

Socio-Historical Dynamics of Islamic Education in the Indonesian Archipelago: The Institutional Evolution of Pesantren and Madrasah

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ABSTRACT

The historical development of Islamic education in the Indonesian archipelago reflects a dynamic process of institutional transformation shaped by socio-cultural, religious, and political changes. Despite numerous studies on pesantren and madrasah, limited attention has been given to examining their evolution within a comprehensive socio-historical framework. This study aims to analyze the evolution of Islamic educational institutions in the archipelago, focusing specifically on the historical development and institutional transformation of pesantren and madrasah in Indonesia. This research employs a qualitative method based on a literature review. Data were collected from various scholarly sources, including books, academic journals, historical documents, and relevant articles. The collected data were analyzed descriptively to trace patterns of continuity and change in Islamic educational institutions over time. The findings reveal that Islamic education in the archipelago evolved gradually from informal religious instruction conducted in homes and mosques to more structured institutions such as pesantren, dayah, surau, meunasah, and later madrasah. Pesantren emerged as early centers of Islamic learning characterized by non-classical systems centered on Kiai, students (santri), dormitories, and religious texts. The establishment of madrasah marked a significant phase of modernization by introducing a more formal and systematic educational structure without displacing pesantren. Instead, both institutions developed in complementary ways and played a crucial role in strengthening Islamic education in Indonesia. This research suggests that understanding the historical continuity and adaptability of these institutions is essential to developing responsive, contextually grounded Islamic education policies in contemporary Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

The socio-historical development of Islamic education in the Indonesian archipelago represents one of the most enduring and influential educational phenomena in Southeast Asia (Bruinessen, 1995; Dhofier, 2011). With more than 39,000 pesantren officially recorded in Indonesia and millions of santri enrolled in Islamic educational institutions, pesantren and madrasah continue to shape religious authority, social mobility, and national identity (Abas et al., 2025; Humaidi et al., 2024). Qualitatively, these institutions have functioned not only as centers of religious transmission but also as agents of social transformation, political resistance, and cultural preservation (Arif et al., 2024; Hamdanah, Baharun, et al., 2025). However, their evolution has never been linear; rather, it reflects a dynamic interaction between local traditions, colonial intervention, state regulation, and global Islamic reform movements (Hamdanah, Mardia, et al., 2025; Rohani et al., 2025). This complexity makes the socio-historical study of Islamic educational institutions both crucial and timely.

Existing scholarship has examined pesantren primarily as traditional religious institutions emphasizing classical kitab studies and Kiai-centered authority (e.g., studies by Zamakhsari Dhofier and Martin van Bruinessen) (Bruinessen, 1995). Other scholars have focused on the modernization of madrasah within the framework of national education policy, particularly after the enactment of the National Education System Law (Amalia et al., 2024; Haddade et al., 2024). Meanwhile, research on surau in Minangkabau or dayah in Aceh often treats them as regionally isolated phenomena (Ar et al., 2025; Gojali et al., 2024; W et al., 2024). Although these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to analyze pesantren and madrasah separately, or focus on specific periods such as the colonial or post-independence era (Hafidz, 2021; Humaidy et al., 2025). What remains underexplored is a comprehensive socio-historical analysis that traces the institutional continuity, transformation, and mutual complementarity of pesantren and madrasah across different historical phases.

This paper aims to fill this gap by reconstructing the socio-historical dynamics of Islamic educational institutions in the Indonesian archipelago, focusing on the institutional evolution of pesantren and madrasah from early informal religious learning to contemporary formalized systems. Unlike previous studies that emphasize either traditionalism or modernization, this research seeks to demonstrate how both institutions developed through processes of adaptation, negotiation, and institutional hybridization. The focus of this paper is therefore to provide an integrated historical narrative that connects pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence developments within a single analytical framework.

This study argues that the evolution of Islamic education in the archipelago reflects not a process of replacement where madrasah displaced pesantren but rather a pattern of institutional complementarity and adaptive continuity. The hypothesis tested in this paper is that pesantren and madrasah evolved through socio-historical negotiation with political power and societal change, enabling them to survive and remain relevant within Indonesia's modern educational landscape. By situating this argument within existing scholarship, this study clarifies its position as a contribution that bridges fragmented historical analyses into a cohesive socio-historical interpretation.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design using a systematic library research approach. To ensure methodological rigor, the data collection and selection process follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which provides a transparent and structured procedure for identifying, screening, and selecting relevant literature.

The first stage (identification) involved searching academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journals, and national journal repositories using keywords including Islamic education in Indonesia, pesantren history, madrasah development, and Islamic educational institutions in the archipelago. The search was limited to scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, historical documents, and authoritative reports relevant to the topic.

The second stage (screening) consisted of removing duplicate records and excluding sources that were not directly related to the socio-historical development of pesantren and madrasah. The third stage (eligibility) involved assessing the full texts of selected sources to determine their relevance, credibility, historical scope, and theoretical contribution. Only sources that substantially discussed institutional transformation, historical evolution, or socio-educational dynamics were included in the final analysis.

In the final stage (inclusion), selected literature was analyzed qualitatively using descriptive-analytical techniques. Data were categorized chronologically and thematically to trace patterns of continuity, change, and institutional adaptation across different historical periods. This qualitative analysis enabled a comprehensive reconstruction of the socio-historical dynamics of Islamic educational institutions in the Indonesian archipelago. By adopting the PRISMA framework, this study enhances transparency, replicability, and systematic rigor in conducting literature-based research.

Table 2. Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of Studies on Islamic Education Development

No	Author(s) & Year	Research Focus	Method/Approach	Key Findings	Research Gap
1	Mas'ud et al. (2019)	Historical development of Islamic educational institutions	Historical analysis	Islamic education evolved from mosque-based learning to institutional forms such as pesantren and madrasah	Limited discussion on socio-political dynamics shaping institutional transformation
2	Baiza (2018)	Diversity of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia	Conceptual and historical review	Islamic education developed into multiple institutional forms including pesantren, surau, and madrasah	Does not explore the historical interaction between these institutions and state policies
3	Albantani (2017)	Emergence of modern madrasah	Historical study	Madrasah development was influenced by Islamic reform movements led by major scholars	Limited analysis of how colonial and political contexts shaped madrasah formation
4	Zaman & Hefner (2010)	Political context of Islamic education	Socio-political analysis	Colonial authorities attempted to control Islamic education to prevent resistance	Focuses mainly on political control, with less attention to

5	Mukhlis (2017)	Reform movements in Islamic education	Historical approach	Islamic reform movements encouraged integration of modern subjects into religious education	institutional adaptation strategies Lacks broader socio-historical perspective on institutional evolution
6	Hasan et al. (2024)	Madrasah within the national education system	Policy analysis	Madrasah gained formal recognition through integration into national education policy	Limited historical explanation of how this institutional integration evolved
7	Bruinessen (1995)	Origins and development of pesantren	Anthropological-historical	Pesantren emerged as centers of Islamic learning linked to the spread of Islam in the archipelago	Focuses on pesantren origins but does not compare with other institutional forms
8	Khasanah et al. (2022)	Indigenous roots of pesantren	Historical-cultural analysis	Pesantren may have adapted earlier educational traditions from Hindu-Buddhist institutions	Limited discussion on later institutional transformation
9	Salim et al. (2024)	Educational characteristics of pesantren	Educational analysis	Pesantren emphasize holistic education combining knowledge, character formation, and communal life	Focuses on educational practice rather than historical evolution
10	Baihaqi et al. (2023)	Typology of pesantren	Institutional classification	Pesantren are categorized into salafi (traditional) and khalafi (modern) institutions	Does not explain historical processes leading to this institutional diversification

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

History of Islamic Education in Indonesia

The history of Islamic education in Indonesia began with the early arrival of Islam in the archipelago, which occurred through trade interactions with merchants from Arabia, Persia, and India (Azra, 2006). Through this process, Islamic education grew and developed as an integral part of community life—not only as a religion, but also as a foundation for moral values, ethics, and culture (Mohamed, 2014; Sahin, 2018) (Ya'kub & Rama, 2024).

Sumatra was the first island in Indonesia to be visited by Islam. In Java, Islam first entered the region of Leran, Gresik. With the spread of Islam in Sumatra and Java, Islamic educational institutions were eventually established to disseminate Islamic values to society. Early institutions included mosques or langgar (small prayer houses), pesantren, meunasah, rangkang and dayah in Aceh, and surau in Minangkabau (Khasanah et al., 2022; Steenbrink, 1990).

Islamic kingdoms that later developed into centers of political power in Indonesia had a significant impact on the process of Islamization and the development of Islamic education. These kingdoms functioned as instruments for accelerating the spread of Islam throughout the archipelago. With the emergence of Islamic political authority and strong governance structures, education received greater attention and institutional support (Miftahuddin et al., 2024).

The Evolution of the Islamic Education System in the Indonesian Archipelago

In its development, Islamic education in Indonesia has been marked by the gradual emergence of various educational institutions, ranging from very simple forms to more modern and comprehensive systems. In the early period of Islam’s growth in Indonesia, the mosque functioned as the sole center of community activities, including education. Educational activities conducted in mosques were relatively simple at that time and were regarded as the primary means of nurturing a better Islamic society. However, as time progressed, mosques were no longer able to accommodate the increasing number of people seeking education due to limitations of space and time. Consequently, gradual institutional development took place, leading to the establishment of specialized institutions aimed at providing continuous Islamic education (Mas’ud et al., 2019). From this process emerged various institutional forms such as pesantren, dayah, surau, madrasah, and others, each possessing its own distinctive characteristics (Baiza, 2018).

Overall, the historical development of Islamic education in Indonesia reflects complex social, political, and cultural dynamics. From the era of Islamic kingdoms to the modern period, Islamic education has played a significant role in shaping the identity and character of the Indonesian nation (M Said et al., 2014).

The History and Development of Madrasah in the Indonesian Archipelago

Madrasah in Indonesia is not originally an indigenous institution. The term *madrasah* itself derives from Arabic, meaning “school,” and was later adopted into the Indonesian language. A madrasah is a formal educational institution similar to a general school; however, it places greater emphasis on Islamic religious instruction. In essence, madrasah and pesantren share similar educational models and objectives. Madrasah can be seen as a development of the pesantren system, with the mission of educating the nation’s youth—particularly those who, at that time, were not inclined to reside in boarding schools during their studies. This is evident from the early initiators and founders of madrasah, most of whom were prominent ulama and founders of pesantren, including Syekh Amrullah Ahmad (1907) in Padang, KH Ahmad Dahlan (1912) in Yogyakarta, KH Wahab Hasbullah and KH Mansyur (1914), and KH Hasyim Asy’ari, who established Madrasah Salafiyah in Tebuireng, Jombang, in 1919 (Albantani, 2017).

Table 2. Historical Development of Islamic Education and Madrasah in Indonesia

Historical Phase	Time Period	Key Characteristics	Main Actors / Institutions	Educational Implications
Early Islamic Educational Phase	Early spread of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago	Mosques functioned as the central institutions for religious learning and community activities. Educational activities were informal	Muslim (ulama), scholars, mosque communities	Formation of early Islamic learning traditions and the emergence of religious communities centered on mosques.

		and focused primarily on Qur'anic learning and basic Islamic teachings.		
Institutional Diversification Phase	Pre-20th century to early 20th century	Limitations of mosques as educational centers led to the emergence of specialized Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren, dayah, and surau. These institutions developed distinctive pedagogical traditions and residential learning systems.	Ulama and pesantren leaders	Institutionalization of Islamic education and development of boarding-based learning models.
Madrasah Emergence Phase	Early 20th century	Madrasah institutions emerged as a modernization of pesantren education, integrating structured curricula and classroom-based instruction while maintaining Islamic teachings.	Syekh Amrullah Ahmad (Padang), KH Ahmad Dahlan (Muhammadiyah), KH Wahab Hasbullah, KH Mansyur, KH Hasyim Asy'ari (Tebuireng)	Development of formal Islamic schooling that could accommodate students who did not reside in pesantren.
Organizational Expansion Phase	1910s–1930s	Islamic socio-religious organizations established numerous madrasah with various levels and institutional models.	Muhammadiyah, Al-Irsyad, Matlaul Anwar, Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah (Perti), Nahdlatul Ulama	Expansion of Islamic education networks and diversification of educational curricula and institutional structures.
Colonial Control Phase	Dutch colonial period	Colonial government implemented restrictive educational policies such as the Teacher Ordinance and regulations on "Wild Schools" to control Islamic educational institutions.	Dutch East Indies government	Islamic education became politicized and developed as a cultural resistance to colonial authority.
Institutional Transformation Phase	Early 20th century reform era	Islamic educational reform movements sought to modernize Islamic education by establishing structured schools such as Sekolah Adabiyah, Sekolah Madras, Sekolah Diniyah, and Madrasah Muhammadiyah.	Muslim reformists and Islamic intellectuals	Emergence of modern Islamic educational institutions combining religious and general knowledge.

Post-Independence Consolidation Phase	1945–1975	Establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (1946) to regulate and support Islamic education. Madrasah institutions strengthened their focus on Islamic learning.	Indonesian government, Ministry of Religious Affairs	Institutional consolidation and increased governmental support for madrasah education.
Standardization Phase	1975	The Joint Decree of Three Ministers (SKB Tiga Menteri) recognized madrasah as educational institutions equivalent to public schools.	Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Home Affairs	Standardization of madrasah education and greater integration with the national education system.
National Education System Integration Phase	Post-1989	After the National Education System Law (No. 2/1989), madrasah became formally integrated into the national education structure with equivalent levels (MI, MTs, MA, MAK).	Indonesian government	Madrasah recognized as formal schools with Islamic characteristics, combining national curriculum with Islamic education.

Islamic organizations engaged in education established numerous madrasah and general schools under various names, types, and levels. For example: (1) Muhammadiyah (1912) established Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Tsanawiyah, Muallimin/Mu'allimat, Muballighin/Muballighat, and Madrasah Diniyah. (2) Al-Irsyad (1913) founded Madrasah Awaliyah, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Madrasah Tahiziyah, Muallimin, and Tahassis. (2) Matlaul Anwar in Menes, Banten, established Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Tsanawiyah, Aliyah, and Diniyah. (3) Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah (Perti) (1928) founded institutions such as Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah, Madrasah Awaliyah, Tsanawiyah, and Kuliya Syariah. (5) Nahdlatul Ulama (1926) established Madrasah Awaliyah, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Tsanawiyah, Muallimin Wustha, and Muallimin Ulya (M.A, 2019).

The growth of madrasah in the history of Islamic education in Indonesia began in the early twentieth century as a response to Dutch colonial educational policies. The policies of the Dutch East Indies government toward Islamic education were generally restrictive, as colonial authorities feared that educated Muslims might develop militancy that could threaten colonial stability (Zaman & Hefner, 2010). For the colonial government, education was not merely pedagogical and cultural but also political.

One significant policy implemented by the Dutch East Indies government to supervise Islamic educational institutions was the issuance of the "Teacher Ordinance" and regulations concerning "Wild Schools" (private or non-government schools). These policies required religious teachers to obtain official permits from the government. Even qualified religious scholars were prohibited from teaching in educational institutions without government authorization. The Teacher Ordinance was essentially political in nature, intended to suppress religious education so that it would not become a catalyst for popular resistance against

colonial rule (Rury & Tamura, 2019). After Indonesia gained independence, the development of madrasah can be categorized into four major phases:

The Institutional Transformation Phase: Islamic education, which initially took place in homes, musholla (small prayer houses), mosques, and pesantren in the form of basic Qur'anic recitation, gradually evolved. This development included formal changes in institutional structure, curriculum (teaching materials), instructional methods, and organizational systems, leading to the emergence of a new educational form known as *madrasah*. Two major factors underlay the growth of madrasah: a) The Islamic revival movement in Indonesia in the early twentieth century, driven by the desire to return to the spirit of the Qur'an and Sunnah, to foster nationalism against colonialism, to strengthen socio-cultural and political movements, and to reform Islamic education. b) Islamic education's response to Dutch colonial educational policies. Beginning with the 3G slogan (*Glory, Gold, and Gospel*), the Dutch established Christian schools across various regions of Indonesia. In the early twentieth century, under Governor-General Van Heutsz, the education system was expanded and access to traditional schools was opened to the public. This development inspired Muslim intellectuals to advance Islamic education by founding institutions such as Sekolah Adabiyah (1907), Sekolah Madras (1910), Sekolah Diniyah (1915), Madrasah Muhammadiyah (1918), and Sekolah Arab (1918) (Mukhlis, 2017).

The Post-Independence Consolidation Phase (1945–1975): From independence until 1975, religious schools focused more intensively on deepening Islamic knowledge. On January 3, 1946, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was established to manage religious matters in Indonesia, including Islamic education, particularly madrasah.

The Standardization Phase (1975): Following the issuance of the Joint Decree of Three Ministers (SKB) on March 24, 1975, madrasah were formally defined as educational institutions equivalent to general schools, although their management remained under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Nevertheless, differences persisted in curriculum allocation, instructional time, teaching personnel, and facilities.

The National Education System Integration Phase (Post-1989): After the enactment of the National Education System Law (Law No. 2 of 1989), Islamic schools were formally recognized as schools with Islamic characteristics. Madrasah became structurally equivalent to public schools in terms of grade levels and time allocation: SD = MI, SMP = MTs, SMA = MA, and SMK = MAK. Schools with Islamic characteristics were defined as institutions that adopt the national curriculum while adding Islamic religious subjects and fostering an Islamic educational environment (Hasan et al., 2024).

As stated in the 1994 Madrasah Curriculum, a madrasah is defined as a school characterized by Islamic religious identity. These characteristics are reflected in: (1) Islamic religious subjects derived from Islamic education, namely Qur'an-Hadith, Aqidah-Akhlak (Islamic creed and ethics), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Islamic Cultural History, and Arabic; and (2) a religious atmosphere, including a pesantren-like environment, the availability of worship facilities, the use of religious approaches in delivering subject matter whenever possible, and the requirement that teachers be Muslim and possess noble character. In addition, teaching staff must meet the professional qualifications stipulated by prevailing regulations (Juliana et al., 2026).

Currently, the status of madrasah can be considered equal to that of general schools in terms of content, process, management, and evaluation, as regulated by Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005 concerning National Education Standards and Ministerial

Regulations No. 22, 23, and 24 of 2016, which govern the forms and types of formal education in Indonesia—from basic education to higher education—including both general and Islamic schools (Amalia et al., 2025).

In the contemporary era, madrasah frequently become a topic of public discourse due to their growing credibility and modern capacity. Didik Juhaedi notes that an American anthropologist who chaired the Association for Middle East and North Africa Studies expressed admiration for the Indonesian government's policy synergy in sustaining madrasah by bridging Islamic ideology with Pancasila through the Constitution as Indonesia's common platform (Fernando & Zumratun, 2025).

The existence of madrasah within the educational system is expected to help Muslim communities develop integrally—avoiding split personality—by fostering broad knowledge, noble character, and the balanced integration of human potentials (IQ, SQ, and EQ). At least five roles can be developed by madrasah to achieve these objectives: 1) as an alternative educational choice for Muslims; 2) as a moral bulwark amid contemporary moral decline 3) a 4) center for the formation of *akhlaqul karimah* (noble character); 5) as a preserver of Islamic religious traditions; and 6) as a medium for the socialization of Islamic values.

The History and Development of Pesantren in the Indonesian Archipelago

Pesantren, commonly known as *pondok pesantren*, is derived from the Arabic word *funduq*, meaning lodging or inn, while *pesantren* refers to a non-classical Islamic educational institution in which students are provided with accommodation or dormitories (*pondok*).

It is often stated that the first pesantren was established by one of the Wali Songo, namely Shaykh Maulana Malik Ibrahim. This pesantren holds significant historical importance in the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. Shaykh Maulana Malik Ibrahim was a prominent scholar who played a major role in the spread of Islam in Java in the fourteenth century. The pesantren he founded functioned not only as a center for Islamic religious learning but also as a place for the development of knowledge, arts, and culture. His initiative laid the foundation for the pesantren tradition that continues to flourish in Indonesia, serving as a center of religious and cultural learning that plays a crucial role in shaping the intellectual and moral character of Indonesian Muslims (Bruinessen, 1995).

From a historical perspective, *pondok pesantren* is regarded as one of the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. In line with social dynamics, its function has expanded and diversified, although its core mission remains unchanged. The establishment of a pesantren generally stemmed from the community's recognition of a Kiai (Islamic scholar) known for deep knowledge and noble character. People from surrounding and distant regions would come to study under the Kiai, eventually building residences around his home, which gradually formed a pesantren community.

Table 3. Characteristics and Development of Pesantren in Indonesia

Aspect	Description
Origin and Terminology	The term <i>pesantren</i> is derived from the Arabic word <i>funduq</i> meaning lodging or inn, referring to an Islamic educational institution where students (<i>santri</i>) live in dormitories (<i>pondok</i>) while studying religious knowledge.
Historical Foundation	Pesantren is considered one of the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Historically, it is often associated with Shaykh Maulana Malik Ibrahim, one of the Wali Songo, who played a significant role in spreading Islam in Java.

Indigenous Educational Roots	Some scholars argue that pesantren evolved from earlier indigenous educational institutions such as <i>pawiyatan</i> , where teachers (<i>Ki Ajar</i>) and students (<i>cantrik</i>) lived and studied together in a communal environment.
Institutional Formation	Pesantren generally developed around a respected Kiai (Islamic scholar). Communities gathered to study under the Kiai and gradually formed residential learning communities.
Educational Characteristics	Education in pesantren emphasizes Islamic knowledge, character formation, moral discipline, and the study of classical Islamic texts (<i>kitab kuning</i>) through various stages of learning.
Educational Functions	Pesantren serves two main functions: as an institution of Islamic education and as a center for da'wah (Islamic propagation) and character formation within society.
Learning System	Instruction traditionally involves classical texts studied through traditional methods such as <i>sorogan</i> and <i>bandongan</i> , supported by communal living that fosters discipline, solidarity, and moral development.
Typology of Pesantren	Pesantren can generally be classified into two categories: salafi (traditional) , focusing on classical Islamic texts, and khalafi (modern) , integrating general education and modern educational systems.
Institutional Variations	Modern pesantren may vary in structure: simple institutions centered on a mosque and Kiai, pesantren with dormitories, classroom-based pesantren similar to madrasah, and pesantren with modern educational facilities.
Educational Outcomes	Pesantren education aims to produce Islamic scholars (<i>ulama</i>), transmit Islamic knowledge, preserve Islamic traditions, and prepare graduates capable of contributing to society.

Another perspective suggests that long before Islam arrived in Indonesia, institutions similar to pesantren had already existed. These institutions were reportedly used to teach Hindu religious doctrines and to train cadres for the propagation of Hinduism. Some scholars argue that pesantren did not originate solely from Islamic tradition, as similar institutions are not found in other Muslim-majority countries, but can be observed in Hindu-Buddhist societies such as India, Myanmar, and Thailand. This view is reinforced by Nurcholish Madjid, who argued that historically, pesantren-like institutions were widely known in pre-Islamic Indonesian society. Islam later adopted and Islamized these existing structures. In other words, pesantren is not only synonymous with Islamic identity but also represents an indigenous Indonesian institution rooted in the Hindu-Buddhist period (Khasanah et al., 2022).

Using the analogy of the pesantren model, it is evident that Islam developed in Indonesia—particularly in Java—by adapting earlier educational models such as *pawiyatan*. This pre-Islamic educational model was later transformed into an Islamic educational system. Pesantren carries a dual mission in preparing its graduates: (1) to form Indonesian Muslims who are faithful and devoted to Allah, and (2) to produce graduates who are responsive to the demands of the times, particularly in relation to developments in science and communication technology. Consistently, pesantren has played a significant role in improving human resources—not only in mastering knowledge and technology but also in cultivating character, moral attitudes, and the internalization and practice of religious teachings (Jasminto & Rofi'ah, 2025).

Pesantren, as one of the Islamic educational institutions, holds a strategic role that cannot be underestimated. Its important position is reflected in its contribution not only as an

educational institution that provides a learning environment, but also as a center for shaping character and instilling Islamic values within education. The strategic role of pesantren in Indonesian society remains a reference point for Muslims, as reflected in the belief that deepening religious knowledge can best be achieved through the experience of living and studying in a pesantren. Moreover, pesantren education has proven capable of delivering integrative and comprehensive learning by uniting knowledge and morality for its students (santri). Another distinctive feature is that pesantren does not impose age restrictions on students, embracing the concept of lifelong education that takes place throughout the day (R & Thohir, 2024; Salim et al., 2024). Education in pesantren also emphasizes honesty, sincerity, and good character as integral components of the learning process. Brotherhood is a defining characteristic of santri life, evident in their communal living arrangements, where many students share one room and dine together with simple meals—traditions that strengthen solidarity among them.

Historical accounts of education in Java reveal that prior to the arrival of Islam, an ancient Javanese educational institution known as *pawiyatan* already existed with practices similar to pesantren. Pawiyatan involved a *Ki Ajar* as teacher and *cantrik* as students, who lived together in a single complex where teaching and learning occurred. Through this analogy, it can be concluded that pesantren has deep roots dating back to the early arrival of Islam in Indonesia, particularly in Java (Utama & Salim, 2024).

Education in pesantren fundamentally focuses on teaching religious knowledge and character formation. Instruction centers on Islamic values, and to achieve certain intellectual levels, students study classical Islamic texts grouped into beginner, intermediate, and advanced stages. Mahmud Yunus categorized pesantren education into four levels: elementary, intermediate, advanced, and *takhassus* (specialization) (Abas et al., 2025).

Essentially, pesantren serves two primary functions: as an institution of da'wah (Islamic propagation) and as an educational institution. Despite the passage of time and social change, these core functions have remained intact, continuing even after Indonesia's independence. Although historically pesantren tended to be relatively closed and less nationally recognized, Indonesian leaders in 1935–1936 discussed pesantren as a potential model for national education, reflecting appreciation for its cultural and educational values.

In general, pesantren can be classified into two major categories: *salafi* and *khalafi*.

- a) **Salafi pesantren** maintain classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) as the primary teaching material, using traditional instructional methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*, often with Javanese as the translation language. These are typically referred to as traditional pesantren.
- b) **Khalafi pesantren** incorporate general (non-religious) subjects alongside religious studies and are often referred to as modern pesantren. They may include: 1) Type A: very simple pesantren, consisting only of a mosque and a Kiai; 2) Type B: pesantren with dormitories for all students; 3) Type C: pesantren implementing a classical (classroom-based) teaching system similar to other madrasah; 4) Type D: pesantren equipped with more modern facilities and infrastructure (Baihaqi et al., 2023).

In its subsequent evolution, pesantren has undergone dynamic transformation from traditional to more modern forms. Particularly after Indonesia's independence, many pesantren adapted to contemporary developments, although some have remained conservative (Hadiyanto et al., 2022). In the current era of modernization, pesantren faces the challenge of maintaining its relevance. Nurcholish Madjid argued that pesantren must meet the future needs of its students in line with societal change by providing adequate general education and practical skills. The availability of academic specializations aligned with students' individual

potentials is considered essential. According to Madjid, the ultimate goal of pesantren education is to cultivate individuals with genuine Islamic religious consciousness (Rury & Tamura, 2019).

According to Ariza (2023), there are three essential outcomes of pesantren education: producing ulama (Islamic scholars), transmitting Islamic knowledge, and preserving Islamic traditions. The pesantren curriculum, which is based primarily on classical Arabic texts written by earlier scholars, combined with the practice of religious knowledge and the maintenance of Islamic traditions, shapes students into future religious scholars. Upon completing their studies, santri are expected to disseminate Islamic teachings within society (Azra, 2006).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the development of Islamic education in the Indonesian archipelago—particularly the institutional evolution of pesantren and madrasah—is deeply shaped by complex socio-historical dynamics involving religious, political, and cultural interactions. The findings demonstrate that Islamic educational institutions did not evolve linearly but rather through adaptive transformations in response to changing contexts, including the influence of Islamic kingdoms, colonial interventions, reform movements, and state educational policies. These dynamics indicate that pesantren and madrasah have functioned not only as institutions for religious transmission but also as agents of social transformation, cultural preservation, and the formation of national identity. The study shows that the institutional resilience and adaptability of Islamic education have played a greater role in shaping Indonesian educational and social landscapes than previously assumed.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes to the existing body of scholarship by providing a socio-historical interpretation of the institutional evolution of Islamic education in Indonesia. It reinforces earlier studies on the role of pesantren and madrasah while also challenging simplified narratives that view these institutions merely as traditional or static educational systems. Instead, the study highlights their dynamic interaction with broader socio-political structures and introduces a more integrated perspective that connects historical transformation with institutional adaptation. This contribution enriches scholarly discussions on Islamic education, particularly in understanding how religious educational institutions negotiate modernity and state structures.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The analysis primarily relies on historical and conceptual sources focusing on particular institutional trajectories, which may limit the generalization of findings across the diverse contexts of Islamic education in Indonesia. Additionally, variations related to regional differences, institutional models, and socio-demographic factors were not explored in depth. Future research is therefore recommended to employ broader empirical data and comparative approaches in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the transformation and contemporary challenges of Islamic educational institutions.

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