

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL DA'WAH IN CONFRONTING WESTERN HEGEMONY: THE THOUGHT OF MUHAMMAD ABDUH, AL-AFGHANI, AND THE RESPONSES OF MUHAMMADIYAH AND NAHDLATUL ULAMA

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Abstract

This study examines the reform of modern Islamic education within the context of Western hegemony through the educational thought of Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, as well as the responses of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama toward colonial education in Indonesia. The nineteenth century marked a period of multidimensional crisis in the Muslim world due to political decline, intellectual stagnation, and the expansion of Western colonialism, which introduced not only political domination but also epistemological hegemony through modern secular education systems. In this context, Islamic reformist thinkers emerged to reconstruct Islamic educational thought as a strategy for civilizational revival. This research employs a qualitative approach using library research methods with historical and philosophical perspectives. Primary data were obtained from the works and ideas of Al-Afghani and Abduh, while secondary data were collected from reputable national and international academic journals, books, and historical studies related to Islamic educational reform and colonialism. Data were analyzed using content analysis and critical-interpretative approaches to identify the relationship between Islamic educational reform and resistance to Western epistemological domination. The findings reveal that Al-Afghani emphasized Pan-Islamism, political consciousness, and scientific advancement as instruments for resisting Western imperialism, whereas Abduh focused on educational modernization through the integration of reason and revelation, curriculum reform, and the revitalization of Islamic intellectual traditions. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama adapted these reformist ideas differently according to the Indonesian socio-cultural context. Muhammadiyah adopted a modernist educational model integrating religious and general sciences through modern schools, while Nahdlatul Ulama maintained pesantren traditions through adaptive traditionalism and selective modernization. The study concludes that Islamic educational reform in Indonesia represents not a process of Westernization, but rather an epistemological negotiation aimed at preserving Islamic identity while engaging with modern global civilization.

Keywords: *Islamic educational reform; Western hegemony; Muhammad Abduh; Jamal al-Din al-Afghani; Muhammadiyah; Nahdlatul Ulama*

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This study is important because it demonstrates that Islamic education is not merely a system for transmitting religious knowledge, but also a strategic instrument for strengthening intellectual independence, cultural identity, and social resilience in the face of global challenges. By examining the reformist ideas of Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani alongside the educational experiences of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, this research shows how Islamic educational institutions can engage constructively with modernity without abandoning their religious foundations. The findings provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, religious organizations, and the wider public seeking to develop educational models that integrate faith, scientific advancement, and social responsibility. Ultimately, this study highlights that educational reform can serve as a transformative form of da'wah, fostering inclusive, adaptive, and value-based education capable of responding to contemporary societal needs.

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic world entered the nineteenth century amid a multidimensional crisis characterized by political, economic, social, and educational decline. After centuries of serving as the center of world civilization through advances in science, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and education, Muslim societies gradually lost their intellectual supremacy and geopolitical influence. The three major Islamic empires Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal once symbols of Islamic glory, experienced continuous decline due to internal conflicts, weak governance, and the increasing pressure of Western colonialism (Adam et al., 2022; Oktianto et al., 2024). This decline not only weakened the political power of Muslims but also eroded the intellectual traditions that had long become the foundation of Islamic civilization. In this situation, the Muslim world experienced intellectual stagnation marked by the dominance of taqlid, the weakening of scientific culture, and the widespread assumption that the gate of ijthihad had been closed. Consequently, Muslims lagged behind the West in the development of science and technology during the era of industrial revolution and intellectual enlightenment (Nurlina, 2022).

Awareness of this backwardness intensified after Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt in 1798. This event was not merely a military invasion but represented a major confrontation between Western modernity and the traditional Islamic world. Napoleon brought not only soldiers but also scientists, engineers, printing technology, and modern research instruments that demonstrated the superiority of Western science and technology before the Muslim world (Septiyadi et al., 2023). For Muslim intellectuals, this event became a reflective moment revealing that the decline of Muslims was caused not only by political defeat but also by the weakness of educational systems and the stagnation of Islamic epistemology. Since then, many Muslim thinkers realized that educational reform was a fundamental prerequisite for the revival of Islamic civilization. Education was no longer viewed solely as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also as a strategic instrument for rebuilding the social, political, and intellectual strength of Muslims in facing Western domination.

Western colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced impacts far beyond territorial occupation. Western powers introduced modern educational systems based on secularism, rationalism, and empirical positivism, gradually replacing traditional Islamic educational systems. Within the colonial perspective, education functioned as an instrument to create societies obedient to colonial interests while simultaneously internalizing Western

worldviews into Muslim societies. This epistemological hegemony became one of the greatest challenges faced by the modern Islamic world because it controlled not only physical territories but also the intellectual paradigms of Muslim communities (Makki, 2019; Halik et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the Dutch colonial government implemented discriminatory educational policies toward Islamic institutions. Pesantren and madrasah were considered backward and irrelevant to colonial development, whereas Western schools were positioned as symbols of progress and rationality. As a result, a sharp dichotomy emerged between religious sciences and general sciences, creating a prolonged epistemological problem within the Indonesian Islamic educational system (Mubin & Aziz, 2020; Subandi et al., 2023).

In response to these conditions, modern Islamic reformism emerged as an intellectual movement seeking to answer the challenges of colonialism and Western hegemony through educational and religious reform. This movement was pioneered by Muslim intellectuals who believed that the decline of Muslims could not be overcome merely through nostalgia for past glory but required a reconstruction of Islamic thought that was more rational, dynamic, and contextual. Among the most influential reformist thinkers were Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. Al-Afghani emphasized Pan-Islamic solidarity and political awakening to resist Western colonialism, while Abduh focused more on educational reform and the integration of reason and revelation within Islamic thought. Both thinkers regarded education as the primary instrument for rebuilding Muslim consciousness and enabling Muslims to compete with the West without losing their Islamic identity. Their reformist ideas later influenced various Islamic renewal movements across the Muslim world, including Indonesia.

In the Indonesian context, the influence of modern Islamic reformism can be observed in the emergence of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama as the two largest Islamic organizations responding differently to Western modernity and colonial educational systems. Muhammadiyah adopted a modernist approach by integrating religious and general sciences through modern schooling systems, whereas Nahdlatul Ulama maintained the pesantren tradition while selectively adapting to modern developments. Although they differed in educational orientation, both organizations shared a common objective: preserving Islamic educational identity while strengthening the competitiveness of Muslims under Western epistemological domination. Therefore, the development of Islamic educational reform in Indonesia cannot be separated from the influence of Middle Eastern reformist thought that was later adapted to Indonesian socio-cultural and political contexts.

Studies concerning Islamic educational reform in the context of Western hegemony have been widely conducted. Usman and Umar (2021) examined Abduh's educational modernization and concluded that the integration of reason and revelation constituted the foundation of modern Islamic educational reform. However, their study did not explore how these ideas were transformed into the Indonesian educational context. Khoirurrijal et al. (2023) analyzed the reflection of Abduh's thought in Islamic educational renewal but did not connect it with the ideas of al-Afghani as a significant intellectual partner in Islamic reformism. Miswanto, Hitami, and Murhayati (2023) discussed the ideas of Abduh and al-Afghani simultaneously, yet their study did not address the institutional responses of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama in adapting these reformist ideas. Meanwhile, Ofiani and Mardalena (2024) found that the dichotomy between religious and secular sciences remains a contemporary issue in Indonesian Islamic education, but their research did not trace the historical roots of how Muhammadiyah and NU responded to this

problem during the colonial period. Halim and Masykuri (2024) also discussed Islamic educational reform from Abduh's perspective, but their analysis remained historical-descriptive and lacked a comparative framework between modernist and traditionalist movements in Indonesia.

Despite the growing number of studies on Islamic educational reform, existing research still tends to examine these issues separately and descriptively. Previous studies have not critically synthesized the interconnected relationship between the reformist ideas of Abduh and al-Afghani and the institutional adaptation carried out by Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama within the context of Western educational hegemony in Indonesia. Furthermore, prior studies have not formulated a comprehensive analytical framework explaining how reformist Islamic thought was transformed into educational movements capable of responding to colonial epistemological domination. Thus, the research gap lies not merely in the absence of discussion on the integration of these figures and organizations, but also in the absence of a conceptual synthesis linking transnational Islamic reformism with local educational adaptation in Indonesia.

To clarify this gap, the article develops a state-of-the-art synthesis by comparing previous studies based on their focus, methods, findings, and limitations. Through this synthesis, the study demonstrates that earlier scholarship has primarily concentrated on individual figures or institutions without constructing an integrative analytical perspective connecting reformist thought, educational transformation, and anti-colonial responses. Consequently, this article positions itself as an effort to bridge the theoretical fragmentation that still characterizes studies of Islamic educational reform.

The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of an integrative conceptual framework that connects the reformist educational ideas of Abduh and al-Afghani with the institutional adaptation strategies of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama in responding to Western hegemony and colonial educational systems in Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on either Middle Eastern reformist thought or Indonesian Islamic institutions separately, this article proposes a transnational analytical model demonstrating how global Islamic reformism was localized into distinct educational movements in Indonesia. This conceptual framework also explains the dialectical relationship between modernism, traditionalism, and colonial resistance within the development of Indonesian Islamic education.

This article aims to analyze integratively the educational reform ideas of Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in the context of Western hegemony while examining how Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama adapted these intellectual legacies in responding to colonial educational domination in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach with library research methods, this study analyzes various primary and secondary sources relevant to Islamic educational reform and colonial discourse. Through this approach, the article is expected to contribute theoretically by offering a new analytical framework for understanding Islamic educational reform as part of the broader struggle of the Muslim world against Western epistemological hegemony and global modernity.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research. This approach was selected because the research focuses on conceptual, historical, and epistemological analyses of modern Islamic educational reform within the context of Western hegemony, particularly through

the thoughts of Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, as well as the responses of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama to Western colonial education in Indonesia.

The research is descriptive-analytical in nature and applies both historical and philosophical approaches. The historical approach was used to trace the development of Islamic educational reform since the nineteenth century, particularly in relation to Western colonialism and the decline of the Muslim world. Meanwhile, the philosophical approach was employed to examine the epistemological foundations of Islamic reformist thought, especially concerning the relationship between reason, revelation, modern science, and critiques of the dominance of Western epistemology.

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included the original works of Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, such as *Al-Urwah al-Wuthqa*, *Risalat al-Tawhid*, and historical documents related to the development of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama educational institutions. Secondary sources were obtained from reputable national and international journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and previous studies relevant to the themes of Islamic educational reform, colonialism, and Western epistemological hegemony. The selection of sources was conducted purposively based on thematic relevance, academic quality, publication reputation, and the recency of the literature.

Data collection was carried out through documentation study. The researcher identified, read, recorded, and selected literature relevant to the focus of the study. The collected literature was then classified into several major themes, including Muhammad Abduh's Islamic educational reform, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's Pan-Islamism, Western epistemological hegemony, modernization of Islamic education, and the educational responses of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama to the colonial educational system.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and critical-interpretative analysis. The analytical procedures were carried out in several stages. First, the researcher conducted an in-depth reading of all primary and secondary sources. Second, a coding process was performed by marking keywords, concepts, arguments, and important statements related to the research themes. The initial codes included "integration of knowledge," "reason and revelation," "educational colonialism," "Western hegemony," "Pan-Islamism," "modernization of Islamic education," "Muhammadiyah," and "Nahdlatul Ulama."

Third, these codes were grouped into broader analytical categories, such as the epistemology of Islamic education, institutional reform, resistance to colonialism, and the responses of Indonesian Islamic organizations. Fourth, each category was analyzed by comparing the ideas of the figures and institutions examined in this study. At this stage, the researcher interpreted the similarities, differences, continuities, and contributions of the thoughts of Abduh, Al-Afghani, Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama in constructing the paradigm of modern Islamic education.

Fifth, interpretation was conducted by relating textual findings to their socio-historical contexts. Thus, the analysis did not merely describe the contents of the literature but also explained the conceptual meanings and contemporary relevance of these ideas in responding to the hegemony of Western epistemology within modern Islamic educational reform.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Source triangulation was implemented by comparing primary works, historical

organizational documents, academic books, and reputable journal articles. When differing interpretations were found among sources, cross-checking was conducted by examining the historical context, the academic position of the authors, and the consistency of arguments within other relevant literature. Theoretical triangulation was carried out by applying perspectives from Islamic educational reform, hegemony theory, and Islamic epistemology to critically interpret the data.

Furthermore, data validity was strengthened through persistent engagement with the literature, adequacy of references, and the selection of credible academic sources. The references used in this study were prioritized from journals indexed by Scopus, Web of Science, SINTA, and other reputable academic publishers. Through these procedures, the research method is expected to produce a systematic, operational, and academically credible analysis.

RESULT

The Genealogy of Islamic Educational Reform under Western Hegemony

The findings demonstrate that the emergence of modern Islamic educational reform in the nineteenth century was closely related to the multidimensional crisis experienced by the Muslim world, including political decline, intellectual stagnation, and the expansion of Western colonialism. The weakening of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires marked the decline of Islamic political and intellectual supremacy. At the same time, Western colonial powers introduced modern secular education systems that gradually marginalized traditional Islamic educational institutions.

The study further reveals that Western colonialism operated not only through political domination but also through epistemological hegemony. Colonial education systems promoted rationalism, secularism, and positivism as universal standards of knowledge while positioning Islamic intellectual traditions as backward and irrelevant. In Indonesia, Dutch colonial educational policies created a dichotomy between religious and general sciences, which later became a long-standing epistemological problem in Islamic education.

Table 1. Historical Background of Islamic Educational Reform

Historical Context		Main Characteristics	Impact on Islamic Education
Decline of Islamic Empires		Weakening political and intellectual authority	Loss of scientific and educational leadership
Western Colonial Expansion		Spread of secular and modern education systems	Marginalization of pesantren and madrasah
Epistemological Hegemony		Dominance of positivism and rationalism	Dichotomy between religious and general sciences
Intellectual Stagnation		Closure of ijtihad and rise of taqlid	Decline of scientific creativity in Muslim societies

The findings indicate that Islamic reformist movements emerged as intellectual responses to this crisis. Reformist thinkers viewed education as the primary instrument for rebuilding Islamic civilization while simultaneously resisting Western domination.

Reform of Modern Islamic Education in the Thought of Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani

The results show that Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani developed interconnected yet distinct approaches to Islamic educational reform. Abduh concentrated on epistemological and educational reconstruction, whereas Al-Afghani emphasized political awakening and Pan-Islamic solidarity. Abduh criticized the stagnation of Al-Azhar University, which relied heavily on rote memorization and neglected critical reasoning and scientific inquiry. He proposed curriculum reform by integrating philosophy, history, geography, and modern sciences into Islamic education. The findings also reveal that Abduh's most influential contribution was his concept of the integration of reason and revelation. According to Abduh, Islam fundamentally supports rational inquiry and scientific progress; therefore, modern sciences should not be separated from religious sciences.

Meanwhile, Al-Afghani viewed education as a strategic instrument for political liberation and anti-colonial resistance. Through Pan-Islamism, he sought to build Muslim solidarity across ethnic and national boundaries. Education, in his view, should develop political awareness and collective resistance against colonial domination.

Table 2. Comparative Framework of Abduh and Al-Afghani's Educational Reform

Aspect	Muhammad Abduh	Jamal al-Din al-Afghani
Main Orientation	Educational and epistemological reform	Political awakening and Pan-Islamism
Educational Focus	Curriculum modernization	Political consciousness through education
Core Concept	Integration of reason and revelation	Muslim solidarity and anti-colonialism
View of Modern Science	Compatible with Islam	Instrument for Muslim revival
Critique of the West	Selective adaptation of modernity	Resistance to imperialism and colonialism
Educational Goal	Intellectual modernization of Muslims	Liberation from colonial domination

The study additionally finds that both thinkers rejected blind imitation (*taqlid*) and encouraged intellectual renewal through *ijtihad*. Their educational reform projects represented attempts to construct an Islamic modernity that could engage with modern civilization without losing Islamic identity.

Muhammadiyah's Response to Colonial Education and Western Modernity

The findings demonstrate that Muhammadiyah adopted a modernist approach toward educational reform. Founded by Ahmad Dahlan in 1912, Muhammadiyah responded to colonial educational domination by establishing modern Islamic schools that integrated religious and general sciences. Unlike many traditional Islamic institutions that rejected Western-style schooling, Muhammadiyah selectively adopted modern educational methods such as structured classrooms, standardized curricula, systematic teaching methods, and administrative organization. However, these methods were reoriented toward Islamic objectives. The study also finds that Muhammadiyah rejected the dichotomy between religious and secular sciences. Its educational model reflected Abduh's epistemological framework by integrating Qur'anic studies, fiqh, and Islamic ethics with mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences.

Table 3. Muhammadiyah's Educational Reform Model

Educational Aspect	Muhammadiyah's Response
Educational System	Modern school model
Curriculum	Integration of religious and general sciences
Teaching Method	Structured and systematic learning
Educational Orientation	Social and intellectual transformation
Position toward Western Modernity	Selective adaptation
Main Objective	Producing modern yet Islamic individuals

The findings further indicate that Muhammadiyah transformed education into a broader social movement by establishing hospitals, orphanages, and social welfare institutions alongside schools. Education was therefore understood not merely as knowledge transmission but as a comprehensive project of Islamic social transformation.

Nahdlatul Ulama's Adaptive Traditionalism toward Western Educational Hegemony

The results reveal that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) adopted a different strategy from Muhammadiyah in responding to Western modernity. NU defended the pesantren tradition as the foundation of Islamic intellectual and spiritual continuity while selectively adapting to modern educational developments. The study finds that pesantren within NU functioned not only as educational institutions but also as centers of cultural resistance against colonial domination. Through the transmission of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), sanad traditions, and kyai authority, pesantren preserved Islamic epistemological traditions amid the expansion of colonial education. At the same time, NU gradually introduced modern subjects into the pesantren curriculum through the madrasa system. Nevertheless, the integration of modern sciences remained subordinate to the broader objectives of moral formation, spirituality, and Islamic ethics.

Table 4. NU's Adaptive Traditionalism in Islamic Education

Educational Aspect	Nahdlatul Ulama's Response
Educational Foundation	Pesantren tradition
Curriculum Reform	Selective integration of modern sciences
Main Educational Goal	Moral, spiritual, and intellectual formation
Position toward Modernity	Adaptive traditionalism
Epistemological Orientation	Preservation of Islamic scholarly tradition
Strategy against Western Hegemony	Epistemological negotiation

The findings also show that NU's educational model emphasized the continuity of Islamic intellectual traditions while remaining flexible toward social change. This adaptive traditionalism enabled NU to maintain its Islamic identity while participating in the development of modern education in Indonesia.

Synthesis of Islamic Educational Reform in Indonesia

The results of this study indicate that Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama represented two distinct yet complementary models of Islamic educational reform in Indonesia. Muhammadiyah emphasized modernization and institutional reform, while NU prioritized the preservation of Islamic traditions through selective adaptation. Despite these differences, both organizations shared the same objective: resisting Western epistemological domination while strengthening Islamic civilization through education.

Table 5. Comparative Synthesis of Muhammadiyah and NU Educational Models

Dimension	Muhammadiyah	Nahdlatul Ulama
Educational Orientation	Modernist	Traditionalist-Adaptive
Institutional Basis	Modern schools	Pesantren and madrasah
Curriculum Model	Integrative-modern	Selective integration
View of Modernity	Acceptance with adaptation	Selective accommodation
Intellectual Influence	Muhammad Abduh	Traditional Islamic scholarship
Main Educational Objective	Modern Muslim society	Preservation of Islamic tradition

Overall, the findings confirm that Islamic educational reform in Indonesia did not represent a process of Westernization, but rather a process of epistemological negotiation between Islamic intellectual traditions and modern global civilization.

Islamic Educational Reform as a Da'wah Movement against Western Epistemological Hegemony

The findings of this study demonstrate that modern Islamic educational reform was not merely an intellectual or pedagogical movement, but also a transformative da'wah movement aimed at reviving Islamic civilization amid the expansion of Western hegemony. In the nineteenth century, colonial domination penetrated not only political and economic structures but also the epistemological foundations of Muslim societies through secular-modern education systems. Education became a strategic instrument for disseminating Western values, rationalism, secularism, and positivism, which gradually marginalized Islamic intellectual traditions. In this context, da'wah was no longer limited to ritual preaching (*tabligh*) but evolved into a broader project of intellectual and civilizational transformation through educational reform.

The study reveals that Muhammad Abduh conceptualized Islamic education as a medium of da'wah for reconstructing Muslim intellectual consciousness. Abduh criticized the stagnation of Al-Azhar and argued that the decline of Muslims resulted from intellectual rigidity, blind imitation (*taqlid*), and the separation between religion and rational inquiry. Through educational reform, Abduh attempted to restore Islam as a rational and dynamic religion capable of engaging with scientific modernity. This finding strengthens Sedgwick's (2010) argument that Abduh's educational reform represented an effort to modernize Islamic institutions. However, the present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that Abduh's reform was fundamentally da'wah-oriented because it sought to revive the intellectual spirit of Islam and guide Muslims toward social and civilizational renewal.

Abduh's integration of reason and revelation also reflects a da'wah strategy aimed at countering colonial narratives that portrayed Islam as incompatible with science and progress. By

integrating religious sciences with modern knowledge, Abduh positioned Islamic education as an instrument for restoring Muslim dignity and confidence in the modern world. His educational reform therefore functioned simultaneously as epistemological resistance and as da'wah for societal transformation. This finding aligns with Hanafi's (2009) argument that Islamic reformism sought to reconstruct the relationship between Islam and modernity without surrendering Islamic identity.

Similarly, the findings indicate that Jamal al-Din al-Afghani viewed education as a political and civilizational form of da'wah. Al-Afghani believed that Muslim decline was rooted not only in colonial domination but also in the absence of political awareness and collective solidarity among Muslims. Therefore, education was envisioned as a means to awaken the ummah and mobilize anti-colonial resistance. Through Pan-Islamism, Al-Afghani transformed da'wah into a transnational intellectual movement that united Muslims across ethnic and territorial boundaries.

The publication of *Al-Urwah al-Wuthqa* by Al-Afghani and Abduh illustrates how da'wah was expanded beyond traditional religious sermons into modern intellectual media. The journal became an educational and ideological platform for spreading reformist Islamic ideas and anti-colonial consciousness throughout the Muslim world. This finding supports Euben's (2002) and Kedouri's (1997) interpretations of Al-Afghani as a pioneer of Islamic anti-imperialism, while also highlighting the role of da'wah as an instrument for constructing collective Muslim consciousness under colonial domination.

The study further demonstrates that the reformist ideas of Abduh and Al-Afghani established a new paradigm of da'wah that integrated education, intellectualism, and social transformation. Da'wah was no longer confined to spiritual guidance in mosques and religious gatherings; instead, it expanded into institutional reform, curriculum reconstruction, and the production of alternative Islamic knowledge systems capable of confronting Western epistemological dominance. Consequently, Islamic educational reform emerged as both a pedagogical and da'wah project for rebuilding Islamic civilization in the modern era.

Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama: Da'wah Strategies through Islamic Educational Institutions

Another important finding of this study is that Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama institutionalized Islamic educational reform as part of broader da'wah movements in Indonesia. Both organizations transformed education into a strategic instrument for preserving Islamic identity, strengthening Muslim society, and responding to colonial and modern challenges. However, each organization developed different da'wah approaches according to its socio-cultural orientation.

The findings reveal that Muhammadiyah developed a modernist da'wah model through educational institutions. Ahmad Dahlan viewed schools not merely as places of instruction, but as instruments for social reform and Islamic renewal. Muhammadiyah adopted modern educational methods such as classroom systems, structured curricula, and scientific instruction while embedding Islamic moral and theological values within them.

This educational model reflected Muhammadiyah's vision of da'wah as *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* through social and intellectual transformation. Muhammadiyah's schools integrated religious and general sciences in order to produce Muslims who were spiritually grounded,

intellectually modern, and socially active. This finding supports Burhani's (2010) argument that Muhammadiyah transformed Islamic teachings into practical social activism. However, this study emphasizes that Muhammadiyah's educational institutions also functioned as spaces of da'wah resistance against colonial hegemony by reconstructing Islamic identity within modern institutional frameworks.

The findings further show that Muhammadiyah expanded its da'wah mission beyond formal education into broader social services, including hospitals, orphanages, and welfare institutions. This demonstrates that Muhammadiyah interpreted da'wah not only as verbal preaching but as concrete social engagement aimed at empowering Muslim communities under colonial oppression. In this sense, Muhammadiyah developed an integrative da'wah paradigm combining education, social welfare, and religious reform.

In contrast, Nahdlatul Ulama developed a cultural and traditionalist model of da'wah through pesantren institutions. The study reveals that NU positioned pesantren as centers for preserving Islamic scholarship, spirituality, and moral formation amid the expansion of secular colonial education. Through the transmission of *kitab kuning*, sanad traditions, and the authority of *kyai*, pesantren became institutions of cultural da'wah that maintained the continuity of Islamic intellectual traditions.

Unlike Muhammadiyah's modernist orientation, NU's da'wah strategy emphasized cultural adaptation and spiritual continuity. Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that NU was not entirely resistant to modernity. Pesantren gradually integrated selected modern sciences and administrative systems into their educational structures while maintaining Islamic ethical and spiritual values as the foundation of learning. This finding supports Tan's (2014) argument that Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia developed hybrid models capable of synthesizing classical traditions with modern educational demands.

The comparative findings indicate that Muhammadiyah and NU represented two complementary paradigms of Islamic educational da'wah. Muhammadiyah emphasized reformist-modernist da'wah through institutional modernization, while NU emphasized cultural-spiritual da'wah through adaptive traditionalism. Despite these differences, both organizations shared a common mission: strengthening Muslim society and preserving Islamic identity in the face of colonial and epistemological domination.

From a theoretical perspective, this study proposes the concept of "transformative educational da'wah" as an analytical framework for understanding Islamic educational reform in Indonesia. This concept refers to da'wah practices that operate through educational institutions, curriculum development, social empowerment, and intellectual reconstruction rather than merely through conventional preaching activities. The findings therefore demonstrate that Islamic educational reform in Indonesia should be understood as a comprehensive da'wah movement that negotiated modernity while simultaneously reconstructing Islamic civilization.

The study implies that contemporary Islamic da'wah cannot rely solely on conventional religious preaching. In the era of globalization and digital modernity, da'wah requires institutional, intellectual, and educational strategies capable of responding to epistemological challenges while preserving Islamic values. The experiences of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama illustrate that education remains one of the most effective forms of da'wah for shaping Muslim identity, strengthening social resilience, and constructing an Islamic modernity rooted in religious and cultural authenticity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the reform of modern Islamic education emerged as a transformative da'wah movement in response to the political, intellectual, and epistemological crises experienced by the Muslim world under Western colonial hegemony. The findings reveal that Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani positioned education as the primary instrument for reviving Islamic civilization. Abduh emphasized the integration of reason and revelation through curriculum reform and intellectual modernization, while Al-Afghani focused on political awareness, Pan-Islamic solidarity, and anti-colonial consciousness. In the Indonesian context, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama adapted these reformist ideas through different educational da'wah strategies. Muhammadiyah developed a modernist educational model integrating religious and general sciences within modern institutions, whereas Nahdlatul Ulama maintained pesantren traditions through adaptive traditionalism and selective modernization. These findings demonstrate that Islamic educational reform in Indonesia did not represent a process of Westernization, but rather an epistemological negotiation aimed at preserving Islamic identity while engaging with modern global civilization.

The study also provides an important insight that da'wah in the modern era should not be understood merely as verbal preaching, but as a broader intellectual, educational, and social transformation movement. Education functions as a strategic medium of da'wah for strengthening Muslim identity, reconstructing Islamic knowledge, and empowering society in the face of global challenges. Nevertheless, this research has several limitations. First, the study relies primarily on library research and historical-literature analysis without empirical field investigation into contemporary Islamic educational institutions. Second, the discussion focuses mainly on Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, thereby limiting broader comparative analysis with other Islamic movements in the Muslim world. Future research is therefore recommended to employ empirical and comparative approaches in examining how Islamic educational da'wah continues to transform in the digital era and within contemporary global educational systems.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, S.S. and T.N.; methodology, S.S.; formal analysis, S.S.; investigation, S.S.; resources, S.S.; data curation, S.S.; writing—original draft preparation, S.S.; writing—review and editing, T.N., R.A., A.F., and I.K.; visualization, S.S.; supervision, T.N.; project administration, S.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD STATEMENT

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because it is a library research based exclusively on published literature, historical documents, and publicly available academic sources, without involving human participants, personal data, or experimental procedures.

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Not applicable. This study did not involve human participants or identifiable personal data.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are derived from published books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and historical documents cited in the reference list. No new empirical datasets were generated during this research.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used generative artificial intelligence tools (including ChatGPT and Claude) solely to assist with language refinement, grammar improvement, and manuscript organization. All intellectual content, conceptual development, interpretation, and final revisions were performed by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the published work.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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