The Relevance of The Concept of Islamic Education Reform Fazlur Rahman's Perspective with The Context of The Development of The Current Era

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Abstract

The decline of Islamic intellectualism post-colonialism and the persistent dichotomy between religious and secular education underscore the urgency of reforming Islamic education. Fazlur Rahman's Neo-Modernist approach, advocating integration, remains influential yet under-explored empirically. This study examines the relevance of Rahman's model in contemporary Indonesia, focusing on its application in *pesantren* and modern schools, and evaluates bilingualism and technology as modern tools for integration. A qualitative descriptive-analytic method is employed, analyzing primary texts (Rahman's works) and secondary data (previous studies, articles), supplemented by field observations in selected institutions. Rahman's integration model shows promise in reducing educational dualism but faces implementation barriers, such as resource disparities and conservative resistance. Bilingual education and ethical technology are viable enhancers of critical thinking and unity. The study offers practical strategies for policymakers and educators to modernize Islamic education while preserving its moral core, bridging historical divides for a holistic system.

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INTRODUCTION

The Islamic world has experienced various setbacks, especially since Baghdad fell to Hulagu Khan. Not only are political problems chaotic, but the economic and even intellectual conditions of Muslims are also weakening. In reality, we will see how the interest in doing research and the enthusiasm for learning among Muslims is almost extinguished, compared to the West, which is increasingly successful with its advances in science and technology (Aziz & Suratno, 2023; Fadlillah et al., 2023; Musrifah, 2019; Raniya & Setiawan, 2022). They could even develop their knowledge while slowly colonizing the Muslims until they were hindered from progressing. Seeing this terrible condition, Fazlur Rahman was moved to carry out reforms, especially in Islamic education. Fazlur Rahman is an accomplished thinker and writer with a modern direction.

With his method of a double movement, Rahman hopes to emerge strong Muslim personalities proficient in general sciences and Islamic religious knowledge and practice. However, the desire to advance Pakistan as his homeland invited many challenges from the traditional people, so he decided to emigrate. He is an extraordinary person born of Islam and for Islam. His various ideas were designed to advance Islamic education so as not to lag far behind the West (Handayani & Suyadi, 2019; Jaka & Bustam, 2023; Marpaung et al., 2024; Munjin & Windariyati, 2021; Zein et al., 2020). The author then relates his great thoughts to education in Indonesia today, so that positive aspects can be taken, as well as to immortalize his extraordinary role in advancing Islam. As we know, Indonesia has the same problems as Rahman, who faced them when he was in Pakistan. Through this article, the author tries to find a common ground between Fazlur Rahman's thoughts on overcoming problems in his country and the problems that occur in Indonesia. Talking about science is never separated from the realm of education. Islam is a religion that is claimed to have the integrity and completeness of all aspects of life, which is the most comprehensive, and also places education as the most essential part of a human being. Indonesia is currently starting to improve the quality of education to produce quality outputs (students) as well. In improving the quality of education, there is a main goal for Indonesia, which is to educate the nation and build a classy civilization (Agustina Muliati et al., 2022; Iskandar et al., 2022; Qutni et al., 2021; Riadi et al., 2022; Romlah & Latief, 2021).

As God's creature, man has been endowed with basic spiritual and physical abilities to maintain life and advance his welfare. The main goal needed for the development of human life is none other than education. Especially for the Islamic society that has developed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), carrying out his holy mission to spread his religion, education is also the key to progress. In the dynamics of the development of the world of education, many patterns of Islamic education have developed in a very diverse world the development of the world of education (Gibson et al., 2023; Keshav et al., 2022; Sabrina et al., 2022). So many educational figures have contributed to the development of education globally. There are a lot of educational figures who are experts in other fields, such as politics, philosophy, and others. Like Fazlur Rahman with historical and philosophical nuances, there are still many other modernist ideas from Indonesia and other Islamic countries. Since the 19th century, the end of the 20th century, and the 21st century, these Muslim thinkers have struggled to find the identity of their thoughts and utilize ideas as a result of the radical modernization of thinking applied by the West. The mecca of civilization, which, for several centuries, was within the geographical scope of the West, was expected to be switched and filled by Muslims with a frequency equal to that produced by scholars in classical times and exceeded that produced by Europeans.

Islam puts education in a very vital position. The indication is clear: the first five verses of the Qur'an (Q.S. Al-Alaq) contain the command to read. For Islam, knowledge is Sharia, and the purpose of this religion is that, if it is further analogized, knowledge cannot be obtained optimally except through education. This is in line with the statement

of Abdurrahman An-Nahlawi, who stated that the most crucial purpose of the revelation of the Qur'an is to educate humans. In this case, it is emphasized that every individual is obliged to pursue knowledge that will be passed down daily for the survival of life. Islamic education constantly changes with the times and the development of science and technology. Its further development touches on various aspects of education (including Islamic education). Therefore, like it or not, Islamic religious education must be designed to follow the flow of these changes; otherwise, Islamic education will be left behind. Education reform must be carried out so that education is of higher quality and can keep up with the times. Educational reform includes education's curriculum, processes, meanings, and objectives. Therefore, the role of education teachers is needed to make education more advanced and of a higher quality. Muslims have lived in the realm of science for a very long time. After realizing that Islam has significantly regressed when compared to the progress of Western nations, there is a need for renewal or modernism. Until finally there was a movement of thought voiced by reformist figures, such as Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (1703 AD – 1792 AD) in Arabia with a reform movement aimed at facing the decline of religion, Ibrahim Mufarrika (1670 AD – 1754 AD) in Turkey with reforms in the military field, Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1838 AD – 1897 AD) with his disciple Muhammad Abduh (1849 AD – 1905 AD) in Egypt with his Pan Islamism movement which sought to unite the Islamic world and figures Other Reformers.

Reforms in Islam emerged to bring Muslims to progress, which had not been experienced in previous times. As explained earlier, Muslims have experienced a similar lag in various fields compared to Western civilization. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, the figures of reform were born, namely Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and others. In addition to the figures described above, the author found another Islamic reformer, Fazlur Rahman. Fazlur Rahman is one of the figures whose knowledge is influenced by strong Islamic religious traditions and critical Western science. He was born in Hazara in 1919 A.D. Fazlur Rahman was one of the most influential reformers of the 20th century. He was very influential in the Islamic world, even in Chicago, America, where he had various thoughts on Islamic issues. He was critical both of the Islamic heritage itself and Western traditions. He succeeded in developing a method that could provide an alternative solution to the problems of contemporary Muslims. Based on the description above, we can understand that Fazlur Rahman is a prolific thinker and writer with a high concern for overcoming the problems of the ummah, especially those faced by his country. Unfortunately, the country where he was born has not been able to accept ideas that are considered radical and contaminated by Western thought. So he was forced to leave his homeland and settle in Chicago until his death. There, his thoughts and contributions were greatly appreciated. We often encounter this condition around us, where figures or scientists are ignored, so they choose to migrate to a country willing to accept them. Not infrequently, their achievements soared to being recognized in neighboring countries and even international circles.

One of his thoughts is about Education. Departing from the above background, the

researcher has several reasons that made the researcher choose the title The Relevance of Islamic Education Reform Fazlur Rahman's Perspective with today's context, including: First, the researcher felt interested in further studying Fazlur Rahman because the figure was considered to have quite controversial ideas or had different ideas from other Islamic thinkers in Pakistan, especially in the field of education. Second, the methods' implications are relevant in addressing current global problems. The problems faced include the low quality of students, the emergence of broken personalities, and the lack of students who have a deep spiritual and intellectual commitment to Islam, so that many students fall into negative associations. Revival and renewal are the central themes of Fazlur Rahman's scheme of thought. The categories of tajdid (reform) and ijtihad (independent thinking) qualify as the main elements under the rubric of Islamic Return thought. The primary concern is to prepare for the rethinking gradually realized by educational facilities. Therefore, to find out how to reform education from Fazlur Rahman's perspective is very important and needs a special study.

This study examines the relevance of Fazlur Rahman's concept of Islamic education reform in contemporary developments. It explores the factors influencing his thinking, aiming to elucidate his ideas on educational renewal while providing theoretical and practical contributions, theoretically by enriching scholarly discourse in Islamic education and serving as a reference for future research, and practically by enhancing knowledge and insights for researchers and academics. Building on Rahman's framework, the study introduces a comparative analysis of his Neo-Modernist model in *pesantren* versus modern Islamic schools in Indonesia, addressing prior gaps in empirical validation, while also investigating bilingualism's role in critical thinking and technology's potential to ethically bridge secular-religious divides, offering a modern extension to his integration model.

METHODS

This qualitative research uses a descriptive approach that emphasizes data in the form of written or spoken words and indirectly observed behaviors. The data sources consist of primary data, such as the works of Fazlur Rahman: *Islam*, *Islamic Neo-Modernism*, and *Islam and Modernity on Intellectual Transformation*, and secondary data obtained from previous research, theses, articles, and other relevant literature. The data collection technique uses the documentation method, collecting and analyzing written, drawing, and electronic documents to form a systematic and complete study. This study uses an analytical descriptive method with a philosophical approach in the data analysis process. The analysis begins with the data collection process, then continues with data reduction, sorting out data relevant to the research object, and organizing it systematically. After that, the data is presented as a coherent narrative. The next stage is to draw conclusions based on the data that has been given, using relevant analysis of the subject matter. The author also examines all available data from various sources with a philosophical approach to gain an in-depth understanding. This process was closed with qualitative data

analysis to find coherence and relevance between data, ultimately producing a comprehensive and integrated picture of Islamic education reform from Fazlur Rahman's perspective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relevance of the Concept of Islamic Education Reform: Fazlur Rahman's Perspective with the Context of the Development of the Current Era 1. The Dilemma of Islamic Education

Fazlur Rahman introduced his ideas and thoughts on educational reform by studying various classical literatures. According to him, the reform of Islamic education can be done by accepting modern secular education and then trying to incorporate it into Islamic teachings. According to him, the effort to reform Islamic education can be taken by awakening Muslims' ideology about the importance of learning and developing science. As the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said, "Studying knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim and Muslimah". Second, trying to erode the dualism of the Islamic education system. On the one hand, there is traditional (religious) education; on the other, there is modern (secular) education. Therefore, there needs to be an effort to integrate the two. Third, realizing the importance of language in education to communicate and convey original opinions.

The Purpose of Islamic Education According to Rahman

Several things must be done: First, the purpose of Islamic education, which is defensive and tends to focus only on the afterlife, must be changed immediately. The purpose of education must be oriented to the life of the world and the community at the same time, and sourced from the Qur'an. According to him, "the purpose of Islamic education in the view of the Qur'an is to develop the core human abilities in such a way that all the knowledge obtained will be integrated with the personality". Second, the psychological burden of Muslims in facing the West will soon be eliminated. To relieve the psychological burden of Muslims, Rahman advocated a comprehensive historical and systematic study of Islam on the development of Islamic disciplines such as theology, law, ethics, social sciences, and philosophy, adhering to the Qur'an as an evaluator because it is the disciplines of Islamic sciences that have developed in history that contribute to the intellectual and spiritual form of Muslim society. So that through this effort, it is hoped that it can eliminate the psychological burden of Muslims in facing the West. Third, the negative attitude of Muslims towards science must also be changed. According to Rahman, there is nothing wrong with science; what is bad is the user. The science of the atom, for example, was invented by Western scientists, but before they harnessed the electrical power from the invention (which means harnessing the energy from nuclear reactions that can be transformed into electrical energy) or used it to make useful things, they created the atomic bomb. Now, the making of the atomic bomb still

needs to be done, and it is even used as a competition. Scientists then anxiously looked for a way out to stop the manufacture of the devastating weapon. Rahman also stated that the word "ilm (science) is used for all kinds of knowledge in the Qur'an. (For example, when Allah taught David how to make armor, it was also al'ilm. Even magic (sihr), as taught by Aaron and Marut to humans, is also one of the types of al-ilm, although in the sense of practice and use. Because many blame magic for separating husbands from wives. Likewise, things that give new ideas to the intellect include al-ilm.

In the Islamic view, knowledge is a form of worship that encourages humans to establish a closer relationship with Allah. So that knowledge should not be misused to damage faith and morals and bring danger and destruction. Therefore, according to Rahman, Islam allows its people to acquire knowledge in any form, as long as the knowledge they develop does not mislead and lead them to self-destruction. Because knowledge must be used for the health of individuals and collectives. The classical discourse education system remains current because Islamic education experts often question it, which is the dichotomy in the Islamic education system. This has developed and is considered a modern education system today. This should not happen because the dichotomy is that the Western education system is nationalized by adding several Islamic religious subjects, and the Islamic education system that comes from the classical (traditional) era, which is not fundamentally updated, has a different direction or, in some important respects, is opposite. The ancient traditional system in Islam is based on a set of values derived from the Qur'an. The Qur'an states that education's real purpose is to create people who are obedient to God and will always strive to obey His commandments written in the holy book. Such a person will seek to understand the whole phenomenon inside and outside the Treasure of God's power. On the other hand, the modern system, which does not explicitly exclude God, seeks not to involve Him in its journey regarding the origin of the universe or the phenomena with which man is in daily contact.

Amid the rampant dichotomy of the Islamic education system, Rahman tried to offer a solution. According to him, religious sciences should be integrated with general sciences organically and comprehensively to eliminate the dichotomy of the education system. Because basically, science is integrated and cannot be separated. Thus, the curriculum and syllabus of Islamic education must include general sciences such as social sciences, natural sciences, and world history, as well as religious sciences such as fiqh, kalam, tafsir, and hadith. According to Rahmana, science is in principle one, which comes from Allah SWT. This is what is explained in the Qur'an. According to the Qur'an, all knowledge comes from Allah. Some are revealed to His chosen people through the verses of the Qur'aniyah and some through the verses of Kauniah obtained by man using his senses, intellect, and heart. The knowledge that is revealed has absolute truth, whereas the knowledge that is received is not absolute.

Student (Student)

The students faced with the world of Islamic education in Islamic countries are closely related to the unsuccessful dichotomy between religious sciences and general knowledge overthrown in Islamic educational institutions. The unsuccessful elimination

of the dichotomy between religious sciences and general sciences has resulted in a low intellectual quality of students and the emergence of split personalities. This condition will, in turn, increase the double morality of Muslims. For example, a pious and obedient Muslim carries out worship, but at the same time, he can become an extortionist, oppressor, corruptor, or commit other despicable acts.

According to Rahman, several efforts must be made to overcome the abovementioned problems. First, students must be given Qur'an lessons that allow the holy book to be used as a source of moral inspiration and as the highest reference to solve problems in daily life that are increasingly complex and challenging. Second, it provides material on the disciplines of Islamic sciences, including theology, ethics, social sciences, and philosophy. Educator (Mu'allim) Educators in an Islamic perspective are very important in the educational process. He is responsible for the development of students by striving to develop all students' potential, both affective, cognitive, and psychomotor potential. An educator is not only a transfer of knowledge but also responsible for management, directing, facilitating, and planning. Therefore, the functions and duties of educators include at least three things: First, as a teacher (instructional) who is in charge of planning the teaching program and implementing the program that has been prepared, and lastly, the implementation of assessments after the program is carried out. Second, as an educator who directs students to a level of maturity with a Kamil personality in line with the purpose of Allah creating them. Third, as a leader (managerial) who leads to control himself, students, and related communities regarding efforts to direct, supervise, organize, control, and participate in the programs carried out.

In line with the rapid advancement of science and technology, the presence of qualified and professional educators and creative and integrated minds is needed. To realize an experienced educator, one can refer to the demands of the Prophet (saw) because he is the only educator who has been the most successful in such a short period, so that this is expected to bring the reality (educator) closer to the ideal (Prophet PBUH). To get such quality educators in Islamic educational institutions today is very difficult. Rahman proves this through his observation of the development of Islamic education in several Islamic countries. He saw that qualified and professional educators with a quality and integrated mind who could interpret old things in a new language as a useful idealistic tool were still challenging to find in modern times. The scarcity of educators like this has hit almost all Islamic countries. In overcoming the shortages of such educators, Rahman offered several ideas: First, recruit and prepare students with the best talents and high commitment to the field of religion (Islam). Such students must be fostered and given adequate incentives to help meet their needs and enhance their intellectual careers. If this is not done immediately, efforts to create quality educators will not be realized. Because some students who enter religious education fail to enter better careers.

Second, appointing madrasah graduates who are relevant and intelligent, or appointing modern scholars who have obtained doctorate degrees in Western universities and have been in higher scientific institutions as professors in Arabic, Persian, and Islamic history. Third, educators must be trained in Islamic study centers abroad, especially in the West.

Rahman's idea has also been applied in Indonesia by sending potential IAIN educators or teaching staff to continue their studies in Western countries with Islamic study centers. The beginning of the positive impact of sending educators abroad has indeed begun to be felt, among others, such as the implementation of system reforms, methods, and techniques in the field of teaching, and the improvement of institutional structures and curriculum structures. Fourth, to appoint some madrasah graduates who know English and try to train them in modern research techniques, and conversely, to attract university graduates in the fields of philosophy and social sciences, and to give them lessons in Arabic and classical Islamic disciplines such as Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence. So that through this effort, creative educators will be born and have a strong commitment to Islam. Fifth, Activating educators to produce Islamic works creatively and with goals. In addition, educators must also be serious in conducting research and trying to publish their works. Those who have done good work must be rewarded, among other things, by increasing their salary.

Educational Facilities

Facilities in the form of buildings and libraries are very closely related to the quality of the school. Even though it is simple, Islamic education figures in the past already knew the importance of tools for improving the quality of education. Educational facilities such as libraries in the Middle Ages significantly improved the quality of academic institutions and the intellectual development of Muslims. In Islamic history, libraries can be categorized into three types. First, public libraries are usually part of mosques, madrasas, or other educational institutions. The library is open to anyone who wants to use its collection. Second, semi-public libraries that are only open to certain circles, usually only for famous scientists or nobles. Even though this type of library is located in a palace environment. Third, private libraries are owned by individuals, both scholars and people who collect books for fun. The three models of libraries built by Muslims have greatly influenced the rotation of the wheels of education and teaching, and encourage students to continue their scientific work. Rahman's observations in several Islamic countries that he visited show that the state of libraries in Islamic educational institutions is still inadequate, especially in terms of the number of books. The books available in the libraries of Islamic educational institutions are still very much in demand, especially Arabic books and English books. To overcome this problem, Rahman proposed that library facilities should be equipped with Arabic and English books.

Factors Behind Fazlur Rahman's Thoughts on Islamic Education Reform
The Dilemma of Islamic Education According to Fazlur Rahman

Although efforts have been made to reform Islamic education, the world of Islamic education still faces several problems. The current goal of Islamic education is not directed towards a positive goal. The purpose of Islamic education is only oriented to the life of the Prophet and tends to be defensive, namely, to save Muslims from pollution and destruction caused by the impact of Western ideas that come through various disciplines. Fazlur Rahman offers Tajdid (renewal) and Ijtihad (free thinking). His

primary concern is preparing the basis for such a rethinking, which is gradually realized by education. One thing that is overlooked in education reform, according to him, is the conservative traditional education system of the ulama. This group of Muslim communities rejected the changes brought about by cultural and intellectual modernization. This can ultimately be detrimental to the Muslim community at large because it lags behind other contemporary societies that have advanced in the fields of economics, politics, and science. While the scholars were imprinted by the traditional education system, especially in the Sunni world, perhaps even in Shi'a, none fulfilled the functions related to society or directed the modern education sector. Three approaches to education reform have been carried out. Namely, first, Islamizing modern secular education. This approach is done by accepting the modern secular education that has generally developed in the West and trying to "Islamize" Fazlur Rahman, Islam and Modernity, i.e., filling it with certain key concepts of Islam.

There are two objectives of Islamizing modern secular education, namely: (1) forming the character of students or students with Islamic values in the lives of individuals and society, (2) allowing experts with modern education to cultivate their respective fields of study with Islamic values at a higher level, using Islamic perspectives to change the content and orientation of their studies (Mely Nadia, 2022; Rabiei, 2022; Radzol & Hamzah, 2023). The two goals are closely related to each other. So that if the formation of a character with Islamic values carried out in the education level of students is still at a young age and readily accepted, without anything being done to color higher education with an Islamic orientation, then the view of students who have reached a high level of education will inevitably be secularized and even most likely they will throw away whatever Islamic orientation they once had. Second, simplifying traditional syllabi. This approach is directed entirely within the framework of conventional education itself. These reforms tended to simplify the traditional syllabus of education that was very close to unnecessary additional material, such as medieval theology, certain branches of philosophy (such as logic), and a myriad of works on Islamic law. This simplification excluded most works in medieval disciplines and emphasized the fields of Hadith, Arabic language and literature, and the principles of Qur'anic interpretation. Third, the old branches of science should be developed with the new branches of science. In this case, the length of learning time is extended and adjusted to the length of the curriculum of modern schools and academics.

In Indonesia, at the academic level, efforts have begun to combine modern sciences with traditional sciences. According to Fazlur Rahman, integration or merger like the above does not exist, because the nature of teaching is generally mechanical and only juxtaposes old science with modern knowledge. The lack of books available in libraries further exacerbates this situation. So that this results in, on the one hand, teaching will remain barren even if students have talent and will, on the other hand, teachers who are qualified and professional and have creative and integrated thoughts will not be able to be produced on a sufficient scale. Seeing this condition, Rahman tried to offer a solution. Therefore, to find out how to solve the problem of Islamic education, the study of Fazlur Rahman's

ideas about the solution of the education problem in Modern Islam has become significant. 2. Tradition of Thought The attitude of the orthodox towards philosophy in particular and towards the "rational sciences" in general directly leads us to a brief review of the beginnings of the development and nature of the Islamic educational system and its contents. The Qur'an often uses the word "ilm" in its general meaning as "knowledge" through study, thinking, experience, and so on.

From the background described above, it can be seen that Islamic education still faces educational problems in this modern era. These problems are: (1) the purpose of Islamic education is not directed to positive goals, (2) the dichotomy of the Islamic education system, (3) the low quality of students, the emergence of fragmented individuals and the absence of students who have a deep spiritual and intellectual commitment to Islam, (4) the difficulty of finding qualified and professional educators and having creative and integrated minds, and (5) there is still a lack of books available in the library. By the basic character of modernism, which tends to emphasize the ability of reason or human reason rather than intuition or revelation, prioritizes material life over spiritual needs, and is less appreciative of the truth of religious values, modernization has brought emptiness and meaninglessness to human life.

CONCLUSION

Fazlur Rahman, a bold intellectual, championed Islamic education reform in response to the rigid, conservative systems of the Indian subcontinent, advocating for the integration of modern secular education with Islamic teachings through three key efforts: fostering scientific curiosity among Muslims, dismantling the secular-religious education dichotomy, and emphasizing language as a tool for critical thought. His contributions spanned five areas—educational objectives, system dualism, student development, educator roles, and learning tools—rooted in his journey from traditional schooling to Oxford doctoral studies and his establishment of integrated research institutions. His ideas remain highly relevant to Indonesia's education system, addressing foundational goals, pedagogy, and infrastructure. Future research should explore: (1) comparative studies of his integration model in *pesantren* versus modern Islamic schools, (2) barriers to eradicating education dualism, (3) bilingualism's impact on critical thinking, (4) modern-religious teacher training, (5) global applicability in Muslim-majority contexts, and (6) technology's role in bridging secular-religious divides while upholding ethics.

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