

ISLAMIC EDUCATION REFORM IN THE MIDDLE EAST: Tradition and Modernization in Education in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey

Kemas Ahmad Fadhluzzakiyy, Munir, Nurlaila

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang

Jl. Prof. K.H. Zainal Abidin Fikri KM. 3.5, Palembang, Sumatera Selatan,

E-mail: kemasahmadfadhluzzakiyy_24052160038@radenfatah.ac.id, munir_uin@radenfatah.ac.id,
nurlaila_uin@radenfatah.ac.id

Abstract: This abstract aims to analyze the process of Islamic education reform in three Middle Eastern countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, which face challenges in balancing the preservation of traditional Islamic values and the need for modernization based on science and technology. This study uses a qualitative approach with literature review to explore educational policies and socio-political dynamics that influence the transformation of Islamic education in the three countries. The findings reveal that Saudi Arabia, through its Vision 2030, focuses on moderating religious teachings and reforming the curriculum to create a globally competitive generation. Egypt attempts to integrate Al-Azhar education with the secular education system despite facing epistemological dualism. Turkey strengthens Islamic education through Imam Hatip schools under a secular state framework. This study identifies that the success of educational reform is greatly influenced by political and ideological contexts and the readiness of human resources. The implications of this study include the importance of curriculum flexibility and teacher training to respond to the challenges of the 21st century.

Keywords: Educational Reform, Tradition, Educational Modernization

Abstrak: Abstrak ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis proses reformasi pendidikan Islam di tiga negara Timur Tengah, yakni Arab Saudi, Mesir, dan Turki yang menghadapi tantangan dalam menyeimbangkan antara pelestarian nilai-nilai tradisional Islam dan kebutuhan modernisasi berbasis ilmu pengetahuan dan teknologi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi pustaka untuk mengeksplorasi kebijakan pendidikan dan dinamika sosial-politik yang mempengaruhi transformasi pendidikan Islam di ketiga negara tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Arab Saudi, melalui Visi 2030, fokus pada moderasi ajaran keagamaan dan reformasi kurikulum untuk menciptakan generasi yang kompetitif secara global. Mesir mencoba mengintegrasikan pendidikan Al-Azhar dengan sistem pendidikan sekuler meskipun menghadapi dualisme epistemologis. Turki menguatkan pendidikan Islam melalui sekolah Imam Hatip di bawah kerangka negara sekuler. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bahwa keberhasilan reformasi pendidikan sangat dipengaruhi oleh konteks politik, ideologis, dan kesiapan sumber daya manusia. Implikasi penelitian ini mencakup pentingnya fleksibilitas kurikulum dan pelatihan guru untuk merespons tantangan abad ke-21.

Kata Kunci: Reformasi Pendidikan, Tradisi, Modernisasi pendidikan

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in the Middle East region plays a very important role in shaping the social, cultural and spiritual identity of the community. Since the early history of Islamic civilization, education has been one of the main pillars supporting the intellectual, moral and social progress of Muslims. However, along with the times, Islamic education faces great challenges, especially in facing the demands of modernization and globalization (Assaad et al., 2021). In this context, Middle Eastern countries, especially Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, have undergone educational reforms that seek to balance between traditional Islamic values and the needs of modern education based on science and technology.

Islamic education in these countries is rooted in the classical Islamic scholarly tradition that emphasizes the learning of religious texts and moral-spiritual instruction. However, with the emerging challenges of globalization, technological advancement, and the integration of the international job market, there is a strong push to revamp and update the curriculum and teaching methods of Islamic education. For example, Saudi Arabia, which has been known for its conservative Islamic education system, has begun to adopt modern elements such as educational technology, data-driven education management, and a curriculum that is more adaptive to the needs of the global

market (Kusmawati et al., 2023). On the other hand, Egypt and Turkey have long faced dualism in their education systems, which combine traditional Islamic education with secular education systems that are more open to science and technology (Omar, 2020).

The actual issue behind this topic is how countries in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, are trying to balance the traditions of Islamic education with the demands of more global modernization. The reform of Islamic education in the region involves not only curriculum changes, but also a perspective on the relevance of religious education in preparing young people to face the challenges of an increasingly connected and complex world. On the one hand, the traditions of Islamic education are maintained, but on the other hand, there is a need to introduce technology, science and other skills relevant to the modern world (Habibi, 2018).

The main issue to be examined in this article is how the process of reforming Islamic education in these three countries adapts to modernization without losing its traditional values. This process poses several challenges, both in terms of policy, curriculum and human resources. How these countries respond to this paradigmatic shift, especially in the context of an increasingly globalized world of education, is the main focus of this article.

The urgency of this topic is very high, both in scientific and policy contexts. At the scholarly level, the discussion of Islamic education in the Middle East provides important insights into how integration between tradition and modernity can occur in a faith-based education system. At the policy level, this topic is very relevant to assist policy makers in Middle Eastern countries in formulating more progressive education policies, accommodating the changing times without ignoring the religious values that are the basis of their education system.

Meanwhile, although a number of studies have addressed Islamic education in the Middle East, there is an in-depth research gap regarding how this modernization process occurs practically at the policy implementation level and its effect on learning outcomes. Previous research has mostly focused on historical analysis of Islamic education or simply comparing education models between Western and Middle Eastern countries. This article aims to fill this gap by digging deeper into the Islamic education reform policies implemented in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey and how they respond to the challenges of globalization and technological development.

The implicit aim of this study is to analyze and compare the policies and strategies of Islamic education reform in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, and explore how Islamic education is transforming amidst the demands of rapid

modernization, while maintaining basic Islamic values.

The distinction of this research lies in its approach that focuses on a comparative analysis of Islamic education reform in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, emphasizing aspects of policy implementation and its impact on the education system in each country. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on historical aspects or comparisons between Islamic and Western education, this article highlights concrete changes that occur at the level of education policy and practice. This research seeks to dig deeper into how the three countries respond to the challenges of modernization and globalization in Islamic education, as well as how the reform efforts can maintain a balance between maintaining traditional values and meeting the growing needs of the modern world. Through this approach, the article offers relevant new perspectives for education policy makers and practitioners in formulating educational strategies that are more adaptive and responsive to the challenges of the 21st century.

The main contribution of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the Islamic education reform process in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey, by highlighting the dynamics that occur at the level of policy and implementation practices. It offers a comprehensive comparative perspective on how these three countries have attempted to balance the existing traditions of Islamic education

with the demands of modernization and globalization. In addition, this research contributes to formulating practical recommendations for policy makers to create education policies that are more adaptive, flexible and relevant to technological developments and the needs of the global market. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide new insights that are useful for the development of Islamic education in the future, both in local and global contexts, as well as enrich the academic literature on Islamic education in the Middle East region.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library research method that aims to analyze and compare Islamic education policies in three Middle Eastern countries-Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey-in relation to the challenges of modernization and globalization. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can provide a deeper understanding of complex phenomena, especially in terms of the dynamics of education policies that are difficult to measure quantitatively. The focus of this research is to explore how Islamic education policies in the three countries try to maintain a balance between the preservation of traditional Islamic values and the demands to keep up with the times in terms of science, technology, and global market integration.

This research is descriptive-comparative in nature, which aims to

compare Islamic education policies implemented in the three countries by taking into account their respective political, social and cultural contexts. The literature study method was chosen because it can access various relevant literature sources, both in the form of official policy documents and previous research. By using literature study, researchers can obtain various perspectives related to Islamic education policies that are not only limited to one country, but also include comparisons between countries to identify patterns and differences in their implementation.

The data sources used in this research consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data sources include official education policy documents issued by the governments of each country, such as Vision 2030 documents in Saudi Arabia, education policies related to Al-Azhar in Egypt, and education policies related to Imam Hatip school in Turkey. In addition, reports of international educational institutions and organizations involved in Islamic education reform are also used as primary data sources. Secondary data sources include indexed scholarly articles, academic books, previous studies, and reports from research institutions that discuss Islamic education and education policies in these countries over the past ten years. This secondary data is important to provide additional insights into the development of Islamic education in the Middle East and to compare how

these policies are applied in a more global context.

The data collection technique is carried out by means of a systematic literature study, which includes identifying and selecting literature sources relevant to the research topic. In collecting this data, researchers will search for documents, articles, and books that discuss Islamic education policy, especially those that touch on issues of education reform, curriculum modernization, and the influence of globalization on the Islamic education system. After collecting the data, the next step is to analyze the information obtained in depth and systematically.

The data analysis technique used in this research is content analysis, which aims to identify the main themes related to Islamic education policies, such as curriculum approaches, institutional structures, challenges in policy implementation, as well as their relevance to the needs of the global labor market. The analysis will also identify similarities and differences in education policies in the three countries and how they respond to the challenges posed by globalization. This content analysis is conducted by organizing relevant information into thematic categories, making it easier for researchers to understand the implications of the policies implemented in each country.

To ensure the accuracy and validity of the data, this research applies source triangulation and source critique.

Triangulation is done by comparing data from different sources, such as policy documents, scientific articles, and reports from international institutions. Source critique is used to evaluate the credibility and objectivity of the sources used, especially to ensure that the information obtained is not only accurate but also relevant to the research objectives. Data validity is crucial in this research because the topic under discussion-Islamic education reform-is related to policy changes that can have a direct impact on future generations.

The results of the data analysis are presented in the form of a comparative narrative that describes the comparison of Islamic education policies in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey, and how these policies adapt Islamic education to meet the demands of the times without sacrificing traditional Islamic values. With this approach, this research is expected to make a meaningful contribution in understanding how countries in the Middle East respond to the challenges of globalization in the context of Islamic education and how this reform process can be carried out while maintaining a strong religious identity.

RESULTS ND DISCUSSION

The Process of Islamic Education Reform in Saudi Arabia

The reform of Islamic education in Saudi Arabia, in the context of Saudi Vision 2030, reflects profound changes involving not only education policy, but

also broader social and economic transformation. Vision 2030, initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has the long-term goal of reducing the country's dependence on the oil sector and building a more skilled and productive human capital. Islamic education reform in Saudi Arabia focuses on two main issues: first, moderation of religious teachings that are more inclusive and pluralistic, and second, modernization of the education curriculum that is relevant to the challenges of the modern world (Maulana et al., 2024).

One of the most important elements in this reform was a major overhaul of the religious education system. Previously, Islamic education in Saudi Arabia tended to be rigid and closed, with a heavy focus on religious texts and Wahhabism-based teaching that is often considered conservative. In an effort to reduce radicalization and create a more moderate education, the Vision 2030 policy encouraged a major shift in the approach to religious education, emphasizing a more moderate, inclusive, and adaptable understanding of Islam to the modern social context (Al-Otaibi, 2020). This emphasis on moderation is also reflected in programs that teach interfaith tolerance, the reduction of extremism, as well as efforts to bring young people closer to a global outlook.

However, the concept of moderation in religious teachings needs to be explained in more depth. Moderation in religious education, in this case, could

mean an attempt to strike a balance between tradition and social development. An emphasis on a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of religion not only reduces radicalization, but also introduces a more flexible approach in dealing with the growing plurality of thoughts and beliefs in a globalized world. This opens up space for discussion on how the religious education curriculum in Saudi Arabia can reflect diversity of thought and how the values of tolerance are applied in religious classes.

On the other hand, modernizing the Islamic education curriculum is one of the main focuses of this reform. As part of Vision 2030, the education curriculum in Saudi Arabia now includes a broader field of study and is not just limited to religious studies. The curriculum increasingly includes science, technology, philosophy, as well as foreign languages, such as Mandarin, to prepare the Saudi generation for an increasingly globally connected world. The teaching of science and technology, which was once considered secondary in religious education, is now getting a larger share, with the aim of improving the quality of human resources who not only master religious teachings, but also have practical skills relevant to the international job market (Maulana et al., 2024; Sarah et al., 2023).

However, despite significant progress in integrating science and technology into the religious education curriculum, the biggest challenge is resistance from conservative groups who

still view the modernization of education as a threat to religious integrity. Many fear that the integration of science and technology in religious education will diminish the moral and spiritual values on which Islamic education is based. This criticism needs to be seen as part of a larger discussion on how to create a balance between authoritative religious education and more modern, science-based teaching. On the other hand, this policy requires significant changes at the level of teaching and teacher training, as most teachers are still trained in an education system that focuses heavily on religious teachings and lacks integration with science (Maya et al., 2024).

Furthermore, despite efforts to introduce technology in education, the access gap between cities and remote areas remains an issue that needs to be addressed. Modern and technology-based education infrastructure has been built in major cities, but in some rural areas, access to quality education and technology is still limited. Therefore, the success of Vision 2030 in reforming Islamic education depends not only on the policies adopted, but also on the state's ability to reach all levels of society, especially in less developed areas (Saad & Fahim, 2021). More inclusive approaches need to be introduced, such as improving the distribution of technology-based education infrastructure and teacher training in less developed areas, so that there is no widening gap in the quality of education.

Overall, Islamic education reform in Saudi Arabia, despite significant progress, still faces major challenges in terms of implementation and social acceptance. The process of moderating religious teachings and modernizing the curriculum are necessary steps to adapt to the needs of the times, but must be done carefully so as not to compromise the cultural and religious identity that has become an integral part of Saudi society. The success of these reforms largely depends on how the government can overcome these challenges and engage the entire society in a sustainable and inclusive process of educational transformation.

Islamic Education in Egypt: Integration between Tradition and Modernization

Islamic education in Egypt has a long history as a world center of science and Islamic studies, with Al-Azhar University as its central symbol. Since medieval times, Al-Azhar has been an influential center of traditional Islamic education. However, since modern times, especially post-19th century, Egypt has faced the challenge of educational dualism: one path based on conservative Islamic tradition and one secular path introduced by the state. This study aims to critique how Egypt manages and integrates the two systems in facing the demands of global modernization.

The dualism of education in Egypt became apparent during the era of Muhammad Ali Pasha in the early 19th

century. During that time, a secular education system was introduced to support modern state building, while Islamic education was maintained through Al-Azhar. These two systems developed in parallel, but were often disconnected, even competing in the social and intellectual discourse of Egyptian society (Karo, 2017).

This phenomenon reveals an epistemological segregation between Islamic sciences and modern science. Secular education systems that adopt Western curricula are often considered superior in producing a professional workforce, while Al-Azhar education focuses more on moral and spiritual formation. This imbalance creates social stereotypes that place religious education graduates in a marginal position in national economic development. Furthermore, the absence of a dialogical framework between these two systems creates resistance among academics and scholars to reforms coming from outside the traditional framework. Therefore, substantial integration that is able to bridge Islamic values with the needs of the times is an urgency that has not been fully answered until now.

One of the important milestones of reform occurred in 1961 through Law No. 103 issued by President Gamal Abdel Nasser. This reform changed the structure of Al-Azhar by expanding general faculties such as medicine and engineering, as well as adding the study of modern sciences to the Islamic curriculum. The aim was to

make Al-Azhar graduates more competitive in the national and global job market (Azmiyah et al., 2024). However, this state intervention in Al-Azhar's curriculum has also led to criticism from conservatives who feel that Al-Azhar's Islamic identity is being eroded.

The effort to integrate modern and traditional education cannot be separated from the thought of Muhammad Abduh. As a reformist figure, Abduh emphasized the importance of reason and rationality in Islamic education. He tried to reconstruct Al-Azhar's curriculum by including modern sciences such as mathematics and science, without neglecting classical Islamic studies. This idea was strongly challenged by traditionalist scholars, but remained an important basis in the discourse of Islamic education reform in Egypt (Takwil, 2023).

The 1961 reforms were not only a structural merger between religious and general sciences, but also a political move to control the religious narrative in Egypt. Al-Azhar, which had previously been relatively autonomous, became more beholden to state policy, especially in terms of appointments of top officials and oversight of teaching materials. This raises concerns about the independence of religious institutions in determining their own scholarly direction. Some argue that the state's influence limits the critical thinking and diversity of thought in Al-Azhar's academic environment. As a result, the integration of modern sciences is not matched by deep pedagogical

renewal, resulting in overlapping curricula without a strong epistemological synthesis.

In the contemporary context, Al-Azhar continues to face challenges between maintaining tradition and responding to modernity. One of the major challenges is ensuring the quality of teaching and the relevance of the curriculum amidst technological developments and globalization. Islamic education in Al-Azhar is still considered excellent in terms of theology and fiqh, but is often perceived as lacking in the mastery of 21st century skills. Therefore, the integration of general sciences into the traditional system remains an ongoing policy challenge (Usman & Umar, 2021).

Egypt is not the only country facing the challenge of integrating Islamic and secular education. Countries like Indonesia and Malaysia are also trying to combine these two education systems. However, Egypt's approach tends to be more conservative due to Al-Azhar's strong position in the socio-religious structure. However, Al-Azhar's institutional independence provides an opportunity for more consistent internal reforms (Dayem et al., 2024).

In the context of international comparison, the Islamic education systems in Egypt and Indonesia show different approaches in integrating tradition and modernity. In Egypt, educational dualism is still quite evident, with a separation between general and religious education. Meanwhile, Indonesia

tends to adopt an integrative approach, where general and religious subjects are taught simultaneously at different levels of education. This reflects differences in education policy and social dynamics in the two countries.

Through this study, it is seen that Egypt has undergone a long process of managing a dual education system. This dualism reflects the tug-of-war between the preservation of tradition and the demands of modernization. State policy is often a key driver of integration, but can also be a source of ideological conflict within Al-Azhar. Therefore, a collaborative approach between the state and religious authorities is necessary.

In addition, the main challenges in the integration process are not only curriculum issues, but also teaching methods and human resource development. Reforms should include teacher training, updating teaching materials, and thorough evaluation of learning outcomes. Thus, Islamic education in Egypt can become an integrative model that responds to the needs of the times without losing its Islamic identity.

This study found that the integration process between tradition and modernity in Islamic education in Egypt, especially in Al-Azhar, still faces various challenges, both at the policy level and curriculum implementation. One of the main findings is that despite efforts to incorporate modern sciences in Al-Azhar's curriculum, the integration has not fully

succeeded in creating a strong epistemological synthesis. Most of the changes made, such as the introduction of modern sciences in 1961, were more structural and political in nature, with the aim of making Al-Azhar graduates more competitive in the national and global job market. However, resistance from conservatives who maintain a traditional approach remains a major obstacle to deeper reform. Moreover, the growing influence of the state in Al-Azhar's structure also raises concerns about the loss of autonomy of religious institutions and the narrowing of space for plurality of thought in Islamic education. These findings point to the importance of dialogue between tradition and modernity, which in this context requires more comprehensive pedagogical reforms, including teacher training, development of teaching materials, and evaluation of learning outcomes that are more adaptive to the challenges of the 21st century.

This finding is closely related to the educational theory developed by Muhammad Abdurrahman, a reformist figure who emphasized the importance of rationality and renewal in Islamic education. Abdurrahman proposed that modern sciences, such as mathematics and science, be introduced in the Islamic education curriculum without sacrificing deep religious values. Abdurrahman's idea of the importance of balance between religious and modern sciences became the theoretical basis for educational reform efforts in Egypt, although its implementation still faced various

obstacles. This approach is also relevant to the theory of epistemological integration which proposes that education should be able to harmonize traditional and modern knowledge, creating a curriculum that is not only relevant to the needs of the times but also retains cultural and religious roots (Takwil, 2023). Thus, the theory of integration between tradition and modernity initiated by Abdurrahman and developed in the discourse of Islamic education in Egypt can be an important reference in formulating educational policies that are more responsive to the demands of globalization without losing its Islamic identity.

Islamic Education in Turkey: Secularization and the Influence of Modernization

The transformation of education in Turkey in the 20th century is one of the most significant examples of secularization and modernization efforts in the Islamic world. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as the founder of the Republic of Turkey, perceived that the religious-based education inherited from the Ottoman era was incompatible with the vision of the modern state he wanted to build. Therefore, education reform became one of the main agendas in the country's secularization project.

Before Atatürk's reforms, the education system in Turkey was heavily

influenced by Islam, with madrassas being the main institution for the dissemination of knowledge and religious teachings. Madrasahs played a central role in education during the Ottoman era, providing education in theology, Islamic law and other sciences. However, with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, Atatürk saw that a faith-based education system was incompatible with the modernizing and secularizing vision of the country he wanted to build.

One of the first steps taken by Atatürk in reforming education was the passing of the Tevhid-i Tedrisat (Unification of Education) Law in 1924. This law abolished the previous dual education system that separated religious and general education, and placed all educational institutions under the control of the Ministry of National Education. Madrasahs and religious schools were closed, and the educational curriculum was changed to emphasize secular science, modern languages, and technology.

Atatürk also introduced language reforms by replacing the Arabic script used in Turkish writing with the Latin script in 1928. This move aimed to increase literacy levels and break links with classical Islamic heritage. In addition, religious education was eliminated from

the public school curriculum, and Arabic and Persian lessons were abolished (Haq et al., 2023).

Atatürk's education reforms had a major impact on Islamic education in Turkey. The closure of madrassas and the removal of religious education from the public school curriculum created a void in formal religious education. Those who still wanted to maintain religious education sought alternatives through private institutions and communities that provided Islamic education informally.

However, this reform also triggered a revival of Islamic education in the form of private institutions that attempt to integrate Islamic values with modern curricula. This model of education tries to accommodate the needs of the times while still maintaining a religious identity. However, these efforts face challenges, such as resistance from communities that prefer a completely tradition-based approach to education (Nurhasanah & Sassi, 2024).

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, there was a revival of Islamic education in Turkey. The government began to support the establishment of Imam Hatip schools, which provide religious education alongside the general curriculum. These schools aim to educate students in religious sciences and Arabic,

and prepare them for careers as religious educators, imams, or in other fields related to Islam (Zengin & Hendek, 2023).

In addition, the government also sought to integrate religious values in the general curriculum, creating a balance between secular and religious education. However, there is debate over how much emphasis should be given to Islamic values in the context of general education. Some support secular and modern education, while others fight to maintain a more religious and madrassa-based education (Yilmaz, 2022).

Comparative Islamic Education: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey

Islamic education in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey shows a different approach although all three have strong historical roots in the Islamic scholarly tradition. Each country is trying to strike a balance between the existing traditions of Islamic education and the need to adapt to the challenges of modernization and globalization. All three countries face similar challenges in trying to create education systems that are relevant to the modern world without compromising deep religious values. However, the way they deal with them is heavily influenced by different social, political and ideological contexts.

In Saudi Arabia, a major reform of Islamic education is being implemented as part of the Saudi Vision 2030. This vision

aims to reduce the country's dependence on the oil sector and create more skilled human resources ready for the global market. In this context, Islamic education is undergoing a transformation that emphasizes moderation of religious teachings that are more inclusive and pluralistic, as well as curriculum modernization. This approach involves strengthening the curriculum to include not only religious studies but also science, technology, foreign languages such as Mandarin, and other knowledge relevant to the needs of the times. Despite progress in implementing these reforms, major challenges remain, especially in terms of resistance from conservative groups who see this modernization as threatening their religious identity. In addition, the issue of disparities in access to education between big cities and remote areas remains a significant obstacle, so the success of these education reforms depends largely on the government's ability to address these issues.

Meanwhile, Egypt faces the challenge of educational dualism that has existed since the colonial period. Since the time of Muhammad Ali Pasha in the 19th century, Egypt has had two educational paths running in parallel: one based on the Islamic tradition symbolized by Al-Azhar, and one secular path introduced to support modern state building. Although secular education was often considered superior in producing a professional workforce, Al-Azhar's education adhered to deep religious teachings, and this

created an epistemological segregation between modern science and Islamic sciences. Major reforms took place in 1961 through Law No. 103 which integrated modern sciences into Al-Azhar's curriculum, but this did not succeed in overcoming the deep differences between the two educational systems. Integration that was only structural in nature without being matched by changes in teaching methodology and educational philosophy led to social inequalities, where Al-Azhar graduates were often considered less prepared to meet the demands of the global workforce. In addition, despite educational reforms, many, especially conservatives, feel that state intervention in the curriculum has eroded Al-Azhar's Islamic identity. Although efforts to integrate modern education into Islamic education are ongoing, major challenges remain, mainly related to resistance to change and the difficulty in creating a synthesis between these two different educational systems.

In Turkey, Islamic education has also undergone an interesting transformation within the framework of a secular state. Since the establishment of the modern Turkish state, Islamic education has been separated from the secular national education system. However, during the reign of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, there was an increased role for Imam Hatip schools, which are schools that teach religion along with general studies. This decision reflects an

increasingly strong Islamization policy in education in Turkey, although the state has maintained its secular status. Imam Hatip schools now have an important role in educating a generation that not only understands Islamic teachings but is also equipped with general knowledge relevant to global developments. Despite efforts to combine religious education with secular education, Turkey still faces challenges in creating a harmonious balance between the two. The tension between efforts to strengthen religious education and the need to prepare young people for the challenges of globalization remains a controversial issue in Turkey.

These three countries, despite their different approaches to Islamic education reform, all face similar challenges in terms of integration between tradition and modernity. Saudi Arabia is promoting the moderation of religious teachings and the strengthening of a more global curriculum, Egypt is still struggling with the dualism between religious and secular education that is difficult to integrate substantially, while Turkey is trying to manage Islamic education in the context of an increasingly Islamist secular state. Each country is trying to adapt their Islamic education system to the needs of the times, but major challenges remain, especially in terms of resistance to change, ideological differences, and socio-economic disparities that affect policy implementation. The success of Islamic education reform in these three countries depends largely on their ability to respond

to rapid social, political and economic changes and find ways to bridge the gap between religious and general education in order to prepare future generations for

an increasingly connected and complex world. The following table compares these education policies:

Table 1. Comparison of Education Policies in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey

Aspects	Saudi Arabia	Egypt	Turkey
Main Approach	Curriculum reform for moderation	Keeping Al-Azhar's tradition with adaptation	Islamization of education in a secular framework
Key Institutions	Ministry of Education	Al-Azhar	Ministry of Education, Imam Hatip
Curriculum	Reduction of religion class hours, integration of Islamic studies	The dominance of traditional religious studies	Improved religious and moral lessons
Destination	Preparing tolerant and competitive citizens	Maintaining religious identity	Building a religious and nationalist generation
Challenge	Balancing modernization and tradition	Limitations in curriculum innovation	Concerns about secularism and pluralism
Response to Labor Market	Adjustment of the curriculum to the needs of the global economy	Limited to the religious sector	Focus on moral and religious values

The Role of Islamic Education in Maintaining Traditional Values and Facing the Demands of Modernization

Islamic education in the Middle East is in a dilemma between maintaining traditional values that have been rooted for centuries and meeting the increasingly urgent demands of modernization in the era of globalization. On the one hand, Islamic educational institutions such as Al-Azhar in Egypt or madrasas in Saudi Arabia play an important role in the preservation of Islamic scholarly traditions, such as the study of tafsir, hadith, and fiqh. However, on the other hand, the pressure to integrate

contemporary science, technology and 21st-century skills is becoming stronger as social change and the needs of the global job market continue. This paradox has led to debates about the authenticity of Islamic teachings when framed in a modern paradigm, as well as concerns about the erosion of spiritual values in the modernization process. Therefore, Islamic education is required to not only be able to maintain the continuity of transcendent values, but also be adaptive enough to respond to the growing socio-cultural dynamics. This epistemological tension is a

crucial problem in the discourse of contemporary Islamic education reform.

Challenges Facing Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey Reforming Islamic Education

Each country in the Middle East faces complex and distinctive challenges in trying to reform their Islamic education systems. Saudi Arabia, for example, within the framework of Vision 2030, has to deal with internal resistance from conservative groups when trying to deconstruct the education system that has been thick with Wahabi ideology. In Egypt, the dualism of the education system between the traditional Al-Azhar path and the national secular system has caused friction in the creation of an integrative curriculum synthesis, often ending in patchwork policies that do not touch on fundamental epistemological problems. Meanwhile, Turkey faces a contradictory paradigm shift; from the extreme secularization of the Atatürk era to the Islamization of education under the AKP government, which raises concerns about the erosion of pluralism and academic freedom. All three show that Islamic education reform is not just a technocratic issue in curriculum design, but an ideological project that is strongly influenced by the political dynamics, power relations, and socio-cultural configuration of each country.

Education Policy Focuses on Technology Integration

The integration of technology in Islamic education has been high on the agenda of education system reform in

many Middle Eastern countries, but its implementation still faces structural and cultural barriers. Saudi Arabia sets a progressive example by adopting digital learning systems and data-driven education management as part of its ambitious national transformation in Vision 2030. However, the infrastructure gap between urban and rural areas and the lack of digital competency among teachers pose major challenges to equitable access. In Egypt, despite efforts to use technology as a medium for preaching and learning, this approach has not been fully supported by adequate pedagogical updates. Turkey has made progress by facilitating the digitization of learning in Imam Hatip schools, but there are concerns that over-integrating religious content in digital formats may reduce the space for dialogue and critical reasoning. Thus, the integration of technology in Islamic education requires a systemic approach that is not only based on the provision of hardware, but also includes educator training, curriculum updates, and pedagogical approaches that are able to combine Islamic values with 21st century learning methods.

CONCLUSION

Islamic education reforms in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey reflect the dynamic between the preservation of traditional Islamic values and the demands of modernization. Saudi Arabia, through **Vision 2030**, focuses on moderation of religious teachings and

integration of modern science to support economic diversification. In Egypt, educational dualism between the traditional Al-Azhar system and secular education continues without consistent epistemological integration. Meanwhile, Turkey struggles with the ambiguity between Kemalist secularism and the Islamization of education under the AKP regime, creating tension between religious identity and pluralism. In general, these reforms show that Islamic education is not only an academic space, but also an arena of ideological contestation. The imbalance between modernization and the preservation of religious orthodoxy creates a policy dilemma that is difficult to resolve. One of the main challenges is how the Islamic education curriculum can accommodate contemporary science without neglecting the spiritual dimension of Islam. Therefore, a critical approach to curriculum design, educator development, and institutional reform is needed. Some of the suggested measures include the development of an integrative curriculum that combines Islamic epistemology and modern sciences, as well as teacher capacity building in terms of teaching methodologies and digital literacy. The development of equitable education infrastructure and digital access is also a priority to ensure equitable access, both in urban and rural areas. In addition, there needs to be multi-stakeholder participation in policy formulation to make reforms more inclusive and sustainable, as well as empirical data-

based policy evaluation to ensure relevant impact.

REFERENCES

Al-Otaibi, N. (2020). *Vision 2030: Religious Education Reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*.

Assaad, R., Hendy, R., Lassassi, M., & Yassin, S. (2021). Explaining the MENA Paradox: Rising Educational Attainment, Yet Stagnant Female Labor Force Participation. *HHS Public Access*, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2020.43.28.Explaining>

Azmiyah, Yafi, S., Zulmuqim, & Masyhudi, F. (2024). Kajian Dinamika Universitas Al-Azhar dan Reformasi Pendidikan di Mesir serta Pengaruhnya terhadap Dunia Islam. *Tanjak: Jurnal Sejarah dan Peradaban Islam*, 4(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.19109/tanjak.v4i2.2728>

Dayem, F. G. A., Fikri, A., Sutrisno, & Susilo, M. J. (2024). Analisis Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam di Al-Azhar, Mesir pada Era Kontemporer. *Buletin Edukasi Indonesia (BEI)*, 3(01), 27–37. <https://doi.org/10.56741/bei.v3i01.519>

Habibi, D. F. (2018). Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam di Timur Tengah (Studi Kawasan Mesir dan Turki). *Risâlah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam*, 4(2), 31–43. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3552061>

Haq, A. D., Anwar, A., & Sulaiman, U. (2023). Islam Sekuler di Turki dan Pemikiran Kemal Ataturk. *CARITA: Jurnal Sejarah Dan Budaya*, 2(1), 18–32. <https://doi.org/10.25130/sc.24.1.6>

Karo, T. K. (2017). Modernisasi Pendidikan

Islam di Mesir. *Waraqat: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman*, 2(2), 97–120. <https://doi.org/10.51590/waraqat.v2i2.60>

Kusmawati, H., Kasanah, N. R., & Fasanah, S. N. (2023). Karakter Pendidikan pada Masa Peradaban Islam di Luar Indonesia. *Educationist: Journal of Educational and Cultural Studies*, 2(1), 208–218.

Latifah, A., & Solihat, A. (2024). Power Relation and Knowledge: Linking Islamic Education to Socio-Political Reform in Saudi Arabia. *Attarbiyah: Journal of Islamic Culture and Education*, 9(2), 157–172. <https://doi.org/10.18326/attarbiyah.v9i2.157-172>

Maulana, R. H., Badrudin, & Erihadiana, M. (2024). Transformation of Saudi Arabian Education in the Framework of Vision 2030. *Proceeding of International Conference on Education, Society and Humanity*, 02(02), 515–521.

Maya, R., Mufid, Samsuddin, & Al-Farisi, M. F. (2024). Moderasi Internal Beragama Perspektif 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sudais, Presiden Urusan Dua Masjid Suci. *Al-Qiblah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Bahasa Arab*, 3(5), 826–842. <https://doi.org/10.36701/qiblah.v3i5>.

Mohamed, A. E. (2024). The Relationship between State-Provided Islamic Education and Islamism. *Politic and Religion*, 17, 468–493. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4504692>

Nurhasanah, & Sassi, K. (2024). Analisis Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam di Turki: Model Pendidikan Terpadu antara Tradisi dan Modernitas. *Jurnal Al-Qayyimah*, 7(2), 89–109.

Omar, M. T. M. (2020). Religious Education in the Arab World: Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Egypt as Models. *English Language Teaching*, 13(12), 27–36. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n12p27>

Saad, A., & Fahim, A. (2021). Access Digital Divide in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA): Current State and Measures for Improvement. *International Journal of Information Engineering and Electronic Business*, 13(3), 13–21. <https://doi.org/10.5815/ijieeb.2021.03.02>

Şahin, I., & Kesik, F. (2019). A Critical Review of Religious Education Policies and Practices of Turkey from the Perspective of Inclusion. *Education as Change*, 23, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/3456>

Sarah, S., Arifin, N. F., Ramona, E., & Adam, Y. F. (2023). Modernisasi Arab Saudi Era Muhammad bin Salman. *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 25(2), 151–165.

Takwil, M. (2023). Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam di Mesir, Malaysia dan Indonesia. *El-Banat: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Pendidikan Islam*, 12(2), 177–193.

Usman, A. M., & Umar, M. (2021). Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam; Telaah Pemikiran Muhammad Abduh. *Jurnal Ilmiah Iqra'*, 15(2), 237–258.

Yilmaz, I. (2022). Islamist Populist Nation-Building: Gradual, Ad Hoc Islamisation of the Secular Education System in Turkey. *Religions*, 13(9), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090814>

Zengin, M., & Hendek, A. (2023). The Future of Imam Hatip Schools as a Model for Islamic Education in Türkiye. *Religions*, 14(3), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030375>