

Inclusive Islamic Education Model: A Literature Analysis on Azyumardi Azra's Thoughts

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Abstract

This study analyzes Azyumardi Azra's thoughts on the inclusive Islamic education model through literature studies. The objectives of the research are (1) to formulate the characteristics of inclusive Islamic education according to Azra, (2) to identify its implications for educational curriculum and practices in Indonesia, and (3) to offer implementable recommendations for Islamic educational institutions. The method used is a critical analysis of the main works and secondary articles that examine Azra's ideas. The results of the analysis show that Azra emphasizes the modernization of Islamic education, the integration of modern traditions and sciences, the democratization of access to education, and the development of multicultural education that prioritizes tolerance and dialogue between religious communities. The main implication is the need for curriculum reform, educator training, and fairer access policies to realize inclusive Islamic education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Azyumardi Azra, Inclusive Islamic Education, Education Modernization, Multiculturalism, Democratization of Education

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Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia has a strategic role in shaping the character of a nation that is religious, moral, and tolerant of socio-cultural diversity. However, the dynamics of modernity, globalization, and plurality of Indonesian society require the Islamic education system to transform the paradigm from an exclusive model to a more **inclusive, open, and adaptive model to the changing times** (Azra, 2002). An inclusive Islamic education model is expected not only to instill Islamic values, but also to develop social, intellectual, and spiritual competencies that are able to build harmony in the life of the nation and religion.

According to Azyumardi Azra, one of the biggest challenges of Islamic education is its tendency to still be trapped in the **separation between religious science and general science**, which has an impact on the birth of a dichotomy of knowledge and an attitude of exclusivism among students (Azra, 2012). He emphasized the importance of **integrating classical Islamic scientific traditions with modern science** so that Islamic education can remain relevant in the context of contemporary society (Azra, 1999). Thus, Islamic education should not only be oriented towards the transfer of dogma, but also on the formation of a well-informed human being open to differences.

Inclusivity in Islamic education is also closely related to the idea of **democratization of education**, which is an effort to expand access to quality education regardless of the social, cultural, or religious background of students (Azra, 2006). In this context, Islamic educational institutions such as madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and Islamic universities must play a role as centers of community empowerment, not just religious teaching institutions. Through an inclusive and democratic approach, Islamic education can be an effective means to foster **tolerance, respect for diversity, and national spirit** (Nugroho, 2018).

Furthermore, Azra emphasized that Islamic education should not stop at the normative level, but need to develop into **a multicultural education** that respects the pluralistic social reality of Indonesian society (Azra, 2005). In his view, pluralism is a social necessity that must be managed through an education system that fosters dialogue, openness, and respect for differences. Through a multicultural approach, Islamic education can be a means of forming **tolerant, critical, and humanist citizens**, in line with the universal Islamic values of justice ('adl), balance (tawazun), and compassion (rahmah) (Azra, 2000).

These ideas made Azyumardi Azra one of the influential figures in the reform of Islamic education in Indonesia. He seeks to reconnect the treasures of classical Islamic scholarship with the dynamics of global modernity within the framework of rational, moderate, and inclusive thinking (Fadillah, 2021). Azra's thoughts are relevant to answer the problems of exclusivism, intolerance, and radicalism that sometimes arise in the practice of religious education in Indonesia. Thus, the analysis of the inclusive Islamic education model in Azyumardi Azra's thought is important as an effort to find a theoretical and practical framework for the development of Islamic education that is in line with the principles of pluralism and humanity in the modern era.

Literature Review The Concept of Inclusive Islamic Education

Inclusive Islamic education is an educational concept that emphasizes openness to differences, respect for diversity, and participation of all groups in the educational process without discrimination (Tilaar, 2004). In the context of Islam, educational inclusivity is based on the principle of rahmatan lil 'alamin which affirms that Islam is present to bring grace to all mankind (QS. Al-Anbiya: 107). Inclusive education in Islam means building a learning system that recognizes social, cultural, and religious diversity as wealth, not a threat (Abdullah, 2015).

According to Nata (2016), inclusive Islamic education is oriented towards the development of universal characters such as justice, tolerance, and compassion. This principle is in line with the

spirit of plurality of the Indonesian nation which is multiethnic and multi-religious. Thus, Islamic education must be able to instill universal Islamic values that are compatible with democracy and human rights.

Azra (2002) views that the Islamic education system in Indonesia needs to be contextualized with modern social realities. Education that emphasizes too much on normative aspects without opening up space for cross-cultural dialogue can foster an attitude of exclusivity and intolerance among students. Therefore, according to Azra, inclusive Islamic education is an education that not only instills *tafaqquh fi al-din* (religious deepening), but also equips students with *tafaqquh fi alhayat* (understanding of social life and humanity) (Azra, 2005).

Azyumardi Azra's Thoughts on the Modernization of Islamic Education

Azyumardi Azra is known as one of the reformers of Islamic education in Indonesia who carries the idea of modernization and scientific integration. He rejected the dichotomy between religious knowledge (*al-'ulum al-diniyyah*) and general knowledge (*al-'ulum al-dunyawiiyyah*) inherited from the colonial education system (Azra, 1999). For Azra, the modernization of Islamic education does not mean secularization, but rather the reformulation of educational epistemology to be more relevant to global challenges (Azra, 2012).

Azra's modernization thinking was heavily influenced by the classical Islamic intellectual tradition that was open to science and philosophy, as reflected in the history of Islamic education in the Middle East and the archipelago (Azra, 2006). He assessed that Islam actually has a dynamic intellectual tradition and is adaptive to the changing times. Therefore, modern Islamic education must combine *turats* (traditional heritage) with *tajdid* (renewal) in a critical and scientific framework.

The concept of modernization of education is in line with the view of Rahardjo (2002) who emphasizes the need for Islamic education not to be trapped in dogmatic formalities, but directed at the formation of rational and ethical lifelong learners. Azra (2005) also emphasized that modern Islamic education must strengthen literacy, science, and technology without abandoning Islamic moral-spiritual values.

Multicultural Dimension and Pluralism in Islamic Education

One of Azra's important contributions is his views on multicultural education as the foundation of inclusivity. In his book *Islamic Education: Tradition and Modernization Towards the New Millennium*, Azra (2005) emphasized that plurality is part of a social destiny that must be accepted and managed wisely. Islamic education should not be exclusive only to certain groups, but should be a learning space for all citizens who respect differences of faith and culture.

According to Azra (2000), multicultural education is a strategic means to build a fair, tolerant, and democratic civil society. He views education as a cultural instrument that can foster national awareness and interfaith social solidarity. This is in line with the opinion of Banks (2006), who stated that multicultural education functions to foster social competence and empathy between students from different backgrounds.

In the Indonesian context, multicultural education in Azra's perspective emphasizes the values of religious moderation (*wasathiyyah*), which is the balance between text and context, between faith and humanity. This moderation is important to suppress the emergence of radicalism in educational institutions and foster the spirit of dialogue between people (Fadillah, 2021). Thus, inclusive Islamic education is not only oriented to the curriculum, but also to the culture of educational institutions that value differences and encourage the active participation of all parties.

The Relevance of Azyumardi Azra's Thought in the Context of Contemporary Islamic Education

Azyumardi Azra's thinking has become very relevant in the midst of increasing challenges of globalization, information flows, and intolerance issues that plague the world of education. The inclusive education model he offers serves as an antithesis to education that is dogmatic and closed to differences. According to Rahman (2017), Azra's thinking emphasizes the balance between the spiritual and rational dimensions, between faith and knowledge, and between tradition and modernity.

In the context of the curriculum, Azra's inclusive ideas demand the integration of universal Islamic values such as social justice, gender equality, and respect for human rights (Azra, 2002). In terms of learning methodology, he encourages a dialogical and participatory approach so that students are able to think critically and appreciate the diversity of opinions. Thus, the inclusive Islamic education model is not only theoretical, but also has a practical and transformative dimension to the Indonesian national education system.

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with the library research method. This method was chosen because the purpose of the research was not to test empirical hypotheses, but to analyze Azyumardi Azra's ideas and conceptual constructions regarding an inclusive Islamic education model. Literature studies allow researchers to examine various written sources such as books, journal articles, proceedings, and official documents relevant to the research theme (Zed, 2008).

The data sources of this research consist of two main categories, namely primary sources and secondary sources.

Primary sources include Azyumardi Azra's original works, such as *Essays on Muslim Intellectuals and Islamic Education* (1999), *Substantive Islam* (2000), *New Paradigm of National Education* (2002), *Islamic Education: Tradition and Modernization Towards the New Millennium* (2005), and *Islam in the Indonesian World* (2006).

Secondary sources are books, journal articles, dissertations, and research reports that discuss Azra's thoughts and their relevance to contemporary Islamic education (Fadillah, 2021; Nugroho, 2018; Rahman, 2017).

The data collection technique in this study is collected through the following stages:

Literature inventory, which is the search and collection of Azra's works and previous research through libraries, university repositories, and academic online sources such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Neliti.

Resource classification, which is the grouping of literature based on main themes such as modernization of Islamic education, multiculturalism, and educational inclusivity.

Close reading of Azra's main texts to understand the context and consistency of his arguments.

Data recording and documentation, by recording citations, main ideas, and initial interpretations in a bibliographic record format (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Data analysis is carried out through **a content analysis approach with** three main stages as described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014):

Data reduction, which is the selection and simplification of important information from the literature that is relevant to the focus of the research.

Data display, in the form of a grouping of Azra's main ideas on Islamic education and the principle of inclusivity.

Conclusion drawing and verification, namely the interpretation of meaning, inter-concept relationships, and the implications of Azra's thinking on the development of an inclusive Islamic education model.

In the process of analysis, the researcher uses a hermeneutic approach to interpret the meaning behind the text of Azra's thought, so as to understand not only its literal content but also its ideological and epistemological context (Palmer, 1969). This hermeneutic approach helps to find the basic values such as tolerance, justice, and openness that are at the core of inclusive education in Azra's view.

Results Islamic Education as a Transformation of Values and Character

Azyumardi Azra emphasized that Islamic education is not only an instrument of religious knowledge transmission, but also a means of transforming values and forming universal human character (Azra, 2002). For Azra, the core of Islamic education is to instill ethical and spiritual values that are able to lead humans to become individuals of faith and high social character. This confirms his view that Islam is a religion that has the dimension of *hablun minallah* and *hablun minannas*, both of which must run in balance in the educational process.

In this context, inclusive Islamic education serves to form individuals who are open to differences and respect universal humanity. This kind of education avoids religious exclusivism which often causes social polarization (Hidayat, 2020). Azra (2012) even criticized the educational model that emphasizes too much doctrinal aspects without considering social and humanitarian aspects. He emphasized that Islamic education that only focuses on memorizing dogmas will not be able to answer the challenges of the times that demand critical, tolerant, and creative thinking.

This thinking is in line with the theory of critical pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire (1997), which places education as the process of human liberation from ignorance and structural oppression. Azra, in the context of Islam, encourages Islamic education to be a forum for spiritual and intellectual liberation, which fosters self-awareness and social responsibility (Azra, 2006). Thus, inclusive Islamic education is an education that emphasizes the balance between spirituality and humanity, not just the transmission of religious teachings.

Integration of Islam, Indonesianness, and Modernity

One of Azyumardi Azra's great contributions to the discourse of Islamic education is his idea of **the integration of Islam, Indonesianness, and modernity**. According to Azra (2006), the ideal Islamic education in Indonesia is an education that is firmly rooted in Islamic teachings, internalizes national values, and is responsive to the development of modernity. This integration is intended so that Islamic education is not uprooted from the socio-cultural reality of the nation, as well as not trapped in religious fundamentalism.

Azra (2014) assessed that Islam in the archipelago has a *wasathiyah* (moderate) character, which is a strength for the development of an inclusive education system. In his view, Islamic educational institutions such as *madrassas* and Islamic boarding schools should play a role as centers for the seeding of national values and democracy. This view is in line with the thinking of Hefner (2013), who stated that Islamic education in Southeast Asia has great potential in building a "civil Islam" that is in line with the values of democracy and pluralism.

The integration of Indonesian and Islamic nature offered by Azra also strengthens the position of Islamic education as part of the national education system. This at the same time strengthens the argument that Islam and nationality are not two opposing entities, but two forces that complement each other to build a civil society (Azra, 2006). In the context of globalization, this integrative approach also gives birth to a selective attitude towards modern culture, namely taking positive

values from modernity such as rationality and scientific progress without abandoning Islamic moral and spiritual values (Rahman, 2019).

Moderation and Pluralism as the Spirit of Inclusive Education

Azra views that **moderation (wasathiyah)** is the main principle in building inclusive Islamic education. According to him, a moderate attitude is a balance between text and context, between the ideality of teachings and social reality (Azra, 2017). Moderate Islamic education does not mean a compromise on the principles of faith, but the ability to interpret Islamic values in a contextual, relevant, and dialogical way with a pluralistic society.

This concept of moderation has very important pedagogical implications. The Islamic education curriculum needs to contain materials that teach the values of tolerance, social justice, and respect for differences in beliefs (Nugroho, 2021). Teachers or educators must also play a role model that displays a moderate and inclusive attitude in the learning process. Thus, the educational process not only transfers knowledge, but also instills character values through example (*uswah hasanah*).

Azyumardi Azra assessed that intolerance and radicalism often arise due to the failure of educational institutions in instilling the spirit of moderation (Azra, 2017). Therefore, inclusive Islamic education must be directed to foster the awareness of *ukhuwah insaniyah* (brotherhood of humanity), which is the basis of Islamic social ethics. This approach is in line with the multicultural educational paradigm developed by Banks (2009), which emphasizes the importance of equality, respect for other cultures, and recognition of plural identities.

In addition, pluralism in Islamic education, according to Azra, is not religious relativism, but the recognition of the social reality that human beings are created differently to know each other and cooperate (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13). Education that internalizes the value of pluralism will produce students who have global citizenship and are able to coexist in a multicultural world society (Hidayat, 2020).

Implications of Azyumardi Azra's Thought on Islamic Education Reform in Indonesia

Azra's inclusive thinking has made a real contribution to the direction of Islamic education reform in Indonesia. He encouraged Islamic educational institutions not only to become centers of religious studies, but also to become social institutions that actively strengthen the values of humanity, democracy, and nationality (Azra, 2002). In this regard, Islamic education has a moral responsibility to prepare a generation that is religious, nationalist, and open to global progress.

Practically, Azra's model of inclusive Islamic education can be implemented through several strategies:

- a. **Reorient the curriculum** to focus not only on the cognitive dimension, but also on the affective and social dimensions, by including issues of humanity, social justice, and world peace (Hefner, 2013).
- b. **Training teachers and lecturers** to improve pedagogical skills and multicultural competence, so that they are able to teach Islam with a moderate and open perspective (Rahman, 2019).
- c. **The development of a school culture** that upholds the values of tolerance and interfaith dialogue as a real practice of Islamic teachings that are *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (Azra, 2012).

If applied consistently, this educational model can be the antithesis to religious fundamentalism movements that tend to be exclusive and intolerant. The inclusive Islamic education formulated by Azra essentially seeks to restore the mission of Islamic education as humanizing the human — humanizing human beings in a holistic, rational, and spiritual sense (Azra, 2006).

Synthesis of Azra's Thought and Its Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Education

Analysis of the literature shows that Azyumardi Azra's thoughts are still very relevant to the challenges of Islamic education in the modern era. The concept of *wasathiyah* that he carries is not only a theological discourse, but also a methodological foundation for civilized educational practices. In the Indonesian context, this thinking is a solution to the emergence of symptoms of social disintegration due to the polarization of religious identity.

In addition, the idea of integrating Islam, Indonesianness, and modernity opens up space for the birth of a contextual and adaptive Islamic education model that is adaptive to the times. In this framework, Islamic education is not only a tool of *da'wah*, but also a means of social development that fosters social cohesion and religious literacy (Azra, 2014; Hidayat, 2020). In other words, Azyumardi Azra's thinking emphasizes that inclusive Islamic education is the key to the realization of a peaceful, plural, and progressive Indonesian society.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the literature analysis of Azyumardi Azra's thought, it can be concluded that **inclusive Islamic education** is an educational model that combines Islamic values, **Indonesianness, and modernity** in harmony and contextual. Azra sees that Islamic education should not be trapped in theological exclusivism, but must be open to plurality and changes in the times (Azra, 2006). Thus, Islamic education functions as an instrument of social and moral transformation that shapes people of faith, knowledge, and civility.

First, according to Azra, inclusive Islamic education has an orientation to **the transformation of values and character**, not just the transfer of religious knowledge. The goal is to produce human beings who have universal morals, respect differences, and uphold humanity (Azra, 2002). This kind of education affirms the role of Islam as a religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* that brings grace to all mankind.

Second, **the integration between Islam, Indonesianness, and modernity** is the main characteristic of Azra's thought. This integration contains the message that Islamic identity in Indonesia must synergize with national values and scientific progress (Azra, 2014). With this approach, Islamic education is able to build students who are rooted in religious traditions, but open-minded to global advances and modern science.

Third, **moderation and pluralism** are at the core of inclusive Islamic education. Azra (2017) emphasized that Islamic education must teach the attitude of *wasathiyah*, which is a balance in religion, thinking, and acting. Moderation is a cultural strategy to ward off radicalism, while pluralism is a social foundation to build harmony between religions (Nugroho, 2021). In the context of a pluralistic Indonesia, this is an important foundation for the creation of a peaceful and tolerant society.

Fourth, Azyumardi Azra's thinking has **practical implications for the reform of the Islamic education system** in Indonesia. These reforms include the reorientation of the curriculum that emphasizes human and national values, increasing the capacity of teachers to understand religious moderation, and the creation of an inclusive and dialogical school culture (Hefner, 2013; Rahman, 2019). With this step, Islamic educational institutions can become the center of civilization that gives birth to a generation of religious and cosmopolitan learners.

Thus, the inclusive Islamic education model initiated by Azyumardi Azra can be used as a paradigm for the development of contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia. This model invites Muslims to make education a means of humanizing the human—forming humans who are faithful, knowledgeable, tolerant, and socially responsible. In an era of globalization full of differences,

Azra's ideas have become relevant and strategic to strengthen the role of Islamic education as the main pillar of a peaceful and civilized civilization.

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