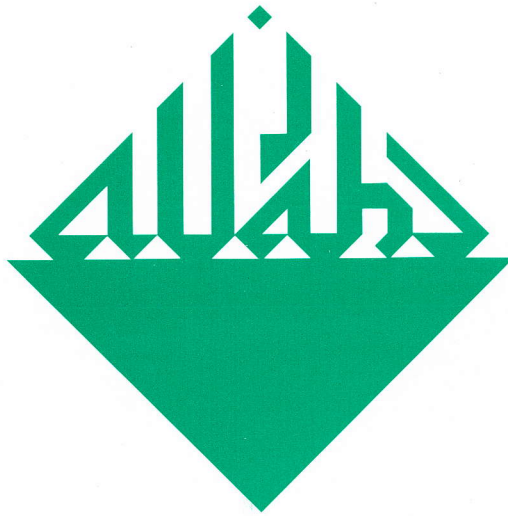


# STUDIA ISLAMIKA

INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

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## Mainstreaming Madrasahs and Pesantrens in the East Java Province

Jajang Jahroni

*Madrasahs and pesantrens are two Islamic educational institutions that have a very strategic role in the development of Indonesian society. Both act as sources of education for the Muslim youth from the middle and lower classes in the villages, not to mention a good number of upper-class children from the cities. The importance of madrasahs and pesantrens is evident when we realise that a large proportion of Indonesia's population lives in villages, and a large percentage of these are poor; thus education through madrasahs and pesantrens is often the only avenue left for those who are poor. The Old Order and New Order regimes in the past actively pursued policies of marginalizing these education institutions and such a policy must be brought to an end. This is because the fate of the people of this country is closely tied to the success and development of Islamic educational institutions.*

*Based on this, since 2005 PPIM UIN Jakarta has carried out training aimed at mainstreaming pesantrens and madrasahs in six provinces in Indonesia (South Sumatra, Banten, West Java, Central Java, East Java, and West Nusa Tenggara). This activity has been carried out in cooperation with the Danish Embassy in Jakarta. These six provinces were chosen because the largest number of pesantrens and madrasahs in Indonesia can be found in these provinces.*

*The East Java component of the training program, entitled *Pelatihan Pemberdayaan Pesantren and Madrasah di Jawa Timur* (Mainstreaming Training for Pesantrens and Madrasahs in East Java), took place in Jombang at Pondok Pesantren Attahdzhib Rejoagung Ngoro. Around 15 pesantrens from a number of districts (including Jombang, Kediri, Ponorogo, Madiun, Pacitan, Malang, Mojokerto, Tuban, and Lamongan) took part in the training. As is well-known, East Java is generally dominated*

by Nahdhatul Ulama; however this program also included the participation of two Muhammadiyah pesantrens, that is, Pondok Modern Muhammadiyah Paciran Lamongan and Pondok Pesantren Muhammadiyah Karangasem Paciran Lamongan (although the second pesantren was unable to follow the training program up to the end).

### **Findings**

There's no escaping the fact that pesantrens and madrasahs need to strengthen themselves, both in terms of their management and resource-wise. Mainstreaming is a process that seeks to bring madrasahs and pesantrens up to standard, in line with other educational institutions. A number of points, however, need to be understood regarding this developmental process. In line with the madrasah's development, it must be acknowledged that the institution might be forced to abandon values upon which it was originally founded. This does not mean that it would end in the cessation of the teaching of religious studies, for if this were to occur it would cease to be a madrasah. After all, the establishment of a madrasah is based on religious doctrine which instructs at least one person from each community to be religiously learned.

However experimentation and policies developed by these religious education institutions to bring their schools up to standard have clearly failed. During the era of Munawwir Syadzali, a former Minister for Religious Affairs, there were pesantrens who combined religious and secular studies at a ratio of 30:70 and 40: 60, and even more, depending on the wishes of the madrasah's management. Some have even chosen a more extreme path in that they either teach 100% secular studies or 100% religious studies.

This experimentation can be easily understood when we consider that focusing on specific fields is necessary in order to meet pragmatic needs. At present, there are madrasahs which have specialisations such as in science and technology, languages, and so on. However there are great expectations from society for madrasahs to teach religion with the aim of producing experts on Islam. As a result, religion accounts for about 70% of studies in such institutions. This tug-o-war between religious and secular studies puts the madrasahs in a huge dilemma.

Over the last two decades madrasahs have undergone significant development, but to ensure continued development a blue-print for success is required. Furthermore, it must be realized that past development has not necessarily constituted the development required by madrasahs and pesantrens. Development in the recent past has been more quantitative and legal-administrative. The quantitative aspect is evident in the growing number of children being sent to madrasahs by their parents. Besides this,

*pesantren* buildings have developed considerably in recent years. At the same time, the legal-administrative aspect can be seen by the growing status and function of madrasahs in the education sector in Indonesia. Hence while there has been development on some fronts, the real challenge for Madrasahs in this day and age is to overcome issues concerning the dichotomy of religious knowledge and secular knowledge.

A number of parties, be it education experts or those more directly involved with the schools, claim that madrasahs are attempting to integrate religious knowledge and secular knowledge. However, what has actually happened in the field is Islamization, where general studies such as physics and biology are given according to evidence from the Qur'an or sayings of the Prophet. Such methods certainly do not solve the existing problems. The integration of religious and secular knowledge only occurs at the ontological and epistemological levels. Because of this, what is needed is a scientific methodology which does not contrast religious knowledge and secular knowledge. Until now, there has been some effort on the part of education experts to try to solve this conflict, although there has been little success to date.

At the empirical level, the dichotomy within madrasahs is slowly fading away. This development has serious implications for the further development of the madrasah. From the beginning it has been viewed as a purely religious institution, but now it is playing a greater role in social development. Now it can claim to be a "sekolah umum plus" (Plus Public School).<sup>1</sup> Because of the increased demands for madrasahs to play a greater role, they have a larger burden, having to develop a curriculum which provides both Islamic and secular material.

At the same time, regarding issues that arise in the community, madrasahs have yet to give a maximal contribution. One of the main reasons for this, it might be said, is that their understanding of essential matters in the life is extremely weak compared to their understanding of matters that aren't so important. In general, their understanding of showbiz, for example, and their understanding of music, as well as well-known celebrities and film stars, is much higher than their understanding of the geography, the political system, and economics, world views, as well as history.

### **Studies and Training**

In order to overcome these problems, madrasahs must raise their ability to deal with the issues so that they can better give direction for the development of the community. This can only occur if madrasahs are not left behind and at the same time understand the meaning of the changes that are taking place. The community further idealizes how a madrasah should

be, and the madrasah should be guided by this in making the necessary changes, while at the same time determine the steps that need to be taken to reform education in Indonesia.

There is a critical need for madrasahs to raise their ability to deal with issues so that they can better provide direction in the development of the community, because in the future they will face many situations which cannot be solved with traditional models. Steps taken to anticipate changes and developments in the future are critical to ensuring that madrasahs can always provide a lasting contribution to the community. Changing conditions will mean that education models will cease to be relevant in the future, and in order to sail smoothly through to the future, new models must be developed. Such models must be appropriate with new demands. To do this we must all understand these new models and systems. Activities aimed at doing this are referred to as innovative learning which is conceptually different to maintenance learning.

The issues covered above are of great concern, not only for madrasahs but for the community as a whole. Because of this we need to clarify the identity of madrasahs, be it those which focus on religious studies or those which focus on secular studies. The mainstreaming of madrasahs does not need to be rushed without first the development of concepts and clear teaching methodologies, because when this will only mean that the current situation will prevail.

### **Endnotes**

1. As a result of the introduction of law No. 20 1998, madrasahs are now considered "Islamic" public schools.

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