



## Communication: The Essence of Educational Reform and Islamic Educational Institutions

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### Abstract

This article discusses the essence of Islamic education reform and Islamic educational institutions in the knowledge era. Islamic education reform is an imperative action in facing the challenges of globalization and the development of science and technology. The method used in this research is the documentation method, namely reviewing literature sources relevant to the topic studied. The results of the study indicate that professional educators in Islam are figures who master various disciplines while being able to transfer knowledge, internalize values, and implement good deeds. Islamic educational institutions including Islamic boarding schools play a strategic role in shaping the character of students with noble morals. Islamic education reform does not mean changing essential values such as monotheism, the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, morals, and worship, but rather updating methods, curriculum, and institutional management to be relevant to the needs of the times. Society's expectations of Islamic educational institutions are very high, namely that their graduates are not only intellectually intelligent but also have noble morals and are able to contribute to the progress of the nation and Islamic civilization.

## INTRODUCTION

The world is now entering the knowledge age (*knowledge era*), a phase of civilization in which knowledge, information, and technology become determining factors for economic and societal progress. This era began to develop in the late 20th century and continues into the 21st century, marked by rapid advances in information and communication technology that fundamentally change the way humans work, learn, and interact (Castells, 2010; Schwab, 2016). In this context, education plays a central role as the primary instrument for developing competent, creative, and character-based human resources.

Islamic education, as an integral part of Indonesia's national education system, faces significant challenges in this knowledge era. On the one hand, demands for curriculum modernization and relevance continue to increase; on the other, the purity of essential Islamic values derived from the Quran and the Prophet's Hadith must be maintained. Therefore, reform of Islamic education is a necessity—not to replace its normative foundation, but rather to update methods, approaches, and institutional management to meet the needs of the times (Wahib, 2021; Dacholfany, 2016).

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Islamic education reform in Indonesia is highly urgent, given the vast number of Islamic educational institutions from madrasas and Islamic boarding schools to Islamic universities spread throughout the archipelago. These institutions serve not only as venues for the transfer of knowledge but also as centers for character formation, the internalization of Islamic values, and the development of national civilization (Zulmuqin, 2020; Nata, 2012).

Some priority areas in Islamic education reform include: (1) revising and updating the curriculum to integrate Islamic studies with science, technology, and social sciences; (2) updating teaching methods to be more interactive, student-centered, and encourage critical thinking skills; (3) integrating technology into the learning process while still prioritizing Islamic values; and (4) developing the professionalism of educators (*teacher professionalism*) sustainably (Arianti et al., 2023; Zakir et al., 2022).

## METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a documentation method (*documentary research*). The documentation method is a data collection technique through the study of relevant written sources, including books, scientific journals, laws and regulations, and other official documents related to the topic being researched (Sugiyono, 2019; Arikunto, 2013). Compared with observation and interview methods, the documentation method has the advantage of data stability data sources do not change over time thus allowing for more reliable verification and replication.

The data sources in this study consist of two types: first, primary data sources, namely sources directly related to the problem under study, such as laws and regulations on national education and Islamic religious education; second, secondary data sources, in the form of supporting literature that strengthens the analysis, including the results of previous research, journal articles, and relevant scientific works. Data analysis was conducted descriptively-analytical, by presenting findings from documentary sources and then analyzing them critically within the framework of Islamic education reform.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Hopes and Criticisms of Islamic Religious Education

Islamic education in Indonesia has long borne the burden of high public expectations. Islamic educational institutions are expected to produce not only intellectually intelligent graduates but also those with noble morals and a strong Islamic personality. This public trust is evident in the high interest in quality Islamic educational institutions, at both the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Even as many public and private universities experience a decline in enrollment, private Islamic universities tend to remain resilient and in demand (Dacholfany, 2016; Wahib, 2021).

However, behind this belief, society also harbors very high expectations. They want the Islamic values studied and taught daily in Islamic educational institutions to be truly internalized in real-life behavior for both educators and students. Society does not tolerate a gap between the teachings conveyed and the behavior displayed (Irsad, 2020). In other words, the label "Islamic" on an educational institution must truly reflect Islamic values and ethics, not simply a formal identity.

Criticisms frequently leveled at Islamic educational institutions include the rise of violent and anarchic behavior on Islamic campuses, a low academic ethos, and the inability of graduates to resolve problems in ways that reflect Islamic morals

namely through dialogue, deliberation, and a polite approach. This phenomenon is ironic, considering that Islamic educational institutions should be at the forefront of realizing the noble values of Islam in real life (Nata, 2012; Muhaimin, 2004).

### **Development of Science, Technology, and Its Implications**

Islam and the development of science and technology are not inherently incompatible. History records that Islamic civilization was once a center of global scientific advancement, with significant contributions in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy (Azra, 2012). Islam's theological foundation encourages its followers to continually think, research, and develop knowledge, as emphasized in various verses of the Quran that encourage contemplation of the universe.

In the context of contemporary Islamic education, integrating technology into the learning process has become a key agenda for reform. Technology serves not only as a teaching aid but also as a vehicle for expanding access to useful sources of knowledge. However, technological integration must be carried out selectively and critically, while maintaining the filter of Islamic values. As emphasized by Mei et al. (2024), the use of technology in Islamic education must always be oriented towards strengthening faith and piety, not merely technical efficiency. Educators need to equip students with critical digital literacy skills so they can select correct information (*right*) from the wrong (*falsehood*).

The multidimensional crisis that once hit Indonesia encompassing economic, political, and security has negatively impacted the world of education, creating what Zamroni (2021) calls a "new balance in education." In this new balance, educational services can no longer be delivered through conventional means. New breakthroughs in thinking and acting are needed, making educational reform not merely an option but an imperative action (*imperative action*) which cannot be postponed.

### **The Meaning and Essence of Islamic Religious Education Reform**

Etymologically, the word 'reform' refers to a process of renewal or planned change without sacrificing deeply rooted fundamental values. In Arabic terminology, reform refers to two complementary words: *update* (update) and *islâh* (repair). *Tajdid* literally means renewal, and the perpetrator is called *innovator*. Since the beginning of its history, Islam has had a deep-rooted tradition of renewal, as whenever new problems were encountered, scholars quickly responded based on the fundamental doctrines of the Qur'an and Sunnah. The word *islâh* in the context of modern Islam refers to 'efforts for improvement' as well as 'reconciliation', as opposed to deviation (Al-Arna'ut, 2020; Nasution, 2003).

Islamic education reform has two basic characteristics: programmed and systemic. Programmed reform refers to updating the curriculum or program of an educational institution. Innovation in this context can be interpreted as an effort to improve and perfect it for the better, without abandoning the roots of Islamic scientific tradition (Dacholfany, 2016; Maksum, 2019). Meanwhile, systemic reform touches a broader level, encompassing educational policy, financing, institutional governance, and the relationships between various elements within the Islamic education ecosystem.

The urgent agenda for Islamic education reform encompasses the following: First, a comprehensive curriculum revision to accommodate developments in modern science without abandoning Islamic substance. Second, updating teaching methods to be more active, participatory, and competency-based. Third, improving the quality and professionalism of educators through continuous professional development. Fourth, strengthening Islamic education institutions and governance to make them more accountable, transparent, and efficient. Fifth, developing a holistic

evaluation and assessment system that measures not only cognitive abilities but also affective and psychomotor aspects (Abdillah & Fithriani, 2023; Mulyasa, 2013).

### **Islamic Educational Institutions: Contributions and Challenges**

The development of Islamic educational institutions is an integral part of the Islamic education reform agenda in Indonesia. Islamic educational institutions especially Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have made significant contributions to the advancement of Islamic education and civilization in the archipelago. As stated by Zulmuqin (2020), the success of Islamic education in Indonesia is determined by three basic elements: the pesantren as educational institutions, the kiai as educators, and *yellow book* as a curriculum or teaching material all three of which are like 'tali tigo sapilin' in Minang terms.

On the other hand, Islamic educational institutions also face various contemporary challenges. Among the biggest challenges are the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the workplace, the need for improved institutional management capacity, and the ability to adapt to developments in information technology. In the context of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Islamic educational institutions are required to meet national educational standards while maintaining their uniqueness and comparative advantages in developing Islamic character (Nasional & Blitar, 2003; Tilaar, 2006).

### **The Meaning and Essence of Islamic Religious Education**

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a much deeper meaning than simply transmitting religious knowledge. PAI is an education whose theories are based on the Qur'an and Al-Hadith, with a primary orientation toward developing a holistic personality integrating intellectual intelligence, emotional maturity, and spiritual devotion (Hendri et al., 2023; Muhaimin, 2004). Islamic education in this sense does not differentiate between religious knowledge and general knowledge, but rather views all knowledge as a manifestation of the majesty of Allah SWT, which must be mastered as part of devotion to Him. Literasi Digital Guru.

There are several things that are considered essential and cannot be changed in the reform of Islamic education, including: (1) Monotheism, as the foundation of faith that affirms the oneness of Allah SWT and must be the foundation of all aspects of a Muslim's life; (2) Al-Quran, as a guide to life that contains instructions, laws, and universal moral values; (3) Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as a concrete example in behavior and action; (4) noble character, as the highest goal of Islamic education that enables a person to live in harmony with others and their environment; and (5) worship, as the embodiment of human servitude to the Creator, which includes prayer, fasting, zakat, hajj, and other deeds (Nata, 2012; Uhbiyati, 2005).

A professional educator from an Islamic perspective is someone who not only has a deep understanding of their field of study, but is also able to integrate Islamic values into the learning process, be a role model in behavior, and be able to guide students to grow and develop holistically both in intelligence and creativity for the benefit of themselves and society (Mulyasa, 2013; Kurniadin & Machali, 2016). The development of educator professionalism must be carried out continuously through systematic training, supervision, and evaluation, as mandated by Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the studies presented, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, Islamic education reform is a non-negotiable imperative in facing the challenges of the knowledge and globalization era. This reform is programmatic and

systemic, encompassing curriculum updates, teaching methods, technology integration, educator professionalism, and institutional governance. Second, reforming Islamic education does not mean abandoning its essential values. Tawhid (monotheism), the Quran, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), morals, and worship are unchangeable pillars. What needs to be reformed are the delivery methods, supporting curriculum, and institutional management to make them more relevant and responsive to the needs of students and society. Third, Islamic educational institutions especially Islamic boarding schools play an irreplaceable, strategic role in shaping the nation's character. Developing institutions that integrate classical Islamic scholarly traditions with the demands of modernity is an urgent agenda that requires the support of all parties, including the government, society, and families. Fourth, the practical application of Islamic values in real life is the primary measure of the success of Islamic education. Students need to be given the opportunity to implement what they have learned through internships, community service, and activities that provide real-world experience. In this way, Islamic education can truly fulfill society's expectations: producing a generation that is not only intellectually superior but also morally noble and ready to contribute to the advancement of the nation and Islamic civilization.

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