



Implementation of KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thoughts in the merdeka curriculum

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This article has undergone peer review and was presented at the Islam in World Perspectives Symposium 2024 on August 14, 2024

Keywords

*Educational Thought ,
Kurikulum Merdeka ,
Religious Knowledge,
Scientific Knowledge.*

This research aims to see how the thoughts of KH Ahmad Dahlan are implemented in the kurikulum merdeka that is being promoted by the government through KEMDIKBUDRISTEK. The research method used is a literature review where the author collects data on the educational thoughts of KH Ahmad Dahlan, independent curriculum and discusses how it is implemented. The results of the study show that the thoughts of KH Ahmad Dahlan are implemented in the independent curriculum in several aspects including: in the education system, namely the integration of religious and Scientific knowledge curricula, in the aspect of educational goals, namely the formation of students who are religiously knowledgeable and intelligent in insight and scientific views which are reflected in the Pancasila student profile, in terms of technical implementation, namely indications of pending development of educational implementation, in terms of learning methods namely contextual learning which is reflected in intracurricular and cocurricular learning models on independent curriculum. In addition to these four aspects, both KH Ahmad Dahlan and the concept of independent curriculum focus on developing students both individually and socially. The implication of this research is the formation of educational institutions that truly become an answer to the needs of students in facing the development of time, not just schools as a formality to get a diploma. As for educators, they should be more open-minded so that they are ready to develop and ready to become a solution for student development.

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Introduction

KH Ahmad Dahlan is recognized as one of the prominent thinkers and reformers of education in Indonesia, particularly in the modernization of Islamic education. His efforts to integrate religious and general education, which was considered unusual at his time, are a testament to his forward-thinking approach. During that era, the educational landscape in Indonesia was divided into two distinct streams: one focused on religious subjects such as the Qur'an, Hadith, Aqidah, and others, while the other centered on general education introduced by the Dutch colonial government (Awaluddin & Saputro, 2020; Mukhtarom, 2020). This division led to stagnation and backwardness

in Islamic education, as it emphasized religious instruction and neglected general knowledge, which was viewed as the education of infidels. Therefore, according to KH Ahmad Dahlan, education was a strategic effort to save the Muslim community from static thinking and to promote dynamic thought. Through education, it was hoped that the Muslim community would become educated, intelligent, critical, and capable of analyzing problems across various fields of life (Mukhtarom, 2020).

Over time, Islamic education in Indonesia has undergone remarkable development, with Islamic educational institutions gradually adopting the integration of religious and general education as promoted by KH Ahmad Dahlan. The Muhammadiyah organization itself, founded by KH Ahmad Dahlan, now oversees thousands of educational institutions ranging from early childhood education to universities (Nuryana, 2017), all of which implement the educational concepts initiated by KH Ahmad Dahlan. Nevertheless, there is still much room for improvement in the implementation of KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational concepts across various Islamic educational institutions, particularly within Muhammadiyah. Many within Muhammadiyah, including educators, still view these concepts with skepticism or prioritize general education over religious education. This issue is particularly evident in discussions surrounding curriculum and teaching methods, where many still believe that these are relevant only to general knowledge. However, a deeper examination reveals that KH Ahmad Dahlan has always emphasized these two aspects to ensure that Islamic education in Indonesia keeps pace with contemporary developments, including advancements in the field of education.

In recent decades, the Indonesian education system has been preoccupied with the introduction of a new curriculum model, the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) curriculum. For some, this curriculum presents new challenges in the learning process, while for others, it offers a solution to the outdated teaching methods of the digital age. This sentiment is also felt by educators in Muhammadiyah schools. Some are uncertain whether their schools can engage all educators in implementing the curriculum, while others question its relevance to religious subjects, which have traditionally relied more on lecture-based methods than on project-based learning as proposed in the Merdeka curriculum.

Research on the implementation of KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought has been conducted by several scholars. For example, Faiz Fatoni's thesis explores how KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational ideas are implemented in the learning process at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Purwokerto. The study found that teaching methods in the school are primarily classical, with lectures being the most frequently used method by teachers. The school has also integrated the 2013 curriculum and the ISMUBA curriculum in its teaching process (Fatoni, 2019). Another relevant study by Fandi Ahmad examines the application of KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought at SMP

Muhammadiyah 6 Yogyakarta. This study notes that education at the school has integrated both general and religious subjects, although this integration is not yet fully realized (Anshori, 2010).

In 2019, Pipit Patimah conducted research at SMP Muhammadiyah 33 Jakarta Barat to assess the extent to which KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought has been implemented at the school. The study concluded that the concepts and ideas of KH Ahmad Dahlan have been well implemented, and that these concepts remain relevant today. However, the researcher recommended that all teachers introduce Islamic and Muhammadiyah values, rather than relying solely on Islamic Studies teachers (Patimah, 2019).

Another related study by Bayu Suta Wardianto investigates whether KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought remains relevant in addressing the challenges of Islamic education in the 4.0 era. The study suggests that KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought should continue to evolve to meet the changing times, and that people must be able to integrate religion, culture, and modern advancements (Wardiyanto, 2020). In addition to these studies, several other articles focus on the challenges of implementing the Merdeka curriculum, highlighting issues such as the technological lag among many Indonesian teachers (Oktavia et al., 2023), the unfamiliarity of religious teachers with their role as facilitators, and the reluctance of many teachers to move away from the lecture method, which is still considered the best method for teaching (Susilowati, 2022).

This article aims to discuss how KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought can be implemented within the Merdeka curriculum. Although there has been extensive discussion on both KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought and the Merdeka curriculum, no study has yet explored the connection between the two. This gap exists partly because the Merdeka curriculum is a relatively new concept, proposed in 2019 by Nadiem Makarim, the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. Therefore, this research is important to determine how KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought can be integrated into the Merdeka curriculum. Additionally, the author aims to demonstrate that KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought can be implemented in the Merdeka curriculum, ensuring that religious educators are not confused or unfamiliar with the new curriculum and that it aligns with the educational model promoted by KH Ahmad Dahlan. Furthermore, this article seeks to encourage teachers, particularly religious educators, to embrace the developments in education and to lead the implementation of KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thought, especially in Muhammadiyah schools.

To facilitate the writing of this article, the author will focus on the educational concepts proposed by KH Ahmad Dahlan, the Merdeka curriculum, and how and where KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational concepts can be applied within the Merdeka curriculum.

Method

The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative research method, where the author

will elaborate on the educational thoughts of KH Ahmad Dahlan and present the concept of the "Merdeka Belajar" Curriculum, which is currently being implemented in almost all schools in Indonesia. The data collection technique employed in this research is library research, which is particularly well-suited for studies that prioritize depth of analysis. In this context, the author will gather data related to the study from academic journals, books, scientific articles, and news portals relevant to this research. The purpose of this study is to collect data on KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thoughts and the "Merdeka Belajar" Curriculum concept, which is being actively promoted in schools.

Result and Discussion

1. KH Ahmad Dahlan's Educational Thoughts

Islam entered Indonesia through da'i (Islamic preachers), most of whom were also traders. The arrival of Islam had an impact on various aspects of society, including education. Islamic education in Indonesia began with direct contact between da'i and the community, either individually or collectively. Historically, the Walisongo (the nine saints) initiated the spread of Islam by establishing mosques as the centers of learning before expanding into Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). Even today, mosques remain an essential component of pesantren. Thus, it is not incorrect to consider mosques as the first Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia (Susilo & Wulansari, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, formal Islamic educational institutions such as dayah, surau, and pesantren began to emerge. During the early stages of their development, while Indonesia was still a Dutch colonial territory, there was a dichotomy in educational institutions: those that focused solely on religious instruction and those established by the Dutch colonial government, which concentrated on general education. This division was intentionally maintained by the Dutch colonial government to perpetuate social status differences between Dutch and Indonesian citizens, under the pretext of differences in knowledge (Selamat, 2019). The authorities at that time even went so far as to restrict the intellectual development of Indonesians, particularly in Islamic education, by creating a special body called the Priesterraden to oversee religious life and Islamic education. Moreover, religious teachers were required to obtain a teaching license from the Dutch colonial government, preventing everyone knowledgeable in religious matters from teaching (Rahman, 2018).

In this context, KH Ahmad Dahlan emerged as one of the reformers of Islamic education in Indonesia. He was able to inspire future generations to integrate their religious beliefs into real-life situations. He placed significant emphasis on education, particularly Islamic education, driven by his belief that advancing the Muslim community required struggle, and that successful struggle

depended on two main pillars: education and preaching (dakwah). KH Ahmad Dahlan's belief is reflected in his actions, as he spent almost his entire life teaching and preaching (Asman et al., 2021). In his efforts to modernize Islamic education, Ahmad Dahlan established the Ibtidaiyah Diniyah Islamiyah School on December 1, 1911 (Setiawan, 2018), which became the precursor to the modern Muhammadiyah school system. Unlike most schools of that time, this school taught both religious and general subjects, which was considered unusual and even criticized as being Westernized (Rahman, 2018). Traditional educators strongly opposed this concept, with some even labeling KH Ahmad Dahlan as an infidel for following Dutch educational practices (Achmad, 2021; Amelia & Hudaidah, 2021).

KH Ahmad Dahlan's dedication and struggle in education did not stop with the establishment of the Ibtidaiyah Diniyah Islamiyah School or the teachers' schools known as Madrasah Mu'allimin Yogyakarta and Madrasah Mu'allimat Yogyakarta. His efforts continued to grow, leading to the establishment of more than 10,000 Muhammadiyah educational institutions, ranging from kindergarten to university levels (Sormin et al., 2022). His educational spirit still thrives today, with Muhammadiyah schools continuing to implement the educational concepts developed by him (Nuryana, 2017).

To achieve educational reform, KH Ahmad Dahlan introduced several aspects of educational renewal, including the education system, educational management techniques, educational objectives, and teaching methods. In terms of the education system, KH Ahmad Dahlan pioneered schools that adopted the Dutch education system, allowing students to learn both general knowledge and religious studies. Through this system, he hoped that the institutions he founded would achieve comprehensive educational goals, producing students who were both religiously knowledgeable and scientifically literate, capable of applying their knowledge in service to Muhammadiyah, and courteous in society (Lenggono, 2018).

Regarding the curriculum, KH Ahmad Dahlan believed that the curriculum should cover three main aspects:

- a. Moral and character education to cultivate good character based on the Qur'an and Sunnah.
- b. Individual education to foster balanced and holistic individual awareness, encompassing the development of mind and body, faith and intellect, emotion and reason, and worldly and spiritual matters.
- c. Social education to encourage the desire and willingness to live in a community (Mukhtarom, 2020).

These points indicate that KH Ahmad Dahlan desired Islamic education that included general knowledge within its scope.

In terms of educational management, he adopted practices from Dutch colonial schools, such as

the use of classrooms, blackboards, chalk, and even neckties. He believed that adopting these practices did not compromise religious teachings because, according to him, education falls within the realm of muamalah, which can be developed according to needs. Regarding teaching methods, KH Ahmad Dahlan introduced innovative ways to deliver lessons. While traditional schools at that time relied on rote memorization and recitation, he used more varied and contextual teaching methods. This is evident in his teaching of Surah al-Ma'un, where he emphasized the importance of understanding and applying the social implications of the Surah in everyday life. This approach led to the establishment of Muhammadiyah orphanages. Besides contextual learning, KH Ahmad Dahlan also positioned himself as a facilitator in the learning process. These two teaching methods demonstrate that his ideas are implemented in the Merdeka curriculum, where teachers are positioned as facilitators, and learning is divided into intra-curricular and co-curricular activities aimed at developing the Pancasila student profile with its six dimensions (Achmad, 2021).

2. Merdeka Curriculum

Nadiem Anwar Makarim, as the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, officially announced the name of the prototype curriculum as the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum is expected to have a more flexible framework, focusing on essential subjects and developing students' uniqueness and skills (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022). The primary focus of the Merdeka Curriculum is to provide greater freedom for both teachers and students. The Ministry of Education and Culture interprets Merdeka Belajar as a learning process that grants freedom and authority to each educational institution, allowing them to be free from overly complex administrative procedures. The main assumption of Merdeka Belajar is to trust educators, particularly teachers, to carry out the learning process. With the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, learning will be more relevant and less monotonous. Project-based learning will provide students with ample opportunities to actively explore factual issues (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022). The strengths of this curriculum lie in its simplicity, its focus on essential learning materials, and the development of students' competencies according to their stage of development. Additionally, the Merdeka Curriculum also allows students in high school to choose their study programs, enabling teachers to teach based on students' abilities and developmental levels (Rahayu et al., 2022).

From the above explanation, it can be seen that the Merdeka Curriculum has three main characteristics:

1. Project-based learning as an effort to develop soft skills and character in line with the goals of the Pancasila Student Profile;

2. A focus on essential, relevant, and in-depth learning materials, leaving ample time to foster and develop students' creativity and innovation in achieving basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy;
3. Flexibility for teachers to conduct learning in accordance with the achievement level and developmental stage of each student, as well as adapting to the context and local content (Chidliir, 2023).

As mentioned above, one of the strengths of this curriculum is its project-based learning approach. The goal of this project-based learning is to achieve the Pancasila Student Profile, which is further explained in the P3 guidebook developed by the Merdeka Curriculum development team. The project's aim is to shape the Pancasila Student Profile in accordance with the vision and mission of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which defines a Pancasila student as a lifelong learner who is globally competent, has Pancasila character, and exhibits six main indicators: faith, piety to God Almighty, and noble character; independence; critical thinking; creativity; collaboration; and global diversity (Rusnaini et al., 2021). Each indicator has elements that further explain the project's objectives, ensuring the achievement of the Pancasila Student Profile is clearly visible. The following are the elements of each of the Pancasila Student Profile indicators mentioned above:

1. Faith, Piety to God Almighty, and Noble Character: This dimension describes students who exhibit religious behavior. They understand the teachings of their religion and apply their religious understanding in daily life. There are at least five key elements in this dimension: (a) religious behavior; (b) personal character; (c) interpersonal character; (d) environmental character; and (e) civic character (Irawati et al., 2022).
2. Global Diversity: In this dimension, Indonesian students uphold cultural values, local wisdom, and their identity while being open to engaging with other cultures, fostering mutual respect, and creating new, positive cultural elements that do not conflict with the nation's values. The key elements of global diversity include recognizing and respecting different cultures, having cross-cultural communication skills when interacting with others, and reflecting on and taking responsibility for experiences of diversity (Trisnawati et al., 2022).
3. Collaboration: This dimension expects Indonesian students to work together effectively, voluntarily participating in group activities to ensure tasks are completed efficiently and effectively. The essential elements of this dimension are collaboration, care, and sharing.
4. Independence: This dimension encourages Indonesian students to be self-reliant, meaning they are ready to take responsibility for all aspects of their learning process and outcomes. The key elements of independence are self-awareness and self-regulation.

5. **Critical Thinking:** This dimension aims for students to develop analytical thinking skills, allowing them to process both qualitative and quantitative data neutrally, establish connections between various pieces of information, evaluate, assess, and draw conclusions. The critical elements of this dimension include acquiring and processing information and ideas, analyzing and evaluating reasoning, and reflecting on thought processes during decision-making.
6. **Creativity:** This dimension expects students to be capable of modifying and creating original, meaningful, and valuable work that has a positive impact. The main elements of this dimension include generating original ideas and producing original works and actions, as well as having the flexibility of thought to find alternative solutions to problems (Satria et al., 2022).

3. Implementation of KH Ahmad Dahlan's Educational Thoughts in the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on the above analysis, it is evident that KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thoughts remain highly relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum, which was introduced by Minister Nadiem Makarim from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2019. These educational thoughts can be implemented in the Merdeka Curriculum across various aspects:

- a. **Educational System:** The Merdeka Curriculum does not restrict schools from incorporating religious subjects into their curriculum. This means that KH Ahmad Dahlan's idea of integrating religious and general knowledge is maintained. Furthermore, this curriculum also allows for greater focus on the individual development of students, meaning that students with a particular interest in a subject can study it in more detail.
- b. **Educational Goals:** KH Ahmad Dahlan envisioned that students should excel in religious knowledge and be intellectually capable, applying both in service to the community, particularly within Muhammadiyah. This vision is reflected in the Merdeka Curriculum through the project to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile, with its six indicators.
- c. **Educational Management Techniques:** KH Ahmad Dahlan adopted practices from Dutch colonial schools, such as the use of classrooms, blackboards, chalk, and even neckties, which may seem irrelevant to the learning process today. However, his approach to educational management was foundational in ensuring that the educational system could evolve and meet the challenges of the time. This can be seen in his statement that education falls within the realm of *muamalah*, which can be developed according to needs.
- d. **Teaching Methods:** KH Ahmad Dahlan introduced contextual learning, as seen in his teaching of Surah al-Ma'un. When teaching Surah al-Ma'un, he emphasized that students

should observe the social phenomena of the time, so they not only understood the meaning of the Surah but were also able to apply it in their daily lives—and this approach was successful. The process of teaching Surah al-Ma'un led to the establishment of Muhammadiyah orphanages. In addition to contextual learning, KH Ahmad Dahlan also positioned himself as a facilitator in the learning process. These two teaching methods are reflected in the Merdeka Curriculum, where teachers act as facilitators, and learning is divided into intra-curricular and co-curricular activities, with the co-curricular activities aiming to build the Pancasila Student Profile with its six dimensions.

In addition to these four aspects, KH Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts on the development of students both individually and socially are also reflected in the Merdeka Curriculum, which fundamentally supports the development of students. This is evident in the three principles of the Merdeka Curriculum:

1. Project-based learning as an effort to develop soft skills and character in line with the Pancasila Student Profile.
2. A focus on essential, relevant, and in-depth learning materials, leaving ample time to foster creativity and innovation in students as they achieve other basic competencies like literacy and numeracy.

Flexibility for teachers to tailor their teaching to the achievement level and developmental stage of each student, and to adapt to the context and local content.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational thoughts have been implemented in the Merdeka Curriculum, as seen in various educational aspects: (1) Educational System: Both KH Ahmad Dahlan's educational concepts and the Merdeka Curriculum do not limit the development of religious or general knowledge curricula; (2) Educational Goals: KH Ahmad Dahlan's aspiration to produce students who are religiously knowledgeable and intellectually capable is reflected in the Pancasila Student Profile, with its six indicators: faith, piety to God Almighty, and noble character; independence; critical thinking; creativity; collaboration; and global diversity; (3) Educational Management Techniques: KH Ahmad Dahlan provided the key to ensuring that education could evolve according to the needs of the time. The presence of intra-curricular and co-curricular activities in the Merdeka Curriculum is evidence of the importance of developing educational management techniques; (4) Teaching Methods: KH Ahmad Dahlan also demonstrated the potential for developing teaching methods, which remain relevant even today. Beyond these four aspects, other educational thoughts of KH Ahmad Dahlan have also been implemented in the Merdeka Curriculum, which broadly emphasizes the individual and social development of students.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to IWOS for providing the opportunity to attend the seminar. The authors also would like to express our deepest gratitude to Mrs. Betty Mauli Rosa as the supervising lecturer.

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