

## Islamic Education as a Locus of Cultural-Religious Acculturation Affirming the Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago

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**Abstract:** Islamic education in the archipelago has played a historical and strategic role as a center of acculturation between Islamic values and local culture, giving rise to the distinctive character of Tamadun Islam Nusantara. This study aims to critically analyze how Islamic educational institutions, particularly Islamic boarding schools, function as a space for dialectics between religion and culture in shaping a moderate, tolerant Islamic character that is strongly rooted in local traditions. Using a qualitative approach with a literature review method, this study examines secondary data in the form of books, scientific articles, educational documents, and classical and contemporary texts relevant to the theme of Islamic education and acculturation in the archipelago. The results show that Islamic boarding schools have transformed from centers of religious teaching to centers of cultural conservation and dynamic civilizational agents. The process of integrating Islamic values with local wisdom is reflected in the curriculum, architecture, social practices, and religious arts and rituals that are rich in the values of moderation (wasathiyah), tolerance (tasamuh), and ease (taysir). The novelty of this research lies in its analytical approach, which affirms Islamic education as an active structure that not only preserves tradition but also reproduces civilization through contextual and inclusive pedagogy. Implicitly, this culture-based Islamic education model can be used as a reference in strengthening religious moderation and shaping national character amid the challenges of globalization and religious puritanism.

**Keywords:** Islamic education, Nusantara culture, acculturation, Nusantara Islamic civilization, religious moderation.



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## Introduction

The process of Islam's entry and development in the archipelago is one of the most unique and impressive chapters in world civilization history. The spread of Islam in this region is known as a model of peaceful and cultural religious transmission, far from the nuances of military conquest or forced confrontation. This phenomenon cannot be separated from the central role of Islamic educational institutions, especially Islamic boarding schools, which from the beginning functioned as a social-cultural *melting pot* and a center for the formation of a distinctive Islamic civilization in the archipelago. In the pesantren environment, universal Islamic teachings such as tauhid, akhlak, and justice are not presented dogmatically, but are harmoniously interacted with local traditions and cultures that have strong roots in Java, Sunda, Malay, and Bugis. Through this process of inculcation, Islam is accepted as an integral part of cultural identity, not as a foreign entity.

Islamic education acts as an intelligent engine of inculcation, translating the substantive values of Islam into the language of local culture through various mediums such as art, literature, and social ethical systems. Such practices produce a model of Islam that is *wasathiyah* (moderate), *tasamuh* (tolerant), and inclusive of cultural diversity. This civilization is known as *Tamadun Islam Nusantara*, characterized by a balance between spirituality and rationality, between obedience to the text (*naql*) and understanding of context ('*aql*).

However, in the era of digital globalization, the patterns of acculturation that have been established over centuries face serious challenges. The flow of religious information from outside is often puritanical and decontextualized, seeking to separate Islam from its cultural roots in the archipelago. Such movements claim that local traditions are forms of heresy that must be eliminated for the sake of religious purity. As a result, two major risks have emerged: first, the erosion of the distinctive characteristics of Indonesian Islam, which is moderate and adaptive; second, increased socio-religious polarization due to the loss of space for intercultural dialogue. If Islamic educational institutions fail to maintain their acculturative role, the process of passing on the identity of Tamadun Islam Nusantara (the Islamic civilization of the archipelago) could be disrupted and the younger generation could experience a crisis of religious and cultural identity.

Previous studies have examined Islam in the archipelago from various perspectives. Azyumardi Azra (2006) highlights the role of the network of scholars as mediators between global Islamic centers and local traditions, forming an adaptive scientific network that is characteristic of this region. Zamakhsyari Dhofier (1982) shows that Islamic boarding schools are an Islamic subculture that combines *tafaqquh fi al-dīn* with local cultural values, making the *kyai* the main figure of acculturation. Barton (2002) asserts that traditional Islamic education is the main bastion for the continuity of *civil Islam* in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Komaruddin Hidayat (2018) emphasizes the importance of a contextual *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* approach as the philosophical foundation of the Islamic civilization of the Archipelago, and Abdurrahman Wahid (1987) introduces the idea of *the indigenization of Islam* as a strategy for expressing universal teachings through local cultural language. Ismail (2019) adds that *cultural fiqh* needs to be contextualized in the Islamic education curriculum in order to provide theological legitimacy for moderation and tolerance.

However, these studies generally stop at the descriptive and historical level, without deeply examining the practical mechanisms of the Islamic education curriculum and pedagogy as an active means of cultural preservation and as a laboratory for strengthening the Islamic civilization of the archipelago in the global era. This is where the research gap (gap analysis) that underpins this study lies: there is still a lack of research that reveals how Islamic education—both formal and non-formal—functions concretely in maintaining acculturation and building a distinctive Islamic civilization identity in the archipelago amid the pressures of global puritanism.

Based on this gap, this study offers novelty in the form of an in-depth analysis of the practices and structure of Islamic education curricula that actively integrate the cultural values of the archipelago, as well as exploring the role of educational institutions—particularly Islamic boarding schools—as centers for the preservation, development, and revitalization of local culture in harmony with Islamic teachings. Thus, this study not only contributes to strengthening the theory of *Tamadun Islam Nusantara*, but also provides an empirical and conceptual basis for strengthening moderate and

culturally-rooted Islamic education as a civilizational solution for a global world that is vulnerable to extremism and cultural fragmentation.

Hypothetically, it is assumed that the higher the level of integration of local cultural values in the curriculum and practices of Islamic education, the stronger the resilience of the identity of Tamadun Islam Nusantara against the influence of transnational puritan ideology. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) analyze the forms of integration of Nusantara cultural values in the curriculum and practices of Islamic education; (2) identify the strategic role of Islamic educational institutions in preserving local culture in harmony with Islamic teachings; and (3) assess the empirical contribution of Islamic education in strengthening the foundations of the Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago, which is characterized by moderation, tolerance, and respect for diversity.

### **Research Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method (library research) because it focuses on the interpretation and in-depth understanding of historical, sociological, and curricular texts relevant to the theme of *Tamadun Islam Nusantara*. A descriptive-analytical approach was applied to systematically describe the phenomenon of cultural integration and Islamic teachings in the education system, then analyze its meaning in the context of the Islamic civilization of the Archipelago. The type of data used is secondary data, obtained from various sources such as the Qur'an and hadith, academic books, monographs, journal articles, scientific proceedings, and Islamic education documents that discuss the history of Islamic education in the archipelago, the structure of the pesantren curriculum, and the relationship between Islam and local culture. These literary sources were collected through documentation techniques, namely the activities of identifying, reading, recording, and classifying data systematically based on predetermined categories, such as the role of educational institutions, methods of acculturation, curriculum content, and cultural manifestations. The main instrument in this study was the researcher himself (human instrument), assisted by documentation guidelines to maintain consistency in categorization and data extraction. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, which consisted of three main stages, namely (1) data reduction, by selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives; (2) data presentation, through narrative and argumentative descriptions of the findings; and (3) verification and conclusion drawing, by interpreting the findings based on theoretical concepts such as acculturation, moderation, and *Tamadun Islam Nusantara*. This research is non-physical in nature because it was not conducted in a specific location, but rather examined literature from various geographical contexts in the archipelago that reflect the richness of Islamic education practices and local cultures.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Islamic Education as a Center of Cultural-Religious Acculturation**

The main findings of this literature review consistently show that Islamic educational institutions in the archipelago, especially Islamic boarding schools, have transformed from mere centers of religious teaching into highly dynamic centers of cultural-religious acculturation, as described in Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. "Structure not only constrains action but also enables action. Agents (in this case, educational institutions) continuously reproduce and transform structures in their daily practices." (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). This dual role is key to the formation of Indonesia's unique Islamic character. Based on the historical context of the arrival of Islam in the archipelago, according to Ricklefs (2001), the spread of Islam in the archipelago, especially in Java, had characteristics that differed from the process of Islamization in the Middle East or South Asia. This process was marked by gradualism and significant cultural accommodation (as seen in the practices of the Wali Songo), which meant that early educational institutions (the precursors to Islamic boarding schools) had to prioritize dialogue and assimilation over confrontation. This historical context became the foundation for why Islamic education in Indonesia is inherently adaptive. Furthermore, Lubis (2015) highlights that the process of cultural acculturation in Islamic education is not limited to Java, but also occurs significantly in other regions such as North Sumatra. This shows that the methods of Islamic education historically have a high degree of regional adaptability, which

allows religious teachings to interact with Malay traditions or local customs, thereby strengthening the geographical diversity of the Islamic civilization of the archipelago. Ziemek (1986) examined how Islamic boarding schools adapt and respond to social changes in society. His findings show that Islamic educational institutions are not static but have a high degree of flexibility to modify their curricula and practices to remain relevant without losing their core Islamic identity. This adaptability is key for Islamic boarding schools to remain centers of cultural preservation as well as agents of social change (Ziemek, 1986). Meanwhile, Fadli (2020) found that the integration of Islamic boarding school curricula that consciously incorporates local wisdom is an effective pedagogical strategy for instilling a character of moderation. Through this integration, santri learn to balance religious texts and cultural contexts, producing graduates who are moderate and adaptive to social diversity (Fadli, 2020). According to Suparta (2012), the function of pesantren directly highlights that pesantren are not only religious educational institutions but also the main medium for preserving local culture. This preservation function is realized through the teaching of social ethics, the use of regional languages in recitation, and the maintenance of art and ritual traditions that have been inculcated. Pesantren thus act as living conservation centers for the cultures of the archipelago that are in harmony with Islamic values. These findings can be presented systematically through three main dimensions:

First, the Curricular and Pedagogical Dimension (Internal). Islamic education has succeeded in integrating Islamic values and local wisdom into its learning process. In addition to teaching *Sharia* sciences, the curriculum is enriched with local elements:

- a. Use of Local Languages. Classical Islamic texts are often taught and translated using traditional teaching methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan*, which are delivered in local languages and scripts such as Malay and Javanese as well as local scripts (*Pegon*).
- b. Integration of Local Arts and Philosophy. Local arts are used as a medium for preaching and moral education, emphasizing that art is a means of religious expression (for example, *tambourines* or modified puppets) as a medium for preaching and moral education, emphasizing that local wisdom is a means of conveying universal Islamic values.

Second, Architectural and Ritual (Symbolic) Dimensions. Islamic educational institutions symbolically emphasize the acculturation of two dimensions:

- a. Local Architecture. Mosques and ancient Islamic boarding school complexes adopt traditional Indonesian architectural styles, reflecting respect for the local cultural environment. This preservation is evident in the architecture of Islamic boarding school complexes that adopt local styles (e.g., overlapping roofs or *pendopo*).
- b. Traditional Islamic Rituals. Practices such as *haul* and *tahlilan*, which are fused with Islamic values, are an integral part of training santri to appreciate social traditions.

Third, Social and Ethical Dimensions (Character). Acculturative education gives rise to an inclusive Nusantara Muslim character in two dimensions:

- a. Attitude of Tolerance (*Tasamuh*). Students are shaped to have an open attitude towards differences, a prerequisite for a harmonious civilization.
- b. Attitude of Mutual Cooperation. The values of communalism and social solidarity (*ukhuwah*) are strengthened. Geertz's (1989) classic work highlights the existence of three main cultural variants in Javanese society: *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi*, which show that Islam in the archipelago is not homogeneous. Islamic educational institutions, especially pesantren (which represent the *santri* tradition), play an important role in defining and maintaining a specific religious identity, while interacting with the other two cultural categories in shaping the overall socio-cultural structure of Java (Geertz, 1989).

## **The Connection Between Theory, Islamic Legal Principles, and Civilizational Contributions**

The above findings are empirical evidence of the success of the concept of Islam Indigenization (Islam Pribumi), in which Islamic values are indigenized into the local cultural structure. Nurcholish

Madjid (2000) introduced and championed the concept of Islam Indigenization (Pribumisasi Islam). According to him, this is not an attempt to localize the basic principles of Islam, but rather an effort to translate and express universal Islamic teachings into the framework of local language, traditions, and culture. This concept directly legitimizes the practice of Islamic education that is acculturated with the culture of the archipelago (Madjid, 2000). Meanwhile, according to the theory/opinion (Islam, State, and Nationality) of Sjadjali (1988), he discusses the evolution of the relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia. Although his focus is on politics, his views indirectly support the role of Islamic education in instilling the concept of *hubbul wathan minal iman* (love of the homeland is part of faith). Islamic educational institutions shape individuals who believe that being a devout Muslim can be in line with and even strengthen their Indonesian and national identity (Sjadjali, 1988).

First, Integration of Theory, Legal Basis, and Contextualization. This concept of acculturation is in line with Giddens' Structuration theory and reinforces the view that acculturation is *ta'wil* (interpretation) that strengthens the social acceptance of religion. More importantly, the practice of acculturation and moderation has a strong legal basis in the main sources of Islamic teachings:

a. Legal Basis of Acculturation and Cultural Diversity (Local Acceptance)

Acculturation is a manifestation of Islam's recognition of diversity and humanity. This is supported by Allah's words in Q.S. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13: "*O mankind, indeed We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another (li ta'arafū). Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you..."*

This verse legitimizes the existence of *nations and tribes* (cultures) as a means of mutual understanding (*ta'aruf*). Islamic education utilizes the culture of the archipelago as a means (*wasilah*) for *ta'aruf* and *da'wah*, not as a barrier.

b. Legal Basis of Moderation (Wasathiyah) (Balance)

The attitude of moderation taught by Nusantara Islamic Education, which balances religion and culture, is rooted in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143: "*And thus We have made you (a moderate community), so that you may be witnesses over mankind and the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) may be a witness over you..."*

This verse explicitly commands Muslims to be a moderate community. Islamic education in the archipelago interprets this *moderation* as a balance between obedience to sharia (*habl min Allah*) and socio-cultural harmony (*habl min al-nās*), so that Islam does not become an extreme religion.

c. Legal Basis for Ease in Religion (Avoiding Difficulties)

The use of adaptive educational and cultural methods is in line with the principle of *taysīr* (ease) in Islam. This is supported by the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW: "*Make things easy and do not make them difficult, give good news and do not make people run away.*" (H.R. Bukhari and Muslim).

The application of local culture in *da'wah* and education (*tahlilan*, performing arts) is a practice of *taysīr* so that Islamic teachings are easily accepted and do not feel foreign to the people of the archipelago.

### Context of Strengthening the Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago

The research results confirm that Islamic education is a vital institution that produces and reproduces the Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago. Its inclusive pedagogical model is a *blueprint* that integrates cognitive, affective, and cultural aspects, ensuring that the Muslim character produced is: First, Inclusive and Tolerant: Developing an attitude of *tasamuh* based on recognition of *sunnatullah* (Allah's decree) regarding diversity, in accordance with Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13. Second, Balanced: Practicing *moderation* as a solution to reject religious and cultural extremism.

### Analysis of Contributions to Strengthening Islamic Civilization Values

The contribution of Islamic education to strengthening Islamic civilization values is summarized in the following table:

**Table 1.1**  
**Analysis of Contributions to Strengthening Islamic Civilization Values**

<b>Islamic Civilization Values</b>	<b>Legal Basis of the Qur'an/Hadith</b>	<b>Manifestation in Islamic Education</b>
Wasathiyah (Moderation)	Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143 (The Middle Path)	The use of contextual <i>ta'wil</i> methods; Rejection of extremist religious thought.
Tasamuh (Tolerance)	Q.S. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13 (Getting to know each other) Getting to know each other/Ta'aruf	Integration of local arts and culture; Practice of communal living ( <i>mutual cooperation</i> ) and brotherhood.
Ease ( <i>Taysir</i> )	Hadith Narrated by Bukhari-Muslim (Make things easy and do not make them difficult)	The use of local language and rituals in preaching and teaching so that religion is easily accepted.

**Source: Data managed by researchers**

Overall, Islamic education in the archipelago has proven to be an active agent of civilization (Tamadun). It not only bridges orthodoxy and context, but also carries out the mandate of the Qur'an and Hadith to be a moderate, knowledgeable, and facilitating community. Its success lies in its pedagogical ability to teach religion as *a blessing for all creation*, rooted in the soil of the Nusantara.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that Islamic education in the archipelago, especially Islamic boarding schools, has transformed into a dynamic and strategic center of cultural-religious acculturation in shaping the distinctive character of *the Islamic civilization of the archipelago*. Through the process of integrating Islamic values with local wisdom, Islamic educational institutions not only serve as institutions for the transmission of religious knowledge, but also as agents of cultural preservation and transformation that reinforce a moderate (*wasathiyah*), tolerant (*tasamuh*), and adaptive (*taysir*) Islamic identity. This phenomenon proves the success of the concept of *Islam indigenization* (Nurcholish Madjid, 2000) and is in line with Giddens' structuration theory (1984), which asserts that social institutions have the ability to reproduce and transform cultural structures. Theoretically, this study reinforces the understanding that Islamic education is a *civilizational instrument* that bridges orthodoxy and the local context, producing a model of Islam that is peaceful and deeply rooted in the culture of the archipelago. The practical implications of this study emphasize the importance of preserving and revitalizing a contextual Islamic education curriculum based on local culture to face the challenges of globalization and transnational puritanism. Although this study is literature-based and does not touch on empirical dimensions in depth, its findings provide a conceptual basis for further field research on the concrete practices of Islamic education acculturation in various regions. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions and the government are expected to strengthen education policies based on the values of *Tamadun Islam Nusantara* as the foundation for the formation of national character and sustainable religious moderation.

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