach to learning, Muhammadiyah aimed to produce Muslims who are not only religiously committed but also intellectually capable and able to engage with broader social developments. The expansion of Muhammadiyah's educational institutions—from basic

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*Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulamāi in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century* (University of Hawaii Press, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Abuddin Nata, *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam* (Prenada Media, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Zuhdi, "Challenging Moderate Muslims: Indonesia's Muslim Schools in the Midst of Religious Conservatism," *Religions* 9, no. 10 (October 11, 2018): 310, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9100310>.

<sup>11</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Di Tengah Tantangan Milenium III* (Prenada Media, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Tasman Hamami, "Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama Education: Two Main Pillars of National Education in Indonesia."

education to higher education—is often cited as evidence of its substantial contribution to the modernization of Islamic education.<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, NU is rooted in the pesantren tradition, where the transmission of classical scholarship serves as a central foundation. Over time, however, NU gradually adopted forms of formal education without abandoning its traditional educational heritage. NU's strong roots in pesantren culture emphasize mastery of classical texts, ethical formation (*adab*), and scholarly lineages. Educational life in NU has often been directed toward deepening religious understanding and shaping moral character through sustained interaction between *kiai* and *santri*. At the same time, NU has pursued certain forms of institutional renewal by establishing madrasah and formal schools, thereby creating a space in which classical scholarly traditions can coexist with the national education system.

In the face of social change and broader global pressures, Muhammadiyah and NU are often described as contributing to the continuity of Islamic education through approaches that are adaptive and context-sensitive. Muhammadiyah tends to emphasize modernization through integration of religious learning with science, professional management and the use of digital technology. NU, in turn, maintains pesantren-based traditions grounded in moderate Islamic values while remaining open—within certain limits—to curricular and methodological adjustment. In this sense, the combination of renewal and preservation can be interpreted as supporting the sustainability and ongoing relevance of Islamic education.

Muhammadiyah and NU represent two major pathways in Indonesia's Islamic education landscape, commonly understood as modernist and traditionalist orientations. Rather than operating as mutually exclusive alternatives, both can be read as complementary in shaping education grounded in faith, knowledge, and moral formation. Through this role, Muhammadiyah and NU function not only as education providers but also as institutions that influence character formation, cultural continuity, and broader social development.

## 2. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

### a. The Establishment of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

The arrival of Islam in Indonesia remains a subject of scholarly debate. Some Indonesian Muslim scholars argue that Islam began to emerge in the seventh century, while a more widely accepted view suggests that Islam arrived in Indonesia in the fourteenth century. The manuscript notes the influence of transnational religious currents, including Wahhabi–Salafi

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<sup>13</sup> Hasnan Bachtiar, Moh. Nurhakim, and Fathor Rohim, "Purification, Spiritualism, and Reform: Muhammadiyah's Reception of Neo-Sufism," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 15, no. 1 (June 5, 2025): 84–112, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2025.15.1.84-112>.

ideas, in Indonesia's educational landscape.<sup>14</sup> Amid these developments, reformist groups strongly criticized the practices of traditional Muslim communities and ulama. From the reformists' perspective, such practices were considered *bid'ah* because they were perceived as lacking a foundation in the Qur'an and authentic Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

In 1926, traditional Muslim circles sought to unite within an organization in order to preserve an Islam that is friendly and tolerant toward local culture, without positioning religious teachings in opposition to cultural practices. Initiated by KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, with ideas and support from younger figures such as KH. Wahab Hasbullah and other ulama, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was established as a religious organization that firmly upholds the principle *al-muhafadzatu 'ala qadimi al-shalih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadidi al-ashlah* (preserving good old traditions and adopting new traditions that are better).

In the establishment of NU, the manuscript describes a series of events experienced by the ulama that are referred to as the *isyarah* (signs) of NU's establishment. This narrative begins when KHR. As'ad Syamsul Arifin studied at Pesantren Jengkebuan, Bangkalan, under the guidance of Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil. In 1924, Kiai As'ad was summoned by Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil to go to Jombang to visit KH. Hasyim Asy'ari in order to deliver a wooden staff associated with Prophet Musa, along with the recitation of Surah Tāhā verses 17–21:

وَمَا تِلْكَ بِيَمِينِكَ يَا مُوسَى ﴿١٧﴾ قَالَ هِيَ عَصَايَ ۖ أَتَوَكَّلُ عَلَيْهَا ۖ وَأَهْشُ بِهَا عَلَىٰ غَنَمِي ۖ وَإِي فِيهَا مَأْرَبٌ أُخْرَىٰ ﴿١٨﴾ قَالَ أَلْقِهَا يَا مُوسَى ﴿١٩﴾ فَأَلْقَاهَا فَإِذَا هِيَ حَيَّةٌ تَسْعَى ﴿٢٠﴾ قَالَ خُذْهَا وَلَا تَخَفْ ۗ سَنُعِيدُهَا سِيرَتَهَا الْأُولَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾

*Meaning:* “And what is that in your right hand, O Musa?” Musa said, “It is my staff; I lean upon it, and with it I strike leaves for my sheep, and I have other uses for it.” Allah said, “Throw it down, O Musa.” Then he threw it down, and suddenly it became a snake, moving swiftly. Allah said, “Take hold of it and do not fear; We will return it to its former state.”

While at the residence of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, KH. As'ad conveyed a message from Bangkalan, after which KH. Hasyim Asy'ari immediately proposed the establishment of a *Jam'iyah Ulama*. Before the end of the year, KHR. As'ad Syamsul Arifin was invited once again to visit KH. Hasyim Asy'ari with the purpose of delivering prayer beads (*tasbih*) and two *Asmaul Husna*, namely Ya Jabbar and Ya Qahhar, which were to be recited twice in one cycle while holding the *tasbih* loosely.<sup>15</sup> This event occurred one year before the death of Syaikhona

<sup>14</sup> Denny Febriansyah and Dawoud Sudqi El-Alami, “Moderate Islam Vis-a-Vis Salafism in Indonesia: An Ideological Competition,” *Walisono: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 29, no. 1 (May 20, 2021): 55–78, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.29.1.7212>.

<sup>15</sup> KHR. As'ad Syamsul Arifin, “Pidato KHR. As'ad Syamsul Arifin” (P3S3, n.d.).

Muhammad Kholil in 1925. In the following year, precisely on 31 January 1926 / 16 Rajab 1344 H, the *Jam'iyah Ulama* was officially established under the name Nahdlatul Ulama (Awakening of the Ulama) at the residence of KH. Wahab Hasbullah in Surabaya, as an Islamic social organization of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* led by Indonesian ulama.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was founded by ulama who already shared common religious perspectives, including similarities in understanding, perception, attitudes, and ways of practicing Islamic teachings, extending to daily behavior.<sup>16</sup> These shared characteristics were then institutionalized through the *Jam'iyah* of Nahdlatul Ulama as a collective platform of struggle toward *Izzul Islam wal Muslimin*, which was later formulated as Khittah An-Nahdliyyah, outlining the general principles and lines of struggle of Nahdlatul Ulama.<sup>17</sup> The organization aims to protect moderate Islamic teachings, maintain religious diversity, and address the influence of extremist ideologies. Over time, NU expanded its role, including in the field of education.

Through the NU Ma'arif Education Institute, NU manages thousands of madrasah and schools with a moderate-traditional character rooted in the principles of *tawassuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *tawazun* (balance). NU also integrates pesantren with formal education systems, such as madrasah and general schools, without eliminating its traditional identity. Pesantren remain central to the cadre formation of ulama and function as spaces for shaping the character of *santri*. This approach reflects NU's ability to maintain the continuity of tradition while adapting to the demands of modernity.

One form of formal education organized by NU is the madrasah, which is commonly associated with teaching that combines religious knowledge and general knowledge. Subjects taught include the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, Science, Mathematics, and Language. This educational concept is promoted by NU madrasah to balance spiritual and intellectual development. Several madrasah institutions under NU are recognized for producing young generations with quality education, broad perspectives, and the ability to adapt to contemporary developments.

Educational institutions under NU include not only pesantren and madrasah, but also primary schools (SD), junior secondary schools (SMP), senior secondary schools (SMA), and higher education institutions. Among these are Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Ampel Surabaya and Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama (UNU), which are spread across various regions in

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<sup>16</sup> Ach. Azaim Ibrahimy, *Reaktualisasi Khittah An-Nahdliyyah, Memaknai Khittah An-Nahdliyyah Sebagai Sanu'iduha Sirataha Al-Ula* (Situbondo, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> KH. Shiddiq Ahmad, *Khittah Nahdliyyah*, 4th ed. (Surabaya: Khalista, 2006).

Indonesia. NU also establishes non-formal educational institutions aimed at community empowerment, such as training programs and vocational courses. Through these institutions, NU seeks to improve social welfare and support communities in becoming more skilled and independent in facing social and economic challenges.<sup>18</sup>

### **b. NU Figures and Their Contributions in the Field of Education**

The effectiveness and smooth management of education within NU cannot be separated from the struggle and contributions of NU ulama and leading figures. NU figures have played an important role and continue to be remembered for ideas that are described as contributing to the stability of Islamic education. Figures from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) are presented as having significant contributions to the development of the Islamic education system through pesantren and madrasah. KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, as the founder of NU, initiated pesantren-based education with a focus on mastery of *kitab kuning*, etiquette in learning, discipline, and the formation of morality and nationalism. Through Pesantren Tebuireng, he positioned the pesantren as a center of religious education and character development for *santri*.

KH. Wahab Hasbullah played a role in renewing NU education by establishing madrasah and introducing more systematic learning methods. KH. Bisri Syansuri strengthened the scholarly tradition through deep engagement with *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh*, reinforcing pesantren as centers of Islamic scholarship. In addition, KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) encouraged openness within NU education toward modern knowledge, democratic principles, and humanitarian values, while promoting attitudes of mutual respect and inclusivity. The educational orientation developed by NU figures reflects an approach that combines scholarly tradition, moral formation, and national awareness. Education within NU is directed not only toward producing *santri* with strong religious competence, but also toward shaping individuals who are moderate, broad-minded, and socially responsible within their communities and the state.

### **c. Challenges Faced by NU in Education**

Based on the analysis of NU's contributions to the stability of education in Indonesia, NU faces several challenges in the educational field. One of these challenges relates to the process of educational modernization and innovation. NU educational institutions continue to face difficulties in introducing technology and more modern pedagogical methods.<sup>19</sup> For

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<sup>18</sup> A. Supriyadi, *Madrasah Sebagai Media Pendidikan Islam Moderat*. (Surabaya: Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengembangan Pendidikan., 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Hafid Abdi et al., "KIPRAH NU (NAHDATUL ULAMA) DALAM PENDIDIKAN INDONESIA," *Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu Akademik* 1, no. 5 (2024): 264–68, <https://ejurnal.kampusakademik.co.id/index.php/jmia/article/view/2699>.

example, pesantren and madrasah often experience limitations in facilities, technical resources, and the integration of learning technologies. At the same time, considerations regarding restrictions on the use of electronic devices are maintained in order to preserve stability and effectiveness in pesantren learning activities.

Another challenge concerns the national education system, which is frequently constrained by government regulations that affect educational institutions such as pesantren. In this context, efforts to promote equal educational quality across Indonesia require closer collaboration between NU and the government.<sup>20</sup> Regulatory alignment and institutional cooperation remain important factors in supporting the sustainability and development of NU-based educational institutions. Funding and infrastructure also constitute significant challenges. Many NU educational institutions continue to face limitations in financial resources and physical infrastructure, which affect their capacity to improve educational quality and expand institutional services.

### 3. Muhammadiyah

#### a. The Establishment of Muhammadiyah

Several works influenced the intellectual development of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, including *Al-Islam wa al-Nashraniyyah* by Muhammad Abduh, *Tafsir Juz 'Amma*, and *Risalah Tauhid*. Other works mentioned include *At-Tawassul wa al-Washilah* in discussions of *bid'ah*, attributed to Ibn Taymiyyah; *Al-Qashaid ath-Thasiyah* by Abdullah al-Aththas; *Dairatul Ma'arif* by Farid Wajdi; *Izhharul Haqq* by Rahmatullah al-Hindi; *Matan al-Hikam* by Ibn 'Atha'illah; and *Tafsir al-Manar* by Sayyid Rashid Rida. These works are described as sources used by KH. Ahmad Dahlan to strengthen a progressive intellectual orientation.<sup>21</sup> From the perspective of Islamic renewal, these readings influenced his religious and socio-religious thought and practice and encouraged him to establish Muhammadiyah as a means of accelerating Islamic reform in Indonesia.

Through reflection on the meanings of the Qur'an, Allah's words in Surah Ali 'Imran verses 104 and 110 are cited to emphasize the call to goodness, the promotion of what is right, the prevention of wrongdoing, and faith in Allah. These verses are presented as normative foundations that strengthened KH. Ahmad Dahlan's motivation to establish an organized

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<sup>20</sup> Fatma. Basrin Melamba Siti Hermina Herman Syahrin, "Peran Nahdatul Ulama Dalam Pendidikan i Kota Kendari, 1990-2019," *Jurnal Idea Of History* 5, no. 2 (2022): 35–48, <https://journal.fib.uho.ac.id/index.php/history/article/view/1881?articlesBySimilarityPage=5>.

<sup>21</sup> Dan Indah Salma Khairi Weli Tridayatna AS Fathiyyah Shabrina Mudafri, "Sejarah Dan Peran Muhammadiyah Di Dalam Pendidikan," *Proceeding International Seminar on Islamic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2024): 1323–29, <https://jurnal.umsu.ac.id/index.php/insis/article/view/18682>.

movement oriented toward *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*. KH. Ahmad Dahlan expressed a strong interest in forming a structured community, institution, or association aimed at disseminating Islamic teachings of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* among wider society.<sup>22</sup> Conditions during Dutch colonial rule are described as contributing to the backwardness of Indonesian Muslim society in various aspects of life. Educational stagnation is identified as a major factor linked to this condition, while the idea of moderate Islam became an important consideration in the emergence of an organizational platform for Islamic reform.

The term “Muhammadiyah” refers to the community or followers of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), encompassing Muslims who recognize Muhammad as the servant of Allah and the final Prophet. The naming of Muhammadiyah by Ahmad Dahlan was intended to encourage members to emulate the conduct of the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammadiyah was established in Kampung Kauman, Yogyakarta, on 8 Dzulhijjah 1330 H / 18 November 1912 by Muhammad Darwis, who later became known as KH. Ahmad Dahlan. The backwardness of Indonesian Muslims in many aspects of life prompted efforts to seek solutions for social advancement. Educational backwardness is described as a primary factor contributing to decline in Muslim civilization. KH. Ahmad Dahlan viewed that pesantren could not always be regarded as the sole institution capable of producing young Muslims with a modern mindset. Social welfare would remain at risk if ignorance continued to overshadow Indonesian Muslim society. The stated aim of Muhammadiyah is to uphold and elevate the dignity of Islam in order to realize a truly Islamic society.<sup>23</sup> Over time, Muhammadiyah expanded into various sectors, including education.

Muhammadiyah views education as a means of community renewal and liberation from backwardness. KH. Ahmad Dahlan emphasized the importance of integrating religious knowledge with modern scientific knowledge. In line with this view, the Muhammadiyah education system adopted a Western classical model supported by modern management, a structured curriculum, and systematic learning evaluation. Muhammadiyah schools provide instruction not only in Islamic studies but also in general knowledge, practical skills, and social values. Within the context of national education, Muhammadiyah is described as a pioneer in the modernization of Islamic education.

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<sup>22</sup> Salito, Bahaking Rama, and Muhammad Rusdi Rasyid, “Organisasi Sosial Keagamaan; Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah, Tokohnya Dan Kegiatannya Dalam Bidang Pendidikan,” *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (January 9, 2023): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.58540/isihumor.v1i1.138>.

<sup>23</sup> and Muhammad Al-Qadri Burga. Nurhayati Siti Mahsyar Idris, *Organisasi Muhammadiyah Dalam Perspektif Sejarah, Organisasi Dan Tata Nilai* (Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Trust Media Publishing., 2019).

### **b. Muhammadiyah Figures in the Field of Islamic Education**

The educational ideas of KH. Ahmad Dahlan form the foundation of Muhammadiyah education. Values such as *ijtihad*, rationality, and openness are described as being transmitted through his educational vision. Several Muhammadiyah figures are presented as having made substantial contributions to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. KH. Ahmad Dahlan, as the founder of Muhammadiyah, played a pioneering role in reforming the education system by integrating religious education with general knowledge within modern school curricula. He introduced planned curricula, learning methods that combined tradition and modernity, and an emphasis on character education. Through this approach, Islamic education was directed not only toward religious values but also toward cognitive development and student skills.

KH. Mas Mansur contributed to strengthening educational modernization by improving teacher quality, designing curricula, and instilling Islamic and national values. Ki Bagus Hadikusumo emphasized the importance of moral education, faith, and exemplary conduct as the foundation of character formation. In addition, Prof. Dr. HM. Amin Rais encouraged the development of Muhammadiyah higher education institutions so that they would be able to compete at both national and international levels. The contributions of these figures are described as shaping an Islamic education system that integrates faith, knowledge, and practice. Through their ideas and efforts, Muhammadiyah developed an education system characterized by modern management, character formation, and an orientation toward social progress.

### **c. Challenges Faced by Muhammadiyah in Education**

Amid rapid social and technological change, Muhammadiyah faces various challenges in managing and developing education so that it remains relevant, of high quality, and competitive. One challenge relates to globalization and technological development, which require educational institutions to adapt to advances in information technology. Muhammadiyah educational institutions are expected to respond to these developments in order to maintain educational relevance.

Another challenge concerns the quality and professionalism of educators. Many teachers and lecturers are described as not yet meeting academic qualifications and pedagogical competencies in accordance with contemporary demands. This condition affects the quality of teaching and learning processes in Muhammadiyah educational institutions. Muhammadiyah also faces ideological challenges and social change, including the rapid spread of ideas and ideologies that are not aligned with Islamic and Muhammadiyah values. In addition, limitations

in funding remain a challenge, as many Muhammadiyah schools and universities continue to rely heavily on community funding and independent financial efforts.

#### **4. Educational Orientations of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)**

Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) both place the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the primary foundations of their educational practices. Both organizations aim to develop learners who are faithful, pious, and morally grounded, while also possessing intellectual and social competence. Education is understood as a vital means for shaping individuals who are not only academically capable but also characterized by ethical responsibility and social awareness.

Both Muhammadiyah and NU integrate religious education with general knowledge within their educational institutions. Each manages a wide range of educational settings, including pesantren, madrasah, general schools, and universities across Indonesia. Through these institutional networks, the two organizations contribute to expanding access to education, improving the quality of human resources, and promoting values of moderation, tolerance, and national consciousness within Indonesian society. Despite these shared foundations, Muhammadiyah and NU differ in their educational methods and traditions. Muhammadiyah has historically developed a modern education system by adopting formal schooling models, implementing planned curricula, and applying rational and science-based learning approaches. Muhammadiyah education places emphasis on efficiency, discipline, and innovation in order to respond to changing social conditions and community needs.

NU, by contrast, maintains the pesantren tradition as the core of its educational orientation. Educational practice within NU emphasizes the study of *kitab kuning*, mastery of classical Islamic scholarship, and spiritual formation grounded in the close relationship between *kiai* and *santri*. At the same time, NU educational institutions have also engaged in forms of renewal through the establishment of modern schools and universities. In terms of religious orientation, Muhammadiyah emphasizes the purification of Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, while NU adheres to the *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* perspective, which accommodates religious tradition and local cultural practices.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This library-based study examined how Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have shaped Islamic education in Indonesia through their historical trajectories, institutional strategies, and educational orientations as reflected in scholarly literature and organizational documents. The analysis shows two dominant but distinct patterns. Muhammadiyah is consistently associated with educational renewal through the integration of religious learning

and modern science in structured schooling, supported by systematic curriculum organization and institutional management. NU, meanwhile, is recurrently linked to the preservation of pesantren-based scholarly traditions, ethical formation (*adab*), and moderate religious values, while also expanding formal educational institutions through Ma'arif networks and related initiatives.

Rather than positioning these orientations as contradictory, the thematic reading of the literature indicates that they operate in a complementary manner within Indonesia's broader Islamic education landscape. In this sense, "stability" in this article is understood not as a fixed condition, but as the continuity and sustainability of Islamic educational institutions and orientations amid social and technological change. Muhammadiyah's emphasis on modernization contributes to adaptive capacity, while NU's emphasis on tradition and moderation contributes to continuity, moral formation, and the maintenance of religious learning lineages. Together, both organizations support the ongoing relevance of Islamic education through institutional expansion, curriculum adjustment within their respective traditions, and the transmission of religious–ethical values within national educational frameworks.

At the same time, this study is limited by its reliance on published and documentary sources, meaning that the conclusions describe patterns in the literature rather than measuring outcomes at the level of schools, pesantren, or learners. Future studies may strengthen this discussion by combining documentary analysis with empirical evidence—such as case studies, policy analysis, or comparative field research—particularly regarding how digital transformation, governance, and quality assurance are negotiated within NU and Muhammadiyah educational institutions in the context of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0.

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