

Secularism and its Challenges to Islamic Education: A Historical and Philosophical Analysis of Islamic Education

Lilik Qonitah^{*1}, Sugeng Solehuddin², Rumia³

^{1,2} Univeristas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia

³ Institute An-Nikmah Al-Islamiah, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

*e-mail correspondence: lilikqonitahadib@gmail.com

 OPEN ACCESS

Keywords:

secularism, islamic education, philosophy of islamic education, history of islamic thought, modernity

Abstract

Secularism is often discussed in Islamic education studies in a normative manner, primarily as an ideology perceived to be incompatible with religious teachings. Previous studies tend to examine secularism either from the perspective of Western historical development or from Islamic normative critiques, without sufficiently integrating historical analysis with the philosophical framework of Islamic education. This article aims to analyze the historical development of secularism and its influence on the Muslim world, to examine how Islamic educational philosophy conceptualizes secularism, and to explore the implications of secularism for contemporary Islamic education. This study employs a qualitative approach through critical library research, drawing on classical and contemporary literature, with particular emphasis on peer-reviewed journal articles and works of modern Muslim thinkers. The conceptual framework is grounded in an integrative Islamic epistemology that views knowledge, moral values, and spirituality as inseparable. The findings indicate that secularism emerged from specific Western historical contexts and entered the Muslim world through colonialism and modernization, resulting in epistemological tensions within Islamic educational systems. Islamic educational philosophy views secularism as problematic due to its separation of knowledge from transcendent values, which has contributed to educational dualism and identity crises. This article contributes to Islamic education scholarship by emphasizing the need for a reconstructive and integrative educational paradigm that engages modernity critically while preserving its spiritual foundations.

Kata Kunci:

sekularisme, pendidikan islam, filsafat pendidikan islam, sejarah pemikiran islam, modernitas

Abstrak

Sekularisme merupakan konsep yang sering dipahami secara normatif dalam kajian pendidikan Islam, terutama sebagai ideologi yang bertentangan dengan ajaran agama. Banyak penelitian sebelumnya cenderung membahas sekularisme secara parsial baik dari sisi sejarah Barat maupun dari sudut pandang normatif keislaman, tanpa mengintegrasikan analisis historis dengan kerangka filsafat pendidikan Islam secara komprehensif. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji sejarah perkembangan sekularisme dan pengaruhnya terhadap dunia Islam, menganalisis pandangan filsafat pendidikan Islam terhadap konsep sekularisme, serta menelaah implikasi sekularisme terhadap pendidikan Islam kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kepustakaan kritis terhadap literatur klasik dan kontemporer, terutama sumber-sumber jurnal ilmiah bereputasi dan karya pemikir Muslim modern. Kerangka konseptual yang digunakan

bertumpu pada epistemologi pendidikan Islam yang integratif, yang memandang ilmu pengetahuan, nilai moral, dan spiritualitas sebagai satu kesatuan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sekularisme lahir dari konteks historis Barat dan masuk ke dunia Islam melalui kolonialisme dan modernisasi, sehingga memunculkan ketegangan epistemologis dalam sistem pendidikan. Filsafat pendidikan Islam memandang sekularisme problematik karena memisahkan ilmu dari nilai transendental, yang berdampak pada munculnya dualisme pendidikan dan krisis identitas. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kajian pendidikan Islam dengan menegaskan pentingnya rekonstruksi paradigma pendidikan Islam yang integratif dan dialogis dalam menghadapi tantangan modernitas

Copyright© 2025 The Author (S).

This article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license. (CC BY-SA 4.0).

INTRODUCTION

Secularism has become one of the dominant paradigms in the construction of Western modernity, particularly through the separation between religion and the public sphere, including in the field of education (Mahmood, 2006). Within this framework, education is understood as a rational-technical realm that must be freed from theological authority for the sake of scientific objectivity (Dressler et al., 2019). However, globalization has made secularism no longer a particular Western experience, but rather a global paradigm that has helped shape educational systems in various parts of the Muslim world. This process places education in a position that is no longer value-neutral, but rather an arena of ideological struggle between secular and religious worldviews, where epistemological battles over the sources, goals, and meaning of knowledge are intense (Şahin, 2018). Historically, secularism emerged in the West, marked by a long conflict between church authority and the development of intellectual rationality since the Middle Ages. The church's dominance over science and politics gave rise to philosophical resistance that culminated in the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment movements, which asserted the supreme position of human reason over religious dogma (Harahap, 2015). In its subsequent development, secularization not only separated religion from the state but also established a new epistemological paradigm that removed revelation from the structure of scientific knowledge (Al-Azmeh, 2020). Through colonialism and modernization, this paradigm was then transmitted to the Islamic world, particularly through modern educational, legal, and administrative systems, thus creating an unbalanced encounter between Islamic scientific traditions and Western secular rationality (Dressler et al., 2019).

In Islam, education has historically been based on the integration of faith, knowledge, and good deeds as an inseparable epistemological whole. Knowledge is not understood as something value-free, but rather as a means to realize the goal of forming a perfect human being (Refrinur & Fauzi, 2025). The entry of secularism into the Islamic world, particularly through the colonial education system and modernity, has given rise to an educational dualism that separates religious knowledge from general knowledge (Mirdad et al., 2025). This condition has triggered a variety of responses from Muslim thinkers, ranging from epistemological criticism to attempts at dialogue and reinterpretation. Figures such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Fazlur Rahman, and Nurcholish Madjid have attempted to reformulate the relationship

between religion, knowledge, and modernity with different approaches, ranging from sharp criticism of secularism to selective acceptance of the process of secularization (Wijaya, 2020). Contemporary studies on secularism generally place this phenomenon within a socio-political and historical framework, particularly regarding the relationship between religion and the state in the Muslim world (Agbaria, 2021). A number of studies also examine secularism as a modernity project that influences changes in the legal system and religious institutions (Al-Azmeh, 2020). However, studies that specifically examine the implications of secularism for Islamic education still tend to be partial and normative, often separating historical analysis from philosophical reflection on education (Farabi et al., 2023). This results in Islamic education being positioned more often as an object of policy or a social institution, rather than as an epistemological system with its own internal logic and ontological vision.

Based on this research map, there appears to be a gap in studies that comprehensively integrate historical analysis of secularism with the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy. The lack of a philosophical approach has often led to secularism being understood merely as an educational policy, rather than as an epistemological and ontological challenge to the foundations of Islamic education (Mirdad et al., 2025). Furthermore, few studies explicitly position Islamic education as a knowledge system rooted in monotheism, thus offering a critique of secularism's fundamental assumptions. This gap opens up space for a dialogical analysis that not only describes the impact of secularism but also examines its philosophical foundations from an Islamic educational perspective. This research is urgent in the context of the strengthening demands of modernity, the globalization of education, and the competition for knowledge, which often operates within a secular framework. Islamic education faces the challenge of remaining socially and globally relevant without losing its epistemological identity and the fundamental values of monotheism (Suyatno et al., 2022). The theoretical contribution of this research lies in strengthening the philosophy of Islamic education as an analytical framework capable of engaging in critical dialogue with secularism. However, Islamic educational philosophy contains values such as honesty, responsibility, justice, and integrity which are relevant in building character (Halwani & Raharjo, 2025). The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, which combines historical analysis, philosophical reflection, and the study of Islamic education, thus producing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between secularism and contemporary Islamic education.

Based on the description above, this study aims to: (1) analyze the history of the development of secularism and its influence on the Islamic world; (2) examine the concept of secularism from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy; and (3) examine the influence of secularism on contemporary Islamic education. With a reflective and dialogical historical-philosophical approach, this study is directed at formulating a conceptual framework for Islamic education that is responsive to the challenges of secularism without being trapped in a state of uncritical acceptance. Thus, Islamic education is expected to emerge as a critical and competitive scientific tradition in the modern global arena, while remaining firmly rooted in the transcendent values of Islam.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a library research design combined with historical and philosophical analysis. This approach was chosen because the research objective is not to empirically test hypotheses, but rather to deeply understand the concept of secularism, its historical development, and its implications for Islamic education from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy. Philosophical analysis is used to examine the ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects of secularism in the context of Islamic education, while a historical approach is used to trace the origins and dynamics of secularism from the West to the Islamic world. In this qualitative, library-based research, the research population is not individuals, but rather a corpus of scientific literature relevant to the research topic. The population includes scientific works on secularism, Islamic educational philosophy, modernity, and contemporary Islamic education.

The research sample was determined purposively, namely literature that has direct relevance to the focus of the study. The sample includes books and classic works of Islamic thinkers such as Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid that discuss the modernization, secularization, and renewal of Islamic thought, reputable national and international journal articles discussing secularism, Islamic education, and Islamic educational philosophy (for example, the works of Mahmood, Al-Azmeh, Sahin, and other contemporary researchers), as well as scientific documents discussing the policies and practices of Islamic education in Muslim countries.

This research employs a qualitative method with data collection techniques in the form of documentary studies sourced from written literature, including books, journal articles, scientific proceedings, and research reports relevant to the study's focus. A systematic literature search was conducted through scientific databases, such as Google Scholar, SINTA-accredited national journal portals, and international academic publishers, to ensure the completeness and credibility of the data sources. Data analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically through several stages: data reduction by selecting literature relevant to the research objectives, data categorization by grouping concepts and findings into main themes, and a critical-philosophical analysis comparing the concept of secularism with the principles of Islamic educational philosophy. The final stage involves drawing conclusions through the preparation of a conceptual synthesis regarding the position of secularism and alternative developments in Islamic education. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, the use of credible and relevant scientific references, and analytical consistency between the data, theoretical framework, and research conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

History of the Development of Secularism and its Influence on the Islamic World

Literally, "secular" or "secularization" comes from the Latin word *saeculum*, meaning time or generation. However, in the Latin world, this word is interpreted as referring to the present world. The word *saeculum* is actually one of two Latin words meaning world, the other being *mundus*. *Saeculum* denotes time and *mundus* denotes space. *Saeculum* itself is the opposite of *eternum*, meaning eternal, and is used to denote the eternal realm, namely the afterlife (Harahap, 2015). In the Islamic world, the term

secular was first popularized by Zia Gokalp (1875-1924), a prominent sociologist and Turkish national theorist. This term was understood to be irreligious or anti-religious, thus raising suspicion. The word "secularization" has acquired negative connotations in Indonesian vocabulary, especially after it was included in the Indonesian Dictionary and various Indonesian encyclopedias (Harahap, 2015).

In the Great Indonesian Dictionary, the word "secular" is defined as "worldly or materialistic," so secularization means a love of the world, where norms need not be based on religious teachings. Meanwhile, according to the Indonesian Encyclopedia, secularization is defined as a process that causes someone to increasingly turn away from religion (Harahap, 2015). According to Harun Nasution, secularization in Islam begins with freeing the people from the bonds of tradition, including religious teachings that are neither fundamental nor sacred, which are relative and are the product of the *ijtihad* of previous scholars, and ends with the return of Muslims to the Qur'an and Hadith, or inseparable from both (Harahap, 2015). Secularization is an effort to free Muslims from the feeling of attachment to religious teachings that are traditional and truly worldly and not sacred. Therefore, it is not seen as secularism that means the separation between religion and state or the separation between the spiritual and the worldly.

Nur Cholis Madjid takes the positive side of the word secular from a sociological perspective. He differentiates between secularism and secularization. "Secularism is the idea of atheism in human worldly life. The basic principle of secularism is absolute belief in human ability to solve the problems of worldly life. What humans rely on is their reason, so rationalism is an implication of secularism. A rationalist will assume that their mind is capable of finding the truth and eliminating God, so that the peak of secularism is atheism. Meanwhile, secularization is the process of paying more attention to worldly life, in this case science. So secularization is the recognition of the authority of science and its application in fostering worldly life, because science is always in process and developing towards its perfection" (Wijaya, 2020).

Secularization in the West began with the separation of science, politics, and worldly affairs from religion and ended with the separation of science from the church (Harahap, 2015). Secularism in the West began as a response to the dominance of the church, which regulated almost all aspects of society. At that time, the church became the epistemic authority that controlled the production and distribution of knowledge, thus triggering resistance from humanist thinkers and modern scientists (Djamil et al., 2024). In an intellectual climate that demanded freedom of thought, secularism emerged as an expression of rationality that sought to limit the role of religion to the private sphere. This movement was later strengthened by the Renaissance, Reformation, and European Enlightenment, which asserted the supremacy of human reason.

The development of modern science became a crucial momentum in establishing secularism as a paradigm of knowledge. Scientific figures such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton challenged the church's interpretation of the universe, thus widening the gap between science and religious dogma. In this context, secularism became a symbol of intellectual liberation from the power of theology (Mahmood, 2006). The structure of modern society shifted from theocentric to anthropocentric, where humans were considered the center of value orientation. The peak of secularism as a political ideology occurred in the modern era when the modern state separated religious authority from government. Throughout Christian history, there have always been two powers: God and Caesar. The

concept of secularism allows its adherents to submit to Caesar all that belongs to Caesar and to God all that belongs to God (Harahap, 2015). This principle was solidified through the French Revolution and the wave of liberalism that rejected the church's dominance in public affairs. Al-Azmeh writes that secularism is not merely a philosophical idea, but also a modern project that restructures the relationship between religion, state, and society. Thus, secularism became a normative framework that determines the structure of Western institutions (Al-Azmeh, 2020).

Secularism then developed into a global idea through colonialism and Western intellectual expansion. When European nations colonized Asia and Africa, they brought with them legal, educational, and administrative systems based on secular values. This made secularism part of the colonial legacy embedded in the social structures of non-Western societies (Dressler et al., 2019). It was in this context that the Islamic world began to experience systematic contact with secularism. Ultimately, the roots of secularism in the West cannot be understood simply as the separation of religion and state, but also as a historical transformation involving changes in epistemology, politics, and social structures. This process gave rise to a new paradigm regarding the relationship between humans, knowledge, and religious authority. From here, secularism then spread to the Islamic world through various channels of global interaction.

Secularism entered the Islamic world not through an organic internal process, but rather was influenced more by colonialism and modernization. When colonial powers controlled the Arab world, North Africa, and Southeast Asia, they introduced secular educational systems oriented toward modern rationality (Setiawan & Minarti, 2024). This system placed religion as merely one of the subjects, not the epistemological foundation. As a result, a sharp dichotomy emerged between religious and general knowledge. In addition to colonialism, modernization was a significant factor in the spread of secularism in the Islamic world. The Tanzimat Reforms in Ottoman Turkey, for example, introduced a more secular legal and educational system to catch up with the West (Agbaria, 2021). This process opened up space for modern Muslim thinkers such as Muhammad 'Abduh, who attempted to reform Islamic teachings to suit the demands of the times (Elnakep et al., 2024). However, these reforms often sparked controversy because they were considered too close to the secularization project.

Islamic modernists have had a significant influence in opening a dialogue between Islam and secularism. 'Abduh, for example, emphasized rationality and contextual interpretation as the path to Islamic renewal. However, some scholars view his ideas as a form of veiled secularization that undermines the role of revelation as the highest authority (Elnakep et al., 2024). This debate demonstrates that the relationship between modernity and secularism is not always easily accepted in Muslim societies. The most radical implementation of secularism occurred in Turkey through the policies of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Atatürk abolished the caliphate, replaced Islamic law with Western civil law, and separated religious authority from the state (Irwanti & Pratama, 2022). His policies marked a new stage in secularism, becoming not merely an idea but also a socio-political practice that influenced education, culture, and national identity. This model of Turkish secularism later became a model for several other Muslim countries.

In his ideas about reform, Mustafa Kemal was influenced not only by Turkish nationalist ideas but also by Western ideas. Turkey could progress only by emulating the West. Mustafa embodied Western civilization in Turkey through advances in science,

technology, and other aspects. In Islamic civilization, religion encompasses everything, interfering in everything, thus causing the decline of Islam. Conversely, in the West, secularization gave rise to advanced civilization (Nasution, 1996). According to Mustafa, government should be separated from religion. However, Mustafa Kemal's secularization did not eliminate religion. His secularization centered on the power of the ulama (Islamic scholars) in state and political matters, thus opposing the formation of a religious party. He also strongly opposed the establishment of an Islamic state. Mustafa's secularism did not eliminate Islam from Turkish society, but it did remove religious power from politics and government (Nasution, 1996).

In the history of the Indonesian homeland about secularism, Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, was an admirer of Mustafa Kemal, who also wanted Indonesia to become a secular state. He called Mustafa Kemal's separation of religion from the state the most modern and radical step. Religion was made a personal matter. Islam was not eradicated from Turkey, but rather handed over to the Turkish people, not the state. Worldly affairs were left to the government, while religious affairs were left to those who practice religion. Therefore, it can be said that secularization is the path to a nation's revival (Husaini, 2005). In conclusion, the entry of secularism into the Islamic world was a complex process involving colonial interactions, internal reforms, and modern political dynamics. This phenomenon resulted in a long debate between modernists, traditionalists, and Islamists regarding the place of religion in the state and education. This complexity demonstrates that secularism in the Islamic world cannot be viewed as a single process, but as a diverse and tense historical dynamic.

Islamic Educational Philosophy Regarding Secularism

Islamic educational philosophy views knowledge as an entity integrated with divine values. This paradigm contrasts with secularism, which separates religion from the educational process. According to Refrinur and Fauzi, secularism seeks to separate knowledge and morality, while Islamic education emphasizes that knowledge must direct humans toward goodness and devotion to God. Therefore, secularism is deemed incapable of forming humans holistically (Refrinur & Fauzi, 2025). From an Islamic epistemological perspective, the source of knowledge comes not only from reason but also from revelation. Secularism prioritizes rationality and disregards the spiritual dimension, resulting in only instrumental knowledge. Ahmad Tafsir, as quoted by Refrinur and Fauzi, rejects the total separation of knowledge and values, arguing that education must develop the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects. This separation is considered to create a spiritual vacuum in modern humans.

Islamic education emphasizes that the goal of education is to develop perfect human beings, not merely productive individuals. Secularism is considered to ignore the moral elements that are at the heart of Islamic education (Arfan et al., 2024). Therefore, the application of secularism in education is considered to have the potential to lead to an identity crisis and moral degradation. This is caused by the loss of the transcendental orientation that underpins the life of Muslims. Criticism of secularism also arises from contemporary thought, which believes that the secular paradigm is incompatible with the epistemological character of Islam. Mirdad et al. assert that secularism ignores the unity of knowledge, which is a fundamental principle of Islamic education. In the Islamic perspective, religious knowledge and worldly knowledge are inseparable because both

serve to guide humanity to the truth (Mirdad et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, some Muslim thinkers have attempted to reconcile with modernity. Thoriquattyas et al. explain that figures like Muhammad Hamdi Yazır attempted to combine rational and religious knowledge to provide relevant Islamic education in a secular state like Turkey. This effort demonstrates that dialogue between Islam and secularism remains possible as long as it does not eliminate the principle of monotheism as the foundation of education (Thoriquattyas et al., 2025). The development of secularism in the Islamic world cannot be separated from the influence of reformist figures who attempted to bridge tradition and modernity. One important figure was Muhammad ‘Abduh, an Egyptian reformist scholar who pioneered the renewal of Islamic thought in the 19th century. Elnakep notes that ‘Abduh attempted to rework Islamic teachings to make them compatible with modern rationality. However, his views are often perceived as a form of secularization, even though he himself asserted his loyalty to the Salafist tradition (Elnakep et al., 2024).

Another figure who played a role in the institutionalization of secularism was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Atatürk transformed the Turkish state structure into a fully secular state, revoking Sharia as the legal basis, and adopting Western values in governance and education (Irwanti & Pratama, 2022). His reforms were not only structural but also influenced the identity of modern Turkish society. Atatürk became a symbol of the success of radical secularization in the Islamic world, although he continued to generate resistance from Islamists. In 1924, Mustafa Kemal issued a law unifying education, placing all schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Madrasahs were closed and replaced by imam-preacher training schools, and religious education in schools was eliminated. Arabic and Persian were removed from the curriculum, and the Arabic script was replaced with Latin script (Nasution, 1996). Mustafa Kemal also paid attention to women's rights. He established special secondary schools for women, including teaching, secretarial, nursing, and midwifery, seeking to liberate women from the constraints of religious views that held them back. In higher education, Mustafa established an agricultural school in Ankara, which later developed into Ankara University. The theology faculty, established in 1924, was transformed into the Institute of Islamic Research in 1933 (Rusli, 2018).

Within the Arab tradition, thinkers such as Aziz al-Azmeh also made significant contributions to explaining the concept of secularism in the modern Arab context. Agbaria asserts that al-Azmeh saw secularism as a sociological necessity in a pluralistic society. He argued that secularism could be a solution to the sectarian conflicts that arose from the politicization of religion (Agbaria, 2021). Thus, secularism was seen not only as a Western idea but also as a social necessity. Some modern Muslim thinkers have attempted to establish a dialogue between secularism and Islamic teachings. Thinkers like Fazlur Rahman and Nurcholish Madjid are historically considered figures who advocated the rationalization of Islamic education while maintaining Islamic ethical values. Their ideas became the foundation for contemporary Islamic education, which is more dialogical with the modern world.

Nurcholish Madjid, for example, argues that the word "secular" has undergone a shift in meaning. Initially, the word "secular" referred to this world, and still had a lowly and despicable connotation. However, over time, the meaning of "secular" has changed, and both negative connotations have begun to disappear. This demeaning notion of the

world is the responsibility of the philosophy that prevailed in the Western world at that time. This view differs completely from the Islamic view, which only forbids despising this world and even considers it a means to the afterlife (Wijaya, 2020). Nur Cholish continued, explaining that secularization is a liberating form of development, a modernization of Islam, namely the liberation of society from the shackles of superstition, heresy, superstition, and polytheism driven by logical impulses. This does not mean the elimination of religious orientation in societal norms and values. Therefore, secularization can be interpreted as the secularization of values that should be worldly and freeing the Muslim community from the tendency to deify them. This is the worldly duty of humans as caliphs on earth (Wijaya, 2020).

Based on the above, secular figures in the Islamic world not only serve as proponents of secularization but also as bridges between traditional Islamic values and the demands of modernity. Their role demonstrates that the discourse of secularism in the Islamic world is dialogical, dynamic, and full of rich intellectual debate. Criticism of secularism in the Islamic world primarily focuses on the separation between religion and science. Islamic education views this separation as a reduction to the essence of humankind, which has spiritual, moral, and intellectual dimensions (Mirdad et al., 2025). Secularism is considered to fail to understand that knowledge is not merely a tool, but also a means to divine awareness.

Secularism is often considered to have brought about a "crisis of meaning" in modern education. Arfan asserts that the loss of transcendental values in education has produced a generation that is technically intelligent but morally impoverished. In this context, Islamic education views secularism as a threat to the formation of morals and a holistic personality. A personality torn between the demands of the modern world and spiritual values will result in existential anxiety (Arfan et al., 2024). Islamic education also criticizes secularism for ignoring the significant contribution of religion to the history of science. Farabi reminds us that many classical Muslim scholars developed worldly sciences with religious inspiration. Therefore, secularism is considered ahistorical because it separates the Islamic intellectual tradition, which has been integrative from its inception. Critics see secularism as imposing Western models of knowledge on Muslim societies without considering their historical and spiritual context (Farabi et al., 2023).

Although secularism is seen as problematic, some Muslim academics see the need for a critical dialogue with modernity. Sahin proposes a hybrid approach that allows Islamic education to interact with the values of democracy and liberalism without losing its monotheistic identity. This approach emphasizes the need for curriculum reconstruction to address global challenges while remaining rooted in Islamic tradition (Şahin, 2018). Ultimately, the philosophical critique of Islamic education against secularism does not constitute a total rejection, but rather a reflective one, questioning the ontological and epistemological foundations of secularism. This critique opens up space for a dialogue between Islamic values and modern ideas that is inevitable in an increasingly interconnected world.

The Influence of Secularism on the Contemporary Islamic Education System

The main impact of secularism on Islamic education is the emergence of a dualistic educational system. On the one hand, there are public schools that follow a secular curriculum, while on the other, there are madrasas and Islamic boarding schools

(pesantren) that teach religious knowledge. This phenomenon creates a dichotomy between religious knowledge and general knowledge (Mirdad et al., 2025). This dualism in education widens the gap between secularly educated and religiously educated groups. According to Islamiati and Alting, this separation makes it difficult for the younger generation to find common ground between modern knowledge and religious values. As a result, identity dilemmas and epistemological confusion arise, especially when students face social issues that require a holistic approach between knowledge and morality (Islamiati & Alting, 2024).

The secular education system adopted by some Muslim countries has also caused Islamic educational institutions to lose their social authority. Secular curricula emphasizing science and technology are considered more capable of meeting the needs of the job market. This has led to religious education being viewed as supplementary, rather than fundamental, to human life. Consequently, Islamic education has become marginalized within the national education system (Kurmanalieva & Orynbekov, 2019). Educational dualism also impacts the quality of graduates. Graduates of secular schools are often perceived as lacking an understanding of Islamic values, while graduates of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools are considered less competitive in the workforce. This situation worsens public perceptions of Islamic education. According to Suyatno, this imbalance creates a complex social gap between modernist and traditionalist groups (Suyatno et al., 2022). Thus, educational dualism is a structural problem born of the influence of secularism and has long-term impacts on the identity, quality, and direction of Islamic education. This phenomenon demands a comprehensive solution through curriculum integration and a reconstruction of the Islamic educational paradigm.

To respond to the challenges of secularism, Islamic education offers an integrative approach that combines religious and general knowledge within a single system. This approach aims to eliminate educational dualism and develop an integrative curriculum based on monotheism. According to Islamiati and Alting, the integration of knowledge is a strategic step to restore the unity of Islamic epistemology, which has been fragmented by the secular education model. This approach requires a thorough reconstruction of the curriculum, not simply combining subjects but unifying the scientific paradigm (Islamiati & Alting, 2024). Some Muslim countries have begun pioneering an integrative education model by strengthening religious subjects without diminishing the importance of science and technology. This model is implemented in progressive Islamic education, which integrates Islamic values, Indonesian identity, and modernity (Suyatno et al., 2022). Progressive Islamic education emphasizes that modernity does not have to conflict with Islam as long as moral and spiritual values remain the foundation of education.

In addition to curriculum integration, dialogue between Islamic and secular values is also necessary. Mirdad emphasized that Islamic education needs to create a space for critical reflection on the development of modern science to avoid being left behind globally. This dialogue is not a form of ideological compromise, but rather part of an effort to enrich the Islamic scientific tradition (Mirdad et al., 2025). With healthy dialogue, Islamic education can embrace the positive aspects of modernity without abandoning its identity. Furthermore, institutional reform is also an alternative solution in confronting secularism. Islamic educational institutions need to improve their management systems, learning methods, and quality standards to remain competitive with secular schools..

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, this research found that secularism is a concept that emerged from the historical context of the West as a response to the church's dominance over science, politics, and social life. A long process involving the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment shaped secularism as the foundation of the modern state that separated religion from the public sphere. When it entered the Islamic world through colonialism, modernization, and political reform, secularism did not exist in a vacuum, but interacted with established Islamic scientific and social traditions. As a result, secularism is often perceived as a foreign ideology that contradicts Islamic values, although some modern Muslim thinkers have attempted to read it more contextually. From the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, secularism is seen as problematic because it separates knowledge from transcendental values. Islamic education is grounded in an integrative epistemology that unites revelation and reason in the formation of a perfect human being. Secularism is seen as tending to reduce educational goals to functional and utilitarian aspects, thus neglecting the moral and spiritual dimensions. This impact is evident in the emergence of a dualistic education system that separates religious and general education, triggering scholarly fragmentation, an identity crisis, and the marginalization of Islamic education. Nevertheless, contemporary Islamic education has responded by attempting to reconstruct its paradigm toward an integrative model capable of synergizing modern science and the values of monotheism.

This research is significant because it provides a conceptual and philosophical foundation for a critical and proportionate understanding of the relationship between secularism and Islamic education. Its contribution lies in strengthening the discourse of integrative Islamic education that does not reject modernity but maintains a transcendental identity and orientation. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for policymakers and education practitioners. Further research is recommended to examine the concrete implementation of the integrative Islamic education model within the context of curricula and institutional practices.

REFERENCES

- Agbaria, A. (2021). *Secularism in the Arab World: Contexts, Ideas and Consequences*. By Aziz al-Azmeh. Translated by David Bond. Modern Muslim Thinkers in Translation. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. Pp. 529. \$85.00 (cloth); \$85.00 (digital). ISBN: 9781474447461. *Journal of Law and Religion*, 36, 429–432. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2021.17>
- Al-Azmeh, A. (2020). *Secularism in the Arab World*. <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474447461.001.0001>
- Arfan, F., Nirwana, A., Fuadi, M., Fadli, N., & Ana, A. S. (2024). Contribution of Ali Hasjmy's Legacy of Thought to Aceh Islamic Education. *Suhuf*. <https://doi.org/10.23917/suhuf.v36i2.4764>
- Djamil, E. C., Rahayu, E. G., & Fahreza, F. (2024). Thoroughly Exploring Secularism in an Islamic Perspective: History, Dynamics, and Interpretation of the Qur'an. *Bulletin of Islamic Research*. <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v2i1.30>
- Dressler, M., Salvatore, A., & Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (2019). Islamicate Secularities: New Perspectives on a Contested Concept. *Historical Social Research*, 44, 7–34. <https://consensus.app/papers/islamicate-secularities-new-perspectives-on-a->

- [contested-dressler-salvatore/8c9deb8cd3135f7ba83a998a392a4f2f/](https://doi.org/10.11648/j.hss.20241206.19)
- Elnakep, M., Branca, P., & Elgeidi, S. (2024). The Ideology of Islamic Secularization of Muḥammad ‘Abduh, the Most Prominent Pioneer of Enlightenment Thinkers in the Middle East and the Arab World. *Humanities and Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.hss.20241206.19>
- Farabi, M. Al, Hasibuan, F. H., Maulana, A., & As-Sya’i, A. R. (2023). An Examination of the Values of Islamic Education and Western Secular Education: A Comparative Analysis. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i2.2820>
- Halwani, I., & Raharjo. (2025). Filsafat Pendidikan Sebagai Landasan Membangun Budaya Anti Korupsi di Sekolah: Perspektif Plato, Ki Hajar Dewantara, dan John Dewey. *Haibanasywa*, 1 (1), 1–12.
- Harahap, S. (2015). *Islam dan Modernitas* (Cetakan 1). Kencana.
- Husaini, A. (2005). *Wajah Peradaban Barat*. Gema Insani.
- Irwanti, N., & Pratama, M. I. B. (2022). The Impact of Kemal Atthaturk’s Secularism on the Islamic World in the 19th Century. *El Tarikh : Journal of History, Culture and Islamic Civilization*. <https://doi.org/10.24042/jhcc.v3i1.7905>
- Islamiati, S. H. D., & Alting, M. G. (2024). Sains Modern, Sekularisme, dan Pendidikan Islam. *Jurnal Dirosah Islamiyah*. <https://doi.org/10.47467/jdi.v6i2.1690>
- Kurmanalieva, A., & Orynbekov, N. (2019). Islamic Education in the Context of the Secular State Policy. *Eurasian Journal of Religious Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.26577/ejrs-2019-1-197>
- Mahmood, S. (2006). Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation. *Public Culture*, 18, 323–347. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2006-006>
- Mirdad, J., Saifullah, Asmaret, D., Sakinah, S., & Dharmasraya, I. (2025). Dinamika Pendidikan Islam Dan Pendidikan Sekuler: Kajian Mendalam Tentang Ruang Lingkup, Karakteristik, Dan Implikasinya. *IMTIYAZ: Jurnal Ilmu Keislaman*. <https://doi.org/10.46773/imtiyaz.v9i1.1635>
- Nasution, H. (1996). *Pembaharuan dalam Islam : Sejarah Pemikiran dan Gerakan* (Cetakan 12). Bulan Bintang.
- Refrinur, U. H., & Fauzi, A. (2025). Comparison between Islamic educational philosophy and secular western educational philosophy Ahmad tafsir perspective. *JPP (Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran)*. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um047v32i12025p30-36>
- Rusli, R. (2018). *Pembaruan Pemikiran Modern dalam Islam*. Rajawali Pers.
- Şahin, A. (2018). Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education. *Religions*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110335>
- Setiawan, H., & Minarti, S. (2024). Problematika Paradigma Pendidikan Mts Darut Tauhid Ngablak Bojonegoro. *At-Tuhfah*. <https://doi.org/10.32665/attuhfah.v13i1.2806>
- Suyatno, S., Wantini, W., Sukiman, S., & Rachmawati, Y. (2022). Progressive Islamic Education: Bridging the Gap of Islam, Indonesianness, and Modernity. *The Qualitative Report*. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.4782>
- Thoriquttyas, T., Ahsin, N., & Khasbulloh, M. (2025). Muhammad Hamdi Yazır’s Contributions to Islamic Education in Modern Türkiye: A Cultural Anthropology Perspective. *Al’Adalah*. <https://doi.org/10.35719/aladalah.v27i2.510>
- Wijaya, A. (2020). *Satu Islam, Ragam Epistemologi* (Cetakan 1). IRCiSoD