

The Relevance of Contemporary Islamic Educational Thought Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Volume: 4 ISSN: 2963-5489	This research deeply examines the relevance of the contemporary Islamic education thought of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) within the context of modern Indonesian life. Using the library research method, this study analyzes the trail of Gus Dur's thought, which encompasses his biography and intellectual background, his thought and teachings on tolerance as the core of his struggle, as well as his views on the context of life's diversity in Indonesia and the relation between religion and state. The main focus of the relevance of his thought is placed on the concept of Multicultural Islamic Education he championed. The findings of the research indicate that Gus Dur's thought, which is characterized by inclusivity, humanism, and neomodernism, is highly relevant and urgent to be implemented in the contemporary Islamic education system. His thought is capable of becoming a fundamental framework in shaping students who possess a moderate religious understanding, are tolerant of differences, and are ready to become citizens who uphold pluralism and the integrity of the nation. Gus Dur's thought serves as an anti-discrimination and anti-radicalism solution in facing the challenges of diversity in Indonesia.
KEYWORD Gus Dur, Contemporary Islamic Educational, Tolerance, Multicultural, Relationship Religion and State	

1. Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia, both before and during the era of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid, or more commonly known as Gus Dur, was often faced with the dilemma between tradition and contemporary modernity. As a result, the curriculum in pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools), for instance, was rich with studies of the yellow books (kitab kuning) but was sometimes considered less relevant and less suited to the needs of the times. Conversely, general education tended to neglect profound spiritual and moral values. Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid, leveraging his strong background in pesantren education and his studies abroad, sought to bridge these two poles. He viewed education as an instrument to create individuals who are pious, knowledgeable, and morally upright, yet also adaptive, critical, and tolerant in the face of diversity. It is important to understand that Gus Dur's educational thought holds relevance in contemporary education. This is because current Islamic education increasingly emphasizes humanism and teaches universal humanitarian values, instills the value of patriotism (love for the homeland), and addresses the challenge of radicalism among religious communities in Indonesia.

Gus Dur's educational thought is highly relevant for several main reasons. Firstly, Gus Dur stressed the importance of contextualizing Islamic teachings in education. According to him, Islamic education must not be rigid and isolated from social

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realities. Instead, it must be able to answer challenges such as radicalism, intolerance, and poverty. Gus Dur promoted an education that teaches universal humanitarian values, such as tolerance, pluralism, and justice, which he believed to be the core of Islamic teachings itself (Wahyudi, S., & Hidayat, N. 2017).

In practice, Gus Dur emphasized his educational philosophy by advocating for a learning process that seeks to change the way a person sees and understands the world, as well as reform the meaning within themselves. This process involves critical reflection on one's own beliefs and assumptions, thereby leading to a change in perspective and a broad awareness.

Secondly, Gus Dur's thinking on transformative education is highly relevant in the current modern era. Gus Dur did not merely view education as the transfer of knowledge, but as a process that shapes character and social awareness. Gus Dur encouraged educational institutions, particularly pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools), to become community development centers that empower the local economy and teach social entrepreneurship (Munir, M. 2019). This is different from educational models that focus solely on academics. It is precisely Gus Dur's contemporary Islamic education thought regarding transformative education that allows students in this modern era to grow into learners who are critical of their own beliefs.

Thirdly, Gus Dur's thought on multicultural education is crucial in a diverse Indonesia. Gus Dur taught that difference is a blessing (a gift) from Allah SWT, and that education must be a space for dialogue and mutual understanding between various religions and cultures. Therefore, this concept challenges homogenous and exclusive educational models. Instead, Gus Dur encouraged a curriculum that is inclusive and teaches appreciation for diversity, an approach that is desperately needed amidst the rise of identity polarization (Santosa, A. 2021).

Overall, Gus Dur's educational thought is a progressive and relevant intellectual legacy. It offers a framework that not only strengthens the foundation of Islamic values but also prepares the next generation to become responsible, tolerant, and globally competitive citizens.

The aim of this research is to analyze the form of relevance of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's contemporary Islamic education thought to present-day education. Using a qualitative approach and the literature review method, this study explores various relevant academic sources and analyzes scholarly works discussing Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's contemporary thought. By critically examining Islamic theories and principles, this research is expected to provide an ontological and rational critical analysis by the researcher and contribute to the academic discourse on the relevance of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's contemporary Islamic religious education thought in the modern era. Ultimately, this research advocates for the relevance of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's contemporary Islamic religious education thought to promote an education that teaches universal humanitarian values, such as tolerance, pluralism, and justice, which he believed to be the core of multicultural Islamic teachings

2. Literature Review

A previous literature review serves as reference material to compare the current research with earlier studies related to the Relevance of Contemporary Islamic Education Thought of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). Below are some previous studies conducted by various researchers that are used as a literature review in this research.

First, the research conducted by Mulyadi. Their journal article discusses "Gus Dur's Thought on Multicultural Islamic Education." Although the aforementioned study also discusses Gus Dur's thought, the author's research (referring to the current study) is more broadly focused than this previous study, which is exclusively concentrated on Multicultural Education. Second, the research conducted by Mahar Tri Pamungkas, et al. Their journal article discusses "Abdurrahman Wahid: A Study of Thought on the Relation Between Religion and State." Although the aforementioned study also discusses Gus Dur's thought, the author's research (referring to the current study) is more broadly focused than this previous study, which is exclusively concentrated on the Relation Between Religion and State.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytic method to examine the contemporary Islamic education thought of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid and its relevance to Islamic religious education in the modern era. This approach was

chosen by the researcher because it facilitates an in-depth and contextual study of the relevance of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's contemporary Islamic religious education thought. As explained by Creswell, qualitative research provides space to holistically explore the experiences and perspectives of individuals regarding a particular issue (John Ward Creswell :2014).

The data for this research was obtained through one main technique: the literature review. In this regard, the researcher used the Literature Review method, involving references from various academic sources, including books and Scientific journals, and previous research related to the contemporary thought of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid, as the relevance of Islamic religious education thought today. Thus, the various references used by the researcher for this study are expected to yield a scholarly paper that can serve as a reference source for future researchers. The data obtained by the researcher will be analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (A. Michael Huberman Matthew B. Miles:2014).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Short Biography of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)

Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid, affectionately called Gus Dur, was born in Jombang, East Java Province, on September 07, 1940, to the couple Wahid Hasyim and Solichah. This statesman, reformer, intellectual, thinker, and political leader replaced Prof. Dr. B.J. Habibie as the 3rd President of the Republic of Indonesia after being elected by the MPR (People's Consultative Assembly) following the 1999 General Election. Gus Dur served as the 4th President of the Republic of Indonesia from October 20, 1999, until the Special Session of the MPR in 2001. It should be noted that Gus Dur became President due to pressure from Prof. Dr. Amin Rais, the MPR, and the National Mandate Party (PAN), who stated that a change in the presidency was necessary, arguing that it should not be exclusively from the Muhammadiyah organization but that it was time for a President from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

Gus Dur was born with the name Abdurrahman ad-Dakhil, which means "The Conqueror," and later became better known by the nickname Gus Dur. "Gus" is an honorific title typical of pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools) for the son of a kiai (Islamic scholar). Gus Dur was the first of six children, born into a highly respected family in the East Javanese Muslim community. His paternal grandfather, KH. Hasyim Asyari, was the founder of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) mass organization, as was his maternal grandfather, KH Bisri Syamsuri.

Gus Dur's father, K.H. Wahid Hasyim, was involved in the Nationalist Movement and became the Minister of Religious Affairs in 1949. His mother, Hj. Sholehah, was the daughter of the founder of the Denanyar Jombang Islamic Boarding School. After the declaration of Indonesian independence on August 17, 1945, Gus Dur returned to Jombang and remained there during Indonesia's war of independence against the Dutch.

In addition to being an activist in various fields, Gus Dur was also a prolific thinker. This can be seen in several of his works, including:

1. Muslim di Tengah Pergumulan (Muslims in the Midst of Struggle) (1981)
2. Kiai Menggugat, Gus Dur Menjawab Sebuah Pergumulan Wacana Dan Transformasi (Kiai Sues, Gus Dur Answers a Struggle of Discourse and Transformation) (1989)
3. Kiai Nyentrik Membela Pemerintah (Eccentric Kiai Defends the Government) (1997)
4. Tabayun Gus Dur (Gus Dur's Clarification) (1998)
5. Tuhan Tidak Perlu Dibela (God Does Not Need to Be Defended) (1999)
6. Mengurai Hubungan Agama dan Negara (Untangling the Relationship Between Religion and State) (1999)
7. Islam, Negara, dan Demokrasi, Himpunan Percikkan Perenungan Gus Dur (Islam, State, and Democracy, A Collection of Gus Dur's Reflections) (1999)
8. Prisma Pemikiran Gus Dur (Prism of Gus Dur's Thought) (2000)
9. Melawan Melalui Lelucon (Fighting Through Jokes) (2000)
10. Menggerakkan Tradisi, Essai-Essai Pesantren (Mobilizing Tradition, Pesantren Essays) (2001)
11. He eventually passed away on Wednesday, December 30, 2009, at 6:45 PM WIB at Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital, Jakarta. He took his last breath at the age of 69 (Barton, Greg :2011).

4.2 Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's Thoughts and Teachings on Tolerance

Gus Dur's thought indirectly held a high degree of tolerance among religious communities, which is evidenced by several of his works. Furthermore, while serving as President, Gus Dur engaged in numerous diplomatic relations and fostered the

impression that Indonesia remained viable and active post-Reformasi. This was crucial because, at that time, news circulating from the West—which carried the nuance of news imperialism—was largely negative towards Indonesia. The circulating news depicted Indonesia, a nation with a majority Muslim community, as being in decline. Therefore, to counter this, President Gus Dur and his goodwill delegation demonstrated that Indonesia was not as portrayed by the irresponsible Western news sources.

However, on the one hand, Gus Dur was once given the title 'Father of Pluralism,' but the notion that Gus Dur was a Father of Pluralism is not entirely accurate. This is because, in his Islamic faith, Gus Dur did not justify non-Islamic religious teachings, various belief systems, or falsehoods. Rather, Gus Dur demonstrated a very high level of tolerance. This can be quoted from his lecture at the Al-Ma'soem Foundation, where Gus Dur conveyed the message that difference (in ethnicity, religion, and economy) is a wealth, not a threat, and that being a true Muslim means becoming a defender of justice for all human beings. Gus Dur never presented himself as an adherent of Pluralism in the sense of justifying all other religions or belief systems as equal in terms of their faith status. Instead, Gus Dur showed respect for every religion or belief system held by its followers. This was evident when Gus Dur shared a message while on his hospital bed at Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital. He spoke about the messages of his ancestors, particularly Sultan Adiwijaya, urging Gus Dur to use his time to focus more on developing pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools) rather than his political activities (Suryanegara Ahmad Mansur:2016).

When serving as the 4th President of the Republic of Indonesia, Gus Dur's administration issued a policy in the field of education that resulted in the equal status and recognition of all educational efforts and their graduates (abituriens or alumni) run by any Ministry. This included the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, with the exception of education managed by the Ministry of Defense and Security. For example, IAIN (State Islamic Institute) alumni could be accepted into any Ministry that required them. Similarly, students from State or Private Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High Schools) were permitted to take entrance exams for any faculty or department they chose, in accordance with their background.

4.3 Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur's) Thought in the Context of Diversity in Indonesian Life and the Relationship Between Religion and State

Gus Dur's thought concerning the concept of the relationship between religion (Islam) and the state utilized the functionalist (structural) method. Gus Dur reasoned that to formulate an appropriate relationship between religion and the state, one must adopt a functional perspective, viewing both religion and the state within a single framework that has a social function in society. It must be understood that the State and religion fundamentally have different functions, yet they can be said to be mutually complementary; one cannot exist without the presence of the other. The model Gus Dur used was the method of balance, prioritizing the creation of harmony, because, in his theory, a harmonious condition can be achieved in society if the culture, personality, and social system are compatible, both normatively and structurally.

According to Musthafa Abd. Rahman, the substance of Abdurrahman Wahid's thought regarding religion and the state is that religion is a source of inspiration for a person who is both religious and a citizen. Abdurrahman Wahid provided the example that he goes to the mosque not because of a state command, but because of a religious command. Religious teachings become a source of inspiration for Abdurrahman Wahid. Furthermore, Abdurrahman Wahid stated that religion is a driving force in life for developing religious teachings themselves, whether with the state or without the state. This statement implies that that which is personal or substantive is more important and primary than that which is in the form of formalism or symbols (Abd. Rahman, Musthafa. (2010).

According to Gus Dur, based on the Indonesian context, Islam must not become the state religion. Gus Dur's Islamic thought, within the framework of cosmopolitan Islam—which establishes a connection between religion and nationhood—is a continuation of a pattern of religious understanding and renewal. Gus Dur assessed that Islam must be used as a complementary factor alongside other national components to solve the problems faced by the nation. If the state's foundation were to formally and legally use Islam, it is feared that this would create psychological problems for non-Muslim citizens—who are also part of Indonesia—in participating in nation-building. Should that happen, it would cause the bond of nationhood established by Indonesia's founding fathers to become fragile.

The attitude of tolerance that Gus Dur taught and practiced was not merely about respecting and appreciating the beliefs or stances of people from different religions, but was also accompanied by a willingness to accept good teachings from other religions. In an essay titled 'Intelektual di Tengah Eksklusivisme' (Intellectuals Amidst Exclusivism), Gus Dur once said:

"I read, master, and apply the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the yellow books (kitab kuning) not exclusively for Muslims. I am willing to use whichever [source] is correct, suitable, and in accordance with my conscience. I don't care if the quote is from the Gospel or the Bhagavad Gita; if it is insightful, we accept it. In national issues, we use Qur'anic verses functionally, not to be believed theologically. Theological conviction is used in fundamental matters. But application is a matter of interpretation. Talking about interpretation means it is no longer a theological issue, but an issue of thought» (Abdurrahman Wahid:2010).

Therefore, Gus Dur's teachings and thoughts on pluralism are not an idea stating that all religions are the same. Instead, we all acknowledge and realize that every religion has different teachings. And these differences should not be a reason to sow conflict and division, as encapsulated in the value of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity—Different yet still one). This is the underlying principle that difference can actually serve as a catalyst for understanding God's evident grace and for continuously weaving harmony and tolerance. Consequently, the relevance of Gus Dur's contemporary Islamic education thought can be applied because difference and diversity are inevitable necessities. Moreover, within these differences and diversity lie unique qualities, allowing one group to complement and complete another.

4.4 Gus Dur's Thought in the Context of Multicultural Islamic Education

Multicultural Islamic Education is a form of education that utilizes a set of scientific methodologies to help an individual understand knowledge comprehensively, namely hermeneutics. The goal of multicultural Islamic education in this context is to create a civil society that upholds the concept of the social contract, meaning a concept where every individual and group has equal rights and obligations, regardless of their different backgrounds.

According to Gus Dur, the overlap between religion and culture will continuously occur as a process that will enrich life and prevent it from becoming barren (Mulyadi :2019). Islam and culture each possess their own independence, but they also have overlapping domains, similar to philosophy and science. One cannot practice philosophy without science, yet we also cannot say that science is philosophy. Between religion and culture, there is both an overlap and a difference. According to the author, in national and social life, we must be able to instill the values of harmony as a form of social ethics so that religion and diversity no longer become a source of conflict due to differences. Instead, religion (Islam), by prioritizing the values of tolerance, can realize its true ideals: justice and equality among all human beings.

Regarding what has long been a debate concerning state ideology, he stated: 'We don't need to search for an ideal state because there is no such thing as an ideal state.' Islam never mentions the issue of an ideal state, nor does it mandate one. God is pleased with Islam as your religion, not as a system of government. Islam becomes great if it does not display a political face but rather prioritizes its moral face, or in other words, Islam prioritizes politics as an institution. According to his admission, 'I look more toward achieving the true ideals of Islam, namely justice, prosperity, and equality among all human beings; therefore, if we consider Islam superior to other religions, that is actually un-Islamic and goes against the values of Islamic teachings.'

There are at least two important points that must be noted regarding the dialogical attitude directed at two branches of religious life. First, Gus Dur himself was of the opinion that the differences between religions tend to be differences at the humanitarian level. He stated that, ultimately, only God can judge who enters heaven and hell. Second, Gus Dur also took steps toward more practical aspects. For Gus Dur, the practicality of religion became something very essential in inter-religious relations, which was based on tolerance and concrete action. As a clear proof, Gus Dur was also openly willing to cooperate with anyone, whether with non-Muslim religious groups such as Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, or other Muslim groups. The fact that he subsequently dealt extensively with secular groups who did not overly concern themselves with religious doctrines or dogmas is another development.

One of Gus Dur's core ideas for portraying the image of Islamic education in societal life is Multicultural Islamic Education. This education primarily emphasizes developing views and cultural frameworks, complemented by efforts to build a societal system that aligns with the desired cultural vision.

Gus Dur viewed that Multicultural Islamic Education could be achieved through various approaches and strategies, such as the renewal and modernization of Islamic education. Gus Dur provided examples like the use of head coverings in non-religious schools (public schools), which we commonly know as the jilbab. Such outward expressions of Islam can also be proven by the increasing number of people year after year who perform the minor pilgrimage (umrah) or the Hajj. Likewise, the drive to practice Islamic teachings often stems more from communication outside of school, among various components of the Muslim community. In other words, Islamic education is not only conveyed through formal Islamic teachings in religious schools or madrasahs but also through non-religious schools scattered across the world.

Gus Dur also had a cultural strategy designed to develop Islamic education by improving the quality of these educational institutions to keep pace with the times. This goal can be achieved by deepening Islamic education's awareness of the complexity of its environment. Furthermore, Islamic education, especially the *pesantren*, must emphasize rationalist thinking to strengthen solidarity with fellow human beings regardless of ideology, origin, race, or culture. This strategy allows Islamic education to be more broadly accepted by the public through general institutions. As a clear testament, Gus Dur placed the *pesantren* in an exclusive position for the transformation of Islamic teachings. Gus Dur's thoughts remain open to championing traditional Islamic cultures, particularly the *pesantren* culture, yet without ignoring the ever-evolving conditions and developments of the modern era.

Therefore, some of Gus Dur's ideas illustrate that he was not an existentialist, but a person of faith who believed in the concept of revelation (Naqli), while also being able to integrate it with modern thought. This is one source of intellectual multiculturalism, but there are other multicultural sources as well. A person can be pluralistic because they possess a humanitarian attitude; a love for humanity makes us respect one another. In this regard, an education is considered successful when it produces individuals who are not only capable of mastering religious knowledge but who also achieve the integration of religious and non-religious knowledge. As a result, the graduates produced by the *pesantren* become a whole and well-rounded personality, one in whom a strong element of faith is combined with a balanced knowledge.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Dr. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur's) thought on contemporary Islamic education, several main conclusions regarding its relevance can be drawn:

1. Gus Dur as a Neomodernist Intellectual: Gus Dur's biographical and intellectual background, which spanned *pesantren* tradition, the Middle East, and the modern West, gave rise to a style of Islamic Neomodernism. This is relevant because he encouraged the modernization of Islamic education without sacrificing fundamental values, thus enabling it to meet the challenges of the era without being eroded by the currents of globalization.
2. Tolerance as the Foundation of Education: Gus Dur's teachings on tolerance are not merely discourse but must be internalized as a fundamental attitude in the educational process. This attitude is highly relevant for equipping students to interact peacefully within a diverse society.
3. Framework for National Diversity and Education: Gus Dur's thought, which places Indonesian diversity and the relation between religion and state within a complete framework (inclusive and non-sectarian), provides a philosophical foundation for the education curriculum. Islamic education must be oriented toward patriotism (love for the homeland) and an appreciation for Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution as the national consensus.
4. Urgency of Multicultural Islamic Education: The concept of Multicultural Islamic Education championed by Gus Dur represents the peak of his thought's relevance. This educational model seeks to integrate Islamic and Indonesian values, making it key to preventing polarization and radicalization among Muslim students. A curriculum imbued with Gus Dur's thought will produce individuals who are not only pious in ritual but also socially righteous and possess a national perspective.

Overall, Gus Dur's Islamic education thought offers a progressive, humanist, and inclusive framework that is desperately needed to revitalize Islamic education in Indonesia, keeping it relevant, transformative, and a vital pillar in safeguarding the harmony and integrity of the nation.

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