



The Contribution of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's Thought to the Advancement of the Muslim Community in Indonesia

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Received July 01, 2024; Revised August 19, 2024; Accepted September 12, 2024

Abstract: *This study examines the contributions of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan to Islamic reform in Indonesia, focusing on his role in modernizing Islamic education, social justice, and theological practice through the establishment of Muhammadiyah. The objectives are to analyze Dahlan's contributions to Islamic teaching, evaluate Muhammadiyah's societal impact, and explore the enduring relevance of his legacy. Theoretical frameworks include Islamic modernism and reformist thought, drawing on the ideas of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida, which influenced Dahlan's vision for a progressive, action-driven interpretation of Islam. The historical-qualitative method utilized primary sources from Muhammadiyah archives and secondary literature. Results and discussion highlight Muhammadiyah's integration of secular and religious education, its emphasis on social justice through Surah Al-Ma'un, and gender inclusivity via Aisyiyah. Research implications demonstrate the relevance of Dahlan's reformist ideology in contemporary contexts, including education, interfaith dialogue, and social development. Originality/Value lies in its comprehensive analysis of Dahlan's vision and Muhammadiyah's role as a worldwide transformative model for Islamic reform.*

Keywords: *k.h. ahmad dahlan, muhammadiyah, islamic reform, social justice, theology of al-ma'un.*

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic tradition in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, has long been an example of religious dynamism and cultural adaptability. Over centuries, Islam in this region has not merely survived but flourished, integrating into the local socio-cultural milieu in a way that preserves its core theological principles while celebrating local diversity [1], [2]. This syncretism has birthed a distinct Southeast Asian Islamic identity—one that champions harmony, inclusivity, and collective well-being. Yet, the arrival of the colonial period in the late 19th century posed significant challenges to this unique tradition. Under Dutch colonial rule, traditional systems of governance and culture were disrupted, and colonial policies severely impacted local Muslim societies. As the Dutch introduced their economic, political, and educational systems, they fostered socio-economic inequality, undermining Indigenous leadership and displacing traditional social structures [3]–[5].

Alongside colonial pressures, Western secularism and education became powerful forces that reshaped the social landscape. The traditional Islamic institutions, notably the pesantren, which were the cornerstone of Islamic learning and moral development, found themselves ill-equipped to meet the changing demands of society. In contrast, Dutch-run schools introduced a curriculum focused on science, mathematics, and modern languages, which trained a new elite increasingly distanced from their religious roots. The growing divide between the traditional Islamic educational system and Western secular learning created a pressing need for reform within the Muslim community [6], [7].

This intellectual shift across the broader Muslim world sparked a wave of reformist thought aimed at modernizing Islamic practice and thought. Thinkers like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida advocated for *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and a return to the Quran and Sunnah as a means to navigate the challenges of modernity. They criticized the rigidity of traditional practices and sought a version of Islam that was both intellectually vibrant and socially relevant. These ideas had a profound influence on Muslim communities in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia [8]–[10].

In Indonesia, one of the most prominent figures to embrace and adapt these reformist ideas was K.H. Ahmad Dahlan. Born in 1868 in Yogyakarta, Dahlan was deeply influenced by the reformist thinkers during his studies in Mecca. He returned to Indonesia with a vision to address both the spiritual and practical needs of the Muslim community, founding Muhammadiyah in 1912 as a reformist movement aimed at modernizing Islamic education and addressing social issues. His vision of Islam was not only concerned with religious rituals but also with education, healthcare, social justice, and economic development—issues that were crucial in a rapidly changing world [11], [12].

The colonial period's challenges to Islamic traditions in Indonesia and the growing influence of modern secular ideas set the stage for a radical shift in how Islam was practised and understood. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's contributions to Islamic reform were transformative, offering a model of Islam that balanced modernity with tradition. His establishment of Muhammadiyah marked a key turning point in the history of Indonesian Islam, providing a framework for Muslims to engage with modernity while remaining rooted in their faith [4], [13].

This study seeks to analyze K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's role in the Islamic reform movement in Indonesia, focusing on his contributions to Islamic education, his creation of Muhammadiyah, and his enduring legacy in shaping contemporary Islamic thought. By exploring his life, ideas, and initiatives, this study aims to highlight the profound impact Dahlan had on both Indonesian society and the broader Islamic world. Specifically, it will address how Dahlan's vision for Islam continues to resonate in contemporary discussions on globalization, interfaith dialogue, and the integration of modernity and religion [14]–[16].

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan is an Islamic reformer whose contributions have significantly shaped the development of the Muslim community in Indonesia. As the founder of Muhammadiyah,

his thoughts and movements not only reformed religious understanding but also directed the community towards progress in various aspects of life, including education, social welfare, and economics. In the modern context, examining the contributions of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's ideas is crucial to understanding how Islamic reform concepts can be adapted to address contemporary challenges [17]–[19].

This study is important as it delves into the legacy of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's thought, which emphasizes the synergy between faith and knowledge, as well as the orientation toward tangible actions beneficial to the broader society. His progressive ideas on education, grounded in modern Islamic values, have provided a foundation for significant social transformation in Indonesia. By analyzing these contributions, this research not only honors his historical legacy but also offers inspiration and strategic insights for addressing the challenges faced by the Muslim community in the era of globalization [20]–[23].

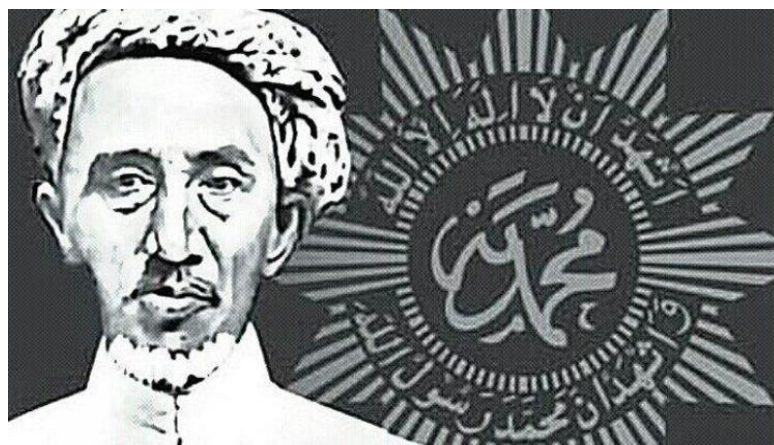


Figure 1. Profile of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and Muhammadiyah

The findings of this study are expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's ideas as a cornerstone for community development, as well as their relevance in fostering a civilized, competitive, and morally upright society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the contributions of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's thought highlights its foundational role in the development of the Muslim community in Indonesia. Several studies emphasize his influence on Islamic education reform, where he integrated religious and secular knowledge to create a competitive and morally upright generation of Muslims. According to Raharjo, this approach marked a breakthrough in addressing the dualism of education during the colonial period [24]–[26].

In addition, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's social thought, which focused on community empowerment, has been widely studied. Research by Hasbullah reveals how the Muhammadiyah movement under his leadership successfully established various social and healthcare institutions that empowered the community practically. This aligns with his belief that Islam should offer tangible solutions to societal challenges [27]–[29].

In the modern context, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's ideas remain relevant to sustainable development. For instance, Nuryadin associates his movement with strengthening social and educational values to address the challenges of globalization. However, further research is needed to explore how his legacy can remain applicable to the future challenges of the Muslim community [30]–[32].

This body of literature demonstrates that K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's thought serves as a strategic inspiration for developing a civilized and adaptable Muslim community in an ever-changing era [33]–[36].

Table 1. Literature Review

Theme/Focus	Key Findings	Gap Identified	Source
Context of Islamic Reform Movements	Islamic reform movements in Southeast Asia adopted local customs and engaged with broader Islamic intellectual currents. However, specific contributions of reformist leaders like K.H. Ahmad Dahlan remain underexplored.	A lack of focused studies on reformist leaders like K.H. Ahmad Dahlan despite their pivotal contributions to Southeast Asian Islamic identity.	[37]
Deliar Noer's The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942 (1973)	Provides insights into the socio-political forces shaping Muhammadiyah, particularly the influence of Middle Eastern reformists like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. Limited analysis of Dahlan's contributions.	Limited focus on K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's methodologies and personal role in Muhammadiyah's development.	[38]
Greg Barton's Indonesia's Struggle: Jemaah Islamiyah and the Soul of Islam (2005)	Situates Muhammadiyah within the broader context of Islamic modernism, focusing on its ideological response to traditionalist and Western secular pressures. Lacks detailed examination of Dahlan's methodologies.	Insufficient analysis of Dahlan's specific contributions and leadership strategies within Muhammadiyah.	[39]
Azyumardi Azra's Research on Southeast Asian Islam	Highlights intellectual connections between Indonesian reformists and Middle Eastern thinkers like Rashid Rida. Does not fully explore Dahlan's impact on Islamic reform in Indonesia.	Does not fully address Dahlan's nuanced role in shaping Islamic reform in Indonesia.	[40]
Contribution of This Study	This study provides an in-depth analysis of Dahlan's unique approach to integrating faith with modernity, his role in establishing Muhammadiyah, and his enduring influence on Islamic reform.	Fills the existing gap by comprehensively analyzing Dahlan's contributions to Islamic reform, contextualized within broader Southeast Asian movements.	[41]

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a historical-qualitative approach to explore K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's contributions to Islamic reform in Indonesia. A historical-qualitative approach is suitable for understanding the impact of historical events, individuals, and movements, particularly when analyzing the interplay between social, religious, and cultural changes over time. By focusing on both primary and secondary sources, this study provides a comprehensive understanding

of Dahlan's role in Islamic reform, his vision for modern Islam, and the long-term effects of his work on Indonesian society [42].

Data and Data Sources

The primary data sources for this study include historical records, documents, and archival materials related to K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and Muhammadiyah. Key primary sources are drawn from the Ensiklopedi Muhammadiyah (Encyclopedia of Muhammadiyah) and Muhammadiyah archives housed at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. These archives provide valuable insights into the life of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, the development of Muhammadiyah, and the broader social, political, and educational reforms that took place under his leadership [5].

Secondary data sources include scholarly articles, books, and previous studies on Islamic reform in Indonesia. These sources provide theoretical and contextual background on the broader Islamic reform movements, the role of Muhammadiyah, and the intellectual currents that influenced Indonesian reformers. Notable secondary sources include works by scholars such as Deliar Noer, Azyumardi Azra, and Greg Barton, which offer valuable perspectives on the historical context and significance of Muhammadiyah's formation and its socio-political impact [43].

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection for this study involves both document analysis and archival research. The primary data collection technique consists of an in-depth examination of primary sources such as Muhammadiyah's founding documents, letters, speeches, and reports on educational and social programs initiated by Dahlan. Archival research will focus on primary sources available at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta and other relevant institutions [44].

Secondary data collection will involve reviewing scholarly publications, including books, journal articles, and theses related to Islamic reform movements in Southeast Asia. These sources will be analyzed to build a comprehensive understanding of the historical and intellectual context of Islamic reform in Indonesia and the broader Southeast Asian region [45].

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis for this study follows a thematic framework, categorizing Dahlan's contributions into key areas such as education, theology, interfaith dialogue, and leadership. This approach will allow for a detailed examination of his role in reforming Islamic education, his efforts in creating a modern and progressive Islamic social movement, and his impact on the broader Muslim community [46]–[49].

The data will be analyzed through a historical lens to understand the broader socio-political context in which Dahlan operated. This involves identifying patterns and themes in his writings, speeches, and initiatives, as well as analyzing the documents from Muhammadiyah's archives to assess their alignment with Dahlan's vision [50]–[53].

Furthermore, a comparative analysis of Dahlan's reformist vision and its implementation in Muhammadiyah will be conducted. This will include comparing Dahlan's work with other reformist leaders in the Muslim world, particularly those who influenced him, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida [17], [54]–[56].

By combining historical-qualitative research with primary and secondary sources, this study aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's role in Islamic reform in Indonesia. The data analysis techniques outlined above will help uncover the complexity and significance of his contributions, providing a nuanced understanding of his legacy and its continued relevance in contemporary Islamic thought [57]–[59].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Establishment of Muhammadiyah

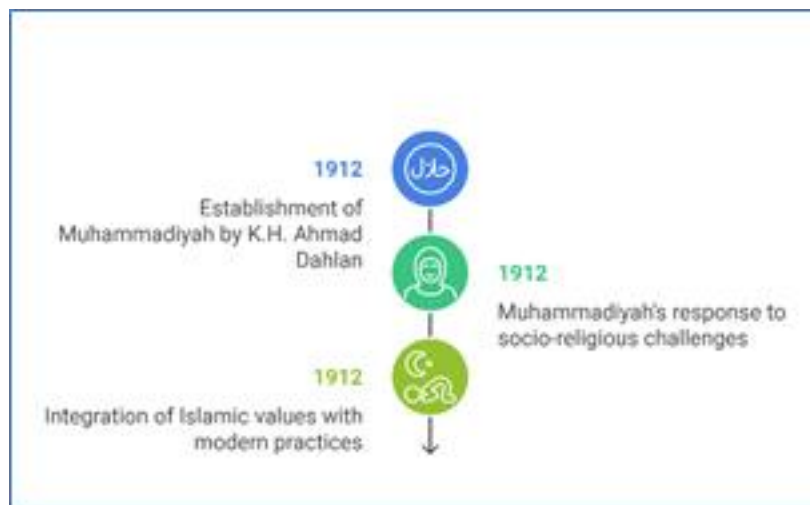


Figure 1. Muhammadiyah's Impact on Islamic Reform

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's establishment of Muhammadiyah in 1912 was a strategic response to the socio-religious challenges faced by Indonesian Muslims during Dutch colonial rule. As described in historical records, Indonesian Muslim communities were confronting poverty, illiteracy, and cultural erosion due to Western influence and colonial structures. Dahlan's response was to create Muhammadiyah as a progressive and inclusive organization that addressed the immediate needs of the community while remaining rooted in Islamic principles. He aimed to purify and revitalize Islamic practices, addressing the spiritual and societal issues of the time [60].

The establishment of Muhammadiyah served as a crucial step in the Islamic reform movement within Indonesia. The organization's commitment to both spiritual renewal and practical action allowed it to respond to the socio-economic needs of the time. Through its educational, healthcare, and social welfare programs, Muhammadiyah offered solutions to problems like illiteracy and lack of access to healthcare. Dahlan's model of reform within Muhammadiyah was unique for its synthesis of Islamic values with modern organizational practices, which would later influence reform movements globally [60].

Education Approach

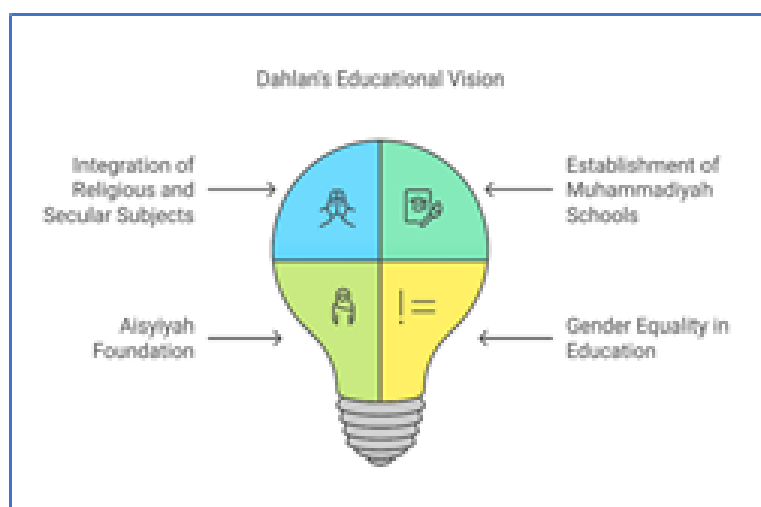


Figure 2. Dahlan's Educational Vision

Dahlan's approach to education stands as one of the most significant elements of Muhammadiyah's impact on Indonesian society. His reforms integrated religious teachings with modern academic subjects, which marked a departure from the traditional pesantren model that focused exclusively on Quranic memorization and Islamic jurisprudence. Dahlan's reforms were not merely about academic learning but aimed at creating an educational system that prepared students for the challenges of modernity while remaining deeply connected to their faith [61].

The establishment of Muhammadiyah schools, with an inclusive curriculum that integrated religious and secular subjects, represented a key component of Dahlan's vision. These schools did not just focus on religious studies but also included subjects like mathematics, science, and civics, which were essential for engaging with the world outside the religious community. Additionally, Dahlan founded Aisyiyah in 1917 to promote the empowerment of women through education, challenging traditional gender norms. This progressive stance on gender was further reinforced by Muhammadiyah's support for equal access to education for both boys and girls, which helped shape a more inclusive educational landscape in Indonesia [62].

Dahlan's Theology

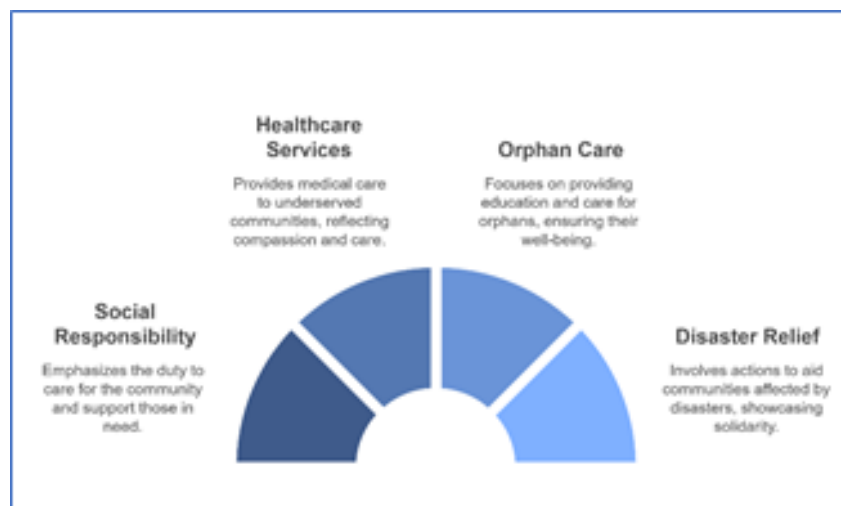


Figure 3. Dahlan's Theology

Dahlan's theological perspective, particularly his interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un (Chapter 107 of the Quran), is another fundamental aspect of Muhammadiyah's teachings. The Surah, which highlights the importance of social responsibility, caring for the poor, and providing support for orphans, became a foundation for Muhammadiyah's social programs. Dahlan's theology of "Islam in action" emphasized the application of Islamic teachings to address societal issues. This approach went beyond religious rituals, advocating for concrete actions that contribute to the betterment of society [63].

This focus on social justice and welfare found expression in Muhammadiyah's programs, including its healthcare services, orphan care, and disaster relief efforts. Muhammadiyah's hospitals and clinics provided medical care to underserved communities, while its social welfare programs aimed to alleviate poverty and provide education and care for orphans. These initiatives not only reflected the teachings of Surah Al-Ma'un but also demonstrated Dahlan's vision of Islam as a force for societal transformation [64].

Table 2. Muhammadiyah's Contributions to Education and Social Development

Aspect	Contribution	Impact	Example of Implementation
Curriculum Reform	Combined Islamic studies with modern subjects, such as mathematics, science, and civics	Enhanced the relevance of Islamic education, enabling students to participate in a modern society	Muhammadiyah schools offered Quranic studies alongside formal education in STEM fields.
Gender Inclusivity	Advocated equal access to education for both male and female students	Empowered women to play active roles in social and religious development	Opening Muhammadiyah schools for girls and promoting female teachers in educational systems
Founding Aisyiyah	Established in 1917 as the women's wing of Muhammadiyah	Created opportunities for women's leadership in education and community development	Aisyiyah schools and training programs for women in healthcare and teaching professions
Teacher Training	Developed a teacher training program to prepare educators for a reformed curriculum	Ensured quality education and trained educators to integrate Islamic values with modern pedagogy	Teacher training colleges under Muhammadiyah, emphasizing both spiritual and academic excellence
Inclusive Policies	Welcomed students of various socio-economic backgrounds	Democratized education, ensuring equal opportunities for underprivileged communities	Provided scholarships and community-based education in rural and urban areas

CONCLUSION

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan has made significant contributions to Islamic reform in Indonesia through an approach that integrates faith, education, and social action. In addressing the challenges of colonialism and modern societal needs, he established Muhammadiyah in 1912 as a progressive reform platform. This organization integrates Islamic values with modern education, social justice, and gender inclusivity, thereby making a broad impact on various aspects of society. One of Dahlan's key concepts is action-based theology, as reflected in his interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un. This thought emphasizes the importance of tangible deeds in religious life, which later inspired various programs in education, healthcare, and social welfare within Muhammadiyah. To this day, this movement continues to provide substantial benefits to communities in Indonesia and serves as a model for Islamic reform that can be adopted globally. The continued influence of Muhammadiyah demonstrates that this organization remains relevant in responding to the challenges of the times. Therefore, further research is needed to understand Muhammadiyah's role in addressing contemporary global issues such as sustainable development, digital education, and interfaith relations. Additionally, studies on Muhammadiyah's adaptability in various socio-cultural contexts and its influence on global Islamic movements will provide valuable insights into its continued relevance and broader transformative potential. With a strong foundation in Islamic values and a commitment to social progress, Muhammadiyah continues to be a significant force in Islamic reform. Its success in adapting Islamic teachings to modern needs shows that Islam is not only a spiritual religion but also holds great potential in building a more just, inclusive, and competitive society on a global scale.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge Allah SWT for His endless blessings and guidance throughout this research. Special thanks to Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta for providing access to valuable archival resources and academic support. The authors also express gratitude to the Muhammadiyah community for their continuous efforts in preserving and promoting the legacy of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan.

Author Contribution

All authors made equal contributions to the main contributors to the study, all authors read and approved the final research, and all authors stated there was no conflict of interest.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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