

# The History of Islamic Civilization: A Critical Review of the Thoughts of Ahmad Syalabi and A. Malik Fadjar in the Context of Islamic Education

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## Abstract

*This paper critically examines the Islamic civilization from two distinctive yet complementary perspectives: Ahmad Syalabi's historical approach and A. Malik Fadjar's educational reorientation framework. Ahmad Syalabi provides a comprehensive historical narrative of Islamic civilization, emphasizing the periodization and cultural achievements of Muslim societies. Meanwhile, A. Malik Fadjar offers a progressive educational paradigm through his concept of "Reorientasi Pendidikan Islam," which integrates traditional Islamic values with modern educational needs. This study employs a qualitative library research method to synthesize both perspectives and their implications for contemporary Islamic education, particularly within the Muhammadiyah context. The findings reveal that understanding Islamic civilization through historical lenses while simultaneously embracing educational innovation represents a balanced approach toward achieving "Islam Berkemajuan" (Progressive Islam) in the 21st century.*

**Keywords:** Islamic Civilization, Ahmad Syalabi, A. Malik Fadjar, Islamic Education, Muhammadiyah, Progressive Islam.

## Introduction Section

Islamic civilization has made monumental contributions to the history of humankind. From the glorious era of the Abbasid Dynasty to the shining Islamic civilization in Andalusia, the intellectual and cultural heritage of Islam has served as a bridge of knowledge between the East and the West. However, understanding Islamic civilization is not enough by merely studying its past glories. We need an approach that connects historical achievements with contemporary needs, particularly in the field of education. In the context of Indonesia, the discourse on Islamic civilization takes on a special dimension through the thoughts of educational figures who not only understand history but also strive to transform the values of Islamic civilization into tangible movements. Two key figures who have made significant contributions are Ahmad Syalabi with his historiographical approach and A. Malik Fadjar with his concept of the reorientation of Islamic education.

Ahmad Syalabi, a prominent Muslim historian, authored the monumental work *History and Culture of Islam*, which has become a primary reference in understanding the dynamics of Islamic civilization across various periods. His work is not merely a chronology of events but a deep analysis of the factors influencing the rise and fall of Islamic civilization. Syalabi believed that Islamic civilization did not develop in a vacuum but through a dynamic interaction between religious teachings, socio-political conditions, and the development of science. On the other hand, A. Malik Fadjar, through his work *Reorientation of Islamic Education*, offers a transformative perspective on how Islamic education should be managed in the modern era. Malik Fadjar argues that Islamic education should not be trapped in the dichotomy between religious knowledge and general knowledge. According to him, education is a process of humanization that integrates the physical-biological and spiritual-psychological aspects of human beings into a holistic unity.

These two perspectives—historical and transformative—are highly relevant in the context of Muhammadiyah as a progressive Islamic movement. Since its founding by KH. Ahmad Dahlan in 1912, Muhammadiyah has made education a primary tool in realizing Islam that not only preserves

the purity of teachings but is also responsive to the development of the times. This research aims to critically analyze how Ahmad Syalabi's thoughts on the history of Islamic civilization can be integrated with A. Malik Fadjar's concept of the reorientation of Islamic education and its implications for the development of progressive Islamic education in Indonesia.

### ***Methodology***

*This study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. Data is collected from primary sources, including works by Ahmad Syalabi and A. Malik Fadjar, as well as secondary sources such as scientific journals, books, and articles relevant to the research topic. Data analysis is carried out descriptively-analytically by comparing and synthesizing the two perspectives to find common ground and their relevance in the context of contemporary Islamic education, particularly within the Muhammadiyah movement.*

## **The History of Islamic Civilization from Ahmad Syalabi's Perspective**

### **The Concept of Civilization in Syalabi's View**

Ahmad Syalabi understands Islamic civilization as a comprehensive manifestation of Islamic teachings, encompassing spiritual, intellectual, social, and material aspects. In his monumental work, Syalabi does not distinguish between culture and civilization. For him, Islamic culture is the expression of Islamic values internalized in the life of society, while civilization is the concrete form of that culture expressed in institutions, social systems, and intellectual achievements. Syalabi emphasizes that Islamic civilization is built on the foundation of monotheism (tauhid), which serves as the source of values in all aspects of life. This concept aligns with the understanding that Islam is not merely a belief system, but a way of life that governs the relationship between humans and God, among humans, and with the universe.

### **The Periodization of Islamic Civilization According to Syalabi**

In studying the history of Islamic civilization, Syalabi uses a systematic periodization approach. He divides Islamic history into several important periods:

#### **Early Period: The Time of Prophet Muhammad SAW and the Rashidun Caliphate**

Syalabi views this period as the foundation-building era of Islamic civilization. Prophet Muhammad SAW not only brought spiritual teachings but also established a new social-political structure in Medina. The Constitution of Medina stands as concrete evidence of how Islam regulated the lives of a diverse society based on principles of justice and equality.

Syalabi notes that the time of the Rashidun Caliphs was a period of consolidation and expansion of Islamic civilization. Abu Bakr resolved the problem of apostasy and continued territorial expansion. Umar ibn al-Khattab built a sophisticated state administration system, establishing councils (diwan) and a fair taxation system. Uthman ibn Affan contributed to the codification of the Quran, while Ali ibn Abi Talib faced complex political challenges.

#### **The Umayyad and Abbasid Dynasties**

Syalabi describes the Umayyad dynasty (661-750 AD) as a period of remarkable territorial expansion. Islam spread as far as Spain in the west and Central Asia in the east. However, Syalabi also observes that this period was marked by a weakening of commitment to the principles of Sharia compared to earlier times. Meanwhile, the Abbasid dynasty (750-1258 AD) is seen by Syalabi as the peak of Islamic civilization in the field of knowledge. The House of Wisdom in Baghdad became a center for translation and the development of science. Muslim scholars such as Al-Khwarizmi in

mathematics, Ibn Sina in medicine, and Al-Farabi in philosophy made contributions that influenced the development of global knowledge.

### **Period of Decline and Revival**

Syalabi does not ignore the period of decline in Islamic civilization. He analyzes various factors that led to the decline, including the Mongol invasions, internal divisions, and intellectual stagnation. However, he also highlights the reform efforts that emerged in different periods, including the reform movements of the 18th and 19th centuries.

### **Factors Driving the Advancement of Islamic Civilization**

According to Syalabi's analysis, several key factors contributed to the progress of Islamic civilization:

1. **The Spirit of Knowledge:** Islam encourages its followers to seek knowledge. The hadith of the Prophet "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" serves as a strong motivation for the development of knowledge.
2. **Intellectual Tolerance:** Islamic civilization at its height showed openness to knowledge from various sources. The translation of Greek, Persian, and Indian works demonstrated an inclusive attitude in the search for truth.
3. **Organized Education System:** The establishment of educational institutions such as kuttab, mosques, and madrasahs shows a serious commitment to human resource development.
4. **Political Support:** Caliphs and sultans who patronized scholars and scientists played an important role in the flourishing of Islamic civilization.

## **Reorientation of Islamic Education in the Thoughts of A. Malik Fadjar**

### **Background of Malik Fadjar's Thought**

A. Malik Fadjar is one of the prominent figures in Islamic education in Indonesia, whose ideas are greatly influenced by his experiences in Muhammadiyah. As a former Minister of Religious Affairs and Minister of National Education, Malik Fadjar has a profound understanding of the challenges facing Islamic education in Indonesia. In his book "Reorientasi Pendidikan Islam" (Reorientation of Islamic Education), Malik Fadjar critiques the state of Islamic education that remains trapped in the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge. According to him, this separation results in graduates who are "lopsided" in terms of knowledge: pesantren produce students who are morally strong but weak in mastering science and technology, while general education produces intellectually smart graduates but weak in morality.

### **The Concept of Integralistic Education**

Malik Fadjar proposes the concept of integralistic education that integrates three essential components:

1. **Divine Dimension:** Education must uphold values of tauhid (monotheism), iman (faith), ihsan (excellence), and taqwa (piety) as its spiritual foundation.
2. **Human Dimension:** Education must develop values of humanity such as brotherhood, equality, and kindness.
3. **Natural Dimension:** Education must teach how humans interact with nature as stewards (khalifah) who are responsible.

This concept aligns with Muhammadiyah's view on progressive education, which does not separate the knowledge of the world and the hereafter, religion, and science.

### **Principles of Progressive Islamic Education**

According to Malik Fadjar, progressive Islamic education is based on several fundamental principles:

#### **1. Principle of Humanization**

Education is the process of humanizing humans. Malik Fadjar defines humanization as the development of all aspects of humanity, both physical-biological and spiritual-psychological. Education should not focus solely on cognitive aspects but must also develop affective and psychomotor aspects.

#### **2. Principle of Empowerment**

Islamic education must be oriented toward empowerment. Malik Fadjar emphasizes the importance of developing students' potential so that they can act and fight for their rights according to human nature.

#### **3. Principle of Pragmatism with a Foundation of Values**

Islamic education must be pragmatic, meaning responsive to the needs of the times and society, yet still rooted in Islamic values. Pragmatism here does not mean abandoning principles but rather applying creativity in integrating Islamic values in an ever-changing context.

#### **4. Principle of Strong Culture**

Malik Fadjar stresses the importance of Islamic education being rooted in local culture. Education should not sever students from their cultural roots but should strengthen their cultural identity while remaining open to positive global influences.

#### **5. Implementation in the Muhammadiyah Education System**

Malik Fadjar exemplifies the implementation of the reorientation of Islamic education in the Muhammadiyah education system. According to him, Muhammadiyah has demonstrated how Islamic education can be an agent of social change while preserving Islamic identity. KH. Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah, laid the foundations for progressive education by combining the pesantren education system with the modern education system. Malik Fadjar views this integration model as successful in eliminating the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge.

### **Synthesis: Connecting the History of Civilization with the Reorientation of Education**

#### **Lessons from the History of Islamic Civilization**

When we view the history of Islamic civilization through the lens of Ahmad Syalabi and relate it to the concept of educational reorientation by Malik Fadjar, several valuable lessons emerge:

**First**, during its golden age, Islamic civilization demonstrated a harmonious integration between knowledge and spiritual values. Muslim scholars like Al-Khawarizmi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Biruni were both religious scholars and scientists. They did not see a contradiction between religion and science but rather viewed both as two sides of the same coin in understanding the truth.

**Second**, the progress of Islamic civilization was always supported by a strong educational system. From the kuttab in mosques to the Nizhamiyah institutions established by Nizham al-Mulk, educational institutions were the driving force of civilization. This highlights the importance of investing in education, as emphasized by Malik Fadjar.

**Third**, intellectual tolerance and openness to knowledge from various sources were key to progress. The translation movement at Bait al-Hikmah demonstrated that Islamic civilization was not

exclusive in its quest for knowledge. This principle aligns with Malik Fadjar's concept of an integral education system that values wisdom from various sources of knowledge.

### **Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Education**

In the context of Indonesia, particularly within the Muhammadiyah movement, the synthesis of the ideas of Syalabi and Malik Fadjar provides a solid theoretical and practical framework.

Muhammadiyah, as a progressive Islamic movement, needs to:

1. **Understand Historical Roots:** By studying the history of Islamic civilization as examined by Syalabi, contemporary Muslim generations can understand that Islam has a rich intellectual tradition. This provides the self-confidence that Muslims are capable of contributing to global civilization.
2. **Implement Reorientation:** Malik Fadjar's concept of the integration of knowledge needs to be translated into the curriculum and practices of education. Muhammadiyah schools should become models of education that are not only excellent academically but also strong in character.
3. **Develop Superior Human Resources:** Just as past Islamic civilizations produced scholars and scientists, contemporary Islamic education must produce graduates who are qualified—excellent in intellect and rich in deeds.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Of course, the effort to connect history with educational reform is not without challenges. Some of the main challenges include:

1. **Resistance to Change:** There are still segments of the Muslim community that resist the integration of knowledge, fearing westernization or secularization.
2. **Gap Between Theory and Practice:** The concept of the integration of knowledge often remains a discourse and has not yet been fully implemented in educational practices.
3. **Human Resource Limitations:** Integrating knowledge requires teachers and lecturers who have dual competencies—mastery in both religious and general knowledge.

However, these challenges also present opportunities. The digital era provides unlimited access to knowledge sources. Islamic educational institutions can leverage technology to develop innovative and inclusive learning.

### **Progressive Islam: Muhammadiyah's Vision for the Future of Civilization**

#### **The Concept of Progressive Islam**

Muhammadiyah has adopted the concept of "Progressive Islam" as the organization's vision for advancing Islamic teachings in Indonesia. This concept is not merely a slogan but a paradigm that connects the purity of Islamic teachings (purification) with the progress of the times (modernization). Progressive Islam embodies five main characteristics (al-Khasha'ishu al-Hamsu):

1. **Based on Tawhid:** Emphasizing the importance of liberating human thought from shirk, syncretism, and religious nationalism.
2. **Upholding Reason and Knowledge:** Encouraging the use of reason and the development of knowledge.
3. **Promoting Social Justice:** Education should produce individuals who care about social justice.
4. **Prioritizing Noble Morality:** Character and morality are the primary outputs of education.
5. **Orientation towards the Common Good:** All policies and programs must be oriented towards the welfare of the community.

## **The Role of Education in Realizing Progressive Islam**

Education becomes the main instrument in realizing Progressive Islam. Malik Fadjar emphasizes that Muhammadiyah's education should:

- 1. Create a Civilization of Education:** Education must arise from the philosophy of life and the educational knowledge of the Muhammadiyah community.
- 2. Implement Tajdid (Renewal) in Education:** The renewal movement (tajdid) that characterizes Muhammadiyah must be translated into educational innovations.
- 3. Build the Character of the Generation:** Education must shape a generation with both a spiritual dimension (through Islamic values, faith, goodness, and piety) and a humanistic dimension (with values of brotherhood, equality, and kindness).

## **Best Practices in Muhammadiyah Education**

Several Muhammadiyah schools and universities have demonstrated best practices in implementing the concept of Progressive Islam. For instance, SMA Muhammadiyah PK Kottabarat Surakarta, which ranks among the best schools nationally, or Muhammadiyah universities that have successfully integrated Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) courses with modern academic disciplines. However, the challenge lies in how to make these best practices a widespread culture across all Muhammadiyah educational institutions—not only concentrated in Java but also extending to Papua and even abroad.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes several important points:

**First**, Ahmad Syalabi's ideas on the history of Islamic civilization provide a strong historical foundation for understanding how Islam once reached its peak through the integration of spiritual values and the development of knowledge. Syalabi's periodization analysis shows that the advancement of Islamic civilization has always been marked by a strong educational system and intellectual tolerance.

**Second**, A. Malik Fadjar's concept of reorienting Islamic education offers a practical framework for transforming Islamic education in the contemporary era. Principles such as the integration of knowledge, humanization, empowerment, and value-based pragmatism provide operational guidance for Islamic educational institutions.

**Third**, the synthesis of Syalabi's historical perspective and Malik Fadjar's transformative perspective produces a progressive Islamic education paradigm that not only preserves Islamic identity but is also responsive to the demands of the times. This paradigm has become Muhammadiyah's vision in developing education in Indonesia.

**Fourth**, the implementation of the concept of progressive Islam in education requires strong commitment from all stakeholders, including organizational leaders, educators, and the community. Existing challenges are not obstacles but opportunities to continue innovating and improving the Islamic education system.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made:

#### **For Muhammadiyah Educational Institutions:**

- 1.** Develop a curriculum that explicitly integrates religious and general knowledge, rather than merely combining both within one institution.

2. Enhance educators' competencies through ongoing training in integrative pedagogy.
3. Build a quality assurance system to ensure that all Muhammadiyah educational institutions implement progressive Islamic standards, not just the elite schools in Java.
4. Develop exchange programs and benchmarking among Muhammadiyah educational institutions to share best practices.

#### **For Future Research:**

1. Conduct empirical studies on the implementation of the integration of knowledge concept at various educational levels within Muhammadiyah.
2. Examine effective teaching methods for integrating Islamic values with modern science and technology.
3. Research the long-term impact of progressive Islamic education on graduates' character and competencies.

#### **For Policymakers:**

1. Provide policy support that fosters the development of integrative Islamic education.
2. Provide adequate facilities and infrastructure to support educational innovation.
3. Facilitate collaboration between Islamic educational institutions and research institutions and industries to strengthen the relevance of education to societal needs.

#### **Closing**

The journey of Islamic civilization from its peak to its period of decline, and now its efforts toward revival, offers valuable lessons that education is the key to the progress of the ummah. The ideas of Ahmad Syalabi and A. Malik Fadjar, though originating from different contexts, provide complementary perspectives that are highly relevant for the development of contemporary Islamic education. Muhammadiyah, with its vision of progressive Islam, has a historical responsibility to continue the legacy of Islamic civilization through quality education. By understanding history, learning from the past, and daring to innovate for the future, Islamic education can once again become a beacon of civilization that enlightens not only Muslims but all of humanity.

**Wallahu a'lam bi al-shawab.**

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