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The Transformation of Islamic Education in Indonesia: An Analysis of Modernization and Reform Efforts

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Abstract

The modernization and reform of Islamic education in Indonesia are essential responses to globalization, scientific and technological advancement, and moral decline while maintaining the foundational values of Islam. This study aims to analyze the processes, forms, and challenges of modernization and reform in Islamic education in Indonesia, with particular attention to curriculum development, learning methods, and educational institutions. This study employed a qualitative library research approach. Primary data were drawn from Zubairi's (2018) *Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam / Modernization of Islamic Religious Education*, while secondary data were obtained from relevant scholarly journal articles indexed in Google Scholar. The findings indicate that modernization in Islamic education has been implemented through the integration of religious and general knowledge, the use of digital technology, participatory and contextual learning approaches, and professional educational management. Educational reform has also developed dynamically in response to changes in Indonesia's national context, from the post-independence period to the Reform Era, with the aim of improving educational quality. However, the transformation of

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Islamic education continues to face several challenges, including the persistence of the knowledge dichotomy, limited educational facilities and infrastructure, disparities in teacher quality, and moral decline. This study concludes that strong collaboration among the government, educational institutions, and society is necessary to develop an integrative and adaptive Islamic education system. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on Islamic educational modernization by clarifying the relationship between reform, knowledge integration, and institutional adaptation. Practically, it offers implications for strengthening Islamic educational institutions in producing Muslim generations who are intellectually competent, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible.

Keywords: Islamic Education; Educational Modernization; Educational Reform; Knowledge Integration; Islamic Educational Institutions

INTRODUCTION

Advances in science and digital technology mark the development of global society in the modern era. Changes in social patterns are occurring rapidly and massively, significantly impacting education systems around the world. Islamic education, which has played a key role in shaping the character, intellect, and spirituality of the community since its inception, has also felt the impact of these changes. The demands of the times require Islamic educational institutions to function not only as transmitters of religious values but also to be able to adapt to remain relevant and competitive (Mukhlis et al., 2026). These institutions are required to produce a generation of Muslims who are both intellectually competent and morally strong, so that academic ability and religious ethics go hand in hand.

Historically, Islamic education has a strong scientific tradition through the integration of religious and rational knowledge. However, over time, a separation between Islamic and general knowledge emerged in educational practice. This separation created a scientific dichotomy that hindered the development of students who were well-rounded in their mastery of knowledge and attitudes to life. The modernization of Islamic educational institutions emerged as an effort to reintegrate knowledge, so that religious teachings would once again be integrated with science, technology, and social reality as a unified system of knowledge (Zuhriansah et al., 2025). The term modernization is not unfamiliar to Muslims. It refers to a process of modernization characterized by actuality and progress, and has recently been used in almost all aspects of life, including Islamic education.

In Indonesia, the modernization of Islamic education since the early 20th century has had a significant impact on the development of educational systems, institutions, management, and policies. These changes have added color and dynamism to Islamic education, although not all of their impacts are positive. The essence of modernization is change for improvement. Therefore, every step of modernization should be based on the goal of improvement (Astrini, 2025). Modernization actors in education can come from various parties. Often, modernization emerges as a product of organizations—not just individual initiatives—through policies, programs, and institutional movements. This situation is relevant in Indonesia, which has many Islamic organizations, in line with its predominantly Muslim population (Irawan & Rohman, 2025).

Modernization and reform are two distinct but interrelated concepts in the development of Islamic education. Modernization emphasizes updating the substance and practices of education through the utilization of modern advancements, while reform emphasizes systemic changes—policies, institutions, curriculum, and governance—to improve the effectiveness and quality of education delivery (Lubis et al., 2022).

Educational reform in Indonesia has been ongoing since independence, reflected in periodic curriculum changes (1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, 2013) and education budget policies. The 1998 event marked the beginning of a new, broader reform, encouraging systemic overhaul in various aspects of life, including Islamic education. The goal of the reform was to address fundamental issues such as quality disparities, governance weaknesses, and adjustments to national education policy to ensure Islamic educational institutions remain relevant and adaptive.

Based on several relevant previous studies, the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia appears to be a gradual modernization process that moves from a response to colonial education to an integration of national curricula, institutions, and policies, while maintaining Islamic identity. Four of the most representative studies show that this modernization was driven by socio-political pressures, the need for curriculum relevance, and the demands of the reform era, but still faces challenges of quality, disparities in access, and resistance to change (Sari et al., 2024). Kurniawan (2023) asserts that the modernization of the Islamic education system in Indonesia began to strengthen in the early 20th century in response to colonial educational discrimination and criticism of traditional models, then developed into a more accommodating and adaptive system until the contemporary era.

Azzahra et al. (2025) show that the transformation of Islamic education institutions and curricula took place from the colonial period to the Reformation through a process of adaptation, formalization, and integration; they emphasize that policies such as Law No. 20/2003 strengthened the position of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools, although issues of teacher quality, standardization, and radicalism remained. Daulay and Dalimunthe (2021) demonstrate that the modernization of Islamic education is also evident in the experiences of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), particularly in the renewal of objectives, curriculum, methods, human resources, and institutions, thus making significant contributions to national education. Similarly, studies of the Reformation era emphasize that decentralization and democratization opened up significant opportunities for strengthening Islamic education, but also gave rise to new challenges in the form of disparities in quality, globalization, and issues of religious moderation (Hidayat et al., 2025).

Therefore, the synergy of modernization and reform is key to realizing quality, adaptive Islamic education capable of producing a generation of Muslims who excel intellectually, spiritually, and socially. In-depth studies are needed to understand the processes, influencing factors, challenges, and impacts of modernization and reform on the quality of Islamic education and the wider community. This article aims to explore the characteristics of modernization in Islamic educational institutions, the forms of modernized institutions, the forms of reform, challenges, and their impact on the education system and society.

METHOD

The researchers in this study employed a qualitative approach with library research (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2021; Safrudin et al., 2023). This approach was chosen because the research focused on an in-depth understanding of the concepts, policies, and historical dynamics related to Islamic education during the colonial period, rather than on quantitative measurements or statistical generalizations. The library method allowed researchers to integrate various theoretical and empirical perspectives recorded in written sources to construct a comprehensive analytical framework (Adlini et al., 2022).

The data collection technique was carried out through a systematic search of relevant literature, including books, scientific articles, research reports, policy documents, and archival manuscripts related to the modernization and reform of Islamic education in Indonesia. The

literature search was conducted in several scientific databases and repositories, with the following inclusion criteria: topically relevant publications, in Indonesian or English, and, for journal articles, prioritized those published within the last five years to capture the latest developments; however, older historically important sources were still considered if they provided significant analytical contributions.

Data sources are classified into primary and secondary data. The primary data in this study is the main monograph used as an analytical reference. Secondary data consists of journal articles, other books, research reports, and policy documents that support the triangulation of findings. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through content analysis and thematic coding techniques: a pre-coding stage to select relevant literature, mapping main themes, and critical interpretation of inter-concept relationships and policy developments. To ensure reliability and validity, the researchers applied source triangulation and reflective notes throughout the analysis process (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018; Moleong, 2018).

RESULTS

Forms of Modernization of Islamic Education in Indonesia

Modernization of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia is a systematic effort born of the need to align Islamic education with current developments. This change can be seen in various dimensions: curriculum, teaching methods, infrastructure, institutional management, and perspectives on knowledge (Hamdi et al., 2025).

First, curriculum integration is a major milestone in the modernization process. In the past, religious and general knowledge were often rigidly separated, with the assumption that religious knowledge was sacred and general knowledge was worldly (Zubairi, 2022). However, today, a growing number of Islamic educational institutions are harmoniously combining these two types of knowledge. Science, mathematics, English, and even information technology subjects are beginning to be included in the curriculum of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and *madrasahs* (Islamic schools). Conversely, Islamic religious and moral values are also implemented in general schools (Asmuri et al., 2025). It demonstrates an awareness that Islam views knowledge holistically.

Second, teaching methods are also undergoing innovation. The one-way lecture system that previously dominated religious classes is being abandoned. It is being replaced

by interactive methods such as group discussions, case studies, multimedia, and project-based approaches. Some Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have even begun implementing blended learning, a combination of face-to-face and online learning (Istikhomah, 2025). This approach makes it easier for students to access course materials anytime and anywhere.

Third, Islamic educational institutions are now also paying attention to the development of infrastructure and information technology. Classrooms which were originally simple have been renovated and equipped with modern devices such as LCD projectors, computers and internet networks. Science laboratories, language laboratories and digital libraries are part of the standard facilities at many leading madrasas. In the post-pandemic era, technological readiness has even become an important indicator of an institution's success in maintaining its educational services (Sarnoto, 2023).

Fourth, management aspects have also been modernized. Many institutions have transformed from traditional kinship-based management to professional, transparent, accountable, and data-driven management. The use of academic information systems, digital financial systems, and performance-based evaluations have begun to be implemented to increase efficiency and public trust (Susanto et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION

Islamic Education Reform in Indonesia

1. Definition of Islamic Education Reform

Reform is a drastic change for improvement in the social, political, or religious spheres of a country. Reform is an effort to comprehensively renew a system of life in political, economic, legal, and educational aspects, particularly Islamic education. History records that efforts to reform Islamic education have been carried out before the modern era. Reform efforts were carried out in the education system, including curriculum changes, empowering educational institutions as centers for cultivating values, attitudes, and skills, as well as updating and strengthening the system. These reforms were supported by political policies to increase the role and responsibilities of the DPR, MPR, and other high state institutions (Tiopan et al., 2023). Therefore, reform can be interpreted as an effort to address and improve various deficiencies. The concept of Islamic education reform is renewal by looking at future needs, emphasizing returning to the original form (basics), stopping deviations and deviant practices, introducing better procedures with a complete overhaul in

the economic, legal, social, and educational aspects, including Islamic education (Niyozov & Memon, 2011).

2. Background of Islamic Education Reform (Globalization, Science and Technology, Moral Crisis, Dichotomy, Demands for Quality Education)

Education reform aims to improve the quality of national education so that it can compete globally and meet the challenges of the times (Astuti et al., 2023). In the context of Islamic education, reform is also crucial to maintaining the relevance of Islamic teachings in the era of globalization and modernization. Education reform in Indonesia encompasses a series of strategic policies aimed at improving the quality and relevance of national education. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology is encouraging systemic change through the development of a more adaptive and flexible curriculum, known as the Independent Curriculum/*Kurikulum Merdeka* (Kemdikbudristek, 2024; Yuliana & Rahman, 2023).

Furthermore, reform involves changes in the assessment system, not only in cognitive aspects but also in holistic aspects, namely that student learning also focuses on strengthening student character and skills. Educational reform policies emphasize the importance of a student-centered learning approach, commonly referred to as student-centered learning (Ramadani et al., 2025). Therefore, learning is expected to be interactive, critical, innovative, and creative. Azyumardi Azra explains in his book that the essence of reform in Islamic education is a renewal of intellectual thought and perspective. Several Islamic thinkers, including KH. Ahmad Dahlan in Indonesia consider that reform in Islamic thought is an important idea as a form of ambivalence critique of the implementation of Islamic education that is rigid, textual, harsh, and inflexible. At the same time, the West is actually starting a process of developing general knowledge that gives birth to scientific discoveries and gives rise to new paradigms about knowledge and science. In fact, Amin Abdullah believes that almost no Muslim at that time was able to leave a golden ink in the development of science (Abdullah, 2020). As a result, Muslims become consumptive. The paradigm of Western science, which previously studied and gained knowledge from Islam, is now guided by Western science.

3. Forms of Islamic Education Reform

a. Islamic Education Curriculum Reform

Curriculum reform in Indonesia has progressed significantly since educational decentralization, evident in the KTSP (School-Based Curriculum), the 2013 Curriculum, and the Merdeka Curriculum. The 2013 Curriculum emphasized the national goal of strengthening students' spiritual, social, and cognitive aspects, while the Merdeka Curriculum continues the direction of flexibility and character building. This change positions the curriculum not merely as a transfer of knowledge but also as a tool for developing pious, tolerant, and responsible individuals (Anggraini et al., 2022; Annisa Firaudhatil Jannah & Istikomah, 2024).

Islamic education reform is moving toward a holistic learning model that links Islamic material with real-life experiences, social projects, and the development of Islamic character in everyday life (Mukhlis et al., 2026). Since the early 20th century, reformers such as Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad and organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama have pushed for the integration of general and Islamic education to address the needs of the times and prevent education from becoming colonial-oriented.

The history of Islamic education reform can be divided into four phases: the independence era (impeded by instability), the Old Order and New Order eras (improved management, mandatory religious instruction, and strengthened national policies), and the post-1998 reform era, marked by decentralization, Law No. 20/2003, and the strengthening of character education through the 2006 Curriculum (KTSP) and the 2013 Curriculum. Socio-cultural developments and technological advances (Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0) increasingly emphasize the need for character education to balance scientific and technological progress (Yakymchuk, 2024).

b. Reform of Islamic Education Management and Institutions

Reform of Islamic educational institutions is aimed at strengthening global competitiveness through an international system with curriculum adjustments. The hope is to transform Islamic institutions into internationally competitive universities. At the university level, reform of Islamic educational management is being implemented through the integration of study programs and academic management. In the context of Islamic education, this is a strategy for building institutions that are more flexible, modern, and responsive to contemporary needs.

Muslimin stated that from an institutional perspective, reform of the Islamic education curriculum in the *Merdeka Belajar* era has encouraged madrasas and *pesantren* to innovate in learning. The Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for Islamic educational institutions to develop their institutional characteristics through the Operational Curriculum for Educational Units (KOSP) (Ichsan et al., 2023).

Institutional reform has given rise to various forms of modern Islamic educational institutions, including Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT), nature schools, and the addition of Islamic study programs at various universities. This reform is strengthened by collaboration between institutions, religious organizations, and the private sector to improve educational quality, facilities, and community learning access to prepare individuals who are more inclusive, adaptive, competent, and prepared to meet the needs of a modern global society (Wahyuningsih & Budiyono, 2014).

c. Reform of Educators and Learning Methods in Islamic Education

Educational reform is necessary because teachers are key actors in classroom learning practices. Teachers must not only master Islamic material but also be able to master competency and character education critically, holistically, and contextually (Asykur et al., 2025). Therefore, strengthening the capacity of Islamic Education teachers can be seen through teacher certification programs. Furthermore, Islamic Education teachers must be able to model behavior and morals, thus inspiring students to internalize religious values in their daily lives. The application of multicultural and inclusive learning methods in Islamic Education will strengthen the quality of religious education and create a peaceful, tolerant, and civilized Indonesian society (Mainah & Wahyuni, 2025).

In today's digital era, reform is based on the need for digital literacy from both educators and students. Digital literacy is not merely a passive viewing activity by educators but also involves students in interacting, responding, and solving problems relevant to the learning material. It is a strategy for educators to strengthen communication, build collaboration, and prepare students to adapt to the flow of digital information (Judijanto et al., 2024).

Developed countries like Singapore have implemented the Smart Nation Initiative, which integrates technology into every aspect of education (Tan et al., 2023). Finland, on the other hand, has successfully implemented phenomenon-based learning, enabling students to learn multidisciplinary approaches in real-world contexts (Sahlberg, 2023). South Korea and

Estonia have demonstrated the results of digital education reforms, including e-School programs that enable all students and teachers to access integrated digital education systems. However, education reform in developing countries like Indonesia still faces significant challenges related to budget constraints and access to technological infrastructure (UNESCO, 2023). Therefore, the success of education reform depends heavily on government support and policies, the availability of adequate resources, and the readiness of educational institutions. Effective education reforms enable future generations to be better prepared to face global challenges and demonstrate more active contributions in the digital economy (Syahriani et al., 2023).

4. Challenges and Problems of Islamic Education Reform

Among the obstacles that are challenges and problems for reform are the following:

a. Internal Barriers

Muslims have yet to demonstrate a strong will to strengthen their potential in driving Islamic educational reform. The lack of comprehensive educational development has prevented educational reform from being developed in a detailed, comprehensive, and targeted manner, as is the case in developed countries. Therefore, various elements of the Muslim community must synergize to advance Islamic education (Muhsan & Haris, 2022). Furthermore, fundamental improvements through revitalization, reformulation, and systemic reconstruction are necessary to address the current unclear orientation of education. This situation is exacerbated by the persistence of scientific dichotomies and inadequate curriculum integration, which hinder the creation of an Islamic education that is adaptive to the challenges of modernity.

1) Geographical Conditions of the Region and Prepared Resources

Developed countries' education systems are carefully prepared to prepare the next generation to face and play an active role in the era of globalization. Among the reform programs implemented by Singapore are the Thinking School, Learning Nation, Teach Less, Learn More, and School Excellent Model. Research findings indicate that Indonesia faces challenges in teacher distribution, given its geographic and demographic conditions. The distribution of teachers in Kalimantan, Papua, and West Papua is supported by the application of the kringing model (Arfan & Pekei, 2025). Further research in 2012/2013 showed that the distribution of teachers in Kalimantan was 7,394, Papua 9,483, and West

Papua 2,846. Redistributing teachers, particularly certified teachers, is a current education policy option to address education issues in Indonesia.

2) Teacher Readiness to Face the New Curriculum

Teacher readiness is a key factor in the success of educational reform, both in general and in Islam. In education, teachers are required to face new curricula and adapt learning to the needs of students. The curriculum must be based on core values acceptable to a pluralistic society, a commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and self-actualization in all areas of life, and self-acceptance and respect for oneself, developing physical, emotional, aesthetic, spiritual, intellectual, moral, social, and socially responsible potential. Teacher training and professional development serve as a platform for improving pedagogical, scientific, and technological competencies (Vanegas et al., 2025). Furthermore, mastery of these competencies must be accompanied by improvements in the managerial quality of educational institutions and the support of an adequate information technology infrastructure to bridge the gap in access to learning.

In addition to training, support from the government and schools plays a crucial role in helping teachers adapt to the new curriculum. The minimum qualification for teachers is a bachelor's degree in a field relevant to the learning material. Teacher education and training are directed at four basic competencies: pedagogical, personal, social, and professional. Regular supervision and mentoring can provide constructive feedback on implementing effective and interactive learning methods in the classroom. Teachers must be able to design interactive learning, particularly in science, where students are required to conduct experiments, think critically, and be creative. Therefore, teacher certification programs are a crucial factor in educational reform to provide better educational services in the future (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012).

3) Limited Facilities and Infrastructure

Several developed countries have provided space for schools to develop facilities and learning for students to adapt to regional conditions and meet national standards. The Indonesian government is expected to facilitate local governments by providing space and ensuring facilities for schools to improve the quality of education. It is also crucial for the Indonesian government to evaluate the previous zoning system implemented in developed countries by ensuring equitable infrastructure and certified teachers to achieve educational equity in Indonesia.

In each region, the main challenge in learning lies in the new curriculum in science education. The availability of adequate laboratories, teaching materials, and practical tools remains a problem in several remote educational institutions. Without adequate facilities, science learning, which should be contextual and experimental, cannot be implemented effectively. This can be addressed by regularly procuring practical tools and materials and utilizing information technology in learning for more effective learning. Schools are also encouraged to collaborate with external parties, such as universities or research institutions, to provide the resources and facilities needed by students in learning. In the context of Islamic education itself, educational institutions should be able to develop religious and general knowledge in an integrated manner (Utari et al., 2025). Therefore, the restructuring of the Islamic education system can be realized through reconstruction, reconceptualization, reorientation, and reformulation as a continuous and balanced process based on existing Islamic educational theory.

4) Advances in Science and Technology and Moral Decline

It has been stated that advances in science and technology and the resulting moral decay hinder education, both today and in the era of globalization. It is even more evident in the context of Islamic education. Social changes in the era of globalization demonstrate the need for changes in Indonesian political, economic, and social systems. Technology plays a crucial role in the educational process and supports learning (Ichsan et al., 2026). Western culture is often adopted by Indonesians, who embrace a consumerist lifestyle. It can diminish nationalism and Indonesian national identity, fostering individualism that fosters apathy toward the actions of others. The sophistication of today's technology can lead to a preoccupation with gadgets, often leading to a neglect of education (Ichsan, 2026).

A positive impact of technology use is that students are able to access learning information more effectively. However, it is also important to note that the negative impact of technology use can make students less inclined to read printed media, and there is widespread misuse of technology, especially among students. Wisely implemented technology can be a tool that strengthens the dissemination of knowledge and produces a superior generation in the digital age. Therefore, globalization must be addressed wisely and filtered so that the goals of education in Indonesia can be effectively realized. The goal of education is to achieve harmony between needs and outcomes through program reforms and activities to ensure they remain relevant to the needs of local, national, regional, and international communities (Leicht et al., 2018).

5. Prospects and Direction of Islamic Education in Indonesia

Educational development strategies need to focus on synchronizing the mastery of religious knowledge and general knowledge to address the challenges of globalization and sustainable development. This effort requires a more integrative curriculum reformulation and enhanced pedagogical and professional competencies of educators to meet international standards and 21st-century needs. Strengthening graduate quality must be supported by the use of information technology in the learning process and improvements to educational infrastructure as prerequisites for increasing competitiveness on the global stage.

Azyumardi Azra states that Islamic educational reform is essentially a renewal of intellectual thought and perspective; this includes a reorientation of methodology, curriculum, and the relationship between religious tradition and modern knowledge (Azra, 2014). Several Islamic reform thinkers in Indonesia, such as KH. Ahmad Dahlan have criticized rigid and textualistic educational practices and advocated adjustments to make Islamic education more relevant and responsive to contemporary social and scientific contexts. Historians of Islamic thought assert that in the past, the Islamic world was a center of knowledge, but since modernity and colonialism, a shift has occurred, resulting in the relative decline of the Muslim scientific tradition compared to Western centers of knowledge. This phenomenon has contributed to the tendency to adopt Western scientific paradigms in contemporary education in many Muslim societies. Similar observations are also made in studies examining the relative backwardness of the Muslim scientific tradition after the peak of civilization and the socio-historical factors that influenced this dynamic.

CONCLUSION

The modernization of Islamic education in Indonesia is a strategic process that contributes to increasing the relevance, competitiveness, and integration of religious and general knowledge in a digital context. The analysis reveals four complementary dimensions of reform: (1) an integrative curriculum that combines religious knowledge with science, technology, and information within a single epistemological framework; (2) learning methods that shift from one-way lectures to a learner-centered, dialogical, contextual, and inclusive approach; (3) the development of technology-based infrastructure, including the utilization of IT tools and the implementation of blended learning models; and (4) the modernization of institutional management through a transformation toward transparent, accountable, and data-driven professional managerial practices. The journey of Islamic education reform is

historical and adaptive to national policies—from post-independence to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum—which have encouraged the emergence of a variety of modern educational institutions (e.g., Integrated Islamic Schools and nature schools) as well as increasing educator capacity through certification and strengthening digital literacy. However, this transformation faces substantial challenges, including the remaining dichotomy between religious and general sciences, resistance by some social actors to systemic change, the unequal distribution of teachers and facilities in remote geographic areas, and the risk of negative impacts of digital flows on students' moral development if spiritual values are not maintained. Based on these findings, developing an integrative and adaptive Islamic education system requires strong collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and the community. Policy recommendations include: strengthening the sustainable integrative curriculum; investing in digital infrastructure and science practice facilities in remote areas; teacher capacity-building programs that emphasize student-centered pedagogy and digital literacy; and managerial policies to strengthen institutional transparency and accountability. The implementation of these recommendations is expected to produce graduates with spiritual and moral depth, as well as intellectual competencies relevant to the demands of the global digital economy.

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