



KH. Abdul Wahid Hasyim's Paradigm on Freedom of Learning in *Madrasa*

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Abstract

In the early twentieth century, Indonesia witnessed the flourishing of madrasa as a new model for Muslim educational institutions to respond to public schools established by the Dutch colonial era. Abdul Wahid Hasyim was one of the prominent Muslim intellectuals who introduced some approaches in madrasa learning process in which different from the traditional learning system in the pesantren. The purpose of this paper is to elaborate on Abdul Wahid Hasyim's thoughts on freedom of learning in madrasa using a historical approach to understand the historical context of Hasyim's ideas. As a result, this paper argues that Wahid Hasyim offered a mixed curriculum in madrasa by combining Islamic and secular subjects that are considered useful for students in the future. Another finding is that Wahid Hasyim preferred the tutorial method in the learning process, which replaced teacher-centered learning, as is common in pesantrens. To some extent, this method of learning is similar to student-centered learning in contemporary pedagogy.

Keywords: *Wahid Hasyim, Madrasa, Pesantren*

Abstract

Pada permulaan abad ke-20, Indonesia menyaksikan tumbuhnya madrasa sebagai sebuah model baru institusi pendidikan Islam untuk merespon sekolah publik yang didirikan oleh pemerintah kolonial Belanda. Abdul Wahid Hasyim merupakan salah satu dari intelektual terkemuka yang memperkenalkan beberapa pendekatan baru dalam proses pembelajaran di madrasa yang berbeda dari pembelajaran tradisional di pesantren. Tujuan dari tulisan ini adalah untuk mendiskusikan pemikiran Abdul Wahid Hasyim tentang merdeka belajar di madrasa dan menggunakan pendekatan sejarah dalam rangka untuk memahami konteks historis gagasan-gagasan Wahid Hasyim. Hasilnya, tulisan ini berpendapat bahwa Wahid Hasyim menawarkan kurikulum terpadu di madrasa dengan mengkombinasikan mata pelajaran keislaman dengan mata pelajaran sekuler yang dianggap memberikan manfaat untuk masa depan murid. Temuan berikutnya yaitu Wahid Hasyim lebih memilih menggunakan metode tutorial dalam proses pembelajaran yang menggantikan metode guru sebagai pusat pembelajaran yang biasa digunakan di pesantren. Cara pembelajaran ini, pada tingkat tertentu, serupa dengan pembelajaran yang menempatkan siswa sebagai pusat yang dikenal di dalam pedagogi kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Wahid Hasyim, Madrasah, Pesantren*

INTRODUCTION

On February 11, 2022, Nadiem Makarim, the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia launched officially the “Merdeka Belajar” curriculum as an effort in enhancing and preparing students to live in this digital society (Tempo, February 11, 2022). On this occasion, Makarim also introduced the Merdeka Mengajar (Freedom of Teaching) platform which teachers can access and utilize by using their smartphones. This application offers numerous learning materials to upgrade students’ knowledge, improve their teaching skills, and share their work. Another purpose of this platform is to become user-generated content where all teachers across Indonesia can upload and share their experiences (YouTube Kemendikbud RI, February 11, 2022).

Interestingly, the concept of Freedom of Learning, as Makarim said, was inspired by Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy of education. However, looking back at Indonesian history, Ki Hajar Dewantara was not the only figure who offered this notion. KH was another influential factor in terms of educational transformation. Abdul Wahid Hasyim, the son of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama, and the first Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia. For instance, he changed the point of view of students and teachers, who generally regarded the objects of education as the subjects of education. He then tried to implement this way of thinking in his father's Islamic educational system, Pesantren Tebuireng. Therefore, Zamakhshari Dhofier in his work *Tradisi Pesantren Memadu Modernitas Bangsa* (2009) stated that Wahid Hasyim was a prominent figure who successfully combined the pesantren tradition into the nation's modernity vision that was second to none at the time.

It can be said that Wahid Hasyim's ideas paved the way in which madrasa and pesantren students can compete with public school pupils. In his way of thinking, santri who live in pesantren and madrasa is not only about acquiring religious knowledge, but also developing life skills for better quality of life. Furthermore, during his reign as the Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, he contributed significantly in introducing "secular subjects" to madrasa including Islamic junior high school (Madrasa Tsanawiyah) and Islamic senior high school (Madrasa Aliyah) in Indonesia. This policy, in my opinion, has a pivotal role in establishing Indonesia Muslims today that well-known as moderate Muslims that significantly different from other Muslim majorities countries.

This article discusses Wahid Hasyim's thoughts on freedom of learning and his efforts to implement his ideas, both in Pesantren Tebuireng in Jombang East Java and in madrasas across Indonesia. Accordingly, the research is significant in order to find the basis of freedom of learning in terms of Islamic education system in Indonesia.

There is a wide range of scientific work related to Wahid Hasyim, including his biography, his ideas on pesantren reforms, and his political life and contributions. One of the most comprehensive works is *Sejarah Hidup K.H.A. Wahid Hasyim dan Karangan Tersiar* by Aboebakar Atjeh (1957). It is considered the first book that informs about the life and work

of Wahid Hasyim. Another writing is *Manusia Di Panggung Sejarah: Pemikiran dan Gerakan Tokoh-Tokoh Islam* of Kholid O. Santosa (2007) that describes Wahid Hasyim as one of significant political and Muslim figures in modern Indonesian history along with other Muslim figures. On the other hand, Ahmad Zaini in *Kyai Haji Abdul Wahid Hasyim: His Contribution to Muslim Education Reform and Indonesian Nationalism during the Twentieth Century* (1998) emphasized Wahid Hasyim's role in Islamic education reforms and as an important figure from the Muslim party especially in the early period of Indonesian nation-state. In terms of Islamic education, Zamakhsyari Dhofier in his monumental work of *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiai* (1982) stated that Wahid Hasyim was the figure who brought the pesantren world to modern Indonesia circumstances.

In the same vein, Paisun in his article "Analisis Terhadap Pemikiran Wahid Hasyim tentang Pembaruan Pendidikan Pesantren" (2018) stresses Wahid Hasyim's ideas on pesantren reforms by introducing non-religious subjects in the pesantren curriculum and new learning method replacing bandhongan method which is popular in the pesantren. Another article related to Wahid Hasyim's thoughts was written by Rangga Sa'adillah, who attempted to expose Wahid Hasyim's ideas on character education (2015). The writer states that there are eight characters education values based on Hasyim's ideas: religion, tolerance, independence, democracy, and nationalism. Meanwhile, Maragustam's article "The Reformation of Pesantren Education System: The Study on Abdul Wahid Hasyim Thoughts the Perspective of Islamic Education Philosophy" (2016) identifies Wahid Hasyim's thoughts as positive-active as a result of his personal learning experiences and influenced by socio-cultural circumstances in the early twentieth century.

In contrast to previous work, this paper attempts to figure out and interpret Hasyim's ideas of Islamic education as an option of freedom of learning concepts from a historical perspective. This writing is divided into four parts: an introduction, a brief biography of Wahid Hasyim, his ideas on freedom of learning, and his efforts to implement his notions.

Theoretical Framework

Freedom of learning is a concept that offers students a sense of freedom to develop their own talents. The policy of freedom of learning was designed based on student needs (*Kompas*, June 24, 2021). On another occasion, Makarim said that:

"Freedom of learning is giving freedom to educational institutions and freedom from bureaucratization; lecturers are freed from complicated bureaucracy, and students are given the freedom to choose "their preferred field" (Mazid et al., 2020, 72).

Based on this explanation, this paper tries to elaborate on Wahid Hasyim's thoughts regarding this notion. In this respect, it is deeply connected to Islamic education institutions, especially madrasas, for which Wahid Hasyim is well-known as a figure who introduced madrasa reforms in the past.

Historically speaking, madrasa is learning institutions that has its roots in the classical period of Islam (610-1258 AD). George Makdisi's work *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (1981) clearly stated that:

"The madrasa was the Muslim institution of learning par excellence. As such, it was a natural development of two previous institutions: the masjid, in its role as a college of law, and its nearby khan, as the residence of the law students in attendance. The development of this college was made in three stages: from the masjid, to the masjid khan complex, to the madrasa. The masjid involved in this development was that in which the teaching was devoted to law as its primary subject. The basic law course of the masjid, usually lasting a period of four years, required a place of residence for the law students who came to it from out-of-town; whence the development of the masjid-khan complex. From this complex to the madrasa there was but one simple step. The essential difference between the second and third stage of development is to be found in the legal status of the masjid and that of the madrasa" (Makdisi: 1981, 27).

It should be noted that in the classical Islam the madrasa was focused first and foremost to the study of Islamic law as regarded the queen of the Islamic sciences. The other sciences, on the other hand, were being studied as ancillaries (Makdisi: 1981, 9).

Despite the fact that the term *madrasah* as an Islamic educational institution began to be used in the classical period and became more popular in the medieval period of Muslim civilization in many parts of the world, it seems that Muslims in the Indonesian archipelago began to use it in the modern period, especially in the early twentieth century. In Southeast Asia, the typical institutions that study Islamic law are *pondok*, *pondok pesantren*, and *pesantren*. These institutions, as Lukens-Bull stated (2010), teach religious courses such as Quranic memorization, Quranic interpretation, traditions of the Prophet (Hadith), and Islamic Jurisprudence. On the other hand, some argue that *madrasah* emerged in response to public schools by the colonial government. This means that in the Indonesian context, the establishment of *madrasa* was not only to provide religious subjects but also to offer secular subjects that, to some extent, were completely different from *madrasah* in medieval Islam.

METHODS

This research uses a historical method that consists of four stages: heuristic, critics, interpretation, and historiography. First, in the heuristic stage, the author collected sources related to Wahid Hasyim's biography and his thoughts from many books and journal articles, including numerous writings on the websites. It is important to acknowledge that most of the information about Wahid Hasyim came from secondary sources, because the author did not find any primary sources regarding this topic. It can be said that the work of Aboebakar (*Sejarah Hidup K.H.A. Wahid Hasyim dan Karangan Tersiar*) is the only book which contains some of Wahid Hasyim's article, especially Abdullah Oebayd sebagai Pendidik that brought notion to the concept of freedom of learning. The second step is critics, which involves internal and external critics, in which the author tried to determine the authenticity of the data. Based on the accurate data, it was followed by the interpretation stage to analyze and interpret the information gathered to draw conclusions. In the last step, historiography, the author systematically wrote about Wahid Hasyim, his ideas, meanings, and events relevant to the topic in this paper.

DISCUSSION

A Brief Biography of Wahid Hasyim

KH. Abdul Wahid Hasyim was born on June 1, 1914, in Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java (Aceh 1957, 141). His father, Hasyim Asy'ari, was a prominent ulama, the founder of Tebuireng Pesantren, and then established Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926, the largest Muslim organization in contemporary Indonesia. His mother, Nafiqah, was the daughter of Kiai Ilyas, a charismatic ulama from Sewulan Pesantren in Madiun, East Java (Zaini 1998, 19). Saiful Umam (1998, 98) noted that the original name of Wahid Hasyim was Muhammad Asy'ari, which then changed to Abdul Wahid because of his physical weakness during his childhood. However, Abdul Wahid preferred to write his name as Abdul Wahid Hasyim and finally more familiar with Wahid Hasyim.

Pesantren's learning system significantly influenced Wahid Hasyim's formative period. Initially, he studied basic religious subjects, particularly reciting the Holy Quran, under Hasyim Asy'ari's guidance. In addition to this, he attended Madrasah Salafiyah to learn some Islamic texts including *Fath Qarib*, *Minhaj al-Qawim*, and *Mutammimah*. He also began to communicate in Arabic with his father and due to his Arabic skills, Hasyim used to read and memorize *Diwan al Shuara'*, a compilation of Arabic poems then translated into Javanese (Aboebakar: 1957, 145; Zaini: 1998, 19). When turning 13 years old, he went to Siwalan Panji Pesantren which is located in Sidoarjo, East Java. He lived in this pesantren for 25 days during the month of Ramadhan and studied several *kitab kuning* such as *Hikam*, *Bidayah al Hidayah*, *Sullam al Taufiq*, and *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (Zaini: 1998, 21). The following year, he studied in Lirboyo Pesantren, which was established by KH. Abdul Karim in Kediri, East Java. Barton (2008, 32) argued that Wahid Hasyim travelled from one pesantren to others to receive *barakah*.

In 1929, when he was 15 years old, he started to study Latin abjads, which encouraged him to learn non-religious subjects, such as math, exact science, and foreign languages, especially English and Dutch. He subscribed to newspapers and magazines in both Indonesia

and Dutch in order to increase his language ability and broaden his knowledge. For instance, he read *Sumber Pengetahuan*, a three-language magazine based in Bandung. In 1932, with his nephew Muhammad Ilyas, he went to Mecca for the hajj pilgrimage and spent about two years improving his religious subjects, such as Arabic grammar and morphology, jurisprudence, tafsir, hadits, and Muhammad's tradition from distinguished Muslim scholars, including Umar Hamdan and Abdul Wahab al-Khuqir (*Tebuireng Online*, April 8, 2014; Zaini: 1998, 25). It is important to note that these experiences were unpopular among *santri* at the time and, more importantly, contributed to the way Wahid Hasyim thought about the pesantren's educational system.

After returning to Indonesia, he played an important role in advancing the Tebuireng Pesantren. He not only assisted Hasyim Asy'ari to teach in this pesantren, but was also involved in developing the curriculum and representing his father in both local and national forums. Furthermore, he tried to implement his ideas to introduce secular subjects in the pesantren curriculum, although it was difficult to accept by Hasyim Asy'ari since it would be a controversial notion among pesantren communities. Nevertheless, in 1935, his father accepted his idea of building Madrasah Nizamiyah, which combined religious and secular materials into its curriculum. Its name was inspired by Madrasah Nizamiyah established by Hasan bin Ali bin Ishak At-Thusi which well-known as Nizham al-Mulk under Alp Arslan of Saljuk Dynasty. Shallabi stated that Nizamul Mulk established Madrasah Nizamiyah in strategic locations such as Baghdad, Balkh, Naisabur, Herat, Isfahan, Basrah, Marwa, Thabaristan, and Mosul, and became the main institutions concerned with Sunni teaching (Shallabi: 2020, 27).

It had 29 students in the first year which was followed by the establishment of a library which had around a thousand book collections in the following year (1936). Furthermore, he initiated to subscribe a variety of magazines such as *Panji Islam*, *Dewan Islam*, *Berita Nahdlatul Ulama*, *Adil*, *Nurul Iman*, *Penyebarkan Semangat*, *Panji Pustaka*, and *Pujangga Baru* to provide fruitful and insightful reading material for students (*Tebuireng Online*, 8 April 2014).

Under the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies (1942-1945), which established Shumubu (Department of Religious Affairs), Wahid Hasyim represented his father Hasyim Asy'ari. He started his political career as a secretary of NU in district Cukir in 1938 and then became a chairman of the NU of Jombang, East Java. Following this, in 1940, Wahid Hasyim was involved in the Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) as a chairman of the Ma'arif Department, which coordinated the education of madrasas and pesantrens under NU. His political career rose significantly when he was appointed as a member of BPUPKI (the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Independence) with other national political figures. Moreover, based on the BPUPKI recommendation, Sukarno created a committee known as the *Panitia Sembilan*, where Wahid Hasyim was one of its members. The committee played a crucial role in determining the basic forms of the Indonesian government.

When he was appointed Minister of Religious Affairs in 1949, he tried to implement his ideas on Islamic education from the elementary to university level. Based on Religious Affairs Regulation Number 3 dated August 11, 1950, Wahid Hasyim pushed all madrasas to introduce secular subjects to students. In addition, he contributed significantly to establishing State Islamic Higher Education (PTAIN) and Schools for Islamic Teachers (SGAI/PGAN) across the country, and passed away on April 18, 1953, in a car accident in Cimindi, West Java.

Wahid Hasyim Ideas on Freedom of Learning in Madrasa

Historically, it seems that Wahid Hasyim's thoughts emerged in Indonesian circumstances where there was a polarization between government schools, established by Dutch colonial rule, which was concerned with producing skillful employees for the colonial government and pesantren education that tended to preserve Islamic teaching and avoid secular subjects such as science and foreign languages, including social sciences that were considered as a part of the colonial system. Suminto (1985) argues that although the Dutch colonial period provided education for Indonesian people as a part of ethical policies, the number of illiterate people was significantly higher, accounting for 93% of the 60 million Indonesian citizens in 1930. At that

time, the number of students who graduated from senior high school was around 200 across the archipelago. In 1940, Suminto noted that only 40% of children aged six to eight acquired elementary school. This means that not all Indonesians could access public schools, except for certain social strata, especially among Dutch employees. For instance, modern education for White European was the Europeesche Lagere School (ELS). Meanwhile, the Hollandsch Chineesche School (HCS) was for the Chinese and Hollandsch Arabische School (HAS) for Arabs. The colonial government provided modern education for local elites, such as the Hollandsch Inlandsche School (HIS) and Sekolah Rakyat (Volkschool) (Madjid 2008, ixiv).

To solve this problem, in the early 20th century, some ulama started to build madrasas that combined both religious and secular subjects. Therefore, although the term madrasah as an Islamic educational institution was rooted in the classic and medieval age of Muslim civilization, it seems that madrasah was a modern phenomenon in the Indonesian context. Deliar Noer (1972) argued that madrasah emerged due to the fact that Muslim teenagers had limited access to colonial schools and, at the same time, as a critic to the pesantren education that had a tendency to protect its curriculum from modern education. Unsurprisingly, when Wahid Hasyim established Madrasa Nizamiyah, many Muslim clerics, particularly from the NU circle, considered Hasyim's ideas unsuitable for pesantren's values.

Wahid Hasyim was probably the pioneer who introducing madrasa system into pesantren especially NU's pesantrens across Java Island. Previously, in Sumatra, Syech Abdullah Ahmad established Madrasah Adabiyah in Padang in 1908, which became HIS Adabiyah in 1915. M. Taib Umar, around the same time, built Madrasah School in Batusangkar and H. Mahmud Yunus with the Diniyah School in 1918. Another madrasah was Saadah School in Aceh by Tengku Daud Beureh which was established in 1930 (Drajat:2018, 202-203). During this period, Indonesia also witnessed an increasing number of madrasahs by new Muslim organizations, such as Muhammadiyah (1912), Al-Irsyad (1913), and Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah/Perti (1928). Regarding pesantren education, Wahid Hasyim stated that pesantrens are not only a center for students who want to become

ulama but also for those who want to develop life skills. Therefore, as can be seen in Madrasah Nizamiyah, the curriculum was not merely Islamic teaching, but provided a wide range of secular subjects. Moreover, Wahid Hasyim offered progressive ideas, such as mixed curriculum and students as the center of learning. These notions are what the author called the basic thoughts of freedom of learning, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Mixed Curriculum

To begin with, Wahid Hasyim argued that becoming religious leaders or ulama was not the main objective of why *santri* went to pesantren. In other words, it is sufficient for them to study the basic material of Islamic teaching and spend more time studying a wide variety of knowledge and other life skills (Dhofier:2009,105). Accordingly, Wahid Hasyim implemented a new curriculum in Madrasah Nizamiyah, which consisted of 70% life skills and general knowledge and only 30% religious subjects. At that time, Wahid Hasyim was a breakthrough in the pesantren world. He introduced Dutch and English which were associated with the oppressors or simply “kafir” languages. Consequently, he had to deal with a number of criticisms from other pesantren leaders. As documented by Aboebakar, Wahid Hasyim argued that it was based on a prophet saying that whoever masters the language of a nation, then he is safe from deception. Language, he added, is a window into the world.

Interestingly, while a number of countries, such as Europe and America, tend to erase religious subjects from public schools, Wahid Hasyim encouraged and pushed all public schools to train their pupils in religious subjects. In his article, Wahid Hasyim noted that general and religious knowledge cannot be separated since knowledge without religion may lead to moral decadency. Conversely, religion without science and knowledge can bring about narrow-minded thinking. Indonesia, he said, not only needs scholars who are experts in religion, but also scholars with a wide range of expertise.

Students as the Center of Learning

Secondly, Wahid Hasyim considered students as the subject of education. This means that pesantren should implement other teaching

methods especially tutorials. Kester Brown ("Tutorial Teaching," n.d.) suggested,

"At the start of the tutorial, the tutor should explain that everyone is expected to contribute and that students should feel free to express their ideas. Occasionally, the tutor may have to ask talkative and disruptive students to hold their answers, while others give their opinion. This gives everyone a chance to participate and provides a more balanced session".

Furthermore, the main role of teachers or tutors in tutorial teaching is to act as catalysts or facilitators. Hence, this idea is totally different from that of Bandongan, in which teachers are considered a source of knowledge and tend to dominate the class. In other words, students do not have the opportunity to ask questions or even discuss the materials but become passive learners by listening, taking notes, and memorizing the materials based on the teacher's instruction.

Wahid Hasyim's Abdullah Oebayd sebagai Pendidik is an appealing example of how the tutorial was conducted. He narrated Abdullah Oebayd and his two sons when visiting Wahid Hasyim's home: There was a short dialogue between Oebayd and one of his sons, particularly when the child wanted to drink hot tea. As a parent, undoubtedly, Oebayd permitted him to drink. However, the child complained due to the fact that the tea was very hot. Instead of helping him by pouring tea onto the plate, Oebayd asked his child to do it himself. The son replied that it could be spilled out. The father encouraged him by saying, 'It is no problem. The host might not be angry with you, isn't it Mr. Wahid Hasyim?' "It is completely fine," Wahid Hasyim said. The child then poured the tea onto a plate, and after waiting for a minute, he asked help from his father to drink. "Just drinking it by yourself, you are a smart kid and don't be afraid to spill out it." Finally, he successfully drank it.

It is clear from this story that there are multiple benefits to the tutorial method in the learning process, such as responsibility, confidence, and patience, for both students and teachers. Based on this dialogue, it seems that it is significant to treat students as subjects of education in which they can explore new experiences and ideas and encourage them to know and understand a variety of opinions. Wahid Hasyim's ideas on this topic to some degrees are closely linked to

student-centered learning (SCL) instead of teacher-centered learning that well-known in contemporary pedagogy. Anna Sudderth (2022) argues that student-centered learning (SCL) makes students co-creators of their own education, engaging them in decisions about what, when, and how they learn. More importantly, this approach assists students not only with academic knowledge, but also with the skills of self-direction, curiosity, creativity, and collaboration they will need for future success.

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CONCLUSION

Madrasa is an integral part of Muslim civilization that can be traced in the history of Muslims from the classical period. However, it was a modern phenomenon in the Southeast Asian context where madrasas arose as the "challenge and response" of the colonial policy that introduced public schools across Indonesian territories. Wahid Hasyim was a figure who brought madrasa into NU's pesantren in the 1930s and was regarded as a reformer of Muslims educational institution in Indonesia. To conclude, this study found two essential ideas of Wahid Hasyim regarding the madrasa learning process:

First, he offered a mixed curriculum in madrasa. This means that madrasa is not only a center of religious studies but also an Islamic educational institution that prepares its students to acquire broadened knowledge and life skills for their future living. Hasyim implemented 70% of the madrasa's curriculum with non-religious subjects and 30% with religious subjects. Second, Hasyim argued that students should be regarded as the center of the learning process. This means that the traditional learning system in pesantrens, especially *bandongan*, should be altered with the tutorial method. This method provides more room

for students to explore their potential and maximize their talent. Based on these findings, the author argues that these ideas are the concept of freedom of learning in Wahid Hasyim.

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