

The Formation of Ulama in Modernist Organizations: A Review of Curriculum Management in Muhammadiyah's *Kursus Ulama Tarjih*

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the curriculum management of the *Kursus Ulama Tarjih* (KUT) or Ulama Tarjih Course program organized by Muhammadiyah in North Sumatra Province. This research employed a qualitative field study method with data collection techniques including interviews, observations, and document analysis. Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony was used to examine how the KUT program strengthens Muhammadiyah's ideology. The findings reveal that, as part of its efforts to regenerate religious scholars (*al-'ulamā'*), Muhammadiyah North Sumatra has been organizing the KUT program since 2002. The program runs for two years in collaboration with Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU). The curriculum management of KUT emphasizes mastery of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and the Qur'an. The teaching methods employed are modern, including classical classroom systems, seminar discussions, and practical exercises. The KUT program plays a significant role in the regeneration of ulama by adopting an inclusive and modern curriculum while reinforcing Muhammadiyah's ideology amidst changing times.

Keywords: management, curriculum, hegemony, Muhammadiyah, Islamic ideology

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Introduction

Muslims universally recognize the necessity of Islamic scholars (*al-'ulamā'*).¹ Ulama function as agents of social control, providers of religious guidance to the community, and symbols of religious authority,² in addition to their other roles. Additionally, their contributions as educators in non-formal institutions, including mosque pulpits, *majelis taklim*, and study circles, have been substantial for an extended period. The role of ulama is both critical and influential, particularly in the context of educating the Muslim community.³ Nevertheless, there has been a dearth of rigorous research that investigates the influence of 'ulamā' on the development of Islamic intellectualism and comprehension.⁴ It is reasonable to assume that Muslims acquire a greater degree of enlightenment from ulama through non-formal educational institutions than through formal Islamic education systems.

The quantity and quality of ulama, as well as technological advancements that have marginalized their influence, are indicators of the scarcity that has been observed in recent times. In 1984, a charismatic ulama expressed his concern in the *Panji Masyarakat* magazine under the title "are ulama Becoming Scarce?".⁵ The decline in the number of ulama is primarily due to the passing of many senior figures without adequate successors. Meanwhile, serious efforts for ulama regeneration have yet to find an effective format. This often limits contemporary religious figures to preachers (*da'ī'*), speakers, and *ustādh*, many of whom lack sufficient backgrounds in religious education.⁶

There have been various efforts to regenerate ulama. Historically, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) were the sole institutions authorized

¹ R.C. Repp, "Ulamā," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

² Zulkifli, "The Ulama in Indonesia: Between Religious Authority and Symbolic Power," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 37, no. 1 (2013): 180–97, <https://jurnalmiqotojs.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/jurnalmiqot/article/view/79>

³ Mun'im Sirry, "Fatwas and Their Controversy: The Case of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI)," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013): 100–117, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23321692>.

⁴ Hiroko Horikoshi, *Kyai dan Perubahan Sosial* (Jakarta: P3M, 1987).

⁵ Ali Hasjimi, "Ulama Makin Langka?," *Panji Masyarakat*, 1984.

⁶ Ramli Abdul Wahid, *Peranan Islam Dalam Menghadapi Era Globalisasi Sekuler* (Medan: Citapustaka Media, 2014).

to produce ulama.⁷ In addition to their role in transmitting knowledge and preserving Islamic traditions, these institutions played a critical role in ulama regeneration. *Pesantren* have become more modern, especially in curriculum, making their claim to be ulama-making centers less important. Efforts to address this issue have included the establishment of specialized educational programs.

For instance, in the early 1990s, the government initiated the *Madrasah Aliyah Program Khusus* (MAPK), a boarding school system aimed at producing ulama.⁸ Similarly, since the 1990s, provincial-level branches of the Indonesian *Ulama Council* (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI) have initiated *Pendidikan Kader Ulama* (PKU) programs.⁹ Several district and city-level MUI offices have followed suit. Furthermore, they have developed the *Ma'ad 'Aly* program, a *pesantren*-based higher education initiative, to nurture future ulama.¹⁰ As of now, there are 74 *Ma'had 'Aly* institutions across Indonesia that focus on producing future ulama. These institutions operate with academic structures similar to conventional universities, including undergraduate (*Marḥalah al-Ula*), master (*Marḥalah al-Wuṣṭā*), and doctoral (*Marḥalah al-'Ulīya*) programs.¹¹ *Ma'had 'Aly* maintains its autonomy as a *pesantren*-managed educational institution, allowing for curriculum development that preserves the *pesantren*'s identity while addressing societal, scientific, and religious developments.¹²

⁷ Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Menuju Milenium Baru* (Jakarta: PT. Logos Wacana Ilmu, 1999).

⁸ Marwan Saridjo, *Bunga Rampai Pendidikan Agama Islam* (Jakarta: CV. Amissco, 1996).

⁹ Kamalia, "Regenerasi Ulama: Antara Pesantren Dan Pendidikan Kader Ulama.," *Al-Idarah: Jurnal Pengkajian Dakwah Dan Manajemen* 9, no. 2 (2021): 10–15, <https://jurnal.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/idarrah/article/view/10615>

¹⁰ See: "Pendataan," in <http://emispendis.kemendiknas.go.id/mahadaly/pendataan>.

¹¹ Farid Permana, "Pendidikan Ma'had 'Aly Sebagai Pendidikan Tinggi Bagi Maha Santri," *Al-Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 16, no. 1 (2019): 1–16, <https://ejournal.kopertais4.or.id/tapalkuda/index.php/qodiri/article/view/3310>

¹² See: Keputusan Direktur Jendral Pembinaan Kelembagaan Agama Islam No. 179 Tahun 2001 Tentang Pokok-Pokok Pedoman Penyelenggaraan Ma'had 'Aly.

The Formation of 'Ulama' in Modernist Organizations

The regeneration of ulama is a significant responsibility of Islamic organizations, which are the legacy of ulama.¹³ This obligation is predicated on two primary factors: the capacity of Islamic organizations to establish specialized ulama training programs and the preservation of ulama traditions. In 2002, Muhammadiyah¹⁴ North Sumatra established the *Kursus Ulama Tarjih* (KUT) in this context. This four-semester course, which lasted for two years, was conducted in conjunction with the Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatra (UMSU). The program's primary objective was to equip UMSU students from *pesantren* and Muhammadiyah-based Islamic schools with the necessary skills to continue the intellectual and organizational traditions of Muhammadiyah.

Other Islamic organizations in North Sumatra have also undertaken concrete efforts to address the scarcity of ulama. For instance, Al Washliyah¹⁵ established a PKU program in early 2022, beginning with 20 candidates

¹³ Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu, Hasan Asari, Junaidi Arsyad, "Kaderisasi Ulama Di Sumatera Utara: Antara Pesantren Dan Pendidikan Kader Ulama (PKU)," *Fikrah: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah Dan Studi Keagamaan* 11, no. 2 (2023): 299–316, <https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v11i2.19286>.

¹⁴ For history of Muhammadiyah, see: Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Lakum Dinukum Wa-Liya Dinî: The Muhammadiyah's Stance Towards Interfaith Relations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22, no. 3 (2011): 329–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2011.586512>; Indal Abror and Muhammad Nurdin Zuhdi, "Tafsir Al-Qur'an Berkemajuan: Exploring Methodological Contestation and Contextualization of Tafsir At-Tanwir by Tim Majelis Tarjih Dan Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 19, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.14421/cesensia.v19i2.1347>; Azyumardi Azra, "Muhammadiyah: A Preliminary Study" 1, no. 2 (1994); Muhammad Ali and Muadilah Hs Bunganegara, "Kajian Hadis Di Lingkungan Nahdlatul Ulama Dan Muhammadiyah," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 25 (2023): 188–99; Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Torn between Muhammadiyah and Ahmadiyah in Indonesia: Discussing Erfaan Dahlan's Religious Affiliation and Self-Exile," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 48, no. 140 (2020): 60–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2019.1663678>; Ahmad Najib Burhani, "The Ideological Shift of Muhammadiyah from Cultural into Puritanical Tendency in 1930s," *Jurnal Masyarakat Dan Budaya (JMB)* 8, no. 1 (2006): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jmb.v8i1.178>; Hilman Latief and Haedar Nashir, "Local Dynamics and Global Engagements of the Islamic Modernist Movement in Contemporary Indonesia: The Case of Muhammadiyah (2000–2020)," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 39, no. 2 (2020): 290–309, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103420910514>.

¹⁵ For history of Al Washliyah, see: Ja'far Ja'far, "Ulama, Al Washliyah and Knowledge in Modern Indonesia (1930–1980)," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 46, no. 2 (2022): 235–56, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v46i2.984>; Mhd. Syahnan,

as the initial cohort of future ulama.¹⁶ Similarly, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)¹⁷ has promoted *pesantren* as a hallmark of its educational identity by establishing *Ma'had 'Aly* institutions.¹⁸ Specifically, the North Sumatra branch of NU founded the *Ma'had 'Aly Pesantren NU* program on October 11, 2019, as part of its ulama regeneration efforts. However, this program was discontinued after three semesters (2019–2021) due to financial constraints. Nevertheless, the North Sumatra NU leadership remains committed to reviving the program. Therefore, this study focuses specifically on the response of Muhammadiyah of North Sumatra in ulama regeneration through specialized training programs. The scope of the discussion is limited to three aspects: the history of KUT Muhammadiyah, curriculum management, and teaching methodologies.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony,¹⁹ which posits that education serves as a tool to reinforce specific ideological dominance. In this context,

Ja'far Ja'far, and Muhammad Iqbal, "Ulama and Radicalism in Contemporary Indonesia: Response of Al Washliyah's Ulama on Radicalism," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 21, no. 1 (2021): 89–110, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v21i1.19684>; Ja'far Ja'far, "Respons Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah Terhadap Terorisme," *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 22, no. 1 (n.d.): 1–26, <https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/index.php/akademika/article/view/561>; Ja'far Ja'far, "Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah Dan Pelestarian Akidah Ahl Sunnah Wa Al-Jamâ'ah Di Indonesia," *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (2019), <https://islamica.uinsa.ac.id/index.php/islamica/article/view/525>; Ja'far Ja'far, "Ulema, Al Washliyah, and Knowledge in Modern Indonesia (1930-1980)," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 46, no. 2 (2022), <https://jurnalmiqotojs.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/jurnalmiqot/article/view/984>.

¹⁶ Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu et al., "Revitalisasi Kurikulum Lembaga Pendidikan Al Washliyah Dalam Melahirkan Ulama," *El-Buhuth: Borneo Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2023, 201–10, <https://journal.uinsi.ac.id/index.php/el-Buhuth/article/download/5761/2091>.

¹⁷ For history of Nahdlatul Ulama, see: Faisal Ismail, "The Nahdlatul Ulama: Its Early History and Contribution to the Establishment of Indonesian State," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 5, no. 2 (2011), <http://dx.doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2011.5.2.247-282>; Greg Fealy and Greg Barton, *Nahdlatul Ulama, Traditional Islam and Modernity in Indonesia* (Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 1998).

¹⁸ Idham, "Pola Pengkaderan Ulama Di Sulawesi Selatan (Studi Pada Program Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang Kabupaten Wajo)," *Al-Ulum* 17, no. 2 (2017): 439–58, <https://journal.iaingorontalo.ac.id/index.php/au/article/view/239>

¹⁹ Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951),

the ideology of Muhammadiyah is perpetuated through the inclusive teaching of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Qur'anic studies encompassing four major schools of thought. KUT plays a pivotal role in shaping ulama who are not only proficient in religious teachings but also act as agents of change promoting Muhammadiyah's ideology. This research highlights the importance of ulama regeneration in sustaining and advancing Islamic scholarly traditions and examines how Muhammadiyah's curriculum adapts to contemporary developments while preserving its core identity. For example, the move toward an Arabic-centered curriculum with Ma'had Abu Ubaidah after the collaboration shows how Muhammadiyah's ideological dominance and larger social, political, and economic changes interact and change over time.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative field research method,²⁰ with data collection techniques including interviews, observations, and document analysis. The research informants consisted of the leadership of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra, representatives of ulama, educators, and managers of the *Kursus Ulama Tarjih* (KUT) Muhammadiyah North Sumatra. Given that the KUT Muhammadiyah was no longer operational, observations and document analysis were combined in this study. The data collected were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Results and Discussion

Brief History of the Muhammadiyah

Kursus Ulama Tarjih (KUT) in North Sumatra

The Muhammadiyah *Kursus Ulama Tarjih* (KUT) is an institution for the regeneration of ulama, established by the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership of North Sumatra to prepare future ulama who will continue Muhammadiyah's mission. This course has been running from 2002 to 2014, producing six cohorts. The program spans two years or four

Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1949), Talcott Parsons, *Structure and Process in Modern Societies* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1960).

²⁰ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (London: Sage Publication, Inc., 2014).

semesters, combining classroom lectures with practical experience in specific courses.

Institutionally, Muhammadiyah KUT operates under the auspices of the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership of North Sumatra. The Chairman of Muhammadiyah serves as the advisor for the KUT Muhammadiyah. This course is organized in collaboration with the University of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra (*Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara*, UMSU), and the classes are conducted at UMSU, with all associated costs covered by the university. The Rector of UMSU assumes responsibility for the course activities.

According to the proposal document for the establishment of KUT Muhammadiyah, the objectives of the course are as follows:

- 1) to prepare Muhammadiyah ulama cadres capable of determining Islamic law in accordance with *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the essence of Islamic law) as contained in the Qur'an and Sunnah, capable of guiding the community, and applying the principles of the *Tarjīh* method.
- 2) to guide and mobilize human resources in the fields of Islam, scholarship, language, skills, and arts, to produce charismatic and dignified members of the Muhammadiyah organization.
- 3) to conduct intensive studies and research in the fields of the Qur'an and Sunnah, producing specialized experts in *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth*.
- 4) to hold discussions and studies on the intellectual contributions of the mujtahid imams in legal rulings, producing experts in *fiqh* (jurisprudence).
- 5) to foster an academic atmosphere that refreshes the understanding of *Tarjīh* principles, complemented by the wisdom of current fatwas in the form of *Qirā'at al-Ummah* (community reading).
- 6) to encourage focused recitation (*qirā'at al-ummah*) and mastery of Qur'anic memorization (*ḥifẓ al-Qur'ān*) to produce fluent and competent prayer leaders.

Further clarification in the document explains that the education and teaching system applied in KUT Muhammadiyah are, as follows:

- 1) The course level and program run for 2 years (4 semesters).
- 2) The program begins with a selection process, where participants are chosen from UMSU students with a background in *Madrasah*

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Aliyah (Islamic high school) or *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school).

- 3) The course is delivered through lectures, assignments, and fieldwork according to the available curriculum.
- 4) The educational system follows a Semester Credit System, with 16 meetings per semester.
- 5) additional activities include community service and religious preaching (*tabligh* or *da'wah*).
- 6) The final task for course participants is a thesis or scholarly work.
- 7) Student assessments are based on exams for the subjects listed in the Course Registration Form each semester, including Mid-Semester Exams, End-of-Semester Exams, final project exams, and field practice exams.
- 8) To sit for the Mid-Semester Exams and the End-of-Semester Exams, students must attend at least 85% of the classes in accordance with the schedule.
- 9) Academic administration is purposely to issue a course certificate to those who successfully complete the program.

According to the head of the Muhammadiyah KUT organizing committee, the course was established to train the future ulama of Muhammadiyah. Therefore, the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership of North Sumatra collaborated with UMSU to organize and finance the course. In an interview, he expressed his desire for Muhammadiyah to develop future ulama cadres who they can trust. In addition, he also said "Everything is financed by Muhammadiyah through UMSU. It is just unfortunate that it did not continue due to a lack of attention from the current leadership; Allah knows best".²¹

According to the administrator of KUT, who is also the Chairman of the Muhammadiyah *Tarjih* Council of North Sumatra, the program was intended to ensure the continuity of ulama regeneration within Muhammadiyah, particularly in North Sumatra. As stated in his interview:

"...The KUT only lasted 2 semesters, at most 4 semesters. Why did it stop? Because by 2016, Ma'had Abu Ubaidah was established.

²¹ Dalail Ahmad (Chairman of the Muhammadiyah KUT Organizer), interview by Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu, July 25, 2023.

If I'm not mistaken, by 2016, Ma'had Abu Ubaidah had been set up. So, there was no need to spend large amounts of money, but there were people from the Middle East who provided significant funding to educate individuals specializing in Arabic, the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic law. However, they did not offer a bachelor's degree, just a diploma. Later, they would complete their bachelor's degree at UMSU".²²

The above interview shows that Muhammadiyah KUT was initiated by the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership of North Sumatra in collaboration with UMSU. The reason for establishing Muhammadiyah KUT was to continue the ulama regeneration within Muhammadiyah so that it would not be interrupted. The program ran for two years (or four semesters). Additionally, when KUT was held, Muhammadiyah North Sumatra was also constructing the Observatory of Astronomy (OIF) building. Therefore, students educated at KUT were prepared not only to become the future ulama of Muhammadiyah but also to fill positions in the astronomy field, which was under development at the time.

Muhammadiyah KUT, which was established by Muhammadiyah, had a highly beneficial program, especially in terms of ulama regeneration. However, it is regrettable that the program ceased in 2014. Muhammadiyah KUT ran for six cohorts, starting in 2002 and ending in 2014. One of the factors that contributed to the cessation of the program was the high financial cost required. Structurally, Muhammadiyah KUT was led by a chairman, assisted by a vice chairman, a secretary, a vice secretary, a treasurer, and a vice treasurer. Above the chairman, there was a person in charge (the Rector of UMSU), and above that, an advisor. According to the author's findings from the 2011 organizational structure document of Muhammadiyah KUT, it was as follows:

Advisor : Chairman of Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership of North Sumatra
Person in Charge : Rector of UMSU
Chairman : Drs. Dalail Ahmad, M.A.
Vice Chairman : Akrim, S.Pd.I., M.Pd.
Secretary : Gunawan, S.Pd.I.
Vice Secretary : Zailani, S.Pd.I., M.A.

²² Sulidar (Chairman of the North Sumatra Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council), interview by Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu, March 21, 2023.

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Treasurer : Junaidi, S.Pd.I., M.Si.

Vice Treasurer : Sobrun, S.Ag.

Apart from the financial aspect, another reason for the cessation of the Muhammadiyah KUT program was the collaboration with Ma'had Abu Ubaidah, an educational institution under the Asia Muslim Charity Foundation (AMCF), starting in 2016. According to Palahuddin, this collaboration was an effort by Muhammadiyah to address the shortage of ulama.²³ One of the outcomes of this collaboration was the creation of an integrated program between the *Ma'had* and the Faculty of Islamic Studies at UMSU. Thus, students who registered at *Ma'had* studied there for five semesters or 2.5 years. Afterward, they continued their bachelor's degree at Islamic Studies of UMSU, choosing between two programs: Islamic Education or Early Childhood Islamic Education.

The original educational institution related to ulama regeneration in Muhammadiyah is not KUT but *Pendidikan Ulama Tarjih Muhammadiyah* (the Muhammadiyah Ulama Tarjih Education). Established on April 10, 1968, in Yogyakarta, the Muhammadiyah Ulama Tarjih Education Statute further clarifies that it is an ulama educational institution equivalent to a bachelor's degree, organized by the Tarjih and Tajdid Council of Muhammadiyah's Central Leadership.²⁴ Its goal is to produce ulama cadres with a Muhammadiyah personality, academic and professional capabilities, and the ability to spread Islam for the welfare of the *ummah*.

Curriculum Management at Muhammadiyah KUT of North Sumatra

In the context of the regeneration of scholars within an educational institution, both formal and non-formal, the curriculum plays a crucial role. The curriculum serves as the distinguishing feature of the scholarly framework that will be produced through the process of scholar regeneration. Specifically, Muhammadiyah KUT of North Sumatra has developed a

²³ Palahuddin, "Mencari Solusi Defisit Ulama: Potret Kaderisasi Ulama Muhammadiyah," *Jurnal Edukasi: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama Dan Keagamaan* 20, no. 2 (2022): 183–200, <https://jurnaledukasi.kemenag.go.id/edukasi/article/view/1303>.

²⁴ Hamdan Hambali, *Mentjetak Kijahi Kemadjocan: Setengah Abad Perjalanan Pendidikan Ulama Tarjih Muhammadiyah* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021).

specialized curriculum that is deemed capable of enhancing the scholarly depth for the prospective scholars to be produced. A comprehensive description of the Muhammadiyah KUT curriculum has been presented in the findings section of the research, even detailing the instructors for each course. This section will focus on the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum.

In the author's view, the strength of the Muhammadiyah KUT curriculum lies in the field of Fiqh. Therefore, graduates of KUT are expected to become experts in Fiqh. In terms of quantity, as seen in the curriculum documents, out of the 28 courses, 11 are focused on Fiqh. These courses include: *Fiqh Tarjīh* Muhammadiyah, *Uṣūl Fiqh*, History of Legislation (*Tārīkh Tasyrī'*), *Tafsīr Ahkām*, *Ḥadīth Ahkām*, *Qawā'id Fiqhiyah*, Criminal and Civil Law, Comparative Religion and Schools of Thought, *Fiqh* Issues (*Masā'il al-Fiqhiyah*), Methodology of *Tarjīh* (*Manhaj Tarjīh*), and Theory and Practice of *Tarjīh*.

Based on the analysis of the curriculum documents regarding the offered courses, Muhammadiyah KUT of North Sumatra appears to be more focused on *Fiqh* (*Tarjīh*) and Quranic Studies. This can be seen from the course offerings, which predominantly focus on these two fields. Out of the total 28 courses, 9 courses are related to *Fiqh*, such as *Fiqh Tarjīh* Muhammadiyah, *Uṣūl Fiqh*, *Tafsīr Ahkām*, *Ḥadīth Ahkām*, *Qawā'id al-Fiqhiyah*, Comparative Religion and Schools of Thought, *Fiqh* Issues (*Masā'il al-Fiqhiyah*), Methodology of *Tarjīh* (*Manhaj Tarjīh*), and Theory and Practice of *Tarjīh*. In contrast, for the field of Astronomy (*Ilmu Falak*), there are two courses: *Ilmu Falak I* and *Ilmu Falak II*.

Within the Muhammadiyah tradition, the gathering place for scholars is referred to as *Majelis Tarjīh* (Tarjīh Council). This group is responsible for issuing fatwas within Muhammadiyah. Therefore, understanding fiqh and related sciences is highly significant. As stated by the Chairman of the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership of North Sumatra in the interview excerpt below:

“... scholarship is marked by a person who understands or participates in formulating the decisions of *Tarjīh*. In Muhammadiyah, there is the *Majelis Tarjīh*, but also a body called *Lajnah Tarjīh* or its institution”²⁵

²⁵ Hasyimsyah Nasution (Chairman Executive of the Muhammadiyah North Sumatra), interview by Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu, May 3, 2023.

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This view is supported by the statement of the Secretary of the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership of North Sumatra, who explained that those who sit on the *Majelis Tarjih* are considered Muhammadiyah scholars. Consequently, a strong understanding of *fiqh* becomes essential. As mentioned in the interview excerpt below:

“...One of the principles in Muhammadiyah’s Methodology of *Tarjih* is that it is important for individuals to have scholarly capability and a religious foundation (mastery of the Quran and *Hadith*). However, no specific decision has been made. Typically, those appointed to the *Majelis Tarjih* are those who are considered competent in religious knowledge. At a minimum, they are recognized as capable of serving as an *ustādh*”.²⁶

Below is a document of the author’s findings on the Muhammadiyah KUT curriculum for 2011, which can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. Details of KUT Courses for Semester I

| Day | Time | Course | Credits | Lecturer |
|----------------------|---------------|--|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Monday | 14.00 – 15.30 | Arabic Language | 2 | Prof. Dr. Asmuni, M.A. |
| Monday | 16.00 – 17.30 | Science of the Qur'an | 2 | Prof. Dr. A. Ya'kub Matondang, M.A. |
| Tuesday | 13.30 – 15.00 | Science of the Hadith | 2 | Prof. Dr. Nawir Yuslem, M.A. |
| Tuesday | 15.10 – 16.40 | <i>Fikih Tarjih</i> Muhammadiyah | 2 | Gunawan, S.Pd.I. |
| Tuesday | 17.00 – 18.00 | <i>Qirā'at al-Qur'ān</i> | 2 | Junaidi, S.Pd.I., M.Si. |
| Wednesday | 13.30 – 15.00 | Thoughts in the Development of Islam | 2 | Dr. Faisar Ananda, M.A. |
| Wednesday | 15.10 – 16.40 | History of the Development of Islamic Civilization | 2 | Prof. Dr. Hasyimsyah Nasution, M.A. |
| Wednesday | 17.00 – 18.00 | Memorizing the Qur'an | 2 | Drs. Dalail Ahmad, M.A. |
| Total Credits | | | 16 | |

²⁶ Irwan Syahputra (General Secretary Executive of the Muhammadiyah of North Sumatra), interview by Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu, May 4, 2023.

Table 2. Details of KUT Courses for Semester II

| Day | Time | Course | Credits | Lecturer |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Monday | 14.00 – 15.30 | <i>Insyā'</i> and <i>Muḥādathah</i> | 2 | Ahmad Sanusi Lukman, Lc, M.A. |
| Monday | 16.00 – 17.30 | <i>Uṣūl Fiqh</i> | 2 | Drs. Dalail Ahmad, M.A. |
| Tuesday | 13.30 – 15.00 | <i>Tārīkh Tasyrī'</i> | 2 | Prof. Dr. Asmuni, M.A. |
| Tuesday | 15.10 – 16.40 | <i>Tafsīr Aḥkām</i> | 2 | Prof. Dr. A. Ya'kub Matondang, M.A. |
| Tuesday | 17.00 – 18.00 | <i>Qirā'at al-Qur'ān</i> | 2 | Junaidi, S.Pd.L., M.Si. |
| Wednesday | 13.30 – 15.00 | <i>Ḥadīth Aḥkām</i> | 2 | Prof. Dr. Nawir Yuslem, M.A. |
| Wednesday | 15.10 – 16.40 | <i>Takhrīj Ḥadīth</i> | 2 | Dr. Sulidar, M.A. |
| Wednesday | 17.00 – 18.00 | Memorizing the Qur'an | 2 | Drs. Dalail Ahmad, M.A. |
| Total Credits | | | 16 | |

Table 3. Details of KUT Courses for Semester III

| Day | Time | Course | Credits | Lecturer |
|----------------------|---------------|--|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Monday | 14.00 – 15.30 | <i>Balāghah</i> and <i>Ma'ānī</i> | 2 | Ahmad Sanusi Lukman, Lc, M.A. |
| Monday | 16.00 – 17.30 | <i>Qawā'id Fiqhiyah</i> | 2 | Drs. Dalail Ahmad, M.A. |
| Tuesday | 14.00 – 15.30 | Criminal and Civil Law | 2 | Suhrawardi K. Lubis, SH, Sp.N, M.H. |
| Tuesday | 16.00 – 17.30 | <i>Ilmu Falak I</i> | 2 | Prof. Dr. Asmuni, M.A. |
| Wednesday | 14.00 – 15.30 | Hadith Studies in the Archipelago and the West | 2 | Dr. Faisar Ananda, M.A. |
| Wednesday | 14.00 – 15.30 | Comparison of Religion and School of <i>Fiqh</i> | 2 | Dr. Ali Imran Sinaga, M.A. |
| Total Credits | | | 12 | |

Table 4. Details of KUT Courses for Semester IV

| Day | Time | Course | Credits | Lecturer |
|----------------------|---------------|---|-----------|------------------------------|
| Monday | 14.00 – 15.30 | Logic Science | 2 | Sobrun, S.Ag. |
| Monday | 16.00 – 17.30 | <i>Ilmu Falak II</i> | 2 | Prof. Dr. Asmuni, M.A. |
| Selasa | 14.00 – 15.30 | <i>Masā'il al-Fiqhiyah</i> | 2 | Drs. Dalail Ahmad, M.A. |
| Selasa | 16.00 – 17.30 | <i>Manhaj Tarfīḥ</i> | 2 | Drs. Askolan Lubis, M.A. |
| Wednesday | 14.00 – 15.30 | Theory and Practice of <i>Tarfīḥ</i> | 2 | Irwan Syahputra, M.A. |
| Wednesday | 14.00 – 15.30 | <i>Qawā'id al-Taḥdīth</i> and <i>Manābij al-Muḥaddithīn</i> | 2 | Prof. Dr. Nawir Yuslem, M.A. |
| Total Credits | | | 12 | |

Based on the distribution of courses in the Muhammadiyah Islamic Higher Education program, as outlined above, it is evident that the intellectual tendency expected of students after participating in KUT is proficiency in the fields of *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and Qur'anic studies. Out of 28 courses or 56 credit hours, the *Fiqh* component comprises 11 courses or 22 credit hours, which accounts for 39.28%.

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Meanwhile, the portion allocated to Qur'anic studies consists of 6 courses or 12 credit hours, making up 21.42%. However, after the KUT program was discontinued and replaced by a collaboration with Ma'had Abu Ubaidah, this academic focus shifted from fiqh and Qur'anic studies to Arabic language studies.

Fiqh is a crucial discipline in Islam and can be regarded as an essential competence for any scholar. In the ulama (Islamic scholars) tradition, especially in the Archipelago context, ulama have traditionally been seen as experts in fiqh. At the same time, Fiqh is a discipline that has evolved significantly, in line with the rapid pace of change in modern times. In this regard, the development of Muhammadiyah's *Fiqh Tarjih* (jurisprudence) has been very encouraging, with a considerable amount of scholarly work produced in the field of Fiqh. At least, Nuruddin Al Akbar notes that the *Tarjih* Assembly has produced works on: Fiqh of Water, Fiqh of Disaster Management, Fiqh of Agrarian Law, Fiqh of Urban Spatial Planning, Fiqh of Air Law, Fiqh of Natural Resources, and other ongoing discussions, such as Fiqh of Disability.²⁷

The specific fiqh of Muhammadiyah mentioned here is not the same as the commonly understood fiqh in the Muslim community. Rather, it is a fiqh that elaborates on the four Sunni schools of thought. Muhammadiyah does not adhere to a single school but instead seeks the most authoritative opinion among the four schools. This is the core task of the Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council. In this context, Hamka (Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah) once stated that the decline of the Muslim community is due to blind adherence (*taqlid*) in the jurisprudence of sharia and innovation (*bid'ah*) in matters of theology (*tauhid*).²⁸ The Tarjih Council functions as an institution that formulates *fiqh* rulings and *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning). The products of this council are fiqh interpretations that are purer and more scriptural in nature.²⁹ For example, in matters of worship, Muhammadiyah no longer

²⁷ Nurdin Al Akbar, "Memperkuat Jihad Ekologis Muhammadiyah," dalam Ahmad Faizn Karim, *Membaca Muhammadiyah: Esai-Esai Kritis Tentang Persyarikatan, Amal Usaha, Dan Gerakan Dakwahnya* (Gresik: Caremedia Communication, 2021).

²⁸ Abdur Munir Mulkan, *Marhanis Muhammadiyah* (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2010).

²⁹ Hasnan Bactiar, "Pertaruhan Modernitas Muhammadiyah," dalam Ahmad Faizn Karim, *Membaca Muhammadiyah: Esai-Esai Kritis Tentang Persyarikatan, Amal Usaha, Dan Gerakan Dakwahnya* (Gresik: Caremedia Communication, 2021).

strictly follows the Shāfi'ī school but integrates the four Sunni schools, provided there is no contradiction with the Qur'an and Hadith.

It is anticipated that aspiring ulama from Muhammadiyah will not only comprehend but also master Fiqh *Tarjīh* because of the specific methodology used in this field. Consequently, the fiqh component occupies a prominent position in the curriculum of Muhammadiyah KUT of North Sumatra.

The Muhammadiyah KUT curriculum includes supplementary knowledge, such as the Science of Astronomy (*Ilmu Falak*), in addition to *fiqh*. This course is offered twice, in the third semester (*Ilmu Falak I*) and the fourth semester (*Ilmu Falak II*). The significance of *Ilmu Falak* for Muhammadiyah is its application in the determination of the commencement of the Islamic lunar months, prayer times, the direction of the *Qiblah*, and eclipses, all of which are determined through the *hisāb* (astronomical calculation) method. This approach is in stark contrast to that of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Indonesian government, which rely on *ru'yat al-hilāl* (visual observation of the moon). Consequently, *Ilmu Falak* is the scientific discipline that most strongly endorses the *hisāb* method. The *hisāb* method is the preferred method of Muhammadiyah, as it is based on the aspiration to establish a universally applicable Islamic calendar, comparable to the Gregorian calendar that is currently in use worldwide.³⁰ In addition, it is contended that the *ru'yah* method is equivalent to forecasting a date, which is only possible one day in advance, whereas the *hisāb* method enables the establishment of a global Islamic calendar.

Muhammadiyah's dedication to the advancement of *Ilmu Falak* is much more than a mere course in the curriculum at Muhammadiyah KUT or the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU). Additionally, a Department of *Ilmu Falak* has been established by UMSU. UMSU had already established a comprehensive set of tools known as the "Observatorium Ilmu Falak" (OIF) prior to the launch of this program. Indeed, UMSU established the Muhammadiyah KUT with the aim of producing personnel for the OIF deployment.

³⁰ Afrian Riza Mustaqim, *Hisab & Rukyat* (Banda Aceh: Syiah Kuala University Press, 2022).

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This shift in focus has not been without issues, even though Ma'had Abu Ubaidah is an educational institution that is highly focused on Arabic language studies. According to Zailani, students who are currently enrolled in the integrated classes of Ma'had Abu Ubaidah and the Faculty of Islamic Studies at UMSU are only able to master basic conversational Arabic (*ḥiwār*). However, they lack proficiency in understanding classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), which is critical for future ulama to possess.

Learning Methods of KUT Muhammadiyah North Sumatra

It appears that Muhammadiyah KUT, like other Muhammadiyah educational institutions, is implementing a modern learning system, which encompasses teaching methods. The learning method at Muhammadiyah KUT is characterized by a classical system, like that of general university lectures, as evidenced by the author's interviews with numerous informants. The demonstration method is employed for practical courses, such as Astronomy (*Ilmu Falak*), at Muhammadiyah, as the university has a fully equipped laboratory, such as the Center for the Observatory of Astronomy (OIF) at the University of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra (UMSU).

According to the statement from the Head of Muhammadiyah KUT, the teaching methods applied are like general university lectures and have introduced classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), but only at the introductory level, not as primary reference sources. This was conveyed in the following interview:

“At that time, we introduced them to books such as *Subul al-Salām*, which is a classical Islamic text, and *al-Ashbah wa al-Nazā'ir*, which is also a classical book. We have started moving in that direction. However, at the initial stage, it was not fully implemented”.³¹

The author directly confirmed this with alumni of Muhammadiyah KUT and gathered information that the learning method employed is classical, with lectures and discussions. However, the learning process

³¹ Dalail Ahmad (Chairman of the Muhammadiyah KUT Organizer), interview by Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu, July 25, 2023.

is more focused on practical activities, especially in Astronomy courses. This is reflected in the following interview excerpt:

“Usually, it is done with lectures and classical discussions, but the focus is more on the practice of Astronomy. In Astronomy, practical sessions are always used because of the calculations and other aspects”.³²

The same was confirmed by other KUT alumni, stating that the teaching method implemented is similar to general university lectures but combined with practical training in the field of Astronomy. This is evident in the following interview excerpt:

“The learning method is normal, but it is more in-depth. In KUT, the most emphasized subject is how to calculate in Astronomy, as it is the most complex. So, Astronomy is mandatory in Muhammadiyah because we use the *hisāb* method, which involves calculations, and this is studied every semester”.³³

Based on the interview information above, it can be understood that the learning method at Muhammadiyah KUT of North Sumatra is conducted in a classical manner (lectures and discussions) with practical training, especially in Astronomy and the practice of *tarjih*. Regarding the classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), Muhammadiyah KUT does not use them as a primary reference in the learning process but only for introductory purposes.

Since its inception, Muhammadiyah educational institutions have adopted a system of education implemented by the Dutch. This is why general schools are more popular among Muhammadiyah members compared to *madrassa* or *pesantren*. According to Karel Steenbrink’s notes, Muhammadiyah continued the model of schools combined with the Dutch government’s educational system (*gubernemen*). Furthermore, Steenbrink explained that when Muhammadiyah expanded to various regions, their efforts were focused on establishing new schools, and quantitatively, Muhammadiyah’s mass base was in urban communities.

³² Marataon Ritonga (an alumnus of KUT Muhammadiyah and a lecturer at UMSU), interview by Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu, March 10, 2023.

³³ Adi Syahputra (alumnus of KUT Muhammadiyah), interview by Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu, March 25, 2023.

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Therefore, it is evident today that Muhammadiyah schools continue to thrive in urban areas.

In relation to the Muhammadiyah KUT method, which combines classical learning with practical training, it is seen as very ideal, especially in producing scholars (*al-'ulamā'*). In the classroom, students will engage in discussions, think critically, and solve problems. Meanwhile, field practice requires students to observe real-life situations and learn from direct experience. These two elements combine theory and practice. This is because often, teaching methods focus only on theoretical knowledge, but once theory is mastered, the reality does not always align with the theory.

The lecture method is indeed inseparable from the learning process, no matter how advanced the methods developed may be, the lecture method will always remain relevant. Borrowing from Junaidi Arsyad's terminology, the lecture method or *muhādarah*, is the delivery of teaching materials to students through verbal communication. This method has been in use for a long time, and in the classical Islamic education tradition, it was used by Prophet Muhammad when delivering revelations to the community.³⁴ To this day, the lecture method is still employed, especially in the process of training future scholars. The art of lecturing holds significant importance for educators, and this skill must be passed down to aspiring scholars.

The lecture, discussion, and demonstration methods used by Muhammadiyah KUT certainly have the advantage of promoting independent learning and the freedom to express ideas or opinions. This is because students are often trained through discussions under the guidance of lecturers. However, at the same time, these methods also have limitations. The first limitation is that the number of effective meetings between lecturers and students is very limited, with only 16 sessions in total. This includes the Mid-Semester Examination and End-of-Semester Examination. Thus, students effectively only receive guidance from lecturers for 14 sessions. It is evident that this limited number of meetings makes it difficult for students to fully understand theories or knowledge, particularly those related to in-depth scholarships. The second limitation

³⁴ Junaidi Arsyad, *Metode Pendidikan Rasulullah SAW: Inspirasi Bagi Guru Sejati* (Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2017).

is the lack of specialized knowledge that students gain in becoming scholars, as the learning time is restricted to only 2 credits and 16 meetings. Meanwhile, becoming a scholar requires expertise in a specific field of Islamic studies.

From the perspective of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, educational institutions like Muhammadiyah KUT of North Sumatra can be seen as a mechanism for maintaining and strengthening the dominance of a particular ideology within society. Gramsci argued that power is not only achieved through physical domination but, more importantly, through ideological domination that permeates various social institutions, including education. Muhammadiyah KUT, with a curriculum focused on the development of fiqh and Quranic studies, as well as a teaching method that prioritizes classical and practical teaching, reflects Muhammadiyah's efforts to create scholars who not only understand religious teachings but also support and spread Muhammadiyah's ideology, which is more inclusive of the four Sunni schools of thought rather than being limited to a single school. This ideological dominance is significant because, through education, Muhammadiyah's ideology is socialized to students, who will become agents of change and religious leaders in the future.

However, on the other hand, the changes that occurred following the cessation of Muhammadiyah KUT and the collaboration with Ma'had Abu Ubaidah, which focused more on Arabic language development, can be understood within the context of a shift in hegemony. Gramsci emphasized that hegemony is not static and can shift in response to political, social, and economic dynamics. This shift can be seen as an effort to adapt to the changing demands of the times and the need for more globalized learning. This change can be viewed as part of a strategy to expand Muhammadiyah's influence in a broader context, where mastery of the Arabic language becomes key to understanding the classical texts that form the foundation of Muhammadiyah's ideology. This shows that in the world of education, ideological hegemony does not only occur through rigid teaching but also through adaptation to the evolving social demands, while maintaining the key elements that are part of Muhammadiyah's identity.

Conclusion

The response of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra to the need for 'ulama' regeneration has been the establishment of the Muhammadiyah *Kursus Ulama Tarjih* (KUT) of North Sumatra, which has been operational since 2002. The curriculum management emphasized mastery of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and Qur'anic studies, while the teaching methods employed modern approaches, including classical classroom systems, seminar discussions, and practical sessions. This indicates that Muhammadiyah aims to produce ulama who are more modern in orientation compared to the 'ulama regeneration traditions of other organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Al Washliyah, and the *Pendidikan Kader Ulama* (PKU) programs run by the Indonesian Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or MUI). These other organizations tend to uphold classical traditions, heavily relying on the *kitab kuning* (traditional Islamic texts) as mandatory references in the learning process.

From the perspective of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, educational programs like the Muhammadiyah KUT of North Sumatra serve as tools to reinforce Muhammadiyah's ideological dominance through the teaching of fiqh and Qur'anic studies in an inclusive manner across the four schools of Islamic thought. The KUT not only cultivates ulama who comprehend religious teachings but also shapes them as agents of change who propagate Muhammadiyah's ideology. However, the shift following the collaboration with Ma'had Abu Ubaidah, which places a greater focus on the Arabic language, reflects an adjustment in Muhammadiyah's ideological hegemony to align with contemporary developments and global social needs. This shift demonstrates that hegemony is not static but evolves with social, political, and economic dynamics while maintaining the core elements of Muhammadiyah's identity.

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