

# Recontextualizing Islamic Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, A Study on the Thought of KH. Ahmad Dahlan

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**Abstract:** KH. Ahmad Dahlan, founder of Muhammadiyah in 1912, was a prominent Islamic reformer whose educational vision emphasized the integration of religious and general sciences, moral development, and responsiveness to social change. This study aims to recontextualize his thoughts in the framework of 21st-century Islamic education, which demands critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. Using a qualitative library research method, data were collected from books, journals, websites, and other credible sources. The analysis employed descriptive techniques to interpret Ahmad Dahlan's educational philosophy. The findings highlight core components of his concept, including the definition, goals, methods, and materials of education, along with the roles of teachers and students. His holistic and progressive approach laid the foundation for competency-based Islamic education that embraces technology and character formation. In the modern context, his ideas remain highly relevant for shaping Islamic education that is inclusive, transformative, and rooted in the spirit of rahmatan lil-'alamin.

**Abstrak:** KH. Ahmad Dahlan, pendiri Muhammadiyah pada tahun 1912, merupakan seorang pembaharu Islam yang pemikiran pendidikannya menekankan integrasi antara ilmu agama dan umum, pengembangan akhlak, serta responsivitas terhadap perubahan sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merekontekstualisasi pemikirannya dalam kerangka pendidikan Islam abad ke-21 yang menuntut kemampuan berpikir kritis, kreativitas, kolaborasi, dan literasi digital. Dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif melalui studi pustaka, data dikumpulkan dari buku, jurnal, situs web, dan sumber terpercaya lainnya. Analisis dilakukan secara deskriptif untuk menginterpretasi filosofi pendidikan Ahmad Dahlan. Temuan penelitian menyoroti elemen-elemen utama dalam konsep pendidikannya, termasuk definisi, tujuan, metode, dan materi pendidikan, serta peran pendidik dan peserta didik. Pendekatannya yang holistik dan progresif menjadi dasar bagi pendidikan Islam berbasis kompetensi yang mengintegrasikan teknologi dan pembentukan karakter. Dalam konteks modern, gagasannya tetap relevan untuk membentuk pendidikan Islam yang inklusif, transformatif, dan berlandaskan semangat rahmatan lil-'alamin.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education not only focuses on cognitive aspects but also emphasizes the formation of attitudes during the learning process (Islam, Baqi, et al., 2025). In Islamic education, this goes beyond merely teaching moral values to counter the negative effects of globalization (Islam, Qodari, et al., 2024). Islamic education functions as a liberating force that promotes social transformation through the internalization of moral values (Shofa et al., 2020). This reality underscores the role of Islamic education as a pillar for preserving cultural traditions while enhancing the quality of Indonesia's education system (Ulufah et al., 2024). Therefore, theoretical foundations and visionary thoughts are needed to direct Islamic education from a less ideal form toward a more adaptive and effective system (Ardiansyah et al., 2023; Islam, Habibah, et al., 2025).

KH. Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah, is widely recognized as one of Indonesia's foremost Islamic reformers whose thoughts catalyzed the transformation of Islamic education in the early 20th century (Islam, Azmi, et al., 2025). His principle of "talk less, do more" (Islam, Nurdiyanto, et al., 2024; Mulkhan, 1990) exemplifies an action-oriented philosophy that integrates Islamic values with real-world impact. His legacy, particularly through the Muhammadiyah education movement, underscores an enduring model that balances religious commitment with scientific and social engagement. His contributions serve as a foundation for educational renewal that remains relevant amid 21st-century demands.

Despite the growing interest in Islamic educational reform, many previous studies have tended to focus on historical and philosophical dimensions of KH. Ahmad Dahlan's thought. These include his interpretation of Qur'anic teachings, the emphasis on moral education, and his criticism of the rigidity of traditional pesantren models (Asman et al., 2021; Mu'thi et al., 2015). Research has also emphasized how Muhammadiyah institutions exemplify his educational principles through their integration of religious and general sciences (Mayarisa, 2016). His theological underpinnings, particularly the concept of tauhid and the application of amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, have also been widely examined as foundations of Islamic social ethics (Islam, Nurdiyanto, et al., 2024; Nurhayati et al., 2018).

However, there remains a notable gap in current literature: few studies have specifically examined the synthesis of Ahmad Dahlan's educational philosophy with the 21st-century education framework in both conceptual and practical terms. In particular, little attention has been paid to how his holistic educational model can be applied within the competencies and pedagogical paradigms emphasized in contemporary education, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy. This research seeks to fill this lacuna by aligning Dahlan's vision with present-day educational priorities.

This study seeks to explore and reconstruct the concept of Islamic education according to KH. Ahmad Dahlan. The research will specifically focus on: (1) the definition of education from his perspective, (2) educational goals he proposed, (3) his preferred educational methods, (4) the content and curriculum that reflect his educational ideals, and (5) the roles and characteristics of both educators and students. These elements will be studied through the examination of his

biographical trajectory, writings, and the institutional practices of Muhammadiyah schools.

Moreover, this research also aims to delve deeper into Ahmad Dahlan's original works, such as his writings on social and religious reform, to identify recurring themes and practical strategies that can inform educational practices today. These textual analyses will be contextualized with his life journey, including his exposure to reformist ideas in Mecca and his early interactions with colonial and traditional educational institutions in Yogyakarta. Understanding this historical background is crucial for grasping how his reformist spirit emerged and how it can be adapted to modern pedagogical needs.

The core argument of this study is that KH. Ahmad Dahlan's educational philosophy offers a timeless and practical model for Islamic education in the 21st century. His approach is both deeply rooted in Islamic spiritual and moral values and oriented toward pragmatic societal improvement. It advocates a balance between religious devotion and active citizenship, positioning education not merely as a transmission of knowledge but as a transformative tool for personal and social advancement.

This research is significant because it contributes to the ongoing recontextualization of classical Islamic reformist thought within the framework of modern education. It provides a theoretical bridge between traditional Islamic educational values and 21st-century educational competencies, thus offering a potential model for Islamic schools and educators seeking to remain faithful to their religious identity while engaging effectively with global challenges.

Furthermore, this study has practical implications for curriculum development in Islamic educational institutions. By providing a comprehensive analysis of Ahmad Dahlan's educational ideals, the research can inform the design of integrative curricula that blend spiritual, moral, and intellectual development with digital literacy and problem-solving skills. Such integration is vital for producing graduates who are spiritually grounded, intellectually capable, and socially responsive.

Ultimately, this study aspires to offer a renewed understanding of KH. Ahmad Dahlan's vision for Islamic education, one that is inclusive, holistic, and forward-looking. This aligns with the principle of "*likulli zamānin tajdīd*" (renewal for every era), affirming the relevance of Islamic values in all aspects of human life, including education. In doing so, this research hopes to inspire future scholarship and policy directions that further strengthen the role of Islamic education in building a just, enlightened, and dynamic society.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method to explore and analyze KH. Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts on Islamic education in the context of the 21st century. The qualitative approach is suitable for examining the philosophical and educational values of Islamic education figures through a critical review of various literature sources (Darmalaksana, 2020). The data sources in this

study are categorized into primary and secondary sources. Primary data sources include authentic documents such as KH. Ahmad Dahlan's writings, speeches, letters, and texts, as well as reputable journal articles (especially those indexed in Scopus), e-books, and credible online media discussing his thoughts. Secondary data sources consist of biographies, proceedings, magazines, newspapers, historical records of the Muhammadiyah organization, and articles discussing his contributions to modern education (Wong et al., 2014).

The data collection process involves identifying, classifying, and validating sources based on their relevance to the study. First, data is identified by searching for documents and references directly related to the topic. Then, the data is classified into themes, such as education concepts, curriculum, educator roles, learning methods, and integrative values. Finally, the credibility of the sources is verified by ensuring they meet academic standards, including being peer-reviewed, reputable, or originating from credible institutions. This ensures that only the most relevant and accurate information is included in the study.

For data analysis, the study employs descriptive-qualitative analysis with an inductive approach. This method allows for drawing conclusions from specific data and developing general theoretical generalizations (Sugiyono, 2022). The analysis process includes several stages: collecting primary and secondary data, classifying the data based on key themes, reducing the data to identify the most relevant information, presenting the data in a descriptive narrative form along with thematic tables, and interpreting the data by synthesizing KH. Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts with the 21st-century education framework. The final step involves drawing conclusions and verifying them through source triangulation to ensure their reliability.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study's results, source triangulation and conceptual validation are employed. Source triangulation involves comparing findings from different sources, while conceptual validation ensures that the interpretations align with contemporary Islamic education theories and previous research results. This method will help provide a comprehensive understanding of how KH. Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts can be applied to modern education, particularly in integrating values, knowledge, and technology. Through this approach, the study aims to offer valuable insights into the practical recontextualization of his educational philosophy in today's educational landscape.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULT**

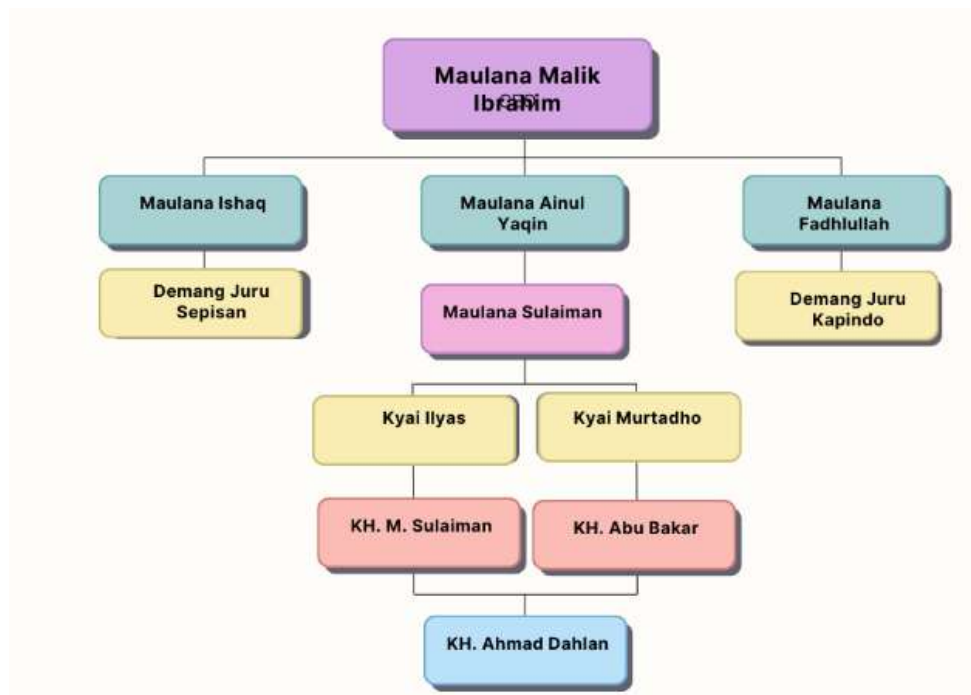
#### **Biography of KH. Ahmad Dahlan**

KH. Ahmad Dahlan was born on August 1, 1868, in Kauman Village, located west of the North Square of Yogyakarta. Kauman, which was almost a hundred years old at the time of Ahmad Dahlan's birth, is a village that has a long history as a center of Islamic religious activities, especially in Yogyakarta. This village, like many other areas in Java, is the main base for the santri community. Ahmad Dahlan was the fourth of seven children born to KH. Abu Bakar and Siti Aminah. Initially, he was

given the name Muhammad Darwis before finally changing his name to Ahmad Dahlan. As the fourth child, he had five sisters and one brother (Mukhtarom, 2020).

KH. Ahmad Dahlan was raised in an environment that was very thick with religious nuances. The influence of family and the surrounding environment played a major role in shaping his personality and tendency to become a devout Muslim. His father, KH. Abu Bakar bin Kyai Sulaiman, was a prominent imam and preacher at the Great Mosque of the Yogyakarta Sultanate. In addition, KH. Abu Bakar also served as an "abdi dalem" at the Yogyakarta Palace, although his role was limited to the religious field (Mukhtarom, 2020).

His mother, Siti Aminah, was the daughter of KH. Ibrahim was a prince and servant of the Yogyakarta Kingdom. In addition, one of KH. Ahmad Dahlan's grandfathers, Kijai Mas Sulaiman, also had a priyayi title. In terms of family tree, KH. Ahmad Dahlan was the 12th descendant of Maulana Malik Ibrahim, one of the guardians who spread Islam in Java. This genealogy shows that KH. Ahmad Dahlan came from a family that had an important position in Islamic society in Yogyakarta and Java in general (Mukhtarom, 2020).



**Figure 1. Family Tree of KH. Ahmad Dahlan**

Muhammad Darwis, who later became known as KH. Ahmad Dahlan received his first religious education from his father. At the age of eight, he was able to read the Quran fluently until he finished 30 Juz. Darwis was known as a tough, diligent, and diligent child. He had a very fast learning ability thanks to his perseverance, as well as a high curiosity, which encouraged him to always ask about things he did not understand. Darwis was also known to be creative and imaginative in facing various challenges in life (Abdullah, 2015).

From a young age, Darwis showed prominent leadership traits. He was respected by his friends and often became a role model in leadership. As a hard-

working, honest, and helpful child, Darwis had many friends. In addition, he also had a talent for making various crafts and traditional games such as kites and spinning tops (Abdullah, 2015).

As a teenager, Darwis began to study law under the guidance of K.H. M. Saleh and studied nahwu under the tutelage of Kyai Haji Manysin, both of whom were his brothers-in-law. He also studied astronomy under the guidance of K. Raden Haji Dahlan and studied hadith with Kyai Mahfudzi and Syaikh Khayyat. In addition, he studied Qira'ah Al-Qur'an from Syaikh Amien and Sayyid Bakri Syatha and gained knowledge about wild animal poisoning from Syekh Hasan. Among his other teachers were R. Ngabehi Sastrosugondo, R. Wedana Dwijosewoyo, and Shaykh Muhammad Jamil Jambek from Bukittinggi (Ichsan et al., 2022; Mustofa et al., 2022).

After completing his education at the madrasah and pesantren, Darwis traveled to Mecca for the first time in 1890 and stayed there for a year to study. One of his teachers in Mecca was Sheikh Ahmad Khatib, a reformer from Minangkabau. Three years later, in 1903, he returned to Mecca for the second time and stayed longer, namely for two years. While in Mecca, he learned a lot from great figures such as Sheikh Muhammad Khatib, Kyai Nawawi from Banten, Kyai Mas Abdullah from Surabaya, and Kyai Fakih Maskumambang from Gresik (Nata, 2005).

In 1899, Darwis married Siti Walidah binti Kyai Penghulu Haji Fadhil, who was also his cousin. From this marriage, they were blessed with six children, namely Djahanah (1890), Siraj Dahlan (1897), Siti Busyro (1903), Siti Aisyah (1905), Irfan Dahlan (1905), and Siti Zuharoh (1908) (Abdullah, 2015).

After getting married, Darwis went to Mecca to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. His main goal was to deepen his knowledge of Islam and spread it. During his five-year stay in Mecca, he deepened his religious studies by reading the works of Islamic reform figures such as Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rasyid Ridha. In Mecca, he also received a name change certificate from Sayyid Bakri Syatha and was given the name Haji Ahmad Dahlan. It is believed that in this holy city, he found the ideas of Islamic renewal initiated by Jamaluddin Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh (Mayarisa, 2016).

After returning to Indonesia, KH. Ahmad Dahlan helped his father teach at the Kauman Grand Mosque. He taught during the day, afternoon, and after Maghrib until Isya', replacing his father if the father could not attend. The students, children, and the public began to call him "Kyai". Since then, he has been known as Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan (Prayitno & Qodat, 2019).

In 1896, after his father, KH. Abu Bakar passed away, and Ahmad Dahlan had to replace his father as Khatib at the Kauman Grand Mosque. He also carried out his duties as a teacher together with eight other khatibs and delivered teachings in the mosque hall every week together with six other penghulu (Abdullah, 2015). After returning from Mecca, he began to establish Islamic boarding schools for students from various regions such as Pekalongan, Batang, Magelang, Solo, and Semarang. In addition, students also came from surrounding areas such as Bantul, Srandakan, Brosot, and Kulonprogo. While in Mecca, KH. Ahmad Dahlan studied many books of Ahlusunnah Wal Jamaah, such as akidah, fiqh Syafi'i, and tasawuf by Imam Ghazali (Azmi et al., 2024). However, after returning to Indonesia, he began to read books

that carried the spirit of renewal. Some of the works that he often read include *Al-Tauhid* by Muhammad Abduh, *Tafsir Jus Amma* by Muhammad Abduh, *Kanzul Ulum*, *Bezirk Al-Ma'arif*, by Farid Wajdi, *Fi'al-Bid'ah* by Ibn Taimiyyah, *Al-Tawassul w-a-wasilah* by Ibn Taimiyyah, *Al-Islam wan Nashraniyyah* by Muhammad Abduh, as well as several other works that influenced his thinking and contribution to Islamic education and preaching in Indonesia (Abdullah, 2015; Azmi et al., 2025).

### **Works of KH. Ahmad Dahlan**

KH. Ahmad Dahlan, as one of the Islamic reformers in Indonesia, produced several important works that contributed greatly to the development of education and religion in the country. The following are some of his works and contributions that cover various aspects of social life, religion, and education.

#### ***Muhammadiyah Organization***

In 1909, KH. Ahmad Dahlan joined the Budi Utomo organization to provide religious guidance to its members. To achieve this goal, he proposed that religious classes be provided in public schools, considering that many Budi Utomo members worked in schools under the auspices of the government. This was intended so that teachers and students in these schools could obtain religious education that was appropriate to their needs. His proposal then developed into the idea of establishing a modern religious school, which was finally approved and supported by Budi Utomo carefully to avoid the fate of traditional Islamic boarding schools which often closed after the death of their caregivers (A. Noer et al., 2017; D. Noer, 1996).

On November 18, 1912, KH. Ahmad Dahlan founded the Muhammadiyah organization in Yogyakarta. This organization aims to spread Islamic teachings by the law of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and to promote Islam to the community. Muhammadiyah focuses on establishing educational institutions, including schools that teach science and religion, as well as building waqf, mosques, and publication media such as books, brochures, newspapers, and magazines. Muhammadiyah's activities, especially in the early days, focused on preaching, education, and social empowerment activities, by collecting funds and providing assistance to the poor (Nata, 2005).

In building this organization, KH. Ahmad Dahlan did not work alone. He was supported by his friends in Kauman, such as Haji Sujak, Haji Fakhruddin, Haji Tamim, Haji Hisham, Haji Syarwani, and Haji Abdulgani. In addition, support also came from members of Budi Utomo such as Mas Rasyidi, a student at the Yogyakarta Kweekschool, and R. Sosrosugondo, a teacher at the school. KH. Ahmad Dahlan died on February 23, 1923, but his struggle to establish Muhammadiyah and develop Islamic education continued (Nata, 2005).

#### ***Muhammadiyah Calendar***

KH. Ahmad Dahlan is also known as one of the figures who played an important role in the development of astronomy in Indonesia. One of the most striking achievements was the adjustment of the direction of the qibla of the Great Mosque of Yogyakarta. Previously, the direction of the qibla of the mosque and surrounding mosques faced west, but KH. Ahmad Dahlan changed the direction of the qibla to the north, which is the correct direction of the qibla. This change is

considered a significant step in determining the direction of the qibla in Indonesia (Azhari, 2001; Budiwati, 2018).

In addition, KH. Ahmad Dahlan also initiated the Muhammadiyah calendar in 1915. This calendar includes three calendar systems, namely the Gregorian calendar, the Hijri calendar, and the Javanese Islamic calendar. This calendar also contains information about prayer times, the direction of the Qibla, and other astronomical calculations, which demonstrate his expertise in the field of astronomy. This expertise was obtained through research and collaboration with Indonesian and Mecca astronomers. One of his teachers in Yogyakarta who also played a role in the development of astronomy was Kiai Ahmad Dahlan Semarang (Jayusman, 2015; Tiswarni et al., 2023).

### ***Fruits of Thought in the Reform Movement***

As a reformer, KH. Ahmad Dahlan was inspired by the works of modern Islamic thinkers, which later influenced his struggle in the Islamic renewal movement in Indonesia. Some of the works that had a major influence on his thoughts and movements include *Kitāb Tauhid* and *Tafsīr juz 'ammā* by Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, *Kanz al-'Ulūm* by Farīd Wajdī, and *Fi'al-Bid'ah* and *Al-Tawassul* by Ibn Taimiyyah. In addition, he also studied *Al-Islam wa al-Nashraniyyah* by Muhammad Abduh and *Izhar al-Haq* by Rahmah Allah Al-Hindi (Islam, Rahma, et al., 2024; Mustofa et al., 2022).

These works provided a foundation for KH. Ahmad Dahlan in integrating his thoughts into more modern Islamic education and preaching practices in Indonesia. The reform movement he initiated aims to bring Indonesian Muslims towards a more rational, progressive, and accessible understanding of Islam for all levels of society, as well as reduce the influence of traditions that are considered inconsistent with pure Islamic teachings (Trisnani et al., 2024).

### **KH. Ahmad Dahlan's Concept of Islamic Education**

The concept of education was developed by KH. Ahmad Dahlan includes various important aspects that are relevant to the framework of modern education, including curriculum, methods, objectives, and evaluation. This concept aims to revive Islamic teachings with an approach that by the development of the times, combines religious values with science. The following is a more in-depth discussion of the concept of education taught by KH. Ahmad Dahlan:

#### ***Definition of Education***

Education according to KH. Ahmad Dahlan is in line with the understanding regulated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere that allows students to develop their potential. This potential includes spiritual, religious, self-control, intelligence, noble morals, and skills needed for life in society and the state (Undang-Undang Sisdiknas, 2003).

KH. Ahmad Dahlan has a more modern and progressive idea of education compared to the traditional education system at that time. In 1912, he founded a Muhammadiyah school that combined the pesantren education system with the



Western education model, to produce an intelligent generation, that had strong faith and had broad knowledge, especially in the natural sciences. The education he offered included Islamic religious education based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW but also provided space for modern science, which was considered an effort to advance Indonesian Muslims at that time (Hermawanti & Nisrokha, 2020; Zuhri et al., 2024).

### ***Educational Methods***

KH. Ahmad Dahlan viewed that Islamic education must combine traditional pesantren methods with modern learning methods (Islam et al., 2023; Suyudi, 2019). Some of the methods he applied include: First, the Sorogan Method: This method is used in pesantren, where a kiai reads the contents of a book and gives an explanation in the local language, while the students listen carefully. This method focuses on a direct understanding of religious texts (Agama, 2003; Mansir, 2020). Second, Memorization Method: In this method, students are asked to memorize certain texts under the guidance of the kiai, which helps them remember and understand religious teachings (Agama, 2003). Third, Demonstration Method: This method is used in teaching religious practices, where students are trained to practice the theories they have learned, both individually and in groups, with direct supervision from the kiai (Hermawanti & Nisrokha, 2020; Islam & Syaifudin, 2024). These methods reflect KH. Ahmad Dahlan's efforts to combine the traditions of Islamic boarding school education with an approach that is more applicable and relevant to everyday life.

### ***Educational Objectives***

KH. Ahmad Dahlan had a grand vision in the world of Islamic education. He tried to create a generation of Muslims who were noble, pious, and had a broad understanding of knowledge, both in the context of religion and worldly knowledge. Several factors that drove his thinking about education included the backwardness of Muslims at that time, the poverty that hit many groups, and the limited levels of education in Islamic boarding schools (Ismail et al., 2001).

Through education, KH. Ahmad Dahlan aimed to educate Muslims who were not only religious but also able to face the challenges of the times. The goal of Islamic education according to him was to create a society that was knowledgeable, moral, and contributed to the progress of the nation. This is reflected in the goals carried by Muhammadiyah, which continued to develop over time, namely: (1) Spreading Islamic teachings in Yogyakarta and its surroundings; (2) Advancing Islamic religious teachings in the Dutch East Indies; (3) Forming a better and more advanced society through preaching and education (Rukiati & Hikmawati, 2006; Trisnani et al., 2025).

### ***Educational Materials***

The educational materials taught by KH. Ahmad Dahlan is a combination of Islamic education and modern education. The main teaching materials taught include the Qur'an, and hadith, as well as earth sciences, reading, writing, and arithmetic (Islam, Amelia, et al., 2025; Islam & Fawaz, 2017). He did not hesitate to adopt materials from the Western education system, such as those implemented in Dutch schools, if they did not conflict with the principles of Islamic teachings. In the

teaching process, KH. Ahmad Dahlan also encouraged students to actively ask questions and discuss, as part of more interactive and dynamic learning (Amtu et al., 2021; Islam, 2017).

This approach shows that KH. Ahmad Dahlan introduced a more critical and reflective way of learning, where students are invited to think independently and actively engage in the learning process, which is by 21st-century learning models such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) which are now applied in many educational institutions (Hermawanti & Nisrokha, 2020).

### ***Educators and Students***

In the educational concept of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, educators have an important role not only as teachers but also as role models for students. Educators must demonstrate a wise and responsive attitude because their actions and attitudes will be emulated by students. Educators must also prepare materials carefully and choose the right learning methods, according to the needs of students (Sadulloh et al., 2015; Waluyo, 2021).

Students in the perspective of KH. Ahmad Dahlan are individual who must have an active, intelligent, and responsible attitude in the learning process. In addition, students must develop good character values, including (1) religious character; (2) nationalist character; (3) honest character; and (4) integrity character. Thus, education is not only to gain knowledge but also to form individuals with noble morals and ready to contribute to society (Sutarna et al., 2022). From these four values, if interpreted in learning and applied in the world of education, students will get what they want. The concept of education was developed by KH. Ahmad Dahlan shows his deep understanding of the importance of holistic education, which includes aspects of morality, intellectuality, and practical skills needed to face the challenges of the times.

## **DISCUSSION**

The thoughts developed by KH. Ahmad Dahlan in the field of Islamic education has made a major contribution to the development of education in Indonesia. His ideas not only reflect a response to the internal conditions of Muslims, but also as a reaction to external influences arising from social, political, and colonial policy changes at that time. KH. Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts, especially in Islamic education, can be seen through two main factors: internal factors and external factors.

### ***Internal Factors***

Internal factors refer to the dynamics that occur within Muslims themselves, which are reflected in the understanding of religion and the Islamic education system that existed at that time. KH. Ahmad Dahlan realized that in religious practice, Muslims were still trapped in practices that led to shirk, *taklid*, and *bid'ah* (Akmal, Marjany, et al., 2024), due to the influence of Hindu and Buddhist culture that had taken root in Indonesian society. Islamization in Indonesia went hand in hand with the influence of Sufism and tarekat (Berger & Hartono, 1991), as well as the fiqh school of thought (Afandi, 1990; Akmal, Islam, et al., 2024), which influenced the way Muslims practiced their religious teachings. Through his reformist thoughts and actions, KH. Ahmad Dahlan tried to return Muslims to a

purser understanding of Islamic teachings and to change the existing education methods to be more relevant to the demands of the times.

### *External Factors*

External factors that influenced the ideas of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, especially in the development of Islamic education, were the Dutch colonial policies that introduced the Western education system through Westernization and Christianization efforts. The colonial education system in the early 20th century spread to various cities in the archipelago, offering basic to higher education dominated by Christian educational institutions and managed with financial support from the colonial government (Sholehuddin, 2021).

This colonial education emphasized science and general knowledge, while traditional Islamic education focused more on religious education. Colonial policies that limited religious teachings in educational institutions motivated KH. Ahmad Dahlan established educational institutions that integrated religious education with general knowledge (Nasution, 1983). This approach is a synthesis of modern Dutch teaching methods and traditional Islamic methods, to create education that is more holistic and relevant to the needs of society at that time (Nasution, 1983).

The adoption of content and methods in this context refers to the process of absorbing educational ideas and methods applied in the Netherlands. Modern Dutch education consisting of various aspects of education was used by educational institutions in the Netherlands, which were then adapted by KH. Ahmad Dahlan. Dahlan had an extraordinary ability to absorb new ideas and training methods applied in schools, and he succeeded in implementing them in establishing traditional madrasahs (Sholehuddin, 2021). The method applied by Dahlan was a synthesis between modern Dutch teaching methods and traditional Islamic teaching methods, which differentiated the educational institutions he founded from other educational institutions, such as those managed by Christian institutions or priests.

As an initial step, KH. Ahmad Dahlan founded public schools in Kampung Kauman and the areas around Yogyakarta and built a college called al-Qism al-Arqa. This college would later become the forerunner of Madrasah Muhammadiyah and Madrasah Mu'allim Muhammadiyah. In its development, these institutions experienced name changes, including becoming Pondok Muhammadiyah, Hogere Muhammadiyah, Madrasah Mu'allim Muhammadiyah, and Madrasah Mu'allimat Muhammadiyah (Wirjosukarto, 1985).

Overall, the goals of Muhammadiyah education according to KH. Ahmad Dahlan can be formulated in three main points: (1) Instilling goodness and deep piety in the core teachings of Islam; (2) Preparing individuals with the general knowledge needed in the world of science; and (3) Preparing a generation-ready to contribute to fighting for social progress (Agama, 1996). This educational idea was born as a form of dissatisfaction with the existing education system at that time, which only developed one field of knowledge, while Ahmad Dahlan tried to integrate both fields of knowledge, both religious knowledge and general knowledge, to produce education that was more comprehensive and relevant to the development of the times (Ihsan & Islam, 2023; Sholehuddin, 2021).

Thus, the idea of KH. Ahmad Dahlan's developing Islamic education cannot be separated from the experience and history he obtained. Islamic education initiated through the Muhammadiyah organization integrates religious education with general knowledge so that no field of knowledge is left behind because both are combined with Islamic values that include *ubudiyah*, *mua'malah*, and *i'tiqadiyah* (Islam, Miftah, et al., 2024).

Research conducted by experts shows that the theories and thoughts of KH. Ahmad Dahlan in the field of Islamic education is not free from various controversies. Initially, the idea of educational reform developed by Dahlan was not accepted by the surrounding community and was even considered heretical. However, over time, and with the ongoing reform movement, the idea was finally accepted by the community. Education developed by KH. Ahmad Dahlan, known as holistic education, successfully combined general education and traditional education without ignoring Islamic values.

*First*, KH. Ahmad Dahlan began to admire the thoughts of Middle Eastern figures, such as Muhammad Abduh, Jamaluddin al-Afghani, and Rashid Rida. These thoughts raised his fighting spirit to implement the education reform movement in Indonesia. *Second*, the works produced from his ideas gave birth to various thoughts, such as the Muhammadiyah organization which still exists today and has produced many prominent leaders in Indonesia. In addition, the Muhammadiyah Almenak was initiated by KH. Ahmad Dahlan, demonstrated his expertise in astronomy, with a calculation method to determine the beginning of the months of Shawwal and Dzulhijjah known as *Hissab hakiki (wujudul hila)*. *Third*, the concept of education was built by KH. Ahmad Dahlan in the world of Islamic education is very relevant to the concept of today's education, which includes educational goals, teaching methods, educational materials, and educational evaluation, which are currently known as the curriculum. By integrating general education and traditional education, KH. Ahmad Dahlan shows that both are equally important in forming intelligent and moral individuals (Islam, 2023; Islam & Nasution, 2024). *Fourth*, the reforms carried out by KH. Ahmad Dahlan cannot be separated from the goals of Islamic education, namely to form *insan kamil*, individuals who are perfect in various aspects of life. In this process, education must be in line with the ideals of the nation, namely making education a way to humanize humans. The contribution of KH. Ahmad Dahlan in the world of Indonesian education has been proven by the existence of formal educational institutions that he founded, which are now growing rapidly from elementary to tertiary levels, and reflect the Islamic education renewal movement pioneered by Muhammadiyah. This movement is a characteristic of Islamic education in Indonesia, which distinguishes Muhammadiyah from other organizations.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that KH. Ahmad Dahlan (1868-1923 AD) was born from a religious social background and was a devout Muslim, with a lineage of the Wali Songo. He was active in the world of education and studied with prominent scholars in Indonesia, such as KH. Sholeh Darat and Sheikh Ahmad Khotib Sambas. Ahmad Dahlan also continued his education in Mecca in 1903, where he deepened his

religious knowledge and met with several teachers, such as Sheikh Muhammad Khatib, Kyai Nawawi, and Kyai Fakhri Maskumambang. His perseverance in studying the works of reformist thinkers such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rasyid Ridho inspired the reform movement in Indonesia. After returning to Indonesia, he founded an Islamic boarding school for students from various regions, such as Pekalongan, Batang, and Magelang. His greatest work was establishing the Muhammadiyah organization, which is now one of the largest organizations in Indonesia, besides Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The organization grew rapidly, with branches spread throughout Indonesia.

The concept of Islamic education was initiated by KH. Ahmad Dahlan is involved in the development of spiritual strength, self-control, morality, and skills. The educational methods applied integrated pesantren traditions, such as sorogan and memorization, with Islamic values. The purpose of education according to him was to spread the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, advance life, and make Islam meaningful for religion, state, and nation. He emphasized the importance of interaction between educators and students, making the learning process more active and effective. The renewal of Islamic education initiated by KH. Ahmad Dahlan integrated general and religious education, resulting in a holistic education system that was relevant to the times.

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