



ADPIKS
Asosiasi Dosen Peneliti
Ilmu Keislaman dan Sosial

Conservative and Liberal Islamic Educational Ideology

Nila Wahyuni Nasution

Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidimpuan

e-mail: wahyuninila@uinsyahada.ac.id

Abstract

The development of contemporary Islamic education is confronted with an ideological debate between conservative and liberal approaches in responding to modern social and scientific dynamics. Conservative Islamic education emphasizes the preservation of tradition, the authority of religious texts, and the stability of moral values, whereas liberal Islamic education promotes contextual interpretation, freedom of thought, and critical dialogue. These differing orientations generate tensions in curriculum design, instructional methods, teacher authority, and the relationship between religion and modern knowledge. This study aims to analyze the characteristics, contributions, and implications of both ideologies in the development of Islamic education. The research employs a qualitative method with a library research approach, analyzing classical and contemporary literature on Islamic education and educational ideology. The findings indicate that conservatism plays a significant role in maintaining Islamic identity and fundamental values, while liberalism contributes to intellectual renewal and educational adaptation to social change. Future research is recommended to explore models of ideological synthesis capable of fostering Islamic education that is moderate, value-oriented, and contextually responsive.

Keywords: Islamic Education; Conservatism; Liberalism; Educational Ideology.

Abstrak

Perkembangan pendidikan Islam kontemporer dihadapkan pada perdebatan ideologis antara pendekatan konservatif dan liberal dalam merespons dinamika sosial dan keilmuan modern. Pendidikan Islam konservatif menekankan pelestarian tradisi, otoritas teks keagamaan, dan stabilitas nilai moral, sementara liberalisme pendidikan Islam mendorong penafsiran kontekstual, kebebasan berpikir, serta dialog kritis. Perbedaan orientasi tersebut menimbulkan ketegangan dalam aspek kurikulum, metode pembelajaran, otoritas pendidik, dan relasi antara agama dan ilmu pengetahuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis karakteristik, kontribusi, dan implikasi kedua ideologi dalam pengembangan pendidikan Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi pustaka melalui analisis literatur klasik dan kontemporer terkait pendidikan Islam dan teori ideologi pendidikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konservatisme berperan dalam menjaga identitas dan nilai fundamental Islam, sedangkan liberalisme berkontribusi pada pembaruan pemikiran dan adaptasi pendidikan terhadap perubahan sosial. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk mengkaji model sintesis ideologis yang mampu menghadirkan pendidikan Islam yang moderat, berkarakter, dan kontekstual.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Islam, Konservatisme, Liberalisme, Ideologi Pendidikan.



Introduction

Islamic educational ideology is the foundation that determines the direction, goals, and practices of education in the context of Muslim societies. Amidst the ever-evolving social, political, and intellectual dynamics, two main poles of thought have emerged that are often debated: conservative Islamic educational ideology and liberalism. Both represent different perspectives on interpreting Islamic teachings, formulating educational goals, and determining how the learning process should be conducted. These differences are not simply a matter of method, but also concern fundamental views on the relationship between religion, reason, and social change.(Aini, 2017).

Conservative Islamic education is grounded in a strong desire to maintain established Islamic traditions. This approach prioritizes the preservation of classical teachings, respect for the authority of religious scholars, and the affirmation of moral and ethical values as top priorities in education. Within a conservative framework, education is understood as a means to maintain the purity of Islamic teachings, develop devout character, and protect students from the influence of social changes perceived as threatening the stability of values. The curriculum often focuses on classical religious texts, while learning methods are more mechanistic, such as memorization and an emphasis on obedience.(Usman & Usman, 2019).

In contrast, liberalism in Islamic education stems from the awareness that Muslim societies live in a constantly changing world, requiring creative reinterpretation of Islamic teachings to remain relevant. This approach emphasizes the use of reason, rationality, individual rights, and freedom of thought as integral components of education. Liberal Islam does not view tradition as something to be rejected, but rather as a social product that can be reexamined in the context of the times. Education from a liberal perspective aims to develop students who are critical, innovative, and able to play an active role in facing the challenges of modernity. The curriculum is more open to other disciplines, including science, humanities, and social sciences, using interactive and dialogical learning methods.

The conflict between conservatism and liberalism often creates polarization



in Islamic education, particularly regarding issues of curriculum, learning methods, teacher authority, and the relationship between religion and science. Nevertheless, both have important contributions that can enrich the treasury of Islamic educational thought. Conservatism plays a role in maintaining the identity and fundamental values of Islam, while liberalism opens up space for renewed thought and the ability to adapt to global dynamics. It is in this context that the study of these two ideologies becomes increasingly relevant.(Isti'ana, 2024).

Through a comprehensive analysis, research on conservative and liberal Islamic educational ideologies is expected to demonstrate how these two approaches can complement each other, rather than mutually exclude each other. Contemporary Islamic education requires a model that is not only faithful to religious principles but also able to address the needs of the times. Therefore, a discussion of these two ideologies is crucial for finding a more moderate, inclusive, and competitive formulation of Islamic education in facing global challenges.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research design to analyze the ideologies of conservative and liberal Islamic education. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding the concepts, ideas, and theoretical debates developing in Islamic education literature. Data were obtained through a search of various primary and secondary sources, such as books on Islamic educational thought, scientific journal articles, works by conservative and liberal figures, and relevant academic documents. Data collection techniques involved identifying, classifying, and analyzing texts to identify key themes related to the two ideologies.(Baker, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques. Through this technique, researchers in-depth examined various narratives and arguments presented in the literature to understand the characteristics, differences, and common ground between conservative and liberal ideologies in Islamic education. Data validity was strengthened by triangulating sources, namely comparing various



literatures from different perspectives. With this method, the research is expected to provide an objective, systematic, and comprehensive understanding of how both ideologies influence the discourse and practice of Islamic education in the modern context (ACS, 2021).

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of Conservative Islamic Educational Ideology

Conservative Islamic educational ideology is an approach oriented toward preserving religious traditions, upholding moral values, and respecting the authority of Islamic scholars and classical Islamic texts. This approach is based on the belief that Islamic teachings provide perfect, complete, and relevant guidance for all aspects of life, including education. Therefore, conservatism views the primary task of Islamic education as maintaining the purity of the teachings and ensuring that the younger generation understands and consistently practices these values.

One of the main characteristics of conservative ideology is a strong reliance on classical scholarly heritage (turāth). Texts on tafsir, fiqh, hadith, and traditional theology serve as the primary references in educational curricula. This curriculum is typically static, with little change or innovation, as it is considered established and time-tested. In this context, past scholarly traditions are positioned as standards of truth to be upheld, rather than as historical products subject to reinterpretation.(Maghfuri, 2019).

Furthermore, conservative Islamic education places a high premium on the authority of teachers and religious scholars. Teachers are viewed as figures who serve not only as instructors but also as spiritual and moral guides. The relationship between teacher and student is hierarchical, with students expected to demonstrate respect and complete obedience to the teacher's guidance. This relationship model is believed to instill discipline, etiquette, and piety, which are core goals of education from a conservative perspective.

Learning methods in the conservative approach are typically traditional, such as text memorization, repetition, and an emphasis on accurately understanding Islamic jurisprudence and religious doctrine. Critical reasoning is often not a



primary focus, fearing it could lead to free interpretations that could potentially go beyond the boundaries of the teachings. This aligns with the conservative view that prioritizes value stability and social harmony.(Aini, 2017).

In the context of morals and ethics, conservatism places a strong emphasis on the formation of noble character. Education is viewed not only as an intellectual process but also as a means of developing religious character. Values such as simplicity, obedience, humility, and a commitment to Islamic law are emphasized from an early age. Thus, education is expected to produce individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess pious personalities and adhere to religious teachings.(Zamroji, 2021).

However, the conservative approach often faces criticism for being insufficiently responsive to social change, scientific developments, and the demands of modernity. An educational model that is too tradition-oriented is thought to limit students' creativity and adaptive abilities. However, proponents of conservatism argue that preserving fundamental Islamic values is an important bulwark in preserving the identity of the Muslim community and protecting the younger generation from the negative influences of globalization.

Characteristics of Liberal Islamic Educational Ideology

The ideology of liberal Islamic education is an approach that emphasizes the importance of freedom of thought, contextual interpretation of Islamic teachings, and openness to scientific developments and social change. This approach is based on the view that Islam is a dynamic and flexible religion, allowing its teachings to be interpreted according to the needs of the times without losing their fundamental values. Thus, Islamic education from a liberal perspective aims not only to preserve tradition but also to encourage a renewal of thought to make it relevant to modern life.

The first characteristic of liberal ideology is its emphasis on rationality and *ijtihad*. Liberals view the use of reason as an integral part of Islamic teachings, as reflected in numerous verses of the Quran that encourage critical thinking and



reflection. Therefore, Islamic education within a liberal framework teaches students to question, analyze, and evaluate teachings based on social and historical context. Interpretations of religious teachings are not considered final but are open to review according to societal needs (Coal, 2020).

Second, the liberal educational approach is inclusive and humanistic. This ideology places universal values such as justice, equality, human rights, and individual freedom as integral parts of Islam. In educational settings, this translates into a learning environment that values diversity, dialogue, and active student participation. Teachers are no longer the sole source of authority, but rather act as facilitators, assisting students in their search for knowledge. The relationship between teachers and students is more egalitarian than in conservative approaches.

Third, liberalism in Islamic education is open to multidisciplinary learning. The curriculum focuses not only on religious studies but also integrates modern disciplines such as science, social studies, humanities, and technology. This approach aims to produce students with broad perspectives, capable of competing globally, and able to relate Islamic teachings to current developments. Learning methods are also more varied, including discussions, case studies, problem-solving, and project-based learning.(Fadal, 2018).

Fourth, the liberal educational ideology strongly encourages creativity and innovation. Students are given space to express new ideas, experiment, and develop critical thinking skills. This open learning environment is believed to foster a generation of Muslims who are progressive and adaptable to change.

However, the liberal approach is not without its critics. Some believe that liberalism has the potential to weaken the authority of tradition and open too much room for free interpretation. However, supporters of liberalism argue that reform is part of Islamic history and essential for maintaining the relevance of teachings amidst the tide of modernity.(Isti'ana, 2024).

Differences in Curriculum and Learning Orientation

The fundamental differences between conservative and liberal Islamic educational ideologies are clearly reflected in their curriculum orientations and



learning approaches. These differences extend not only to content but also to perspectives on educational goals, teaching methods, the role of educators, and student learning experiences.

In conservative Islamic educational ideology, the curriculum tends to be oriented toward preserving established Islamic scholarly traditions. Subject matter focuses on classical texts such as tafsir (interpretation of the Islamic teachings), hadith (traditional Islamic jurisprudence), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and aqidah (belief), which are considered primary guidelines for fostering piety and devotion in students. Religious knowledge is central to the curriculum, while modern science is given limited space or is supplementary. This curriculum orientation aims to preserve the purity of Islamic teachings and maintain stable moral values that remain unchanged over time.(Mahamid, 2022)

In contrast, in liberal Islamic educational ideology, the curriculum is structured in a more open, flexible, and contextual manner. Religious studies are still taught, but they are integrated with other disciplines such as science, technology, social sciences, and the humanities. This approach aims to develop students who not only understand Islamic teachings but are also able to relate them to the realities and challenges of modern life. A liberal curriculum tends to be multidisciplinary and encourages the integration of Islamic values with contemporary science.

In terms of learning methods, conservative education prioritizes traditional methods such as memorization, lectures, and repetition. The teacher serves as the central authority and decision-maker in the learning process. Students are expected to obey their teacher's guidance, memorize the material accurately, and adhere to established rules and procedures. Classroom interactions tend to be one-way, and student creativity is often restricted to maintain uniform understanding.

In contrast, the liberal approach prioritizes participatory, dialogic, and student-centered learning methods. The learning process is designed to encourage discussion, criticism, collaboration, and problem-solving. The teacher acts as a facilitator, providing space for students to think independently, ask questions, and



express opinions. Methods such as case studies, project-based learning, and inquiry are essential to this approach.(Thohari, 2020)

Thus, the differences in curriculum and learning orientation between these two ideologies reflect fundamental differences in how they view education. Conservatives prioritize value stability and continuity of tradition, while liberals emphasize adaptation, innovation, and relevance to current developments. Both have their own advantages, which, when combined wisely, can produce a balanced, relevant, and meaningful model of Islamic education.

Theoretical Debate between Conservatives and Liberals

The theoretical debate between conservative and liberal Islamic educational ideologies is part of an intellectual dynamic that reflects differing ways of understanding Islamic teachings, the goals of education, and the relationship between religion and modernity. This debate is not merely academic but also influences educational policy, learning practices, and the construction of knowledge in Islamic educational institutions.

One of the main points of contention lies in the authority of interpretation. Conservatives emphasize that classical interpretations and the opinions of early scholars have supreme authority and should be the primary reference in education. They argue that allowing too much freedom of interpretation could undermine the purity of the teachings and create moral relativism. In contrast, liberals believe that Islamic teachings must be interpreted contextually, taking into account modern social conditions and scientific developments. They believe that intellectual stagnation will occur if texts are understood literally without considering the changing times.(Usman & Usman, 2019).

A further debate arises regarding the use of rationality. Conservatives tend to limit the role of reason to prevent it from exceeding the boundaries of sharia, while liberals place reason as a crucial instrument in understanding religion. In the liberal view, Islam teaches universal principles that can be explained and developed through reason. Therefore, education should encourage critical thinking, dialogue, and analytical skills.



The relationship between religion and science is also a hotly debated topic. Conservatives often view modernity as a threat to Islamic values, making them cautious about integrating modern science into the curriculum. Meanwhile, liberals view modern science as part of humanity's quest to understand God's creation, and therefore not in conflict with Islam. For liberals, education must be responsive to developments in science and technology to remain relevant to the needs of the times.(Tahrani, 2023).

Furthermore, there are differing views regarding the goals of education. Conservatives emphasize the formation of morality, obedience, and piety as the primary goal, while liberals emphasize the development of individual potential, freedom of thought, and adaptability. These differences affect the learning methods used, the structure of the curriculum, and even the relationship between teachers and students.

Although the debate between the two ideologies often appears intense, both have actually made important contributions to the development of Islamic education. Conservatism upholds fundamental religious values and Islamic identity, while liberalism encourages intellectual dynamism and the relevance of teachings to changing times. A balanced combination of these two approaches has the potential to create a more moderate, progressive, and contextual Islamic education system.(Woly, 2008).

The Contribution of the Two Ideologies in Islamic Education

Conservative and liberal Islamic educational ideologies, though often opposed, each have important contributions to enriching Islamic educational discourse and practice. Both not only reflect differing perspectives but also offer complementary strengths in the effort to build relevant and high-quality Islamic education.

First, the primary contribution of conservative ideology lies in preserving fundamental Islamic values. By emphasizing classical scholarly traditions, conservatism ensures that education remains rooted in authentic religious teachings.



This approach maintains moral, ethical, and spiritual stability in students. Amidst the currents of globalization that bring new values, the role of conservatism is crucial in maintaining Islamic identity and preventing the younger generation from potential value deviations. A curriculum based on religious texts, teaching methods that emphasize etiquette, and the authority of teachers as moral role models are aspects that strengthen character education from a conservative perspective.(Gunawan, Abdussahid, & Mahmudah, 2020).

On the other hand, liberal ideology makes a significant contribution by encouraging the renewal of thought and adapting education to current developments. The liberal approach opens up space for the use of rationality, critical dialogue, and creativity in the learning process. This makes Islamic education more inclusive, progressive, and able to interact with modern science. The integration of multidisciplinary sciences into the curriculum prepares students to face global challenges, whether in the technological, social, or economic fields. Thus, liberalism plays a role in developing a more responsive, dynamic, and contextual education system.

Beyond individual contributions, these two ideologies also offer benefits when combined in a more moderate approach. Conservatism provides a strong foundation of values, while liberalism offers flexibility and openness. When solid moral values are combined with innovative learning methods, Islamic education can achieve a balance between preserving tradition and the demands of modernity. In the context of educational institutions, this can be seen through learning models that maintain respect for classical texts while also teaching 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy.(Rosyidin, 2023)

Thus, the contributions of these two ideologies are inseparable from the overall dynamics of Islamic education. Conservatism preserves roots, while liberalism encourages growth. Their collaboration is key to creating Islamic education that is relevant, resilient to change, and adheres to the fundamental values taught by the religion.



Conclusion

Conservative and liberal Islamic educational ideologies each have distinct strengths and characteristics in shaping the direction of Islamic education. Conservatism emphasizes the preservation of tradition, the authority of classical scholarship, and strong moral and spiritual formation. Meanwhile, liberalism offers a more open, rational, and contextual approach by encouraging freedom of thought, innovation, and the integration of modern knowledge. The differences between the two reflect the dynamics of thought within the world of Islamic education, particularly regarding how to understand religious teachings and respond to contemporary developments.

However, both ideologies have common ground that can be leveraged to build a more balanced and progressive Islamic education. Conservatism provides a solid foundation of values, while liberalism provides the flexibility to adapt to social and technological changes. When the strengths of both are combined, a moderate, relevant, and future-oriented model of Islamic education is born. This integrated approach enables Islamic educational institutions to produce a generation with character and critical thinking, capable of facing global challenges without abandoning their Islamic identity.

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