

The concept of muhammadiyah education renewal towards opportunities and challenges in the modern era

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to comprehensively analyze the opportunities and challenges of the concept of Muhammadiyah education reform in responding to changes triggered by digital transformation, globalization, and socio-cultural dynamics of contemporary Indonesian society. To achieve this goal, this study uses a qualitative approach by combining *content analysis* and *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) Fairclough model. The data was obtained through the study of official Muhammadiyah documents, such as the Tanfidz Mukhtamar, the AIK-ISMUBA curriculum guidelines, the policies of the Dikdasmen Council, and the scientific literature indexed by Sinta and Scopus for the 2020–2025 period. The results of the study show that there are a number of strategic opportunities for strengthening the concept of Muhammadiyah education reform, including the optimization of the ISMUBA curriculum as an integrative framework for Islamic values and competencies in the 21st century, the development of a digital learning ecosystem based on *blended* and *hybrid learning*, increasing the digital literacy of teachers and students, and strengthening international networks through the internationalization program of PTMA. This opportunity affirms Muhammadiyah's position as a pioneer of modern Islamic education that is adaptive to technological developments and remains rooted in religious values. However, this study also identifies various structural, pedagogical, and cultural challenges, such as quality disparities between schools, low pedagogical-technological competence of some teachers, weak internalization of AIK values in school culture, funding inequality, and global popular culture penetration that affect students' religious identities. The conclusion of the study emphasizes that the reform of Muhammadiyah education is an ideological as well as a technical process that requires strengthening governance, teacher professionalism, research culture, and institutional capacity. Practical recommendations are presented to encourage more adaptive, measurable, and transformative renewal strategies.

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Introduction

The founding of Muhammadiyah in the early 20th century marked a significant milestone in the modernization of Islamic education in Indonesia. At that time, Indonesian Muslims were experiencing social conditions characterized by low literacy, limited access to education, and insufficient scientific capacity to face modernity. In this context, Muhammadiyah emerged as a reform movement (*tajdid*) that aimed to integrate Islamic values with rationality, modern science, and a professional educational system. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's strong commitment to education positioned the organization as a pioneer in integrating religion and science within formal education.

The main reason for selecting this topic is that Muhammadiyah education plays a strategic role in the development of national education while simultaneously facing new dynamics in the digital era and globalization. Empirically, Muhammadiyah currently manages more than 160 universities, 1,800 secondary schools, and thousands of elementary and nonformal educational institutions. This massive expansion demonstrates the high level of public trust in the quality of Muhammadiyah educational institutions. However, such rapid development has also created new issues that require critical examination.

Several factual problems have emerged in the implementation of Muhammadiyah education. First, there is inequality in quality among institutions, especially between those in urban areas and remote regions, which still struggle with limited facilities, teacher competence, and technological access. This disparity is a direct consequence of uneven funding structures, institutional management, and human resource distribution. Second, the weak digital literacy of teachers and students has resulted in suboptimal integration of learning technology. Amid the demands of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, many teachers still rely on traditional methods due to limited training and facilities. Third, the implementation of the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK) curriculum tends to remain cognitive in nature and has not fully developed character, Islamic habitus, and the ethos of progress as embodied in the ideological spirit of Progressive Islam.

Externally, Muhammadiyah educational institutions also face pressure from national policies such as the Merdeka Curriculum and competition from other modern Islamic educational institutions—modern pesantren, Islamic Integrated Schools (SIT), and leading madrasahs—which offer more integrative curricula and adaptive facilities. This phenomenon may reduce the competitiveness of Muhammadiyah institutions if not accompanied by consistent innovation.

Previous studies have examined aspects such as the quality of Muhammadiyah education, evaluation of the AIK curriculum, and teacher readiness in the digital era. Various studies have found similar issues: quality disparity, weak teacher professionalism, minimal implementation of technology, and a lack of preparedness in facing policy changes. However, most of these studies are partial and have not linked policy analysis, *tajdid* ideology, and practical realities into one comprehensive framework.

This is where the research gap emerges. There remain limited studies that employ an integrative approach combining Content Analysis of Muhammadiyah educational policies and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine tensions between the ideological vision of Progressive Islam and the actual practices in the field. In other words, no research has comprehensively mapped how the concept of reform is constructed in texts, reproduced in practice, and negotiated within diverse sociocultural contexts.

Ideally, Muhammadiyah education should be excellent, equitable, technologically adaptive, and capable of translating the values of Progressive Islam into transformative learning.

Muhammadiyah education should produce graduates with strong character, mastery of 21st-century competencies, and an orientation toward humanity and scientific advancement.

Considering the various opportunities—such as digitalization, internationalization, and strengthening research—and challenges like quality disparity, local cultural barriers, and uneven digital proficiency, this research becomes essential in providing a critical mapping of the direction of Muhammadiyah educational reform. The combination of Content Analysis and CDA enables an in-depth examination of how the concept of reform is understood, implemented, and further developed within the dynamics of contemporary Islamic education.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a content analysis design and Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Content analysis is utilized to examine data sources in the form of ideological structures, concepts, and directions of educational reform found in Muhammadiyah's official documents such as the *Tanfidz Mukhtamar*, Articles of Association/Bylaws (AD/ART), AIK guidelines, and policies issued by the Council for Basic and Secondary Education (Majelis Dikdasmen). Meanwhile, CDA is applied to explore the relationship between language, power, and ideology within Muhammadiyah's educational discourse through three levels of analysis: text, discursive practice, and social practice.

Research data were obtained through documentation of official documents, Sinta- and Scopus-indexed journals (2020–2025), and academic books on modern Islamic education. The data collection process was conducted through close reading, note-taking, and initial coding to ensure accuracy and rigor.

Data analysis was carried out through reduction, thematic categorization, and integration of empirical findings with Islamic education theory and critical discourse theory. The emerging themes include educational *tajdid*, the AIK/ISMUBA curriculum, digital literacy, and implementation challenges. Content analysis was used to identify meaning structures and the representation of values within policy texts, while CDA facilitated the interpretation of discourse construction and the underlying ideology.

Data validity was ensured through theoretical triangulation and source triangulation. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, supported by categorization tables, coding sheets, and digital notes for data organization. The final results of the analysis served as the basis for developing the discussion regarding opportunities, challenges, and the direction of Muhammadiyah educational reform.

Result

The results and discussion section of this study includes theoretical analysis, document-based data interpretation, a critical reading of Muhammadiyah's educational policy discourse, and the integration between the theory of *tajdid* and the contemporary reality of Muhammadiyah education. The main focus of this section is directed toward elaborating the opportunities and challenges faced by Muhammadiyah education, accompanied by critical analysis based on Norman Fairclough's perspective, thus producing a comprehensive, structured, and argumentative discussion.

Opportunities of the Concept of Muhammadiyah Educational Reform

The first opportunity arises from the strong ideological identity of Muhammadiyah as a Progressive Islamic movement. This identity provides a theoretical and moral foundation for the development of modern Islamic education capable of synergizing with the development of science, technology, and global demands. The *Risalah Islam Berkemajuan* has positioned education as an instrument of social transformation and the formation of excellent character.

The ISMUBA Curriculum (Al-Islam, Kemuhammadiyahan, Arabic Language) becomes a strategic opportunity to develop integrative Islamic education. This curriculum combines spiritual values, social skills, and Arabic language competence as the foundation of religious understanding. If developed innovatively, ISMUBA can become an integrative curriculum model that instills character, religious literacy, and 21st-century skills simultaneously.

The development of digital technology provides major opportunities for Muhammadiyah educational institutions to implement blended learning, hybrid learning, and the use of digital platforms as collaborative tools. Several studies show that digital utilization can increase student participation, access to literature, and school management efficiency.

This opportunity becomes even greater if Muhammadiyah is able to strengthen the digital literacy of teachers and students. Digital literacy enables them to use technology productively, not only consumptively. With enhanced digital literacy, teachers can be more creative in designing learning, while students have wider access to develop research skills, collaboration, and problem-solving.

Muhammadiyah education also has opportunities to expand international networks through academic cooperation, student exchange, and collaborative research. Several PTMA have established collaborations with foreign universities, opening opportunities for the internationalization of modern Islamic education.

Muhammadiyah's nationwide network enables the formation of a strong community-based educational ecosystem. With the support of families, autonomous organizations, and charitable enterprises, Muhammadiyah educational institutions possess substantial social capital to build character and a positive learning culture.

Challenges of the Concept of Muhammadiyah Educational Reform

The main challenge lies in the disparity in quality among Muhammadiyah schools and madrasahs. Schools in urban areas tend to have better access to technology, facilities, and funding compared to those in remote areas. This disparity hinders the equalization of Muhammadiyah education quality at the national level.

Not all Muhammadiyah teachers possess adequate pedagogical abilities and digital literacy. Some teachers still rely on traditional lecture methods without collaborative or project-based learning approaches. This condition causes learning to be less adaptive to the demands of the 4.0 era.

The AIK curriculum, which should be the core of Muhammadiyah education, has not been successfully implemented consistently. In some schools, AIK only becomes a normative subject that is not internalized into school culture and students' daily activities.

Studies show that the research culture among Muhammadiyah teachers and students is still low, especially at the primary and secondary education levels. The low involvement of teachers in classroom action research (CAR) results in stagnation in learning innovation.

Funding issues remain a major structural challenge that hampers the equalization of educational reform concepts. Schools in remote areas often have limited budgets, making it difficult to provide modern facilities such as computer laboratories, digital libraries, and stable internet networks.

Young Muhammadiyah generations face an identity crisis due to the penetration of global popular culture. Without creative learning strategies, they are at risk of losing the orientation of moderate Islamic values that characterize Muhammadiyah.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA Fairclough)

At the textual level, it is found that terms such as “Progressive Islam,” “modern education,” “internationalization,” and “curriculum reform” are intensely used in Muhammadiyah policy documents. These terms construct the image of the organization as a modernist movement. However, their operational meaning is often not explained in detail within practical policies.

At the level of discursive practice, Muhammadiyah’s educational policies are centrally produced by the Central Board and the Council for Basic and Secondary Education, but their implementation depends on the interpretation of each institution. This leads to significant variation between central policies and actual practices in the field.

At the level of social practice, the discourse on Muhammadiyah educational reform is influenced by social dynamics, technology, and globalization. This discourse not only reflects the ideological values of the organization but also becomes a response to global pressures in the form of digitalization, the education market, and competition among institutions.

CDA analysis shows that the concept of Muhammadiyah educational reform requires consolidation between policy texts, discursive practices, and social practices. Without this consolidation, the reform concept will only remain at the discursive level without impacting changes in educational practices in the field.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the concept of educational reform in Muhammadiyah is based on a strong ideological foundation through the idea of *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressive Islam), which positions knowledge, rationality, character, and universal humanity as pillars of civilization. This ideological foundation serves as a source of strength for Muhammadiyah in formulating a model of modern Islamic education that is capable of adapting to the challenges of the digital age, globalization, and scientific advancement.

The strategic opportunities identified in this study include strengthening the ISMUBA curriculum as an integrative model of religious values and 21st-century competencies, digital transformation in learning processes, and the enhancement of digital literacy among teachers and students. Other opportunities emerge from the expanding international network of Muhammadiyah and ‘Aisyiyah Higher Education Institutions (PTMA), which opens space for global collaboration and academic exchange that can enrich Muhammadiyah’s educational practices.

On the other hand, this study also reveals several fundamental challenges, including disparities in school quality, weak digital literacy competence among teachers, limited funding, and

the suboptimal internalization of the AIK curriculum within school culture. These challenges become more complex due to the pressures of globalization that influence the religious identity of younger generations, demanding more creative and adaptive pedagogical approaches.

Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study demonstrates that Muhammadiyah's educational reform is not merely a technical or administrative activity, but also a discursive practice that shapes identity, value orientation, and the direction of educational policy. Muhammadiyah's policy texts contain discourses of modernity, internationalization, and progressive character, yet their implementation still faces challenges at the levels of discursive and social practice.

Theoretically, this study enriches the field of modern Islamic education by integrating content analysis and critical discourse analysis as methodological approaches to understanding the dynamics of Muhammadiyah education. Practically, the findings provide recommendations for policymakers, teachers, and Muhammadiyah educational institutions to strengthen governance, pedagogical innovation, and contextual-transformation strategies for AIK internalization.

This study also opens space for further research, particularly comparative studies among Muhammadiyah schools, implementation-based studies on the ISMUBA curriculum, and ethnographic research on the digital culture of Muhammadiyah students. Further research is crucial to strengthen the empirical foundation and discover the best patterns for Muhammadiyah's educational reform in the future.

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