



## THE ADAPTATION OF ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS TO MODERNIZATION: THE PIONEERING ROLE OF KH. ABDUL WAHAB TURCHAM IN WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN SURABAYA

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pivotal role of pesantren in advancing women's education in Indonesia, with a particular focus on KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham, a pioneer in this domain in Surabaya. As traditional Islamic educational institutions, pesantren have historically been central to both religious and secular education in Indonesia. This qualitative research employs a descriptive approach, utilizing literature review methods to examine how pesantren are adapting to contemporary educational demands, particularly regarding women's education. The study underscores the critical need for policy initiatives and community support to drive educational transformation within Islamic boarding schools, ensuring they meet the evolving educational needs of women. Key findings highlight the influential role of Kiai, with KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham being instrumental in spearheading significant advancements in women's education. The research also identifies complex challenges facing female students, emphasizing the essential role of the Kiai in addressing these issues and fostering the development of a knowledgeable and empowered female generation.

**Keywords:** Islamic Education, Pesantren, Women

### ABSTRAK

*Studi ini menyelidiki peran penting pesantren dalam memajukan pendidikan perempuan di Indonesia, dengan fokus khusus pada KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham, pelopor domain ini di Surabaya. Sebagai lembaga pendidikan Islam tradisional, pesantren secara historis menjadi pusat pendidikan agama dan sekuler di Indonesia. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif, menggunakan metode tinjauan literatur untuk mengkaji bagaimana pesantren beradaptasi dengan tuntutan pendidikan kontemporer, khususnya mengenai pendidikan perempuan. Studi ini menggarisbawahi kebutuhan kritis akan inisiatif kebijakan dan dukungan masyarakat untuk mendorong transformasi pendidikan di dalam pesantren, memastikan mereka memenuhi kebutuhan pendidikan perempuan yang terus berkembang. Temuan-temuan kunci menyoroti peran berpengaruh Kiai, dengan KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham berperan penting dalam memelopori kemajuan signifikan dalam pendidikan perempuan. Penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi tantangan kompleks yang dihadapi siswa perempuan.*

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan Islam, Pesantren, Perempuan.



## INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, known as pesantren, have been a cornerstone of Islamic education in Indonesia since their inception in 1596 (Rokim, 2016). These institutions played a pivotal role in the nation's independence movement, with many leaders of the 1945 struggle being alumni of pesantren (Mastuhu, 1994).

The term 'pesantren' originates from the Arabic word 'funduq', meaning dormitory, and 'pondok', referring to a simple bamboo residence (Rokim, 2016). These institutions serve as residential centers for students to immerse themselves in Islamic studies. Given their deep roots in Indonesian society, pesantren are increasingly seen as vital in promoting women's empowerment (Prasetiyawan & Rohimat, 2019).

One of the core missions of Islam is the empowerment and elevation of women's status, ensuring their rights and obligations are equal to those of men. The Prophet Muhammad emphasized the importance of treating women with dignity, whether as daughters, wives, mothers, sisters, or community members (Lutfi et al., 2023). Despite these teachings, contemporary issues of gender injustice persist, with women often perceived as inferior to men.

According to the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), 18 cases of sexual violence occurred in educational institutions in 2021. Notably, 66.66% of these incidents took place in institutions with a dormitory format, including pesantren, highlighting a significant issue within these settings (Abdi, 2021). Additionally, the

National Women's Commission reported that between 2015 and 2020, 19% of sexual violence cases in the educational sphere occurred in pesantren, second only to universities (Rosa, 2021).

Education in Islamic boarding schools apparently does not yet provide a safe space for women. There are still many women who experience injustice. Islamic boarding schools must have an orientation to direct, guide and guide girls as students, so that they are able to be independent, creative and responsible (Ridho, 2018). Women in Islamic boarding schools are still indoctrinated with traditional discourse that women need to be considered egalitarian (Ratnasari, 2016).

Currently, pesantren often fail to provide a safe and equitable environment for female students, who frequently face traditional and patriarchal norms. The traditional curriculum, heavily influenced by the 'kitab kuning', reinforces these norms, which often portray women in a subordinate role (Jauhari & Thowaf, 2019). This rigid approach, which lacks integration with contemporary knowledge, perpetuates gender inequality within these institutions. Research conducted by Pebriaisyah revealed that a gender mainstreaming program is needed to create gender sensitive and responsive Islamic boarding schools through sexual education integrated into the Islamic boarding school curriculum as an effort to prevent sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools (Fitri Pebriaisyah et al., 2022)

Meanwhile, Prasetiawan & Lis stated that women's leadership in Islamic boarding school organizations has the same chance of success, there are no substantive obstacles,

because technically it can be covered by the management, but female leaders in Islamic boarding schools are perceived as temporary and merely as replacement successors. The characteristics of women's leadership have a lot of relevance to the Islamic boarding school's traditionalism style, which is charismatic and authoritative. The benefit of female leadership in Islamic boarding Islamic ideas about women (Prasetiawan & Lis, 2019).

Ridho revealed that understanding of Islamic teachings must be adjusted to the principles of justice, equality, benefit and mercy that Islam has taught conceptually and practically for all human beings, without having to be limited by gender. In general, men are positioned in public affairs and women are positioned in domestic affairs in the Islamic boarding school environment. Islamic boarding schools, which are supposed to teach and uphold the values of justice, have now embraced the teachings of community culture; patriarchy, femininity, and masculinity (Ridho, 2018)

The previous studies presented provide an illustration that Islamic boarding schools must provide a learning space that is dynamic, expressive and contains equality for women using Islamic religious principles. The foundation founded by KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham, known as Khadijah, gave a new color to the world of Islamic boarding schools, especially for women. Khadijah, a religious educational institution that follows the direction of civilization, has proven to produce great women with a modern Islamic boarding school background. The research question this time is how did the founder,

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham, build Islamic boarding schools and women?

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach, utilizing the literature review method. The literature review, also referred to as a literature study, involves systematically acquiring, reading, and critically evaluating research literature pertinent to the research objectives. The primary source of literature for this research is the book titled "KH. A. Wahab Turcham: Activator of Women's Education in Surabaya."

The literature review is a rigorous, explicit, and reproducible methodology designed to identify, assess, and synthesize relevant research findings and theoretical perspectives. It is crucial for determining the scope of existing research, identifying gaps, and setting the foundation for future studies. Denney and Tewksbury (2013) define a literature review as a structured process to discern what has been explored and what remains unexamined, thereby highlighting areas for further investigation. This study meticulously follows the systematic steps of a literature review: defining the research question, sourcing and selecting relevant literature, critically analyzing the findings, and synthesizing the insights to construct a coherent narrative (Denney & Tewksbury, 2013). This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the current knowledge landscape and aligns the research objectives with identified scholarly gaps.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Biography of KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham was born on January 5, 1915, in Paneleh village, Surabaya. His parents were KH Ahmad Turcham and Hj. Marwiyah, and he had two siblings named Abdullah and Fatimah.

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham began his education at Tarbiyatul Aitam in Surabaya. In addition to formal schooling, his father provided him with rigorous religious education, covering fundamental texts such as *Aqidatul Awam*, *Safinatun Naja*, and other essential works. During his teenage years, he attended the Nahdlatul Wathan Madrasah in Surabaya, which aimed to produce educational activists and foster Muslim movements for the nation's revival.

While at the Madrasah, the young KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham became actively involved in Itihadus Syubban (Youth Association), where he honed organizational skills, explored and articulated ideas, mastered rhetorical techniques, and engaged in dialogues with KH. Wahab Hasbullah. Upon graduation, KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham pursued further education at the Islamic boarding school managed by KH. Basuni in Paneleh village, later continuing at Tebuireng Jombang. At Tebuireng, he was mentored by Hadratus Shaykh Hasyim Asyari and his son, KH. Wakhid Hasyim.

After completing his studies at Tebuireng, KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham returned to Surabaya and established the Islamic Middle School (SMI) for both boys and girls. However, the school eventually

closed due to the turbulent conditions in Surabaya following the events of November 10, 1945. Alongside his teaching endeavors, he dedicated himself to the NU organization, specifically LP Maarif, serving as the branch manager in Surabaya from 1940 to 1956. From 1956 to 1964, he was appointed chairman of the Surabaya branch of LP Maarif.

In addition to his roles as an educator and activist, KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham was also politically active, representing the NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) party. In the 1950s, as the nation's situation began to stabilize, he rededicated his efforts towards establishing an educational institution now known as TPP Khadijah. Besides his commitment to this institution, KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham taught at several universities in Surabaya, including IKIP, UNSURI, and IAIN.

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham remained a devoted teacher throughout his life, never marrying and leaving behind a legacy centered around the knowledge and institutions he established, notably TPP Khadijah.

### Laying the Foundation for Women's Education

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham founded Madrasah Muallimat Nahdlatul Ulama on August 1, 1954, in Surabaya. The establishment of this institution was supported by the administrators of PCNU Surabaya, including KH Abdul Fatah Yasin, KH. Abdul Manaf Murtadho, and KH. Abd. Aziz Diyar, all of whom were students of Tebuireng and disciples of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, alongside Mrs. Yasin, the Chair of

PC Muslimat NU Surabaya. These individuals were not only active in the field of education but also in the administration of NU. Upon its inception, the institution faced significant challenges, such as inadequate funding, a scarcity of teachers, and parental neglect towards education, particularly for girls. At that time, there were no educational institutions for girls in Surabaya, making KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham the pioneer in establishing the first girls' school in the city.

The madrasa's opening was met with a positive response from the community, though the number of enrollees was initially modest. In its first phase, 30 female students enrolled in Class I (accepting SR/People's School graduates), while Class IV (catering to junior high school graduates) had 12 students. The teaching staff consisted of five educators. The madrasa's appeal lay in its integrated curriculum, combining general and religious education, and its Islamic boarding school attire, including the headscarf. Due to the increasing number of students, the administrators planned to relocate to the Wonokromo area. However, political conditions in the 1960s, particularly the tensions between the NU and PKI factions, posed significant obstacles, including interference from PKI figures regarding the proposed site.

This period was especially challenging due to the unstable political climate, economic turmoil, and ideological confrontations. Despite these difficulties, Kiai Wahab and the teachers remained determined to sustain the madrasa and its community. Ultimately, they succeeded in

establishing the Madrasah Muallimat in the Wonokromo area. To address the needs of the modernizing student body, many of whom came from Gresik, a boarding school was established to enhance the quality of education. By 1965, the well-established NU Madrasah Muallimat was renamed NU Women's Education Park (TPP NU). This year marked the expansion of TPP NU, encompassing various institutions such as Kindergarten, Elementary School, Middle School, High School, a three-year Teacher Education School (SPG), and Muslimat.

In 1970, the TPP NU School became a notable institution within the NU network, uniquely operating as a non-Islamic boarding school, yet maintaining boarding school characteristics. It attracted students from prominent families, including the daughters of KH. Idham Chalid, KH. Achmad Syaichu, and Hadji Kalla. The student body was diverse, comprising individuals from Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Maluku, West Nusa Tenggara, and even international students from Malaysia, Singapore, and Suriname, many of whom continued their studies at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University in Surabaya.

During its early years as Madrasah Muallimat, the institution did not participate in government-administered exams due to various administrative reasons. However, from 1960 onwards, it adopted the Ministry of Education and Culture's system, and by 1971, the institution, now named TPP NU, was authorized to conduct its own examinations. In 1972, due to political reasons and the evolving situation in Indonesia, the institution, known as TPP

NU during the New Order era, was renamed TPP Khadijah to reflect a more inclusive educational approach while maintaining its core values.

### **The Character of a Kiai**

In the culture of Islamic boarding schools, a kiai embodies multiple roles: cleric, educator, caregiver, community liaison, leader, and manager. This multifaceted role demands that kiai possess the ability, dedication, and high commitment to effectively navigate various situations (Anwar, 2010).

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham exemplifies this versatility as he serves not only as an educator but also as a caregiver, founder, and leader of the Khadijah Foundation. The kiai's position is pivotal in Islamic boarding schools, where they act as designers, architects, founders, developers, leaders, and managers (Mardiyah, 2012).

The centrality of the kiai's role in Islamic boarding schools cannot be overstated; the success or stagnation of the institution largely hinges on the kiai's vision and leadership. A kiai provides the foundational ideas, spirit, and motivation essential for the school's development (Rosi, 2020). Despite his significant position at UNSURI Surabaya, KH. Wahab chose to use public transportation, and he generously donated his salary to fund the education of underprivileged students at Khadijah. He epitomized the principle: "Struggle must be at the forefront." Beyond their religious knowledge, kiai are characterized by humility, openness to criticism, honesty,

fairness, commitment to struggle, and sincere devotion to Allah (Anwar, 2010).

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham's wise disposition is evident in his financial habits. He divides his income among daily needs, contributions to the Khadijah Foundation, and the purchase of books and international magazines. His actions reflect a kiai more concerned with the future of his institution than personal gain. Drs. H. Abdullah Sani M.Pd., a senior lecturer at the Khadijah Foundation, attests to Kiai Wahab's consistency and punctuality, noting his ascetic lifestyle and dedication to the foundation, leaving behind no personal assets. He is a visionary leader, continually contemplating the foundation's growth, such as expanding buildings and enhancing teacher competencies.

In the face of global challenges, kiai are required to have a clear and directed vision for the development of their educational institutions. Contemporary kiai transcend traditional roles of teaching the Quran and instead guide administrators and the Asatidz council toward advanced thinking and action (Umam, 2020). KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham is recognized as a visionary leader for his continuous evaluation and improvement of Khadijah Foundation through comparative studies, supervision, and performance evaluations.

M. Rofi'uddin, a teacher at the Khadijah Foundation, highlights Kiai Wahab's patience, sincerity, and discipline. KH Wahab's belief that "stealing is not only about stealing things but also about stealing time" underscores the importance of setting a good example. This exemplary behavior is

crucial for students to emulate (Tafsir, 1996). The values of simplicity, independence, consistency, perseverance, humility, and discipline in Islamic teachings must be consistently demonstrated by the kiai, making him a role model for all students at the Islamic boarding school (Ifendi, 2020).

### **Kiai as a Motivator for Santri**

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham is a distinguished kiai who plays a pivotal role in inspiring his students, especially women who often perceive themselves as subordinate to men, to pursue education. Islamic boarding schools thrive and progress when led by a charismatic kiai who is adept at managing the educational system within the institution and remains resilient against external influences that could disrupt the school's harmony (Permadi & Wahyudi, 2022; Umam, 2020).

Islam teaches that possessing beneficial values is a fundamental human trait, encapsulated in the saying "khoirunnas anfauhum linnas" (the best of people are those who bring the most benefit to others). KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham instilled in his students the importance of embodying values that benefit others. He often referenced the contributions of Thomas Alva Edison, whose inventions have significantly benefitted humanity. According to him, Edison epitomizes a person who provides immense value to others. Implicitly, KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham encouraged his students to not only contribute to the welfare of others but also to appreciate and learn from the benefits provided by individuals, irrespective of their religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. This holistic approach to learning is critical in the

evolving landscape of education (Umam, 2020).

A kiai's role extends beyond preserving traditional pesantren culture; they must also anticipate future challenges for students, equipping them with diverse knowledge that spans beyond religious studies to include other fields necessary to navigate global challenges (Umam, 2020). KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham emphasized to his students that educational activities should never be postponed, as initial efforts pave the way for subsequent actions towards achieving final goals. He advocated for the performance of even the smallest acts of kindness, asserting that such actions set a precedent for further goodness and that timely education can preempt negative behaviors.

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham famously remarked, "No step is ever truly wasted. Every step matters, even if it is as simple as picking up a piece of trash, as it is part of the process of guiding our students and protecting them from potential harm." The methodology of Islamic education must inherently have the capacity to steer the subject matter towards its educational objectives through a systematic process, applicable across formal, non-formal, and informal institutions. The ultimate goal of Islamic education is to cultivate a Muslim personality that embodies Islamic values in every facet of life (Ihsan & Ihsan, 1998). Thus, kiai are seen as innovative leaders who continually develop the pesantren in new dimensions, reflecting their exceptional creativity (Dhofier, 1994).

Dra. Hj. Nihayah Abdul Djabar, an alumna of the Khadijah Foundation,

revealed that Kiai Wahab possesses comprehensive abilities. Besides being an expert in fiqh, hadith, faraid, and astronomy, he is also skilled in art and pencak silat. A kiai must adapt to the changing times; otherwise, the pesantren risks becoming irrelevant and abandoned, especially in the context of advancing science and technology (Pramitha, 2020). The community holds kiai in high regard, valuing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which are perceived as holy. They are believed to possess a profound understanding of natural events and the majesty of God, which commands deep respect and obedience from the community (Umam, 2020).

### **Women and Islamic Boarding Schools**

The transformation of education within Islamic boarding schools is anticipated to foster positive change by enhancing the quality of life through education. With the rapid advancements in science and technology, there is a heightened potential for societal transformation. Female students, as Muslim women, have an obligation to acquire and study diverse forms of knowledge, both religious and secular (Muafiah, 2013).

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham posits that providing educational provisions to girls is paramount, given that women play a crucial role in the education of their children. He argues that if women's education is substandard, it will hinder their children's educational progress. Therefore, it is imperative that women receive the highest possible education. Buhongo underscores that women hold a central role in the educational aspect of life, both in society and

within the family. Within the family, women's central role in educating children is particularly dominant (Buhongo, 2017).

The educational approach adopted by mothers will significantly influence the subsequent educational process. Islam profoundly understands the central role women play in the family and society. This recognition is evident in KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham's ability to perceive this dynamic. Historically, female figures such as Siti Khodijah exemplified balance. Islamic education, with its inherent values, offers ample space for women to maintain a balancing role in achieving collective success. This balance fosters strength both within the family unit and socially (Lutfi et al., 2023).

Kiai have a significant influence on the thoughts and behavior of their students, being central figures who command respect and obedience. At Islamic boarding schools, students are tasked with the duty to study diligently and become agents of change within their communities. The education provided not only aims to produce intellectually capable individuals but also morally upright ones. This includes instilling the concepts of justice and gender equality, challenging the public perception that Islamic boarding schools are entrenched in a patriarchal culture (Habsi, 2022).

As a leader at Khadijah, KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham consistently motivates his students by narrating the struggles of formidable women such as Aisyah, RA. Kartini, and Cut Nyak Dien. The patriarchal culture prevalent in society, including in Islamic boarding schools, is not only a legacy of the past but also influenced by traditional



religious interpretations derived from classical texts (Towaf, 2008). However, Husein Muhammad argues that the subordination of women within Islamic contexts does not stem from normative religious texts but rather from the socio-cultural and political dynamics of Muslims, with education being a fundamental factor (Prasetiawan & Lis, 2019).

The author concurs with the perspective that classical Islamic texts have contributed to gender inequality, as anticipated by KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham. He believes that education should not be confined to verbal instruction but should be complemented by written materials to facilitate better comprehension. This approach underscores the importance of filtering knowledge to cater to the specific needs of students. KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham, an avid reader, has donated numerous books to the PCNU East Java office, encompassing a range of subjects including fiqh, linguistics, and Sufism. His extensive collection of classical and contemporary texts serves as vital teaching resources.

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham also advocates for women's pursuit of good careers through continuous education, extending beyond elementary and secondary levels. He envisions women having equal opportunities as men to achieve successful careers.

Education on gender equality for santri (students) is deemed essential, as they represent the future generation striving for a just and equitable society. An engaging and varied educational process on gender equality is necessary, encompassing

counseling, workshops, training, discussions, consultation services, and classroom dialogues (Towaf, 2008). KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham has implemented such education by providing platforms for students to develop skills in martial arts, dance, and music. Through education, he has championed the empowerment of women. Gender equality promotes the realization of men and women as foundational elements in the formation of ideas, organizational structures, and cultural practices, ensuring women's rights and equal learning opportunities (Fahmi Ilmy, 2020).

KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham believes that women should not be relegated to secondary roles. He advocates for women to lead and maximize their talents, not lagging behind men. By providing supportive facilities, he encourages students to develop their potential, become independent, and cultivate strong character. Kiai are expected to employ strategies to shape students' character by instilling comprehensive values rooted in Islamic teachings, serving as exemplary role models, and preparing students to be independent and morally sound (Zuchdi, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

The role of the kiai in the educational framework of Islamic boarding schools, particularly those catering to female students, is of paramount importance. Recent incidents involving female students underscore the multifaceted and intricate nature of the underlying issues, some of which are directly influenced by the actions of the kiai. KH. Abdul Wahab Turcham, a

distinguished figure from both the pre- and post-independence periods, epitomizes a kiai who was profoundly attuned to the educational needs of women. This study highlights the critical need for visionary kiai in women's Islamic boarding schools—those who can anticipate and adapt to evolving conditions while ensuring the safety and well-being of their students and staff. Furthermore, a kiai with a comprehensive understanding of both religious and secular knowledge is an invaluable asset for the progressive development of an Islamic boarding school. These findings indicate that the leadership qualities of the kiai are essential for the holistic advancement of educational institutions. Future research should delve into the specific attributes that contribute to effective leadership in this context and examine the broader impact of kiai leadership on educational outcomes.

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