

Humanistic Islamic Education Concept from the Perspective of Nurcholish Madjid

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept of humanistic Islamic education from the perspective of Nurcholish Madjid and examine its relevance to the development of contemporary Islamic education. The study is motivated by the tendency of modern education to emphasize cognitive achievement and academic competence, while the dimensions of humanity, morality, and character formation have not received adequate attention. This research employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. Primary data were obtained from the major works of Nurcholish Madjid, particularly *Islam, Doctrine and Civilization* and *Islam, Modernity and Indonesian-ness*, while secondary data were collected from books, scholarly journal articles, and previous studies relevant to the research topic. Data were analyzed using the content analysis method through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education is founded upon the paradigm of *tawhid*, which integrally combines the dimensions of divinity and humanity. Education is directed toward the holistic development of individuals through the reinforcement of six core values: *tawhid* as the foundation of humanism, freedom of thought, tolerance, democracy, social justice, and social responsibility. Furthermore, humanistic Islamic education is characterized by dialogical and student-centered learning, respect for diversity, the cultivation of critical thinking, and the development of moral character and social responsibility. The study also demonstrates that Nurcholish Madjid's educational thought remains highly relevant to the needs of twenty-first-century Islamic education, particularly in strengthening character education, promoting religious moderation, fostering critical thinking skills, encouraging ethical digital literacy, and implementing learner-centered pedagogical practices. Therefore, Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education offers an alternative paradigm for developing an inclusive, moderate, democratic, and responsive Islamic educational system capable of addressing the challenges of contemporary society.

Keywords: *Humanistic Islamic Education, Nurcholish Madjid, Islamic Humanism, Character Education, Religious Moderation.*

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Introduction

Education is a fundamental instrument for developing human quality and advancing civilization. From the perspective of Islam, education serves not merely as a means of transmitting knowledge but also as a comprehensive process of nurturing individuals who possess faith, knowledge, moral integrity, and the capacity to fulfill their role as *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth. However, contemporary educational practices increasingly demonstrate a pragmatic orientation that prioritizes academic achievement, technical competence, and labor market demands. Consequently, education often neglects its humanistic dimension, paying insufficient attention to character formation, moral development, and universal humanitarian values (Tilaar, 2012).

This tendency has contributed to numerous social problems that reflect a growing gap between intellectual competence and moral maturity. The rise of intolerance, violence, corruption, discrimination, and declining social responsibility indicates that education has not fully succeeded in producing individuals with strong character and holistic personalities. Therefore, there is an urgent need for an educational paradigm that transcends cognitive development and fosters the comprehensive growth of learners' human potential (Freire, 2005).

Within the landscape of contemporary Indonesian Islamic thought, Nurcholish Madjid is recognized as one of the foremost Muslim intellectuals who consistently advocated for a humanistic approach to Islamic education. Popularly known as Cak Nur, he promoted the renewal of Islamic thought through rational, inclusive, and humanistic perspectives. According to Nurcholish Madjid, Islamic education should cultivate individuals who possess intellectual freedom, openness toward diversity, and a strong commitment to building a just and civilized society (Madjid, 2019).

Humanism in Nurcholish Madjid's perspective should not be understood as a secular worldview that places humanity above God. Rather, it is rooted in the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid*, which recognizes human dignity as a divine trust. He argued that Islamic teachings inherently promote humanitarian values by acknowledging human beings as honorable creatures endowed with rights, responsibilities, and the freedom to develop their full potential under the guidance of divine principles (Madjid, 2008).

Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education has become increasingly relevant amid the challenges posed by globalization, digital transformation, and the growing complexity of multicultural societies. Islamic education should not merely produce academically competent graduates but should also cultivate individuals who are tolerant, democratic, critical, morally responsible, and socially engaged. Accordingly, examining Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education is essential for providing a conceptual foundation that supports the development of Islamic education capable of responding effectively to contemporary societal challenges.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the concept of humanistic Islamic education from the perspective of Nurcholish Madjid and examine its relevance to the development of contemporary Islamic education.

Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Humanism in Education

Humanism is an educational philosophy that views human beings as individuals possessing inherent dignity, potential, and the freedom to achieve optimal personal development. Within educational discourse, humanism regards learners as active subjects who deserve respect and opportunities to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially, and

spiritually. Humanistic education seeks to establish democratic, dialogical, and student-centered learning environments (Rogers, 1983).

According to Maslow (1970), the primary goal of education is to facilitate individuals in achieving self-actualization, a condition in which they are able to realize their fullest potential. Similarly, Freire (2005) argues that education should function as a means of liberating individuals from oppression and injustice by fostering critical consciousness.

From an Islamic perspective, however, humanism cannot be separated from the principle of divine guidance. Islam views human beings as honored creations of Allah, as affirmed in Surah Al-Isra' (17:70). Consequently, humanistic Islamic education seeks to develop all dimensions of human potential while remaining firmly grounded in the values of *tawhid*, morality, and social responsibility (Nata, 2019).

2.2 The Concept of Humanistic Islamic Education According to Nurcholish Madjid

Nurcholish Madjid is one of Indonesia's most influential Muslim reformist thinkers who emphasized the importance of developing an educational system centered on human dignity. He argued that Islamic education should promote the balanced development of intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social dimensions of human life. Education should not merely produce academically accomplished individuals but should cultivate ethical awareness and social responsibility (Madjid, 2008).

In Madjid's educational philosophy, Islamic education must encourage rational and critical thinking. He rejected dogmatic and authoritarian educational practices because they suppress creativity and intellectual independence. Instead, education should become a dialogical space that enables learners to develop independent, critical, and responsible thinking (Madjid, 2019).

Furthermore, Nurcholish Madjid stressed the importance of openness toward diversity. Islamic education should cultivate inclusiveness and tolerance because Indonesia's pluralistic society requires citizens who are capable of living harmoniously amidst religious, cultural, and social diversity. Therefore, Islamic education should not become an instrument of exclusivism but rather foster national unity and universal humanitarian values.

2.3 Core Values of Humanistic Islamic Education in Nurcholish Madjid's Thought

a.3.1 Tawhid as the Foundation of Humanism

According to Nurcholish Madjid, Islamic humanism is fundamentally rooted in the doctrine of *tawhid*. *Tawhid* regulates not only the relationship between humans and God but also establishes the principle of human equality as God's creation. Consequently, education should cultivate respect for human dignity without discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or social background.

b.3.2 Freedom of Thought

Madjid emphasized that intellectual freedom is an essential prerequisite for civilizational progress. Education should encourage learners to think critically, rationally, and openly toward diverse perspectives. Freedom of thought does not imply rejecting religion but rather deepening religious understanding through contextual and reflective inquiry.

c.3.3 Tolerance and Inclusiveness

Tolerance constitutes a central value within Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education. Diversity should be accepted as a social reality and appreciated as part of God's design. Therefore, education must nurture learners who respect differences in religion, culture, ethnicity, and worldview.

d.3.4 Democracy and Dialogue

Humanistic Islamic education emphasizes dialogue as the foundation of the learning process. Relationships between teachers and students should be democratic, enabling active participation, creativity, mutual respect, and freedom of expression within the classroom.

e.3.5 Social Justice and Social Responsibility

Education is intended not only for individual development but also for cultivating social awareness. Learners should be encouraged to develop concern for humanitarian issues, social justice, and public welfare, thereby contributing positively to society.

3. 4. The Relevance of Humanistic Islamic Education to Contemporary Education

Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education possesses significant relevance to the needs of twenty-first-century education. First, it supports the development of character education by emphasizing integrity, responsibility, empathy, and social awareness. Second, it strengthens religious moderation through the cultivation of tolerance and inclusiveness. Third, Madjid's emphasis on freedom of thought aligns closely with the growing importance of critical thinking as one of the essential competencies required in contemporary education.

Furthermore, humanistic Islamic education provides valuable guidance for addressing the challenges of digital transformation. Students today require not only digital literacy skills but also ethical competence in using information responsibly. In this context, the values of Islamic humanism provide a moral foundation for fostering ethical digital citizenship and responsible engagement with technology.

Overall, Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education offers a comprehensive educational paradigm that integrates Islamic values, human dignity, democracy, and national identity. This paradigm represents a meaningful alternative for developing an inclusive, moderate, democratic, and contextually relevant model of Islamic education capable of responding effectively to the challenges of contemporary society.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach using the library research method. Primary data were obtained from the major works of Nurcholish Madjid, including *Islam, Modernity and Indonesian-ness*, *Islam, Doctrine and Civilization*, and *The Political Ideals of Islam in the Reform Era*. Secondary data were collected from books, scholarly journal articles, and previous studies relevant to the theme of humanistic Islamic education.

Data were collected through documentation studies by systematically identifying, reviewing, and examining relevant literature. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis to identify, classify, and interpret Nurcholish Madjid's ideas concerning humanistic Islamic education. The analytical process followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing various relevant primary and secondary sources.

Results

4.1 The Philosophical Foundation of Humanistic Islamic Education According to Nurcholish Madjid

The analysis of Nurcholish Madjid's major works reveals that his concept of humanistic Islamic education is fundamentally grounded in the paradigm of *tawhid*, which views human beings as God's creatures endowed with dignity (*karāmah*), freedom, and responsibility. Within this perspective, education functions not merely as a process of knowledge

transmission but also as a process of humanization that enables individuals to develop their innate potential (*fitrah*) comprehensively.

According to Nurcholish Madjid, Islamic humanism is entirely compatible with the principle of divine transcendence. Rather than conflicting with religious values, *tawhid* serves as the philosophical foundation that establishes respect for human dignity by recognizing human beings as Allah's vicegerents (*khalifah*) on earth. Consequently, Islamic education should integrate spiritual, intellectual, moral, social, and humanitarian dimensions in a balanced manner. An educational system that focuses exclusively on intellectual achievement inevitably produces academically capable individuals who may nevertheless lack empathy, ethical awareness, and social responsibility.

The findings further demonstrate that Nurcholish Madjid's understanding of humanism differs significantly from secular humanism, which places humanity at the center of all existence. Islamic humanism, by contrast, associates human dignity with accountability before God as well as responsibility toward fellow human beings. Accordingly, the ultimate objective of Islamic education extends beyond producing academically competent graduates to cultivating individuals who possess faith, moral integrity, democratic values, and a deep commitment to humanitarian concerns.

4.2 Core Values of Humanistic Islamic Education in Nurcholish Madjid's Thought

Analysis of Nurcholish Madjid's principal works identifies at least six fundamental values that constitute the foundation of his concept of humanistic Islamic education.

a.2.1 Tawhid as the Foundation of Humanistic Education

Nurcholish Madjid regarded *tawhid* as the fundamental principle underlying every educational endeavor. *Tawhid* instills the awareness that all human beings possess equal dignity before Allah, thereby rejecting discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, race, social status, or cultural background. Within educational practice, this principle requires the establishment of learning environments that respect every learner as an individual endowed with unique potential for growth and development.

b.2.2 Freedom of Thought

The findings indicate that intellectual freedom represents one of the defining characteristics of Nurcholish Madjid's educational philosophy. Education should not merely encourage learners to memorize information but should develop their capacity for critical, reflective, rational, and creative thinking. Teachers are expected to function as facilitators of intellectual dialogue rather than as the sole authority possessing absolute truth.

This paradigm encourages the development of an academic culture characterized by open discussion, scholarly inquiry, scientific research, and continuous intellectual advancement.

c.2.3 Tolerance and Inclusiveness

Tolerance constitutes another essential component of humanistic Islamic education. Nurcholish Madjid viewed diversity as *sunnatullah*—a divine law governing human existence—which should be accepted as a social reality. Consequently, Islamic education should nurture learners who respect differences in religion, culture, language, and worldview. Rather than fostering exclusivism, educational institutions should become spaces for dialogue that strengthen universal human solidarity.

d.2.4 Democracy in Education

The study also reveals that education, according to Nurcholish Madjid, should be built upon democratic relationships between teachers and learners.

The learning process should provide students with opportunities to express opinions, ask questions, participate in discussions, and actively construct knowledge. Such democratization

of education promotes an open academic culture characterized by creativity, participation, and respect for academic freedom.

e.2.5 Social Justice

Another fundamental value is social justice.

Nurcholish Madjid maintained that education should guarantee equal educational opportunities regardless of learners' economic background, religion, ethnicity, or gender. Humanistic education should therefore contribute to reducing social inequalities by ensuring equitable access to quality education for all members of society.

f.2.5 Social Responsibility

Humanistic Islamic education is intended not only to produce intellectually competent individuals but also socially responsible citizens.

Through education, learners are encouraged to become agents of social transformation capable of addressing issues such as poverty, social injustice, environmental degradation, and communal conflict. This finding demonstrates that Nurcholish Madjid's educational philosophy possesses a strong orientation toward social transformation.

4.2 Characteristics of Humanistic Islamic Education from Nurcholish Madjid's Perspective

The synthesis of relevant literature indicates several distinctive characteristics of Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education.

First, education is oriented toward the holistic development of the human person (*insān kāmil*), integrating intellectual, spiritual, emotional, moral, and social dimensions in a balanced manner.

Second, learning is conducted through dialogical interactions in which learners become active participants in constructing knowledge.

Third, education fosters a culture of scientific inquiry, rationality, and critical thinking while remaining firmly rooted in Islamic values.

Fourth, it cultivates inclusiveness, tolerance, and respect for diversity as essential characteristics of Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Finally, education seeks to develop leadership qualities, social responsibility, and commitment to universal humanitarian values.

These characteristics demonstrate that Nurcholish Madjid's educational philosophy extends well beyond academic achievement, emphasizing the comprehensive formation of learners' personalities.

4.4 The Relevance of Humanistic Islamic Education to Contemporary Islamic Education

The findings indicate that Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education remains highly relevant in addressing the challenges of twenty-first-century education.

a.4.1 Strengthening Character Education

Islamic humanism reinforces character education by promoting integrity, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and social awareness. Character education is therefore understood not as an isolated subject but as a culture embedded throughout the educational process.

b.4.2 Developing Twenty-First-Century Skills

The paradigm of intellectual freedom advocated by Nurcholish Madjid aligns closely with the competencies required in twenty-first-century education, particularly critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (the 4Cs). Consequently, humanistic Islamic education contributes to preparing learners who can adapt successfully to scientific and technological developments.

c.4.3 Strengthening Religious Moderation

The values of tolerance, inclusiveness, and dialogue that characterize Nurcholish Madjid's educational thought strongly support the implementation of religious moderation in Indonesia. Islamic education should therefore cultivate learners who possess moderate religious understanding, appreciate diversity, and are capable of living peacefully within multicultural societies.

d.4.4 Promoting Ethical Digital Literacy

Rapid digital transformation requires students not only to master technological skills but also to develop ethical awareness in digital environments. Values such as social responsibility, honesty, and morality embedded in humanistic Islamic education provide an important ethical foundation for fostering responsible digital citizenship while preventing the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and cyberbullying.

e.4.5 Transforming Educational Paradigms

Finally, Nurcholish Madjid's educational philosophy encourages a transformation from teacher-centered instruction toward student-centered learning. Teachers are expected to function as facilitators, motivators, mentors, and moral exemplars rather than merely transmitters of knowledge. This paradigm is highly compatible with contemporary educational reforms emphasizing active learning, differentiated instruction, character development, and learner autonomy.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education represents an educational paradigm that positions human beings as the central subjects of education while remaining firmly grounded in the principle of *tawhid*. Education is intended not only to develop intellectual competence but also to cultivate individuals who are faithful, morally upright, critical, democratic, tolerant, and socially responsible. The humanism articulated by Nurcholish Madjid is essentially a theocentric humanism, in which respect for human dignity derives from awareness of God, thereby integrating spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social dimensions in a balanced and harmonious manner.

The study further identifies six fundamental values underpinning Nurcholish Madjid's concept of humanistic Islamic education: *tawhid* as the foundation of humanism, freedom of thought, tolerance, democracy, social justice, and social responsibility. These values are realized through dialogical, participatory, and inclusive learning processes that promote the holistic development of learners' potential. Within the context of contemporary Islamic education, this educational philosophy demonstrates significant relevance for strengthening character education, promoting religious moderation, cultivating critical thinking, fostering ethical digital literacy, and implementing student-centered learning in accordance with the demands of twenty-first-century education. Therefore, Nurcholish Madjid's educational thought provides a valuable philosophical and pedagogical foundation for developing a more humanistic, inclusive, transformative, and globally responsive model of Islamic education while preserving its authentic Islamic identity.

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