

The Impact of Dutch Colonial Educational Policies on the Development and Transformation of Islamic Education in Indonesia

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Abstract

Kebijakan pendidikan kolonial Belanda turut memengaruhi perkembangan dan transformasi pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis dampak kebijakan tersebut serta bentuk respons dan transformasi lembaga pendidikan Islam terhadap sistem kolonial. Penelitian menggunakan metode kepustakaan dengan pendekatan kualitatif-historis melalui analisis deskriptif-interpretatif terhadap literatur sejarah, kebijakan pendidikan kolonial, dan kajian pendidikan Islam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa diferensiasi akses dan struktur pendidikan kolonial mendorong pendidikan Islam melakukan pembaruan kelembagaan, kurikulum, metode pembelajaran, serta strategi mempertahankan identitas keislaman. Transformasi tersebut berkontribusi terhadap pembentukan pendidikan Islam modern di Indonesia. Pengalaman kolonial menjadi faktor penting dalam membentuk dinamika perubahan dan kemampuan adaptasi pendidikan Islam terhadap perkembangan sosial dan sistem pendidikan modern.

Kata kunci: Kebijakan Pendidikan Kolonial; Pendidikan Islam; Kolonialisme Belanda; Transformasi Pendidikan; Indonesia.

Abstract

Dutch colonial education policies significantly influenced the development and transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia. This study aims to analyze the impact of these policies and the responses and transformations of Islamic educational institutions under the colonial system. The study employs a literature review with a qualitative-historical approach through descriptive-interpretive analysis of historical literature, colonial education policies, and studies on Islamic education. The findings show that disparities in educational access and institutional structures under colonial rule encouraged Islamic education to reform its institutions, curricula, teaching methods, and strategies for preserving Islamic identity. These transformations contributed to the development of modern Islamic education in Indonesia. The colonial experience became an important factor in shaping the dynamics of change and the capacity of Islamic education to adapt to social developments and the modernization of the educational system.

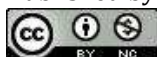
Keywords: Colonial Educational Policies; Islamic Education; Dutch Colonialism; Educational Transformation; Indonesia.

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Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia has a long historical trajectory rooted in pesantren, surau, madrasah, and other community-based Islamic learning institutions. Before the establishment of the modern national education system, these institutions served not only as centers for transmitting Islamic knowledge but also as important spaces for moral formation, religious identity, and social development. The arrival and expansion of Dutch colonial rule introduced a different educational structure that gradually influenced access to education, institutional organization, curriculum, and educational administration. Consequently, the development of Islamic education in Indonesia cannot be separated from the interaction between colonial educational policies and the capacity of Islamic educational institutions to maintain and develop their educational functions.¹ The central problem concerns the unequal educational structure established under Dutch colonial rule and its implications for Islamic education.

Colonial educational policies were not implemented within a neutral educational environment but were closely connected to the political and administrative interests of the colonial government. The establishment of Western-oriented schools created differentiated educational opportunities among population groups, while Islamic educational institutions faced various forms of regulation and supervision. These circumstances affected the institutional position, educational access, and development of Islamic education. Therefore, the historical problem is not merely how the Dutch colonial government developed its education system, but how its educational policies affected Islamic education and shaped the responses of Muslim scholars and institutions.² The effects of these policies generated a complex process of restriction, continuity, adaptation, and transformation within Islamic education.

¹ "Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia: Masa Kolonial Hingga Masa Reformasi," *EDUKASIA Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran* 2, no. 2 SE-Articles (2021): 181-97, <https://doi.org/10.62775/edukasia.v2i2.47>.

² Abdul Wahid, "Eksistensi Dan Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam Pada Masa Kolonial Belanda," *Jurnal Kewarganegaraan* 6, no. 3 (2022): 4613-23, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31316/jk.v6i3.3799>.

Pesantren and madrasah continued to preserve their religious functions and Islamic intellectual traditions while encountering changes in the educational environment introduced by colonial institutions. Islamic educational actors responded by developing institutional strategies, modifying curricula, adopting new teaching approaches, and maintaining Islamic identity. Thus, Islamic education should not be viewed solely as a passive recipient of colonial policies. Rather, its historical development demonstrates an active process of adaptation and institutional resilience in response to changing political and educational circumstances.³ Previous studies have examined the relationship between Dutch colonialism and Islamic education from several historical perspectives.

Cahyanti discusses the development of Islamic educational policies in Indonesia from the colonial period to the reform era and demonstrates that educational policies changed according to the political orientation of successive governments.⁴ Wahid examines the existence and policies of Islamic education during the Dutch colonial period and highlights the restrictive environment experienced by Islamic educational institutions.⁵ Similarly, Azizah et al., examine Dutch colonial political policies toward Islamic education and demonstrate that Islamic education had already developed before independence while facing different regulatory conditions from colonial government schools.⁶ These studies establish colonial educational policy as an important factor in understanding the historical development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

More recent studies have expanded the discussion by examining institutional responses and educational transformation. Hasibuan and Hasibuan demonstrate that Dutch colonial authorities implemented policies of regulation and supervision toward Islamic education, while Muslim communities developed responses to

³ Fatimah Azzahra et al., "Strategic Adaptation and Resilience: Islamic Education's Response to Colonialism in Indonesia," *HEUTAGOGIA: Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 1 SE-Articles (2025): 69–81, <https://doi.org/10.14421/hjie.2025.51-06>.

⁴ "Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia: Masa Kolonial Hingga Masa Reformasi."

⁵ Wahid, "Eksistensi Dan Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam Pada Masa Kolonial Belanda."

⁶ Muthia Azizah, Zulmuqim, and Muhammad Zalnur, "Islamic Education in The Archipelago Before Independence Case Study: Dutch Colonial Political Policy Towards Islamic Education In Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 SE-Articles (December 28, 2023): 65–72, <https://doi.org/10.31949/ijie.v1i2.7924>.

preserve and advance Islamic educational institutions.⁷ Romzi et al., further explain that the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia emerged through interactions among local traditions, religious authority, and state educational policies. More recent scholarship also emphasizes adaptation and resilience as important characteristics of Islamic educational institutions when confronting colonial structures.⁸ The existing literature therefore indicates that colonial educational policies had consequences beyond the formal establishment of Western-style schools.

They influenced the institutional position of Islamic education and contributed to changes in educational organization, curriculum, and pedagogical practices. At the same time, Islamic educational institutions developed various forms of adaptation to preserve their religious identity while responding to broader educational changes. This perspective suggests that the relationship between colonial policy and Islamic education should be understood as a dynamic interaction involving policy, institutional pressure, adaptation, and transformation rather than simply as a one-directional process of colonial control.⁹ Despite the growing literature on colonial education and Islamic education in Indonesia, an important research gap remains.

Existing studies frequently examine colonial educational policies, the marginalization of Islamic institutions, or the modernization of Islamic education as separate historical themes. Consequently, the relationship between colonial educational policies, their effects on the development of Islamic education, and the institutional transformation that emerged as a response to those policies has not always been examined as an integrated historical process. Furthermore, some studies emphasize the description of colonial regulations without sufficiently

⁷ "KEBIJAKAN POLITIK HINDIA BELANDA TERHADAP PENDIDIKAN ISLAM DI INDONESIA: SEBUAH TINJAUAN HISTORIS," *Ahsani Taqwim: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Keguruan* 1, no. 3 SE-Articles (October 13, 2024): 104–19, <https://doi.org/10.63424/ahsanitaqwim.v1i3.85>.

⁸ Abdul Hasis Daulay and Hariza Hasyim, "Educational Policies during the Colonial and Old Order Periods and Their Implications for Islamic Education in Indonesia Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University of Riau, Indonesia," *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 21, no. 2 (2026): 405–28, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24042/aladyan.v19i2.32052>.

⁹ Faisal Amir Toedien and Hariza Hasyim, "Marginalisasi Dan Inovasi: Jejak Kebijakan Pendidikan Dari Kolonial Ke Orde Lama Dalam Perkembangan Pendidikan Islam Indonesia," *Instructional Development Journal (IDJ)* 8, no. 3 (2025): 532–42, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24014/idj.v8i3.38362>.

analyzing how Islamic educational institutions responded to those regulations and transformed their educational structures.¹⁰ This gap is particularly important because the colonial experience shaped not only the institutional constraints faced by Islamic education but also the strategies through which Islamic educational actors negotiated social and educational change.

A more integrated analysis is therefore required to examine how colonial policies affected educational access and institutional development, while simultaneously investigating how pesantren, madrasah, scholars, and Muslim communities responded through adaptation, reform, and institutional transformation. Such an approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the historical formation of Islamic education in Indonesia.¹¹ The novelty of this study lies in integrating three interconnected dimensions within a single analytical framework: Dutch colonial educational policies, their impact on Islamic education, and the transformation and adaptive responses of Islamic educational institutions.

Rather than positioning Islamic education merely as a passive object of colonial policy, this study examines Islamic educational institutions as historical actors capable of negotiating external political and educational pressures while maintaining religious identity. This perspective extends previous studies by connecting colonial educational policy with institutional adaptation and transformation as interconnected processes in the historical development of Islamic education in Indonesia.¹² The study also contributes a contemporary historical perspective by interpreting colonial educational experiences as part of the longer process through which Islamic education developed its capacity for institutional and educational transformation.

Colonial policies contributed to educational differentiation and institutional pressure, while the responses of pesantren, madrasah, scholars, and Muslim

¹⁰ Muthia Azizah, Zulmuqim, and Muhammad Zalnur, "Islamic Education in The Archipelago Before Independence Case Study: Dutch Colonial Political Policy Towards Islamic Education In Indonesia."

¹¹ Azzahra et al., "Strategic Adaptation and Resilience: Islamic Education's Response to Colonialism in Indonesia."

¹² Azzahra et al.

communities demonstrate processes of negotiation, adaptation, and reform. Understanding this historical interaction provides a basis for interpreting the continuing transformation of Islamic education in relation to changing social, institutional, and educational environments.¹³ Based on the research problem, literature review, research gap, and proposed novelty, this study aims to analyze the impact of Dutch colonial educational policies on the development and transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) identify the characteristics and orientations of Dutch colonial educational policies related to Islamic education; (2) analyze their effects on the access, institutional position, and development of Islamic education; and (3) examine the forms of adaptation, response, and transformation developed by Islamic educational institutions and Muslim scholars in confronting the colonial educational system. Through these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper historical understanding of Islamic education as an institution that continuously negotiates religious identity, institutional development, and educational change.¹⁴

Methods

This study employs qualitative library research with a historical-interpretive approach to examine the impact of Dutch colonial educational policies on the development and transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia. A library-based approach was selected because the study focuses on historical policies, educational institutions, scholarly interpretations, and documented responses rather than primary field observations or quantitative measurements. The historical-interpretive approach enables the researchers to examine relationships between colonial educational policies, institutional conditions, and the responses of Islamic educational actors within their historical contexts.¹⁵ The data consist of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, historical

¹³ Daulay and Hasyim, "Educational Policies during the Colonial and Old Order Periods and Their Implications for Islamic Education in Indonesia Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University of Riau, Indonesia."

¹⁴ Daulay and Hasyim.

¹⁵ Darcy E Furlong and Jessica Nina Lester, "Toward a Practice of Qualitative Methodological Literature Reviewing," *Qualitative Inquiry* 29, no. 6 (July 1, 2023): 669–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221131028>.

studies, policy documents, and other scholarly publications concerning Dutch colonial education, Islamic education in Indonesia, pesantren, madrasah, colonial educational regulations, and educational transformation.

Literature published between 2019 and 2026 was prioritized to establish engagement with recent scholarship, while earlier historical and classical sources were retained when they provided essential primary or foundational evidence concerning the colonial period. Sources were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research questions, scholarly credibility, historical significance, and contribution to understanding the relationship between colonial policy and Islamic educational development.¹⁶ Data collection was conducted through systematic identification, screening, and documentation of relevant literature. Searches were conducted using combinations of keywords such as “Dutch colonial education,” “colonial educational policy,” “Islamic education in Indonesia,” “Islamic schools,” “pesantren,” “madrasah,” “Dutch colonialism,” “Islamic educational reform,” and “educational transformation.” Retrieved sources were screened according to title, abstract, publication relevance, historical context, and substantive contribution.

Relevant information was then organized in a literature matrix containing bibliographic information, research focus, historical evidence, colonial policy discussed, effects on Islamic education, institutional responses, and forms of transformation. This procedure supported systematic comparison across the selected literature.¹⁷ The collected literature was analyzed using thematic and comparative content analysis. The analysis followed several stages: familiarization with the literature, identification of significant statements and historical evidence, initial coding, development of thematic categories, comparison across sources, and interpretation of relationships among the identified themes. The principal analytical themes included (1) colonial educational policy and regulation, (2) differentiated educational access and institutional structures, (3) effects on Islamic educational institutions, (4) responses of Muslim scholars and communities, (5) institutional

¹⁶ Furlong and Lester.

¹⁷ Muhammad Naeem et al., “A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 22 (October 1, 2023): 16094069231205788, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>.

and curricular adaptation, and (6) transformation of Islamic education. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, while comparative analysis was employed to examine similarities and differences in the responses of Islamic educational institutions to colonial policies.¹⁸ The analysis further connected colonial policies with the development and transformation of Islamic education by examining the relationship between policy intervention and institutional response.

Rather than assuming that colonial policy directly determined the development of Islamic education, the study interpreted educational transformation as a dynamic historical process involving regulation, constraint, adaptation, resilience, and institutional reform. This perspective allows the study to distinguish between the documented effects of colonial policies and the researchers' interpretation of their longer-term implications for Islamic educational development.¹⁹ The trustworthiness of the study was strengthened through source triangulation, comparative reading, and consistency between the research objectives, data selection, analytical categories, and conclusions. Historical claims were compared across multiple scholarly sources rather than relying on a single account, while interpretations concerning institutional responses and educational transformation were examined against available historical evidence. The researchers also distinguished between documented historical facts, interpretations presented by previous scholars, and analytical conclusions developed in this study. This procedure was intended to minimize selective interpretation and strengthen the credibility and transparency of the qualitative literature analysis.²⁰

¹⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Becoming a Knowing Researcher," *International Journal of Transgender Health* 24, no. 1 (January 25, 2023): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>.

¹⁹ Azzahra et al., "Strategic Adaptation and Resilience: Islamic Education's Response to Colonialism in Indonesia."

²⁰ Furlong and Lester, "Toward a Practice of Qualitative Methodological Literature Reviewing."

Results and Discussion

Result

The analysis of the selected historical literature identifies a dynamic relationship between Dutch colonial educational policies and the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. The findings indicate that colonial educational policy did not produce a single and uniform effect on Islamic education. Instead, its influence developed through several interconnected processes, including educational differentiation, institutional regulation, restricted access, institutional adaptation, preservation of Islamic identity, and educational transformation. These processes demonstrate that the development of Islamic education during the colonial period was shaped by an interaction between external colonial structures and the internal agency of Muslim educational institutions and communities.

Differentiation of the Colonial Educational System

The first finding concerns the emergence of a differentiated educational structure under Dutch colonial rule. The colonial education system developed different types of schools with varying institutional status, educational objectives, curricula, and access. Education was not organized as a single system that provided equal opportunities to the entire population. Instead, educational institutions were differentiated according to social and administrative categories established within the colonial order. This differentiation had important consequences for Islamic education. Islamic educational institutions developed largely outside the principal structure of colonial government schools. Pesantren, madrasah, and other forms of Islamic learning maintained their own educational traditions, organizational structures, and patterns of knowledge transmission. Consequently, two educational orientations developed simultaneously: a colonial-oriented formal education system and a community-based Islamic education system. The findings further indicate that this educational differentiation created an institutional boundary between government schools and Islamic educational institutions. Access to colonial schools was associated with particular social and administrative conditions, while Islamic education remained strongly connected to local communities and religious networks. This distinction influenced the subsequent development of Islamic

education because Islamic institutions had to determine how they would position themselves in relation to an increasingly influential formal education system.

Regulation and Control of Islamic Education

The second finding concerns the increasing regulation of Islamic educational activities. Islamic teachers, religious instruction, and educational institutions encountered various forms of administrative oversight. Regulation affected the ability of Islamic educational actors to conduct educational activities independently and created a more restrictive environment for religious education. The analysis indicates that regulation was particularly significant because education in Islamic communities was closely connected with religious authority and social organization. Restrictions on teachers and educational activities therefore had consequences beyond classroom instruction. They affected the relationship between religious teachers, students, educational institutions, and local communities. However, the findings do not indicate that regulation resulted in the disappearance of Islamic education. Instead, regulation generated new institutional responses. Islamic educational actors developed strategies for continuing educational activities, adjusting organizational arrangements, and maintaining religious instruction. Thus, colonial regulation functioned as a source of institutional pressure while simultaneously becoming a condition that encouraged new forms of educational organization.

Unequal Educational Access and Institutional Position

A third finding concerns unequal access to formal education. The colonial educational structure created different opportunities for different sections of the population. This condition influenced the social position of Islamic education because access to government-established schools increasingly became associated with modern administrative and social opportunities. Islamic educational institutions consequently faced a structural challenge. On one hand, they remained important centers for religious learning and community formation. On the other hand, the growing importance of formal education created new expectations regarding literacy, employment, social mobility, and modern knowledge. This

situation required Islamic educational institutions to negotiate between their established religious functions and the changing educational needs of society. The findings show that this tension became one of the factors underlying subsequent educational reform. The challenge was not simply to preserve Islamic education but also to ensure that Islamic institutions remained relevant within a changing educational environment. The response to this challenge contributed to the emergence of new educational forms and modifications in existing institutions.

Continuity of Traditional Islamic Education

Despite colonial pressure, traditional Islamic education demonstrated substantial continuity. Pesantren remained important centers of Islamic learning, while traditional teaching practices continued to transmit religious knowledge across generations. The preservation of classical Islamic texts, religious sciences, Arabic learning, moral education, and relationships between teachers and students remained central features of Islamic educational practice. The findings indicate that continuity was supported by the strong relationship between Islamic educational institutions and local communities. Educational activities were not dependent entirely on the colonial government because they were sustained through community participation, religious networks, scholars, and local social structures. This continuity demonstrates that colonial educational policy did not completely determine the direction of Islamic education. Islamic educational institutions retained internal mechanisms for reproducing knowledge and educational traditions. As a result, the colonial period produced not the disappearance of traditional Islamic education but its continued existence alongside an increasingly complex modern educational environment.

Emergence of Institutional Adaptation

A fifth finding is the emergence of institutional adaptation among Islamic educational institutions. Faced with the expansion of formal colonial education, some Islamic educational actors began modifying organizational structures and educational practices. Adaptation included the organization of classes, more systematic scheduling, graded instruction, curricular restructuring, and the

incorporation of selected forms of modern educational management. This adaptation did not occur uniformly across all Islamic institutions. Some maintained traditional structures more strongly, while others introduced substantial organizational changes. The variation demonstrates that Islamic educational transformation was not a linear process. It developed through different institutional responses according to local circumstances, leadership, educational objectives, and relationships with colonial authorities. The findings further indicate that adaptation was selective. Islamic educational institutions did not simply reproduce the colonial school model. Instead, elements of modern educational organization were incorporated while religious instruction, Islamic identity, and established educational values remained important. This process produced hybrid forms of educational organization that combined elements of traditional Islamic education with selected features of modern schooling.

Transformation of Madrasah and Emerging Modern Islamic Education

The analysis identifies the development of madrasah as an important manifestation of institutional transformation. Madrasah provided a structure through which Islamic education could respond to the growing influence of formal schooling while maintaining Islamic educational objectives. Compared with exclusively traditional learning arrangements, madrasah offered more structured forms of classroom organization, curriculum, and educational administration. The transformation of madrasah was accompanied by changes in the scope of knowledge being taught. Religious subjects remained central, but some institutions increasingly incorporated general subjects and forms of knowledge associated with modern education. This development reflected an attempt to prepare Muslim students not only for religious life but also for participation in a changing social environment. The findings therefore indicate that the emergence and development of modern madrasah cannot be understood simply as the adoption of Western education. Rather, it represented a process of institutional reconstruction in which Islamic educational actors selected, modified, and integrated educational elements according to their own religious and social objectives.

Curriculum Transformation

Curriculum transformation represents another important finding. Traditional Islamic education emphasized religious sciences and classical Islamic texts, while the changing educational environment encouraged the introduction of broader areas of knowledge. The curriculum in some Islamic educational institutions consequently became more diverse. The analysis shows three simultaneous tendencies in curriculum development. First, core Islamic subjects remained essential for preserving the religious character of education. Second, general subjects increasingly appeared as responses to changing social and educational demands. Third, the relationship between religious and general knowledge became an important issue in the development of modern Islamic education. This process resulted in a curriculum that sought to maintain Islamic identity while expanding educational relevance. The transformation was therefore not characterized by the replacement of Islamic knowledge with secular knowledge. Instead, it involved attempts to create an educational structure in which religious knowledge and broader forms of knowledge could coexist.

Transformation of Teaching and Learning Practices

The findings also reveal changes in teaching and learning practices. Traditional Islamic learning had relied heavily on teacher-centered relationships, direct transmission of knowledge, textual study, and close interaction between teachers and students. The emergence of more organized educational institutions introduced additional practices involving classroom organization, systematic lesson planning, graded instruction, and more structured assessment. These changes altered the educational relationship between teachers and students. The teacher continued to occupy an important position as a source of religious authority, but learning increasingly took place within an organized institutional structure. Students were exposed to a broader range of subjects and learning activities than those available in exclusively traditional settings. The transformation of pedagogical practices demonstrates that the modernization of Islamic education involved not only changes in institutional form but also changes in how knowledge was organized

and transmitted. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that traditional pedagogical elements continued to coexist with emerging modern practices.

Preservation of Islamic Identity

An important finding across the literature is the persistent effort to preserve Islamic identity. Institutional adaptation did not eliminate the religious foundations of Islamic education. Islamic values, religious knowledge, moral formation, Arabic learning, and the authority of religious teachers remained important elements of educational practice. The preservation of identity functioned as an internal boundary during institutional transformation. Educational changes were evaluated according to their compatibility with Islamic objectives and community expectations. Consequently, adaptation was selective rather than unrestricted. The findings demonstrate that Islamic educational transformation involved a continuous negotiation between change and continuity. Islamic institutions attempted to respond to new educational realities without losing the religious characteristics that distinguished them from colonial government schools. This negotiation became one of the defining characteristics of Islamic educational development during the colonial period.

Educational Resilience and Institutional Agency

The analysis further identifies institutional resilience as a major finding. Islamic educational institutions demonstrated the capacity to continue functioning despite regulatory pressure, unequal educational structures, and competition from government schools. This resilience was supported by networks of scholars, religious communities, families, students, and local social organizations. Institutional agency was expressed through decisions concerning educational organization, curriculum, teaching practices, institutional development, and relationships with the wider educational environment. Islamic educational actors did not merely react to colonial policies; they actively determined which aspects of educational change could be accepted, modified, or rejected. This finding changes the interpretation of colonial educational history. The development of Islamic education cannot be explained exclusively through the actions of the colonial

government. The agency of Muslim educational actors constituted an equally important factor in determining how Islamic education developed under colonial conditions.

Colonial Pressure as a Context for Educational Transformation

The overall analysis indicates that colonial educational policies created conditions that influenced the direction and pace of Islamic educational transformation. Colonial policies produced external pressures through educational differentiation, regulation, and competition. Islamic educational institutions responded through a combination of resistance, continuity, adaptation, and reform. The relationship can therefore be represented as a historical process: Dutch colonial educational policies → educational differentiation and regulation → institutional pressure → Islamic educational response → selective adaptation → institutional and curricular transformation.

However, this process was neither automatic nor uniform. Colonial policy constituted an important external condition, but transformation depended on how Islamic educational actors interpreted and responded to those conditions. The findings consequently identify colonialism as a significant historical context rather than the sole determinant of Islamic educational change.

Integrated Findings

The research identifies four major dimensions of the impact of Dutch colonial educational policies on Islamic education in Indonesia. First, colonial policies created a differentiated educational structure that affected the position and access of Islamic education. Second, regulatory mechanisms generated institutional pressure on Islamic teachers and educational institutions. Third, Islamic educational institutions responded through resilience, preservation of religious identity, and selective adaptation. Fourth, these responses contributed to transformations in institutional organization, curriculum, teaching practices, and the emergence of more diverse forms of Islamic education. The central finding is therefore that the relationship between Dutch colonial educational policy and Islamic education was characterized by pressure and response, continuity and change, and regulation and

institutional agency. Colonial policies created significant constraints, but those constraints did not produce a uniform or predetermined outcome. Instead, Islamic educational institutions used their institutional and social resources to maintain continuity while selectively transforming their educational structures. This interaction between external pressure and internal agency became an important historical mechanism in the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Discussion

Dutch Colonial Educational Policy and the Formation of Educational Dualism

The findings demonstrate that Dutch colonial educational policy contributed to the formation of a differentiated educational structure in Indonesia. This differentiation should not be understood merely as the coexistence of different types of schools, but as a structural distinction between educational institutions with different levels of access, authority, curriculum, and institutional recognition. Islamic educational institutions developed largely outside the main colonial school structure, while government schools operated within an administrative system designed by the colonial state. The resulting educational dualism subsequently influenced the institutional positioning of Islamic education within the broader Indonesian educational landscape. Recent historical studies similarly identify colonial educational policy as an important factor in shaping the differentiated position of Islamic education and its subsequent development.²¹ From the perspective of educational policy theory, this finding illustrates that education can function not only as a mechanism for knowledge transmission but also as an instrument through which political authority organizes society. Educational institutions determine which forms of knowledge receive institutional legitimacy, which groups obtain access to particular educational opportunities, and which educational practices are recognized as formally valid. The colonial educational structure therefore influenced not only the organization of schooling but also the social and epistemic position of Islamic education. Contemporary studies of

²¹ Daulay and Hasyim, "Educational Policies during the Colonial and Old Order Periods and Their Implications for Islamic Education in Indonesia Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University of Riau , Indonesia."

coloniality in education similarly emphasize that educational structures can reproduce hierarchies concerning knowledge, authority, language, and institutional legitimacy. Fúnez-Flores (2024), for example, conceptualizes curriculum as part of the geopolitics of knowledge in which particular forms of knowledge can become dominant through historically embedded power relations.

The findings consequently suggest that the colonial legacy should be analyzed at both institutional and epistemological levels. At the institutional level, colonial policy differentiated educational structures. At the epistemological level, it contributed to a hierarchy concerning which forms of knowledge were associated with modernity, formal schooling, and administrative legitimacy. This distinction is important because Islamic education was not simply excluded from colonial education; rather, Islamic knowledge and institutions were positioned within a system in which Western-oriented education increasingly acquired institutional authority. Recent research on the colonial legacy of Indonesian education similarly argues that colonial structures left traces in curriculum, knowledge hierarchies, and educational paradigms beyond the colonial period itself.²²

Regulation and the Transformation of Islamic Educational Authority

The findings also reveal that colonial regulation affected the autonomy of Islamic educational institutions and religious teachers. Regulations concerning Islamic teaching created a new relationship between religious educational authority and state administration. Before colonial intervention, Islamic educational authority was strongly rooted in scholars, *pesantren*, *surau*, *madrasah*, and local communities. Colonial regulation introduced an external administrative dimension into this relationship by requiring certain forms of supervision and control over religious education. This finding can be interpreted through the concept of institutional power. Institutions are not only places where educational activities occur; they also determine who possesses legitimate authority to teach, what knowledge can be

²² Husnul Haetami, Ahyar Ahyar, and Saparudin Saparudin, "Repositioning Islamic Religious Education in the National Curriculum: A Philosophical Critique of the Teacher Ordinance Legacy," *Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* 12, no. 1 SE-Articles (June 24, 2026): 157–86, <https://doi.org/10.20871/kpjipm.v12i1.592>.

transmitted, and under what conditions educational activities may take place. The regulation of Islamic teachers therefore had implications extending beyond administrative procedures. It affected the institutional legitimacy of Islamic education and the relationship between religious authority and political power. Recent research on the legacy of the Teacher Ordinance argues that colonial regulations shaped the authority, legitimacy, and scope of Islamic knowledge within the educational system.²³ However, the findings demonstrate that regulation did not eliminate Islamic educational authority. Instead, it generated institutional responses. Islamic scholars and communities developed mechanisms for maintaining educational activities, strengthening community support, and reorganizing institutions. This finding is consistent with recent research describing Islamic education during colonialism as a site of both adaptation and resilience. Azzahra et al., for example, identify modernization, institutional consolidation, women's educational mobilization, and nationalist character formation as different strategies through which Islamic education responded to colonial structures.²⁴

Islamic Educational Resilience: Continuity Rather Than Disappearance

One of the most important findings of this study is that colonial pressure did not result in the disappearance of Islamic education. Pesantren, madrasah, surau, and other community-based institutions continued to function as centers of Islamic knowledge and social formation. This finding challenges an overly linear interpretation of colonial educational history in which the introduction of Western schooling is assumed to have replaced traditional Islamic education. The concept of institutional resilience provides a useful framework for understanding this phenomenon. Resilience in education does not necessarily mean maintaining an institution without change. Rather, it can involve the capacity to maintain core institutional purposes while modifying organizational practices in response to environmental pressures. From this perspective, the persistence of Islamic education resulted from the combination of continuity and adaptation. Recent

²³ Haetami, Ahyar, and Saparudin.

²⁴ Azzahra et al., "Strategic Adaptation and Resilience: Islamic Education's Response to Colonialism in Indonesia."

studies specifically describe pesantren and madrasah as institutions that survived colonial pressure while simultaneously undergoing transformation.²⁵ This interpretation is important because it places Muslim communities and Islamic educational institutions as historical agents rather than merely objects of colonial policy. The findings demonstrate that Muslim scholars and communities actively determined how their institutions should respond to the colonial educational environment. Some maintained traditional structures, while others introduced new organizational and pedagogical practices. Consequently, the historical development of Islamic education was shaped by a continuous interaction between external pressure and internal institutional agency.

Adaptation as a Form of Educational Transformation

The findings indicate that adaptation was one of the principal mechanisms through which Islamic education transformed during the colonial period. Adaptation occurred through organizational restructuring, curriculum modification, classroom organization, and the incorporation of selected elements of modern education. This process can be understood through educational change theory, which views institutional transformation as a process of negotiation between established practices and changing environmental demands. The transformation of Islamic education therefore cannot be reduced to the simple adoption of Western educational models. Rather, Islamic educational institutions selectively incorporated educational practices that they considered compatible with their objectives. This selective adaptation produced hybrid institutional forms in which traditional Islamic knowledge coexisted with elements of modern schooling. Research on the historical transformation of Indonesian Islamic education similarly shows that pesantren and madrasah experienced processes of adaptation, formalization, and integration rather than complete replacement by Western educational institutions.²⁶ The concept of selective adaptation also helps explain

²⁵ Qonita Yuhanidz, Yowanda Basitka, and Najwa Kamila, "Sejarah Pengelolaan Pendidikan Islam Pada Masa Kolonial Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Bintang Pendidikan Indonesia* 4 (May 30, 2026): 124–36, <https://doi.org/10.55606/jubpi.v4i2.4357>.

²⁶ Azzahra et al., "Strategic Adaptation and Resilience: Islamic Education's Response to Colonialism in Indonesia."

why transformation occurred differently across institutions. Islamic educational institutions did not operate under identical social conditions, nor did their leaders have identical educational orientations. Some institutions emphasized preservation of traditional Islamic learning, whereas others pursued modernization and integration of general subjects. The diversity of responses therefore indicates that transformation was multidirectional rather than uniform.

Madrasah as an Institutional Response to Colonial Modernity

The development of madrasah can be interpreted as one of the clearest manifestations of Islamic educational transformation. The findings demonstrate that madrasah provided an institutional form through which Islamic education could respond to the increasing influence of formal schooling while maintaining Islamic educational objectives. Madrasah therefore occupied an intermediate position between traditional religious learning and modern institutional schooling. The emergence of more structured madrasah education involved changes in classroom organization, scheduling, curriculum, administration, and teaching practices. At the same time, Islamic subjects remained central to the educational identity of these institutions. This combination illustrates that modernization did not necessarily mean secularization. Rather, Islamic educational actors could use modern institutional mechanisms while maintaining Islamic epistemological and normative foundations. This interpretation corresponds with recent historical research showing that the transformation of Islamic education involved the interaction of traditional institutions with modern educational models. Romzi et al., identify pesantren and madrasah as important institutional actors in the historical transformation of Islamic education, while recent research on colonial educational policy describes institutional modernization as one response to colonial pressure.²⁷

²⁷ & Fitriani. Romzi, M., Noviyanti, S. F., Wahananto, J., "The Transformation of Islamic Education in Indonesia: A Historical Review and Educational Policy," *Transformation of Islamic Management and Education* 1, no. 2 (2024): 93–107, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.65663/timejournal.v1i2.93>.

Curriculum Transformation and the Negotiation of Knowledge

The findings concerning curriculum transformation demonstrate that the colonial educational environment created pressure for Islamic institutions to reconsider the scope and organization of educational knowledge. Traditional Islamic subjects remained central, but some institutions increasingly introduced general knowledge and more systematic curricular structures. This development created an important educational question: how could Islamic identity be preserved while Islamic students were equipped to participate in a changing social environment? The findings can be interpreted through the contemporary theory of curriculum decolonization. Decolonial curriculum theory emphasizes that curriculum is not simply a neutral collection of subjects; it also reflects decisions concerning whose knowledge is recognized, which knowledge is prioritized, and how knowledge is organized. Fúnez-Flores argues that curriculum can reproduce geopolitical and epistemic hierarchies by privileging particular knowledge systems.²⁸ Similarly, recent scholarship on curriculum decolonization emphasizes the need to examine the relationship between curriculum, power, knowledge production, and historically marginalized epistemologies.²⁹ In the Indonesian Islamic education context, this theoretical perspective helps explain why curriculum adaptation should not automatically be interpreted as the loss of Islamic identity. The introduction of general knowledge into Islamic educational institutions can instead be understood as an attempt to expand educational capacity while retaining religious foundations. The important issue is therefore not whether Islamic education adopted elements of modern education, but how those elements were selected, reorganized, and integrated into an Islamic educational framework.

²⁸ Jairo I Fúnez-Flores, "Anibal Quijano: (Dis)Entangling the Geopolitics and Coloniality of Curriculum," *The Curriculum Journal* 35, no. 2 (2024): 288–306, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.219>.

²⁹ Thomas Muhr, "The Politics of University Curriculum Decolonising in Neoliberalised Higher Education: A Semi-Systematic Literature Review," *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, April 29, 2026, 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2026.2660770>.

Preservation of Islamic Identity and Educational Agency

Another significant finding concerns the preservation of Islamic identity during institutional transformation. Islamic educational institutions demonstrated that modernization and religious identity were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Educational institutions could modify organizational structures and teaching practices while maintaining Islamic knowledge, moral education, religious authority, and community-based values. This finding can be connected to the concept of educational agency. Agency refers to the capacity of educational actors to interpret changing circumstances and make decisions concerning institutional direction. In the colonial context, agency was demonstrated through the selective acceptance, modification, and rejection of educational practices. Muslim scholars and educational organizations therefore participated actively in shaping the form that Islamic education would take under colonial conditions. Azzahra et al., provide a particularly relevant interpretation by identifying modernization as one form of intellectual resistance while also documenting the consolidation of traditional institutions as a strategy for preserving religious orthodoxy.³⁰ Their findings demonstrate that adaptation and preservation could operate simultaneously.

From Resistance to Negotiation and Institutional Innovation

The findings also suggest that the relationship between Islamic education and colonialism should not be explained exclusively through the binary categories of resistance versus submission. A more nuanced interpretation is provided by the concept of negotiation. Islamic educational institutions could resist particular policies while simultaneously adopting selected organizational practices associated with modern education. This distinction is theoretically significant. Resistance emphasizes opposition to external power, whereas negotiation recognizes that institutions can respond through a combination of opposition, accommodation, adaptation, and innovation. The historical development of Islamic education demonstrates all of these processes. Some institutions maintained traditional

³⁰ Azzahra et al., "Strategic Adaptation and Resilience: Islamic Education's Response to Colonialism in Indonesia."

structures, some developed new educational forms, and others combined traditional and modern approaches. Recent research similarly identifies adaptation, resilience, modernization, and institutional innovation as interconnected responses to colonial educational structures. The 2026 literature on Islamic education during the Dutch colonial period, for example, identifies institutional pressure alongside strategies developed by Muslim communities to maintain and develop Islamic education.

Coloniality of Knowledge and the Contemporary Significance of the Findings

The historical findings have broader implications when examined through the theory of coloniality of knowledge. Colonialism does not necessarily end when political control ends. Its educational effects may continue through institutional structures, curriculum arrangements, hierarchies of knowledge, and assumptions concerning what constitutes legitimate education. Contemporary decolonial scholarship therefore encourages researchers to examine how historical power relations continue to influence educational knowledge and practice. Muhr, through a recent review of curriculum decolonization literature, emphasizes that decolonizing curriculum involves questions concerning what knowledge is included, whose knowledge is recognized, and how educational structures reproduce or challenge colonial hierarchies.³¹ Fúnez-Flores similarly emphasizes the relationship between curriculum, geopolitics, and coloniality of knowledge.³² These theoretical perspectives provide a useful framework for interpreting the historical experience of Islamic education in Indonesia. The relevance of this perspective to Islamic education lies in the recognition that the historical marginalization of Islamic educational institutions was not simply an institutional issue. It also concerned the status and legitimacy of Islamic knowledge within a colonial educational order. Consequently, understanding the colonial history of Islamic education can contribute to contemporary efforts to construct educational systems that recognize

³¹ Muhr, "The Politics of University Curriculum Decolonising in Neoliberalised Higher Education: A Semi-Systematic Literature Review."

³² Fúnez-Flores, "Anibal Quijano: (Dis)Entangling the Geopolitics and Coloniality of Curriculum."

diverse epistemological traditions and avoid reproducing inherited knowledge hierarchies.

Islamic Education as a Site of Epistemic Negotiation

The findings further demonstrate that Islamic education became a site of epistemic negotiation during the colonial period. Islamic institutions encountered educational models associated with Western knowledge while maintaining established Islamic traditions of knowledge. The resulting transformation was therefore not simply institutional but also epistemological. The concept of epistemic negotiation refers to the process through which educational actors determine how different knowledge traditions can coexist, interact, or be prioritized. In this case, Islamic educational institutions negotiated between religious knowledge, local knowledge, and forms of modern knowledge introduced through colonial education. This process helped create educational structures that were neither entirely traditional nor identical to colonial schools. Contemporary decolonial educational scholarship emphasizes that transforming education requires attention to knowledge hierarchies and the recognition of multiple epistemological traditions. Recent research on decolonial curriculum similarly argues that educational transformation involves questioning dominant knowledge structures rather than merely adding alternative content to an existing curriculum.³³

The Historical Pattern of Pressure, Adaptation, and Transformation

When the findings are considered collectively, a historical pattern becomes visible. Dutch colonial educational policies produced institutional differentiation and regulatory pressure. These conditions challenged the autonomy and position of Islamic education. Islamic educational actors subsequently responded through continuity, resistance, adaptation, institutional innovation, and curriculum transformation. The interaction of these processes contributed to the emergence of increasingly diverse forms of Islamic education. The relationship can therefore be conceptualized as: Colonial educational policy → institutional differentiation and

³³ Michalinos Zembylas, "Synergizing Critical Theory and Decolonial Approaches in Educational Philosophy and Theory: Tensions and Insights," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 44, no. 5 (2025): 475–92, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-025-09993-4>.

regulation → educational pressure → Islamic institutional agency → selective adaptation and resistance → institutional and curricular transformation → continuity of Islamic educational identity. This model extends the interpretation of colonial educational history beyond a simple cause-and-effect relationship. Colonial policy created the structural context, but Islamic educational transformation resulted from the interaction between that context and the agency of Muslim educational institutions. Recent historical research similarly emphasizes that colonial policy and Islamic educational responses must be examined together to understand the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.³⁴

Theoretical Contribution and Novelty of the Study

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in connecting three analytical perspectives: colonial educational policy, institutional agency, and educational transformation. Previous studies have frequently emphasized colonial regulation or the survival of Islamic educational institutions. The present analysis brings these dimensions together by showing that colonial pressure and Islamic educational agency operated simultaneously in shaping institutional transformation. This framework suggests that Islamic education should be understood as a historically adaptive educational system. Its transformation did not occur simply because colonial institutions introduced a new educational model. Instead, transformation occurred because Muslim educational actors interpreted the changing environment, evaluated external educational practices, and selectively incorporated elements considered compatible with their religious and social objectives. This interpretation also contributes to contemporary discussions of decolonization. Recent decolonial scholarship emphasizes that educational transformation requires critical examination of inherited knowledge hierarchies and the recognition of historically marginalized epistemologies. The historical experience of Islamic education in Indonesia demonstrates that educational agency can operate through both preservation and transformation. Thus, the colonial history of Islamic education

³⁴ Daulay and Hasyim, "Educational Policies during the Colonial and Old Order Periods and Their Implications for Islamic Education in Indonesia Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University of Riau, Indonesia."

provides an important historical foundation for understanding contemporary debates about epistemic diversity, curriculum, institutional identity, and educational transformation.³⁵ Overall, the findings demonstrate that Dutch colonial educational policies had a substantial historical influence on the institutional environment in which Islamic education developed, but they did not determine its development in a uniform manner.

Colonial policies generated differentiation, regulation, and institutional pressure, while Muslim scholars and educational institutions responded through resilience, selective adaptation, institutional innovation, and preservation of Islamic identity. The transformation of Islamic education should therefore be understood as a dialectical process between external structural pressure and internal educational agency. The colonial system created constraints and new educational challenges, while Islamic educational institutions transformed aspects of their organization, curriculum, and pedagogy without necessarily abandoning their religious foundations. This explains why Islamic education in Indonesia could simultaneously preserve traditional forms and develop modern institutional structures. The broader theoretical implication is that the history of Islamic education cannot be adequately explained through a framework that treats colonial policy as the sole determinant of educational change. Instead, the development of Islamic education resulted from an interaction between power, policy, institutional agency, knowledge, identity, and social adaptation. This interpretation strengthens the contribution of the present study by positioning the colonial experience as an important historical context for understanding the continuing transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Dutch colonial educational policies had a significant influence on the development and transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that colonial educational policies created educational differentiation, unequal access, institutional regulation, and pressure on

³⁵ Zembylas, "Synergizing Critical Theory and Decolonial Approaches in Educational Philosophy and Theory: Tensions and Insights."

Islamic educational institutions. However, these policies did not determine the disappearance or complete marginalization of Islamic education. Instead, colonial pressures generated various responses from Muslim scholars, pesantren, madrasah, and Islamic communities. The study further finds that the development of Islamic education during the colonial period was characterized by the simultaneous processes of continuity, resistance, adaptation, and transformation.

Islamic educational institutions maintained their religious identity and core Islamic knowledge while selectively adopting organizational, curricular, and pedagogical elements associated with modern education. The development of more structured madrasah institutions represents an important manifestation of this transformation. Thus, modernization of Islamic education should not be understood as the replacement of Islamic traditions by Western educational models, but as a process of selective adaptation and institutional reconstruction. The principal contribution of this study is its integrated interpretation of colonial educational policy, institutional pressure, Islamic educational agency, and educational transformation. The study demonstrates that Islamic education was not merely a passive object of colonial policy but an active educational and social institution capable of negotiating external pressures while preserving its religious identity. The historical experience of colonialism therefore provides an important foundation for understanding the resilience and continuing transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia.

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