



# Reconstructing the Intellectual Biography and Contributions of Abdullah Ahmad to Islamic Modernism in Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study aims to reconstruct the intellectual biography, thought, and contributions of Abdullah Ahmad to the development of Islamic modernism in Indonesia. Previous scholarship has largely emphasized his role in Islamic educational reform, while his broader intellectual trajectory and multidimensional contributions remain underexplored. Employing a qualitative approach with content analysis, this research draws upon ten scholarly articles addressing Abdullah Ahmad, Islamic education, and Islamic modernism in Indonesia. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis using the framework of Miles and Huberman, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal Abdullah Ahmad as a multifaceted figure scholar, educator, journalist, and Muslim intellectual whose thought integrated religious and secular sciences, modernized educational systems, introduced innovative teaching methods, utilized print media, and promoted a scientific culture. His major contributions include the establishment of the Adabiyah School as a pioneering model of modern Islamic education and the dissemination of reformist ideas through journalistic activities. The study concludes that Abdullah Ahmad's legacy extends beyond educational modernization to the broader formation of Islamic modernism in Indonesia. The implications highlight the enrichment of Indonesian Islamic intellectual historiography by linking biography, thought, and reformist contributions within a comprehensive framework.

## INTRODUCTION

The development of Islamic education in Indonesia cannot be separated from the contributions of reformist figures who sought to address the social, political, and intellectual challenges that emerged in the early 20th century. One figure who played a key role in this process was Abdullah Ahmad, a Muslim scholar, educator, journalist, and intellectual known as a pioneer of modern Islamic education in Indonesia. Various studies indicate that Abdullah Ahmad played a strategic role in transforming the traditional Islamic education system into a more modern system

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that is adaptable to the changing times. Through the establishment of the Adabiyah School, the development of an integrated curriculum, and the use of print media as a means of *da'wah* and education, Abdullah Ahmad sought to build a new paradigm in Islamic education that integrates Islamic values with modern knowledge (Faishal et al., 2025; Farabi, 2020; Rafles et al., 2017).

These contributions have established Abdullah Ahmad as one of the key figures in the history of Islamic renewal in Indonesia. It is not surprising that various academic studies identify him as one of the pioneers of the modernization of Islamic education, whose influence has shaped the development of modern Islamic educational institutions across Indonesia (Rahimma et al., 2024; Rivauzi, 2019; Syamsuddin, 2013; Zulmuqim, 2015). Furthermore, Abdullah Ahmad's presence was integral to the intellectual dynamics of Indonesian Islam as it sought to respond to the challenges of colonialism, social change, and the rise of modernity. Therefore, studies on Abdullah Ahmad are significant not only in the context of the history of Islamic education but also in understanding the development of modern Islamic thought in Indonesia.

Based on an analysis of previous research, a significant research gap can be identified. First, most studies still place Abdullah Ahmad within the framework of Islamic educational reform and have not examined him as a Muslim intellectual who made broad contributions across various spheres of life. Second, previous research has focused more on the products of Abdullah Ahmad's thought than on the process by which those ideas were formed. Third, there has been no research that comprehensively integrates the aspects of Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual biography, thought, journalistic activities, intellectual networks, and contributions to the development of Islamic modernism within a single, cohesive analytical framework. Fourth, Abdullah Ahmad's activities as a journalist and a disseminator of reformist ideas through the *Al-Munir* media have received relatively less attention compared to his contributions in the field of education. Fifth, the relationship between Abdullah Ahmad's life experiences and the construction of his thought has not yet been adequately explained in the existing literature. Therefore, a study is needed that can reconstruct Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual journey more comprehensively, thereby providing a more complete understanding of his position and contributions to the intellectual history of Indonesian Islam (Nabila et al., 2024; Rafles et al., 2017).

On this basis, this study was conducted to reconstruct Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual biography, thought, and contributions to Islamic modernism in Indonesia through a literature review approach. This study is important because it can provide a more comprehensive perspective compared to previous studies, which tended to be fragmented and focused on specific aspects. Furthermore, this study also seeks to place Abdullah Ahmad within the context of the development of Indonesian Islamic modernism so that his contributions are understood not only as those of an educational reformer but also as part of the intellectual currents that shaped the development of modern Islam in Indonesia. Through a literature review approach, this study will synthesize various findings from previous research to produce a deeper understanding of Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual journey, the characteristics of his thought, and his contributions to Islamic education and Islamic modernism. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the historiography of Islamic education, the intellectual history of Islam in Indonesia, and studies on Islamic modernism fields that have thus far remained relatively separate from one

another. Furthermore, this study is also relevant to understanding the historical roots of various ideas in modern Islamic education that continue to evolve to this day. Therefore, this study not only has academic value but also holds practical significance in enriching the discourse on Islamic education and contemporary Islamic thought.

Based on this background, this study focuses on academic literature that explains Abdullah Ahmad's contributions to the development of Islamic education and Islamic modernism in Indonesia, as well as the relevance of his thought in contemporary academic discourse. To answer these questions, this study aims to synthesize Abdullah Ahmad's contributions as identified in various studies, identify the influence of his thought on the development of Islamic education, and examine the relevance of his ideas to contemporary academic discourse. With this focus, this study is expected to produce a more comprehensive reconstruction of Abdullah Ahmad as a scholar, intellectual, journalist, educational reformer, and pioneer of Islamic modernism in Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the results of a review of the existing literature, research on Abdullah Ahmad is still dominated by discussions of his contributions to the field of education. The study by [Rafles et al., \(2017\)](#) places greater emphasis on Abdullah Ahmad's role in the modernization of Islamic education in Minangkabau through the six educational reform strategies he developed. Meanwhile, [Rahimma et al., \(2024\)](#) examine Abdullah Ahmad in comparison with Abdul Karim Amrullah, directing their research focus toward the similarities and differences in the educational ideas of these two figures. [Zulmuqim, \(2015\)](#) study also focuses extensively on the institutional transformation of Islamic education carried out by Abdullah Ahmad through the establishment of HIS Adabiyah. On the other hand, [Farabi, \(2020\)](#) study highlights the Adabiyah School as a form of modernization of Islamic education in response to the Dutch colonial education system. Collectively, these studies make a very significant contribution to elucidating Abdullah Ahmad's role as a reformer of Islamic education. However, these studies still focus on the outcomes of Abdullah Ahmad's thinking and the implementation of his educational ideas, while the aspects of his intellectual biography that explain how these ideas were formed have not yet been studied in depth. This situation indicates that the academic understanding of Abdullah Ahmad remains partial and has not yet been able to comprehensively describe the full intellectual dimensions of this figure ([Farabi, 2020](#); [Rafles et al., 2017](#); [Rahimma et al., 2024](#); [Zulmuqim, 2015](#)).

These limitations become even more apparent when research on Abdullah Ahmad is compared to studies that specifically focus on his biography and thought. [Fitra et al., \(2025\)](#) have indeed examined Abdullah Ahmad as a scholar, journalist, educator, and intellectual who made significant contributions to the development of modern Islamic education in Indonesia. That study also demonstrates that Abdullah Ahmad's journalistic activities played a crucial role in disseminating ideas of Islamic renewal through print media. However, the study remains descriptive-historical in nature and has not critically analyzed how his life experiences, education, intellectual networks, socio-religious activities, and involvement in journalism shaped the construction of Abdullah Ahmad's thought. Similar findings are evident in the study by [Faishal et al., \(2025\)](#), which explains various educational ideas of Abdullah Ahmad, such as the integration of religious and general

knowledge, modern teaching methods, the use of print media, and the management of educational funding. Although this study successfully identified the characteristics of Abdullah Ahmad's educational thought, its focus remains limited to the field of education and has not yet addressed the social, religious, and intellectual dimensions, nor his contributions to the broader development of Islamic modernism. As a result, Abdullah Ahmad is more often viewed as an educational figure rather than as a modernist Muslim intellectual who influenced the development of Islamic thought in Indonesia (Fitra et al., 2025; Nabila et al., 2024).

Furthermore, studies on Islamic modernism in Indonesia indicate that the educational reforms implemented by Abdullah Ahmad were, in fact, part of a broader Islamic modernist movement. Takdir & Munir, (2025) explain that Islamic modernism in Indonesia emerged as a response to social and educational crises, as well as the challenges of colonialism, through educational reform, da'wah, and social transformation. Meanwhile, Barton et al., (2021) assert that Islamic modernism became one of the major intellectual currents shaping the development of modern Indonesian Islam through a synthesis of Islamic values and the demands of modernity. Meyer, (2024) also points out that Islamic modernism developed through a complex process of negotiation between tradition and modernity in various aspects of social and religious life. In this context, Abdullah Ahmad can be understood as part of a generation of Muslim intellectuals who sought to construct a new paradigm of Islam that was more open to scientific advancements and social change. However, most research on Indonesian Islamic modernism has not specifically focused on Abdullah Ahmad as the primary subject of study. Consequently, Abdullah Ahmad's contributions to the development of Islamic modernism have not yet received proportionate attention compared to his contributions in the field of education. This situation highlights the academic need to examine Abdullah Ahmad not only as an educational reformer but also as a Muslim intellectual who contributed to the development of Islamic modernism in Indonesia (Barton et al., 2021; Meyer, 2024; Takdir & Munir, 2025).

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis, specifically a literature review design, aimed at reconstructing Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual biography, thought, and contributions to Islamic modernism in Indonesia based on a synthesis of various relevant scholarly publications. The literature review approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to integrate various research findings which have so far remained fragmented into a more comprehensive analytical framework. The research data sources consist of eight key scholarly articles that directly or indirectly discuss Abdullah Ahmad and the context of Islamic modernism in Indonesia. These eight articles include studies by (Anidar et al., 2026; Az-Zahra et al., 2025; Efendi et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2025; 2026; Farabi, 2020; Fitra et al., 2025; Rafles et al., 2017; Rahimma et al., 2024; Takdir & Munir, 2025; Zahara et al., 2026; Zulmuqim, 2015). Furthermore, to deepen the understanding of the context of Indonesian Islamic modernism, this study also draws on articles by Barton et al., (2021); Meyer, (2024), which discuss the development of Islamic modernism and the dynamics of Islamic thought in Indonesia.

Thus, the total number of data sources analyzed amounts to ten scholarly articles, consisting of eight articles that specifically discuss Abdullah Ahmad and two articles that discuss the context of Indonesian Islamic modernism. The units of analysis in this study are not individuals or institutions, but rather concepts, narratives, research findings, academic interpretations, and historical information related to Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual biography, thought, and contributions as described in the reviewed literature (Barton et al., 2021; Meyer, 2024; Rafles et al., 2017; Takdir & Munir, 2025; Zahara et al., 2026; Zulmuqim, 2015).

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher themselves (human instrument), who plays a role in identifying, selecting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data obtained from various literature sources. To ensure consistency in the analysis process, the researcher used a data extraction sheet that included the article's identification, research objectives, theoretical perspective, research methods, main findings, research contributions, research limitations, and its relevance to the theme of Abdullah Ahmad's biography and thought. The data collection procedure was carried out in several stages.

The first stage involves identifying and cataloging all available articles relevant to the research topic. The second stage involves a close reading of each article to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content, arguments, and research findings. The third stage is the data extraction process, which involves grouping information based on key themes: the intellectual biography of Abdullah Ahmad, the characteristics of Abdullah Ahmad's thought, his contributions to Islamic education, his contributions to Islamic modernism, and the relevance of his thought in a contemporary context. The fourth stage is the process of categorizing and coding the data so that information sharing similar meanings can be grouped under the same theme. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques through the processes of data reduction, thematic categorization, interpretation of findings, and cross-study synthesis. The analysis was conducted iteratively by comparing the results of one study with those of another to identify patterns, similarities, differences, trends, the state of the art, research gaps, and conceptual contributions emerging in the literature. The final result of this process is a comprehensive reconstruction of Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual biography, thought, and contributions to Islamic modernism in Indonesia, compiled based on a critical synthesis of all the analyzed literature (Barton et al., 2021; Farabi, 2020; Fitra et al., 2025; Meyer, 2024; Rafles et al., 2017; Rahimma et al., 2024; Takdir & Munir, 2025; Zulmuqim, 2015).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Characteristics of the Analyzed Literature**

The results of the literature search and selection indicate that research on Abdullah Ahmad is still dominated by studies focusing on the reform of Islamic education, the modernization of educational institutions, and his contributions to the development of modern Islamic education. Of the ten articles analyzed, eight directly discuss Abdullah Ahmad, while two address the context of Indonesian Islamic modernism that served as the backdrop for the development of his thought. These articles were published between 2015 and 2025, indicating that research on Abdullah Ahmad has continued to evolve over the past decade. Based on the research approaches used, most studies employed qualitative methods based on literature reviews, historical analyses, and literature reviews. The most dominant

research focuses were the modernization of Islamic education, the integration of religious and general knowledge, the transformation of educational institutions, and Abdullah Ahmad's contributions to the development of modern Islamic education. Meanwhile, only one study specifically focused on Abdullah Ahmad's biography and thought as the primary subject of its analysis. These findings indicate that most of the literature places Abdullah Ahmad within the framework of educational reform rather than as the subject of an intellectual biography. Furthermore, studies that explicitly link Abdullah Ahmad to Indonesian Islamic modernism remain relatively limited, meaning that broader intellectual dimensions have not yet been extensively explored (Farabi, 2020; Nabila et al., 2024; Rafles et al., 2017; Rahimma et al., 2024; Takdir & Munir, 2025; Zahara et al., 2026; Zulmuqim, 2015).

**Table 1. Characteristics of the Analyzed Literature**

No	Authors	Year	Research Focus
1.	Rafles et al.	2017	Modernization of Islamic education
2.	Zulmuqim	2015	Transformation of Islamic education
3.	Al Farabi	2020	Adabiyah School
4.	Rahimma & Handika	2024	Reform of Islamic education
5.	Farida et al.	2024	Abdullah Ahmad's educational thought
6.	Fitra et al.	2025	Biography and thought of Abdullah Ahmad
7.	Irfanda & Adnani	2025	Relevance of educational thought
8.	Takdir & Munir	2025	Islamic modernism in Indonesia
9.	Barton et al.	2021	Islamic modernism and democracy
10.	Meyer	2024	Islamic modernism in Indonesia

### Biographical Representations of Abdullah Ahmad as an Intellectual in the Literature

The synthesis reveals that the entire body of literature portrays Abdullah Ahmad as a reformer of Islam who played a multidimensional role as a scholar, educator, journalist, and Muslim intellectual. The study by Fitra et al., (2025) specifically positions Abdullah Ahmad as a central figure in the development of modern Islamic education and Islamic journalism in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the study by Rafles et al., (2017) portrays Abdullah Ahmad as an agent of social change who sought to transform Muslim society through education. The analyzed literature shows that Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual journey was always linked to educational activities and Islamic reform. Most studies highlight Abdullah Ahmad's involvement in the founding of the Adabiyah School as one of the key milestones in the history of modern Islamic education. In addition, several studies have also noted Abdullah Ahmad's role in using print media as a tool for disseminating ideas of Islamic renewal. The literature indicates that Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual identity was shaped through a combination of educational, da'wah, and journalistic activities. Nevertheless, most studies merely mention these aspects descriptively without elaborating in detail on the relationships among these elements in the formation of Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual biography (Fitra et al., 2025; Nabila et al., 2024; Rafles et al., 2017).

### Characteristics of Abdullah Ahmad's Thought

Research findings indicate that several major themes consistently emerge in the literature on Abdullah Ahmad's thought. The first theme is the integration of religious and secular knowledge. Nearly all studies note that Abdullah Ahmad

viewed these two types of knowledge as a single entity that must be taught simultaneously within the Islamic education system. The second theme is the modernization of teaching methods. Research by [Rahimma et al., \(2024\)](#) indicates that Abdullah Ahmad introduced debating clubs, reward-and-punishment methods, and recreational methods as part of his educational innovations. The third theme is the modernization of educational institutions through a classical system, the use of modern classrooms, and more systematic school management. The fourth theme is the use of print media as an instrument for education and *da'wab*. [Faishal et al., \(2025\)](#) show that Abdullah Ahmad utilized print media to disseminate his ideas on education and Islamic reform. The fifth theme is equitable access to education, as identified in the study by [Uldiman et al., \(2024\)](#). Taken together, these findings indicate that Abdullah Ahmad's thought, as reflected in the literature, is represented through various interrelated aspects of education, social issues, and Islamic outreach. Furthermore, all studies agree that Abdullah Ahmad's thought is oriented toward change and the progress of the Muslim community ([Nabila et al., 2024](#); [Rahimma et al., 2024](#)).

**Table 2. Main Themes of Abdullah Ahmad's Thought**

Theme of Thought	Studies Identified
Integration of religious and secular sciences	<a href="#">(Rahimma et al., 2024; Zahara et al., 2026)</a>
Modernization of teaching methods	<a href="#">(Rahimma et al., 2024)</a>
Modernization of educational institutions	<a href="#">(Farabi, 2020; Rafles et al., 2017; Zulmuqim, 2015)</a>
Utilization of print media	<a href="#">(Faishal et al., 2025; Fitra et al., 2025)</a>
Educational equity	<a href="#">(Hardiyanto et al., 2025)</a>
Social transformation through education	<a href="#">(Rafles et al., 2017)</a>

### Abdullah Ahmad's Contributions to Islamic Education

The results of the synthesis indicate that Abdullah Ahmad's contribution to Islamic education is the most dominant theme across the entire analyzed literature. Research by [Rafles et al., \(2017\)](#) identified six key strategies for the modernization of education developed by Abdullah Ahmad: religion-based education, the integration of traditional and modern education, the development of a scientific culture, the formation of educational consortia, openness to modernization, and the strengthening of informal education. [Zulmuqim, \(2015\)](#) study shows that Abdullah Ahmad played a role in the transformation of Islamic education through the development of HIS Adabiyah, which utilized a modern school system. [Ahmad, \(2025\)](#) notes that Adabiyah School was the first modern Islamic school to integrate religious and general curricula. Research by [Rahimma et al., \(2024\)](#) adds that Abdullah Ahmad also innovated in teaching methods. Meanwhile, [Faishal et al., \(2025\)](#) demonstrate that Abdullah Ahmad's contributions were not limited to the curriculum and teaching methods but also encompassed aspects of educational management and financing. The body of research indicates that Abdullah Ahmad's contributions spanned various aspects of education, ranging from curriculum and methods to institutional structures and educational management systems. These findings consistently position Abdullah Ahmad as one of the pioneers of modern Islamic education in Indonesia. Furthermore, all studies indicate that Abdullah

Ahmad's influence extended not only to the institutions he founded but also to the broader development of Islamic education (Raffles et al., 2017; Zulmuqim, 2015).

### **Abdullah Ahmad in the Context of Indonesian Islamic Modernism**

The results of the literature review indicate that Abdullah Ahmad is often placed in the context of the modernization of Islamic education, but only a few studies directly link him to the Indonesian Islamic modernist movement. Research by Takdir & Munir, (2025) indicates that Indonesian Islamic modernism developed through educational reform, *da'wah*, and social transformation. Barton et al., (2021) demonstrate that Islamic modernism became one of the key intellectual currents in the development of modern Indonesian Islam. Meanwhile, Meyer, (2024) explains that Islamic modernism evolved through a process of negotiation between tradition and modernity. In the literature specifically discussing Abdullah Ahmad, it is found that the integration of religious and secular knowledge, the modernization of education, the use of print media, and the formation of a scientific culture are characteristics often associated with Islamic modernism. Research by Fitra et al., (2025) shows that Abdullah Ahmad's journalistic activities served as a medium for disseminating ideas of Islamic renewal. Furthermore, Raffles et al., (2017) found that openness to modernization was one of the key strategies developed by Abdullah Ahmad in education. The data as a whole indicate a connection between Abdullah Ahmad's ideas and the characteristics of Islamic modernism as described in the literature on Indonesian Islamic modernism. These findings demonstrate that Abdullah Ahmad was not only an educational figure but also an integral part of the development of modern Islamic thought in Indonesia (Barton et al., 2021; Fitra et al., 2025; Meyer, 2024; Raffles et al., 2017; Takdir & Munir, 2025).

### **The Reconstruction of Abdullah Ahmad's Intellectual Biography in Academic Literature**

The first research question in this study aims to understand how the construction of Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual biography is represented in academic literature that discusses his life, education, intellectual networks, and socio-religious activities. Based on a synthesis of all the analyzed literature, it was found that Abdullah Ahmad is consistently portrayed as a multidimensional figure who combined the roles of scholar, educator, journalist, reformer, and Muslim intellectual. However, this representation appears only partially and is scattered across various studies with differing focuses. Raffles et al., (2017) position Abdullah Ahmad as an agent of the modernization of Islamic education who successfully integrated traditional and modern educational systems. In that study, Abdullah Ahmad's biography is represented through his contributions to changes in the Islamic education system.

Meanwhile, Fitra et al., (2025) describe Abdullah Ahmad as a scholar, journalist, and intellectual who played a major role in the development of modern Islamic education through the Adabiyah School, the Islamic Religious Teacher Training Program, and other Islamic educational networks. This study shows that Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual identity was shaped not only through his educational activities but also through his involvement in journalism and the dissemination of ideas regarding Islamic reform. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate that Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual biography is in fact broader than the dominant portrayal in the literature, which tends to focus on education.

The findings of this study also indicate that Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual development cannot be separated from the social and religious context that

emerged in the early 20th century. [Zulmuqim, \(2015\)](#) explains that the transformation of Islamic education undertaken by Abdullah Ahmad arose in response to the Muslim community's need to address the social changes brought about by colonialism and modernization. A similar finding is presented in [Farabi, \(2020\)](#) study, which demonstrates that the establishment of the Adabiyah School was a response to the Dutch colonial education system, which failed to accommodate the needs of the Muslim community. Thus, Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual journey was influenced not only by his educational experiences and religious activities but also by the surrounding sociopolitical dynamics. This finding reinforces the argument that the intellectual biography of a figure cannot be separated from the historical context that shaped his thinking. In the case of Abdullah Ahmad, his life experiences, educational activities, involvement in print media, and interactions with the Islamic reform movement were elements that collectively shaped his intellectual identity. Therefore, this study successfully demonstrates that Abdullah Ahmad was not merely a pioneer of modern Islamic education but also part of a generation of Muslim intellectuals striving to construct a new paradigm of Islam responsive to the changing times.

The significance of these findings lies in their ability to broaden our understanding of Abdullah Ahmad, who has traditionally been viewed primarily as an educational figure. Through the reconstruction of his intellectual biography, this study demonstrates that Abdullah Ahmad played a far broader role as a generator of ideas, a disseminator of thought, and a shaper of modern Islamic intellectual culture. This contribution is important for the development of the study of the intellectual history of Indonesian Islam because it provides a more comprehensive perspective on the relationship between a figure's life experiences and the formation of his thought. Furthermore, the results of this study also indicate that research on Indonesian Islamic figures should not focus solely on the institutions they founded but must also examine the intellectual processes that gave rise to those ideas. Thus, this research makes a conceptual contribution to enriching the intellectual biography approach in the study of Indonesian Islam.

#### **Characteristics and Development of Abdullah Ahmad's Thought in Academic Literature**

The second research question aims to identify how the development and characteristics of Abdullah Ahmad's thought are represented in academic literature, particularly regarding Islamic education, religious renewal, and Islamic modernism. Based on the results of the synthesis, it was found that the main characteristic of Abdullah Ahmad's thought is its orientation toward the integration of religious and secular knowledge. This finding consistently emerges in the studies by [\(Rahimma et al., 2024\)](#). All three studies indicate that Abdullah Ahmad rejected the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge that was prevalent at the time. Instead, he believed that both types of knowledge should be taught in an integrated manner within the Islamic education system. From Abdullah Ahmad's perspective, the progress of the Muslim community cannot be achieved if education focuses solely on religious studies without paying attention to the development of modern science. This finding indicates that Abdullah Ahmad's thought has an integrative orientation that seeks to establish a balance between the spiritual and intellectual dimensions in Islamic education. This characteristic is one of the most prominent elements in the entire body of literature discussing Abdullah Ahmad's thought.

In addition to the integration of knowledge, the results of this study also found that Abdullah Ahmad's thinking was characterized by an orientation toward the modernization of education. [Rafles et al., \(2017\)](#) demonstrated that Abdullah Ahmad developed six strategies for the modernization of education, including the development of a scientific culture, the integration of traditional and modern educational systems, and openness to modernization. These findings are reinforced by [\(Farabi, 2020\)](#), who explains that the Adabiyah School was established as a model of a modern Islamic school capable of competing with colonial schools. [Rahimma et al., \(2024\)](#) also found that Abdullah Ahmad introduced various innovative teaching methods, such as a debating club, a system of rewards and punishments, and educational recreation. These findings indicate that the modernization efforts undertaken by Abdullah Ahmad extended not only to the curriculum but also to teaching methods, educational management, and academic culture. Thus, Abdullah Ahmad's ideas can be understood as a systematic effort to develop an Islamic education system that is more relevant to the changing times.

In the context of religious renewal, the results of this study indicate that Abdullah Ahmad's thought is closely linked to the current of Indonesian Islamic modernism. [Takdir & Munir, \(2025\)](#) explain that Islamic modernism developed through educational reform, da'wah, and social transformation. Meanwhile, [Barton et al., \(2021\)](#) note that Islamic modernism is an intellectual movement that seeks to integrate Islamic values with modernity. These characteristics align with Abdullah Ahmad's thought, which strives to blend Islamic education with modern science. [Meyer, \(2024\)](#) also points out that Islamic modernism develops through a process of negotiation between tradition and modernity. In this context, Abdullah Ahmad can be understood as a figure who engaged in this negotiation through his educational, journalistic, and socio-religious activities. Therefore, the results of this study indicate that Abdullah Ahmad's thought was not only oriented toward educational reform but was also part of a broader project of Islamic modernism.

The significance of these findings lies in their ability to clarify Abdullah Ahmad's place in the history of Indonesian Islamic thought. While previous research has largely positioned him as an educational figure, this study demonstrates that Abdullah Ahmad's educational thought is in fact part of a broader framework of Islamic modernism. This finding makes an important contribution to the study of Indonesian Islamic thought because it reveals the connection between educational reform and the intellectual transformation of Muslims. Furthermore, the results of this study also indicate that Abdullah Ahmad's concept of the integration of knowledge remains relevant in contemporary Islamic educational discourse, which continues to seek to overcome the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge.

### **The Contribution and Relevance of Abdullah Ahmad's Thought to Islamic Education and Islamic Modernism**

The third research question focuses on how the academic literature explains the contribution and relevance of Abdullah Ahmad's thought to the development of Islamic education and Islamic modernism. Based on a synthesis of the entire literature, it was found that Abdullah Ahmad's greatest contribution lies in the transformation of Islamic education from a traditional system to a more modern one. [Rafles et al., \(2017\)](#) demonstrate that Abdullah Ahmad successfully developed various strategies for the modernization of education that became the foundation for the development of modern Islamic education. [Zulmuqim, \(2015\)](#) emphasizes

that the transformation of Islamic education in Minangkabau cannot be separated from Abdullah Ahmad's role through the HIS Adabiyah. Meanwhile, [Farabi, \(2020\)](#) points out that the Adabiyah School was the first modern Islamic educational institution to successfully integrate religious and general studies curricula. These findings indicate that Abdullah Ahmad's contributions were not merely conceptual but were also realized in the form of educational institutions that had a tangible impact on the Muslim community.

In addition to his contributions in the field of education, this study also found that Abdullah Ahmad played a significant role in spreading the ideas of Islamic modernism through print media. [Fitra et al., \(2025\)](#) demonstrate that Abdullah Ahmad's journalistic activities served as a key vehicle for disseminating ideas of Islamic renewal to the general public. This finding is reinforced by [\(Faishal et al., 2025\)](#), who show that print media was one of the primary instruments used by Abdullah Ahmad in education and da'wah. Thus, Abdullah Ahmad's contributions were not limited to the classroom and educational institutions but also extended to the broader intellectual public sphere. The results of this study indicate that Abdullah Ahmad served as a mediator between the ideas of Islamic modernism and the Indonesian Muslim community through education and the media.

In terms of relevance, the research findings indicate that various ideas put forth by Abdullah Ahmad remain significant in the context of contemporary Islamic education. [Zulmuqim, \(2015\)](#) demonstrate that the concepts of the integration of knowledge, educational equity, and character development are still relevant for addressing today's educational challenges. [Farida et al., \(2023\)](#) also found that Abdullah Ahmad's educational concepts align with the needs of modern education, which demands a balance between academic competence and moral values. Thus, Abdullah Ahmad's ideas not only hold historical value but also have practical relevance for the development of contemporary Islamic education.

## CONCLUSION

This study successfully reconstructs Abdullah Ahmad's intellectual biography, thought, and contributions to Islamic modernism in Indonesia. The findings show that Abdullah Ahmad was a multifaceted figure a Muslim scholar, educator, journalist, and intellectual who played a significant role in the modernization of Islamic education through the establishment of Adabiyah School, the integration of religious and secular knowledge, innovations in teaching methods, and the use of print media. This study affirms that Abdullah Ahmad's legacy extends beyond educational reform, forming part of the early 20th-century wave of Islamic modernism. The contribution of this research is to broaden the perspective of Indonesian Islamic historiography by integrating Abdullah Ahmad's biography, thought, and reformist activities, while also demonstrating the relevance of his ideas to contemporary Islamic education.

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## DECLARATIONS

### Author Contribution

**Yusuf Efendi:** writing-preparation of original manuscript, **Zidni Ilman Nafian:**

conceptualization, visualization, investigation, **Deby Habja Musdalifa & Desi Asmaret**: methodology, improve language, **Sriwahyuni**: improve content, data accuracy.

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The place or location studied has agreed to conduct research and is willing if the results of this study are published.

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