

Muhammadiyah's Role in Advancing Progressive Islamic Thought: Between Tradition, Reform, and Modernity

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Muhammadiyah's role in advancing progressive Islamic thought within the dynamic relationship between tradition, reform, and modernity in contemporary Indonesian society. The research aims to analyze how Muhammadiyah contextualizes Islamic teachings, develops modern institutional transformation, and promotes moderate and inclusive Islamic values amid contemporary social change. This study employs a qualitative method using a case study research design because the approach enables an in-depth and contextual understanding of Muhammadiyah's intellectual orientation, social engagement, and institutional practices. The research was conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, due to its historical and intellectual significance as one of Muhammadiyah's major educational and organizational centers. The study involved twelve purposively selected informants consisting of Muhammadiyah scholars, organizational leaders, educational practitioners, and youth activists because of their expertise and direct involvement in Muhammadiyah's reform movements. The findings reveal that Muhammadiyah successfully integrates Islamic authenticity with educational reform, humanitarian activism, and digital adaptation while promoting progressive Islamic discourse. The study recommends strengthening Muhammadiyah's digital engagement, intellectual collaboration, and global humanitarian initiatives to sustain its relevance in contemporary Muslim society.



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INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah has long occupied a strategic position in the landscape of contemporary Islamic thought in Indonesia and the wider Muslim world (Speidl, 2025). Established in 1912 by Ahmad Dahlan, the organization emerged as a reformist movement seeking to reconcile Islamic teachings with social transformation, scientific advancement, and modern civilization (Lohlker, 2023). In the midst of changing socio-political conditions, Muhammadiyah has consistently promoted a progressive interpretation of Islam that emphasizes rationality, educational reform, social welfare, and religious moderation. The movement has developed a distinctive intellectual orientation that combines commitment to Islamic orthodoxy with openness to renewal, making it one of the most influential Islamic organizations in Southeast Asia (Mustafa & Ali, 2025). The discourse surrounding Muhammadiyah's contribution to progressive Islamic thought has therefore become increasingly relevant, particularly in the context of globalization, digital transformation, religious polarization, and the growing contestation between conservative and liberal interpretations of Islam.

Recent scholarly discussions indicate that progressive Islamic thought is not merely associated with theological reform, but also with broader socio-cultural engagement involving democracy, gender justice, human rights, interfaith dialogue, and civic participation (Suryantoro, 2025). Within this framework, Muhammadiyah represents a unique model of Islamic reform that does not entirely reject tradition, yet simultaneously seeks to reinterpret religious understanding in accordance with contemporary realities. The organization's educational institutions, health services, philanthropic movements, and intellectual networks demonstrate how Islamic teachings may function as a transformative force within modern society (Fanani & Pohl, 2024). Nevertheless, despite the extensive

academic attention given to Muhammadiyah, many studies remain fragmented and tend to focus only on organizational history, educational contributions, or political involvement. Limited attention has been devoted to examining Muhammadiyah comprehensively as a mediator between tradition, reform, and modernity within the broader framework of progressive Islamic thought.

The state of the art of existing research demonstrates that Muhammadiyah is often portrayed as a modernist Islamic movement committed to purification and reform (M. T. Islam, 2024b). Previous studies generally emphasize the organization's efforts to eradicate syncretic practices, modernize Islamic education, and strengthen social welfare institutions. Other researchers have explored Muhammadiyah's role in democratization, civil society development, and religious moderation in Indonesia (Lidyaningsih & Hanif, 2024). However, these studies frequently separate theological discourse from socio-cultural transformation, resulting in an incomplete understanding of how Muhammadiyah negotiates the tensions between inherited Islamic traditions and contemporary modern values. Furthermore, many earlier studies tend to approach Muhammadiyah from historical or sociological perspectives without adequately examining its intellectual construction of progressive Islam in response to global challenges such as secularization, radicalism, technological change, and ethical pluralism.

The main problem addressed in this research concerns the dynamic position of Muhammadiyah in advancing progressive Islamic thought amidst the ongoing interaction between tradition, reform, and modernity. On one side, Muhammadiyah seeks to preserve Islamic authenticity based on the Qur'an and Sunnah (Sunier, 2023). On the other side, the organization continuously adapts to modern societal demands through educational innovation, humanitarian engagement, and intellectual reinterpretation. This dual orientation raises important questions regarding how Muhammadiyah constructs its religious authority, how it responds to contemporary ideological contestation, and how it maintains relevance within increasingly complex social realities. The tension between maintaining doctrinal purity and embracing modernity constitutes a significant issue that requires critical academic investigation.

The research gap identified in this study lies in the limited scholarly exploration of Muhammadiyah as an integrative actor that simultaneously negotiates tradition, reform, and modernity within the paradigm of progressive Islam. Existing literature often positions these elements as contradictory categories rather than interconnected dimensions (Nursyabani, 2024). Consequently, insufficient attention has been given to understanding how Muhammadiyah synthesizes classical Islamic values with contemporary intellectual and social developments. In addition, previous studies rarely analyze Muhammadiyah's progressive discourse within a multidimensional framework that includes theology, education, social activism, and intellectual production simultaneously. This gap demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive and contextual analysis capable of explaining Muhammadiyah's role not only as a reformist movement but also as a producer of progressive Islamic civilization in the modern era.

The novelty of this research is reflected in its integrative analytical approach that positions Muhammadiyah as a dynamic bridge between Islamic tradition, reformist ideology, and modern civilization. Unlike earlier studies that focus on single dimensions of Muhammadiyah's activities, this research examines the interconnected relationship between religious interpretation, institutional transformation, and socio-cultural engagement. The study also contributes a conceptual framework for understanding progressive Islam as a balanced synthesis between normative religious commitment and contextual adaptation to modernity (Mustakim et al., 2025). Through this perspective, Muhammadiyah is interpreted not merely as a historical Islamic organization, but as an intellectual and social movement that continuously reconstructs Islamic thought in response to contemporary global challenges.

Based on these considerations, this study formulates several central research questions. First, how does Muhammadiyah conceptualize and promote progressive Islamic thought within contemporary Muslim society? Second, how does Muhammadiyah negotiate the relationship between Islamic tradition, reformist ideals, and modernity? Third, what challenges and opportunities does Muhammadiyah encounter in maintaining its relevance as a progressive Islamic movement in the contemporary era? Fourth, how does Muhammadiyah contribute to the development of moderate, inclusive, and transformative Islamic discourse at national and global levels? These research questions

are intended to guide a critical and systematic investigation into Muhammadiyah's intellectual and social contributions.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze Muhammadiyah's role in advancing progressive Islamic thought through its interaction with tradition, reform, and modernity. Specifically, this study aims to examine Muhammadiyah's intellectual foundations, its reformist orientation, and its practical contributions to contemporary Muslim society. In addition, the research seeks to identify the strategies employed by Muhammadiyah in responding to modern socio-cultural challenges while maintaining commitment to Islamic values. Another important objective is to develop a comprehensive understanding of progressive Islam as articulated through Muhammadiyah's educational, social, and ideological movements.

The theoretical significance of this research lies in its contribution to the development of Islamic studies, particularly in discussions concerning reformism, progressive Islam, and modern Muslim societies (Salsabila & Haryanto, 2024). The study enriches academic discourse by offering a multidimensional interpretation of Muhammadiyah's intellectual and social role within contemporary Islamic civilization. Academically, this research is expected to provide an important reference for scholars, researchers, and students interested in Islamic reform movements, Indonesian Islam, and the relationship between religion and modernity. Practically, the findings may contribute to policymakers, educational institutions, and Islamic organizations in formulating strategies for promoting moderate, inclusive, and transformative Islamic values in pluralistic societies.

Despite its contributions, this research acknowledges several limitations. The study primarily focuses on Muhammadiyah within the Indonesian context, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other Muslim societies with different socio-political conditions. In addition, the research emphasizes intellectual and organizational dimensions of Muhammadiyah, while certain local cultural dynamics and grassroots experiences may not be explored comprehensively. The availability of secondary sources and interpretative diversity among Muhammadiyah scholars also present methodological challenges in constructing a fully unified analysis.

Therefore, future research is encouraged to explore comparative studies between Muhammadiyah and other Islamic reform movements in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, or Western Muslim communities (Rahman et al., 2025). Further studies may also investigate the role of Muhammadiyah's younger generation, digital activism, gender discourse, and transnational networks in shaping the future of progressive Islam. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches integrating sociology, political science, religious studies, and digital humanities may provide broader insights into the transformation of Islamic thought in the modern world. Through continuous scholarly engagement, Muhammadiyah's evolving contribution to progressive Islamic civilization can be understood more comprehensively within the global dynamics of religion and modernity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on progressive Islamic thought has developed significantly within contemporary Islamic studies, particularly in relation to reform movements that seek to reconcile religious authenticity with modern social realities (Pratama & Abidin, 2024). Muhammadiyah, as one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, occupies a central position in this scholarly conversation because of its longstanding commitment to educational reform, social transformation, and moderate religious interpretation (Jung, 2023). The organization has consistently promoted an understanding of Islam that integrates spirituality, rationality, and social responsibility. In the context of globalization and ideological polarization, Muhammadiyah's role in advancing progressive Islamic thought has attracted increasing academic attention, especially regarding how the movement negotiates the relationship between tradition, reform, and modernity. Consequently, the present study requires a comprehensive theoretical framework capable of explaining Muhammadiyah's intellectual orientation, institutional transformation, and social engagement within contemporary Muslim society.

This research employs three major theoretical perspectives, namely Islamic Modernism Theory, Social Transformation Theory, and Progressive Islam Theory. These three approaches are considered relevant because they provide complementary analytical instruments for understanding

Muhammadiyah's position as a reformist Islamic movement that simultaneously preserves religious values and embraces modern social development. The integration of these theories enables a multidimensional analysis of Muhammadiyah's contribution to contemporary Islamic civilization.

The first theory applied in this study is Islamic Modernism Theory, which was popularized by Fazlur Rahman Malik (M. Islam & Imran, 2024). Fazlur Rahman was born in Pakistan and later became a prominent scholar at the University of Chicago, United States, during the 1970s and 1980s. His intellectual contribution emerged primarily through his influential works concerning Islamic reform, contextual interpretation of the Qur'an, and the relationship between Islam and modernity (Rifai et al., 2025). Rahman argued that Islamic teachings possess universal ethical principles that must be interpreted dynamically according to changing historical and social conditions. According to his theoretical framework, Islamic reform should not merely imitate Western modernization, but rather reconstruct Islamic thought through critical engagement with both classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary knowledge systems.

Rahman's conceptual framework emphasizes the "double movement" methodology, which involves understanding the socio-historical context of Qur'anic revelation and then reapplying its ethical principles to contemporary realities (Mincheva, 2025). This theory is highly relevant to Muhammadiyah because the organization similarly promotes *ijtihad*, rational interpretation, and contextual religious understanding. Muhammadiyah's educational reforms, healthcare initiatives, and social activism reflect the practical implementation of Islamic modernism in Indonesian Muslim society. Contemporary developments of Islamic Modernism Theory have expanded beyond theological reform into broader issues such as democracy, gender equality, digital ethics, and global citizenship (Junaidi et al., 2025). Current scholars continue to employ Rahman's ideas to analyze how Islamic organizations adapt to technological transformation and pluralistic societies without abandoning religious authenticity.

The second theory utilized in this research is Social Transformation Theory, which was popularized by Anthony Giddens from the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, particularly through his works during the 1980s and 1990s (Hosnan et al., 2024). Giddens introduced the concept of structuration theory, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between social structures and human agency (Sururi & Haryono, 2024). According to Giddens, social institutions are continuously reproduced and transformed through human interaction and collective practices. Modernity, in his perspective, is characterized by reflexivity, institutional dynamism, and the constant negotiation of identity and social order.

The conceptual relevance of Giddens' theory to Muhammadiyah lies in the organization's capacity to function both as a religious institution and as an agent of social transformation. Muhammadiyah not only preserves Islamic values but also actively reshapes educational systems, healthcare services, economic empowerment, and humanitarian movements within Indonesian society (Sijabat et al., 2023). Through thousands of schools, universities, hospitals, and charitable institutions, Muhammadiyah demonstrates how religious organizations can become transformative social actors in modern society. Contemporary developments in Social Transformation Theory increasingly focus on digital society, globalization, transnational activism, and networked communities. In this regard, Muhammadiyah's engagement with digital *da'wah*, online education, and global humanitarian networks illustrates the relevance of Giddens' theoretical perspective within contemporary Islamic movements.

The third theory applied in this study is Progressive Islam Theory, prominently developed by Omid Safi from Duke University, United States, in the early 2000s (Affandi et al., 2025). Safi conceptualized progressive Islam as an intellectual and ethical movement that emphasizes social justice, pluralism, gender equality, human dignity, and compassionate religious engagement (Hasanah, 2023). According to Safi, progressive Islam does not reject Islamic tradition; rather, it seeks to reinterpret Islamic teachings in ways that respond constructively to contemporary human challenges. Progressive Islam therefore combines spiritual commitment with social activism and ethical universalism.

Safi's theoretical framework is highly significant for understanding Muhammadiyah's contemporary orientation because Muhammadiyah consistently promotes moderation, social welfare, educational advancement, and humanitarian engagement as manifestations of Islamic values. Muhammadiyah's involvement in disaster relief, interfaith dialogue, poverty alleviation, and public health demonstrates practical dimensions of progressive Islam within Indonesian society (Saparudin et al., 2024). The current development of Progressive Islam Theory increasingly addresses issues such as environmental ethics, digital religiosity, global inequality, and inclusive citizenship. This theoretical evolution strengthens the relevance of Muhammadiyah as an example of a Muslim organization capable of articulating progressive Islamic values within both local and global contexts.

The perspectives of these three scholars reveal interconnected conceptual foundations. Fazlur Rahman emphasizes contextual reinterpretation of Islamic teachings; Anthony Giddens highlights the dynamic interaction between institutions and social change; while Omid Safi underlines ethical inclusivity and social justice within Islamic thought. Collectively, these theories provide an integrated framework for analyzing Muhammadiyah's role as a reform-oriented Islamic movement that negotiates continuity and change simultaneously. Muhammadiyah does not merely preserve tradition, nor does it fully adopt secular modernity. Instead, the organization constructs a balanced synthesis between religious authenticity and modern social transformation (Suharnis et al., 2023).

The application of these theories is directly related to the main problem of this research, namely Muhammadiyah's position in advancing progressive Islamic thought amid tensions between tradition, reform, and modernity. Islamic Modernism Theory explains Muhammadiyah's interpretative orientation toward contextual religious understanding. Social Transformation Theory clarifies Muhammadiyah's institutional role in shaping modern Muslim society. Progressive Islam Theory illuminates Muhammadiyah's ethical and humanitarian contributions within pluralistic social contexts. Together, these theories address the research gap concerning the limited multidimensional analysis of Muhammadiyah as both an intellectual and socio-religious movement.

The theoretical framework also contributes to answering the research questions regarding how Muhammadiyah conceptualizes progressive Islam, negotiates religious and modern values, and maintains relevance within contemporary society. Furthermore, these theories support the research objectives by providing analytical instruments to examine Muhammadiyah's intellectual foundations, reformist strategies, and transformative contributions. Theoretically, the integration of these perspectives enriches discussions concerning Islamic reform movements and modern Muslim societies (Afriyanto & Anandari, 2024). Academically, the study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship in Islamic studies, sociology, and contemporary religious discourse. Practically, the findings may provide insights for policymakers, educators, and Islamic organizations seeking to promote moderate and inclusive Islamic values within multicultural societies.

The development of these theories in contemporary scholarship demonstrates their continuing relevance in analyzing Muslim societies undergoing rapid transformation (Syafri, 2025). Islamic Modernism Theory increasingly emphasizes ethical contextualization in response to technological and ideological change. Social Transformation Theory now incorporates digital interaction and global connectivity as central dimensions of modern institutional life. Progressive Islam Theory continues expanding toward ecological ethics, gender justice, and transnational humanitarianism. Muhammadiyah's contemporary activities reflect these theoretical developments through its educational modernization, digital religious engagement, and global humanitarian initiatives.

In conclusion, the literature review demonstrates that Muhammadiyah's role in advancing progressive Islamic thought can be effectively analyzed through the integration of Islamic Modernism Theory, Social Transformation Theory, and Progressive Islam Theory. Fazlur Rahman, Anthony Giddens, and Omid Safi provide complementary conceptual frameworks for understanding Muhammadiyah's negotiation between tradition, reform, and modernity (M. T. Islam, 2024a). These theories collectively explain Muhammadiyah's intellectual orientation, institutional transformation, and ethical engagement within contemporary society. The integration of the three theoretical perspectives also addresses the primary research problem, fills the identified research gap, and supports the novelty of the study by positioning Muhammadiyah as a dynamic bridge between Islamic authenticity and

modern civilization. Ultimately, this theoretical framework strengthens the formulation of research questions, objectives, and practical contributions while providing a comprehensive academic foundation for analyzing progressive Islamic thought in the contemporary era.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method to examine Muhammadiyah's role in advancing progressive Islamic thought within the dynamic interaction between tradition, reform, and modernity (Guleng et al., 2024). The qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate method because the research focuses on understanding meanings, interpretations, ideological constructions, and socio-religious experiences embedded within Muhammadiyah's intellectual and institutional practices. Qualitative research enables the researcher to explore complex social phenomena holistically and contextually, particularly regarding religious movements that involve historical, cultural, and ideological dimensions (Rubani, 2023). In the context of this study, Muhammadiyah is not merely analyzed as an organizational structure, but as an intellectual and social movement that continuously negotiates religious values and modern societal transformations. Therefore, the qualitative method provides flexibility and interpretative depth necessary for analyzing progressive Islamic discourse within contemporary Muslim society.

The research design applied in this study is a qualitative case study design with a socio-religious and interpretative approach (Alvina, 2023). The case study design was selected because it allows intensive and in-depth examination of Muhammadiyah as a specific institutional and intellectual phenomenon within Indonesian Islam. Through this design, the researcher is able to investigate Muhammadiyah's ideological orientation, organizational strategies, and practical contributions comprehensively within their natural social setting. The interpretative dimension of the case study approach is particularly important because the research seeks to understand how Muhammadiyah actors construct meanings regarding progressive Islam, religious reform, and modernity. In addition, the socio-religious perspective enables the researcher to analyze the interaction between religious values and broader societal changes, including educational transformation, social welfare activism, and public engagement.

The rationale for employing a qualitative case study design is based on several considerations. First, Muhammadiyah represents a complex and multidimensional Islamic movement that cannot be adequately understood through statistical measurement alone. Second, the research emphasizes exploration of ideas, interpretations, institutional experiences, and social interactions that require rich descriptive analysis (Roza et al., 2025). Third, the study seeks to reveal contextual dynamics and intellectual negotiations within Muhammadiyah that are deeply embedded in cultural and historical realities. Consequently, the qualitative case study design facilitates a comprehensive understanding of Muhammadiyah's role in promoting progressive Islamic thought while preserving Islamic authenticity.

The research was conducted in several Muhammadiyah institutions and intellectual centers located in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Yogyakarta was selected as the primary research location because it occupies a strategic historical and intellectual position within Muhammadiyah's development (Maftukhah et al., 2023). The city is widely recognized as one of the major centers of Muhammadiyah's educational, organizational, and intellectual activities. Several leading Muhammadiyah universities, schools, and social institutions are located in Yogyakarta, including Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta and various Muhammadiyah educational foundations. Moreover, Yogyakarta represents a socio-cultural environment characterized by strong Islamic traditions, educational pluralism, and active civil society engagement. These characteristics make the city an appropriate research setting for examining how Muhammadiyah negotiates tradition, reform, and modernity within contemporary Indonesian society.

The selection of Yogyakarta as the research location was also motivated by practical and academic considerations. From an academic perspective, Yogyakarta provides access to Muhammadiyah scholars, intellectuals, organizational leaders, and educational practitioners who possess extensive knowledge regarding the organization's ideological development and social activities. From a practical perspective, the concentration of Muhammadiyah institutions in the region facilitates data collection through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Additionally,

Yogyakarta has historically functioned as a center of Islamic intellectual discourse and educational innovation, making it relevant to the study's focus on progressive Islamic thought (Fatwa & Marliyah, 2024).

Because this research adopts a qualitative approach, the emphasis is placed on informants rather than statistical respondents (Aprizal et al., 2023). Informants were selected purposively based on their expertise, institutional involvement, and relevance to the research objectives. Purposive sampling was utilized because it enables the researcher to identify individuals possessing deep understanding and direct experience related to Muhammadiyah's intellectual and organizational dynamics. The study involved twelve primary informants consisting of Muhammadiyah scholars, university lecturers, organizational leaders, educational practitioners, and youth activists.

The first informant, referred to by the pseudonym Dr. Ahmad Rizqi, serves as a senior lecturer at a Muhammadiyah university in Yogyakarta. He was selected because of his extensive academic expertise in Islamic reform movements and Muhammadiyah ideology. The second informant, identified as Prof. Hidayat Rahman, is a Muhammadiyah intellectual and senior researcher specializing in Islamic modernism and contemporary Muslim society. His contribution was important for understanding Muhammadiyah's historical and ideological evolution. The third informant, referred to as Nur Aisyah, is an educational administrator within Muhammadiyah's school network. She was selected because of her practical experience in implementing Muhammadiyah's educational reforms and progressive Islamic values within formal education.

The fourth informant, identified by the pseudonym Fajar Maulana, is a youth activist involved in Muhammadiyah's digital da'wah initiatives. His participation was essential for examining Muhammadiyah's adaptation to digital modernity and youth engagement. The fifth informant, called Dr. Siti Mubarakah, is a scholar focusing on gender discourse and Islamic social movements. She was selected because of her expertise in analyzing Muhammadiyah's position regarding women's empowerment and inclusive Islamic discourse. The sixth informant, referred to as Yusuf Hamdani, serves as a leader within a Muhammadiyah humanitarian institution. His insights contributed significantly to understanding Muhammadiyah's social activism and humanitarian engagement.

Additional informants included university administrators, local Muhammadiyah branch leaders, and Islamic education practitioners. Each informant was chosen based on their relevance to the study's themes concerning progressive Islamic thought, organizational reform, and modern societal transformation. The use of pseudonyms was intended to maintain confidentiality and protect informants' privacy in accordance with ethical research standards (Lubis, 2023).

Data collection in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Suhirman et al., 2025). In-depth interviews constituted the primary method of data collection because they enabled the researcher to obtain detailed narratives, interpretations, and reflections from informants regarding Muhammadiyah's intellectual orientation and social practices. Semi-structured interview techniques were employed to ensure flexibility while maintaining focus on the central research questions (Rahdian et al., 2023). Interview topics included Muhammadiyah's understanding of progressive Islam, institutional reform strategies, educational transformation, social activism, and challenges related to modernity.

Participant observation was conducted within Muhammadiyah educational institutions, public discussions, religious gatherings, and organizational activities. Observation allowed the researcher to examine directly how progressive Islamic values are practiced and communicated within Muhammadiyah's institutional environment (Jalwis et al., 2024). Through participant observation, the researcher gained contextual understanding of social interactions, organizational culture, and intellectual dynamics that could not be fully captured through interviews alone.

Document analysis was also utilized to strengthen the credibility and depth of the research findings (Hamdanah, 2023). The documents analyzed included Muhammadiyah organizational guidelines, official publications, educational curricula, conference proceedings, policy documents, journal articles, and digital media content. These documents provided important insights into

Muhammadiyah's ideological framework, institutional policies, and public discourse concerning progressive Islam. The triangulation of interviews, observations, and document analysis enhanced the validity and reliability of the study (S. et al., 2024).

The data analysis process followed thematic and interpretative analytical procedures (Ahmadi et al., 2025). Initially, all interview recordings and field notes were transcribed systematically. The researcher then conducted data reduction by identifying key themes related to tradition, reform, modernity, progressive Islam, educational transformation, and social activism. Coding techniques were applied to classify recurring concepts and patterns emerging from the collected data. Subsequently, the researcher interpreted the findings by connecting empirical evidence with the theoretical framework consisting of Islamic Modernism Theory, Social Transformation Theory, and Progressive Islam Theory.

The analysis emphasized identifying how Muhammadiyah constructs progressive Islamic thought through intellectual discourse, institutional practices, and social engagement. Comparative interpretation was also employed to examine similarities and differences among informants' perspectives. This analytical process enabled the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of Muhammadiyah's role as a mediator between religious authenticity and modern social transformation.

To ensure research validity, the study applied several trustworthiness criteria commonly utilized in qualitative research, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Basya, 2023). Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data sources and prolonged engagement within the research setting. Transferability was strengthened by providing rich contextual descriptions regarding Muhammadiyah's institutional and intellectual environment. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of research procedures and analytical processes. Confirmability was ensured by minimizing researcher bias and maintaining consistency between empirical data and interpretative conclusions.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process (Sulthon et al., 2025). Informants were informed about the objectives of the study and their voluntary participation prior to interviews and observations. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and secure data management procedures. The researcher also ensured that the findings were presented objectively without distorting informants' perspectives or institutional realities.

The conclusion-drawing technique employed in this study followed an inductive analytical approach (Lawal & Dauda, 2023). Conclusions were generated gradually through continuous interaction between empirical findings, theoretical interpretation, and contextual analysis. Rather than imposing predetermined assumptions, the researcher allowed themes and meanings to emerge organically from the collected data. The process involved identifying patterns, constructing conceptual relationships, and synthesizing interpretations concerning Muhammadiyah's role in advancing progressive Islamic thought. Final conclusions were formulated after repeated verification of data consistency and theoretical relevance.

Through this methodological framework, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and academically rigorous analysis of Muhammadiyah's contribution to contemporary Islamic civilization. The qualitative case study approach enables nuanced exploration of Muhammadiyah's intellectual orientation, institutional transformation, and socio-religious engagement within the broader context of modern Muslim society. Consequently, the research methodology not only supports the investigation of the central research problem but also contributes to broader scholarly discussions regarding progressive Islam, religious reform, and modernity in contemporary Islamic studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Muhammadiyah plays a significant and multidimensional role in advancing progressive Islamic thought within contemporary Indonesian society (Fahmi & Panorama, 2025). The organization has successfully positioned itself as a reform-oriented Islamic movement that integrates religious authenticity, social transformation, and modern institutional development. The results reveal that Muhammadiyah's progressive orientation is

manifested through educational reform, humanitarian engagement, contextual religious interpretation, digital religious dissemination, and socio-cultural adaptation. These findings indicate that Muhammadiyah does not merely function as a traditional religious organization but also as a dynamic intellectual movement capable of responding to contemporary global challenges while maintaining commitment to Islamic principles derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah (Aini, 2023).

The primary problem examined in this study concerns how Muhammadiyah negotiates the relationship between tradition, reform, and modernity in advancing progressive Islamic thought. Based on interviews, observations, and document analysis, the findings show that Muhammadiyah adopts a balanced approach that neither rejects Islamic tradition nor uncritically embraces secular modernity. Instead, the organization develops a contextual model of Islamic reform through reinterpretation of religious teachings, institutional modernization, and social activism. This orientation reflects the application of Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Modernism Theory, particularly the concept of contextual interpretation and ethical reconstruction (Hanum et al., 2023). Muhammadiyah leaders and intellectuals emphasized that Islamic teachings must remain relevant to changing societal conditions without losing normative religious foundations. Consequently, Muhammadiyah promotes educational innovation, scientific advancement, and humanitarian values as part of its understanding of progressive Islam.

The findings also demonstrate the relevance of Anthony Giddens' Social Transformation Theory in explaining Muhammadiyah's institutional role within Indonesian society (Juhro et al., 2025). Muhammadiyah has transformed itself into a modern civil society institution through the establishment of universities, schools, hospitals, orphanages, and humanitarian organizations. These institutions function not only as social service providers but also as instruments for shaping moderate Islamic values and civic responsibility. Informants emphasized that Muhammadiyah's social engagement is intended to strengthen the relationship between religion and social welfare rather than limiting Islam to ritualistic dimensions alone. This institutional transformation illustrates Giddens' concept of structuration, where religious organizations simultaneously reproduce and transform social structures through collective action and institutional reflexivity (Supriatna et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the study confirms the relevance of Omid Safi's Progressive Islam Theory in understanding Muhammadiyah's ethical and humanitarian orientation (Bimawan et al., 2025). Muhammadiyah consistently promotes moderation, inclusivity, social justice, and interfaith cooperation as essential dimensions of Islamic teachings. The organization's involvement in disaster management, poverty alleviation, public health campaigns, and educational access demonstrates its commitment to socially engaged Islam. Informants explained that Muhammadiyah perceives progressive Islam not as ideological liberalism but as a practical effort to realize Islamic values of compassion, justice, and public welfare within contemporary society. This finding supports Safi's argument that progressive Islam combines spiritual commitment with ethical responsibility and social transformation.

Table

Table 1 Main Findings of Muhammadiyah's Role in Advancing Progressive Islamic Thought

Research Dimension	Key Findings	Related Theory	Practical Implementation
Religious Interpretation	Contextual and reform-oriented Islamic understanding	Islamic Modernism Theory (Fazlur Rahman)	Ijtihad, educational reform, contextual da'wah
Institutional Transformation	Development of modern educational and social institutions	Social Transformation Theory (Anthony Giddens)	Universities, hospitals, humanitarian organizations
Progressive Islamic Values	Promotion of moderation, inclusivity, and social justice	Progressive Islam Theory (Omid Safi)	Disaster relief, public health, interfaith dialogue

Research Dimension	Key Findings	Related Theory	Practical Implementation
Digital Religious Engagement	Adaptation to technological and digital transformation	Social Transformation Theory	Online education, digital da'wah, social media activism
Preservation of Islamic Authenticity	Maintaining Qur'anic and Sunnah-based foundations	Islamic Modernism Theory	Purification combined with contextual adaptation
Humanitarian and Civic Contribution	Strengthening public welfare and civil society	Progressive Islam Theory	Poverty alleviation and community empowerment

The results further reveal that Muhammadiyah's progressive orientation addresses the existing research gap identified in earlier studies. Previous research frequently portrayed Muhammadiyah either as a puritan Islamic movement or as a modern educational organization without adequately connecting its theological orientation to broader socio-cultural transformation (Habibi et al., 2024). In contrast, the present study demonstrates that Muhammadiyah operates simultaneously within intellectual, institutional, and humanitarian dimensions. The organization's progressive Islamic discourse cannot be separated from its practical engagement in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and digital communication. This multidimensional character constitutes one of the major findings and novelties of the research.

The gap problem discussed in this study concerns the limited scholarly analysis of Muhammadiyah as a mediator between Islamic tradition and contemporary modernity. Earlier studies often emphasized doctrinal purification while underestimating Muhammadiyah's adaptive strategies in responding to globalization and social change. The findings of this research indicate that Muhammadiyah has developed a contextual reform strategy that enables the organization to preserve Islamic authenticity while engaging modern societal realities (Fauziyah & Mubarak, 2023). This adaptive capacity is evident in Muhammadiyah's openness toward scientific development, technological innovation, and democratic participation. Such findings strengthen Fazlur Rahman's perspective regarding the importance of ethical contextualization in Islamic reform movements.

From the perspective of Social Transformation Theory, Muhammadiyah's institutional development illustrates how religious organizations can become agents of societal modernization (Djuwairiyah et al., 2023). The establishment of higher education institutions, research centers, and healthcare services demonstrates Muhammadiyah's ability to transform religious ideals into practical social structures. Informants repeatedly emphasized that Muhammadiyah's educational institutions aim not only to produce academically competent graduates but also socially responsible Muslims capable of contributing to national and global civilization. This finding confirms Anthony Giddens' argument that institutions function dynamically within modern societies by reproducing values and reshaping social interaction simultaneously.

The research findings also address the formulated research questions concerning Muhammadiyah's conceptualization of progressive Islam and its strategies for negotiating tradition and modernity. The study found that Muhammadiyah conceptualizes progressive Islam through three major principles: purification of faith, contextual interpretation of Islamic teachings, and social transformation through institutional engagement. Muhammadiyah intellectuals explained that progressive Islam does not imply abandoning Islamic tradition; rather, it requires reinterpretation of religious values in ways relevant to contemporary societal needs. This perspective reflects the synthesis between Islamic Modernism Theory and Progressive Islam Theory, where religious authenticity and social inclusivity function as complementary rather than contradictory elements (HADAD et al., 2025).

Another important finding concerns Muhammadiyah's adaptation to digital modernity. The organization increasingly utilizes digital platforms, online education systems, and social media for

religious dissemination and civic engagement (Aminuddin, 2025). Muhammadiyah youth activists highlighted that digital transformation has expanded opportunities for promoting moderate Islamic discourse among younger generations. This adaptation demonstrates the contemporary relevance of Giddens' theory concerning reflexive modernity and institutional adaptation within technologically mediated societies. At the same time, Muhammadiyah's digital engagement reflects Omid Safi's emphasis on socially responsive and inclusive Islamic communication.

Table

Table 2. Relationship Between Research Findings and Theoretical Framework

Research Problem	Empirical Findings	Related Theory	Interpretation
Tension between tradition and modernity	Muhammadiyah balances doctrinal authenticity with social adaptation	Islamic Modernism Theory	Contextual reinterpretation of Islamic teachings
Institutional relevance in modern society	Muhammadiyah develops educational and social institutions	Social Transformation Theory	Religious organizations as agents of modernization
Ethical and humanitarian engagement	Muhammadiyah promotes moderation and public welfare	Progressive Islam Theory	Islam as social justice and ethical responsibility
Digital transformation challenges	Muhammadiyah adapts through digital da'wah and online education	Social Transformation Theory	Institutional reflexivity in modern society
Ideological polarization	Muhammadiyah promotes moderate and inclusive Islamic discourse	Progressive Islam Theory	Progressive Islam as inclusive engagement

The study's findings are strongly connected to the research objectives formulated earlier. The first objective aimed to analyze Muhammadiyah's role in advancing progressive Islamic thought. The findings confirm that Muhammadiyah functions as a reform-oriented movement that integrates religious interpretation with social transformation. The second objective focused on examining Muhammadiyah's strategies in responding to modern societal challenges. The research demonstrates that Muhammadiyah addresses these challenges through educational modernization, humanitarian activism, digital engagement, and institutional development. The third objective concerned identifying Muhammadiyah's contribution to moderate and transformative Islamic discourse. The findings reveal that Muhammadiyah consistently promotes moderation, inclusivity, and civic responsibility through both intellectual discourse and practical action (Hidayatullah, 2024).

The theoretical benefits of this study lie in its contribution to the development of interdisciplinary Islamic studies (Efendi, 2024). By integrating Islamic Modernism Theory, Social Transformation Theory, and Progressive Islam Theory, the research provides a multidimensional analytical framework for understanding contemporary Islamic movements. The findings demonstrate that progressive Islamic thought should not be analyzed solely from theological perspectives but also through institutional and socio-cultural dimensions. This theoretical contribution enriches discussions concerning religion and modernity, particularly within Southeast Asian Islamic contexts.

Academically, the research contributes to expanding scholarly understanding of Muhammadiyah beyond conventional narratives of organizational history and educational reform. Previous studies often emphasized Muhammadiyah's puritan orientation or educational achievements

separately. However, this study demonstrates that Muhammadiyah's progressive character emerges through the interconnected relationship between theology, institutional transformation, and social engagement. The integration of these dimensions constitutes an important academic contribution because it provides a more comprehensive interpretation of Muhammadiyah's role within contemporary Islamic civilization.

Practically, the findings may provide insights for policymakers, educators, Islamic organizations, and civil society actors seeking to strengthen moderate and inclusive Islamic values. Muhammadiyah's institutional strategies in education, healthcare, and humanitarian engagement may serve as a model for other Islamic organizations confronting challenges related to globalization, extremism, and technological change (Karmawan et al., 2025). Informants repeatedly emphasized that Muhammadiyah's success lies in its ability to maintain religious legitimacy while simultaneously addressing practical societal needs. This practical orientation supports Omid Safi's argument that progressive Islam must be socially engaged and ethically transformative.

The discussion of findings also reveals continuity with earlier scholarly research while simultaneously offering new perspectives. Previous studies conducted by Indonesian and international scholars frequently identified Muhammadiyah as a modernist Islamic movement committed to educational reform and religious purification (Fawwaz, 2023). However, many earlier analyses did not sufficiently explain how Muhammadiyah negotiates the relationship between Islamic authenticity and modern social realities. The present findings extend these earlier discussions by demonstrating that Muhammadiyah's progressive orientation is not limited to theological reform but also includes humanitarian activism, digital engagement, and institutional modernization.

Earlier studies concerning Islamic reform movements often focused on ideological tensions between conservatism and liberalism within Muslim societies. The findings of this research indicate that Muhammadiyah adopts a middle-path approach that avoids ideological extremism while maintaining strong commitment to Islamic teachings. This balanced orientation constitutes a significant contribution to contemporary discussions concerning moderate Islam and religious pluralism (Hasibuan, 2025). The findings therefore strengthen previous scholarship emphasizing Muhammadiyah's role in promoting civic Islam and democratic participation within Indonesia.

The study also identifies several contemporary challenges confronting Muhammadiyah in maintaining its progressive orientation. Informants acknowledged increasing ideological polarization, digital misinformation, religious populism, and generational transformation as important challenges affecting Islamic organizations today (Sukenti et al., 2024). Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah's adaptive institutional structure and intellectual openness enable the organization to respond constructively to these developments. The findings therefore support Giddens' concept of reflexive modernity, where institutions continuously reconstruct themselves in response to changing social conditions.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative analysis of Muhammadiyah as simultaneously a theological, institutional, and humanitarian movement. Unlike earlier studies that examined Muhammadiyah from isolated perspectives, the present research demonstrates that Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic thought emerges through interaction between doctrinal reinterpretation, social transformation, and ethical engagement. This multidimensional approach fills the identified research gap and contributes new perspectives regarding the relationship between Islam and modernity within contemporary Muslim societies.

Table

Table 3. Contributions and Novelty of the Research

Aspect	Previous Research	Findings of Current Research	Novelty
Muhammadiyah as Modernist Movement	Focus on purification and educational reform	Integration of reform, social activism, and humanitarianism	Multidimensional interpretation
Progressive Islamic Thought	Limited theological discussion	Combination of theology, ethics, and institutional transformation	Integrative theoretical framework
Tradition and Modernity	Often treated as contradictory	Positioned as interconnected dimensions	Balanced synthesis model
Institutional Analysis	Focus on organizational structure	Analysis of digital, educational, and civic engagement	Contemporary contextualization
Social Contribution	General discussion of philanthropy	Detailed explanation of transformative social engagement	Expanded understanding of civic Islam

Overall, the findings confirm that Muhammadiyah has succeeded in constructing a distinctive model of progressive Islamic thought that balances religious authenticity with modern societal engagement (Arizona et al., 2025). Through educational reform, institutional transformation, humanitarian activism, and contextual religious interpretation, Muhammadiyah demonstrates that Islam can function as a constructive force within contemporary civilization. The integration of Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Modernism Theory, Anthony Giddens' Social Transformation Theory, and Omid Safi's Progressive Islam Theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding Muhammadiyah's multidimensional role.

The study concludes that Muhammadiyah's progressive orientation contributes significantly to the development of moderate, inclusive, and transformative Islamic discourse within Indonesia and beyond (Jacoby, 2025). The organization's ability to negotiate tensions between tradition, reform, and modernity constitutes its major intellectual and institutional strength. Consequently, Muhammadiyah represents not only a historical Islamic organization but also a dynamic model of contemporary Islamic reform capable of responding to the ethical, social, and technological challenges of the modern world.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Muhammadiyah has played a significant and transformative role in advancing progressive Islamic thought within the contemporary Muslim world through its dynamic negotiation between tradition, reform, and modernity. Based on the findings and discussion, Muhammadiyah has successfully developed a contextual and adaptive model of Islamic reform that preserves commitment to the Qur'an and Sunnah while simultaneously responding to changing social, cultural, technological, and intellectual realities. The organization demonstrates that Islamic authenticity and modern social transformation are not contradictory dimensions, but rather interconnected elements that can function harmoniously within a progressive Islamic framework. Through its educational institutions, social welfare programs, humanitarian initiatives, and intellectual

discourse, Muhammadiyah has constructed a practical manifestation of progressive Islam that emphasizes moderation, rationality, inclusivity, and social responsibility.

The research findings indicate that Muhammadiyah's progressive orientation is strongly reflected in its efforts to contextualize Islamic teachings in accordance with contemporary societal needs. Muhammadiyah does not interpret religious reform merely as doctrinal purification, but as a comprehensive process involving intellectual reconstruction, institutional modernization, and ethical engagement with society. This conclusion confirms the relevance of Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Modernism Theory, particularly regarding the importance of contextual interpretation and ethical application of Islamic principles within modern civilization. Muhammadiyah's educational reforms, scientific openness, and support for social empowerment demonstrate how Islamic values can be reconstructed to address modern challenges without abandoning religious authenticity.

The study also concludes that Muhammadiyah functions as an influential agent of social transformation through its institutional networks and civic engagement. The organization's extensive development of schools, universities, hospitals, humanitarian agencies, and social welfare institutions reflects its commitment to integrating religious values with practical societal contributions. These institutional achievements illustrate the application of Anthony Giddens' Social Transformation Theory, where social institutions continuously reproduce and reshape societal structures through collective action and reflexive adaptation. Muhammadiyah has therefore succeeded in transforming Islamic ideals into concrete social programs capable of contributing to national development, public welfare, and democratic civic life.

Furthermore, the findings confirm that Muhammadiyah's interpretation of progressive Islam aligns with Omid Safi's Progressive Islam Theory, particularly regarding social justice, humanitarianism, inclusivity, and ethical engagement. Muhammadiyah consistently promotes moderate Islamic discourse and rejects extremism, intolerance, and ideological polarization. The organization's humanitarian involvement in disaster management, public health, poverty alleviation, and interfaith cooperation demonstrates that progressive Islam within Muhammadiyah is not limited to intellectual discourse but extends into practical social action. This orientation strengthens Muhammadiyah's relevance within pluralistic societies experiencing rapid social and technological transformation.

The study further concludes that Muhammadiyah has successfully addressed the tensions between preserving Islamic tradition and engaging modernity by adopting a balanced and contextual approach. Rather than positioning tradition and modernity as opposing forces, Muhammadiyah integrates both dimensions within a reform-oriented Islamic paradigm. This balanced synthesis constitutes one of the organization's major intellectual strengths and represents a distinctive contribution to contemporary Islamic civilization. Muhammadiyah's adaptive capacity is also reflected in its utilization of digital platforms, online education, and modern communication strategies to disseminate moderate Islamic values among younger generations and broader global audiences.

In relation to the identified research gap, this study demonstrates that Muhammadiyah should not be understood solely as a puritan or educational movement, as suggested by some earlier studies. Instead, Muhammadiyah represents a multidimensional Islamic movement that combines theological reform, institutional transformation, humanitarian engagement, and social activism simultaneously. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative analysis of Muhammadiyah through the interconnected perspectives of Islamic modernism, social transformation, and progressive Islam. This multidimensional interpretation contributes new academic insights into how Islamic organizations can maintain religious legitimacy while actively participating in contemporary global civilization.

The conclusions drawn from this study also emphasize the theoretical, academic, and practical contributions of the research. Theoretically, the integration of the three major theories enriches contemporary discussions concerning Islam and modernity by demonstrating that progressive Islamic thought can emerge through the interaction between religious interpretation, institutional development, and ethical social engagement. Academically, the study contributes to broader scholarship in Islamic studies, sociology of religion, and Southeast Asian Muslim societies by providing a comprehensive understanding of Muhammadiyah's evolving intellectual and social role. Practically, the findings offer

important insights for policymakers, educators, and Islamic organizations seeking to strengthen moderate, inclusive, and transformative Islamic values in pluralistic societies.

Overall, this research confirms that Muhammadiyah represents a dynamic and influential model of progressive Islamic thought capable of responding constructively to contemporary challenges without losing its foundational religious identity. Through its commitment to educational advancement, social welfare, intellectual openness, and humanitarian values, Muhammadiyah continues to contribute significantly to the development of moderate and transformative Islamic civilization in Indonesia and the broader global Muslim community.

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