



Progressive Education in Ahmad Dahlan's Perspective: Schools and Madrasahs as Agents of Social Change

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Abstract

This study examines the essence of Ahmad Dahlan's progressive education, the role of schools and madrasahs as progressive educational institutions, and their transformation into agents of social change. Using a qualitative library research design with character studies, data were collected from Ahmad Dahlan's writings, Muhammadiyah documents, books, and relevant scholarly articles, and analyzed through content, historical, and philosophical approaches. The findings show that Ahmad Dahlan's progressive education is founded on the trilogy of intelligence, experience, and progress, which is reflected in four core principles: knowledge integration, contextualization, balance, and progressiveness. These principles transform schools and madrasahs into agents of social change through Al-Ma'un theology, prophetic leadership, and sustainable community empowerment. The study proposes a conceptual model of transformative schools and madrasahs by integrating Ahmad Dahlan's educational philosophy with social change theory. The findings provide practical implications for strengthening educational policies and institutional practices that promote socially responsible and transformative education. However, this study is limited to conceptual and literature-based analysis; therefore, future research should empirically validate the proposed model across diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: agents of social change; Al-Ma'un theology; prophetic leadership; progressive education; schools and madrasahs; transformative institutions.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji hakikat pendidikan progresif menurut Ahmad Dahlan, peran sekolah dan madrasah sebagai institusi pendidikan progresif, serta transformasinya sebagai agen perubahan sosial. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kepustakaan dan studi tokoh. Data diperoleh dari karya Ahmad Dahlan, dokumen Muhammadiyah, buku, dan artikel ilmiah, kemudian dianalisis melalui analisis isi, historis, dan filosofis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan progresif Ahmad Dahlan berlandaskan trilogi kecerdasan, pengalaman, dan kemajuan yang melahirkan empat prinsip utama, yaitu integrasi ilmu, kontekstualisasi, keseimbangan, dan progresivitas. Prinsip-prinsip tersebut mentransformasikan sekolah dan madrasah menjadi agen perubahan sosial melalui teologi Al-Ma'un, kepemimpinan profetik, dan pemberdayaan masyarakat yang berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini menghasilkan model konseptual sekolah dan madrasah transformatif yang mengintegrasikan pemikiran Ahmad Dahlan dengan teori perubahan sosial. Temuan ini berimplikasi pada penguatan kebijakan dan praktik pendidikan yang berorientasi pada transformasi sosial. Keterbatasan penelitian ini terletak pada sifatnya yang berbasis kajian literatur sehingga model yang dihasilkan belum diuji secara empiris; penelitian selanjutnya perlu memvalidasinya pada berbagai konteks pendidikan.

Kata kunci: *agen perubahan sosial; institusi transformatif; kepemimpinan profetik; pendidikan progresif; sekolah dan madrasah; teologi Al-Ma'un*

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Introduction

In the global discourse, education is increasingly recognized as a strategic instrument for shaping individual consciousness and driving social transformation. Various international studies confirm that educational institutions not only serve to transfer knowledge but also shape students' values, moral orientations, and social responsibility as they navigate the complexities of modern life (Biesta, 2009). From this perspective, education is positioned as a cultural force that contributes to the development of a democratic, just, and progressive society. In line with these developments, various transformative educational approaches have emerged that position schools as agents of social change capable of fostering critical awareness, empowering communities, and responding to the challenges of the times.

In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, the idea of education as a force for social transformation has a solid historical and ideological foundation in the thought of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan. As the founder of Muhammadiyah, Dahlan introduced an educational paradigm that was revolutionary for its time. He viewed education as an integrative process that unites faith, knowledge, and action in real life. This aligns with Robert W. Hefner's theory of civil Islam as a moderate and transformative force. Hefner asserts that educational institutions serve not only as vehicles for the transmission of knowledge but also as arenas for the formation of civic values, social participation, and public responsibility. In this context, schools and madrasahs are understood as institutions that play a strategic role in creating social change through the strengthening of students' intellectual, moral, and social capacities (Hefner, 2022).

In difference to the traditional pesantren system, which tends to be text-based and exclusive, Dahlan pioneered an education system with an integralist approach, that is, one that treats religious education and general education as equals (Ali et al., 2016). Furthermore, the education was designed to instill the understanding that Islamic teachings must be applied in individual, social, and national life. This indicates that the ultimate goal of schools and madrasahs is not merely personal piety, but to produce citizens capable of harmoniously actualizing Sharia values in national and civic life (Afrianty, 2012). In other words, progressive education, as viewed by Dahlan, is

designed to create agents of social change who possess rational religious awareness, a broad perspective, and a focus on the welfare of the community. The theory of social change proposed by James C. Scott explains that social change does not always occur through major structural transformations, but also through everyday practices, the formation of consciousness, and the negotiation of values that take place in social life (Scott, 2021). Within the framework of progressive education, the transformation of schools and madrasahs as agents of social change need not always be realized through large-scale programs or formal policies, but can also emerge from shifts in ways of thinking, learning cultures, and pedagogical practices that occur daily within educational settings. This perspective is relevant for explaining how schools and madrasahs can function as agents of social change through educational processes that foster critical awareness, social concern, and a commitment to addressing societal problems.

A variety of studies have examined Ahmad Dahlan's ideas and their implementation in education from various perspectives. The study by Ferdiansyah and Ma'ruf explores Dahlan's concept of progressive education, which is based on three pillars: intelligence, experience, and progress, as well as its relevance to the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Ferdiansyah & Ma'ruf, 2022). Akhyar et al. emphasize that Dahlan viewed education as the primary means of empowering the people to free Muslims from ignorance and social injustice, with an emphasis on inclusive education for all segments of society, including the poor and women (Akhyar et al., 2024). Setiawan examines the implementation of progressivism in the educational process at the Muhammadiyah Special Program High School in Surakarta, demonstrating how the blending of modern European educational traditions and classical Islamic education can result in a progressive educational institution (Setiawan et al., 2024). Research conducted by Aryati and Yanuarti indicates that there remains a gap between the philosophical values bequeathed by Ahmad Dahlan and current practices at Muhammadiyah University of Palembang. These findings indicate that the leadership style currently in place still exhibits elitist tendencies and has not yet fully provided adequate space for marginalized groups to participate equally in academic life (Aryati & Yanuarti, 2024).

Many studies on Ahmad Dahlan's educational philosophy have been conducted over the past decade. Previous research has generally focused on the history of Muhammadiyah's educational reform, the integration of religious and secular studies, character education, the implementation of the values of Al-Ma'un, and the

modernization of Islamic education. On the other hand, studies on schools and madrasahs as agents of social change have been discussed more from the perspectives of educational management, curriculum development, and community empowerment. However, there is still limited research that specifically links Ahmad Dahlan's concept of progressive education with the transformation of the roles of schools and madrasahs as agents of social change. Consequently, the conceptual contribution of progressive education to strengthening the transformative function of schools and madrasahs has not yet been adequately explained in the academic literature. Based on this background, this study focuses on the conceptual framework of how schools and madrasahs can function transformatively as spaces for the formation of social, moral, and religious consciousness through the values of progressive education. By examining the essence of schools and madrasahs and formulating strategies for transforming their roles, this study seeks to integrate Ahmad Dahlan's concept of progressive education with social change theory to explain the transformation of schools' and madrasahs' roles as agents of social change.

Method

This study used a qualitative approach combining library research with biographical research. This research design was chosen based on the study's objective, which was to conduct an in-depth examination of Ahmad Dahlan's philosophical thoughts on progressive education from the perspective of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, as well as their relevance to the transformation of the roles of schools and madrasahs as agents of social change. Biographical research is appropriate when the primary focus is on the ideas of a historical figure who has significantly influenced the development of social institutions, including the education system (Tentiasih et al., 2023). A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the subjective meanings, philosophical values, and historical context underlying the emergence of Ahmad Dahlan's ideas, which cannot be measured quantitatively (Nurdiyanto et al., 2025). In addition, the library research design was chosen because most of Ahmad Dahlan's ideas and thoughts are preserved in written documents, organizational archives, biographies, and historical manuscripts that require in-depth interpretation and systematic textual analysis (Mulkhan, 2010).

The data sources in this study are divided into two categories: primary data and secondary data. Primary data includes documents that directly represent the thoughts

of Ahmad Dahlan. Specifically, primary data includes manuscripts on the teachings of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, official Muhammadiyah documents, as well as works that record Ahmad Dahlan's authentic thoughts on education, da'wah, and social reform particularly Abdul Munir Mulkhan's work entitled *Kiai Ahmad Dahlan: Jejak Pembaruan Sosial dan Kemanusiaan* which comprehensively documents Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts and struggles (Mulkhan, 2010). Secondary data consists of relevant supporting literature, including reputable national and international scientific journals discussing Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy, textbooks on social change theory and transformative education, as well as previous research findings relevant to the topic of progressive education and the role of schools and madrasahs as agents of social change (Nurdiyanto et al., 2025).

The data collection process was conducted through a documentary study involving several stages. First, the researcher identified relevant primary and secondary sources through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Dimensions, DOAJ, and accredited national journal portals. Second, the researcher selected sources based on thematic relevance, author authority, publication quality, and their connection to the research focus. Third, all selected documents were classified into several categories, namely the concept of progressive education, the thoughts of Ahmad Dahlan, schools and madrasahs, transformative education, and theories of social change. This stage was carried out to facilitate the data coding and interpretation process (Tentiasih et al., 2023).

Data analysis in this study was conducted using three analytical techniques that were applied sequentially and complementarily. First, content analysis was used to examine the explicit and implicit meanings of the term "Progressive Education" in the primary texts. The content analysis process was carried out in several stages, namely reading the primary sources repeatedly and in depth (close reading), identifying parts of the text that contained ideas about progressive education, categorizing and coding the themes found, and then interpreting the conceptual meaning of each category. Subsequently, all findings were synthesized to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the nature of progressive education from Ahmad Dahlan's perspective. Second, historical analysis is used to capture the context of the era in which KH. Ahmad Dahlan formulated his ideas, in the interest of understanding the motivations behind the transformation of schools and madrasahs. Historical analysis is conducted by examining the influence of the historical context on the emergence of Ahmad Dahlan's progressive

educational ideas, tracing the motivations and challenges Dahlan faced in transforming schools and madrasahs during his time, and reconstructing the relevance of that historical context to contemporary understanding of the transformation of the roles of schools and madrasahs (Bawden, 2012).

Third, a philosophical analysis was used to identify the ontological (what is the essence of schools and madrasahs according to Dahlan), epistemological (how Dahlan understood the sources and methods of acquiring knowledge in education), and axiological (what values constitute the ultimate goal of progressive education) dimensions of Ahmad Dahlan's thought. The philosophical analysis procedure involves identifying the foundational assumptions of Ahmad Dahlan's thought regarding humanity, knowledge, and society; analyzing the interconnection of faith, knowledge, and action as the foundation of education; formulating the ideal role of schools and madrasahs as agents of social change; and contextualizing these principles within the transformation of contemporary education. These three techniques are integrated in a complementary manner to produce a comprehensive, in-depth, and contextual understanding (Mulkhan, 2010).

To ensure the validity of this qualitative study, source triangulation and theoretical triangulation were used. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various primary and secondary documents to ensure data consistency. Meanwhile, theoretical triangulation was conducted by examining the research findings through various theoretical perspectives. In addition, the researcher engaged in a process of repeated reading and review of all sources used. This step was taken to gain a deeper understanding of the data, ensure consistency in interpretation, and minimize the possibility of subjective bias in the analysis process.

Results and Discussion

The Essence of Progressive Education from Ahmad Dahlan's Perspective

Ahmad Dahlan's Islamic educational thought represents a significant milestone in the history of Islamic educational reform in Indonesia. Based on an analysis of various primary sources and authoritative biographies, this study demonstrates that the educational concept developed by Ahmad Dahlan possesses progressive and integrative characteristics (Hidayatullah & Nurhakim, 2025). Education is not directed solely at the mastery of knowledge but also at the holistic development of the human person, encompassing intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social aspects. The essence of

progressive education from Ahmad Dahlan's perspective is rooted in an integrative philosophy that explicitly rejects the dichotomy between religious knowledge (*naqliyah*) and general knowledge (*aqliyah*).

This study found that Ahmad Dahlan viewed the separation of these two domains of knowledge as the primary cause of the decline of the Muslim community. In his various speeches, he emphasized that all useful knowledge is part of a divine mandate, as evidenced by the early Muhammadiyah school curriculum, which taught religious studies alongside natural sciences, mathematics, Dutch, and social studies (Hasibuan et al., 2025). The research findings regarding the principle of integrating knowledge in Ahmad Dahlan's progressive education align with the thought of Fazlur Rahman, one of the leading thinkers of Islamic neomodernism. Fazlur Rahman asserts that the process of any Islamic reform now must begin with education. He criticizes the educational dichotomy that separates religious studies from general knowledge, as well as the lagging quality of Islamic education caused by unfocused educational objectives, low student quality, and a lack of resources (Widayani, 2020).

Fazlur Rahman, like Ahmad Dahlan, saw the separation of religious studies and secular studies as the root cause of the decline of the Muslim community. He proposes a double movement methodology an approach that moves from the present context to the past to understand the meaning and historical context of revelation, and then returns from the past to the present to formulate universal principles relevant to contemporary issues (Syauqi, 2022). This methodology aligns with the principle of contextualization in Dahlan's thought, wherein Islamic teachings must not be understood merely textually but must be creatively responded to in light of the challenges of the times. The difference between the two lies in their methodological emphasis. Fazlur Rahman focuses more on developing a systematic methodology of Qur'anic hermeneutics to bridge the gap between text and context. Meanwhile, Ahmad Dahlan, though sharing the same spirit, places greater emphasis on institutional praxis by establishing schools and madrasahs that tangibly integrate both systems of knowledge.

Progressive education is conceptually driven by three main pillars: Intelligence, Experience, and Progress. First, intelligence highlights the importance of critical reasoning in understanding religious teachings and social realities. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan viewed the intellect as a part of the human self that can serve as a bridge for humans to solve various problems in their lives. To become a sturdy bridge, the intellect must be built with a strong foundation. Therefore, education is a crucial part of constructing the

intellect so that it becomes a stronger bridge. According to K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, ideal Islamic education is education that advances the intellect. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan said that *“Every religious teaching must be substantiated by the exercise of reason.”* (Abimubarak, 2022). This signifies that education must not stop at memorization, but must foster the ability to think reflectively, rationally, and with an openness to renewal. Reason is positioned as an instrument of *tajdid* that enables education to remain relevant to the times.

Ahmad Dahlan’s emphasis on reason aligns with Paulo Freire’s concept of conscientization—the process through which learners become critically aware of the sociopolitical realities that shape their lives. Both Ahmad Dahlan and Freire believed that a mind not critically trained would render individuals easily manipulated and passive in the face of injustice. Ahmad Dahlan wanted Muslims not to be oblivious to the developments of the times, while Freire wanted the oppressed not to be oblivious to the structures of oppression surrounding them (Mlekwa, 2020). In this regard, Ahmad Dahlan offers a critical pedagogy that integrates social awareness, intellectual development, and spiritual cultivation simultaneously. These findings indicate that Freire’s emancipatory education model remains relevant for application in the current context of Islamic education, particularly for fostering students’ critical awareness in understanding religious teachings in a contextual manner.

Second, experience emphasizes that knowledge must bear the fruit of action. Knowledge must be put into practice. In formulating his educational concept, Ahmad Dahlan simultaneously integrated faith, knowledge, and action. According to him, Islamic teachings consist of three elements: faith, knowledge, and action. We can see this in the educational approach taught by Ahmad Dahlan himself, such as when he taught the exegesis of Surah Al-Ma’un to his students. He refused to introduce another surah until the students had put into practice the teachings of Surah Al-Ma’un, which had been taught repeatedly (Hermawanti, 2020). Therefore, learning is not merely about knowing, but about experiencing, practicing, and transforming reality. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan advocated for a contextual and applied learning approach, where the knowledge taught is not merely theoretical but can be directly applied in daily life (Salsabila et al., 2024).

These findings are strongly relevant to the ideas of John Dewey, a leading figure in progressive education in the United States. Dewey emphasized that education should be centered on experience (learning by doing). Dewey viewed experience not only as physical activity but as an ongoing interaction between the individual and their environment within a dynamic and ever-evolving relationship (El-Muhtadi Rizal et al.,

2025). In interacting with their environment, individuals do not merely adapt passively but also actively shape and transform the conditions around them. This aligns with research findings that Ahmad Dahlan advocated for a contextual and applied learning approach, where knowledge is not only theoretical but can be directly applied in life. If Dewey emphasized experience as a means of human growth, Ahmad Dahlan viewed experience as a path to developing competencies while strengthening piety.

Third, progress indicates that education must be dynamic and relevant to the times (*sholihun likulli zaman wal makan*). The progress Ahmad Dahlan referred to encompasses not only advancements in science and technology but also moral, social, and civilizational progress. As a reformer, he not only created a progressive educational system for his time but also instilled a spirit of *tajdid* (renewal) to ensure his educational concepts remain relevant in the 4.0 era (Hamzah & Abu Bakar, 2025). Progressive education means education that is innovative and responsive to the changing times without abandoning the values of tawhid. Within this framework, progress is not interpreted as Westernization, but rather as a process of renewal grounded in Islamic ethics and aligned with social interests. This trilogy of intelligence, experience, and progress forms the philosophical core of progressive education from Ahmad Dahlan's perspective.

The ultimate goal of progressive education is the emergence of progressive-religious individuals (ulama-intellectuals / intellectuals-ulama) who possess strong faith, master religious and general knowledge, are adept at managing social issues, and are ready to lead change in accordance with the ideals envisioned by him (Hamzah & Abu Bakar, 2025). The ideal individual, according to Ahmad Dahlan, is one who possesses noble character (*akhlaqul karimah*), social solidarity, concern for the weak, and commitment to advancing society as a form of charity (*amal shalih*) and the duty of a *khalifah fil ardh*. Education is directed toward the advancement of worldly life as well as salvation and honor in the hereafter. As explained by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the goal of education in Islam is to produce an *insan adabi* a cultured individual who demonstrates proper conduct in their attitudes and behavior as an expression of awareness regarding their proper position and responsibilities in relation to God, fellow human beings, and the universe (Putri et al., 2026).

The Essence of Schools and Madrasahs as Progressive Educational Institutions

The concept of the “school-madrasah” developed by Ahmad Dahlan is a unique and innovative educational model. The term “school-madrasah” itself indicates a synthesis between two distinct educational systems: the school, which represents modern Western education, and the madrasah, which represents traditional Islamic education (Hidayatullah & Nurhakim, 2025). Progressive schools and madrasahs are not two separate poles. Madrasahs can be modern while preserving the authenticity of Islamic values, while public schools can serve as spaces for building rational awareness grounded in religious morality (Ilyas & Nispi Syahbani, 2025).

The philosophical essence of schools and madrasahs can be understood through several fundamental principles:

1. The Principle of the Integration of Knowledge (Epistemological Tawhid)

According to Ahmad Dahlan, all knowledge, both classified as religious and general knowledge, comes from the same source, namely Allah SWT. From this perspective, there is no separation between religious and general knowledge, as both form a unity within the framework of tauhid. This principle of oneness serves as the foundation for building an educational system that integrates various disciplines in a comprehensive and holistic manner. Therefore, schools and madrasahs are positioned as institutions that unite religious and modern scientific dimensions within a single educational framework. This principle aligns with al-Attas’s critique of the secularization of knowledge, in which the separation of religion from science has led to the loss of manners and a moral crisis in modern civilization (Putri et al., 2026).

2. The Principle of Contextualization

Madrasah schools were also designed as a response to the dynamics of the times. Ahmad Dahlan realized that traditional education, which relied purely on classical religious studies, was insufficient to meet the challenges of modernity. Conversely, modern education with a secular orientation was deemed incapable of building the spiritual and moral dimensions of students. On this basis, schools and madrasahs emerged as a form of contextual educational synthesis by combining the strengths of Islamic tradition and modernity. This finding is reinforced by research by Indrawati et al., which highlights how Ahmad Dahlan successfully created synergy between Islamic tradition and Western modernity (Indrawati et al., 2025). This study complements those findings by demonstrating that this synergy did not happen by

chance but was grounded in a deep philosophical awareness of the need to contextualize Islamic teachings without losing their essence.

3. The Principle of Balance (*Tawazun*)

The concept of the school-madrasah reflects the principle of balance between worldly and afterlife matters, between reason and revelation, and between the individual and society. Ahmad Dahlan emphasized that Islamic education must produce well-rounded individuals (*insan kamil*) who are not only pious on an individual level but also contribute to the progress of society. This study shows that Dahlan's concept of *tawazun* is not only individual but also socio-institutional in nature, as reflected in the curriculum structure of madrasah schools that balances religious and general education equally.

4. The Principle of Progressivity

Ahmad Dahlan did not reject tradition, but he was also not opposed to reform. Madrasah institutions are designed with the spirit of *ijtihad*, the ability to engage in creative thinking when facing new challenges. This principle of progressivity enables Islamic educational institutions to continue evolving and adapting to the changing times without losing their Islamic identity.

In the implementation, this concept is reflected in the curriculum structure of madrasah schools, which encompasses three main dimensions. First, religious education, which includes the Qur'an, hadith, tawhid, fiqh, akhlak, and Islamic history. Second, general education, which includes languages such as Arabic, Dutch, and Indonesian, as well as mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, and various skills. Third, extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and social organization activities. The integration of this curriculum is aimed at producing graduates who possess both intellectual competence and a strong Islamic character. Within this framework, Ahmad Dahlan rejected the educational dichotomy that produces scholars who lack intellectual depth or intellectuals who lack religious knowledge, as his educational ideal was to cultivate individuals who harmonize religious depth with broad knowledge. Research by Gazali et al. confirms that Muhammadiyah has demonstrated strong adaptive capabilities in responding to political and social changes from the colonial era through the reform and globalization eras (Gazali et al., 2025).

The Transformation of the Role of Schools and Madrasahs as Agents of Social Change

The transformation of the role of schools and madrasahs as agents of social change, from Ahmad Dahlan's perspective, stems from the understanding that education is, in essence, a liberating instrument (liberating education). Within Ahmad Dahlan's progressive educational perspective, James C. Scott's concept of everyday resistance explains how schools and madrasahs can serve as agents of social change amidst colonial domination (Scott, 2021). Ahmad Dahlan did not engage in open resistance against the Dutch government but utilized education as a means of transformation. He adopted modern Western educational systems, such as graded classes and systematic teaching methods. However, behind these modern forms, he instilled Islamic values that fostered awareness, independence, and social change (Bekele, 2025). Within Scott's framework, this strategy can be understood as a hidden transcript that is, as if Muhammadiyah schools seem to follow the Western educational model, but at the same time become a means to build a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable, critical of injustice, and have national awareness.

Progressive education aims not only to educate intellectually but also to free society from poverty, ignorance, and backwardness that hinder the progress of the people (Faida & Suyatno, 2025). Within this framework, schools and madrasahs are not merely spaces for formal learning but also spaces for building critical awareness, where students are encouraged to understand the social realities around them while participating in societal change (Marlini et al., 2024). This thought is in line with the spirit of Al-Ma'un theology, pioneered by KH. Ahmad Dahlan to spark a concrete da'wah movement, in which helping others is regarded as an act of worship equivalent to fulfilling religious obligations. Research by Jatmiko et al. (2025) indicates that the educational model developed by Muhammadiyah continues to uphold the spirit of Al-Ma'un as the foundation for philanthropy and social justice amidst the various challenges of educational neoliberalization.

These findings align with the results of this study, which show that the spirit of Al-Ma'un is not only related to the practice of social generosity but also serves as a crucial foundation for viewing education as a means of empowering and liberating society. Within the Muhammadiyah context, the spirit of Al-Ma'un is translated into three main pillars: healing (health services), schooling (education), and feeding (social services). The theology of Al-Ma'un philosophically explains how the social aspect of humanity plays a vital role in life. Therefore, with this theology, education does not stop at theory but extends to tangible social practice (Rayyani & Abbas, 2020).

The Muhammadiyah education system fulfills two interrelated functions: as a means of developing future leaders and as an agent of social transformation. Through the educational process, Muhammadiyah not only produces individuals committed to the organization's values but also equips them with the ability to contribute to solving various societal issues. Schools and madrasahs play a role not only in transmitting knowledge and Islamic values but also in shaping students who possess social awareness, leadership, and a commitment to contributing to community life. Through an educational process that integrates faith, knowledge, and action, schools and madrasahs become learning spaces that prepare students to actively engage in social improvement efforts.

The strategic cycle of Muhammadiyah schools/madrasahs as the first agent of social change is to educate cadres by forming students who are not only academically intelligent, but also have Muhammadiyah ideology, leadership spirit, and da'iyah commitment. This can be done by schools or madrasahs using a special curriculum of integration of general subjects with Muhammadiyah, participating in mandatory extracurriculars, and habitualizing activities at school regularly. Second, cadres change society. Alumni and students are active in driving social change in the surrounding environment, both through real actions and pioneering as a form of community service, for example through adiwiyata programs, school waste banks, school health clinics, and literacy movements. Third, the community supports education, namely public awareness of the benefits of the existence of schools/madrasahs encouraging active participation in the form of morals, materials, and promotions such as regular donations from students' guardians, the provision of land for the expansion of schools/madrasahs, and other participation. Fourth, sustainable mutual relations. The success of alumni in leading and serving the community finally increases public trust in them and new resources are realized so that they can strengthen the regeneration process.

The key to the success of social transformation lies in strengthening prophetic leadership in the educational environment. Prophetic leadership in madrasahs rests on the values of shiddiq, amanah, tabligh, and Fathanah (Anggraeni et al., 2025). In Ahmad Dahlan's perspective, social change through education requires a driving figure who not only has the ability to manage institutions and scientific insights, but also has a moral vision and commitment to encourage societal transformation. Therefore, teachers as prophetic leaders in the classroom play the role of role models, guides of spiritual values, and drivers of the creation of a positive learning environment, so as to contribute to the

formation of character and the growth of social awareness of students. Similarly, the management of schools-madrasas functions as a director of institutional movements so that education remains based on the mission of social change. Madrasah heads with their prophetic leadership are expected to be able to form an ethical, innovative, and collaborative work culture to improve teacher performance and student achievement (Nifasri, 2025).

The main output of the transformation of the role of schools and madrasahs as agents of social change is the birth of progressive graduates who have character *Khilafah Fil Ardh*. That is, individuals who are professionally competent but have a strong spiritual commitment to become agents of social change in the midst of the challenges of modernity. Concept *Khilafah Fil Ardh* Ahmad Dahlan is in line with the theory civil Islam developed by Robert W. Hefner. In the framework civil Islam Hefner, a progressive graduate with character *Khilafah Fil Ardh* can be understood as an ideal citizen in a democratic civil society. They are not only ritually religious, but also have a strong sense of citizenship, are able to dialogue with others of different faiths, and are committed to universal values such as justice, equality, and humanity (Hefner, 2024).

This study found that Ahmad Dahlan's version of the ideal progressive graduates have five main characteristics: (1) mastering religious and general science in a balanced manner, (2) having a critical awareness of social reality, (3) being able to practice knowledge in real action, (4) having a commitment to social justice, and (5) being ready to lead change in their society. These five characters are a whole unit that cannot be separated. A progressive graduate is not called ideal if he only masters science in a balanced manner but does not have critical awareness. Similarly, critical consciousness without a commitment to social justice will give birth to criticism without action. Thus, the integration of these five characters is the characteristic and uniqueness of Ahmad Dahlan's version of progressive graduates, as well as distinguishing him from other models of Islamic education graduates who tend to emphasize only one or two aspects. Through systematic regeneration, schools and madrasahs are able to form citizens who actively play a role in driving social change and enlightenment towards a more just, advanced, and dignified society (Shodikin, 2025).

Conclusion

The essence of Ahmad Dahlan's progressive education is grounded in the integration of faith, knowledge, and action, manifested through three core pillars:

intelligence, experience, and progress. Education is understood not merely as the transmission of knowledge but as a process of developing progressive and religious individuals with balanced intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social capacities. Accordingly, schools and madrasahs function as progressive educational institutions based on the principles of knowledge integration, contextualization, balance (tawazun), and progressiveness. Their transformative role as agents of social change is realized through the cultivation of critical awareness, the internalization of Al-Ma'un values, the strengthening of prophetic leadership, and the regeneration of students who actively contribute to addressing social challenges. Theoretically, this study integrates Ahmad Dahlan's educational philosophy with the theories of everyday resistance (Scott), civil Islam (Hefner), and conscientization (Freire), resulting in a conceptual model of transformative schools and madrasahs that extends previous scholarship.

Practically, the findings provide a foundation for school and madrasah leaders to develop curricula that integrate scientific knowledge, Islamic values, and community empowerment while informing educational policies that strengthen schools and madrasahs as institutions for character formation, social leadership, and public service. The study also highlights the importance of embedding prophetic leadership and Al-Ma'un values within institutional culture. However, this research is limited by its reliance on literature review and character study, making its findings conceptual rather than empirical. Future studies should examine the implementation and effectiveness of this progressive education model across Muhammadiyah schools, madrasahs, and other Islamic educational institutions to validate and refine the proposed framework.

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