



Islamic Education Based on Literacy Tradition in Educating the People of Islamic Union (PERSIS)

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Abstract: Islamic Education Based on Literacy Tradition in Educating the People of Islamic Union (PERSIS)

Objective: This study aims to examine the literacy tradition in public education developed by the Islamic Association (PERSIS) using a literature review and historical analysis. **Methods:** This research was conducted in 2023. The research uses the heuristic method to collect data, and data analysis uses historical analysis of the development of PERSIS in literacy and education. **Results:** PERSIS has successfully developed a strong literacy tradition since its establishment, which focuses on spreading and understanding Islamic teachings by the spirit of returning to the Qur'an and As-Sunnah. **Conclusion:** PERSIS books and publications have become a major means of enriching Islamic literature in Indonesia and helping to deepen people's understanding of Islamic teachings. They have positively impacted the internal PERSIS community and contributed to developing public education in Indonesia. **Contribution:** The results of this study contribute to strengthening PERSIS' literacy-based proselytization strategy, both in print and digital media, so that the wider community can more easily access Islamic teachings.

Keyword: Literacy Tradition; People of Islamic Union; Islamic Education

Abstrak: Pendidikan Islam Berbasis Tradisi Literasi dalam Mencerdaskan Umat Persatuan Islam (PERSIS)

Tujuan: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tradisi literasi dalam pendidikan masyarakat yang dikembangkan oleh Persatuan Islam (PERSIS) menggunakan tinjauan literatur dan analisis sejarah. **Metode:** Penelitian ini dilaksanakan pada tahun 2023 menggunakan metode heuristik untuk mengumpulkan data. Sejarah perkembangan PERSIS dalam bidang literasi dan pendidikan dianalisis. **Hasil:** PERSIS berhasil mengembangkan tradisi literasi yang kuat sejak berdiri. Tradisi literasi PERSIS berfokus pada penyebaran dan pemahaman ajaran Islam sesuai dengan semangat untuk kembali kepada Al-Qur'an dan As-Sunnah. **Kesimpulan:** Buku dan penerbitan PERSIS menjadi sarana utama dalam memperkaya literatur Islam di Indonesia dan memperdalam pemahaman masyarakat terhadap ajaran Islam. Hal ini berdampak positif pada komunitas internal PERSIS dan juga berkontribusi penting bagi perkembangan pendidikan masyarakat di Indonesia. **Kontribusi:** Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam memperkuat strategi dakwah PERSIS yang berbasis literasi di media cetak maupun digital sehingga masyarakat luas dapat lebih mudah mengakses ajaran Islam.

Kata Kunci: Tradisi Literasi; Umat Persatuan Islam; Pendidikan Islam

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A. INTRODUCTION

Persatuan Islam (PERSIS) (in English: Islamic Union) grew and developed into an organization that plays an active role in public education (Newland, 2006). Beginning as a study group, it has become a community organization with many networks in various provinces and districts in Indonesia (Mustofa et al., 2022). There are 372 PERSIS educational institutions in Islamic boarding schools alone. This count does not include mosques, formal schools, and universities affiliated with them. This growth and development have made figures such as Howard M. Federspiel, Akh Minhaji, Syafiq A. Mughni, and others interested in researching this organization (Ravasi & Canato, 2013).

As a responsibility for public education, PERSIS continues to make efforts with various programs and activities (Behzadnia et al., 2018). Apart from establishing Islamic boarding schools, assemblies, universities, and other social and religious activities, PERSIS is also active in literacy (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2016). Literacy has become a tradition in the PERSIS environment because, from its establishment until today, reading is still a well-maintained means of distributing knowledge. During the ideological decade between 1920-1930, various ideologies filled the thought and influenced religious growth and political struggle in Indonesia (Yani et al., 2018). In that period, three significant organizations were born: Muhammadiyah (1912), Persatuan Islam (PERSIS) (1923), and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) (1926). Muhammadiyah was born with a social spirit, and NU was born with the spirit of the revival of Islamic boarding schools. In comparison, PERSIS was born with the spirit of literacy. At the axiological level, however, the three play a role in many of the same things and complement each other. However, the establishment of PERSIS, which started from studying literature (reading), made it more clearly known as a literacy-based movement than others.

Anas mentions several publications that PERSIS has distributed: *Pembela Islam* (1929), *al-Fatwa* (1931), *al-Lissan* (1935), *at-Taqwa* (1937), *al-Hikam* (1939), *Aliran Islam* (1948), *Risalah: Bacaan Peneguh Umat* (1962), *Iber* (1967), and *Pemuda Persis Tamaddun* (1970). Apart from that, books that answer many public issues are widely published and distributed by PERSIS. A. Hassan's books became President Soekarno's mainstay reading for religious matters (Rustam et al., 2023). In "Under the Flag of Revolution," Soekarno documents his earliest letter to A. Hassan regarding his request to send books. In his letter, he wrote:

"Endeh, 1 Desember 1934. Assalamu'alaikum, Jikalau saudara-saudara memperkenankan, saya minta saudara mengasih hadiah kepada saya buku-buku jang tersebut di bawah ini: 1 Pengadjaran Shalat, 1 Utusan Wahabi, 1 al-Mughtar, 1 Debat Talqien, 1 al-Burhan compleet, 1 al-Jawahir. Kemudian daripada itu, jika saudara-saudara ada sedia, saya minta sebuah risalah yang membitjarakan soal "Sayid". Ini buat saya bandingkan dengan alasan-alasan saya sendiri tentang hal ini" (In English: "Endeh, December 1, 1934. Assalamu'alaikum, If you allow me, I would ask you to give me as a gift the following books: 1 Utusan Wahabi, 1 al-Mughtar, 1 Debat Talqien, 1 Al-Burhan compleet, 1 al-Jawahir.. Apart from that, if you are available, ask for a treatise on "Sayid." Compare this with my own reasons for this.")

"Returning to the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah" became the central discourse of PERSIS figures, spreading through these literacy platforms. At the same time, he spread the idea of modernism to stand up and catch up with backwardness through more democratic Islamic studies so that Muslims (Atari et al., 2020), in general, could overcome conditions that were shackled in poverty and backwardness (Mwiti & Goulding, 2018).

From PERSIS' work in literacy to educate the people, researchers are interested in conducting a more in-depth study through research entitled "Literacy Traditions in Educating the People of Persatuan Islam (PERSIS)." Through a qualitative approach with literature study techniques and in-depth historical study, this research aims to describe how PERSIS disseminates understanding of its teachings through various literacy platforms such as magazines, books, and other publications. This research explores how PERSIS utilizes literacy to spread religious teachings and ideology to its members and the general public. This research exa-

mines various types of publications produced by PERSIS, such as magazines, books, and on-line media, and how these publications influence the development of education, religious thought, and social identity within the PERSIS community. Apart from that, this research also explores the ideological and cultural impact of PERSIS literacy, illustrating how it plays a role in shaping the religious style of the Persis community and its influence on the development of Muslim society in Indonesia.

Islamic education based on literacy traditions has become a primary focus in understanding intellectual development in Islam. Various studies have shown that the Islamic literacy tradition plays a crucial role in the distribution and preservation of Islamic knowledge, as supported by Eliwatis et al. (2022), Risdiana (2019), Fauzan & Fata (2019), Abbas (2016), Othman et al. (2015), Azhar et al. (2023), and Fatimah (2018). These studies reveal that PERSIS, as an Islamic organization, is known for its strong literacy-based educational approach to guiding its community.

However, some research gaps still address the role of literacy in Islamic education within the PERSIS environment. Most studies focus on the classical approach to Islamic literacy and do not sufficiently connect it to modern challenges such as digitalization and globalization. Furthermore, the limited number of empirical studies evaluating the direct impact of literacy-based education on the PERSIS community highlights the need for a more in-depth investigation.

This study offers a novel perspective by examining PERSIS as a unique case study, exploring how literacy-based education can adapt to the digital era, and empirically measuring its impact on the understanding and practice of Islam within the PERSIS community. This study is expected to provide new insights into the development of literacy-based Islamic learning methods in the modern era.

B. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with literature analysis and historical methods. The research aims to describe, explain, and descriptively illustrate the narrative of a phenomenon or event and social activities by individuals or groups. This research begins with a literature review on the concept of literacy in religious organizations and the principles of Islamic education, followed by an analysis of the historical development of PERSIS in its work in educating people.

Data was collected using the heuristic method, followed by verification and interpretation. Heuristics was conducted by identifying and collecting data or information from various relevant written sources, such as books on the history of PERSIS, books written by PERSIS figures, and magazines. Data was checked through verification related to the authenticity, validity, and reliability of the data or information, including comparing sources, verifying facts, and ensuring that the data used is valid and reliable.

Data was also analyzed using the heuristic method. It analyzes and understands the meaning of data or information verified by considering the historical, social, and cultural context of the literacy tradition at PERSIS.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The establishment of PERSIS was initiated by a group of people initiated by two Bandung residents from Palembang: KH. Mohamad Zamzam and KH. Mohamad Yunus. They conducted an intensive study of books on Islamic thought (Bahri, 2011). They studied various books and publications, such as *al-Munir* from Padang and *al-Manar* from Egypt. They also warmly discussed various problems, such as the conflict between the al-Irsyad and Jamiatul Khair organizations, communism that divided Sarekat Islam, and the like. Finally, as time passed, this study group crystallized its thoughts on the importance of openness to *ijtihad* and

returning to the Al-Qur'an and sunnah to keep people from confusion. So, the organization was born precisely in the hands of KH. Mohamad Zamzam, KH. Mohamad Yunus, and other names such as H. Agil, Sobirin, Munaf, and Syarif on September 12, 1923, as an Islamic organization.

Three years later, A. Hassan, an Indonesian-Indian born in Singapore, joined PERSIS. His bold thinking made him increasingly stand out in the organization, which had only been established for three years. Several important names were recorded following his joining PERSIS, both organizationally and in the studies: M. Natsir, Munawar Cholil, Fakhruddin Al-Khahiri, A. A. Banama, Rusyad Nurdin, M. Isa Anshary, and E. Abdurrahman. Federspiel mentions that Hamka and Hasbi Ash-Shiddiqy were members of this organization.

PERSIS is an organization with a vital characteristic of *da'wah bil kitabah*. One of the many magazines that still exists and is used to develop Islamic society is *Risalah*. The magazine was established in 1962 and officially began publication in 1963 under the management of Yunus Anis and K. H. E. Abdurrahman. This magazine circulated in the PERSIS community, following in the footsteps of its predecessors such as *Pembela Islam*, *al-Lissan*, *at-Taqwa*, and *al-Muslimun*. At the beginning of its publication, *Risalah* discussed more religious topics than political issues. This focus aligns with the da'wah efforts carried out by PERSIS through publications. However, in 1983, *Risalah* underwent significant changes in its content and authors after Abdul Latief Mukhtar, one of the general chairs of the PERSIS Central Leadership, took over its management. As a result, this magazine began to cover religious topics and political issues in Indonesia.



Figure 1. *Risalah* Magazine

Apart from magazines, PERSIS also established Persis Press and the official website (<https://persis.or.id>). The official website provides various information related to activities and programs run by PERSIS, including news about Islam, Islamic studies, Islamic boarding school education, online publication of *Risalah*, and books and columns from PERSIS. There is also an "Istifta" column, which contains questions from the public regarding matters of worship and daily life. The website can be accessed for free by the public and functions as a digital platform to support da'wah and educational activities carried out by PERSIS (Prasetyo & Halwati, 2023).



Figure 2. The Official Website of Persatuan Islam (PERSIS)

Discussion

This research found that PERSIS, as an organization that spreads the teachings of Islam to society, began to develop and influence spaces of religious thought when A. Hassan documented and published his thoughts in various media such as books, magazines, and pamphlets. They carried out correspondence with various essential figures, such as President Soekarno. In a broader view, PERSIS has educated people through literacy activities. Public education, such as coaching, counseling, or guidance activities, develops the morals or mentality of people in the direction of Islamic teaching. The goal is for people to see religion as a guide and control for behavior, attitudes, and movements in life so that they will be aware to stay away from Allah's prohibitions and carry out all the commands (Julina, 2020).

A. Hassan and other PERSIS activists spread their writing through the rise and fall of four published magazines: *Pembela Islam*, *at-Fatwa*, *al-Lisaan*, and *al-Taqwa*. *Pembela Islam* was published from 1929 to 1933 with a circulation of 2000 copies. This magazine was widely spread and became a reference for Muhammadiyah and al-Irsyad figures in Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Minangkabau, and West Java. In November 1931, *at-Fatwa* was founded, an Indonesian magazine in Javanese letters. Its circulation reached 1000 copies spread to 100 customers in Sumatra and Kalimantan. This magazine lasted up to 20 issues. Then, *al-Lisaan* appeared, which was expected to replace *Pembela Islam*. This magazine was published in 1935 with a circulation of 2000 copies but was stopped due to the Japanese occupation of Indonesia. Meanwhile, *al-Taqwa*, a Sundanese language magazine, was initiated explicitly by KH E. Abdurrahman and Qomarudin in 1930. This magazine published 1000 copies and stopped on its 20th issue.

In these magazines, PERSIS activists, with the symbol of their great teacher, A. Hassan, expressed various thoughts regarding the spirit of returning to the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah. It indirectly contradicted the simplicity of thinking and *blind taqlid* towards religious authority (*kyai, ajengan*). As a result, it disturbed the feudalism of traditional religious leadership that had long existed in the religious life of the Javanese Islamic community (Sunarso, 2018; Thohir et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Natsir talked more about nationality. Meanwhile, Munawar Chalil also contributed his thoughts in the "Sual-Djawab" column, specifically regarding legal fatwa issues.

At the same time, this literacy-based da'wah activity continues to develop along with the birth of books written by PERSIS activist figures, which also significantly influences the formation of this organization's identity as one that is strong in the nuances of *da'wah bil-kitabah*.

In his 1977 book, *Studen Over De Geschiedenis Van De Islam in Indonesia 1900-1950*, Dr. G. Pijper said that A. Hassan was like rice stalks sticking out of the fertile Priyangan rice fields. Pijper used this sentence to express his admiration for Hassan, who has written many works. Hassan has become a reference for many intellectual and general people in the book: *Tafsir Al-Furqon, Questions and Answers, Translation of "Bulughul Maram," "Pengajaran Shalat,"* and *Shorof*. *Tafsir Al-Furqon* and other books were printed by A. Hassan at the Chinese-owned Drukerij Economy printing press in 1928.

Natsir also followed the track record of his teacher, A. Hassan, who published many of his thoughts through magazines and books. Natsir is recorded as having written articles in *Algemeen Indische Dagblad* magazine, "Qur'an en Evangelie" (Al-Quran and the Bible) and "Muhammad als Prophet" (Muhammad as the Prophet) in 1929. Natsir has also written books published dozens of times since 1969: *Fiqhud Dakwah*, *Islam Akal Merdeka*, *Islam Sebagai Dasar Negara*, *Capita Selecta*, and many more. Zainal Abidin Ahmad, in the introduction to *Capita Selecta*, revealed that:

"His writing is content and in-depth, with a rhythmic and interesting structure, which attracts readers' attention. This was not only because of the selected words, which were compiled according to his method, but more importantly because of the insightful content regarding social, economic, and

political issues that were the needs of our nation at that time. Everything was imbued with Islam's spirit and ideology, which became his life's guide" (Natsir).

In Fiqh, KH. E. Abdurrahman wrote many articles in magazines aimed at answering religious issues and other social problems (Haqqi & Yani, 2023). He also produced works including "Risalah Wanita," "Dirayah Ilmu Hadits," "Reflections on Tarikh," "Jihad and Qital," "Darul Islam," "Comparative Madhhab," and others.

In the next generation, there were names of ulama and intellectuals such as KH. Aceng Zakaria and Prof. Dadan Wildan adorned many literary treasures in PERSIS through their books: Dr. Tiar Anwar Bachtiar, Dr. Nashrudin Syarief, Dr. Pepen Irfan Fauzan, and Prof. Jajang A. Rohmana.

Using a literacy approach or in the da'wah literature called *dakwah bil kitabah* is also essential to the PERSIS way of educating the public. Natsir requires preachers to have skills in distributing various kinds of publications, including books, brochures, and other broadcasts, which are primarily aimed at equipping preachers with knowledge, both religious knowledge and other general knowledge, to improve the quality and results of preaching. This effort is consistent in PERSIS. Various book and magazine publications continued until literacy became a tradition in the Persis organization.

Tradition is maintained by every member of society and communicated from generation to generation in a chain of meaning that includes collective memories, collective representations, and habits of doing something (Beel et al., 2017; Liao & Dai, 2020; Figueiredo et al., 2018). Meanwhile, in this case, literacy is reading and writing literacy, as expressed by Gipayana in Amri & Rochmah (2021), which is seen as carrying out reading and writing activities. In this view, literate people can read and write or are accessible from illiteracy. The understanding of literacy then develops into the ability to read, write, speak, listen, and even think critically (Wilson, 2016; Tabačková, 2015; Dvorghets & Shaturnaya, 2015). One's desire and ability to read influence one's knowledge and skills. By reading a lot, one will have much knowledge that will help them do things previously not mastered, so people who read a lot will have qualities superior to those not interested in reading activities (Ku et al., 2019). So, the literacy tradition is the habitual activity of reading and writing over a long period and space carried out from generation to generation by a community to express and maintain its teachings (Thompson, 2013).

Based on these scales, literacy activities at PERSIS have met the criteria as something traditional. This is proven by *Risalah* since 1962 as the official magazine of the PERSIS organization, continuing the previous magazines. Junus Anies and KH E. Abdurrahman initiated this magazine because it became a reading material, communication tool, organizational publication, and reference for public issues among the expat community for members and sympathizers, which continues regularly. A circulation of at least 4500 is published every month.

Risalah, which continues to be consumed by the public to this day, has made its name as the second da'wah magazine that survived after *Soeara Muhammadiyah* (S.M.). In 2021, *Risalah* carried out digital-based publications to answer the challenges of the times and continue to survive in the digital era. The public can access the magazine as a digital page via the portal www.myedisi.com. Research entitled "The Twilight of Print Media: Challenges of Print Journalism in the Digital Era" in the *Trilogy Journal* (Khaer et al., 2021) states that in 2044, there will be intense development of the online world, which will massively erode the existence of printed communication and information media. One of the staff of *Risalah*, Firman Solihin, revealed that:

"The editorial staff of *Risalah* is gradually migrating from print to digital. We hope that the teachings of the Da'wah. Da'wah of the Quran and Sunnah, carried out by PERSIS, will continue to exist. In turn, we will see a symbiotic mutualism of sunatullah: PERSIS maintains literacy, and literacy maintains Persis."

Now, Persis has an official website (www.persis.id). The public can access the website for free. The website contains Islamic and organization news, Islamic studies, Islamic boarding schools, online treatise magazine sections, taught and PERSIS PERS book publishing columns. Apart from that, this website also contains an *istifta* column, which contains questions from the public regarding matters of worship and other daily matters.

D. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Research Implications

This research confirms that literacy traditions are central to Islamic education in PERSIS. Therefore, Islamic education institutions must strengthen their curriculum with a culture of reading, writing, and critical thinking. This research can serve as a basis for policymakers in designing literacy-based Islamic education policies, whether in pesantren, madrasahs, or modern Islamic education institutions.

2. Research Contribution

This study contributes to understanding an Islamic education approach that focuses on literacy traditions as a tool for fostering a deeper understanding of religion and strengthening the unity of the Muslim community. This research's main novelty lies in utilizing Islamic education's literacy tradition in the context of PERSIS, an organization known for its commitment to education and unity. The study explores how literacy traditions, such as reading and writing classical Islamic texts, are applied to enhance understanding of Islamic teachings and build a stronger character among the community in the modern context. Unlike other Islamic education approaches that focus more on teaching theory or practice without a strong connection to literacy, this research demonstrates how literacy traditions can develop critical thinking, deepen religious instruction, and facilitate the creation of a collective awareness that supports the unity of the community. Thus, this study enriches the literature on Islamic education with a literacy-based approach, offering new insights into how reading and writing traditions can serve as an important pillar in educating a knowledgeable, educated, and unified community amidst diversity.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research could compare the literacy tradition in Islamic education in PERSIS with other Islamic organizations, such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), or al-Irsyad, to understand the differences and similarities of literacy strategies in educating Muslim communities. Further research could further enrich the understanding of the literacy tradition in Islamic education by expanding the scope of the study to aspects of digitalization, organizational comparison, curriculum effectiveness, the role of gender, and its impact on Islamic thought. Thus, literacy-based Islamic education in the PERSIS environment can continue to develop and adapt to the challenges of the times.

F. CONCLUSION

PERSIS has succeeded in developing a strong literacy tradition since its establishment, which focuses on spreading and understanding Islamic teachings by the spirit of returning to the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah. PERSIS magazines and books containing the writings of its figures have played an important role in distributing religious information and education and expounding the principles of Islamic teachings. PERSIS books and publications are the main means of enriching Islamic literature in Indonesia and helping to deepen people's understanding of Islamic teachings. The efforts to make a tradition of literacy in education carried out by PERSIS and promote understanding of its teachings positively impact PERSIS' internal community and make an important contribution to the development of public education in Indonesia.

This research confirms that the literacy tradition is a fundamental element in Islamic education within the Islamic Union (PERSIS). Since its establishment, PERSIS has emphasized the importance of a culture of reading, writing, and critical thinking as part of its da'wah and Islamic education strategies. Literacy not only serves as a tool to spread Islamic thought but also as a means to build a deeper understanding of Islam among the Muslim community.

The results show that the literacy approach in PERSIS education is realized through the publication of books, magazines, tafsir, a text-based education system, and scientific discussions. In addition, using print and digital media in the learning process has helped spread Islamic values more widely and systematically. However, in the digital era and globalization, PERSIS needs to adapt to new technologies to maintain and improve the effectiveness of the literacy tradition in Islamic education.

Historically, the literacy-based education approach in PERSIS has contributed to developing Islamic thought in Indonesia, particularly in forming a critical, rational, and argument-based mindset. Therefore, this study concludes that literacy remains the main pillar of Islamic education in PERSIS and needs further development with a more innovative and relevant approach.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis and manuscript. ASS: Conceptualization, Research framework & Writing - Original Draft. INH: Writing - Review & Editing.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no significant competing financial, professional or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

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