

Islamic Civilization in the Nusantara during Indonesia's Old Order: Historical Developments and Educational Transformations

A. Faiq Najmil H, Selina Nur Agustin, Siti Asih

Universitas Yudharta Pasuruan, Indonesia

ahmadfaiq1504@gmail.com; selina2754@gmail.com

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Abstract

This historical-documentary study examines Islamic education policy and its societal impacts in the Indonesian archipelago during the Old Order period (1945–1966). It aims to analyze how the newly independent Indonesian state institutionalized religious education through the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, legal recognition of *madrasahs*, and the development of teacher and judge training programs, including PGA and PHIN. Using qualitative library research, the study drew on primary government documents, legal texts, archival records, and secondary literature, which were analyzed through thematic classification and historical interpretation. The findings reveal persistent tensions between nationalist state-building, reflected in Pancasila-oriented pluralism and Indonesian socialism, and Islamic communities seeking to preserve and modernize *pesantren* and *madrasah* traditions. Old Order policies expanded formal access to Islamic education, as shown by the growth of *madrasahs* and curriculum reforms integrating general and religious subjects. However, implementation remained uneven because of limited funding, political suspicion toward Islamic movements, and divergent visions among

state actors, religious scholars, and community organizations. The study further shows that Islamic educational institutions were both preserved and reshaped as they entered the state system, producing important human-capital and cultural contributions while leaving persistent gaps in equity, quality assurance, and curricular harmonization. The study concludes that Islamic education policy during the Old Order played a formative role in defining the relationship between religion, education, and national development in Indonesia. Its implications emphasize the need for policy approaches that respect traditional pedagogies, ensure sustainable funding, and align curricula without eroding the communal and religious functions of Islamic education.

Keywords: Islamic Education Policy; Old Order Indonesia; *Madrasah*; *Pesantren*; National Development

INTRODUCTION

Islamic civilization in the Indonesian archipelago developed rapidly from the 13th century onward through peaceful preaching, trade, and cultural interactions between local communities and Muslim traders. The presence of Islam extended beyond religious rituals. It also became a value system that influenced social, cultural, economic, and educational life (Bauto, 2014). The transformation of local values occurred gradually, so that religious and customary practices complemented each other in shaping community identity.

Following the proclamation of independence in 1945, Islam in Indonesia entered a new phase tied to the nation-state's constitutionalization. The Old Order period was a crucial moment, as it witnessed intensive efforts to seek a national identity—both in the political sphere, ideology, and education system (Purwanta & Victor, 2022). The state's decision to make Pancasila the foundation of the state, rather than religion, marked a formal boundary between religion and the state and shaped public policy in the following decades (Aseri, 2020).

This decision created a complex dynamic for the Muslim community. On the one hand, Muslims had made significant contributions to the struggle for independence and development. On the other hand, they were required to adapt to the state's secular-pluralist constitution. This tension was not merely an interreligious conflict, but also a struggle over political representation, public space, and the legitimacy of religious education within the national system. In this context, Islamic education emerged as a strategic instrument for

upholding Islamic values while contributing to national development. The Old Order government made initial efforts to integrate religious values into the education system to develop morally and knowledgeably informed citizens (Nirmala et al., 2023a). However, this integration was selective and often faced a dilemma between the need to modernize general education and the demands of preserving religious education.

On the ground, Islamic education policies at the time were inconsistent. Madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) played a crucial cultural and pedagogical role in shaping the character of the younger generation (Ainun et al., 2022; Ichsan, 2019; Ichsan, Khusna, et al., 2025; Ichsan, Rahmawati, et al., 2025; Rustam & Ichsan, 2020), but these institutions were often not treated equally with public schools in terms of funding, regulation, and formal recognition. Differences in educational visions among actors—the state, religious scholars, and community groups—led to policy conflicts that undermined the effectiveness of Islamic education delivery. In addition to structural challenges, political factors exacerbated the situation of Islamic education (Hajar, 2024). Economic instability, the pressing need to develop the new nation's infrastructure, and the political elite's suspicion of Islamic political movements shifted the government's priorities from developing religious education to consolidating the state and international relations (Sahrasad & Mulky, 2020). It resulted in the relative neglect of Islamic education, with the impact evident in the limited access, quality, and relevance of religious educational institutions in some regions.

During the Old Order (1945–1966), Islamic civilization in the Indonesian archipelago underwent a phase of rearticulation marked by the involvement of Islamic scholars and institutions in national development and efforts to integrate traditional institutions into the state framework (Syafrizal, 2015). Historical studies highlight the role of the Wali Songo, scholars, and Muslim elites who mediated between Islamic cultural heritage and Sukarno's nationalist project in the early years of independence (Rezda et al., 2019). The Old Order government, through the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (January 3, 1946) and educational legislation such as Law No. 12/1950, began to incorporate religious education into state schools and provided formal recognition and administrative support to madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), increasing the number and diversity of madrasahs across the archipelago (Annur, 2022). Policy studies explain that the Ministry of Religious Affairs initiated the Religious Teacher Education (PGA) program, the State Islamic Judge Education (PHIN), and the modernization of the

madrasah curriculum as a step to align Islamic education with the needs of the modern nation-state. However, financial support and capacity remained limited, resulting in variations in implementation across regions (Baidlawie, 2018). Other studies have shown that Islamic universities and Islamic educational organizations (e.g., several prominent Islamic universities and madrasas) began to play a significant role in forming a Muslim intellectual elite active in politics and state administration, thereby strengthening the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions in the public sphere (Mardia & Febriani, 2025). Overall, the literature views the Old Order as a crucial transitional period for Islamic civilization in the archipelago—with advances in institutional recognition and the expansion of Islamic educational networks—but also a challenging period due to political tensions, limited resources, and efforts to adapt the pesantren educational tradition to the logic of modern state bureaucracy.

This study aims to analyze Islamic education policies during the Old Order and their impact on society by examining policy documents, political discourse, and the field conditions of Islamic educational institutions. By understanding the tension between the needs of national development and religious demands, this study is expected to provide policy lessons.

METHODS

Research methods are a set of techniques and steps used to conduct research and obtain valid, scientifically accountable data. This research uses a qualitative approach with library research (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018; Sugiyono, 2017), as the study focuses on historical and conceptual analysis of Islamic civilization in the Indonesian archipelago during the Old Order and its educational development. Using this approach, the researcher collected relevant written sources and systematically analyzed them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The data used are qualitative, consisting of descriptive information, concepts, and thoughts related to Islamic civilization and the development of education during the Old Order (1945–1965). Data sources include primary data, namely official government documents from the Old Order era, national education policies related to Islamic education, and historical archives regarding Islamic educational institutions; and secondary data, namely scientific books, journal articles, and the results of relevant previous research.

Data collection was carried out through documentation review and literature searches, and the data obtained were classified by theme to facilitate the analysis process (Moleong, 2018; Yusuf, 2016).

The object of this research is Islamic civilization in the Indonesian archipelago during the Old Order and the development of its education. The focus of this research is directed at several main aspects, namely: (1) the development of Islamic civilization, which includes the social, cultural, and religious conditions of Muslim society; (2) the role of Islam in shaping the social and cultural values of society; (3) the development of Islamic education, which includes educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and Islamic schools, government policies regarding Islamic education, and the education system and curriculum during that period; and (4) the role of Islamic figures and educational institutions in developing Islamic education and civilization in the Indonesian archipelago.

Data analysis techniques included data reduction, thematic classification, historical interpretation, and inductive inference (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018; Rosidah et al., 2023). This analytical model enabled researchers to more clearly examine the relationship between government policies, the position of Muslims, and the development of Islamic educational institutions. All stages of the research—data collection, grouping, analysis, and concluding—were conducted systematically to ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings.

RESULTS

History of Education during the Old Order Era

In Greek, the term "education" comes from the words "paideia" and "paidegogik," which mean "skill in guiding children." According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), education is the provision of teachings regarding manners and intelligence in thinking. In general, education is a method of renewing the character, attitudes, and behavior of individuals and society through a process of teaching and maturation (Arif, 2020). These definitions emphasize that education serves to guide humans from conception to adulthood, both physically and spiritually.

Ki Hajar Dewantara stated that education is an effort to develop a perfect life. From this perspective, education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but rather a

comprehensive effort to guide students' abilities to their fullest development (Putri et al., 2024). The ultimate goal is to develop a complete personality in each individual, thereby improving students' quality of life and making a positive contribution to society. Education encompasses three important dimensions: self, society, and broader reality. Through the educational process, individuals are guided to improve their qualities and capacities so they can play an effective role in their social environment (Stewart, 2013). Therefore, education is not limited to the school environment alone, but continues throughout life as a process of shaping desired attitudes, values, and behaviors.

In addition to the cognitive aspect, education also emphasizes the affective aspect. Ideal education combines thinking skills with emotional skills—such as joy, happiness, and empathy—so that learning becomes more holistic. In the teachings of Ki Hajar Dewantara, the essence of education is to liberate or create space for human development, emphasizing that education must involve moral, emotional, and intellectual aspects in a balanced manner. Islamic education has similar goals, but is based on Sharia law and religious values. Islamic education aims to shape the behavior of a complete believer by developing physical and spiritual abilities in accordance with Islamic teachings (Nor & Malim, 2014). Systematically, Islamic education organizes activities to develop each child's potential in line with religious principles, enabling them to internalize and practice Islamic values in their daily lives.

Overall, both general education and Islamic education serve as bridges that guide individuals toward a higher civilization (Ahmed, 2024). Both focus on developing a balanced personality—combining cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects—so that individuals not only advance in knowledge but also mature morally and religiously, enabling them to implement their knowledge for the common good.

Islamic Civilization in the Archipelago during the Old Order Era

The Old Order period (1945–1968) under President Sukarno positioned Islamic education within the dynamics of post-independence state formation. In that early period, the government adopted the 1950 Provisional Constitution and faced the daunting task of restructuring the government system and educational institutions that had been fragmented during the colonial period (Anwar et al., 2024). This political and constitutional context was

crucial because it determined the direction of education policy, including the decision to place Islamic education development within the state through official institutions.

The establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs on January 3, 1946, was the first significant institutional step in the state's management of Islamic education. The department's existence demonstrated formal recognition of the need to regulate, facilitate, and align religious education with national goals. This step also recognized the social reality: religious education was not merely a private religious matter, but a vital component in shaping national character and identity (Rumini, 2024).

The implementation of Islamic education during the early years of independence was carried out using a formal, traditional approach mandated by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. It reflected efforts to synchronize general and religious education to integrate the curriculum and the character education function, which had shifted during the Japanese occupation. This formal approach ensured that religious education was not merely sporadic in traditional institutions but became part of the national education system (Selvia, 2024).

The history of religious institutions before independence—from the Office of Inland Affairs during the Dutch era to the Shukuma during the Japanese era—indicates that the administrative structure for religious affairs was not entirely new. The transformation into the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1946 marked the localization and nationalization of religious management. This change in name and function also had legitimizing consequences: placing religious affairs in the hands of an independent state, rather than a colonial structure.

The internal debate over the Islamic educational model (old vs. new) in 1945 highlighted the tension between maintaining the tradition of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren/madrasah) and restructuring education to align with the goals of the modern state. The argument that madrasahs and pesantren were ingrained "sources of education" emphasized their socio-institutional position as cultural and pedagogical assets (Irwan et al., 2024). The suggestion that they receive material support and state guidance demonstrated an assimilationist strategy—maintaining social legitimacy while integrating them into national policy.

The Old Order government's policies on Islamic education received mixed responses; some sections of society resisted, perhaps traumatized by colonial experiences

or wary of state intervention. However, for many, the policy became an "oasis," providing space for the development of more systematic Islamic education, both institutionally (madrasahs) and non-institutionally (religious study groups in mosques/surau). This pattern demonstrated a balance between formal modernization and the preservation of traditional practices. The role of social organizations that manage madrasahs is significant—their organizational orientation shapes the institution's curriculum, methods, and goals. With the Ministry of Religious Affairs playing an active role, madrasahs are increasingly being directed to fulfill a dual function: religious education and contributing to national development goals (Ahmar & Azzajjad, 2025). A strong political spirit of Islamic education among Ministry of Religious Affairs officials helps secure resources and institutional status for madrasahs.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs' recommendation that traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) be modernized into madrasahs with a classical concept and a fixed curriculum (including general subjects) reflects the strategy of integrating religious education into the national system. This step opens opportunities for Islamic communities to establish formal, state-recognized institutions while simultaneously creating pathways for professionalization in religious education, such as the Religious Teacher Education (PGA) and the State Islamic Judge Education (JEK), thereby improving the quality of educators and professional religious personnel (Rosyada, 2017).

Data on the development of madrasahs in the 1960s—thousands of elementary madrasahs, hundreds of junior high madrasahs, and hundreds of senior high madrasahs—underscore the tangible impact of Old Order policies. The spread of madrasahs to almost every city demonstrated the expansion of access to formal Islamic education. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' direct involvement in the management and development of madrasahs marked the foundation for the institutionalization of Islamic education in modern Indonesia, while also posing challenges related to standardization, quality control, and harmonization of religious and national goals (Subhan, 2012).

DISCUSSION

The Development of Islamic Education in the Old Order

Islamic civilization in the archipelago during the Old Order (1945–1966) encompassed not only religious traditions but also social, political, and educational

discourses that sought to affirm Islam's place within the nascent nation-state (Fadlillah et al., 2018). The Old Order government, under Sukarno's leadership, recognized the importance of religion in shaping national character, thus allowing Islamic institutions such as mosques, Islamic boarding schools, and madrasas to be given space—albeit within the confines of Pancasila nationalism and Indonesian socialism.

During the Old Order, Islamic civilization in Indonesia was more visible in the form of religious institutions (madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and jami'ah) and the active participation of Muslims in national politics through Islamic parties such as Masyumi and NU. Although Sukarno emphasized "nasakom" (nationalism, religion, communism) and socialist tendencies, Muslims were still able to maintain educational and religious networks as a cultural-scientific axis (Munawaroh et al., 2025).

Islam became a vital element in the debate over the state's foundation. However, after the Decree of July 5, 1959, and the return to the 1945 Constitution, the state's official ideological framework was pluralistic and did not use the term "Islamic State." While efforts to strengthen Pancasila, Muslims instead strengthened educational and religious foundations as cultural capital to influence public mentality and public policy. After Indonesian independence, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was established on January 3, 1946, and played a central role in formulating national-level Islamic education policy. Through the Religious Education Section (later developed into the Religious Education Office and beyond), the Ministry of Religious Affairs formulated three main tasks: teaching religion in public schools, teaching general sciences in madrasas, and establishing the Religious Teacher Education (PGA) and the State Islamic Judge Education (PHIN) (Baidlawie, 2018).

During the Old Order era, Madrasahs began to be formally recognized as part of the national education system, including through Law No. 4 of 1950, which regulated the basics of education and teaching, and through the Ministry of Religious Affairs' recognition of madrasahs. The madrasah system at that time consisted of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), and Madrasah Aliyah (MA), with a curriculum that divided approximately one-third into religious studies and two-thirds into general studies to address public concerns about the quality of general education in madrasahs (Sofyan, 2022).

The Old Order government gave special attention to religious education in public schools through Law No. 4 of 1950 and Law No. 20 of 1954, which stipulated that

religious instruction be provided in public schools, with the option for parents and students to choose whether to participate. This provision was reinforced by a joint regulation issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1951, which stipulated the hours of religious instruction in public schools and exempted the Ministry of Religious Affairs from the costs of religious materials and instruction. Islamic higher education institutions began to receive explicit attention in the early 1950s, for example, with the government's takeover of the Faculty of Religion at UII in 1950 and the establishment of PTAIN (State Islamic Religious College) in 1951. In addition, the establishment of the PGA and PHIN during the Old Order era demonstrated a systematic effort to produce professional religious teachers and judges, who became the backbone of the development of madrasas and religious courts (Fathi, 2023).

Pondok pesantren and Islamic religious education remain the primary hub for transmitting Islamic knowledge at the grassroots level, despite post-independence ups and downs due to political struggles and a shift in focus to formal education. During the Old Order, the role of Islamic boarding schools was more visible in developing prominent ulama (Islamic scholars) and national cadres. At the same time, the new government began to consider how to integrate Islamic boarding schools into the national education system (Siregar, 2018).

At the beginning of the Old Order, national education policy emphasized "Indonesian socialism" and the development of a revolutionary mentality, positioning religious education as a cultural-moral component rather than a single ideological program. However, within this dynamic, Islamic education underwent structural consolidation through the formulation of regulations, the recognition of madrasas, and the integration of religious education into public schools, thereby becoming increasingly institutionalized (Nirmala et al., 2023b). Overall, Islamic civilization in the archipelago during the Old Order era developed within a tension between the imperatives of the nationalist nation-state and strong religious traditions at the grassroots level. The formal recognition of madrasahs marked the development of education, the establishment of teacher and religious judge training institutions, and the democratic integration of religious education into public schools, thus laying the structural foundation for the development of Islamic education in the New Order and Reformation eras.

CONCLUSION

The Old Order period (1945–1966) constituted a formative but ambivalent phase for Islamic civilization and education in the Indonesian archipelago: state recognition and institutionalization—exemplified by the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, legal recognition of madrasahs, and the formation of teacher and judge training programs—expanded access and professionalized religious education, yet uneven resources, political tensions, and competing visions of modernization constrained implementation and quality. This study’s historical-documentary analysis shows that Islamic institutions (madrasahs and pesantren) were both preserved and reshaped as they were integrated into the national education system, producing important human-capital and cultural impacts while also revealing persistent gaps in equity, curricular harmonization, and state support. These findings highlight the need for future policies that balance respect for traditional pedagogies with consistent funding, quality assurance, and curricular alignment to ensure that Islamic education effectively contributes to national development without losing its distinctive religious and community-rooted functions.

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