

Transformation of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Islamic Education: From a Religious-Conservative Approach to a Religious-Rational-Sociological Concept in the Modern Era

Mujahid 

¹ Study Program of Islamic Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

Corresponding author: mujahid@uin-suka.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Purpose – This research aims to explore and formulate an ideal educational model for Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in the modern era by investigating the transition of NU Islamic education from a religious-conservative approach to a religious-rational-sociological one while maintaining core Islamic values.

Design/methods/approach – Employing a historical method, this study involves a systematic analysis of historical data, documents, archives, and relevant literature to understand the evolution of NU Islamic education and its interaction with social and cultural changes.

Findings – The research finds that NU Islamic education has transformed from a traditional religious-conservative approach to a more inclusive model, incorporating religious-rational and sociological aspects. This change encompasses revisions in teaching methodology, curriculum, and the educational orientation of Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*), emphasizing integrating religious education with rational and social aspects.

Research implications – These findings significantly contribute to the discourse on the modernization of Islamic education, recommending the importance of holistic adaptation and innovation to meet the current generation's needs. The implications of this study are relevant for policymakers and educational practitioners in Indonesia and globally, demonstrating how Islamic education can evolve while maintaining its relevance in the modern era.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 August 2023

Revised 22 October 2023

Accepted 29 December 2023

KEYWORDS:

Modernization of Islamic education, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Religious-Rational-Sociological, Integration of tradition and modernity.



Jurnal Pendidikan Islam

1. Introduction

In the religious landscape of Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) occupies a significant position as one of the largest religious organizations alongside Muhammadiyah. Its role is crucial in the historical context, particularly in the struggle for Indonesian independence and the country's education development. NU has expanded its wings through Islamic education centered in Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*), initially rooted in rural areas. The close connection between traditional values and the culture of the rural Muslim community has been a hallmark of the education provided by NU, reflecting their deep commitment to instilling Islamic values (Ahmad Ainun Najib, 2020).

Although initially established as rural-based institutions, NU's *pondok pesantren* have undergone significant expansion, allowing them to transform and adapt to urban environments (Ishak, 2022). The educational approach in these Islamic boarding schools, which emphasizes traditional methods such as repetition and memorization, particularly of "*kitab kuning*" – Arabic-language books covering jurisprudence, theology, hadith, Sufism, and Arabic language – faces challenges in keeping up with modern developments (La Ode Ida, 2004). This issue has raised an urgent need to formulate an



This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC license

How to Cite: Mujahid, (2023) Transformation of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Islamic Education: From a Religious-Conservative Approach to a Religious-Rational-Sociological Concept in the Modern Era, *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 12(2), 191-196.
<https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2023.122.191-196>

educational model that bridges traditional heritage with contemporary demands (Saipuddin Daulay & Rasyid Anwar Dalimunte, 2021).

This study aims to explore and formulate an ideal educational model for NU in the modern era. Its primary focus is investigating how NU's nurtured Islamic education can transform from a religious-conservative model to a more religious-rational-sociological approach while maintaining core Islamic values. Through this approach, the study strives to identify educational adaptation methods to meet contemporary needs without sacrificing their traditional essence.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to advancing the discourse on the modernization of Islamic education. By providing insights into how NU can align traditional Islamic educational heritage with modern principles, this study aims to help strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of Islamic education in the current era. This is important for the NU community and the broader Islamic education world, as it offers a model for how Islamic educational institutions can evolve while maintaining their identity and values. Thus, the results of this study are expected to significantly contribute to educational practices in Indonesia and pave the way for more harmonious integration between tradition and modernity in the context of Islamic education.

2. Methods

The historical method is the primary approach in this research, given its main focus on exploring the evolution of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Islamic education from the past to the modern era. This approach involves a systematic analysis of historical data, including documents, archives, and literature relevant to the development of NU Islamic education. Through the historical method, the study aims to understand the historical context, origins, and changes in NU Islamic education, as well as how these elements interact with social and cultural changes. This process will follow the framework proposed by Barzun and Graff (2012) in "The Modern Researcher," emphasizing the importance of source criticism, contextualization, and narrative analysis in historical research.

Data for historical analysis will be collected from various sources, including archives of Islamic boarding schools, NU publications, and academic works on the history and education of Islam in Indonesia. Classic works such as "Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values" by Federspiel (1996) and "Muslim Education, Tradition, and Conflict" by Azra (2006) will be used as primary references. This approach will enable a deep understanding of NU's educational approach's historical background and evolution and enrich interpretations of how NU's Islamic education has adapted and transformed over time. Data processing will involve analyzing, classifying, and synthesizing historical information to construct a coherent narrative about the development of NU Islamic education.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Dynamics in Pesantren Education: From Traditional to Modern

Historical analysis indicates that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) *pesantrens*, traditionally prioritizing the teaching of the yellow book (Abrasi, 2011), have undergone a significant transformation in methodology and curriculum. Traditional (salafi) and modern (khalafi) *pesantrens* differ in their approach to education (Steenbrink, 1974). While Salafi *pesantrens* adhere to a religious-conservative approach, khalafi *pesantrens* are more open to integrating a modern curriculum and diverse teaching methods (Widodo, 2009). This shift marks a transition from purely textual teaching methods to a more inclusive approach, incorporating general knowledge and contemporary needs.

The study finds that traditional NU education, once dominated by religious-conservative streams, now adopts elements of religious-rational streams (Ridla, 2002). This approach retains

traditional Islamic values while incorporating more critical thinking and rational analysis of religious texts. Additionally, a pragmatic instrumental stream is being adopted in some *pesantren*, where religious education is combined with activities related to practical and material needs, such as integrating cattle farming into the curriculum to provide practical insights and skills to students (Siti Yumnah, 2022). This model reflects NU's effort to respond to contemporary societal needs, considering spiritual, intellectual, and pragmatic aspects.

The research confirms that NU, in its effort to maintain relevance in the modern era, has taken progressive steps to adapt its Islamic education. By blending religious values, rational methods, and socio-pragmatic elements, NU's education meets students' spiritual and intellectual needs and prepares them to interact effectively and responsibly in the broader society. This transformation marks a significant development in Indonesia's history of Islamic education and provides a model for other Islamic educational institutions to integrate tradition and modernity.

3.2. *NU Islamic Education in the Modern Era: Transformation Towards a Religious-Rational-Sociological Model*

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), a leading religious organization in Indonesia, has long provided Islamic education through *pesantren*. The history of the spread of Islam in Indonesia, involving a blend of formal Islamic doctrine and the cult of the saints (Wahid, 1984), and the *pesantren* education approach rooted in the principle of asceticism (zuhd) (Ramayulis, 2011) shows that NU has developed a unique and robust educational model. However, NU experiences pressure to modernize its approach in facing modernity challenges. The study finds that although NU *pesantrens* have adapted to the times, there is an urgent need to integrate a religious-rational-sociological approach further.

The study suggests that NU needs to adopt an education formula relevant to the demands of the modern era associated with NU's position in an increasingly global environment. The study identifies that Islamic education must adapt to the times without losing the core of its education, which has contributed significantly to Indonesian history.

The research introduces the Religious-Rational-Sociological (al-Dini al-Aqlani-ijtima'y) concept as the ideal model. The analysis shows that NU has implemented the Religious aspect by teaching religious values via the yellow book. However, the absolute truths taught now must be balanced with rational and sociological perspectives to meet modern challenges.

The evolution of NU Islamic education towards rationality is evident as students and scholars introduce new thinking into the *pesantren* educational culture. The study indicates significant physical infrastructure and curriculum changes, promoting a more rational education concept. The study reveals that the community widely supports the integration of rational streams with traditional religious values.

The study emphasizes the need to develop the Religious-rational concept by incorporating sociological aspects. Case analysis of thaharah teaching shows that religious law perspectives alone are insufficient; they must be considered from a social viewpoint. The study finds that the sociological aspect of NU's Islamic education needs greater emphasis, integrating social values into educational practices.

For example, the research suggests maintaining hygienic conditions in *pesantrens*, such as cleanliness of water sources. Efforts like community service and environmental maintenance in *pesantrens* preserve cleanliness and instill social values like camaraderie and mutual assistance among students. The research indicates that with a clean environment, the risk of diseases can be minimized, positively impacting the communal life of students.

Through these findings, it is clear that NU's Islamic education in the modern era requires a transformation towards a more inclusive approach - combining religious, rational, and sociological aspects. The study concludes that integrating these three aspects will produce an education model that is not only spiritually and intellectually relevant but also responsive to the social and health needs of the community. This paves the way for more holistic and adaptive education, aligning with this research's goals and significance in modernizing Islamic education.

4. Conclusion

This research successfully uncovers the transformation of Islamic education in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) from a traditional religious-conservative approach to a more religious-rational-sociological model, responding to the dynamics of the modern era. By maintaining core Islamic values, NU has demonstrated its ability to adapt to contemporary needs without sacrificing its traditional essence. This transformation includes significant changes in teaching methods, curriculum, and educational orientation at Islamic boarding schools, emphasizing the importance of integrating religious education with rational and social aspects.

The study affirms that NU, one of Indonesia's most prominent religious organizations, is at the forefront of addressing the challenges of modernizing Islamic education. By implementing the Religious-Rational-Sociological model, NU has shown its capacity for innovation and adaptation while preserving its religious heritage and values. These findings are essential for NU and the broader Islamic education world, offering valuable insights into how Islamic education can evolve and remain relevant in the modern era.

The implications of this research significantly contribute to understanding how Islamic educational institutions, particularly (NU), can navigate the challenges of modernity by integrating traditional religious-conservative teaching methods with a religious-rational-sociological approach. The study recommends adapting and innovating in Islamic education to meet the current generation's needs, emphasizing the importance of a holistic framework that unites religious values, rationality, and social awareness. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and educational practitioners in Indonesia and abroad, suggesting reforms that enable harmonious integration between tradition and modernity and offering a model other Islamic educational institutions can adopt to maintain their relevance and effectiveness in the modern era.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

The author contributed to this work and wrote research reports at each stage.

Funding statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interest's statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to mujahid@uin-suka.ac.id

ORCID

Mujahid 

References

- Abd. Rachman Assegaf, *Aliran Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam Hadharah Keilmuan Tokoh Klasik Sampai Modern*, (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2013).
- Abdur Rahman Wahid, *Bunga Rampai Pesantren*, (Jakarta: Dharma Bakti, 1984).
- _____, *Menggerakkan Tradisi: Esai-esai Pesantren*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2001)
- Ahmad Warson Munawwir, *Kamus al-Munawwir Arab-Indonesia*, (Yogyakarta: Unit Pengadaan Buku Ilmiah Keagamaan Pondok Pesantren al-Munawwir, 1984).
- Ahmad Ainun Najib, "Konsep Dasar Nahdhatul Ulama KH Hasyim Asy'ari" dalam Jurnal Al Ulya: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, Vol. 5 nomor 1, edisi April 2020.
- Ali Maksum, *Ajakan Suci Pokok-pokok Pikiran tentang NU, Ulama dan Pesantren*, (Yogyakarta: Lajnah Ta'lif Wa Nasyr, 1993).
- Amin Abdullah, *Filsafat Kalam di Era Postmodern*, (Yogyakarta: 1995).
- Azra, A. (2006). *Muslim Education, Tradition, and Conflict*. University of Michigan Press.
- Barzun, Jacques, and Henry F. Graff. *The Modern Researcher*. 6th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2003.
- Deliar Noer, *Gerakan Moderen Islam di Indonesia 1990-1940*, (Tk.: LP3ES, 1988).
- Federspiel, H. M. (1996). *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values*. Oxford University Press.
- Heri Kiswanto, *Gagalnya Peran Politik Kyai dalam Mengatasi Krisis Multi Dimensional*, (Yogyakarta: Pessntren Nawesea, 2008).
- Howell, M., & Prevenier, W. (2001). *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*. Cornell University Press.
- Ishak, Sulaiman, "Eksistensi Pendidikan Nahdlatul Ulama" dalam Jurnal Pendidikan dan Konseling Vol. 4 No. 5 tahun 2022
- Ja'far Shodiq, *Pertemuan antara Tarekat dan NU (Studi Hubungan Tarekat dan Nahdlatul Ulama dalam kontek Komunikasi Politik 1955-2004)*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2008).
- Karel A. Steenbrink, *Pesantren Madrasah Sekolah Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Modern*, (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1974).
- Kersten, Carool. *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Kholili Hasib, "KH. Hasyim Asy'ari dan Pelurusan Akidah" dalam http://insistnet.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=478:kh-hasyim-asyari-dan-pelurusan-akidah&catid=21:sejarah&Itemid=19 diakses tgl 3 Juni 2013.
- La Ode Ida, *NU Muda Kaum Progresif dan Sekularisme Baru*, (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2004)
- Mahmud Arif, *Pendidikan Islam Transformatif*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2008).
- Martin Van Bruinessen "NU Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kekuasaanserta pencairan Wacana Baru" (Bantul: PT LKiS Prainting Cemerlang, 2009).
- Moh. Syaiful Bakhri, "Sejarah Berdirinya NU" <http://i-cumama.blogspot.com/2011/06/sejarah-berdirinya-nu.html> diakses tgl 31 Mei 2013.

- Muhammad Jawwad Ridla, Al-Fikr Tarbawi> al-Isa>myy Muqaddimat fi> ‘Us}ulih Al-Ijtima>iyyatwa al-aqla>niyat), Tiga Aliran Utama Teori Pendidikan Islam (Perspektif Sosiologis-Filofis trj. (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2002).
- Muhammad Rofangi, *Pengembangan Institusi Pendidikan Strategi Kebijakan Politik NU di Kabupaten Gunung Kidul Yogyakarta*, (Yogyakarta: Center for Educational Studies and Developmen, 2002).
- Nur Munajat, “Perkembangan, Karakteristik dan Aliran Pendidikan *Pesantren* di Indonesia” Makalah diidiskusikan di Kelas Program Doktor Konsentrasi Kependidikan Islam pada tanggal 10 Mei 2013.
- Nurcholis Madjid, *Bilik-bilik Pesantren Sebuah Potret Perjalanan*, (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1997).
- Ramayulis, *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam Napaktilas Perubahan Konse, Filsafat dan Metodologi Penddikan Islam dari Era Nabi SAW sampai Ulama Nusantara*, (Jakarta: Kalam Mulia, 2011).
- Sembodo Ardi Widodo, *Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia Dasar Pemikiran dan Implementasi*, (Yogyakarta: 2009).
- _____, *Struktur Keilmuan Kitab Kuning Perspektih NU dan Muhamadiyah*, (Jakarta: Nimas Multima, 2008).
- Siti Yumnah, “Eksistensi Pendidikan Islam Nu Dan Muhammadiyah Sebagai Potret Islam Moderat Di Indonesia” Annual Conference for Muslim Scholars 26-27 Februari 2022.
- Sudjoko Prasodjo, dkk, “*Profil Pesantren*” dalam Abuddin Nata (ed.) *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Lembaga Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2001), hal. 104.
- Suwito dan Fauzan (ed.), *Sejarah Sosial Pendidikan Islam*, (Jakarta: Kencana, 2005).
- Syamsul Nizar (ed.) *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam Menelusuri Jejak Sejarah Pendidikan Era Rasulullah sampai Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Kencana, 2011).