

Educational Thought in Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah: The Perspectives of Islam Nusantara and Progressive Islam

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Abstract: This study analyzes and compares the educational thought of Indonesia's two largest Islamic organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, through the respective analytical frameworks of Islam Nusantara (Nusantara Islam) and Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam). The objective of this research is to unpack the philosophical foundations, pedagogical characteristics, and contemporary contributions of both movements in responding to the demands of modernity and national identity. Utilizing a qualitative, library-based research design with a comparative-hermeneutic approach, this study examines foundational literature, institutional documents, and key intellectual works from both organizations. The findings reveal that NU's educational thought, anchored in Islam Nusantara, emphasizes cultural acculturation, the preservation of the traditional *pesantren* system, local wisdom, and contextual jurisprudence (*fikh*). Conversely, Muhammadiyah's educational model, driven by Progressive Islam, prioritizes modernization, religious purification combined with reform (*tajdid*), the integration of secular and religious sciences, and structured institutional efficiency. Despite their methodological divergences – NU relying on traditional continuity and cultural flexibility, and Muhammadiyah focusing on institutional reform and rational modernization – both organizations operate synergistically to counter extremism, reinforce religious moderation (*wasathiyah*), and foster human resources capable of thriving in a globalized world.

Keywords: Islamic Education; Nahdlatul Ulama; Muhammadiyah; Islam Nusantara; Progressive Islam.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis dan membandingkan pemikiran pendidikan dari dua organisasi Islam terbesar di Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) dan Muhammadiyah, masing-masing melalui kacamata paradigma Islam Nusantara dan Islam Berkemajuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguraikan landasan filosofis, karakteristik pedagogis, serta kontribusi kontemporer kedua gerakan dalam merespons tantangan modernitas dan dinamika kebangsaan. Menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan (*library research*) dengan pendekatan komparatif-hermeneutik, penelitian ini menelaah dokumen pemikiran, filosofi kelembagaan, dan karya-karya utama para tokoh kedua ormas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran pendidikan NU berbasis Islam Nusantara menekankan pada akulturasi budaya, pemeliharaan tradisi (*pesantren*), kearifan lokal, dan pemikiran keagamaan bermadzhab yang kontekstual. Sebaliknya, pemikiran pendidikan Muhammadiyah berbasis Islam Berkemajuan mengusung modernisasi, purifikasi akidah yang dipadukan dengan

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Islam; Nahdlatul Ulama; Muhammadiyah; Islam Nusantara; Islam Berkemajuan.

tajdid (pembaruan), integrasi antara ilmu umum dan ilmu agama, serta kelembagaan formal yang rasional-efisien. Meskipun memiliki aksentuasi metodologis yang berbeda—NU mengakar pada kontinuitas tradisi dan fleksibilitas budaya, sedangkan Muhammadiyah berorientasi pada modernisasi institusional dan rekonstruksi sosial—kedua ormas ini saling melengkapi dalam membendung radikalisme, memperkuat moderasi beragama (*wasathiyah*), serta mencetak sumber daya manusia yang berkarakter dan bermartabat di era global.

A. Introduction

The landscape of contemporary Islamic education in Southeast Asia presents a compelling model of pluralism, institutional resilience, and intellectual dynamism. As the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia occupies a unique position in the global Islamic discourse, characterized by an enduring tradition of religious moderation, cultural adaptability, and civil society-led educational initiatives (Azra, 2004; Hefner, 2000). Unlike many nations in the Middle East where religious education was historically state-centric or centralized, the trajectory of Islamic educational development in Indonesia has been primarily shaped by non-governmental social and religious organizations. These civil movements have constructed extensive networks of schools, seminaries, and universities that mediate between Islamic normative traditions and the socio-political realities of a modern democratic state (Ricklefs, 2012).

At the forefront of this socio-educational ecosystem stand Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, the two largest socio-religious organizations in Indonesia, and arguably in the entire Muslim world. Established in the early twentieth century during the twilight decades of Dutch colonial rule, both movements emerged as indigenous responses to the double challenge of foreign imperialism and internal religious stagnation (Barton et al., 2021). Together, NU and Muhammadiyah operate tens of thousands of educational institutions—ranging from traditional boarding schools (*pesantren*) and primary madrasahs to modern comprehensive universities. Consequently, the educational thoughts, philosophies, and pedagogical models developed by these two giants have profoundly dictated the intellectual and moral development of Indonesian society across generations (Latif, 2011).

The historical conditions giving rise to NU and Muhammadiyah reflected distinct socio-cultural environments and ideological imperatives within the Indonesian

archipelago. During the early 1900s, Dutch colonial educational policies were inherently discriminatory, designed to serve administrative colonial interests while neglecting the broad indigenous population (Steenbrink, 1984). In response, indigenous Muslim intellectuals sought to reclaim educational authority, recognizing that the survival of Islamic identity and the eventual liberation of the nation required structured educational reform. However, the precise strategy for achieving this liberation generated two distinct educational philosophies that continue to define Indonesian Islamic discourse today (Woodward, 2010).

On one hand, Nahdlatul Ulama was founded in 1926 by classical Islamic scholars (*ulama*), most notably K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, primarily to safeguard traditional Islamic scholarship, vernacular cultural practices, and classical jurisprudential frameworks (*madhhab*) against the rising tide of foreign-inspired puritan reformism (Bizawie, 2016). NU's educational philosophy was built upon the historical foundation of the *pesantren* system—a traditional Islamic boarding school model deeply rooted in Javanese and regional agrarian societies. Through the *pesantren*, NU preserved a continuous chain of scholarly authority (*sanad*) connecting local Indonesian students with classical Islamic scholarship across the traditional Muslim world (Jackson & Bahrissalim, 2007).

On the other hand, Muhammadiyah was established in 1912 in Yogyakarta by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, inspired by the global Islamic reformist movement championed by figures such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh (Peacock, 1978). Dahlan observed that traditional Islamic education was often overly conservative, fatalistic, and disconnected from the empirical demands of modern administration and science. Consequently, Muhammadiyah formulated an educational philosophy focused on *tajdid* (reform and renewal), aiming to purify Islamic practice from un-Islamic local accretions while simultaneously adopting Western-style school organizational structures, graded curricula, and empirical subjects (Mulkhan, 2010).

In contemporary discourse, the foundational educational philosophies of NU and Muhammadiyah are increasingly articulated through two overarching ideological concepts: Islam Nusantara (Nusantara Islam) and Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam). These terms are not merely political slogans, but represent mature, comprehensive worldviews that govern how each organization interprets sacred texts, engages with local culture, and conceptualizes educational pedagogy in the modern era

(Burhani, 2013; Sahin, 2018). Analyzing NU and Muhammadiyah through these two conceptual lenses offers valuable insights into how traditionalism and modernism interact within Islamic educational thought.

For Nahdlatul Ulama, the concept of Islam Nusantara articulates an educational philosophy that emphasizes cultural acculturation, contextual jurisprudence, and indigenous wisdom (Bizawie, 2016). Islam Nusantara posits that Islam did not spread throughout the Malay archipelago through military conquest, but through gradual, peaceful cultural engagement championed by early mystics and scholars (*Wali Songo*). Educationally, this paradigm teaches that religious values should not be imposed in opposition to local culture; rather, culture serves as a meaningful vehicle for expressing divine truth. The educational goal of Islam Nusantara is to produce scholars who are deeply versed in classical Islamic jurisprudence while maintaining profound empathy for local traditions and social harmony (Woodward, 2010).

Pedagogically, Islam Nusantara finds its most authentic expression in the traditional *pesantren* environment. In this setting, learning revolves around the rigorous textual analysis of classical Arabic texts, known as *kitab kuning* (yellow books), covering jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*aqidah*), grammar (*nahwu/sharf*), and mysticism (*tasawwuf*) (Jackson & Bahrissalim, 2007). The teaching method relies heavily on *sorogan* (individualized instruction) and *bandongan* (collective lecture), fostering deep personal relationships between the *kyai* (revered scholar) and *santri* (student). This relationship extends beyond cognitive transmission to encompass spiritual mentorship, character cultivation (*adab*), and communal living, establishing a holistic moral community (Azra, 2004).

Conversely, Muhammadiyah's conceptual framework of Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam) embodies an educational philosophy centered on rational inquiry, social transformation, and forward-looking institutional modernization (Burhani, 2013). Islam Berkemajuan argues that Islam is inherently a religion of progress (*din al-hadarah*) that mandates Muslims to be at the forefront of science, technology, and social welfare. Educational thought under this paradigm rejects blind imitation (*taqlid*) of medieval interpretations, instead advocating for *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) directly grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah, interpreted through modern rational tools (Mulkhan, 2010).

The pedagogical implementation of Islam Berkemajuan is reflected in Muhammadiyah's extensive network of modern schools, madrasahs, and higher education institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Muhammadiyah* or PTM). From its inception, Muhammadiyah pioneered an integrated educational model that combined religious instruction with general secular sciences—a radical innovation in early 20th-century Dutch East Indies (Peacock, 1978). By adopting modern classroom management, standardized examinations, and empirical curricula, Muhammadiyah sought to create a new generation of educated Muslims who possessed both firm religious conviction and the technical competence required to thrive in a globalized economy (Fanani, 2019).

These contrasting educational paradigms highlight a fundamental epistemological difference between the two organizations regarding tradition, culture, and modernity. NU's Islam Nusantara views tradition as an essential, living repository of wisdom that bridges past divine revelation with present social context, making cultural preservation an integral component of educational success (Bizawie, 2016). In contrast, Muhammadiyah's Islam Berkemajuan views tradition through a more critical lens, distinguishing sharply between immutable divine revelation and mutable historical human practice, thereby encouraging continuous reform and institutional modernization (Burhani, 2013).

Despite these epistemological divergences, both educational paradigms share a strong commitment to national unity, religious moderation (*wasathiyah*), and civic responsibility. Both NU and Muhammadiyah explicitly endorse the pluralistic state ideology of Pancasila and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) as final political frameworks (Menchik, 2016). Through their respective educational networks, both movements actively cultivate a moderate Islamic identity that rejects religious extremism, promotes interfaith tolerance, and instills civic patriotism. Thus, the educational outputs of both traditional *pesantren* and modern Muhammadiyah campuses serve as structural buffers against radicalization in contemporary Indonesia (Hefner, 2000).

However, the rapid acceleration of twenty-first-century globalization, digital transformation, and market-driven economic structures presents unprecedented challenges to the educational paradigms of both organizations (Zuhdi, 2018). Modern students operate within globalized digital networks where traditional sources of

religious authority are continuously questioned, and education is increasingly evaluated through market utility rather than moral development. Consequently, both Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan are forced to continuously adapt their educational methodologies to remain relevant without compromising their core philosophical identities (Sahin, 2018).

For Nahdlatul Ulama, the primary challenge involves modernizing the *pesantren* system to meet national educational standards and technological requirements without diluting its spiritual depth, classical textual scholarship, and traditional *kyai-santri* dynamics (Jackson & Bahrissalim, 2007). As NU expands its formal university system, it must carefully balance the integration of empirical sciences with the preservation of classical *kitab kuning* traditions. Furthermore, NU faces the task of translating the culturally bound wisdom of Islam Nusantara into a systematic, reproducible educational curriculum that appeals to urban, digitally connected youth (Bizawie, 2016).

For Muhammadiyah, the contemporary educational challenge centers on preventing institutional bureaucratization and commercialization within its vast educational empire. As Muhammadiyah universities grow into major corporate institutions, there is an ongoing risk that market demands may overshadow the movement's original spirit of socio-religious reform and spiritual revitalization (Fanani, 2019). Furthermore, Islam Berkemajuan must continuously update its reformist methodology to address complex contemporary ethical issues—such as environmental degradation, bioethics, and digital ethics—ensuring that its definition of "progress" remains grounded in holistic Islamic values rather than mere secular modernization (Mulkhan, 2010).

The interplay between Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan demonstrates that Islamic educational thought in Indonesia is neither static nor homogenous. Instead, it represents a vibrant, ongoing dialectic between cultural continuity and rational innovation (Pohl, 2006). Rather than operating as mutually exclusive systems, NU and Muhammadiyah function as complementary educational forces within Indonesian civil society. NU ensures that Indonesian Islam remains deeply rooted in local historical consciousness, spiritual depth, and communal solidarity, while Muhammadiyah ensures that the Muslim community remains intellectually agile, technologically capable, and institutionally competitive (Latif, 2011).

Despite extensive academic literature examining NU and Muhammadiyah individually, there remains a critical research gap regarding comparative analyses that explicitly operationalize Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan as primary analytical frameworks for educational philosophy. Existing scholarship often treats these two movements through binary categories—such as traditionalist versus modernist, or rural versus urban—without fully exploring how their overarching ideological paradigms directly shape pedagogical methods, curricular structures, and institutional policies in the contemporary era (Burhani, 2013; Woodward, 2010).

This study addresses this gap by conducting a comparative investigation into the educational thought of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah through the explicit lenses of Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan. The core problem explored in this paper is how these two distinct ideological paradigms interpret the role of education in mediating between Islamic revelation, local culture, and modern global challenges, and how their respective pedagogical models respond to the pressures of contemporary society.

To address this problem, this research focuses on three key questions: First, what are the foundational philosophical and epistemological premises underpinning NU's Islam Nusantara and Muhammadiyah's Islam Berkemajuan regarding educational theory? Second, how are these ideological paradigms operationalized within their respective pedagogical practices, curricular frameworks, and institutional structures? Third, how do these two educational paradigms converge and diverge in addressing the contemporary challenges of religious moderation, technological advancement, and national identity in twenty-first-century Indonesia?

The significance of this comparative inquiry is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches global discourses on Islamic educational philosophy by demonstrating how indigenous Southeast Asian Islamic movements have successfully constructed alternative, non-Western models of educational modernization that balance religious orthodoxy with civic democracy. Practically, this study offers valuable insights for educational policymakers, curriculum developers, and community leaders seeking to foster religious moderation, social cohesion, and pedagogical innovation in multicultural and multi-religious societies.

B. Method

This study utilizes a qualitative, non-empirical research design based on library research (*library research*), employing a comparative-hermeneutic and historical-philosophical approach. Qualitative textual analysis is selected because the inquiry investigates philosophical doctrines, ideological frameworks, and pedagogical theories embedded within written primary sources and institutional texts. By analyzing the educational thought of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah through the conceptual lenses of Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan, this methodological design facilitates a critical examination of how religious discourse shapes educational policy, curriculum development, and institutional structures in Indonesian Islam.

The data sources for this research are structured into primary and secondary textual materials to ensure scholarly depth and analytical validity. Primary data sources comprise foundational intellectual texts, institutional manifestos, and official policy documents produced by both organizations. For NU, primary texts include classical treatises such as K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari's *Adab al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim*, official PBNU congress (*Muktamar*) decisions regarding Islam Nusantara, and curriculum guidelines from LP Ma'arif NU and RMI (Rabithah Ma'ahid Islamiyah). For Muhammadiyah, primary texts encompass foundational writings and speeches of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, official decision documents (*Pernyataan Pikiran/Matan*) from PP Muhammadiyah on Islam Berkemajuan, and educational guidelines issued by Majelis Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah (Dikdasmen) and Majelis Diktilitbang.

Secondary data sources consist of peer-reviewed academic journal articles, scholarly monographs, edited volumes, and historical analyses examining Islamic educational reform, civil society movements, and religious socio-political dynamics in Indonesia. Key secondary literature includes seminal works by prominent Islamic studies scholars and sociologists (e.g., Azyumardi Azra, Robert Hefner, M.C. Ricklefs, Ahmad Najib Burhani, and Zainul Milal Bizawie). These secondary texts provide essential socio-historical context, empirical observations, and analytical benchmarks to evaluate and triangulate the primary textual findings against broader trends in Southeast Asian Islamic education.

Data collection was executed through a systematic documentation method (*studi dokumentasi*) guided by specific thematic filtering criteria. Textual selection focused on

materials that directly address: (a) epistemological foundations of Islamic knowledge, (b) pedagogical relationships and learning methodologies, (c) curricular design integrating religious and secular sciences, (d) institutional organization (traditional *pesantren* versus modern formal schooling), and (e) strategic responses to globalization, religious moderation, and modern technology. Texts that exclusively addressed internal administrative regulations or specific political endorsements without significant philosophical or educational relevance were excluded from the primary analytical corpus.

The analysis of the collected textual data followed a two-tier procedure combining hermeneutic interpretation and a comparative analytical framework. First, textual hermeneutics was employed to uncover the deeper socio-philosophical meanings, historical contexts, and ideological intents behind the concepts of Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan as applied to education. Second, a comparative analytical framework—adapted from comparative education methodology (comprising description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and simultaneous comparison)—was applied to systematically map points of epistemological convergence, methodological divergence, and functional complementarity between the educational paradigms of NU and Muhammadiyah.

To ensure academic rigor, analytical validity, and interpretive trustworthiness, this library-based study implemented source triangulation, textual cross-referencing, and contextual verification. Source triangulation was achieved by constantly cross-analyzing primary institutional declarations against independent secondary scholarship and historical records. Hermeneutic validity was maintained by preserving the authentic linguistic and contextual intent of key Arabic and Indonesian Islamic terms (e.g., *tajdid*, *taqlid*, *sanad*, *wasathiyah*), preventing anachronistic misinterpretations. Finally, a clear audit trail documenting textual selection, thematic categorizations, and comparative syntheses was maintained throughout the research process to guarantee transparency and analytical coherence.

C. Results and Discussion

Epistemological Foundations: Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan

The thematic analysis of primary texts reveals that the educational thoughts of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah diverge fundamentally in their epistemological foundations regarding religious authority, historical tradition, and social context. NU's educational worldview, conceptualized through Islam Nusantara, is epistemologically anchored in the preservation of *turath* (classical Islamic intellectual heritage), adherence to established jurisprudential schools (*madhhab*), and the valuation of local cultural context as an valid site for theological realization (Bizawie, 2016). In contrast, Muhammadiyah's philosophy of Islam Berkemajuan operates on a reformist epistemology centered on *tajdid* (renewal), direct textual engagement with the Qur'an and Sunnah, the rejection of *taqlid* (blind imitation), and the systematic deployment of rational *ijtihad* to address contemporary challenges (Burhani, 2013).

In NU's Islam Nusantara framework, knowledge transmission is viewed as an unbroken spiritual and intellectual chain (*sanad*) connecting contemporary learners through generations of scholars (*ulama*) back to the Prophet Muhammad. As articulated by NU's founder K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari in *Adab al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim*, education is fundamentally an ethical and spiritual endeavor where moral discipline (*adab*) precedes cognitive acquisition (Asy'ari, 1926/2000). Knowledge is not treated merely as an instrument for empirical problem-solving, but as a sacred trust requiring spiritual purification, humility, and submission to scholarly authority. Consequently, Islam Nusantara posits that classical texts (*kitab kuning*) possess enduring authority that must be interpretively adapted to local cultural realities (*urf*) without severing historical continuity (Jackson & Bahrissalim, 2007).

Conversely, Muhammadiyah's Islam Berkemajuan, pioneered by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, redefines Islamic epistemology by prioritizing rational inquiry and empirical utility alongside purified scriptural foundations. Distressed by the intellectual stagnation and fatalism prevalent in early 20th-century

traditional society, Dahlan argued that Islamic revelation actively demands the use of human reason (*'aql*) to understand natural laws and improve human welfare (Mulkhan, 2010). Islam Berkemajuan contends that while divine revelation is absolute, human interpretations—including classical medieval jurisprudence—are historical, contextual, and fallible. Therefore, Muhammadiyah's educational epistemology rejects the absolute authority of medieval *madhhabs*, advocating instead for a dynamic, problem-solving approach to Islamic knowledge that integrates empirical sciences with core Qur'anic principles (Fanani, 2019).

This epistemological divergence directly informs how each organization evaluates local Indonesian culture. Islam Nusantara views indigenous traditions, customs, and art forms not as polytheistic contaminations, but as fertile ground for expressing divine truth. Culture is recognized as a pedagogical bridge that facilitated the peaceful Islamization of the archipelago by the *Wali Songo* (Woodward, 2010). In contrast, Islam Berkemajuan adopts a critical stance toward cultural practices that lack direct scriptural validation, classifying them as *tahayyul* (superstition), *bid'ah* (unauthorized innovation), or *churafat* (mythology). For Muhammadiyah, educational reform requires liberating the Muslim mind from unscientific, syncretic cultural practices so that energy can be redirected toward modern social development, scientific literacy, and institutional progress (Peacock, 1978).

Ultimately, these two philosophical traditions reflect distinct yet complementary responses to the challenge of Islamic vitality in the modern world. NU achieves resilience through historical continuity and cultural flexibility, ensuring that Islamic education remains deeply rooted in the social fabric of local communities (Azra, 2004). Muhammadiyah achieves vitality through institutional innovation and intellectual reform, ensuring that Islamic education remains competitive within modern socio-economic systems (Latif, 2011). Together, these epistemological models establish a dual structure within

Indonesian Islamic thought, balancing traditional preservation with modern transformation.

Pedagogical Typologies: Pesantren Textualism vs. Rational Modern Schooling

The translation of these philosophical premises into educational practice has yielded two distinct pedagogical typologies: the traditional *pesantren* system associated with NU and the standardized, graded school network developed by Muhammadiyah. The *pesantren* pedagogical model relies on traditional, text-centric instruction designed to cultivate mastery over classical Arabic grammar, theology, and legal theory. Instruction is primarily executed through two traditional methods: *sorogan*, an individualized tutorial method where students (*santri*) read classical texts directly to the scholar (*kyai*), and *bandongan* or *halaqah*, a collective lecture format where the *kyai* translates and contextualizes texts for a broader audience (Jackson & Bahrissalim, 2007; Steenbrink, 1984).

Central to NU's pedagogical model is the personal, spiritual, and charismatic authority of the *kyai*. In the *pesantren* environment, the *kyai* is not merely an instructor delivering cognitive information, but a spiritual mentor (*murshid*) and moral exemplar whose lifestyle, character, and blessings (*barakah*) shape the *santri*'s identity (Pohl, 2006). This relational pedagogy fosters an environment of intense loyalty, communal solidarity, and moral discipline. Learning occurs holistically within a continuous, 24-hour residential community where everyday activities—from shared chores to communal prayers—are imbued with educational value aimed at building character (*adab*) and humility (Azra, 2004).

In stark contrast, Muhammadiyah pioneered a structural revolution in Islamic pedagogy by replacing the informal, residential *pesantren* format with modern classroom environments modeled on Dutch colonial and Western educational architecture. From its founding, Muhammadiyah introduced structured grade levels, age-based cohorts, standardized desks, blackboards, set schedules, and formal examinations—features entirely absent from traditional

pesantren during the early 20th century (Peacock, 1978). Instruction shifted from passive textual memorization to active teacher-student interaction, group discussion, and empirical inquiry, creating an institutional framework designed to foster rational problem-solving and administrative efficiency (Fanani, 2019).

In the Muhammadiyah pedagogical framework, the educator functions primarily as a trained, professional instructor whose authority derives from subject competence, pedagogical certification, and institutional standing rather than personal charismatic lineage. While moral modeling remains essential, learning is structured around defined learning outcomes, standardized evaluation metrics, and clear curricular objectives (Mulkhan, 2010). This rationalization of pedagogy democratized access to Islamic knowledge, enabling students from non-scholarly backgrounds to systematically acquire both religious and secular competence without requiring decades of residential immersion under a single *kyai*.

These pedagogical typologies yield contrasting educational outcomes that reflect their underlying organizational missions. NU's *pesantren* model excels at cultivating deep textual hermeneutical skills, spiritual discipline, and strong communal identity, producing scholars capable of navigating classical legal debates and maintaining social cohesion in rural communities (Bizawie, 2016). Muhammadiyah's modern school model excels at producing civic literacy, scientific capability, and professional readiness, preparing graduates to enter modern bureaucracies, healthcare systems, technological sectors, and higher education institutions (Latif, 2011).

Curricular Integration and the Science-Religion Interface

The approach to curricular design in both organizations demonstrates how Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan conceptualize the relationship between religious revelation and secular human knowledge. Historically, traditional *pesantren* curricula focused almost exclusively on classical religious sciences, treating empirical or secular subjects as secondary or irrelevant to spiritual salvation (Steenbrink, 1984). Under the influence of Islam Nusantara,

however, NU's curricular philosophy has evolved to embrace a contextual model where classical jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is dynamically applied to contemporary social issues through *bahtsul masail* (deliberative legal forums), while general education is systematically integrated via LP Ma'arif NU (Bizawie, 2016).

In NU's contemporary educational institutions, curricular integration is achieved by pairing traditional *kitab kuning* study with national standard curricula. The core of religious instruction remains rooted in classical legal manuals (such as *Fath al-Qarib* or *Kifayat al-Akhyar*), theological treatises of the Ash'arite school, and Sufi ethical guides by Imam al-Ghazali (Jackson & Bahrissalim, 2007). Through the analytical lens of Islam Nusantara, students are taught to read these classical legal texts not as rigid, dogmatic codes, but as historical applications of legal principles (*qawa'id fihiyyah*) that must be recontextualized to accommodate contemporary Indonesian legal, social, and cultural conditions (Woodward, 2010).

Muhammadiyah, conversely, built its reputation on pioneering a dual-curriculum system that fully integrates religious instruction with empirical natural and social sciences. Rejecting the epistemological dichotomy between "religious knowledge" and "secular knowledge," Islam Berkemajuan asserts that all truth originates from God—revelation constitutes divine words (*ayat qawliyyah*), while the physical universe constitutes divine signs (*ayat kawuniyyah*) (Abdullah, 2000). Consequently, studying mathematics, physics, biology, and social sciences is elevated to an act of worship (*ibadah*) and a moral obligation necessary for human flourishing (Fanani, 2019).

In Muhammadiyah's educational system—spanning primary schools to higher education institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Muhammadiyah* or PTM)—the curriculum allocates equal weight to national standard science subjects and specialized religious education known as AIK (*Al-Islam dan Kemuhammadiyahan*). AIK instruction focuses on purified theology, practical ethics, rational Qur'anic exegesis, and the history of Islamic reform, explicitly

avoiding sectarian jurisprudential biases (Burhani, 2013). This integrated curriculum aims to cultivate holistic Muslim intellectuals who possess both rigorous religious conviction and technical competence in contemporary scientific disciplines.

Comparing these two curricular approaches reveals different strengths in addressing contemporary educational needs. NU's curricular model provides students with exceptional textual depth, historical consciousness, and sophisticated legal hermeneutics, enabling them to construct nuanced religious responses to complex socio-cultural issues (Bizawie, 2016). Muhammadiyah's integrated model provides students with high scientific literacy, technological adaptability, and structured analytical skills, enabling them to lead professional and technical modernization projects (Latif, 2011). Both models effectively demonstrate that Islamic education can successfully engage with modern knowledge systems without sacrificing religious integrity.

Institutional Governance and Civil Society Impact

The structural execution of educational thought in NU and Muhammadiyah has produced two distinctly different models of institutional governance, both of which exert immense influence on Indonesian civil society. NU's educational governance network is historically decentralized and federated, growing organically out of autonomous, privately owned *pesantren* established by individual *kyais* (Pohl, 2006). While national bodies like Rabithah Ma'ahid Islamiyah (RMI) and LP Ma'arif NU provide coordination, policy advocacy, and standardized curricula, individual *pesantren* retain significant operational independence, reflecting the traditional authority of their founding scholars (Jackson & Bahrissalim, 2007).

This decentralized governance model fosters exceptional institutional resilience and deep local integration. Because each *pesantren* is intimately tied to its immediate rural or suburban community, NU educational institutions function as holistic socio-economic centers, providing not only religious instruction, but also community mediation, agricultural cooperatives, and local

welfare support (Azra, 2004; Hefner, 2000). Furthermore, NU's recent institutional evolution has led to the rapid establishment of modern universities (Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama or UNU) designed to connect traditional *pesantren* graduates with modern professional fields while maintaining their traditional identity (Bizawie, 2016).

In contrast, Muhammadiyah operates a highly centralized, rationalized, and bureaucratic institutional governance structure overseen by specialized national boards, specifically Majelis Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah (Dikdasmen) and Majelis Pendidikan Tinggi Penelitian dan Pengembangan (Diktilitbang). This corporate-style organizational hierarchy governs thousands of primary schools, high schools, vocational institutes, and over 170 universities nationwide under uniform administrative standards, financial audits, and quality assurance frameworks (Fanani, 2019; Menchik, 2016).

Muhammadiyah's centralized governance model has enabled it to construct one of the most sophisticated non-governmental social welfare and educational networks in the developing world. By enforcing uniform quality controls, professional administrative standards, and transparent financial management, Muhammadiyah institutions generate significant social mobility, providing accessible, high-quality education to millions of middle- and working-class Indonesians (Latif, 2011; Peacock, 1978). Its higher education institutions (PTMs) operate as major engines of professional accreditation, producing doctors, engineers, educators, and public administrators who embody the movement's reformist ethos.

From a civil society perspective, the complementary institutional impact of NU and Muhammadiyah serves as a cornerstone of Indonesian democracy and religious stability. NU's educational network acts as a powerful buffer against religious extremism by embedding youth in an ethos of cultural tolerance, historical appreciation, and local wisdom (*wasathiyah*) (Menchik, 2016; Zuhdi, 2018). Simultaneously, Muhammadiyah's network prevents religious stagnation and economic marginalization by equipping Muslims with the

technical competencies required to compete in globalized economic structures. Together, these two civil society giants ensure that Indonesian Islam remains both culturally grounded and modernly competitive.

Synthesis: Contemporary Synergy and Global Relevance

In the contemporary era of rapid digital transformation, global market integration, and shifting political dynamics, the educational paradigms of Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan demonstrate increasing convergence in their strategic priorities. While historically distinguished by intense debates over tradition and reform, both NU and Muhammadiyah now recognize that twenty-first-century challenges—such as religious radicalism, digital misinformation, economic inequality, and environmental degradation—require a pragmatic synthesis of traditional wisdom and modern innovation (Barton et al., 2021; Sahin, 2018).

This convergence is particularly evident in their shared commitment to promoting religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) as a core educational outcome. Both organizations explicitly utilize their educational networks to counter transnational extremist ideologies, promoting a vision of Islam that upholds democratic governance, human rights, gender equity, and pluralistic citizenship within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) and Pancasila (Hefner, 2000; Menchik, 2016). NU contributes to this effort by deploying Islam Nusantara's contextual jurisprudence to dismantle rigid, Ahistorical extremist interpretations, while Muhammadiyah uses Islam Berkemajuan's rational methodology to demonstrate the incompatibility of religious violence with modern social progress (Burhani, 2013; Zuhdi, 2018).

Furthermore, both organizations are actively innovating to overcome their historical institutional limitations in response to global trends. NU is rapidly integrating digital technologies, STEM education, and modern management into its *pesantren* and university systems, ensuring that traditional *santri* possess contemporary technical skills without losing their spiritual anchors (Bizawie, 2016). Simultaneously, Muhammadiyah is expanding its spiritual and cultural

engagement, recognizing that technical modernization must be enriched with deep spiritual cultivation and cultural empathy to prevent mechanical bureaucratization (Fanani, 2019; Mulkhan, 2010).

Globally, the educational models developed by NU and Muhammadiyah offer valuable insights for international Islamic education discourse. As Muslim-majority nations throughout the Middle East and South Asia struggle with ideological polarization between autocratic secularism and rigid religious fundamentalism, Indonesia's educational landscape demonstrates that Islamic tradition, modern science, civil society, and democratic citizenship can successfully coexist and enrich one another (Azra, 2004; Hefner, 2000). The educational philosophies of Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan provide a compelling, non-Western model of educational modernization that preserves religious identity while enthusiastically embracing global progress.

In conclusion, the educational thoughts of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah represent twin pillars of Indonesian Islamic educational resilience. NU's Islam Nusantara ensures that education remains spiritually deep, culturally contextualized, and historically grounded, while Muhammadiyah's Islam Berkemajuan ensures that education remains intellectually dynamic, institutionally efficient, and scientifically competitive. Rather than functioning as mutually exclusive opposites, these two paradigms operate as a dynamic, dialectical force that continuously revitalizes Indonesian society, ensuring its flourishing in an increasingly complex, interconnected world.

E. Conclusion

This comparative analysis demonstrates that the educational thoughts of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, articulated through the paradigms of *Islam Nusantara* and *Islam Berkemajuan*, represent two distinct yet deeply complementary approaches to Islamic educational philosophy and practice in Indonesia. NU's *Islam Nusantara* framework anchors Islamic

education in cultural acculturation, classical textual scholarship (*turath*), unbroken spiritual lineage (*sanad*), and the holistic, residential *pesantren* system. In contrast, Muhammadiyah's *Islam Berkemajuan* paradigm drives educational reform through rational *ijtihad*, religious purification combined with continuous renewal (*tajdid*), integrated dual curricula combining religious and secular sciences, and structured institutional governance.

Despite their epistemological and pedagogical divergences—NU prioritizing cultural continuity and traditional authority, and Muhammadiyah emphasizing institutional modernization and rational inquiry—both movements converge on crucial socio-political imperatives. Through their extensive educational networks, both organizations actively foster religious moderation (*wasathiyah*), promote democratic citizenship within the pluralistic framework of Pancasila, and serve as vital structural buffers against religious extremism. NU ensures that Islamic education remains culturally grounded, spiritually profound, and socially cohesive, while Muhammadiyah equips Muslims with the scientific literacy, professional readiness, and institutional competitiveness needed in a globalized world.

Ultimately, the dynamic interaction between *Islam Nusantara* and *Islam Berkemajuan* provides a compelling, non-Western model of Islamic educational modernization. By successfully demonstrating that traditional religious orthodoxy, modern empirical science, and democratic civil society can mutually enrich one another, the educational paradigms of NU and Muhammadiyah offer valuable insights for global Islamic education, proving that religious tradition and contemporary progress can harmoniously coexist.

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