

TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT IN THE MODERN ERA: TRACES OF REFORM AND ITS CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This article explores the evolution of Islamic thought within the framework of modernity, highlighting the signs of renewal initiated by Muslim thinkers and figures, as well as the challenges encountered during this journey. By employing a qualitative method and reviewing relevant literature, this research determined that integrating Islamic perspectives with a contextual approach could enhance Islamic education's role in fostering a better human civilization in today's world. Islamic thought has transitioned from a standard doctrinal framework to a conversational contextual framework that is better suited to the challenges of contemporary times. This renewal encompasses education, legal politics, Sufism, and technology, while encountering difficulties in striking a balance between tradition and modernity. In the views of Islamic scholars, Islamic education should prioritize a comprehensive approach that addresses not just intellectual dimensions but also spiritual, moral, and social elements.

Keywords: Islamic Thought, Transformation, Renewal, Challenges of Modernity.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic philosophy has experienced numerous changes from the classical period to the contemporary period. Renewing Islamic thought is essential to address the challenges posed by the constantly changing times. Nasihin et al. (2022) assert that the discussion on Islamic renewal in Indonesia arose as a reaction to colonialism practices and the Islam purification trends originating from the Middle East. Conversely, Nurcholish Madjid (2022) highlighted the necessity of reforming Islam to address the challenges of modernity and reconstruct a global Islamic civilization. Islamic philosophy has experienced notable changes since the advent of the modern age.

These shifts were initiated by different influences, such as colonization, globalization, and scientific advancement. In reaction to these challenges, a reform movement arose that aimed to modify Islamic teachings to fit the contemporary context while preserving its core principles. Fazlur Rahman (1982), a modern Islamic intellectual, states that "a contextual reading of Islam is essential to address the challenges of today's world". This highlights the significance of re-examining classical writings to ensure their relevance to present social circumstances (Rohman, 2024). Nonetheless, these revitalization initiatives face several obstacles. According to Kamali, "Renewal is frequently criticized by traditionalists concerned about the diminished authority of classical texts." These varying perspectives generate complexities in the attempt to reconcile tradition with modernity.

Islamic education boasts a rich history and a vital influence in the development of human civilization. In the modern age characterized by swift social, cultural, and technological shifts, Islamic education encounters novel challenges that demand innovative responses and perspectives. Key topics in the discussion of modern Islamic education include curriculum relevance, teaching approaches, incorporation of contemporary science, and enhancement of skilled human resources (Alfarobi, et al, 2022). Moreover, Nurcholish Madjid (2022) stressed that "Islam needs to address modern issues while remaining faithful to its core teachings". This method results in the combination of Islamic principles with the requirements of contemporary society.

In the realm of education, the evolution of Islamic thought is similarly seen in initiatives to create a curriculum that is inclusive and responsive to the changes of the time. According to Amin and Haris, "Islamic education needs to respond to the demands of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 through an innovative method." This highlights the significance of education in shaping a generation that comprehends and applies Islamic teachings in context (Amin & Haris, 2024).

These issues require revitalization and change within the Islamic education system to ensure it stays pertinent and can positively impact human existence. As a result, numerous fresh ideas and viewpoints have arisen in Islamic education aimed at addressing contemporary needs while remaining loyal to core Islamic principles and values. Islamic educational theorists and practitioners provide different solutions and methodologies, including the creation of a holistic and context-based curriculum, the use of collaborative and constructive teaching methods, and enhancing the Caliber of educators. They also underscore the significance of holistic education, which concentrates not just on intellectual facets, but also on spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. Modern Islamic educational thought addresses global challenges like radicalism, social strife, and moral decay by providing education aimed at developing individuals who are both academically skilled and possess virtuous character and strong social awareness. Consequently, Islamic education is anticipated to address numerous humanitarian issues and aid in the development of an improved civilization. Addressing

the challenges of Islamic education in today's world necessitates a thorough examination of multiple facets, including concepts, curricula, teaching methods, and practical application. Islamic educators and scholars strive to analyse the origins of the issue and pursue appropriate solutions while following the guidelines of authentic Islamic principles.

Therefore, the evolution of Islamic thought in contemporary times is a continual endeavour to address the challenges of the era while preserving the core of the teachings. This process necessitates a conversation between tradition and modernity, along with a dedication to ensuring the significance of Islamic teachings in today's world.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative method with literature review as the primary technique. Information was gathered from multiple pertinent literature sources, such as books, journal articles, and research reports. The examination involved pinpointing the key themes in the evolution of Islamic thought and the obstacles encountered during the renewal process.

Creswell (2014) highlighted that conducting a literature review is the first step necessary for establishing a theoretical framework that underpins research. He stressed that a literature review aids researchers in grasping current advancements in the field being investigated and pinpointing research gaps that require attention. Hasibuan (2007) characterizes a literature review as a thorough analysis of theories, results, and multiple research references gathered from source materials aimed at serving as a foundation for carrying out research.

The account in this literature review seeks to establish a cohesive framework of comprehension concerning the resolution of the issue. This article primarily focuses on a literature review that restricts the exploration of issues to the theme of the Transformation of Islamic Thought in the Modern Era: Traces of Reform and Its Challenges, using key terms such as: Islamic Thought, transformation, renewal, challenges, and modernity. Constrained by the extensive dialogue on the issue, leading the author to centre the discussion around keywords.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Reform in Islamic Education: Perspectives of Reform Figures

Changes in Islamic education can be observed through attempts to merge Islamic principles with the demands of contemporary society. Ainiah (2022) notes that Jamaluddin Al-Afghani significantly contributed to establishing schools and emphasizing education's vital role in revitalizing Muslims. The reform ideas in politics that stand out are anti-imperialism and colonialism, along with opposition to governments that do not support the populace. His aim of stepping into the political arena was not at all due to

his status, but to inform people about the threats of colonialism and tyrannical leaders. While in exile and confinement for his activism, he sought an alternative path through writing books, essays, columns, and articles. Furthermore,

Contemporary Islamic Thought serves as an intellectual reaction to diverse social, political, and cultural transformations that have taken place over time. Grounded in tradition yet bold enough to tackle modernity, globalization, and technological advancements, contemporary Islamic thought aims to connect history with today by providing relevant, coherent, and contextual solutions. This article outlines different facets of current Islamic thought, including the obstacles encountered, the dynamics at play, and the changes that have taken place in striving to preserve the relevance and authenticity of Islamic teachings today.

Muhammad Abduh: Integration of Religious and General Knowledge

Supriadi (2018) states that Muhammad Abduh highlighted the need for a blend of religious knowledge and general knowledge within the Islamic education framework. He asserted that the separation between religious madrasahs and public schools in education should be eradicated to establish a comprehensive educational system that aligns with contemporary advancements. Abduh also advocated for employing discussion and logical approaches in the educational process to substitute the prevailing lecture method of that era. This indicates that Abduh sought to address the challenges of Islamic education through a more progressive and scientific perspective.

Islamic education plays a crucial role, indeed the most significant one, in the advancement of civilization. Similarly to the advancement of Islamic civilization and in attaining the splendour of Muslims. Islamic education gains competence as it relies on pertinent sources that establish all the boundaries of Islamic education. Thus, the Qur'an has outlined the foundational approach to education and specifies various principles of Islamic education that should be adhered to as a foundation for shaping and nurturing the character of individuals.

Supriadi (2018) mentioned that Muhammad Abduh concentrated on reforming the Islamic education system, encompassing objectives, teachers, learners, and teaching methods. He sought to eradicate intellectual stagnation in Islamic education by implementing a more rational and scientific method. Abduh highlighted that education should cultivate the intellectual and spiritual abilities of students harmoniously to produce a wise and virtuous generation.

Nurcholish Madjid: Inclusive and Modern Islamic Education

Adam Hasyim and Munasir (2023) expressed that Nurcholish Madjid considers Islamic education a tool to develop critical and autonomous individuals. He stressed the significance of updating Islamic education, which involves combining Islamic principles with science and technology. Madjid believes that the Islamic education system needs

to address contemporary challenges and cannot be confined to traditionalism that obstructs progress. He further highlighted the significance of enhancing teacher quality as the essential factor in revitalizing Islamic education. Furthermore, Nurcholish Madjid voiced his discontent with traditional Islamic education as it was seen as stagnant and ineffective in addressing the challenge of nurturing moral values in society. Madjid aims to create an educational framework that integrates Islam, science, and Indonesian values, in line with his principles (Ridwanulloh & Wulandari, 2022). This perspective focuses more on the integration of the three elements of Islam, science, and Indonesianism in education to address the inequalities present in the educational sector.

To him, modernization signifies not the dismissal of traditional Islamic values, but the comprehension of the core Islamic teachings that are inclusive, tolerant, and receptive to change. Islamic principles should be understood in context, aligning with universal values and recognizing contemporary needs. A significant point in his perspective is the necessity for the fusion of contemporary science and Islamic principles within the education system, enabling the cultivation of Muslim individuals who are competitive on a global scale while maintaining a robust Islamic identity. The advancement of Islamic education also encompasses revisions in more progressive and inclusive teaching techniques. Madjid stressed the significance of a method that considers advancements in psychology, cognitive science, and character education. This method aims for students to cultivate critical thinking, grasp plurality, and gain skills that align with contemporary needs. Madjid believes that contemporary Islamic education should effectively connect a strict interpretation of religion with progress in science and technology.

Azyumardi Azra: Modernization and Democratization of Islamic Education

Lalu Abdurrahman Wahid (2022) notes that Azyumardi Azra views the modernization of Islamic education as essential to address the challenges posed by globalization. He suggested a reformation in the epistemology of Islamic science and the overhaul of Islamic educational institutions. Azra highlighted the significance of liberating education and prophetic missions in Islamic teaching to develop high-quality and competitive human resources. Azra's reflections indicate that Islamic education needs to be flexible and responsive to contemporary changes.

Hastuti Baharuddin (2013) described that Azyumardi Azra viewed the revitalization of Islamic education in Indonesia as a means to discard outdated perspectives that did not align with contemporary advancements. He suggested that Islamic education in Indonesia incorporate a balanced approach between worldly existence and the afterlife, between divine knowledge and human efforts, as well as between belief and devotion alongside science and technology. Azra's mindset focuses on establishing both spiritual and material well-being for Muslims.

Islamic education in today's world still appears to be falling behind. Islamic education is generally less competitive in various areas compared to other educational subsystems and is frequently regarded as inferior in relation to other education frameworks. Institutionally, Islamic education remains questionable in its capacity to address contemporary challenges, with educators still lacking professionalism and struggling to compete effectively. Students' behaviour frequently contradicts Islamic values, resulting in educational outcomes that are unprepared for competition in the contemporary world. Similarly, regarding learning resources, strategies, methods, curriculum, and facilities and infrastructure that are still insufficient.

These are the different challenges that have emerged as obstacles in the realm of Islamic education during this age of globalization. Azyumardi Azra, as a prominent figure deeply invested in the upheaval, generated his ideas and reflections regarding the revitalization of Islamic education. The introduction of Azyumardi Azra's concepts and fresh perspectives significantly impacts the implementation of revitalization in Islamic education. The initiatives to revitalize Islamic education undertaken by Azyumardi Azra can be seen as attempts to reform the frameworks of Islamic education that remain unestablished and outdated. Attempts to rebuild the Islamic education system aim to achieve notable improvements over earlier Islamic education practices. His revitalization of concepts involves modernizing and democratizing Islamic education and/or a campaign aimed at restructuring the curriculum of Islamic education.

2. Islamic Legal Reform: Perspectives and Directions of Reform

Islamic legal reform, also known as *ijtihad*, is a crucial element in the revitalization of Islamic philosophy. Intellectuals like Muhammad Abduh and Khaled Abou El Fadl highlight the significance of contextual and inclusive *ijtihad* to address contemporary challenges. Kamali (2008) states that *ijtihad*, which adapts to the changing times, is essential to address modern challenges like democracy, human rights, and gender equality. Sahjad M. Aksan (2019) states that reform (*tajdid*) within Islamic law refers to the attempt to restore something to its original form, allowing it to appear as something novel. In confronting the surge of global trends, *ijtihad* is not merely a necessity but an imperative to rejuvenate the vibrant essence of Islam, overcome stagnation, and identify solutions to the modern challenges encountered by Muslims. Aksan highlights the necessity of reforming Islamic law in Indonesia to address contemporary challenges.

Furthermore, Budiman Sulaeman (2017) notes that the Muslim community places significant trust in classical *fiqh* texts, leading them to believe that the *fiqh* outcomes in these texts are equivalent to Divine law. This process of sacralization has caused Islamic law to become unchanging in Muslim nations. Sulaeman suggests that this issue needs to be addressed by recognizing that Islamic law, at the normative level, should serve as a resolution to real social challenges. Traditional approaches in Islamic legal theory and *sharia* should be viewed as historical reactions to the circumstances of their time.

According to Ahmad Mas'ari (2020), Jamal al-Banna views reform as a representation of the socio-political, cultural, and intellectual circumstances of the Islamic world, which lags significantly behind other nations, particularly the West. Al-Banna presents the idea of reforming Islamic law by 'manipulating' the sources through the rethinking and redefining of traditional interpretations related to the material sources of Islamic law, substituting them with new interpretations. He states that the origins of Islamic law encompass reason, universal principles of the Qur'an, sunnah, and customs.

Muh. Haras Rasyid (2023) highlights that *ijtihad* plays a crucial role in the analysis and development of Islamic law over time, ensuring it remains pertinent to contemporary circumstances and the realities faced by Muslims. Islamic law in Indonesia, despite its challenges such as geographical issues and the vast population of Muslims with diverse legal requirements, presents a unique challenge for reforming Islamic law in both the present and future. All of this can be resolved by consistently attempting *ijtihad* in examining Islamic law from the primary sources of the Qur'an and hadith, along with other legal sources from earlier scholars. Rupi'i Amri (2019) explores Abdullah Ahmed an-Naim's perspectives on reforming modern Islamic criminal law. Amri indicated that the implementation of Islamic criminal law (Sharia Law Jinayah) within the state government framework reflects the aspirations of certain Muslims advocating for it. Nonetheless, the use is frequently political. An-Naim asserts that the law enforced should comply with constitutional and international norms concerning two aspects: the principle of legality devoid of discrimination and the matter of prisoner punishment and treatment.

3. Transformation of Sufism: Dynamics and Relevance in Contemporary Context

Sufism has evolved by emphasizing the principles of humanism and acceptance. Nasaruddin Umar (2022) suggests that contemporary Sufism can effectively address cultural conflicts in Indonesia by embedding values of compassion and tolerance within its practices. Ahmad Fahrur Rozi, Nurwahidin, and Mulawarman Hannase (2024) state that the modern transformation of Sufism is characterized by the rise of neo-Sufism and a transition from a local to a transnational movement. Neo-Sufism presents a harmonious approach to both exoteric and esoteric dimensions, serving as a spiritual option for urban Muslim populations. Furthermore, contemporary Sufism also contributes to a transnational Islamic movement organized through *da'wah*, commerce, and migration. Sulaiman Al-Kumayi (2013) highlights that the Sufism revival movement in Indonesia aims to purify practices regarded as divergent from authentic Islamic teachings. Individuals like Hamka exemplify this movement; he isn't tied to a specific order yet the principles of Sufism. Hamka aimed to restore Sufism to its core, steering clear of heretical and shirk elements that might compromise the integrity of Islam. Nasaruddin Umar (2024) contends that the evolution of contemporary Sufism should be capable of addressing social transformations and offer responses to spiritual dilemmas

within Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape. By fostering the principles of compassion and tolerance, Sufism can address cultural conflicts and promote a harmonious community.

Dedi Kuswandi, Rozib Sulistiyo, and Mohamad Syawaludin (2020) demonstrated that globalization has affected the Sufi culture in the archipelago. Contemporary Sufism arose from cultural modernization, adapting Sufi teachings to current circumstances while preserving their fundamental essence. This indicates that Sufism can adjust to evolving eras while retaining its identity. Sulthon Favian Jiwana (2025) emphasizes the importance of information and communication technology in disseminating tarekat in Indonesia. Social media and various digital platforms have hastened the dissemination of information regarding tarekat and enabled communication among tarekat followers across Indonesia. Nevertheless, obstacles emerge in preserving the genuineness of teachings and digital ethics in the face of the swift stream of information.

4. Challenges in the Renewal of Islamic Thought: Dynamics and Complexity

The revival of Islamic thought encounters difficulties in striking a balance between tradition and contemporary values. For instance, attempts to create a method of ijtihad that adapts to evolving circumstances frequently result in intense discussions among more traditional Muslims. Esposito (2010) states that the main challenge lies in striking a balance between upholding the fundamental principles of Islam and addressing changing modern challenges.

Tension between Traditionalism and Modernism

Ali Allawi (2009) asserts that the Islamic world is undergoing a significant civilizational crisis, characterized by sectarian strife and a decline in intellectual pursuits. He stressed that the divide between traditionalist and modernist factions poses a significant obstacle to the rejuvenation of Islamic thought. Traditionalist factions often uphold conventional interpretations, whereas modernist factions aim to modify Islamic principles to fit the present-day context. A harmony between the two is essential for attaining positive transformation. This theoretical foundation demonstrates that Islamic renewal is a component of the Islamic intellectual heritage that has evolved since the classical period. This study highlights that the Islamic renewal movement in Indonesia, through references to classical texts, literature on Islamic cultural history, and Islamic scientific journals, is not merely a local event but also a component of the global dynamics of Muslims addressing contemporary challenges.

Politicization of Religion and Leadership Crisis

Dawam Rahardjo (2012) argued that the politicization of religion has shifted Muslims' attention away from spiritual exploration and profound philosophical inquiry. He emphasized that the leadership crisis in the Islamic world following the fall of the

Ottoman Caliphate led to confusion regarding the direction and objectives of Muslims. This intensifies the difficulties in renewing Islamic thought, which needs to emphasize intellectual and spiritual advancement. Regardless of acknowledgment, the drive to revitalize Islamic thought has influenced the resolution of numerous civilizational issues. Issues like sectarianism, exclusivism, and religious conservatism have faced strong opposition from pluralism, inclusivism, and moderation, which were championed by the Islamic renewal movement. Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif (2018) criticized the dominance of sectarianism in the Islamic world, which obstructs the growth of rational and inclusive thinking in relation to Radicalization and Identity Crisis. He highlighted that religious radicalization and extremism arose as a reaction to social and political discontent, along with the inability to offer satisfactory solutions to contemporary challenges. This identity crisis intensifies the difficulties in revitalizing Islamic thought, which ought to promote inclusivity and moderation. Another point of critique pertains to the identity crisis and radicalization issue seen in modern Muslims. Confronted with social shifts and globalization pressures, certain individuals and groups pursue identity assurance via extreme ideologies that offer straightforward answers to intricate issues. This radicalization is frequently provoked by social, economic, and political discontent and the inability of moderate Islamic ideology to deliver satisfactory solutions.

The Challenges of Globalization and Postmodernism

Ziauddin Sardar and Syed Hussein Alatas contend that globalization and postmodernism question essential ideas in Islam that rely on the conviction in absolute truth. They emphasize the significance of cultivating an Islamic viewpoint that adapts to global shifts while maintaining its identity and fundamental principles. Nonetheless, this perspective has faced criticism, as it is seen as overly apologetic and fails to offer tangible solutions to the challenges confronted by Muslims in the globalized age. Modern Islamic thought is also encountering the difficulties posed by globalization and postmodernism. Globalization introduces swift and intricate social, economic, and cultural transformations that influence the lifestyles and values of Muslim communities. At the same time, postmodernism, characterized by its doubt of grand narratives and universal truths, questions essential ideas in Islam that rest on the conviction of absolute truth. One way to tackle this issue is to suggest a more analytical and thoughtful perspective on globalization and its effects on Muslim communities. They emphasize the need to cultivate an Islamic viewpoint that adapts to global transformations while maintaining its identity and fundamental principles. Nonetheless, criticism has arisen against this perspective, seen as overly conciliatory and failing to offer concrete solutions to the challenges confronting Muslims in the age of globalization.

Challenges of Education and Intellectuality

Ika Kurnia Sofiani et al. (2024) emphasized major difficulties in today's Islamic education, such as the curriculum's relevance, instructional approaches, and the incorporation of modern science. They highlighted the significance of creating a cohesive and contextual curriculum, applying participatory and constructivist learning approaches, and enhancing the quality of teachers. These initiatives seek to reconcile the preservation of Islamic identity and values with the need to adjust to contemporary demands. Islamic education encounters considerable obstacles in today's landscape marked by swift social, cultural, economic, and technological transformations.

Key challenges encompass curriculum relevance, teaching strategies, science integration, development of human resources, funding and infrastructure, radicalism and extremism, as well as globalization and technological advancements. To tackle these issues, reform and renewal initiatives are essential in the Islamic education system. The proposed solutions involve reshaping and enhancing an integrative and contextual curriculum, adopting participatory and student-focused teaching methods, and elevating the quality of educators through training and educational programs. Islamic education should also highlight a comprehensive approach that addresses not just intellectual dimensions, but also spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions. Instilling the values of moderation, tolerance, and peace is essential to curb radicalism and foster a generation dedicated to a harmonious existence. The transformation of Islamic education necessitates cooperation among multiple stakeholders including the government, educational bodies, Islamic groups, and the community. Integrating Islamic values with contextual reasoning and methods, Islamic education aims to help create a superior human civilization in today's world.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of Islamic thought in contemporary times reflects a drive to address the challenges of the era through revitalization in multiple areas. Nonetheless, this renewal process faces challenges in striking a balance between tradition and modernity. Hence, a contextual and inclusive strategy is essential for revitalizing Islamic thought to ensure it stays aligned with the demands of contemporary society. Integrating Islamic principles and values with contextual ideas and methods is anticipated to enhance Islamic education's role in developing a superior human civilization in today's world. Islamic thought has transitioned from a standard doctrinal perspective to a more flexible dialogical contextual one in response to contemporary challenges. This revival encompasses education, law, Sufism, and technology, grappling with the difficulties of balancing tradition and modernity. In this instance, according to the views of Islamic scholars, Islamic Education should highlight comprehensive education that prioritizes not only intellectual elements but also spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions. The difficulties in evolving Islamic thought during this modern era

require revitalization and changes in the Islamic education system to ensure it stays pertinent and can positively impact human lives.

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