Reconstruction of Islamic Boarding Schools: Curriculum, Management and Educational Ethics Perspective of KH. Imam Zarkasyi

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Abstract
Islamic boarding schools (pesantrens) in Indonesia, as pivotal institutions of Islamic education, face existential challenges from the wave of globalization. Immediate reform and reconstruction of Islamic education and its institutions are necessary to ensure their continued relevance and efficacy in a rapidly evolving global context. This article explores the educational reforms proposed by KH. Imam Zarkasyi, a renowned figure in Islamic education, focusing on the modernization of traditional pesantrens. This study delves into Zarkasyi's concepts for curriculum reform, enhancement of institutional management, and the promotion of fundamental pesantren values. Zarkasyi emphasized an Islamic education curriculum that integrates modern sciences alongside religious studies, advocating for proficiency in both Arabic and English. Additionally, he proposed robust management of pesantren institutions and contemporary oversight of waqf. The core values of sincerity, simplicity, independence, brotherhood, and freedom are highlighted as essential to the Gontor Islamic Boarding School's philosophy. Further research is required to assess the applicability of Zarkasyi's model in the broader context of modernizing traditional Islamic education to meet contemporary demands.

Keywords: Reconstruction, Islamic Boarding School, Curriculum, Management and Educational Ethics

INTRODUCTION
Islamic boarding schools, or pesantrens, are traditional educational institutions that emerged alongside the arrival of Islam in Java. These schools represent the oldest and most original educational institutions in Indonesian society (Mardiyah, 2022; Ziemek, Soendjojo, & Siregar, 1986). As such, they are considered a continuation of the educational systems from the pre-Islamic Hindu-Buddhist era, embodying both the essence of Islam and Indonesian authenticity. Islam, therefore,
needed only to continue and Islamize the existing educational frameworks (Madjid, 1997).

These institutions have historically integrated the Islamic education system—where Islamic teachings are imparted—with the prevailing local culture. This integration was a hallmark of early Islamic propagation, emphasizing flexibility and tolerance towards pre-existing beliefs and values (Siradj, Wahid, & Zuhri, 1999). Thus, pesantrens successfully contextualized Islamic teachings within local cultures. They managed to present and teach Islam in a manner intimately connected with pre-Islamic values, beliefs, and rituals. In some instances, these pre-Islamic beliefs and rites have been maintained and practiced with Islamic content and style by some Muslim communities up to the present day (Azra, 1999; Madjid, 1974).

KH. Imam Zarkasyi is one of the prominent figures in the establishment and modernization of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. His innovative ideas and leadership in creating modern Islamic boarding schools are well documented (Bakar, 1997). His leadership at the Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo Islamic boarding school and his influence both within Indonesia and internationally underscore his contributions (Bakar, 2007). To further develop theories of modern Islamic education, it is essential to examine his ideas and experiences, particularly in the context of Islamic boarding school reform.

This article aims to investigate and synthesize the thoughts of KH. Imam Zarkasyi regarding the reform of Islamic boarding schools. The focus will be on his concepts related to curriculum reform, the establishment of contemporary Islamic boarding schools, the administration of these institutions, enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning process, and addressing issues in Islamic education. This study utilizes a variety of sources, including books, journals, magazines, unpublished documents, and primary and secondary library resources, to explore and reconstruct his ideas.

By analyzing KH. Imam Zarkasyi’s perspectives, this article seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on modernizing traditional Islamic educational institutions while preserving their unique cultural and religious heritage.

METHOD

This study employed a library research method, utilizing books, journals, and relevant websites as data sources. The research focused on materials related to the reconstruction of Islamic boarding schools. Key data sources included various books and journals containing pertinent information. Documentation techniques were employed to gather relevant data from these sources. This method involves collecting information about objects or variables in the form of notes, opinions, and other related materials (Suharsimi, 2006). The research tools included a detailed
planning stage, a research note format, and a checklist for classifying research materials.

For data analysis, the content analysis method was applied. This method involves deriving valid conclusions from the collected data and reexamining these conclusions in light of new information (Klaus, 1993). The process included selecting, comparing, combining, and sorting different meanings to find information relevant to the study. To ensure the validity of the research procedure and to eliminate potential misinformation or human error, a thorough reference check was performed. This methodological approach provided a systematic framework for analyzing the thoughts and contributions of KH. Imam Zarkasyi towards the modernization of Islamic boarding schools.

By adhering to these methods, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and accurate reconstruction of Zarkasyi’s educational reforms, contributing valuable insights to the field of modern Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Short Biography of KH. Imam Zarkasyi

Imam Zarkasyi was born in Gontor Ponorogo on March 21, 1910, and passed away on March 30, 1985. He was the youngest of seven children, and his lineage traced back to prominent Javanese elites. His father, R. Santoso Anombesari, was a third-generation leader of the first Pondok Gontor and a descendant of the Sultan of Cirebon. His mother, Siti Partiyah, was related to Regent Suriadiningrat, known during the Mangkubumen and Mining era (Biography, 1996a).

Orphaned at the age of ten when his father died, Imam Zarkasyi’s early education in religious fundamentals was influenced by his mother’s guidance. He commenced his religious education at the Islamic boarding school in Joresan, studying both in the morning and afternoon. He later continued his education at the Ongko Loro school in Jetis and Jamsarem Islamic Boarding School in Solo (Biography, 1996a).

In addition to his contributions to the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Imam Zarkasyi was actively involved in social and state activities, including roles in the Madiun Residency Religion Office and the Ministry of Religion. He played a significant role in the birth of the SKB of 3 Ministers, which altered the status of madrasas within the national education system (Biography, 1996b). Internationally, he represented Indonesia at significant conferences and was a member of the Advisory Council of the Indonesian Ulema Council, contributing to Islamic education reform in Indonesia.
Modern Pondok as an Alternative to Islamic Boarding School Reconstruction

Imam Zarkasyi critically viewed traditional Islamic boarding schools and sought to address several shortcomings. Firstly, the curriculum of traditional Islamic boarding schools primarily focused on religious knowledge, which limited graduates’ opportunities in broader societal roles. This narrow focus made it challenging for graduates to secure employment requiring a diverse knowledge base and technical skills.

Secondly, traditional teaching methodologies often left students with poor Arabic communication skills. Despite rigorous study, students struggled to speak and write Arabic fluently, leading to a lack of confidence and inferiority in broader contexts.

Thirdly, the management of traditional Islamic boarding schools was centralized and undemocratic. The kiai held full authority, making all administrative decisions, which could lead to inefficiency and hinder progressive development if the kiai lacked the necessary competence or democratic values (Suharto, 2014).

To address these issues, Zarkasyi emphasized educational objectives that prepare students for societal roles, quoting the Prophet Muhammad SAW’s hadith, "Khair al-nas anfa’uhum li al-nas" (the best human being is the one who is most beneficial to the most people). He believed in modernizing Islamic boarding schools, as evidenced by his development of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. This modernization was informed by comparative studies with renowned institutions like Al-Azhar University, Syanggit, Aligarh Muslim University, and Shantiniketan, integrating their strengths into the Gontor system (Nata, 2000; A. S. Zarkasyi, 2005; Mardiyah, 2022).

Main Themes of Thought

Renewal of the Islamic Education Curriculum

Imam Zarkasyi asserted that clear educational objectives are crucial for the advancement of Muslims. He developed a comprehensive curriculum at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, balancing general and religious education. This included subjects such as creed, tafsir, hadith, fiqh, natural sciences, history, and psychology, alongside Arabic and English language studies (Nadjib, 2013; Karel, 1994). Practical and vocational skills were also emphasized, preparing students for societal roles.

Islamic Boarding School Institutional Management

Institutionally, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor was unique in its independence and democratic management. Unlike other Islamic boarding schools, it was free from political influences and organizational affiliations, adhering to the motto "Gontor above and for all groups" (Suharto, 2014). The waqf system established by Zarkasyi and his brothers ensured sustainable management and
governance, promoting transparency and accountability (Bakar, 2007; Mardiyah, 2012; Setiawan, 2018).

In contrast to traditional Islamic boarding schools where decision-making was centralized in the hands of the kiai, Gontor implemented a more democratic and transparent management system. This system involved the establishment of the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Waqf Board, which became the highest governing body of the institution. The Waqf Board was responsible for appointing the kiai for a five-year term, ensuring that the management was not solely dependent on the kiai’s capabilities. This approach promoted a more collaborative and accountable management structure, which was vital for the institution’s sustainability and growth (Bakar, 2007; Mardiyah, 2012; Setiawan, 2018).

Instilling Islamic Boarding School Ethics

Imam Zarkasyi instituted a dormitory system, similar to other Islamic boarding schools, concurrently with the founding of Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) as a madrasa system in 1937. Like students at various other Islamic boarding schools, KMI students were compelled to live in dorms. They were students both inside and outside of the classroom. They received instruction, direction, and care from the kiai. While kiai Ahmad Sahal served as both a carer and a kiai figure, Imam Zarkasyi served as both the madrasa’s (KMI) director and a kiai figure. The ideals and spirit of traditional Islamic boarding schools were upheld despite the fact that the educational system has been updated by incorporating contemporary educational principles (Bakar, 1997; A. S. Zarkasyi, 2005).

Imam Zarkasyi’s views on Islamic boarding schools also conflicted with the views of orientalists. Orientalists in general, such as Snouch Hurgronje, only saw Islamic boarding schools from their external form. For example, the shape of the boarding house, the way of dressing, the equipment used, the layout of the building and its static traditions. Meanwhile, Imam Zarkasyi saw the Islamic boarding school from its heart and soul. He concluded that in boarding school life there were at least and efforts were made to embed five Islamic boarding school souls which he later called Pancajiwa, namely; sincerity, simplicity, independence, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom (Mahfudhoh, Abu Bakar, & Fuad, 2023; Mustofa, 2019; Romdoni & Malihah, 2020).

Sincerity

At Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, sincerity was a core value that influenced the lives of all boarding school members. The kiai and teachers worked without receiving salaries, dedicating their resources to the institution’s development. This selfless dedication was intended to serve as a role model for the students, encouraging them to adopt a sincere approach to their studies and future...
endeavors. The spirit of sincerity was not just a moral lesson but a practical demonstration of commitment and service (Biography, 1996a).

**Simplicity**

Simplicity was another fundamental value. Zarkasyi taught that living according to one's means and needs was essential. This principle was embedded in the daily lives of the students, who were encouraged to lead modest lifestyles. The emphasis was on functionality and practicality rather than luxury, which helped students develop a sense of contentment and focus on their educational and spiritual growth (Biography, 1996a).

**Independence**

The dormitory system at Gontor played a crucial role in fostering independence among students. They were responsible for managing their own needs and participating in various leadership and organizational activities. This system aimed to develop students' self-sufficiency and leadership skills, preparing them to take on responsibilities in their future roles within society. The principle of independence was also reflected in the institution's financial autonomy, as it operated based on independent businesses without relying on external support (Bakar, 2007).

**Islamic Brotherhood (Ukhuwwah Islamiyah)**

Zarkasyi placed a strong emphasis on fostering a sense of Islamic brotherhood among students from diverse backgrounds. By integrating students from various regions and ethnicities and promoting a culture of unity and mutual respect, he aimed to create a cohesive and supportive community. This was achieved through systematic efforts, such as mixed dormitory arrangements and the use of a common language for communication. The naming of dormitories and school buildings after various regions and countries further reinforced the spirit of unity and inclusiveness (Nata, 2000).

**Freedom**

Finally, the spirit of freedom was instilled through democratic educational practices. Students were encouraged to participate in the planning and execution of activities, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility. The democratic nature of the institution's management allowed students to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills, which were essential for their personal and professional growth. The emphasis on freedom also extended to the students' ability to choose their subjects and paths within the educational framework, fostering an environment of intellectual and personal autonomy (Nata, 2000).

In conclusion, Imam Zarkasyi's contributions to Islamic boarding school education reform have had a profound and lasting impact. His innovative
approaches to curriculum development, institutional management, and ethical education have set a benchmark for modernizing traditional Islamic educational institutions while preserving their unique cultural and religious heritage. By integrating traditional values with modern educational principles, Zarkasyi created a model of Islamic education that is relevant, dynamic, and capable of meeting the challenges of contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

Imam Zarkasyi is a pivotal figure in the reform of Islamic education in Indonesia, particularly with regard to Islamic boarding schools (pesantrens). His efforts have ensured that many traditional values of Islamic boarding schools are upheld amidst the challenges of globalization and modernization. Recognizing the need for reform, Imam Zarkasyi implemented significant changes to strengthen institutional governance, modernize the curriculum, and integrate traditional values within a contemporary framework.

Imam Zarkasyi emphasized that education should aim for a balanced and fulfilling life in both this world and the hereafter, moving beyond the traditional focus solely on the afterlife. He introduced a curriculum that combines 100% general knowledge with 100% religious knowledge. This dual approach ensures that students are well-versed in both modern sciences and religious studies, supported by proficiency in both Arabic and English.

Reforms in institutional management at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor included the adoption of a collaborative and transparent leadership model. This shift was critical in promoting democratic values and accountability within the institution. Furthermore, the establishment of a waqf institution was a strategic move to ensure the school’s independence and sustainability. The waqf body owns all assets of the institution, thus removing individual ownership and ensuring that the school’s administration is managed collectively.

In the teaching of Islamic boarding school ethics, the principles of freedom, independence, Islamic brotherhood (ukhuwah Islamiyah), simplicity, and sincerity are emphasized. These values are integral to the school’s ethos and are instilled in students through both their academic and daily life experiences.

Imam Zarkasyi’s reforms have set a benchmark for modernizing Islamic educational institutions while preserving their unique cultural and religious heritage. His work demonstrates that it is possible to integrate traditional Islamic values with modern educational practices, creating a dynamic and relevant model for contemporary Islamic education.
REFERENCES


