

The Evolution of Islamic Educational Institutions from the Classical to the Modern Era: A Historical Analysis of the Transformation of the Islamic Education System

Muhammad Kholid Rafi'i¹, Abdul Rosyid Teguhdin Hamid²

^{1,2} Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Al-Hikmah Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia.
Email: kholidrafii12@gmail.com¹, rosyid.takmir61@gmail.com²

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the evolution of Islamic educational institutions from the classical to the modern era using a historical approach. Islamic education has undergone transformations driven by social, political, and cultural dynamics, as well as advances in science and technology. During the classical period, Islamic educational institutions developed through kuttabs, mosques, and madrasas, which served as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge. As the system moved into the medieval and modern periods, it underwent changes in institutional structures, curricula, teaching methods, and governance in response to the challenges of each era. This study employs a qualitative method using a library research approach. Data were collected from various primary and secondary sources, including books, scholarly articles, national and international journals, and relevant historical documents. The data were analyzed using content analysis and historical analysis to identify patterns in the development of Islamic educational institutions across different periods. The findings indicate that the transformation of Islamic educational institutions has been dynamic while preserving the fundamental values of Islamic teachings. Modernization has encouraged the integration of religious and general sciences, the adoption of technology in the learning process, and the strengthening of professional educational management. Despite the challenges of globalization and digitalization, Islamic educational institutions continue to play a strategic role in developing human resources characterized by integrity and the capacity to adapt to changing times. Therefore, institutional innovation and the improvement of educational quality are crucial to sustaining Islamic education in the modern era.

Keywords: Islamic Educational Institutions, History of Islamic Education, Institutional Transformation, Educational Modernization, Islamic Educational Reform.

I. Introduction

Islamic education has been one of the key instruments in the formation of Islamic civilization from the earliest period of the spread of Islam to the contemporary era. Islamic educational institutions have functioned not only as a means of transmitting religious knowledge but also as centers for the intellectual, social, cultural, and civilizational development of Muslim communities. Historical records show that the advancement of Islamic civilization during the classical period was inseparable from the growth of educational

institutions that served as venues for learning, research, and the development of knowledge. These institutions produced numerous scholars, scientists, and thinkers who made major contributions to the development of global knowledge (Azra, 2019). In the early period of Islam, education was conducted in relatively simple settings, including the homes of the Prophet's Companions, mosques, and kuttabs as centers of basic learning. As Islamic territories expanded, the need for a more structured education system encouraged the emergence of formal institutions such as madrasas. The establishment of madrasas during the Abbasid period marked an important milestone in the history of Islamic education because these institutions integrated educational functions, the development of knowledge, and character formation within a more organized system (Makdisi, 1981).

Islamic education reached a high point during the classical period, when major centers of scholarship flourished in Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Cordoba, and other cities across the Muslim world. Islamic educational institutions at this time taught not only religious disciplines such as Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, jurisprudence, and creed, but also rational sciences such as philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and geography. This condition demonstrates the integrative character of Islamic education, which sought to balance spiritual and intellectual dimensions (Nakosteen, 1964). However, social, political, and economic changes in the Muslim world also influenced the development of Islamic educational institutions. The political decline of several Muslim dynasties, Western colonialism, and the emergence of modern education systems brought significant changes to the structure and orientation of Islamic education. In the modern period, Islamic educational institutions encountered new challenges that required curricular reform, innovation in teaching methods, improvements in institutional governance, and the integration of modern knowledge into the Islamic education system (Nata, 2021).

This transformation became increasingly evident as advances in science and technology drove global changes in educational paradigms. Islamic educational institutions were expected not only to preserve Islamic values but also to produce human resources with academic competence, twenty-first-century skills, and the capacity to adapt to digital technological developments. Consequently, many Islamic educational institutions introduced innovations through curriculum reform, the adoption of educational technology, the strengthening of educational management, and the development of educational models that were more responsive to the needs of modern society (Muhaimin, 2020). Although numerous studies have examined the history of Islamic education, most have focused on particular periods or discussed institutional aspects only partially. Studies that comprehensively examine the evolution of Islamic educational institutions from the classical to the modern era while emphasizing the transformation of the education system remain relatively limited. An understanding of these historical dynamics is important for explaining how Islamic educational institutions have survived and adapted amid changing circumstances.

Against this background, this study aims to analyze the evolution of Islamic educational institutions from the classical to the modern era through a historical approach. It seeks to identify the factors that drove the transformation of the Islamic education system, the forms of change that occurred in institutional and curricular aspects, and their implications for the development of Islamic education in the modern era. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute academically to enriching the historiography of Islamic education while also serving as a reference for developing Islamic educational institutions that remain relevant to contemporary demands.

II. Literature Review

Islamic educational institutions have undergone a long process of development alongside changes in Muslim societies. In the classical period, education was initially conducted through mosques, kuttabs, and informal learning circles before developing into more organized institutions such as madrasas. Makdisi (1981) explains that the emergence of madrasas represented an important stage in the institutionalization of Islamic education, particularly through structured curricula, scholarly traditions, and institutional funding. Similarly, Azra (2019) emphasizes that Islamic educational institutions historically played an important role not only in

transmitting religious knowledge but also in developing intellectual traditions and contributing to Islamic civilization.

The development of Islamic education also demonstrates its capacity to adapt to different social and cultural contexts. In Indonesia, Islamic educational institutions developed through *pesantren*, *surau*, and *dayah*, which combined religious instruction, moral education, and community life. Dhofier (2011) describes *pesantren* as an important institution in maintaining Islamic scholarly traditions through the central role of the *kiai* and traditional learning methods such as *sorogan*, *bandongan*, and *halaqah*. This development indicates that Islamic education has maintained its fundamental religious values while adapting its institutional forms to local cultures and social needs. In the modern era, Islamic educational institutions have faced new challenges arising from colonialism, modernization, scientific development, globalization, and technological advancement. Rahman (1982) argues that Islamic education needs to overcome the separation between religious and modern knowledge through intellectual and educational reform. In the Indonesian context, Daulay (2019) notes that the modernization of *madrasas* and Islamic higher education has strengthened the integration of Islamic education into the national education system. Furthermore, Muhaimin (2020) highlights the importance of curriculum reform that integrates religious knowledge with general sciences and responds to contemporary educational needs.

More recently, digitalization has become an important dimension of educational transformation. Islamic educational institutions are increasingly required to integrate digital technologies, online learning platforms, and new approaches to educational management. Nata (2022) emphasizes that Islamic education in the digital era must maintain its religious and moral foundations while developing technological competence and institutional adaptability. Therefore, the transformation of Islamic education should be understood as a continuous process that combines the preservation of Islamic traditions with institutional, curricular, managerial, and technological innovation. Although previous studies have examined various aspects of Islamic education, much of the existing literature tends to focus on particular historical periods, institutions, or dimensions of educational development. A comprehensive historical analysis that connects the classical, medieval, and modern periods within a continuous framework of institutional transformation remains relatively limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the evolution of Islamic educational institutions across these periods while focusing on changes in institutional structures, curricula, learning methods, governance, funding systems, and the adoption of digital technology.

III. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research. This approach was selected because the study focuses on examining the evolution of Islamic educational institutions from the classical to the modern era through the analysis of historical sources and scholarly literature. Library research enables researchers to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the development of the Islamic education system based on written documents with academic validity (Creswell, 2018). The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include classical works on the history of Islamic education, such as George Makdisi's *The Rise of Colleges*, Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, and works by other Muslim educational thinkers. Secondary sources include books, scholarly articles, nationally accredited SINTA journals, reputable international journals, conference proceedings, and official documents addressing the history and transformation of Islamic educational institutions.

Data were collected through document study by identifying, classifying, and examining literature relevant to the research focus. All selected sources were analyzed based on their substantive relevance to the development of Islamic educational institutions in each historical period. To maintain data validity, the study applied source triangulation by comparing information from multiple references in order to obtain a more objective interpretation (Moleong, 2018). Data were analyzed using historical analysis combined with content analysis. Historical analysis was used to reconstruct the development of Islamic educational institutions chronologically, whereas content analysis was used to identify changes in institutional structures, curricula,

teaching methods, and educational management systems. The analytical stages included data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and the drawing of conclusions based on relationships among the different periods in the development of Islamic education (Krippendorff, 2019). Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a systematic account of the transformation of Islamic educational institutions from the classical period to the modern era and of the factors that influenced these changes.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1. Evolution of Islamic Educational Institutions in the Classical Period

Islamic educational institutions began to develop during the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through learning activities conducted in the homes of his Companions and in the Prophet's Mosque. In early Islam, the mosque functioned not only as a place of worship but also as a center for education, scholarly discussion, the resolution of social issues, and community character formation. The educational model was relatively simple and commonly used the halaqah system, in which teachers and learners sat in a circle during instruction (Hitti, 2002). As Islamic territories expanded during the Rashidun Caliphate and the Umayyad period, the demand for education increased. Kuttab or maktab institutions emerged as elementary educational centers that taught children reading, writing, the Qur'an, the fundamentals of Islamic creed, and Arabic. The kuttab became a fundamental component of Islamic education because of its role in developing literacy among Muslim communities from an early age (Syalabi, 1973).

The most significant development occurred during the Abbasid Dynasty (750–1258 CE). In this period, Islamic education advanced rapidly alongside the growth of scientific knowledge and government support for scholarly activity. Caliphs Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun gave considerable attention to educational development through the establishment of Bayt al-Hikmah, a center for translation, research, and knowledge development that became a symbol of Islamic intellectual achievement (Nakosteen, 1998). Alongside Bayt al-Hikmah, various madrasas emerged as formal educational institutions. One of the most renowned was the Nizamiyah Madrasa, founded by Nizam al-Mulk in the eleventh century. This madrasa had an organized administrative system, a structured curriculum, professional educators, and funding derived from waqf. The Nizamiyah Madrasa became an important milestone in the development of Islamic higher education and is also considered to have influenced the emergence of universities in medieval Europe (Makdisi, 1981).

During the classical period, the Islamic education curriculum was oriented not only toward religious disciplines such as Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, jurisprudence, and theology, but also toward medicine, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, chemistry, and literature. This indicates that the educational paradigm of the period was integrative and did not separate religious from general knowledge. This concept of knowledge integration was an important factor in the emergence of major scholars and scientists such as Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Biruni, and Al-Ghazali (Azra, 2012). The success of Islamic educational institutions in the classical period was supported by government patronage, a strong waqf system, academic freedom, and a high level of literacy within Muslim society. The combination of these factors made the Muslim world a global center of knowledge for several centuries and enabled it to make major contributions to the development of world civilization (Nata, 2016b).

4.2. Transformation of Islamic Educational Institutions in the Medieval Period

Beginning in the thirteenth century CE, Islamic educational institutions underwent significant changes. This period was marked by the weakening political authority of several Muslim dynasties and by internal and external conflicts that affected the stability of the Muslim world. One event with a major impact on Islamic education was the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258 CE. The event resulted in the destruction of numerous centers of learning, libraries, and educational institutions that had symbolized Islamic intellectual

achievement for centuries (Hodgson, 1974a). Nevertheless, political decline did not completely halt the development of Islamic education. Scholarly activities continued through educational institutions across Egypt, Syria, North Africa, Andalusia, and Central Asia. The madrasa remained the principal institution for Islamic education, although its orientation increasingly emphasized religious disciplines such as jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, and Sufism. This shift was influenced by the need of Muslim communities to preserve their Islamic identity amid political instability (Rosenthal, 2007).

Waqf-based educational institutions also developed during this period and became an important foundation for the continuity of Islamic education. The waqf system enabled madrasas to secure relatively independent sources of funding so that educational activities could continue without complete dependence on the government. Waqf funds were used to finance buildings, libraries, student scholarships, and honoraria for scholars and educators. This financing model represented an institutional innovation that contributed substantially to the sustainability of Islamic education for centuries (Kahf, 1998). In addition to madrasas, zawiyahs, ribats, and khanqahs developed as educational centers associated with Sufi orders. These institutions functioned not only as places for learning religious knowledge but also as centers of spiritual development through Sufi education. Sufi scholars developed educational methods that emphasized a balance among mastery of knowledge, moral formation, and purification of the soul. This approach added a distinctive dimension to the history of Islamic education and broadened the function of educational institutions as instruments of character formation (al-Attas, 1993).

In the Indonesian archipelago, the development of Islamic education began to display characteristics different from those of the Middle East. The spread of Islam through trade routes from the thirteenth century onward gave rise to traditional educational institutions such as surau in Minangkabau, dayah in Aceh, and pesantren on the island of Java. Pesantren developed as educational institutions that integrated religious learning, moral formation, and community life. Their educational system employed bandongan, sorogan, and halaqah methods, positioning the kiai as both the principal transmitter of knowledge and a moral exemplar for santri (Dhofier, 2011). The existence of pesantren demonstrates the capacity of Islamic education to adapt to local social and cultural conditions without losing the substance of Islamic teachings. Such cultural acculturation was one factor that enabled Islamic educational institutions in the Indonesian archipelago to survive to the present day. Pesantren subsequently developed into one of Indonesia's largest forms of Islamic educational institution and made important contributions to education, da'wah, community empowerment, and the national struggle for independence (Azra, 2017). Historically, the medieval period was a transitional phase that demonstrated the ability of Islamic educational institutions to maintain their existence amid various political and social challenges. Although science and technology declined relative to the classical period, Islamic educational institutions continued to preserve intellectual traditions and Islamic literature and laid the groundwork for educational reform movements in the modern era.

4.3. Transformation of Islamic Educational Institutions in the Modern Era

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Muslim world encountered new challenges, including Western colonialism, scientific progress, the Industrial Revolution, and the modernization of education systems. These conditions encouraged the emergence of Islamic educational reform movements aimed at improving the quality of Islamic educational institutions so that they could compete with modern education systems. Reformers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida emphasized the importance of curriculum reform, strengthened rational inquiry, and the integration of religious and modern scientific knowledge (Adams, 1968). One of the most fundamental changes in the modern era was curriculum transformation. Whereas Islamic education had previously been more heavily oriented toward religious disciplines, modern madrasas began to introduce subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, foreign languages, economics, and technology. This integration was intended to produce graduates who possessed not only religious competence but also the ability to adapt to scientific developments and the needs of modern society (Nata, 2016a).

In Indonesia, the transformation of Islamic education occurred through the modernization of pesantren, the reform of madrasas, and the growth of Islamic higher education. After independence, the government gave greater attention to Islamic education through the establishment of a ministry responsible for madrasas and through the development of Islamic religious higher education. These reforms became stronger with the implementation of the national education system, which recognized the equivalence of madrasas and general schools (Daulay, 2019). Modernization also brought changes to educational management. Islamic educational institutions began to apply principles of good governance, strategic planning, school-based management, accreditation, quality assurance, and information technology in administration and learning. Educational digitalization, Learning Management Systems (LMS), online learning, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have become part of the transformation of Islamic education in the twenty-first century (Muhaimin, 2020). Nevertheless, Islamic educational institutions continue to face challenges such as disparities in quality across regions, limited facilities and infrastructure, uneven digital competence among educators, and the continuing need to develop curricula that are relevant to contemporary change. Therefore, the transformation of Islamic education requires not only institutional reform but also improvements in human resource quality, a stronger research culture, and collaboration with diverse stakeholders (Azra, 2019).

4.4. Historical Analysis of the Transformation of the Islamic Education System

Historical analysis indicates that the evolution of Islamic educational institutions has been a gradual process influenced by various internal and external factors. These changes reflect not only the development of educational institutions but also the capacity of Islamic civilization to respond to social, political, and economic dynamics as well as developments in knowledge. Therefore, the transformation of Islamic education should be understood as a continuous process of adaptation that does not abandon the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings (Langgulung, 2003). During the classical period, the Islamic education system was built on a paradigm of knowledge integration or unity of knowledge. Religious and rational sciences developed side by side in mosques, kuttabs, and madrasas. Scholars of the period mastered not only religious disciplines but also contributed to medicine, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and the social sciences. This educational model fostered a strong intellectual tradition and made the Muslim world a center for the development of knowledge for several centuries (Makdisi, 1981).

In the medieval period, however, the orientation of education changed. Political conflicts, wars, and the weakening of Muslim political authority reduced attention to the development of rational sciences. Educational institutions increasingly focused on preserving religious sciences as a means of maintaining Muslim identity. Although this helped sustain Islamic scholarly traditions, it also indirectly slowed scientific and technological development in the Muslim world compared with advances in Europe during the Renaissance (Hodgson, 1974b). In the modern era, Islamic education entered a more complex phase of transformation. Western colonialism introduced modern educational systems that emphasized administration, structured curricula, learning assessment, and mastery of modern knowledge. This situation encouraged Muslim reformers to reform Islamic educational institutions by integrating religious and general sciences, improving management systems, and strengthening graduate competencies so that students could compete in modern society (Rahman, 1982).

In Indonesia, this transformation can be seen in the transition from traditional to modern pesantren, the growth of madrasas that adopt the national curriculum, and the establishment of Islamic higher education institutions that develop interdisciplinary approaches. These changes demonstrate the capacity of Islamic education to adapt without losing its Islamic identity. Pesantren, for example, no longer teach only classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) but also develop vocational education, entrepreneurship, information technology, and digitally based learning (Dhofier, 2011). This institutional transformation has also been influenced by developments in information technology in the twenty-first century. The digitalization of learning, Learning Management Systems (LMS), digital libraries, virtual classrooms, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have begun to be implemented in various Islamic educational institutions. Technology is no longer viewed as a threat to

Islamic values but as an instrument for improving learning effectiveness, expanding access to education, and strengthening students' digital literacy (Muhaimin, 2021).

Nevertheless, the transformation of Islamic education continues to face several challenges. First, a quality gap remains between Islamic educational institutions in urban and rural areas. Second, educators' digital competence is uneven, which limits the optimal implementation of educational technology. Third, the integration of religious and general sciences in teaching practice still faces conceptual and practical constraints. In addition, globalization brings new challenges in the form of shifts in social values, culture, and the characteristics of younger generations, requiring Islamic educational institutions to pursue continuous innovation (Nata, 2022). Based on this historical analysis, the continued survival of Islamic educational institutions can be understood as closely related to their capacity to transform in accordance with the needs of each era. Fundamental Islamic values remain the primary foundation, while institutional structures, curricula, teaching methods, and management systems continue to be adjusted to remain relevant to societal developments. Thus, the transformation of Islamic education is a dynamic process that reflects a balance between continuity of tradition and modern innovation.

4.5. Research Novelty

This study contains several elements of novelty compared with previous research. First, rather than describing the history of Islamic education within only one particular period, this study comprehensively examines the evolution of Islamic educational institutions across the classical, medieval, and modern periods within a continuous historical framework. Second, the study emphasizes the transformation of the education system, including changes in institutions, curricula, teaching methods, financing systems, governance, and the use of digital technology. This approach provides a broader perspective than studies that address institutional history only descriptively. Third, this study links the historical development of Islamic education to contemporary challenges, particularly educational digitalization, knowledge integration, and the use of Artificial Intelligence in learning. Accordingly, the findings have not only historical value but also relevance for the development of Islamic education policy in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0. Theoretically, this study strengthens the historiography of Islamic education through an integrative historical approach. Practically, its findings are expected to serve as a reference for managers of Islamic educational institutions, academics, and policymakers in designing development strategies that enable Islamic education to adapt to global change without neglecting the fundamental values of Islamic teachings.

V. Conclusion

This study shows that the evolution of Islamic educational institutions has been a dynamic and continuous historical process influenced by social, political, economic, and cultural changes as well as developments in science and technology. Since the classical period, Islamic educational institutions have developed through *kuttabs*, mosques, and *madrasas* as centers for the transmission of knowledge that integrated religious and general sciences. During this period, Islamic education fostered a strong intellectual tradition and made major contributions to the development of world civilization. In the medieval period, Islamic educational institutions faced various challenges resulting from political conflicts, the Mongol invasion, and the weakening of Muslim political authority. Nevertheless, Islamic educational institutions were able to maintain their existence through the *waqf* system, *madrasas*, *pesantren*, *surau*, *dayah*, and Sufi-based educational institutions. This period demonstrates that the continuity of Islamic education depended not only on state support but also on the participation of communities and scholars in preserving Islamic intellectual traditions.

In the modern era, the transformation of Islamic education has become increasingly visible through curriculum reform, institutional modernization, the integration of religious and general sciences, the adoption of modern educational management systems, and the use of digital technology in learning. These changes

demonstrate that Islamic educational institutions are capable of adapting to changing times without abandoning the fundamental values of Islamic teachings as the primary foundation of education.

The historical analysis in this study shows that the transformation of the Islamic education system involves more than changes in institutional form; it is a process of adjustment oriented toward improving educational quality and relevance to societal needs. The continued survival of Islamic educational institutions is the result of their capacity to balance the preservation of Islamic intellectual traditions with the acceptance of modern educational innovation. Therefore, the future development of Islamic educational institutions should focus on strengthening knowledge integration, improving the quality of human resources, developing a research culture, optimizing the use of digital technology, and strengthening professional institutional governance. These measures are expected to enable Islamic education to function as an institution that excels not only in character and spiritual formation but also in competitiveness in responding to the global challenges of the twenty-first century.

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