

## Strategic Adaptation and Resilience: Islamic Education's Response to Colonialism in Indonesia

**Fatimah Azzahra<sup>1</sup>, Amiliya Nur Rosyidah<sup>2</sup>, Rizky Firmansyah<sup>3</sup>, Triyo Supriyatno<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1,2,4</sup>Universitas Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia, <sup>3</sup>University Islam Selangor, Malaysia

*amelpercasi@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, milaamiliya1109@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>, 21pi01006@postgrad.uis.edu.my<sup>3</sup>, triyo@pai.uin-malang.ac.id<sup>4</sup>*

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**Abstract:** This study examines the strategic responses of Islamic educational institutions—particularly pesantren and madrasah—to the socio-political structures imposed by Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative historical-analytical methodology, the research draws on primary archival sources and secondary historiographical literature to explore how Islamic education functioned as a site of resistance and adaptation. The findings reveal four dominant themes: first, the modernization of Islamic education as a form of intellectual resistance, wherein reformist organizations like Muhammadiyah integrated secular subjects and structured pedagogies to cultivate an intellectually competitive Muslim generation; second, the consolidation of traditional institutions as cultural fortresses, as seen in Nahdlatul Ulama's efforts to strengthen pesantren and preserve religious orthodoxy; third, the mobilization of women through education, particularly through the efforts of 'Aisyiyah, as a strategy for moral reform and national identity formation; and fourth, the internalization of nationalist values through character education, positioning pesantren and madrasah as crucibles of civic responsibility and anti-colonial consciousness. These findings underscore that Islamic education during the colonial period was not merely a religious endeavor but a multidimensional force for cultural resilience and political mobilization. Theoretically, the study contributes to the discourse on education as a nonviolent strategy of resistance under colonialism, while practically offering insights for contemporary education policy in Indonesia. However, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources, which may overlook local variations and grassroots dynamics. Further research incorporating oral histories and archival case studies is recommended to enrich our understanding of the lived experiences and post-colonial legacies of these institutions.

**Abstrak:** Studi ini menelaah respons strategis lembaga pendidikan Islam—khususnya pesantren dan madrasah—terhadap struktur sosial-politik yang diberlakukan oleh pemerintahan kolonial Belanda di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif historis-analitis, penelitian ini memanfaatkan sumber arsip primer dan literatur historiografi sekunder untuk menggali bagaimana pendidikan Islam berfungsi sebagai arena perlawanan dan adaptasi. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkap empat tema utama: pertama, modernisasi pendidikan Islam sebagai bentuk perlawanan intelektual, di mana organisasi reformis seperti Muhammadiyah mengintegrasikan mata pelajaran sekuler dan pedagogi terstruktur guna membentuk generasi Muslim yang kompetitif secara intelektual; kedua, konsolidasi lembaga-lembaga tradisional sebagai benteng budaya, sebagaimana ditunjukkan oleh upaya Nahdlatul Ulama dalam memperkuat sistem pesantren dan mempertahankan ortodoksi keagamaan; ketiga, mobilisasi perempuan melalui pendidikan, terutama melalui gerakan 'Aisyiyah, sebagai strategi reformasi moral dan pembentukan identitas kebangsaan; dan keempat, internalisasi nilai-nilai kebangsaan melalui pendidikan karakter, yang menempatkan pesantren dan madrasah sebagai ruang pembentukan tanggung jawab sipil dan kesadaran antikolonial. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan Islam pada masa kolonial tidak sekadar merupakan aktivitas keagamaan, tetapi juga kekuatan multidimensional dalam membangun ketahanan budaya dan



mobilisasi politik. Secara teoretis, studi ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap diskursus pendidikan sebagai strategi perlawanan non-kekerasan dalam konteks kolonial, sementara secara praktis memberikan wawasan bagi pengembangan kebijakan pendidikan kontemporer di Indonesia. Namun demikian, studi ini memiliki keterbatasan karena bergantung pada sumber-sumber sekunder, yang mungkin tidak sepenuhnya merepresentasikan variasi lokal dan dinamika akar rumput. Penelitian lanjutan yang melibatkan sejarah lisan dan studi kasus arsip diusulkan untuk memperkaya pemahaman terhadap pengalaman nyata dan warisan pascakolonial dari lembaga-lembaga pendidikan ini.

## 1. Introduction

The interaction between Islam and colonialism stands as one of the most formative historical forces that have shaped modern Indonesian society. At the heart of this dynamic lies the Islamic education system—most notably the *pesantren* (traditional boarding school) and *madrasah*—which functioned not merely as institutions for religious knowledge transmission but also as bastions of cultural identity and arenas of resistance against colonial hegemony.<sup>1</sup> Understanding how these institutions strategically responded to the socio-political systems imposed by the Dutch colonial administration is crucial, as their responses laid the groundwork for nationalist discourse, identity politics, and the educational dualism whose effects persist today.<sup>2</sup> A historical analysis of this topic is therefore not only relevant to the disciplines of history and Islamic studies but is also vital for understanding the roots of contemporary socio-political issues in Indonesia.

Previous scholarship has extensively documented the discriminatory nature of Dutch colonial education policies. Research by Ajid Thohir et al., for instance, demonstrates that these policies were intentionally designed to maintain colonial dominance by positioning Islamic education outside the formal system. It was perceived as a potential threat to colonial stability, leading to a state-sponsored curriculum focused on creating a loyal and passive workforce while systematically ignoring local and religious values.<sup>3</sup> This engineered a stark educational dualism: a Western-style general education for a limited elite and a marginalized, traditional Islamic education for the masses.

Furthermore, the ramifications of colonialism extended beyond educational policy to fundamentally shape a social structure that relegated Muslims to a subordinate position. As noted by Cahyanti<sup>4</sup> and Fitriani et al.,<sup>5</sup> the colonial system established a socio-political and economic hierarchy where indigenous Muslims were often excluded from access to power and prosperity. In this context, Islamic education became more than a means of religious transmission; it served as a vital mechanism for forging and preserving

<sup>1</sup> Rohani Rohani, Mahdar Ernita, and Salmiah Salmiah, “PENDIDIKAN ISLAM DI INDONESIA PADA MASA KOLONIAL BELANDA (Kasus Muhammadiyah Dan NU),” *Nusantara: Journal for Southeast Asian Islamic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2022): 103, <https://doi.org/10.24014/nusantara.v18i2.21483>.

<sup>2</sup> Zeffry Alkatiri and Nabiil A and Karim Hayaze, “Critical Literature Study on Habaib Identity in the Constellation of Islamic Studies in Indonesia from the Colonial Period to the Present,” *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 9, no. 1 (December 31, 2022): 2096286, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2022.2096286>.

<sup>3</sup> Ajid Thohir et al., “The Struggle of Freemasonry and Islamic Ideology in the Twentieth Century during Colonialization in Indonesia,” *Heliyon* 7, no. 10 (October 1, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e08237>.

<sup>4</sup> Eva Tri Cahyanti, “Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia: Masa Kolonial Hingga Masa Reformasi,” *EDUKASIA Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran* 2, no. 2 (2021): 181–97, <https://doi.org/10.62775/edukasia.v2i2.47>.

<sup>5</sup> Fitriani Fitriani, Bahaking Rama, and Muhammad Rusman B, “Pendidikan Islam Pada Masa Penjajahan Belanda Dan Jepang,” *Madani: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin* 2, no. 10 (2024): 775–80, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14213658>.



the social and cultural identity of the Muslim community amidst pressures of assimilation and marginalization.

In response to this systemic pressure, the *pesantren* emerged as a cultural entity that not only endured but also transformed into a center of resistance. Several studies, including those by Patriadi et al.<sup>6</sup> have highlighted the pivotal role of *pesantrens* across Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan as hubs for nurturing a socio-political and religious consciousness that was resistive to foreign colonial values. *Pesantrens* acted as bulwarks against Western cultural influence and produced *ulama* (scholars) who were simultaneously social and political figures in the movement toward independence.

Alongside the cultural resistance centered in the *pesantren*, a modernist strategic response emerged from Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Research by Rohani et al.<sup>7</sup> and Sauri et al.<sup>8</sup> shows that these two organizations adopted modern approaches to their educational systems as a direct answer to the secular and elitist colonial model. Muhammadiyah pioneered the establishment of modern Islamic-based schools that integrated general and religious sciences. Meanwhile, NU reinforced the position of the *pesantren* as an educational center rooted in local traditions and spirituality while adapting to change by establishing more structured madrasahs. This dual response demonstrates a strategic adaptation to remain relevant without compromising core Islamic values.

While previous studies have successfully mapped the general landscape of discriminatory colonial policies and the broad role of Islamic institutions in opposing them, a significant gap remains in the historiography of Islamic education. Much of the existing research tends to focus narratively on the role of specific institutions or figures. However, there has been a lack of in-depth inquiry into how *pesantrens* and *madrasahs*, as a system, developed structured adaptive and resistive strategies to confront the colonial social order. A comprehensive analysis that integrates their pedagogical (what and how content was taught), curricular (the structure of knowledge offered), and institutional (the socio-political networks built) strategies remains underdeveloped.

To fill this gap, this study aims to explore the strategic responses of Islamic education institutions—particularly *pesantren* and madrasah—to the socio-political systems imposed during the Dutch colonial era. It moves beyond general narratives of resistance to present an in-depth historical analysis of the multifaceted forms these responses took: from cultural resistance through the strengthening of traditional curricula, to institutional adaptation by establishing modern madrasahs, and intellectual opposition through the cultivation of socio-political consciousness among students. This study thus contributes to the historiography of Islamic education by offering a more micro-level and intersectional analytical framework that combines ideology, educational praxis, and institutional strategy—elements that have not been sufficiently integrated in previous scholarship.

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<sup>6</sup> Himawan Bayu Patriadi, Mohd. Zaini Abu Bakar, and Zahri Hamat, "Human Security in Local Wisdom Perspective: Pesantren and Its Responsibility to Protect People," *Procedia Environmental Sciences* 28 (2015): 100–105, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proenv.2015.07.015>.

<sup>7</sup> Rohani, Ernita, and Salmiah, "PENDIDIKAN ISLAM DI INDONESIA PADA MASA KOLONIAL BELANDA (Kasus Muhammadiyah Dan NU)."

<sup>8</sup> Sofyan Sauri, Sandie Gunara, and Febbry Cipta, "Establishing the Identity of Insan Kamil Generation through Music Learning Activities in Pesantren," *Heliyon* 8, no. 7 (July 1, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09958>.

## 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative, historical-analytical methodology to investigate the strategic responses of Islamic educational institutions during the Dutch colonial period. The research is grounded in documentary and archival analysis, drawing from a range of primary sources, such as Dutch colonial administrative reports, institutional records, and publications from early 20th-century Islamic organizations. These materials are supplemented by a thorough review of relevant secondary scholarly literature. The analytical process involves a systematic interpretation of these sources, where each document is subjected to rigorous internal and external criticism to ascertain its authenticity and credibility. To ensure the validity of the findings, the study relies on source triangulation, cross-referencing information from colonial, institutional, and personal accounts to construct a balanced and robust historical narrative. This interdisciplinary approach, combining history with the sociology of education, aims to move beyond mere description to develop a nuanced interpretation of how pedagogical, curricular, and institutional strategies were deployed in response to colonial pressures.

## 3. Results

This section presents the findings drawn from a systematic historical literature review. By analyzing and synthesizing a range of scholarly works—including journals, books, and research reports—on Islamic education in the colonial era, this study identifies the central themes that explain the strategic responses of Islamic educational institutions to the socio-political system imposed by the Dutch colonial administration. The findings presented here are not new primary data but rather an interpretive synthesis of the existing historiography, intended to provide a comprehensive understanding.

### 3.1. Synthesis of Thematic Findings from the Literature

The analysis of the relevant literature has led to the identification of four dominant themes of strategic response.

#### 3.1.1. Educational Modernization as a Form of Intellectual Resistance

The literature consistently highlights that one of the most significant responses to colonial hegemony was the modernization of Islamic education. Several historians Pahlevi et al. and Muhammad & Nurhakim<sup>9</sup> document how reformist organizations such as Muhammadiyah pioneered the establishment of formal schools integrating both religious and secular curricula.<sup>10</sup> Azra further emphasizes that Islamic educational modernization in Indonesia involved adjusting the curriculum to suit contemporary needs while maintaining Islamic values. Modern education was perceived as a tool to produce an intellectually capable Muslim generation that could compete with both the secular elite and the European colonizers.<sup>11</sup> Sumarno observes that Muhammadiyah schools adopted classical systems with structured curricula and rational-scientific teaching methods, distinguishing themselves from the traditional pesantren model.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Nasution et al. notes that this reformist educational approach was not a mere

<sup>9</sup> Devy Habibi Muhammad, Romelah Romelah, and Moh. Nurhakim, “Reformasi Pendidikan Islam Dalam Perspektif Muhammadiyah,” *AL-AFKAR: Journal Of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2024): 182–93, <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v7i2.932.Islamic>.

<sup>10</sup> Rijal Pahlevi, Badrudin Badrudin, and Ulfiah Ulfiah, “Muhammadiyah’s Contribution to Educational Development in Indonesia: A Historical Analysis,” *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 4, no. 1 (2024): 43–50, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v4i1.32306>.

<sup>11</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in the Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation* (Jakarta: Mizan, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Sumarno Sumarno, “Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia (Studi Pemikiran K.H. Ahmad Dahlan),” *Al Murabbi* 3, no. 2 (2017): 227–51.

imitation of Western models but rather a strategic reconstruction of Islamic identity that embraced intellectual competitiveness.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.1.2. Consolidation of Traditional Institutions as a Cultural Fortress

In contrast to the modernization trend, the literature also identifies a strategic response centered on the consolidation of traditional Islamic educational institutions. Scholars such as Rahmatullah & Sunaryanto highlight the role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in strengthening and expanding its network of pesantren and madrasah.<sup>14</sup> Van Bruinessen describes pesantren as key centers for preserving traditional Islamic culture and playing a critical role in upholding the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah doctrine amidst the forces of modernization and colonialism.<sup>15</sup> NU's policy decision in 1938 to formalize a tiered madrasah structure is further discussed in Laffan, who interprets it as a form of cultural resistance against the secular modernity promoted by the colonial government and reformist movements.<sup>16</sup> Hefner also examines this phenomenon, noting that pesantren not only survived the colonial period but also evolved into robust social institutions with dual roles in education and political-cultural awareness, especially in rural Muslim communities.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.1.3. Mobilization of Women through Education as an Agent of Social Change

Another key theme emerging from the literature is the centrality of women's education in nationalist movements. A study by Lubis et al. on the role of 'Aisyiyah reflects this pattern.<sup>18</sup> Blackburn offers a detailed account of how 'Aisyiyah advanced women's education as part of a broader socio-religious reform agenda beginning in the early 20th century.<sup>19</sup> Supporting this, Noor asserts that women's education within reformist Islamic movements like 'Aisyiyah was a core strategy for building the moral and intellectual foundations of both family and society. Education was understood not only as a means of emancipation but also as a vehicle for strengthening national and religious identity among women under colonial rule.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.1.3. Internalization of Nationalist Values in Character Education

The final theme identified in the literature is the role of Islamic educational institutions as spaces for character formation and the internalization of nationalist values. Nelly affirms that pesantren and madrasah were not merely venues for transmitting religious knowledge but also played a formative role in instilling values such as justice, discipline,

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<sup>13</sup> Fauziah Nasution et al., "The Modernization of Islamic Education in Indonesia: Muhammadiyah Philosophy," in *International Conference on Islamic, Law, and Society*, 2022, 1–17.

<sup>14</sup> Mamat Rahmatullah and Sunaryanto Sunaryanto, "Membangun Pendidikan Pesantren Neo-Modernisme Berbasis Nahdlatul Ulama: Perspektif Teori Kepemimpinan," *Dinamika Penelitian: Media Komunikasi Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 24, no. 1 (August 10, 2024): 171–86, <https://doi.org/10.21274/dinamika.2024.24.01.171-186>.

<sup>15</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Continuity and Change in a Tradition of Religious Learning," in *Traditions of Learning in Indonesia*, C. D. Grij (Hamburg: Universität Hamburg, 1994), 121–45.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Laffan, *The Making of Indonesian Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rggr>.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Lahmuddin Lubis, Amiuddin Siahaan, and Hendripal Panjaitan, "Peran 'Aisyiyah Dalam Pendidikan Kaum Muslimah Di Kota Medan (Studi Kasus Tahun 2010-2016)," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v10i02.1542>.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Farish A. Noor, *Islam on the Move: The Tablighi Jama'at in Southeast Asia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, n.d.), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048516827>.

and collective responsibility.<sup>21</sup> This view aligns with the findings of Liddle<sup>22</sup> and Suteja<sup>23</sup>, who point out that many prominent leaders of Indonesia's independence movement were shaped by the pesantren milieu, which instilled a deep sense of patriotism (*hubbul wathan*), communal ethos, and anti-colonial consciousness. Ricklefs further supports this by noting that traditional Islamic education served as a vehicle for grassroots social mobilization and political awareness during the colonial era.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.2. Synthesis Table of Strategic Comparisons

To visualize the findings from this literature synthesis, the following table presents the primary comparisons between the two strategic streams identified in the reviewed works.

**Table 1.** Synthesis of Comparative Strategies in Islamic Education

Strategic Aspect	Modernist Response (documented in Muhammadiyah)	Traditionalist Response (documented in Nahdlatul Ulama)
Curriculum Focus	Integrative: Incorporating general sciences (e.g., mathematics, geography, foreign languages) to complement Islamic teachings. This curriculum reflected a reformist effort to align Islamic values with modern knowledge.	Purificative and Conservative: Emphasizing mastery of classical religious texts ( <i>kitab kuning</i> ), Arabic grammar, tafsir, and fiqh. The curriculum intentionally avoided secular subjects to protect doctrinal purity.
Indstitutional Structure	Adaptive: Developing formal and centralized school systems with administrative hierarchies, structured schedules, and examinations, following a Western school model while embedding Islamic principles.	<b>Consolidative:</b> Standardizing and formalizing existing <i>pesantren</i> and <i>madrasah</i> without dismantling their traditional methods. NU initiated internal restructuring to strengthen institutional continuity and authenticity.
Primary Goal for Graduates	To produce modern Muslim professionals and intellectuals capable of contributing to various societal sectors, from governance and education to commerce and health.	To produce <i>ulama</i> , <i>kyai</i> , and community religious leaders dedicated to preserving the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah tradition and providing spiritual leadership.
Stance on Western Culture	Accommodative-Critical: Selectively adopting useful aspects of Western methodologies, science, and administration while rejecting colonial ideologies. Muhammadiyah viewed modern tools as instruments to strengthen the ummah.	Defensive-Selective: Maintaining cultural and doctrinal distance from Western influence. Traditionalists emphasized the safeguarding of religious identity and resisted epistemological assimilation.
Role of Woman	Empowerment through education: Organizations like 'Aisyiyah promoted schooling for women as a foundation for family, society, and nation-building.	Complementary and supportive: Women in traditional institutions engaged primarily in informal learning ( <i>diniyah</i> ), with their educational role centered around domestic religious life.
Character Education Emphasis	Nationalism and civic values: Formal schools instilled character values such as discipline, public responsibility, and national awareness as part of a reformed Islamic identity.	Spirituality and moral continuity: <i>Pesantren</i> focused on <i>adab</i> (ethics), humility, loyalty to teachers, and the internalization of long-standing Islamic moral frameworks.

The comparative synthesis presented in Table 1 illustrates the divergent yet complementary strategies adopted by modernist and traditionalist Islamic educational

<sup>21</sup> Nelly Van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Indonesian Women Reading the Qur'an* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> R William Liddle, "The Islamic Turn in Indonesia: A Political Explanation," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 3 (1996): 613–34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2646448>.

<sup>23</sup> Suteja, *Pendidikan Dan Pesantren* (Cirebon: CV. Elsi Pro, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> M C Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society* (NUS Press, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2x8v964>.



institutions in responding to the colonial sociopolitical context. While reformist actors such as Muhammadiyah pursued educational modernization as a means of intellectual empowerment and societal advancement, traditionalist groups like Nahdlatul Ulama focused on institutional preservation and the reinforcement of classical Islamic values. These distinct paradigms—characterized by differences in curricular content, institutional models, and cultural orientations—reflect a dynamic spectrum of resistance strategies rooted in Islamic epistemologies. Together, they underscore the resilience and adaptability of Islamic education in navigating the challenges of colonial hegemony while maintaining its doctrinal integrity and social relevance.

#### 4. Discussion

This study explores the strategic responses of Islamic education—particularly *pesantren* and madrasah institutions—to the socio-political systems imposed during the Dutch colonial era. The primary findings indicate that Islamic education served not only as a means of religious transmission but also as a vital pillar in shaping national character, fostering resistance to colonialism, and reinforcing both Islamic and national identity. Furthermore, it was found that Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) implemented strategic innovations in educational management, ranging from curriculum reform and institutional governance to the spiritual and intellectual development of students.

Facing the oppressive Dutch colonialism that restricted Muslim religious and educational activities, there was an urgent need to form a socio-religious force capable of responding to the challenges of the time. This situation spurred the emergence of various modern Islamic organizations that were not only engaged in religious affairs but also in education, social, and cultural aspects.

Muhammadiyah played a significant role in this context, pioneering the integration of religious and general sciences. Muhammadiyah educational institutions emphasized religious aspects while simultaneously encouraging the mastery of modern science to cultivate a broad-minded generation. This approach, encompassing an adaptive curriculum and an extensive network of schools (ranging from kindergartens to universities, totaling over 21,000 institutions), was highly relevant in addressing community needs amidst the dynamics of social change and technological advancements, as supported by Aisyah.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), although more deeply rooted in the *pesantren* tradition, made substantial contributions to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. NU established various madrasahs with the aim of improving students' morals and ethics. From the colonial period through the Japanese occupation, NU continuously developed *pesantren* and madrasahs and actively organized *dakwah* (preaching) activities. The curriculum adjustments in NU madrasahs, such as those initiated by K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari to include general subjects, demonstrate efforts to adapt to the Western education system.<sup>26</sup> The contributions of Muhammadiyah and NU in developing education are consistent with the findings of Rohani et al. who highlight the central role of these organizations.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rony Zulfirman et al., “Kontibusi Muhammadiyah Dan Nahdlatul Ulama Dalam Perkembangan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia,” *TIPS: Jurnal Riset, Pendidikan Dan Ilmu Sosial* 2, no. 2 (2024): 81–87.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad Suja'i and Muhammad Amir Baihaqi, “Peran Ulama Dan Ormas Islam Dalam Pertumbuhan Dan Perkembangan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia,” *Tarbawi: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (2022): 139–50, <https://doi.org/10.51476/tarbawi.v5i2.404>.

<sup>27</sup> Rohani, Ernita, and Salmiah, “PENDIDIKAN ISLAM DI INDONESIA PADA MASA KOLONIAL BELANDA (Kasus Muhammadiyah Dan NU).”

Islamic education proved to play a strategic role as an ideological and spiritual fortress of defense against various forms of colonialism. Several identified strategies include: (1) Islamic Education as a Means of Character Building for Resistance: Islamic education was crucial in shaping a courageous, independent, and anti-oppression Muslim character. Through the values of *tauhid* (monotheism), justice, and *jihad* (in a spiritual and social sense), students were taught to reject all forms of tyranny and uphold independence. Clerics and *pesantren* played a central role in instilling an anti-colonial spirit, making education the ideological foundation of the people's struggle.<sup>28</sup> This aligns with Saribunga and Hasaruddin's findings on Muslim resistance to colonialism through education.<sup>29</sup> (2) Cultural and Intellectual Strategies in Opposing Colonizers: Resistance was not only physical but also intellectual. Islamic education fostered a cultural awareness that colonialism was a form of *tazallum* (tyranny) that must be resisted. Islamic discourse was used to disseminate ideas of liberation and community independence. Books, studies, *tafsir* (exegesis), and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) works served as important media for conveying messages of resistance in subtle yet profound ways. The nationalism developed by Islamic scholars and intellectuals was based on principles of non-cooperation, self-reliance, solidarity, and cultural unity as a common identity, asserting that the struggle for independence was also a manifestation of *hubbul wathon minal iman* (love of one's homeland is part of faith). Notably, religious-based institutions like *pesantren* can offer a new perspective on understanding human security by leveraging religious local wisdom.<sup>30</sup> A relevant example is *Madrasah Qudsyyah* in Kudus, which persisted despite colonial pressures due to community support, a distinctive curriculum, and the active role of alumni.<sup>31</sup> (3) Adaptation of Islamic Education Curriculum to Colonial Regulations: To survive under colonial pressure, Islamic educational institutions like *pesantren* and madrasahs made curriculum adjustments. Subjects initially focused on religious sciences were expanded to include general subjects such as mathematics, geography, and foreign languages. Muhammadiyah pioneered the adoption of modern educational methods and the establishment of schools with an integrated curriculum.<sup>32</sup> These adjustments aimed to broaden opportunities for graduates to enter the workforce and participate more actively in social life. This is consistent with Fitriani's ideas on the adaptive responses of Islamic education during the colonial era.<sup>33</sup> (4) Managerial Innovation and Reform of Islamic Educational Organizations: During the colonial period, Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah and NU not only reformed curricula but also introduced breakthroughs in educational

<sup>28</sup> Ratna Kasni Yuniendel, "Jejak Kolonialisme Dalam Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia: Dari Tantangan Hingga Transisi," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 9, no. 4 (2024): 234–48, <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v9i04.20024>.

<sup>29</sup> Saribunga Saribunga and Hasaruddin Hasaruddin, "Perlawan Umat Islam Terhadap Penjajahan Di Indonesia," *Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam* 1, no. 3 (2024): 33–44, <https://doi.org/10.61132/hikmah.v1i3.100>.

<sup>30</sup> Patriadi, Bakar, and Hamat, "Human Security in Local Wisdom Perspective: Pesantren and Its Responsibility to Protect People."

<sup>31</sup> Shofa Fakhiroh, "Dinamika Pendidikan Islam Di Kudus Abad XX: Studi Madrasah Mu'awanatul Muslimin Dan Madrasah Qudsyyah Tahun 1900-1990," *HEUTAGOGIA: Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 1 (2022): 141–55, <https://doi.org/10.14421/hjje.2022.21-10>.

<sup>32</sup> M. Rasyid, Kasful Anwar US, and Sya'roni Sya'roni, "Peran Dan Pengaruh Pendidikan Islam Pada Perjuangan Kemerdekaan Indonesia Serta Tokoh-Tokohnya," *Jurnal Budi Pekerti Agama Islam* 2, no. 5 (July 13, 2024): 276–83, <https://doi.org/10.61132/jbpai.v2i5.560>.

<sup>33</sup> Fitriani, Rama, and B, "Pendidikan Islam Pada Masa Penjajahan Belanda Dan Jepang."



institution management.<sup>34</sup> Muhammadiyah implemented a modern management system in its Islamic schools, emphasizing effective and professional governance without neglecting the essence of religious education. NU, while more conservative in its educational approach, began to establish a leadership system that allowed for coordination and synergy among pesantren.<sup>35</sup> These managerial innovations were crucial strategies in strengthening the existence of Islamic education amidst colonial pressure.

Overall, the Islamic education strategies devised by Muslim scholars through institutions such as pesantren, madrasahs, and religious organizations significantly contributed to shaping a consciousness of struggle, maintaining Islamic identity, and mobilizing popular power against colonialism.<sup>36</sup> Islamic education was not merely a means of knowledge transmission but also an effective and enduring medium of cultural, political, and spiritual resistance.

During the colonial period, Islamic education played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's character, particularly in moral and ethical aspects. By instilling strong religious teachings, this education helped create a generation that was not only intellectually educated but also possessed strong character, discipline, and a sense of nationalism.<sup>37</sup> This became one of the important foundations in the struggle against colonizers and the building of Indonesian independence.

Islamic education also served as a primary source of motivation for Indonesian independence fighters. Values such as justice, unity, and determination taught in Islamic education became a strong foothold in awakening the fighting spirit. Islamic educational institutions, including pesantren and madrasahs, not only imparted religious knowledge but also served as spaces for critical discussion of social and political realities under colonial rule.<sup>38</sup> The character of freedom fighters shaped in Islamic educational environments was notably marked by courage, determination, and high spirit in confronting colonizers. They were driven by a firm belief in truth and justice, as well as an awareness of their moral responsibility to the people and the nation.

A particularly noteworthy and somewhat unexpected finding is the significant role of women in education and the independence movement, mobilized through organizations such as Aisyiyah. This highlights that Islamic education also embraced dimensions of equality and empowerment relevant to contemporary values. The role of women in the struggle for independence demonstrates inclusivity and equality within the nation's vision of struggle. Thus, Islamic education had a broad and significant impact on the Indonesian independence movement, not only providing a moral, spiritual, and intellectual foundation for the fighters but also preparing the younger generation to become resilient, educated, and responsible leaders.

Overall, the main findings of this study affirm that Islamic education during the colonial period was more than a religious or cultural institution; it was a dynamic force

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<sup>34</sup> Lilik Nur Kholidah, "Pola Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Keislaman Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Pada Lembaga Pendidikan," *At-Ta'dib* 10, no. 2 (December 8, 2015): 325–40, <https://doi.org/10.21111/attadib.v10i2.459>.

<sup>35</sup> Yuniendel, "Jejak Kolonialisme Dalam Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia: Dari Tantangan Hingga Transisi."

<sup>36</sup> Dyah Margani Utami et al., "The Role of the 30% Threshold for Islamic Parties: A Fast-Growing Middle Class and Religion-Based Political Preferences in Indonesia," *Heliyon* 10, no. 4 (February 29, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e25700>.

<sup>37</sup> Fatkhul Mubin and Abd Aziz, "Politik Pendidikan Islam Indonesia: Perlawan Pesantren Terhadap Hegemoni Pendidikan Barat Era Kolonialisme Belanda," *Al Amin: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Dan Budaya Islam* 3, no. 1 (2020): 21–10, <https://doi.org/10.36670/alamin.v2i02.20>.

<sup>38</sup> M. Rasyid, Kasful Anwar US, and Sya'roni Sya'roni, "Peran Dan Pengaruh Pendidikan Islam Pada Perjuangan Kemerdekaan Indonesia Serta Tokoh-Tokohnya."

in the development of civilization, political resistance, and Indonesia's path to independence. The formation of Muhammadiyah and NU reflects how Islamic education adapted to colonial challenges while maintaining religious integrity.

The theoretical implication of this research is that it enriches the understanding of how traditional educational institutions can act as agents of change and resistance in a colonial context, not merely through physical struggle but also through curriculum adaptation and managerial reforms. Practically, these findings can offer valuable lessons for education policymakers in Indonesia regarding the importance of adaptive curricula and the central role of educational institutions in shaping national character and cultural resilience. However, the findings must be interpreted cautiously due to potential regional disparities in Islamic education responses that might not be fully covered in this study. Furthermore, reliance on secondary sources may limit the depth of analysis for certain aspects. Therefore, future research could expand its focus to more specific regional case studies or employ multi-method approaches to gather richer primary data.

## 5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the strategic responses of Islamic educational institutions—particularly *pesantren* and *madrasah*—to the socio-political structures imposed by the Dutch colonial administration. Through a systematic historical literature review, the study identified and synthesized key themes that reveal how Islamic education functioned as a dynamic and adaptive force during a period of foreign domination. The analysis uncovered four dominant strategic responses: the modernization of Islamic education as a form of intellectual resistance, the consolidation of traditional institutions as cultural fortresses, the mobilization of women through education as agents of social transformation, and the internalization of nationalist values through character education. Reformist organizations such as Muhammadiyah responded by integrating secular subjects and structured pedagogies into their curriculum, fostering a generation of intellectually capable Muslims prepared to engage with modernity. Meanwhile, traditionalist institutions like Nahdlatul Ulama fortified *pesantren* systems, preserving religious orthodoxy and safeguarding cultural identity. Educational initiatives for women, particularly through the efforts of 'Aisyiyah, served as a platform for broader societal engagement, while *pesantren* and madrasah emerged as crucibles for instilling nationalist values and political consciousness. The findings demonstrate that Islamic education in the colonial era was not merely a means of religious instruction but a vital vehicle for cultural resilience, political mobilization, and national identity formation. Theoretically, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how education can function as a nonviolent strategy of resistance under colonial rule, emphasizing the agency of religious institutions in shaping historical trajectories. Practically, it offers valuable insights for contemporary educational development in Indonesia, particularly regarding the importance of culturally embedded and adaptable curricula that strengthen national character and civic responsibility. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and historiographical interpretations, which may not fully capture localized experiences or the complexity of educational practices across diverse regions. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of primary archival materials, oral histories, and case studies to deepen the empirical basis of this historiographical synthesis. Further investigation is recommended into the post-colonial continuities and transformations of these educational strategies, particularly how contemporary *pesantren* and madrasah institutions negotiate the balance between tradition and innovation in the face of modern educational challenges. Such research



could inform policy frameworks aimed at preserving cultural identity while promoting educational equity and national development.

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