

Paradigm of educational modernization Nurcholish Madjid perspective and relevance to the merdeka belajar concept

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to analyze the development of Islamic education through the newly launched concept of "Merdeka Belajar" from the perspective of Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts. This research employs a library research approach with in-depth descriptive analysis. The findings reveal that the achievements of educational reform in Indonesia through "Merdeka Belajar" have both relevance and gaps when compared to Nurcholish Madjid's perspective on educational modernization in three areas: First, the relevance of the conception of values and development principles in the three dimensions of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning through a student-oriented learning approach. Second, the gaps in the practical implementation of "Merdeka Belajar," are: 1) the concept of "Merdeka Belajar" tends to be autonomous concerning the administration of education at educational units, creating opportunities for changes in educational direction; and 2) the aspect of educational equality, which remains uneven to this day. Therefore, these findings can serve as representative evaluation material for stakeholders and policymakers regarding the development of education in Indonesia, particularly in the context of Islamic education.

Keywords: Nurcholis Madjid, Modernization, Merdeka Belajar Concept, Islamic Education

INTRODUCTION

The concept of renewal in various fields has occurred a lot, including the concept of Islamic education as an effort to renew the understanding, interpretation and formulation of Islamic problems through a historical reconstruction approach, with the aim of applying Islamic values in modern life, the main focus emphasized is reopening the opportunity for *ijtihad* and utilizing all the potential of the mind you have (Santi & Aini, 2022). The issue of renewing Islamic education became increasingly popular in the 18th century among Muslim leaders, due to their awareness of the progress of Muslims compared to the West (Rahman, 2017).

The development of Islamic thought began with Islamic doctrine which did not appear to experience a paradigm shift. This creates the impression that the understanding of Islamic teachings becomes very theological and produces a scientific paradigm that is final, exclusive and conventional. However, taking into account developments over time, Islamic thought needs to maintain the authenticity of Islamic teachings by making the concepts of *tajdid* (renewal) and *ijtihad* the main elements in Islamic thought (Vera, 2022).

The paradigm of the direction of Islamic education is also experiencing development marked by the massive issue of Islamic Modernization, which means that there are steps in updating interpretations, formulations and even understanding related to fundamental problems regarding Islam with various methods aimed at reconstructing the history of the actualization of Islam in modern life, marked by the emergence of a spirit of openness. the door to *ijtihad* as wide as possible. This condition actually has the spirit to restore the glory of Islam in the intellectual freedom of the 18th to 19th centuries in Arabia, India and Africa and is better known as "Premodernism Revivalism" (Azhar, 1996). And the efforts to modernize science through Islamic education continued continuously in the 20th century.

In the Indonesian context, Nurcholish Madjid is a modern reformer. He is an Islamic figure who combines two educational heritages, namely traditional and modern, and integrates Islamic educational culture and European secular culture (Mukaffan & Siswanto, 2019). The peak of the reform movement initiated by Nurcholish Madjid began when he expressed his ideas at the *halal bi halal* event which was attended by the successor activists of Masyumi, HMI, PII, and GPI in Jakarta on January 3, 1970. At that time, Nurcholish presented his paper which entitled "The Necessity of Renewing Islamic Thought and the Problem of Community Integration." In this paper that created a stir, he proposed the ideas of secularization and liberalization in Islamic thought (Janah, 2017).

Since then, Nurcholish's ideas have become the object of in-depth study and intense discussion in the context of the relationship and dynamics between Islam, education, and Indonesian identity. Da is even included in the category of "neo-modernism" which is included in the Islamic neo-modernist school along with other figures, such as Harun Nasution, Abdurrahman Wahid, Jalaluddin Rahmat, and so on (Janah, 2017). Neo-Modernism seeks to unite authentic revelation with ever-changing social reality. Nurcholish seeks to shape a vision of Islam in the modern era while still paying attention to Islamic intellectual heritage down to its roots, to achieve modernity within the framework of Islamic thought itself (Fitri et al., 2022).

Even though Nurcholish Madjid's ideas seem innovative, they are not completely well received by Indonesian society, especially considering the cultural condition of Islamic education which is still faced with several fundamental problems. One of them was the paradigm of Muslim thinking, which at that time still tended to be conservative, making it difficult to develop progressive ideas to advance science in the Islamic world (Hajam & Saumantri, 2022). At that time, the educational paradigm still focused on defensive goals, namely protecting Muslims from Western secularization ideas which were considered to threaten traditional Islamic moral standards.

On the other hand, the reality of education policy in Indonesia has also undergone changes and developments recorded around ten times, starting from the Lesson Plan in 1947, then the curriculum was published sequentially in 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975/1976, 1984, 1994, to a competency-based curriculum 2002/2004, then the development of education further developed through the 2006 Education Unit Level curriculum policy, and the 2013 curriculum, and finally the concept of Independent Learning (Achmad et al., 2022).

Merdeka Belajar is not an independent concept, but complements the cultivation of student character with the Pancasila student profile which consists of six dimensions, and each dimension is explained in detail in each element, including faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, the spirit of mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022). This development certainly has relevance to modernization or renewal, Nurcholish Madjid believes that progress or modernization is a must for Muslims. Even though there is still resistance from those who prioritize tradition, Nurcholish Madjid continues to give hope and encouragement to Indonesian Muslims so

that they continue to think critically and intelligently. This effort aims to prevent Indonesia from being trapped in backwardness, especially by parties who have a more advanced civilization.

Despite facing resistance from traditionalist groups, Nurcholish Madjid never stops inviting Muslims to be open to current developments. In the context of research on the topic of Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on educational modernization as a critical analysis of the new concept of "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) in Indonesia over the past five years, there is still a lack of studies. For example, the research by (Nagri et al., 2020) concerns the basic principles of Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts to explore foundational principles for proactive teachers in the context of Islamic education, particularly regarding principles of evaluation, freedom of thought, and an attitude of openness grounded in faith and piety towards Allah SWT. Meanwhile, (Safitri et al., 2022) examined the model of multicultural Islamic education related to tolerance of diverse understandings of Islam, religious differences, and the richness of local cultures in Indonesia, which is relevant to the spirit of Merdeka Belajar.

Therefore, at the level of educational modernization values through Merdeka Belajar, further studies are still needed regarding its relevance to Nurcholish Madjid's views, particularly on how Islamic education policies are supervised in the Indonesian context. This is because both aim to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia.

METHOD

The approach used in this research is descriptive qualitative, Library Research type (Rahardjo, 2010), where data sources are obtained from various library materials such as books and journals and/or other sources relevant to the research object or target. Therefore, the preparation steps involve collecting data from various library materials in the form of books by Nurcholish Madjid, journals and other sources that can support objects related to Nurcholish Madjid's Modernization ideas and the concept of Freedom to Learn. This research is a descriptive analysis aimed at describing and analyzing information according to the studied variables. The next stage involves describing, recording, deeply analyzing, and comparing the concept of "Merdeka Belajar" in the context of Islamic education, while the final stage involves interpretation and validation using a triangulation approach from the collected data to form a conclusion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As an intellectual, Nurcholish Madjid is known as a productive thinker. Until now, his various writings have become the main source for research regarding his range of thought, both published in journals and books, including *Popular Islam and Indonesianism*; *The Thoughts of Madjid 'Young.'*, *Islam, the Religion of Humanity: Building a New Tradition and Vision of Indonesian Islam*, *Modern Islam and Indonesian's*, *Skyline of Islamic Civilization*, *Islamic Tradition: Its Role and Function in Development in Indonesia*, *Islamic Doctrine and Civilization: A Critical Study About Issues of Faith, Humanity and Modernity*, and so on.

Nurcholish Madjid's Concept of Modernizing Islamic Education

Reform in Nurcholish Madjid's view refers more to an effective and purposeful process capable of producing individuals with liberal and critical views, who can think freely. In his view, Islamic education systems and institutions will face increasing challenges, and may even be disowned or lose their relevance, if their approach only emphasizes moral aspects without paying adequate attention to the development of science and technology. Therefore, the educational modernization efforts initiated by Nurcholish Madjid basically aim to overcome dualism in the education system. According to him, both types of educational institutions have positive aspects that should be developed, but also have weaknesses that need to be fully overcome (Madjid, 1993).

So, it can be seen that Nurcholish Madjid directed his modernization efforts towards integrating the two institutions by combining their respective strengths, with the hope of forming an ideal education system. This concept, according to Nurcholish Madjid, is called a step towards meeting point or convergence in the Indonesian education system (Madjid, 1997).

From the study of Nurcholish Madjid's ideas, the Islamic education paradigm in Indonesia must have an integration and interrelationship of three concepts, namely First with the Islamic approach, Nurcholish Madjid is of the opinion that rationality has a very significant role in the implementation of *ijtihad*. *Ijtihad* is considered the main key for Muslims to organize themselves and develop themselves more progressively in facing changing times. The focus of *ijtihad* carried out by Madjid was aimed at and implemented within the framework of reforming Islamic thought (Madjid, 1995b).

In Nurcholish Madjid's view, Islam has a universal character, and the logical consequence of this universal nature is that Islam should be able to be understood and applied in various contexts and eras. Therefore, he believes that Islam needs, even should, be adapted to changing times. If there is a conflict between Islamic teachings and the achievement of modernity, the approach should not be to reject modernity itself, but rather to reinterpret Islamic teachings to achieve harmony (Madjid, 2000).

In the operational realm, this Islamic context includes efforts to include Islamic elements in modern secular education. This process begins with receiving a modern secular education initially, followed by efforts to "Islamize it," that is, by integrating key Islamic concepts into it. The main goal is to form a paradigm of Islamic values in various scientific disciplines and use Islamic perspectives to change orientation in various academic studies (Santi & Aini, 2022).

Second, Indonesian context. Nurcholish Madjid's spirit is to strive hard to modernize with strong determination, based on the foundations of modernity that originate from Indonesia's cultural diversity, and are strengthened by religious beliefs (Madjid, 2000). Therefore, Nurcholish Madjid then carried out a comparison between two countries, namely Japan and Turkey, both of which were trying to achieve modernity, but the results were very different.

Türkiye became the first country to confirm its determination to become a modern country. As a country with a majority population that adheres to Islam, Turkey has a glorious history as a major power. However, when the industrial revolution occurred in Europe, Turkey experienced a setback and was often nicknamed "the sick men" in Europe. To overcome this challenge, they initiated a modernization effort involving community leaders. The Turkish leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, embraced modernization at an extreme level, and was known as westernization. However, these modernization efforts caused Turks to become disconnected from their intellectual past, as they lost the ability to read those written in Arabic (Madjid, 1995a).

Implicatively, it could be a syllabus simplification approach, which involves efforts to simplify the traditional syllabus. This approach focuses more on the fields of language, Arabic literature, and the principles of interpretation of the Koran in the context of traditional education (Santi & Aini, 2022).

Third, scientific context. Nurcholish Madjid emphasized that all scientific disciplines start from the basics of religious knowledge. For him, when Muslim intellectuals can develop and harmonize modern science with religious principles, the Islamic world can achieve prosperity like during classical Islamic times. Currently, Muslims can only witness the remnants of this glory. Nurcholish Madjid also gave examples of technical terms in modern science and technology that originate from Islamic languages, especially Arabic. For example, alchemy comes from "*al-kimiya*," which refers to the science of chemistry. Al-cohol comes from "*al-kuhul*," which refers to alcohol. Alcove comes from "*al-qubba*," which refers to a dome. Alembic comes from "*al-anbiq*," which is a distillation device. Algebra comes from "*al-jabr wa al-musawah*," which refers to algebra and the theory of equations, while algorithm comes from "*al-Khwarizmi*," the name of the scholar who discovered it. Alkali comes from "*al-qali*," which includes hydroxides such as sodium, potassium, and others (Munir, 2018). This effort is carried out by integrating branches of classical science with modern science. This merging process takes quite a long time to understand science because it involves in-depth learning, with a lot of material that needs to be studied and combined (Santi & Aini, 2022).

In general, the educational reform paradigm according to Nurcholish Madjid explains that Islam is a religion that is rational, open and progressive. In this context, the Islamic education curriculum needs to produce alumni who have a deep understanding of Islam, a sense of love for the Motherland, and the ability to think critically and rationally. In the context of teaching staff and teachers, they must have adequate competence to carry out a modern and effective learning process. Thus, the Islamic education curriculum must produce graduates with a deep understanding of Islam, love of the Motherland, and critical and rational thinking skills. At the applicable level, teachers and educational staff need to have adequate qualifications to carry out modern and effective learning. And at the institutional level, educational facilities and infrastructure need to meet sufficient standards to support an effective learning process (Munir, 2018).

Concept of Merdeka Belajar

The development of education in Indonesia has gone through various stages and developments, until in 2022, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) announced the Independent Learning policy. This policy aims to respond to dynamic changing times and prepare students optimally to face future challenges.

Minister Nadhem Makarim emphasized in his speech that the paradigm established in Merdeka Belajar involves various parties, including educational institutions, teachers, families, the business and industrial world, as well as the community, to create quality education for all Indonesian people. According to him, the spirit of Merdeka Belajar aims to increase educational participation rates, student learning outcomes and education distribution. This can be achieved through first, improving school infrastructure and technology; second, implementation of policies, procedures and funding; third, leadership, society and culture; and fourth, curriculum development, pedagogy and assessment (Maula et al., 2021)

In the context of the Curriculum, it is actually interpreted as a learning design that provides space for students to learn comfortably, relaxed, enjoyable, without pressure or stress, so that they can express their natural talents and focus on freedom and creative thinking (Rahayu, Rosita, Rahayuningsih, Hernawan, & Prihantini, 2022). Therefore, Merdeka Belajar is also designed to achieve independence in the learning process with a humanist approach.

Conceptually, Merdeka Belajar is an approach that emphasizes student independence, which is defined as giving each student the freedom to access knowledge from formal and non-formal education. The applicable curriculum does not tie learning only to the school environment, but rather provides space for learning outside of school, while encouraging creativity from both teachers and students (Manalu et al., 2022)

Judging from the learning process, there are several changes. Firstly, the Learning Implementation Plan is only one sheet, which means it is prepared in a simpler and less complicated way than before. Second, the zoning system for accepting new students has become more flexible in its implementation. Third, the National Examination has been replaced by a minimum competency assessment and character survey. Fourth, the National Standard School Examination was shifted to continuous assessment, such as the use of portfolios (group assignments, written work, practicums, and so on) (Sahib & Naimi, 2023).

Study of the Modernization of Nurcholish Madjid's Education in the Context of Independent Learning

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that Freedom of Learning is a paradigmatic concept in the field of education which emphasizes the central role of students

in the learning process, giving them the freedom to manage their learning. The main principle is to provide autonomy for students to choose learning paths, explore personal interests and talents, and access learning resources from various sources, both inside and outside school. So, this concept focuses on developing students' creativity, innovation and independent thinking abilities, with the aim of creating a learning environment that is more dynamic, relevant and in line with individual needs.

From the results of the researcher's critical study, it was found that there is relevance and implementation gaps between the idea of renewing Islamic education from Nurcholish Madjid's perspective and the policy of developing an independent learning curriculum, including:

First, Relevance of the Concept of Dimensions

Nurcholish Madjid's modernization of Islamic education which aspires to balance between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions, and is relevant to the Merdeka Belajar context which is designed to develop students' cognitive competencies such as critical and creative thinking abilities, while still paying attention to affective and psychomotor aspects. These three dimensions are considered important so that Islamic education can form individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally independent. In reflection, development methods are needed in the learning process, including project-oriented learning that can encourage students to hone critical, creative, and collaborative thinking skills. Problem-focused learning can encourage students to develop problem-solving and decision-making skills. Literacy-based learning can encourage students to improve their reading, writing and communication skills. Life skills-oriented learning can encourage students to develop daily skills, such as social, motor, and emotional skills.

Second, Autonomy and Equality Concept Gaps

Modernization of Islamic education Nurcholish Madjid emphasized the important role of the government in developing Islamic education to prevent deviations and make a positive contribution to nation development. However, this still finds gaps in the concept of Merdeka Belajar, giving freedom to educational institutions to determine the curriculum, both content and learning methods, and of course triggers concern regarding the possibility of developing Islamic education that is not in line with religious values. The solution is that steps are needed to anticipate this, including first, the necessity of developing a

comprehensive and holistic Islamic education curriculum covering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, as well as focusing on religious values. Second, improving the quality of teachers and educational staff is essential, where they must have adequate qualifications to provide learning that is in line with religious values. Third, the monitoring and evaluation process needs to be carried out periodically to ensure that learning in Islamic education remains consistent with religious values.

In addition, according to Nurcholish Madjid, the modernization of Islamic education focuses on the importance of creating equality in Islamic education. This point is considered crucial so that Islamic education can provide equal opportunities for all individuals to develop their potentia (Mulyah & Khoiri, 2023). Of course, this still faces many obstacles to the Independent Learning concept which is designed to accommodate the needs of students from various backgrounds. Because its implementation has not been fully successful in addressing the needs of students from poor families, students with special needs, and students in remote areas (Rini et al., 2023). Therefore, the government must aid and subsidize students from poor families, which can include providing books, teaching aids and internet access facilities (Karningsih, 2021). The government needs to develop inclusive education services for students with special needs, which are designed to meet their needs, which means there is still a policy gap at the implementation level in improving educational access in remote areas. Therefore, it is necessary to provide qualified teachers and adequate educational infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

From the results of this research, it is known that the government is making efforts to improve the education system through the Independent Learning Curriculum. The goal is to create a generation that can not only remember information but is also able to understand every concept taught by educators. The Student Oriented principle in the curriculum gives students the freedom to use technology optimally in learning. Previously, Nurcholish Madjid had proposed the idea of modernizing Islamic education by emphasizing three aspects, namely Islamic, Indonesian, and scientific. Even though this concept is relevant, at the level of implementation it shows that it was discovered with the Merdeka Belajar reform. *First*, the relevance of dimensions in the development of Nurcholish Madjid's modernization with Merdeka Belajar, namely comprehensive cognitive, affective, and psychomotor deepening.

Second, the gap between the development of "Merdeka Belajar" and the modernization of Islamic education from Nurcholish Madjid's perspective reveals areas of concern, particularly regarding the autonomy and equality aspects of education. The autonomy granted for implementing "Merdeka Belajar" at educational institutions raises concerns about potential shifts in the direction of Islamic education, indicating that the government's role is still not optimal. Meanwhile, the aspect of educational equality in "Merdeka Belajar" remains insufficiently addressed, especially for impoverished communities, individuals with special needs, and remote populations. Therefore, the spirit of educational reform requires increased awareness from various stakeholders to promptly address existing disparities. Consequently, these findings critique the "Merdeka Belajar" concept in these two aspects and can serve as an evaluation resource for all stakeholders and interested parties in the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

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