

The Educational Thought of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Sheikh Ibrahim Musa: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study analyzes the distinctions in philosophical orientation within the Islamic educational thinking of two Minangkabau reformist personalities, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Sheikh Ibrahim Musa, who, despite being educated by the same instructor, formulated markedly divergent educational philosophies. This study employs a comparative historical and qualitative methodology to examine the fundamental sources of the two personalities across six dimensions: epistemology, educational objectives, pedagogical approaches, attitudes towards tradition, institutional strategies, and reform techniques. The results show that Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah adopted a pragmatic approach that values information for its social usefulness. He focused on community change, experiential-inductive approaches, and confrontational reform. On the other hand, Sheikh Ibrahim Musa had an idealistic view that information is valid only if it fits with ancient scholarly traditions. He stressed deep intellectual growth, text-based, deductive, systematic techniques, and gradual educational change. This difference shows two distinct approaches to addressing the relationship between religious authenticity and modern relevance in the context of colonialism and early Indonesian nationalism. This research helps dismantle the singular narrative of Islamic modernism and offers a reproducible comparative analytical framework for examining Islamic educational philosophy in other contexts.

Keywords: Islamic Reform; Islamic Education; Pragmatism; Idealism.

Introduction

In the early 1900s, a wave of Islamic reform groups swept over the Muslim world, significantly changing how people learned and practiced their religion in response to colonial modernism and a lack of progress in theology.¹ From the Egyptian *Salafiyya* movement under Muhammad Abduh to the Indian Aligarh reformism led by Sayyid Ahmad Khan,² Muslim intellectuals contended with the urgent issue of reconciling Islamic heritage with modern scientific logic and contemporary educational frameworks.³

The transformation of education in Minangkabau, Sumatra, was marked by the establishment of the Thawalib educational institution in 1918, a pioneering network of modernist Islamic schools that revolutionized pedagogical practices by synthesizing classical Islamic sciences with modern organizational structures, classroom-based instruction, and a systematic, tiered curriculum.⁴ Institutional innovation according to Abbas & Afifi⁵ and Bruinessen,⁶ represents far more than mere administrative modernization; it embodies a fundamental reconceptualization of how Islamic knowledge should be transmitted, validated, and applied within the context of colonial modernity and emerging Indonesian nationalism.

Two great thinkers were responsible for this change: Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (1879–1945), the charismatic founder of Thawalib Padang Panjang, was the main reason for Muhammadiyah's growth in Sumatera. Sheikh Ibrahim Musa (1887–1973) was a systematic scholar who transformed Surau Parabek into Thawalib Parabek and authored numerous Islamic educational texts.⁷ According to the findings of Syafrina⁸ and Dalil,⁹

¹ K St Fatimah and Moh Yahya Obaid, "Philosophy of Islamic Education in the Trajectory of Time: Efforts to Formulate Reflective and Contextual Islamic Education," *Dirasah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2025): 240–47.

² David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 2005.

³ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁴ Karel Adriaan Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, School: Recent Developments in Indonesian Islamic Education* (Meppel [Netherlands]: Krips Repro, 1974).

⁵ Afifi Fauzi Abbas and Abdullah A Afifi, "Sumatera Thawalib and the Idea of Islamic Reform in Minangkabau (1918–1930)," *AL-IMAM: Journal on Islamic Studies, Civilization and Learning Societies* 3 (2022): 35–45.

⁶ Martin van Bruinessen, *Traditionalist and Islamist Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia*, 2008, 217–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789048501380.009>.

⁷ Surya Afdal and Bambang Bambang, "The Actualization of Abdul Karim Amrullah's Islamic Educational Thought at the Thawalib Padang Panjang School," *Jurnal Media Ilmu* 2, no. 1 (2023): 140–48.

⁸ Yelda Syafrina, "Fase Dalam Gerakan Pembaharuan Islam Di Minangkabau: Dari Reformis Ke Modernis" 9, no. 2 (2021).

⁹ Fitri Yenni M Dalil, Inong Satriadi, and Hafizzullah Hafizzullah, "Studi Komparatif Kitab Hadis Karya Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul) Dan Syekh Muhammad Yunus (Tuanku Sasak)," *Istinarah: Riset Keagamaan, Sosial Dan Budaya* 4, no. 2 (2022): 143–52.

these two figures shared the same intellectual lineage, having studied under Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi (1855–1916) during their formative years in Mecca. Nevertheless, upon returning to Minangkabau, both developed distinct educational perspectives and institutional practices. These differences not only reflect biographical distinctiveness but also raise an important theoretical question: how can the same religious guidance give rise to different educational models within the same reform movement?

Existing studies on Minangkabau reformists have yielded valuable insights but remain fragmented across disciplinary boundaries and analytical approaches. The works of Hamka,¹⁰ Muslim,¹¹ and Wahyudi & Fatoni,¹² on Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah has illuminated his pivotal role in purifying Islamic practices from what reformists consider *bid'ah* and syncretic elements, his pragmatic organizational involvement through the Muhammadiyah network of schools, hospitals, and orphanages, as well as his influential journalistic work as editor of *Al-Munir* magazine, which served as a critical platform for disseminating reformist ideas throughout the Malay-Indonesian archipelago.¹³

Research on Sheikh Ibrahim Musa remains insufficiently examined in the international literature. They emphasize his institutional accomplishments in transforming conventional surau education into an organized, contemporary Islamic school system, along with his extensive writing of instructional Islamic literature that is widely disseminated within the pesantren network. There are at least a few studies on this subject, such as those by Fazis and Mujib.¹⁴ Even so, there are still three important gaps in this area of research that make it hard for us to appreciate the many ideas that exist within the Islamic reform movement.

¹⁰ Hamka, *Ayahku : Riwayat Hidup Dr. H. Abdul Karim Amrullah Dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama Di Sumatera* (Jakarta: : Gema insani, 2019).

¹¹ Muslim Muslim, “Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah Dan Sejarah Muhammadiyah Di Maninjau Sumatera Barat,” *Jurnal Muhammadiyah Studies* 6, no. 1 (2021): 1–22.

¹² Sahidin Wahyudi and Ahmad Fatoni, “The Relevance of Islamic Education Concept Abdul Karim Amrullah’s Perspective in the Contemporary Era,” *Journal Corner of Education, Linguistics, and Literature* 4, no. 001 SE-Articles (December 5, 2024): 56–66, <https://doi.org/10.54012/jcell.v4i001.362>.

¹³ Zulmuqim Zulmuqim, “Transformation of the Minangkabau Islamic Education: The Study of Educational Thought of Abdul Karim Amrullah, Abdullah Ahmad And Rahmah El-Yunusiyah,” *Al-Ta Lim Journal* 22, no. 2 (2015): 155–64.

¹⁴ Ali Mujib, Ngasbun Egar, and Endang Wuryandini, “Pengaruh Program Pesantren, Sumber Daya Manusia, Dan Lingkungan Pesantren Terhadap Kemandirian Santri Pondok Pesantren,” *Jurnal Inovasi Pembelajaran Di Sekolah* 5, no. 2 SE- (December 17, 2024): 667–79, <https://doi.org/10.51874/jjps.v5i2.279>.

To begin with, the research of Daya, Alwasilah,¹⁵ and Furqon¹⁶ shows that Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Sheikh Ibrahim Musa are important characters in the founding of the Thawalib network. However, there are still big gaps in the literature. There is a notable lack of comparative studies that rigorously analyze disparities in educational philosophies using a uniform analytical framework. Most studies depict both individuals as reformers within a single intellectual tradition, failing to adequately examine the distinct orientations that shaped their ideas and educational methodologies.

Second, while numerous studies have recorded the thinking of individuals, these assessments have typically failed to contextualize their ideas within the expansive framework of Islamic philosophy of education, such as Azhari's.¹⁷ Fitri Yenni M. Dalil,¹⁸ It is still unclear whether the differences between them are merely strategic responses to local circumstances or reflect bigger differences in how they think about knowledge, the purpose of education, and the role of Islamic institutions. *Third*, the current literature has inadequately elucidated why two students of the same teacher, who were raised in relatively analogous cultural contexts and encountered similar socio-religious challenges, ultimately developed markedly distinct institutional frameworks, pedagogical approaches, and reform strategies.

Three primary inquiries direct this research. What ontological, epistemological, and axiological premises shape each thinker's viewpoint on Islamic education? *Second*, how do these philosophical notions manifest in the classroom, particularly regarding the curriculum, pedagogical approaches, school structure, and the dynamics between educators and students? *Third*, what intellectual and environmental factors explain the differences in their philosophical development, given that both were educated by Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi and are committed to Islamic reform? This study employs a comparative philosophical analytical framework that views pragmatism and idealism as heuristic ideal types rather than rigid classifications, enabling the systematic identification of their indicators in sources.

¹⁵ Burhanuddin Daya, *Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam* (Tiara Wacana Yogya, 1990).

¹⁶ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Classical and Contemporary Approaches to Education: An Islamic Perspective," *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 2, no. 3 (2011): 447.

¹⁷ Nadya Rahma Azhari, "Sheikh Ibrahim Musa Parabek's Thoughts on Tashyid and Tawassul in Hidāyah Al-Şibyān," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 18, no. 02 (2023): 189–215.

¹⁸ Dalil, Satriadi, and Hafizzullah, "Studi Komparatif Kitab Hadis Karya Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul) Dan Syekh Muhammad Yunus (Tuanku Sasak)."

This research offers three substantial contributions that extend beyond the context of Minangkabau reformism. This study *first* shows, in theory, that Islamic reform is pluralistic, even among people who have the same teachers, belong to the same institutions, and have the same reform goals. This discovery simultaneously corrects the perception that the concept of Islamic modernity is a uniform category. *Second*, this research represents the inaugural systematic comparative examination of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Sheikh Ibrahim Musa, grounded in primary materials, including original writings, institutional documents, and colonial archives. This methodology facilitates a more discerning analysis than studies that depend exclusively on secondary sources or hagiographic biographies. *Third*, this research is pertinent to contemporary discussions of Islamic education in Indonesia, especially regarding the tensions between religious authenticity and modern pedagogy, institutional autonomy and standardization, and particularistic identity and a universal educational orientation.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative-historical qualitative methodology.¹⁹ To systematically analyze the educational philosophies of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Syekh Ibrahim Musa concerning Islamic reform in Minangkabau during the early 20th century. The historical approach is used to reconstruct the concepts of these two individuals through analysis of primary and secondary sources. The comparative method concurrently enables the recognition of similarities, differences, and philosophical paradigms that shape the educational perspectives of both Gottschalk and Herlin. This research employs a critical interpretivist approach that views historical data as constructs influenced by social, intellectual, and political contexts.²⁰

The primary data comprises the original works of these two individuals. The works of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah encompass *Al-Kawakibud Durriyyah* (1940), *Tasauwoef Islam* (1932), *Pedomam Guru*, articles in *Al-Munir* (1911–1916), and *Sendi Aman Tiang Selamat*. Simultaneously, the works of Syekh Ibrahim Musa encompass *Hidayatus Shibyan*, *Ijabatul Suul*, and *Husulul Ma'mul* (1934). The sources were acquired from multiple organizations, including the Thawalib Padang Panjang Library, Thawalib

¹⁹ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage publications, 2016).

²⁰ Robin George Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

Parabek, PDIKM, the National Library, and the archives of Leiden University. Secondary material encompasses biographical studies, analyses of Minangkabau Islamic reform, and literature on educational philosophy, all of which provide context and enhance interpretation. Data collection was enhanced through semi-structured interviews to gather additional contextual information.

Validity was guaranteed by employing source criticism to analyze all data. External critique was employed to assess the documents' legitimacy, whereas internal criticism was used to analyze the content and potential biases of the author, Kuntowijoyo. Colonial materials were meticulously examined to discern Orientalist prejudices that could affect the portrayal of Islamic reformists.

This study employs a comparative analytical framework, scrutinizing the concepts of the two individuals across six primary dimensions: (1) epistemology, (2) educational objectives, (3) pedagogical methodologies, (4) perspectives on tradition, (5) institutional strategies, and (6) reform approaches. Each dimension is examined with pragmatic and idealistic metrics derived from Gutek's research on educational philosophy.²¹ Pragmatism is defined by its focus on practical utility and social context, while idealism prioritizes universal truth and systematic knowledge frameworks, as noted by Dewey.²² These categories serve as analytical instruments rather than inflexible classifications.

The data analysis was performed in four phases: (1) inductive coding to discern themes within the primary sources, (2) theoretical coding employing pragmatic and idealistic categories, (3) cross-case thematic analysis to uncover patterns of similarities and differences, and (4) contextual interpretation, considering biographical backgrounds and socio-political contexts. Validity was established via triangulation of sources and methodologies, whilst reliability was enhanced through peer discourse and meticulous documenting of the analytical process.

²¹ Gerald L Gutek, "Philosophical, Ideological, and Theoretical Perspectives on Education," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 62, no. 2 (2016): 220–22.

²² John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, vol. 8 (Macmillan New York, 1930).

Data Presentation

A Systematic Comparison of the Educational Thought of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Sheikh Ibrahim Musa

A comparative investigation of the principal works of these two people disclosed disparities in their philosophical orientations throughout the six principal dimensions of this study's analytical approach. The results are carefully presented, incorporating textual evidence from primary sources to substantiate each classification.

Epistemological Orientation

An examination of their epistemological frameworks uncovers significant disparities in their interpretations of the origins and justification of knowledge. In Pedomani Guru (1932), Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah asserted that Islamic education should enlighten the faithful regarding contemporary issues by utilizing the Qur'an and Sunnah as a framework for addressing societal challenges. In his numerous writings in Al-Munir (1911–1916), he consistently associated the comprehension of Islamic teachings with the prevailing social context, exemplified in his article on women's education, wherein he contended that Islamic law does not preclude women from pursuing knowledge advantageous for the nation's advancement (Al-Munir, Vol. 11, 1911).²³ This method demonstrates the validity of knowledge by its practical use in addressing social issues, consistent with pragmatic epistemology.

In contrast, Sheikh Ibrahim Musa, in Hidayatus Shibyan, articulates the objective of education as guiding youth towards a profound understanding of authentic Islamic jurisprudence, grounded in robust evidence from the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the views of mujtahid scholars. In *Husulul Ma'mul* (1934), he formulated a curriculum that begins with the study of Arabic as the essential gateway to classical Islamic knowledge, then advances to the foundational sciences (grammar, morphology, logic), and ultimately addresses Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh, usul al-fiqh, tafsir, hadith*). This hierarchical structure illustrates the validation of information by its logical consistency with an established knowledge system, embodying an idealist epistemology that prioritizes methodical mastery of the academic heritage.

²³ Azyumardi Azra, "The Transmission of Al-Manar's Reformism to the Malay-Indonesian World: The Cases of Al-Imam and Al-Munir," *Studia Islamika* 6, no. 3 (1999).

This epistemic divergence becomes increasingly evident in their perspectives on *ijtihad*. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah, in *Al-Kawakibud Durriyyah* (1940), asserts that the door to *ijtihad* remains open and encourages Muslims to avoid mindless adherence to any particular *madhhab*, advocating direct engagement with the Qur'an and the Hadith instead. Sheikh Ibrahim Musa, in *Ijabatus Suul*, adopts a cautious approach, underscoring the necessity of mastering the ideas of scholars from the four schools of thought before undertaking autonomous *ijtihad*, thereby demonstrating respect for the authority of academic tradition.

Educational Objectives

An understanding of education's primary objective highlights notable disparities in these two individuals' perspectives. In his numerous publications, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah consistently associates education with cultivating Muslims who exhibit virtuous character, acquire knowledge, and actively engage in social affairs. In the Teacher's Guide, he asserts that effective education cultivates graduates who not only memorize scriptures but also possess the ability to emerge as community leaders, construct schools, found hospitals, and enhance the economic development of the Muslim community. This viewpoint embodies an educational objective of a socially transformational character, wherein measurable contributions to the advancement of the Muslim community define educational achievement.

In *Hidayatus Shibyan*, Sheikh Ibrahim Musa articulates the objective of education as cultivating scholars endowed with profound knowledge, steadfast faith, and the capacity to advise the community through sound fatwas. The Thawalib Parabek curriculum he developed prioritizes a profound understanding of classical texts, as evidenced by the extended study time at each level, underscoring a focus on intellectual depth rather than quick, practical application. A student previously interviewed by a researcher recollected that Sheikh Ibrahim consistently advised them against hastily reading a book, emphasizing the need to comprehend each chapter thoroughly.²⁴

²⁴ S Sudarmoko, "Literary Infrastructure in West Sumatra, Indonesia," *Circulation* 13 (2001): 88.

Pedagogical Methods

Variations in pedagogical approaches are evident in classroom activities and the guidelines they develop. In his Teacher's Guide, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah promotes a methodology termed "living learning" (*ta'lim al-hayy*), wherein educators do not simply transmit information but connect it to real-life occurrences within society. He offers a specific illustration: when instructing on zakat, educators could escort pupils to see the impoverished, examine their circumstances, and deliberate on how zakat might mitigate poverty. This method prioritizes experiential and inductive learning, whereby abstract concepts are comprehended through tangible encounters.

Sheikh Ibrahim Musa, during his tenure as an instructor at Thawalib Parabek, created a contemporary halaqah framework with an organized timetable. Curriculum records in the Thawalib Parabek archives indicate that lessons commenced with qira'ah (students reading the text), succeeded by syarh (the teacher's elucidation of the text's literal and contextual meanings), and concluded with *munaqasyah* (student discussions on issues arising from the text). They concluded with *istinbath* (deducing legal conclusions). This method is deductive, constructing understanding through mastery of authoritative texts for specific applications, consistent with the pedagogical heritage of idealism, which prioritizes logical reasoning from general principles.

Views on Tradition

Perspectives on the intellectual legacy of classical Islam exhibit distinct disparities. In his critique of traditional behaviors he saw as bid'ah, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah exhibited a readiness to challenge even esteemed academics if they were perceived to contravene the Qur'an and authentic Hadith. In *Sendi Aman Tiang Selamat*, he stated: "We hold the salaf intellectuals in esteem for their erudition rather than their identities." When opinions conflict with more substantial evidence, we prioritize the evidence above the opinion. This perspective illustrates the use of tradition, wherein the classical legacy is esteemed solely for its applicability to modern requirements.

Sheikh Ibrahim Musa exhibited a more respectful disposition towards tradition. In *Husulul Ma'mul*, he stated: "The early scholars have facilitated our understanding through their rigorous examination of Islamic law." It is our responsibility to continue their scholarly legacy by conducting a comprehensive examination of their works. To demonstrate continuity with the Shafi'i scholarly tradition that predominates in

Minangkabau, the Thawalib Parabek curriculum he developed places classical texts such as *Fath al-Mu'in*, *Minhaj al-Thalibin*, and Tafsir al-Jalalain at the core of learning.

Institutional Strategy

The educational organizational models created exhibit varying institutional perspectives. Thawalib Padang Panjang, influenced by Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah, implemented a stratified class structure and a curriculum that encompassed religious studies alongside conventional subjects such as arithmetic, history, and geography from an early age. The 1923 curriculum paper indicates that early-grade pupils were exposed to arithmetic for commerce and to general knowledge of Islamic countries, alongside religious education. This framework embodies the amalgamation of religious education with readiness for engagement in contemporary society.

Thawalib Parabek, led by Sheikh Ibrahim Musa, emphasizes rigorous religious studies, with general studies incorporated only at the advanced level and in a limited manner. The curriculum specifies that the predominant portion of instructional time (about 80%) is dedicated to Sharia studies and Arabic. Conversely, general studies are regarded as a valuable enhancement after a robust theological foundation has been formed (Thawalib Parabek archives, 1930). This method involves cultivating profound competence in one topic before diversifying.

Reform Tactics

His method of addressing resistance to change demonstrated his reformist disposition. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah was recognized as a polemicist who readily confronted people he deemed to be engaging in bid'ah. In a public argument recorded in *Al-Munir*, he explicitly condemned the rituals of *talqin mayit*, *tahlilan*, and the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday, asserting that they lacked foundation in authentic Sunnah. This confrontational tactic embodies a strategy of mass mobilization by public persuasion and open debate, along with a coherent reformist approach aimed at swift transformation.

Sheikh Ibrahim Musa used a more measured and reflective methodology. His students assert that he did not explicitly prohibit acts deemed bid'ah; rather, he elucidated the appropriate justifications and let students reach their own conclusions (interview with KH. Fahmi, Sheikh Ibrahim's grandson, 2024). This method embodies a transformative

strategy via sustained instruction rather than conflict, aligned with an idealism that prioritizes persuasion through profound comprehension over emotional mobilization.

Synthesis of Comparative Findings

The following table summarizes the orientation patterns found in the analysis of the six dimensions:

<i>Dimension</i>	Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah	Sheikh Ibrahim Musa
<i>Epistemology</i>	Validation through practical utility; open ijthad	Validation through consistency with tradition; controlled ijthad
<i>Objectives</i>	Social transformation; communal activism	Intellectual cultivation; formation of religious scholars
<i>Method</i>	Experiential-inductive; contextual	Deductive-systematic; text-based
<i>Tradition</i>	Instrumental; selective-critical	Reverential; organic continuity
<i>Institutional</i>	Early integration of religion and general education	Religious specialization with in-depth study
<i>Tactical</i>	Confrontational-mobilizing	Gradual-educational

A uniform pattern across all categories reveals that Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah prioritizes responsiveness to current societal demands, methodological adaptability, and swift institutional change traits indicative of a pragmatic approach. Sheikh Ibrahim Musa demonstrates a propensity for methodical depth, continuity of scholarly tradition, and the construction of enduring intellectual foundations, traits aligned with an idealistic approach. It is crucial to underscore that both approaches operate within the same Islamic epistemological framework, in which the Qur'an and Sunnah constitute the paramount sources of authority.

Discussion

This study's findings indicate that the philosophical distinctions between Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Sheikh Ibrahim Musa should not be interpreted as a binary opposition of pragmatism versus idealism in the Western philosophical context, but rather as differing emphases within the continuum of Islamic reformist thought. Both individuals were equally dedicated to eliminating bid'ah from religious practices and improving the Islamic education system. However, they varied in their priorities, techniques, and visions for accomplishing these objectives.

Three primary considerations can elucidate this disparity in orientation. Initially, disparities in biographical experiences and intellectual engagement. Upon his return from Mecca, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah became deeply engaged in the Muhammadiyah movement, which emphasizes social philanthropy as a manifestation of Islam. His participation in founding schools, hospitals, and orphanages influenced his belief that Islamic education should directly enhance societal welfare.²⁵ In contrast, Sheikh Ibrahim Musa devoted an extended duration in Mecca to enhance his understanding of Sharia. He returned with the intention of conveying that academic tradition in its totality to the subsequent generation.²⁶

Secondly, an alternative institutional environment. Thawalib Padang Panjang is situated in the city core, facilitating access to contemporary concepts and direct competition with colonial institutions, thereby accelerating the integration of modern educational components. Conversely, Thawalib Parabek in Bukittinggi, despite being urban, maintained a stronger affiliation with surau heritage and had a more homogeneous population of santri, facilitating a more concentrated effort to enhance tradition.²⁷

Third, a responsive strategy to different challenges. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah faced criticism from colonialists and secular modernists who viewed Islamic education as backward, prompting him to prove that Islam is compatible with progress through concrete actions.²⁸ Sheikh Ibrahim Musa focused on the internal challenge of declining scholarly quality among the ulama, prompting him to prioritize strengthening intellectual foundations.²⁹

This analysis indicates that pragmatism and idealism within Indonesian Islamic educational thought do not align with Western philosophical categories; instead, they reflect distinct emphases in the tension between religious authenticity and contemporary relevance. Both individuals integrate *naql* (revelation) with *'aql* (reason), albeit with differing emphases: Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah prioritizes *'aql* as a tool for addressing

²⁵ Uswatun Hasanah, Vina Nur Afianah, and Mohamad Salik, “No Title” 05, no. 02 (2021): 13–32.

²⁶ Azhari, “Sheikh Ibrahim Musa Parabek’s Thoughts on Tashyid and Tawassul in Hidāyah Al-Şibyān.”

²⁷ Muhammad Fazis, “Cultural Values of Education at the Sumatra Thawalib Islamic Boarding School Parabek, Bukittinggi,” *Ta’dib* 26, no. 1 (2023): 1–18.

²⁸ Sahidin Wahyudi and Ahmad Fatoni, The Relevance of the Islamic Education Concept from Abdul Karim Amrullah’s Perspective in the Contemporary Era, *Journal Corner of Education, Linguistics, and Literature* 4, no. 001 SE-Articles (December 5, 2024): 56–66, <https://doi.org/10.54012/jcell.v4i001.362>.

²⁹ Azhari, Sheikh Ibrahim Musa Parabek’s Thoughts on Tashyid and Tawassul in Hidāyah Al-Şibyān.

social change, whereas Sheikh Ibrahim Musa underscores *naql* as a fundamental principle that must be thoroughly learned first.

Theoretical Contributions to the Study of Islamic Reform and Education

This study's conclusions hold substantial theoretical significance for comprehending the Islamic reform movement in Indonesia and elsewhere. This study challenges the singular narrative of Islamic modernism, which often treats reformists as a homogeneous group with a single objective. This study illustrates that even within a single institutional network (Sumatera Thawalib) and under the guidance of the same educator (Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi), notable diversity in philosophical perspectives persists.³⁰ This indicates that examinations of the Islamic reform movement must be more attuned to internal discrepancies and should not presume uniformity based on categorical designations such as *Kaum Muda* or modernists.

Second, this study contributes to the theory regarding the relationship between tradition and modernity in the context of Islamic education by demonstrating that the two are not opposing categories but rather elements that can be combined in different ways. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah modernized by radically reformulating the learning system while maintaining the Qur'an and Hadith as authorities, whereas Sheikh Ibrahim Musa modernized by structurally reorganizing the *surau* while maintaining continuity with classical scholarly traditions.³¹ Both strategies are modern in that they are responsive to changing times, yet, through different mechanisms, they challenge the tradition/modernity dichotomy often employed in Islamic studies.

Third, this study enriches our understanding of the transfer and transformation of ideas within transnational Islamic intellectual networks. Although Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Sheikh Ibrahim Musa were both exposed to reformist thought from Mecca through Sheikh Ahmad Khatib and Muhammad Rashid Ridha, they adapted these ideas in very different ways, shaped by the local Minangkabau context and their personal priorities.³² This implies that studies of the circulation of global Islamic ideas must

³⁰ Muhammad Zuhdi, "Challenging Moderate Muslims: Indonesia's Muslim Schools in the Midst of Religious Conservatism," *Religions* 9, no. 10 (2018): 310.

³¹ Pam Nilan and Gregorius Ragil Wibawanto, "Religion and Youth Activism for Viability in Indonesia," *Journal of Youth Studies* 28, no. 6 (2025): 850–66.

³² Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

consider not only transmission but also local transformations that produce significant variations.

Fourth, this study provides a methodological model for comparative studies of Islamic educational thought that can be replicated in other contexts. The multidimensional analytical framework, with its operationalization of pragmatic-idealistic indicators, can be applied to compare Islamic educational thinkers in other regions (Malaysia, Egypt, Pakistan) or different periods, enabling a more systematic comparative analysis.³³

Practical Implications

The results of this study have considerable practical significance for advancing modern Islamic education in Indonesia. This study indicates that there is no singular "correct" model of Islamic education for institutions such as pesantren, madrasah, and Islamic schools. Each viewpoint, one prioritizing social responsiveness and the other underscoring the profundity of tradition, possesses distinct strengths and drawbacks. Institutions may choose or integrate components from both models based on their vision, context, and resources.³⁴

Second, contemporary Islamic educators can learn from Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah the importance of linking religious education to contemporary social issues. In the digital and globalized era, Islamic education is insufficient if it merely teaches rituals and fiqh; it must also equip students to think critically, communicate effectively, and contribute to solving social problems such as poverty, corruption, and environmental degradation.³⁵ Experiential learning models that link content to social realities can enhance the relevance of Islamic education.

Third, Sheikh Ibrahim Musa illustrates the necessity of preserving intellectual depth in the face of often superficial pushes for modernization. In a milieu where numerous Islamic institutions are inclined to adopt contemporary educational paradigms lacking a robust theological underpinning, the experience of Thawalib Parabek illustrates that a

³³ Zuhdi, "Challenging Moderate Muslims: Indonesia's Muslim Schools in the Midst of Religious Conservatism."

³⁴ Aat Royhatudin et al., The Role Of Islamic Boarding Schools In Facing The Era Of The 4th Industrial Revolution At Al-Hidayah Islamic Boarding School In Ciomas, Serang, Ta'dibiya 4, no. 1 SE-Article (April 1, 2024): 100–114, <https://doi.org/10.61624/japi.v4i1.131>.

³⁵ S Sarwadi and N Raihan, Reinforcing Islamic Moral Values through Contemporary Pesantren Education, Edukasi Islami: J, no. November (2025): 1137–48, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v14i04.9041>.

profound command of classical texts, Arabic, and traditional Islamic scholarly methodologies is indispensable for cultivating proficient scholars.

Fourth, this study suggests that the national Islamic education strategy should embrace diverse Islamic education models rather than enforce strict conformity. Government laws, including the Minister of Religious Affairs' Regulation on the pesantren curriculum, ought to permit institutions to select their own focal areas in accordance with their vision, provided they meet minimum competency levels.³⁶

Limitations

This research possesses multiple limitations. Initially, not all of the two individuals' primary works are fully available; hence, certain nuances of their thought may remain unarticulated. Restricted access to personal archives and family collections hinders the investigation of biographical elements. The application of pragmatism and idealism as an analytical framework facilitates the interpretation of thought processes. However, it also risks oversimplifying the intricacies of the two figures' concepts.

This study prioritizes textual and institutional analysis and, as a result, has not thoroughly investigated how subsequent generations received, reinterpreted, and developed these ideas. The scope of this study is confined to two people in Minangkabau during the early 20th century; hence, generalizations to the wider context of Islamic reform should be approached with caution. Fifth, despite the use of data triangulation, time and resource constraints limited the scope of interviews and field data analysis. This study significantly contributes by offering a systematic comparative analysis of the educational philosophies of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Syekh Ibrahim Musa, thereby facilitating further research on intellectual diversity within the Islamic reform movement in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This study illustrates that the reform of Islamic education in early 20th-century Minangkabau was not a uniform movement, but rather one marked by considerable internal variety. A comparative investigation of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and Sheikh

³⁶ Nadhif Muhammad Mumtaz, Evi Muafiah, and Doli Witro, "Educational Policy Analysis: Examining Pesantren Policies and Their Implications on the Independence of Kyai and Pesantren in the Contemporary Era," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 2 (2024): 287–306.

Ibrahim Musa reveals that their shared intellectual ancestry did not yield uniformity, but rather resulted in divergent educational orientations. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah proposed a pragmatic methodology that highlighted the societal value of knowledge and incorporated experiential techniques, a hybrid religious-secular curriculum, and revolutionary reform initiatives. Conversely, Sheikh Ibrahim Musa cultivated an idealistic perspective rooted in the consistency of ancient Islamic research, prioritizing text-based education, specialization, and incremental transformation. These disparities illustrate two fundamentally divergent approaches to understanding the relationship between revelation (*naql*) and reason (*'aql*) within the framework of colonial modernity.

This work theoretically contests the singular story of Islamic modernism by emphasizing its internal diversity and reevaluating the distinction between tradition and modernity. It provides a comparative analytical framework for examining Islamic educational thinking across various contexts. The findings indicate that the conflict between social responsiveness and scholarly depth should not be addressed as a dichotomy, but rather be utilized as a positive force. The integration of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah's transformative approach with Sheikh Ibrahim Musa's intellectual rigor presents a potential framework for advancing Islamic education that is both theologically sound and attuned to modern issues.

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