

The Progressive Transformation of Muhammadiyah Education from Arnold Toynbee's Historiographical Perspective

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Abstract: This article examines the progressive transformation of Muhammadiyah education from Arnold Toynbee's historiographical perspective. Employing historical methods and a sociological approach, this study traces how Muhammadiyah has evolved over a century as a dynamic educational force within Indonesian society. The findings reveal three main discoveries. First, Muhammadiyah's organic-interactive organizational structure functions as a vessel for the creative minority in sustaining and transforming its Muhammadiyah Social Enterprise. Second, the transformation of Muhammadiyah's educational thought unfolds through three distinctive phases: the formative period (responding to colonialism), the development period (consolidating institutional identity), and the maturation period (pursuing second-century philosophical renewal). Third, from the perspective of modern education theory, Muhammadiyah's progressive character demonstrates commitment to social problem-solving and continuous personal growth. This historical transformation reveals that Muhammadiyah education is not a static institution but rather a dynamic entity that continuously adapts through cultural *ijtihad* to maintain civilizational vitality. Muhammadiyah's enduring relevance lies in its capacity to transform contemporary challenges into opportunities for adaptive and inclusive educational innovation in Indonesia.

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji transformasi progresif pendidikan Muhammadiyah dari perspektif historiografi Arnold Toynbee. Dengan menggunakan metode historis dan pendekatan sosiologis, studi ini menelusuri bagaimana Muhammadiyah berevolusi selama seabad sebagai kekuatan pendidikan yang dinamis dalam masyarakat Indonesia. Temuan-temuan tersebut mengungkapkan tiga penemuan utama. Pertama, struktur organisasi organik-interaktif Muhammadiyah berfungsi sebagai wadah bagi minoritas kreatif dalam mempertahankan dan mentransformasikan amal usaha Muhammadiyah (AUM). Kedua, transformasi pemikiran pendidikan Muhammadiyah terungkap melalui tiga fase yang berbeda: periode formatif (menanggapi kolonialisme), periode pengembangan (memperkuat identitas institusional), dan periode pematangan (merumuskan pembaharuan filsafat pendidikan pada abad kedua). Ketiga, dari perspektif teori pendidikan modern, karakter progresif Muhammadiyah menunjukkan komitmen terhadap pemecahan masalah sosial dan pertumbuhan pribadi yang berkelanjutan. Transformasi ini mengungkap bahwa pendidikan Muhammadiyah bukanlah lembaga statis, melainkan entitas dinamis yang terus beradaptasi melalui *ijtihad* budaya untuk mempertahankan vitalitas peradaban. Relevansi Muhammadiyah yang abadi terletak pada kemampuannya mengubah tantangan kontemporer menjadi peluang bagi inovasi pendidikan yang adaptif dan inklusif di Indonesia.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia represents a unique phenomenon in world Islamic historiography. As the country with the largest Muslim population, its Islamization process did not occur through military expansion but rather through *penetration pacifique*, which positioned education as a key instrument of social transformation (Azra, 2004; Ricklefs, 2008). For centuries, the *pesantren* system served as the sole indigenous educational pathway, reflecting both cultural authenticity and profound religiosity (Dhofier, 1999; Steenbrink, 1986). However, this stability was disrupted in the early 20th century by colonialism, which introduced a secular education system that threatened the very existence of Islamic intellectualism (M. Ali, 2025).

From Arnold Toynbee's historiographical perspective (1934-1961), civilizational transformation occurs through patterns of challenge and response. Societies that generate creative responses experience growth and transformation; those that fail face stagnation or decline (Toynbee, 1946). In Indonesia, colonial challenges prompted the emergence of modernist organizations such as Muhammadiyah in 1912, initiating a century-long transformation of Islamic education (A. M. Ali, 1971; Federspiel, 1970; Noer, 1978).

Muhammadiyah emerged as a transformative force, reshaping Indonesian Islamic education through innovative charitable endeavors. James Peacock (1978/2017) acknowledged this organization's capacity to transform religious ideas into concrete social praxis. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's integration of Dutch modern schools with Islamic values represented both cultural adaptation and a pathway to modern nationalism (Ricklefs, 2008). Mitsuo Nakamura (2012) emphasized Muhammadiyah's achievement in cultivating modern rationality while preserving Islamic identity (Nakamura, 2012).

However, this institutional growth has generated critical tensions. Clifford Geertz (1976) warned that administrative expansion risked intellectual stagnation. Similarly, Din Syamsuddin (1990) observed that institutional proliferation sometimes overshadowed philosophical innovation. From Toynbee's perspective, such patterns signal potential transformation from creative innovation to administrative routine a condition where organizations rely on bureaucracy rather than adaptive responses (Toynbee, 1957). Federspiel (1970) noted relatively limited international intellectual production compared to the *pesantren* tradition (Federspiel, 1970).

Nevertheless, international expansion to Australia and Malaysia demonstrates ongoing institutional transformation (Burhani, 2013). Historically, Muhammadiyah education has performed strategic functions: cultivating nationalism, Islamic rationality, and scientific thinking (Nakamura, 2012). Islamic heritage in Java has also served as a resource for educational practice (Suharso et al., 2020). Despite experiencing identity challenges during New Order standardization (Arifin, 1990), Muhammadiyah continues representing Islamic modernism that integrates secular and religious knowledge, navigating persistent epistemological tensions (Noer, 1978; Steenbrink, 1986).

Previous philosophical studies have attempted to reconstruct Dahlan's thought. Wirjosukarto (1985) identified reform in the dimensions of ideals and techniques, while Dja'far Siddik (1997) identified five foundations of Muhammadiyah education: *tajdid*, social orientation, activity, creativity, and optimism (Dja'far Siddik, 1997). Mohamad Ali even found alignment between Muhammadiyah's theology of action and John Dewey's pragmatism (M. Ali, 2016).

However, three significant research gaps remain. First, temporal gap. Most studies concentrate on the formative period through the 1970s, leaving post-1998 Reform dynamics and digital transformation inadequately documented. Second, a theoretical gap. No study has systematically applied Toynbee's historiographical perspective to analyze Muhammadiyah education's transformation as a civilizational process. Third, methodological gap. Previous studies tend toward monodisciplinary approaches, requiring integration of philosophy of history, organizational sociology, and educational theory to capture transformation comprehensively (Kuntowijoyo, 2003; Tosh, 2015).

This study aims to answer a fundamental question: how has Muhammadiyah education transformed over a century from Toynbee's historiographical perspective, and what does this transformation reveal about its ongoing vitality? The research focus encompasses the organizational mechanisms that enable educational transformation, the evolution of educational thought across three historical phases (1912-2024), and its theoretical position within modern education scholarship.

Theoretically, this research applies Toynbee's historiographical perspective to trace the transformation of micro-religious organizations and offers insights into "religious-progressivism" (Boland, 1970). Practically, this study serves as a critical reflection for Muhammadiyah and provides a model

for civil society in the independent provision of education (Bjork, 2005). Employing critical historical methods heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Garraghan, 1946; Kuntowijoyo, 2003) this article demonstrates how Muhammadiyah's educational transformation reflects adaptive and value-based innovation across changing historical contexts (Mandaville & Hamid, S., 2018).

METHODS

This study draws on Arnold J. Toynbee's framework for understanding civilizational transformation in *A Study of History* (1934–1961). Toynbee rejects explanations of the rise and fall of civilizations that rest on race, geographical environment, or material and economic determinism, including Marxist historical materialism. He proposes instead the thesis of challenge and response, which stresses human agency in answering external challenges (McNeill, 1989; Toynbee, 1946). A civilization emerges and grows when it responds creatively and adaptively to physical challenges (natural conditions) and human challenges (social pressures). The challenge must be of moderate intensity: a challenge that is too mild produces stagnation, while one that is too severe causes destruction (Costello, 1993; Perry, 1996).

In this framework, institutional transformation depends on the Creative Minority, a group of visionary individuals, innovative organizations, or intellectual elites that formulates solutions to contemporary crises and inspires wider change through mimesis, or voluntary imitation (Toynbee, 1957). Sustained transformation requires that this group keep its creative capacity and continue to generate innovative responses. An organization enters stagnation when the creative minority becomes a Dominant Minority, which has lost its transformative power yet continues to impose authority through coercion, tradition, or resource monopoly (Geyl, 1956; Toynbee, 1961). The shift from mimesis to coercion marks decline. Muhammadiyah is an appropriate case for this framework because it is a century-old civil society organization whose educational network has had to respond to successive colonial, national, and global challenges. The framework therefore allows us to examine how Muhammadiyah education has transformed across historical periods while maintaining organizational vitality.

To capture the pedagogical dimension, Toynbee's theory is combined with the progressive education paradigm, particularly John Dewey's

view of education as growth and learning by doing (Cremin, 1961; Dewey, 1930; Kliebard, 2004). Within this combined framework, progressive education is treated as the instrument through which a creative minority raises generations able not only to imitate existing solutions (mimesis) but also to practice *cultural ijtihad*, that is, independent and contextual interpretation that produces new responses to new challenges (Hyslop-Margison & Richardson, 2005). This allows the study to trace not only Muhammadiyah's organizational transformation but also the quality of its educational thought across periods.

The study uses a qualitative historical method with a critical historiographical approach, carried out in four stages of historical methodology (Garraghan, 1946; Gottschalk, 1953; Tosh, 2015). The first stage is heuristics, the collection of sources. Primary sources include official Muhammadiyah documents (*Tanfidz Keputusan Mukhtar*, educational guidelines, and annual reports of the Central Board), speeches of key figures, and statistical data on charitable endeavours (*Amal Usaha*). Secondary sources comprise relevant research literature from various disciplines. The second stage is source criticism, in which the authenticity (external criticism) and credibility (internal criticism) of the sources are verified to ensure the validity of the historical information on Muhammadiyah's educational development (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). The third stage is interpretation, in which causal relationships and patterns of transformation among historical facts are analyzed through Toynbee's perspective to trace how Muhammadiyah's educational thought evolved. The fourth stage is historiography, the chronological-analytical writing of the transformation of Muhammadiyah's educational thought from 1912 to 2024. The period is divided into three phases (the Formative Period, 1912–1945; the Development Period, 1945–1998; and the Maturation Period, 1998–2024), based on major shifts in political context and on key organizational documents.

A socio-historical approach is also applied to understand the relationship between Muhammadiyah's organizational structure and socio-political change in Indonesia (Kartodirdjo, 1992; Kuntowijoyo, 2003). In addition, comparative-historical analysis positions Muhammadiyah within the context of global Islamic reform movements (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003; Skocpol, 1984).

The researchers' initial data and interpretations were then examined and enriched through a two-day focus group discussion (FGD) in early August 2025 at the Central Board of Muhammadiyah

Office in Jakarta. Participants came from the Council for Elementary, Secondary, and Non-formal Education (Majelis Dikdasmen & PNF) and the Central Board of the Muhammadiyah Teachers Forum (FGM). The FGD served as a form of triangulation and member checking, not as a primary source of data. As a case study of a single organization that relies heavily on internal documents, the study acknowledges the limitation that its sources may reflect the organization's own perspective, and it addresses this through source criticism and comparison with external scholarship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Organizing Education

Muhammadiyah's century-long transformation is a compelling phenomenon in global social movement studies that warrants a comprehensive theoretical explanation. From Arnold Toynbee's historiographical perspective (1946; 1961), organizational transformation depends on the ability of the core group he termed the Creative Minority to generate innovative responses to evolving challenges continuously. This group does not merely lead administratively but functions as agents of innovation who inspire the masses to follow their path through mechanisms of mimesis or voluntary imitation, not through coercion (Perry, 1996). Toynbee emphasized that transformation from creative minority to dominant minority where leadership loses innovative capacity and relies on bureaucratic routines and formal authority signals organizational stagnation (Toynbee, 1957). In contemporary organizational studies, this concept resonates with organizational resilience theory, which emphasizes adaptive capacity and continuous innovation for long-term transformation (Duchek, 2020; Lengnick-Hall & Beck, T. E., 2005). Muhammadiyah, as a civil society organization existing for 112 years (1912-2024), offers a rich empirical case for applying Toynbee's historiographical perspective to modernist Islamic movements in Southeast Asia.

The function of the creative minority in Muhammadiyah is institutionalized through a unique and sophisticated "Three Pillars" management system: *Persyarikatan* (Association) as owner (ownership), *Unsur Pembantu Pimpinan/UPP* (Leadership Supporting Unit) as regulator, and *Pimpinan Amal Usaha* (Muhammadiyah Charity Management) as operator. This tripartite structure reflects modern organizational governance principles that separate strategic, regulative, and operational functions to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure accountability (Cornforth, 2002; Miller-

Millesen, 2003). The first pillar, the Subbranch of Muhammadiyah (*Ranting*) to Central levels, functions as a vessel for ideological cohesion that maintains organizational vision continuity. What is academically interesting is the leadership succession mechanism through the formateur system rather than direct election of the chairman conducted every five years. This collective-collegial leadership pattern, which Michels (1959) termed the antithesis of the "iron law of oligarchy," creates a stable yet dynamic leadership climate. This system prevents the emergence of personality cults or absolute power concentration which, in Toynbee's perspective, can impede institutional transformation when charismatic figures depart without leaving adequate regeneration mechanisms (Weber & Eisenstadt, S. N., 1989; Weber, 2009). Thus, Muhammadiyah's educational transformation remains the collective property of the organization, not the personal ambition of certain elites (M. Ali, 2016; Em et al., 2025).

The second pillar, *Unsur Pembantu Pimpinan* (UPP), constitutes the organization's technocrats who handle field specialization and function as knowledge brokers between strategic leadership and operational management. Based on the 48th Congress (*Muktamar*) Decision in 2022, Muhammadiyah consolidated its creative energy through three main councils: Council for Elementary, Secondary, and Non-formal Education (*Majelis Dikdasmen & PNF*), the Council for Higher Education, Research, and Development (*Majelis Diktilitbang*), and the Department of Islamic Boarding School (*Lembaga Pengembangan Pesantren/LPP*). The presence of UPP is crucial because they work on a voluntary (part-time) basis, distinguishing them from the third pillar, namely Charitable Endeavor Managers (Rectors, School Principals, *Mudhir*) who work professionally and full-time. The separation between voluntary regulators and professional executives creates a system of checks and balances that maintains accountability for the large number of charitable endeavours (Galeswangi, 2025). In organizational theory terminology, this structure represents a stewardship governance model that emphasizes trust, collaboration, and long-term orientation, differing from the agency governance model that emphasizes control and material incentives (Davis Schoorman, F. D., & Donaldson, L., 1997) (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, M., 2003). This stewardship model enables Muhammadiyah to maintain idealism without losing professionalism, a paradox rarely successfully resolved by value-based non-profit organizations (Najam, 2000; Peacock, 2017).

Historically, this tripartite organization represents a transformative strategy addressing dual challenges faced by Indonesian Muslims in the early 20th century: discriminatory and exclusive Dutch colonial education, and the traditional pesantren system considered less relevant to modernity's demands (Azra, 2004; Steenbrink, 1986). Kiai Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah's founder, viewed education as the "ultimate weapon" to overcome three simultaneous challenges: the economic-intellectual backwardness of Muslims, Christian mission penetration through modern schools, and the apathy of the *priyayi* (aristocratic class) toward the suffering of common people (Maarif, 2006; Shihab, 2016). Kiai Dahlan's transformative approach was revolutionary in its contemporary context: he did not reject Western modernity totally (like extreme traditionalists), nor did he accept Western secularism without filter (like secularists). Instead, he engaged in selective appropriation adopting Western educational systems, methods, and technology while maintaining Islamic values as the soul of education (Alfian, 1989; Nakamura, 2012). Kiai Dahlan's early experiment in 1911, establishing a modern Islamic school, was a prototype of the *Met de Quran* (with the Quran) school, which borrowed the Dutch classical system while being imbued with Islamic values (Salam, 2009). This innovation, from the perspective of Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory, represents the "re-invention" stage where adopters not only adopt innovation but modify it according to local context to enhance compatibility with existing value systems.

Muhammadiyah's institutional evolution demonstrates transformation patterns consistent with organizational learning and strategic adaptation theory (Argyris & Schön, D. A., 1997; Senge, 2006). As contextual complexity increased, Muhammadiyah underwent increasingly sophisticated specialization and structural differentiation. In 1920, the organization began task division through the formation of the "Schools Division" which later transformed into the Teaching Council (*Majelis Pengajaran*) in 1923. Intellectual ambition reached its peak when the aspiration to establish a "Superior Pesantren" (Higher Education Institution) proclaimed in 1940 began to materialize in 1958 with the founding of Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta, followed by massive expansion of Muhammadiyah Higher Education Institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Muhammadiyah/PTM*) in various regions. By 1986, the exponential growth of PTM demanded the establishment of *Majelis Diktilitbang* as a specialized organizer possessing technical capacity to

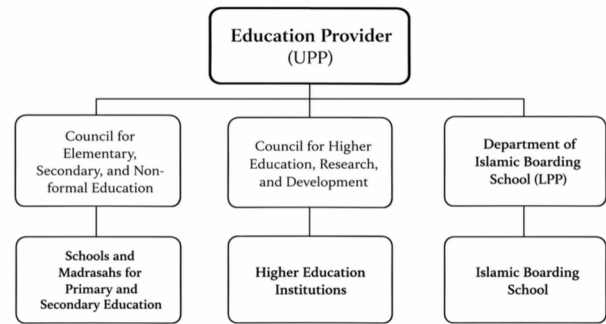


Figure 1. Structure of Muhammadiyah Education Organizers and Charitable Endeavors

manage higher education requiring strict academic standardization (A. M. Ali, 1985). A significant transformative step emerged in 2005 through the establishment of the Departement of Islamic Boarding School (LPP) addressing "ulama crisis" concerns that surfaced since the 1980s a criticism voiced both internally by Muhammadiyah and externally by observers such as Steenbrink (1976) and Azra (1999). The establishment of LPP marked Muhammadiyah's effort to "rebalance" between educational modernization and preservation of classical Islamic scholarly tradition, a transformation that in Bourdieu's (2020) terminology can be understood as negotiation between traditional and modern cultural capital.

Recent data from the Central Board of Muhammadiyah Report (2022), presented at the 48th Congress in Surakarta, show the organization's considerable scale: 6,574 primary and secondary education units, 171 higher education institutions, and 419 Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) spread throughout Indonesia. These figures position Muhammadiyah as one of the largest private education providers in the Muslim world (Hefner, 2008; Mandaville, 2010). The organization of these institutions under three education bodies is shown in Figure 1. Academically, what is more significant is Muhammadiyah's ability to perform quasi-state functions in education, providing quality public services independently without relying entirely on government budgets. From the perspective of civil society and development theory (Edwards, 2009; Putnam et al., 1994), this demonstrates how religious organizations can function as a third sector that bridges market failure and state failure in providing quality education in developing countries (Anheier, 2005; Salamon, 1987). Institutions such as Muhammadiyah Australia College (MAC) in Melbourne and Muhammadiyah University of Malaysia (UMAM) mark a new chapter in educational internationalization, in which Muhammadiyah

continues its transformation to address globalization in its second century. This international expansion represents not merely organizational prestige but a strategy to position moderate Indonesian Islam in global discourse on Islam and modernity (Burhani, 2013; Woodward et al., 2010). From Toynbee's historiographical perspective, Muhammadiyah's capacity to continuously regenerate its "creative minority" and to transform in response to evolving contexts, from colonialism to globalization, demonstrates sustained organizational vitality rather than stagnation.

Transformation of Muhammadiyah Educational Thought (1912-2024)

The institutional dynamics of Muhammadiyah outlined above constitute the external manifestation of internal intellectual transformation that has occurred continuously throughout more than a century. From Arnold Toynbee's (1961) historiographical perspective, Muhammadiyah resembles a living organism that continuously transforms through adaptive responses to its strategic environment. If this transformation appears gradual, it is because Muhammadiyah relies on "Collective Ijtihad" a deliberative mechanism ensuring that responses to contemporary challenges are not sporadic or reactive but rather comprehensive, systemic, and organizationally legitimized (Kusumastuti Rosyadi, I., & Rhain, A., 2022; Nashir, 2010; Rais, 1998). In organizational change theory terminology, Muhammadiyah adopts a deliberative planned change model rather than spontaneous emergent change (Burnes, 2004; By, 2005). Muhammadiyah is not a "static statue" completed by Kiai Dahlan in 1912 but rather a dynamic entity that has undergone continuous transformation through three distinctive historical phases, each addressing qualitatively different contextual challenges (A. M. Ali, 1985).

First, the Formative Period (1912-1945). At the beginning of the 20th century, the primary challenge faced by Indonesian Muslims was the social-intellectual rupture caused by educational dualism that created what Boeke (1953) termed a "dual society" with highly unequal opportunity structures. On the one hand, Dutch modern schools aimed to produce colonial bureaucrats who were secular and alienated from indigenous cultural roots; on the other hand, traditional pesantren tended to be isolated from currents of modernity and the science-technology developments that were transforming the world (Furnivall, 1940; Van Niel, 1960). The Ethical Policy proclaimed by the Dutch colonial government since 1901, although rhetorically

promising "education" for natives, in practice actually exacerbated the situation by making education an instrument of cultural hegemony and social stratification (Ricklefs, 2008; Sutherland, 1979). Colonial economic structures likewise deepened rural inequality in Java (Wasino & Hartatik, 2017). In Gramsci's (2020) framework, colonial education functioned as a hegemonic apparatus that produced consent to colonial domination through the internalization of Western values as superior.

Muhammadiyah's transformative innovation in this period was to conduct a fundamental overhaul of educational ideals and techniques, which Wirjosukarto (1962/1985) documented as a two-dimensional reform: teleological and methodological. The idea of Progressive Islam Kiai Dahlan formulated a "Modern Islamic School" model that dialectically bridged this epistemological chasm adopting the classical system, science-general curriculum, and modern teaching methods from the West, while injecting Islamic values and indigenous knowledge as the soul of education (Dahlan, 1923; Salam, 2009; Shihab, 2016). This synthesis represents what Said (1978) in a different context called an attempt to "reject Orientalism without rejecting modernity" an intellectually sophisticated position. Educational objectives were formulated with great clarity: to produce Muslims with high morality (*akhlaq al-karimah*), an integrated personality, and positive social attitudes, with a commitment to communal advancement (Muhammadiyah, 1950). In this phase, education became an instrument of transformation to awaken Muslims' critical consciousness (*critical consciousness*) toward their subordinate condition, while equipping them with knowledge and skills to effect social transformation a vision resonating with Freire's (1970) pedagogy of liberation. However, Kiai Dahlan formulated it independently within an Islamic context.

Second, the Development Period (1945-1998). Post-independence, the contextual landscape transformed drastically and paradoxically. The Indonesian government began adopting a national education system that actually integrated nationalism and religion a model ironically very similar to Muhammadiyah's early innovation during the colonial era. Simultaneously, traditional Islamic groups, particularly Nahdlatul Ulama, began engaging in "creative imitation" by adopting the classical system and integrative curriculum in their pesantren (Dhofier, 1999; Steenbrink, 1986). This innovation diffusion phenomenon, which, in Rogers' (2003) theory, represents the late majority adoption stage, led Muhammadiyah to lose its monopoly on the

Table 1. Transformation of Muhammadiyah Education (1912-2024)

Period	Challenges	Responses	Movement
Formative Period (1912-1945). From the birth of Muhammadiyah to the end of the colonial era	Dualism of education systems with different orientations: modern schools vs. traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), which in turn created social dualism/ cleavage in societ	Birth of new ideals (concepts) and modern Islamic education techniques (models) capable of bridging educational dualism and social cleavage	Educational ideals/goals: to become Muslims of high morality, with a well-rounded personality and a positive social attitude. Two models of modern Islamic education: general/Western schools plus Islamic teachings, or pesantren enriched with general sciences and the classical system
Development Period (1945-1998). From early independence until the fall of the New Order	After independence, the Indonesian government adopted the Dutch school system, adding religious lessons and national spirit. This was identical to the modern Islamic education model introduced by Muhammadiyah Simultaneously, traditional Muslims who rejected the school system in the early 20th century slowly but surely adopted it Thus, government education policy and the reform orientation of traditional Islamic education converged with Muhammadiyah's early 20th-century reforms. Pressure from above and demand from below triggered an identity crisis in Muhammadiyah education.	Rediscovering the identity of Muhammadiyah education within the national education landscape. Formulation of the Muhammadiyah education system	Formulation of the Basic Guidelines for Muhammadiyah Education, which include: principles, goals, core education, functions of educational institutions, and administration. Compilation of the Muhammadiyah Teacher's Handbook, containing: introduction, functions of Muhammadiyah teachers, position and function of school principals, character building and Islamic/ Muhammadiyah atmosphere, school-parent relationships, pre-teaching activities, teaching activities, and post-teaching activities
Maturation Period (1998-2024). Beginning at the start of the Reformation (Reformasi)	The post-1998 Reformation was marked by openness, including in education, leading to the flourishing of new models of private schools (both national and international) with increasingly diverse philosophies and educational concepts	Muhammadiyah education explicitly formulated its educational philosophy and concepts.	Decision on the Revitalization of Muhammadiyah Education, containing: the preamble, formulation of Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy, and educational concepts encompassing basic educational values and educational aspects

“modernist” identity. Furthermore, national education standardization policies initiated during the New Order era through the 1968, 1975, and 1984 curricula required all private schools, including Muhammadiyah, to follow strict national standards (Parker & Raihani, R., 2011), which constrained teacher autonomy and lesson planning in different school contexts (Saefudin et al., 2024). Nakamura (2012) noted that Muhammadiyah's strategic role

in instilling nationalism and rational thinking began to erode as these functions were taken over by the state through an increasingly hegemonic national education system.

Facing this contextual transformation which Rais (1987) and Boland (1970) documented as a period of organizational critical reflection Muhammadiyah transformed through systematic codification and institutionalization of distinctive values.

The peak of this transformation was the 38th Congress (*Muktamar*) in 1971 in Makassar, which produced the Basic Guidelines for Muhammadiyah Education (*Pedoman Pokok Pendidikan Muhammadiyah*), a fundamental document that explicitly formulated educational philosophy. Here, Muhammadiyah crystallized five key concepts that became identity differentiators: *tajdid* (continuous innovation), *kemasyarakatan* (orientation toward real social problems), *aktivitas* (experience-based learning), *kreativitas* (divergent thinking and problem-solving), and *optimisme* (positive future orientation). This conceptualization demonstrated extraordinary theoretical maturity Muhammadiyah was no longer merely “doing” modern education but “thinking about” and “conceptualizing” modern education within an Islamic framework. Education was no longer defined merely as the transmission of knowledge but as an integral instrument of *dakwah* (Islamic propagation), a leadership pipeline mechanism, and a concrete contribution to national development (Muhammadiyah, 1971). Standardization through the Muhammadiyah Teacher Guidelines (*Pedoman Guru Muhammadiyah*) and various other technical guidelines became a bulwark to ensure distinctive values especially Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK) subjects remained a distinctive competence amid national education standardization threatening homogenization (Barber Donnelly, K., Rizvi, S., & Summers, L., 2013).

Third, the Maturation Period (1998-2024). The Reform Era that began in 1998 brought a qualitatively different transformation context: educational liberalization, proliferation of new model private schools with international standards (internationally standardized schools, Cambridge, IB), and digital technology disruption that fundamentally changed how humans learn and access knowledge (Marginson, 2011; Selwyn, 2014). In the global context, this period was marked by what Beck (1992) termed “risk society,” in which uncertainty became a permanent condition, and by Bauman (2000) as “liquid modernity,” in which all solid social structures underwent liquefaction. For value-based educational organizations like Muhammadiyah, the primary challenge was maintaining identity and relevance amid globalization currents threatening cultural homogenization (Rizvi & Lingard, B., 2009; Spring, 2008).

Muhammadiyah transformed through “Philosophical Maturation,” marked by increasingly high levels of theoretical reflexivity (M. Ali, 2017). Through the 46th Congress Decision in 2010 on the Revitalization of Muhammadiyah Education,

the organization explicitly formulated its educational philosophy as “Education that Enlivens and Liberates,” a vision that deliberately adopted the language of critical pedagogy while remaining rooted in Islamic epistemology (Muhammadiyah, 2010). This phase marked a paradigmatic shift from merely managing schools to developing excellence through the integration of textual revelation (*qauliyah*) and natural revelation (*qauniyah*), an integrative epistemology that Nasr (1976) and al-Attas (1978) viewed as the heart of the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. Operational values such as *Ruhul Ikhlas* (spirit of sincerity), *musyarokah* (collaborative cooperation), and advocacy for *mus-tadh’afin* (marginalized groups) were creatively contextualized to answer increasingly acute social inequality in the neoliberal era (Harvey, 2005; Piketty, 2014). Internationalization through UMAM Malaysia and MAC Australia shows that Muhammadiyah continues to transform in order to become a player in the global Islamic education arena, ensuring that its creative minority retains the capacity to face rapid and disruptive digital change (Castells, 2010; Rizvi, 2017). From Toynbee’s historiographical perspective, the capacity to keep formulating innovative responses across different historical contexts, from colonialism and nation-building to globalization and digitalization, demonstrates sustained organizational transformation rather than stagnation. Table 1 summarizes these challenges and responses across the three periods.

Educational Theory Perspective

The historiographical analysis in the previous section has demonstrated that Muhammadiyah’s educational thought is not a static entity but rather an epistemological organism that has undergone continuous transformation through formative, development, and maturation phases. To position its intellectual trajectory more precisely within the constellation of global education theory, this section examines Muhammadiyah education through the lens of three major schools of modern education theory Progressivism, Essentialism, and Perennialism based on indicators of philosophical foundation, cultural orientation, educational objectives, and curriculum structure (Gutek, 2016; Ornstein & Levine, D., 1989). This mapping is important because, as argued by Dewey (1930) and later reinforced by Noddings (2018), every educational practice contains implicit philosophical assumptions that determine the direction and character of education, whether consciously or not. In the context of Islamic education, theoretical positioning be-

comes more complex, as it involves a negotiation between Western epistemology, which is secular-empirical, and Islamic epistemology, which is theistic-revelational (Halstead, 2004; Tan, 2012). Muhammadiyah, as a reformist movement born of the encounter between Islamic tradition and Western modernity, offers a rich case for exploring the possibilities of epistemological synthesis.

The fundamental difference between Western and Eastern intellectual edifices, as noted by van Peursen (1976) and further developed by Nasr (1987) and Wan Daud (1998), lies in their epistemological starting point: philosophy versus religion. The Western tradition since the Enlightenment has built its educational system on a secular rationality foundation that makes human reason the sole arbiter of truth, while the Islamic tradition and the East in general places revelation as the primary epistemological source that complements and corrects the limitations of reason (al-Attas, 1978). However, Muhammadiyah demonstrates a unique and sophisticated point of convergence with Western progressive education theory, particularly John Dewey's pragmatism, through what can be termed "Religious Pragmatism" a transformative synthesis that adopts the praxis orientation and problem-solving approach from Dewey while maintaining Islamic theological foundations. Kiai Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah's founder, conducted a radical transformation of Islamic understanding that in his time was trapped in narrow ritualism and static conservatism that rejected all forms of innovation as *bid'ah* (Federspiel, 1970; Shihab, 2016). Like progressives who emphasize knowledge functionality and practical utility, Kiai Dahlan offered a "workable Islam" a theology of action that measures the truth of religious ideas from their ability to bring real *maslahat* (welfare) to humanity (M. Ali, 2016; Mulkhan, 2020). This approach resonates with Dewey's pragmatic principle that "truth is what works," although with the theological qualification that "what works" must remain within the corridor of Islamic values (Carr & Hartnett, A., 1996; Pring, 2010).

In the map of cultural orientation, Muhammadiyah firmly rejects Perennialism's regressive pattern that glorifies only the past (past-oriented), holding that eternal truth has been fully revealed in classical tradition, and that education's task is only to preserve that heritage (Adler, 1982; Hutchins, 1953). Muhammadiyah also rejects Essentialism's conservative pattern which, although acknowledging the need for adaptation, tends to be defensive and reactive toward social change (Bagley, 1938;

Bestor, 1953). Instead, this organization adopts a progressive orientation that views culture as something that must be continuously reconstructed (cultural reconstruction) for civilizational advancement. However, it is important to note that although Muhammadiyah carries the slogan "Return to the Quran and Sunnah," this movement does not intend historical romanticism or literal fundamentalism that rejects contextualization (Barton, 1997; Hasyim, 2015; Prayitno et al., 2022). The call to return to original sources is precisely intended to enable fresh interpretation or *ijtihad* that liberates Islam from the accumulation of particular traditions that are no longer relevant, while opening space for the use of modern scientific and technological instruments in understanding and applying Islamic teachings (Federspiel, 1970; Rais, 1998). From Toynbee's historiographical perspective, this represents a transformative strategy to ensure that religion remains functional and relevant in evolving contexts, rather than merely a cultural artifact to be preserved in a static form. Muhammadiyah education is thus progressive because it views culture as something that must be continuously critically transformed for civilizational advancement, while maintaining Islamic transcendental values as a moral compass (Counts, 1978; Noddings, 2018).

The most striking similarity between Muhammadiyah and John Dewey's progressivism lies in the emphasis on experience and problem-solving as the core of education. Dewey (1938) in *Experience and Education* viewed education as the continuous reconstruction of experience to enable individuals to face and solve increasingly complex new problems. Muhammadiyah adopted this principle to realize graduate profiles that are "competent, confident, and useful to society" (Muhammadiyah, 1971). The Muhammadiyah curriculum, as formulated in the Educational Guidelines, is designed not merely for static knowledge transmission but to equip learners with critical thinking abilities, solving real social problems, and continuous innovation principles highly aligned with Dewey's reflective thinking and inquiry-based learning emphasized by Kilpatrick (1918) and Bruner (1971). Active, experimental, and project-based learning methods practiced in Muhammadiyah schools since the formative era constitute concrete application of the learning by doing philosophy that is the heart of progressivism (Cremin, 1961; Kliebard, 2004).

However, there is a fundamental and non-negotiable ontological difference. If Western progressivism limits "experience" to the secular empirical-worldly realm and rejects the metaphysical di-

Table 2. Muhammadiyah Education in the Map of Modern Education Theory

Elements of education	Three Modern Educational Theories			Muhammadiyah Education
	Progressive	Essentialist	Perennials	
Foundations of Philosophy/Religion	Secular-Pragmatism	Idealism and Realism	Idealism	Religious pragmatism
Cultural Orientation	Progressive	Conventional-Essential	Regressive	Progressive
Educational Goals	Continuous reconstruction of student experience	Developing moral and intellectual abilities based on cultural values	Honing intellectual rational abilities based on universal values	The realization of Muslims who are noble in character, capable, self-confident, and beneficial to society and the country.
Curriculum	Student-centered and focused on real-life experiences	Centered on core subjects and valuable cultural values	Focusing on classic and timeless works	Science and technology based on textual revelation (<i>qauliyah</i>) and natural revelation (<i>qauniyah</i> /the universe) develop the ability to utilize the universe. History.

Source: Ornstein & Levine (1989: 188); Ali (2016: 264)

mension as unscientific (naturalistic ontology), Muhammadiyah expands the scope of experience to include the transcendental religious-afterlife dimension (theistic ontology) (Al Hadi et al., 2025; Sutarja et al., 2024). The Muhammadiyah curriculum integrates textual revelation (*qauliyah*) with natural revelation (*qauniyah*) an integrative epistemology that al-Attas (1980) and Nasr (1987) viewed as the heart of the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, which rejects the sacred-profane dichotomy (Prayitno et al., 2026). Learning experiences in Muhammadiyah schools are designed so that students not only master science and technology (*IPTEKS*) for natural resource utilization but also absorb divine values as the basis of morality and spirituality that gives meaning to human existence (Halstead, 2004; Tan, 2012). Education, in Muhammadiyah's perspective, is not only about adaptation to the social-material environment (as Dewey emphasized) but also about forming transcendental character responsible to God (*taqwa*), fellow humans (*akhlaq al-karimah*), and the universe (*khalifah fi al-ard*) (Dja'far Siddik, 1997; Mulkhan, 2020). This difference is not merely a nuance but a paradigmatic divergence rooted in distinct metaphysical assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and the purpose of human life (Barnadib, 1997; Pring, 2010).

Muhammadiyah's choice of the "Religious-Progressivism" path is an intelligent strategy to maintain its status as a creative minority in Toynbee's terminology. By remaining grounded in Is-

lam's universal values (the transcendental, essential aspect) while staying open to new progressive and empirically based pedagogical methods, Muhammadiyah avoided two extreme threats at once: losing its identity roots to radical secularism on one side and losing relevance to an extreme traditionalism that is anti-modern on the other (Burhani, 2013; Hefner, 2000). This synthesis enables Muhammadiyah to move dynamically within a corridor bounded by two principles: *tsawabit* (constants, or permanent principles that cannot be changed) and *mutaghayyirat* (variables, or methods that can be adapted to context). This theoretical position gives hope that, as long as Muhammadiyah education maintains its "religious progressivism" character and continues to reconstruct experience creatively with the compass of Islamic values, the institution can avoid the civilizational disintegration predicted by Toynbee (van Bruinessen, 2013; Woodward et al., 2010). Furthermore, the "Religious-Progressivism" model offers a significant theoretical contribution to global Islamic education discourse by demonstrating that modernity and religiosity are not irreconcilable antitheses but can be productively synthesized into an education system that is both innovative and rooted in values (Halstead & McLaughlin, 2005; Jackson, 2003). In an era of globalization marked by a crisis of meaning and dehumanization caused by the dominance of instrumental rationality (Habermas, 1985; Taylor, 1992), an educational model that integrates material progress with spiritual development, such as

the one developed by Muhammadiyah, becomes increasingly relevant as an alternative to both Western secularism and Eastern fundamentalism (Fida et al., 2022). Table 2 maps Muhammadiyah education against the three major schools of modern education theory.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the century-long transformation of Muhammadiyah education is not a historical coincidence but rather the result of sustained adaptive innovation. Based on analysis conducted from Arnold Toynbee's historiographical perspective, three fundamental findings can be concluded. *First*, the secret of Muhammadiyah's sustained transformation lies in its organic structure through the "Three Pillars" system (*Persyarikatan*, Organizer/UPP, and Management) that functions as a vessel for the creative minority to conduct collective *ijtihad*. The separation of roles between voluntary leadership that maintains ideological vision and professional management that maintains technical operations create a checks and balances equilibrium that prevents the organization from being trapped in rigid bureaucratization. *Second*, the transformation of Muhammadiyah's educational thought (1912-2024) demonstrates extraordinary adaptive capacity. From the Formative phase that addressed colonial dualism through Islamic-modernity synthesis, the Development phase that constructed distinctive identity through systematic codification amid state standardization, to the Maturation phase that articulated the philosophy of "Education that Enlivens and Liberates" in the era of globalization-digitalization, Muhammadiyah has consistently transformed contextual challenges into opportunities for innovation. This transformation demonstrates that Muhammadiyah is a dynamic entity that continuously renews its thinking to maintain institutional vitality. *Third*, theoretically, Muhammadiyah education occupies a unique position as "Religious-Progressivism," integrating Dewey's pragmatism with Islamic theology. Although sharing similarities with Western progressivism in its emphasis on experience and problem-solving, Muhammadiyah distinguishes itself by integrating textual revelation (*qauliyah*) and natural revelation (*qauniyah*), making it an educational model that is methodologically progressive yet ideologically essential.

Based on the research findings, three strategic agendas are recommended. *First*, Muhammadiyah needs to sustain intellectual vitality at the leadership and charitable endeavor management levels

to ensure that the creative minority maintains transformative capacity rather than becoming dependent on established routines. The tradition of philosophical research and internationally reputable academic publications needs to be strengthened to address digital disruption and global humanitarian challenges. *Second*, internationalization expansion through MAC Australia and UMAM Malaysia must be accompanied by strengthening research capacity and evidence-based curriculum development. Muhammadiyah needs to develop centers of excellence capable of competing at the global level while maintaining its progressive Islamic identity (*Islam berkemajuan*). *Third*, for academics and researchers, these findings open a comparative research agenda with other religious organizations both Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia and Islamic reform movements in the Middle East and South Asia applying Toynbee's historiographical perspective. Longitudinal studies on the impact of Muhammadiyah's "Religious-Progressivism" model on educational outcomes (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) over the long term will enrich the contemporary Islamic education literature and provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the modernity-religiosity synthesis in the Muslim context.

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