

**FROM LANGGARS TO MADRASAS:
THE ARAB SCHOOL MOVEMENT IN CENTRAL-SOUTHERN JAVA, 1900-1950**

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Abstract

The social-religious gap between the Langgar and pesantren education systems within the context of colonial education policy was one of the reasons for the emergence of the movement to establish Arabic schools in south-Central Java during the first half of the 20th century. This research aims to explain the social-religious movement of organizational and non-organizational actors fighting for the right to religious education for children of primary school age in several districts and subdistrict centers in south-Central Java. Using the historical method, this research collected data from archives and scholarly works on religious social movements, focusing on movement actors, mobilization, and religious social change. The results indicated that the Arab school movement actors in South-Central Java were religious social organization activists, religious officials, and educational figures who mobilized their internal networks to construct new meanings and identities as religious social change unfolded. The study concludes that the Arab school movement has succeeded in transforming the new collective religious social identity in South-Central Java by enabling Arab school alumni to become an autonomous group alongside alumni of Islamic boarding schools and graduates of hegemonic colonial schools. They succeeded in becoming village officials who guided the religious-social community in south-Central Jva to follow the flow of religion.

Keywords: Arab School Movement; Langgars; Madrassas; South-Central Java.

Abstrak

Kesenjangan sosial keagamaan pada sistem pendidikan Langgar dan pesantren dalam dinamika kebijakan pendidikan kolonial menjadi salah satu dari sekian alasan munculnya gerakan pendirian sekolah Arab di Jawa Tengah-selatan pada paruh pertama abad 20. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan gerakan sosial keagamaan oleh para aktor organisatoris dan non-organisatoris dalam memperjuangkan hak-



hak pendidikan agama bagi anak-anak usia pendidikan dasar di beberapa pusat kabupaten dan kawedanan di Jawa Tengah-selatan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode sejarah dengan pengumpulan data melalui arsip dan karya ilmiah dengan pendekatan sejarah gerakan sosial keagamaan yang mempertimbangkan aspek-aspek aktor gerakan, mobilisasi aksi, dan perubahan sosial keagamaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa aktor gerakan sekolah Arab di Jawa Tengah-selatan adalah para aktivis organisasi sosial keagamaan, pejabat agama, dan tokoh-tokoh pendidikan yang berhasil memobilisasi struktur jaringan internalnya dengan mengkonstruksi makna dan identitas baru sebagai perubahan sosial keagamaan yang dicapai. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahwa gerakan Sekolah Arab telah berhasil menghadirkan transformasi identitas kolektif sosial keagamaan baru di Jawa tengah-selatan ketika alumni sekolah Arab menjadi kelompok otonom tersendiri, disamping alumni pesantren dan lulusan sekolah kolonial yang hegemonik. Mereka berhasil menjadi para pegawai kepenghuluan yang menuntun masyarakat sosial keagamaan di Jawa-tengah selatan mampu mengikuti arus pelembagaan keagamaan sampai pasca-kemerdekaan.

Kata kunci: *Gerakan Sekolah Arab; Langgar; Madrasah; Jawa Tengah-Selatan.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education through pesantren in Java emerged partly due to support from the traditional Islamic political bureaucracy (*kasultanan*), which developed from the 16th century onward. The relationship between pesantren and the Islamic courts gave rise to a new social class known as the *kalangan Putih*, comprising *Ulama* and *santri*. This group acquired an exclusive socio-religious status and role within Javanese society, a condition that persisted and evolved until the 19th century (Ricklefs, 2012). With the Dutch trading company, the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), increasingly controlling the Islamic territory of Mataram, ties between pesantren and the Islamic courts gradually weakened. By the mid-19th century, several pesantren in Central Java no longer maintained close relations with the authorities of the Islamic courts. Nevertheless, pesantren continued to provide Islamic education and consistently produced a *santri* identity that remained socially and religiously exclusive within Javanese society into the early 20th century. Pesantren thus remained a destination for Javanese Muslims willing to leave their homes to pursue more advanced Islamic religious studies (Dhofier, 1982).

In addition to education at pesantren, religious instruction was also conducted in *Langgar* (*Musala*) located in villages or hamlets. One well-known village for providing Islamic education in *Langgar* was *Kampung Kauman*, at both the subdistrict (*Kawedanan*) and district (*Kabupaten*) levels. This form of Islamic

education, based in residential neighborhoods (*pemukiman*), primarily taught the basic religious sciences to children in primary school (ages 6 to 12). Moreover, the participants in this education could not generally be classified as *santri* like those studying in pesantren. It was widely assumed that children who graduated from *Langgar* education lacked the comprehensive religious knowledge possessed by Pesantren alumni. Consequently, until the 19th century, it was rare for *Langgar* graduates to occupy socio-religious positions within the community, as pesantren alumni commonly did. On the other hand, a socio-religious dilemma arose when graduates of *Langgar* and pesantren until the early 20th century did not have certificates (*ijazah*), formal proof of education, similar to those issued by colonial schools. As a result, neither *Langgar* nor pesantren graduates were eligible to work in government or administrative roles. The non-recognition of *Langgar* and pesantren graduates due to their lack of a curriculum system, teaching, and proof of graduation created a socio-religious gap that continued until the early 20th century. This triggered the emergence of the madrasah movement, or Arab school system, in Indonesia, which from the early 20th century gradually transformed traditional Islamic education into a modern system modeled on European education. This transformation also occurred in south-Central Java, supported by community movements eager to expand the presence of Arab schools. However, this phenomenon has not received sufficient attention from researchers on the madrasah education system in Indonesia, including Steenbrink (1986), Maksum (1999), Saleh (2004), Baya'gub (2013), Hosaini (2019), and others. Even those who briefly mention madrasah in south-Central Java, such as Busyairi (2012), Ahmad (1991), Hisyam (2001), Muzan (2011), Zuhri (2013), and Athoillah (2021), have not discussed the movement to establish Arab schools or madrasah in depth.

The rise of the movement to establish Arab schools by Islamic communities in the urban centers and subdistricts of southern Central Java in the early 20th century is the main issue this study addresses. The research question is: To what extent did the educational gap in *Langgar* influence the emergence of the movement to establish Arab schools? Who were the actors in the Arab school movement, and how did their collective action unfold in south-Central Java until 1950? To what extent did the Arab school movement influence socio-religious change in south-Central Java by the end of the 20th century? These issues are analyzed using the approach to religious social movements outlined by Schoenfeld, as reviewed by Michael (1995) in Swatos. Schoenfeld views religious social movements as mechanisms for various classes to assert their legitimacy, struggle for a new social order and values of freedom, and determine their own destiny. Using this approach, the Arab school movement in south-Central Java in the first half of the 20th century, whose people

were considered uncosmopolitan and whose region was viewed as remote from a colonial perspective, can be explained in detail. This point motivates researchers to prioritize the study of Islam in the northern coastal region of Java over the southern region. The spatial scope of this study covers south-Central Java, including the southern part of the *Karesidenan* Pekalongan, *Karesidenan* Banyumas, and *Karesidenan* Kedu. The temporal scope begins in 1900, marking the start of the Dutch Ethical Policy, and ends in 1950, when the Indonesian government began implementing the *Madrasah Wadajib Beladjar* (MWB) program.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses the historical research method according to Kuntowijoyo (1995), beginning with the careful selection of historical sources related to the actors and movements of Arab schools in South-Central Java in the first half of the 20th century. Next, historical sources such as archives or documents, newspapers and magazines, and selected scientific studies were critically examined, both internally and externally, to obtain historical facts whose authenticity and credibility could be verified. Credible historical facts are derived from a review of data relevance, primarily through comparisons of verifications from several relevant perspectives related to the Arab school movement in South-Central Java during that period. Afterwards, these historical facts are analyzed and synthesized to compile the various forms and patterns of the madrasah movement into a logical, chronological historiography.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Langgar and Socio-Religious

Historically, the region referred to as south-Central Java corresponds to the former Islamic Mataram territory known as Bagelen (*Pagelen*), which encompassed *Siti Sewu* (Western Bagelen, including areas such as Banyumas, Kutowinangun, Remo, Semawung, Ledok, and Gowong) and *Siti Numbakanyar* (Eastern Bagelen, including Tanggung, Loano, and Kulon Progo) (Margana, 2004). Meanwhile, Kedu, as of 1636, was divided into *Siti Bumi* (the area west of the Progo River to Mount Sumbing) and *Siti Bumija* (the area east of the Progo River to Mount Merbabu) (Athoillah, 2021). Within the temporal scope of this study, the administrative boundaries of South-Central Java were redefined following *Staatsblad* 1900 no. 334, which, beginning in 1901, merged *Karesidenan* Tegal with *Karesidenan* Pekalongan and also *Karesidenan* Bagelen with *Karesidenan* Kedu (*Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indie*, 1919). In subcultural terms, the region of south-Central Java in

the early 20th century was known as 'Dulangmas', comprising the *Karesidenan* Kedu, Pekalongan, and Banyumas (Athoillah, 2021).

South-Central Java was characterized by fertile agricultural settlements, primarily centered on rice fields and plantations. Following the *Perang Jawa*, regions such as Bagelen and Kedu became significant for coffee and indigo cultivation (Suroyo, 2000). Similarly, the region of *Karesidenan* Banyumas was also developed for sugarcane plantations and the establishment of several sugar factories that remained operational into the early 20th century (Mulyasari, 2010). The socio-religious landscape of south-Central Java was deeply influenced by the Islamic Mataram political-religious framework, marked by narratives of charismatic leadership, *desa perdikan* (tax-exempt villages), pesantren, and the establishment of *tarekat* (Athoillah, 2021), in areas such as Banyumas, Bagelen, and Kedu, centers of *tarekat* and pesantren flourished throughout the 19th century, with several persisting into the early 20th century (Pranowo, 1991).

With the development of the colonial bureaucracy in the 19th century, district centers (*kabupaten*) or subdistricts (*kawedanan*) emerged, along with the establishment of Kampung Kauman, settlements for colonial religious officials (*penghulu* or *pangulu*). According to Gill (1994), Kauman also served as a residential area for mixed-ethnic communities and functioned as an 'intermediary village' within the multi-ethnic cultural system, persisting into the early 20th century. These settlements typically featured a *Langgar* (a small prayer hall) that served as a center for Islamic education (Darban, 2000). Headley (2004) describes the *Langgar* as a local place of worship, often referred to as a 'small mosque' characterized by a distinctive blend of local architectural styles (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2013). In general terms, the *Langgar* served as a 'space for interaction' where village children gathered after their daily activities. They received religious instruction from the *Kiai Langgar*, including lessons on reciting the Qur'an, Salat, and the Twenty Attributes of God. These lessons were typically held in the late afternoon or evening and conducted in the local language, without Arabic (Noer, 1980). This tradition of *Langgar* education was particularly prominent in Kampung Kauman, located within the administrative centers of colonial south-Central Java.

By the 1930s, the number of *Langgar* in villages such as Sokaraja, Banyumas, had reached dozens. The teaching methods employed mirrored those of pesantren, utilizing the *sorogan* (individual recitation) and *bandongan* (group study) models. If the *Kiai Langgar* had sufficient time, Islamic education was extended to both the young and the elderly (Zuhri, 2013). Essentially, the *Langgar* provided foundational religious knowledge, preparing children for more advanced Islamic studies in pesantren (Dhofier, 1982). As a continuation of this education, pesantren offered

religious instruction in Arabic (Noer, 1980). The curriculum in pesantren was considered comprehensive, providing adequate preparation for engaging in socio-religious practices in Javanese society at the time (Bruinessen, 2008). Graduates of pesantren often married, performed the Hajj pilgrimage, pursued further religious studies in Mecca, and returned to Java as respected religious figures in their communities.

However, not all children who are alumni of the *Langgar* within the villages of south-Central Java were able to pursue their religious studies at distant pesantren or beyond their neighbourhood. Consequently, many discontinued their religious education at a young age and returned to ordinary life. As a result, they were often labeled *abangan* for not continuing their religious education, unlike the *santri* in pesantren. This socio-religious dilemma persisted into the early 20th century, coinciding with the emergence of religious reform movements in several districts and sub-districts of south-Central Java.

In Dukuh Turi, the administrative center of the *Kawedanan Bumiayu*, the Arab *Langgar* served not only as a place of worship but also as a community hub for the minority Hadrami Arab population (Athoillah, 2021). In some cases across south-Central Java, *Langgar* also functioned as centers for disseminating religious information, such as updates on the development of Islam in Mecca from pilgrims who had just returned (Noer, 1980). Moreover, in the early 20th century, several *Langgar* in Kauman, Yogyakarta, became centers of Islamic reformist movements and the embryo of the Muhammadiyah organization (Salam, 2009). Some Arab *Langgar* in Bumiayu and Magelang also evolved into hubs for the formation of socio-religious organizations (Athoillah, 2021). These developments demonstrate that *Langgars* were not merely places of worship but also played a pivotal role in fostering communal activities, as argued by Omer (2008).

Actors and Mobilization Actions of the Arab School Movement

In 1882, the colonial government formalized its policy of bureaucratic religious administration by appointing religious officials (*panghulu*) responsible for matters such as marriage, death, and inheritance (Suminto, 1985). These *panghulu* were important actors in religious movements during the transition to the 20th century, alongside pesantren, *Ulama*, and activists of the Islamic movement. Structural mobilization undertaken by *panghulu*, such as *Kiai Haji Ichsan* in Banjarnegara and *Raden Iskandar* in Temanggung, was also conducted within the structural network of the *Perserikatan Penghulu dan Pegawai Masjid* (PPPM), which had been established since 1920 in locations including Banjarnegara, Temanggung, and Purbalingga (Hisyam, 2001).

In addition to the *penghulu*, another key actor in the religious social movements in south-Central Java was Muslim traders (Busyairi, 2012). However, they generally also served as administrators of religious social organizations that emerged in the early 20th century. Among these were officials or activists from Sarekat Islam (SI), Al-Irsyad, Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, Ahmadiyah, and other associations. Particularly in south-Central Java, actors from these organizational circles played a significant role in the movement to establish Arab schools (Ahmad, 1991). Actors such as *Haji Mahfuz* in Bumiayu, *Kiai Haji Ichsan* in Banjarnegara, and *Sech Mochamad Ali Koedoes* in Magelang successfully mobilized Sarekat Islam's structural networks in south-Central Java. Likewise, the administrators of Al-Irsyad, Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Ahmadiyah also succeeded in mobilizing their respective organizational structures to compete with one another in establishing Arab schools in accordance with the directives of their respective central organizations. In addition to the aforementioned actors, there were movement leaders who were not affiliated with social organizations or colonial religious offices. These educational activists utilized their personal networks (*sanad*) to develop Arab schools. Notable examples include Dahlan Ba'abud, Saqqaf al-Jufri, and others who established schools and their branches through networks of their pupils in Kedu throughout the twentieth century (Athoillah, 2021).

In general, the mass base successfully mobilized by actors of the Arab school movement consisted of urban and suburban communities. In this movement, the role of the movement actors as traders was important because it could serve as a side job for the Ulama living in the center of the region's hustle and bustle, especially in Kauman. The *penghulu* were usually appointed from among the families of *Ulama*, owners of *Langgar*, and often worked as traders. As a result, the *penghulu* in south-Central Java were more receptive to the European education system and became active agents in promoting Islamic education. The actors who worked as traders were usually known for their extensive trading networks and deep understanding of Islamic religious issues in Java. On a personal level, Muslim traders living in urban neighborhoods of south-Central Java frequently interacted with Islamic movement organizations to protect their business interests from competition with Chinese traders. Generally, these Muslim traders became sympathetic to the advancement of Islamic education and religious movements in the early 20th century.

The Arab school movement, led by actors who were social organization activists, appeared to be much stronger thanks to the support of organizational structures established long before Indonesia's independence. Meanwhile, the movement led by non-organizational actors enjoyed greater autonomy, as parent

organizations did not govern it, though it was somewhat weaker in terms of structure and networks. The actors from these various circles conducted structural mobilization by leveraging their organizations' internal networks in south-Central Java, which McAdam et al. (1996), as cited in Klandermans (1997), identified as collective means of constructing meaning and forming new identities. In this capacity, actors such as penghulus, merchants, activists of religious social organizations, and educational figures endeavored to leverage the structural networks of their organizations or those of their colleagues within each respective *kawedanan* or regency. These actors also promised achievements and outcomes from the Arab school establishment movement through the construction of meaning and the formation of new religious social identities. The actors further offered an alternative pattern of movement, proposing that by establishing numerous Arab schools, the attainment would be the emergence of autonomy in determining religious social position, which circles from the pesantren and colonial schools had previously dominated.



Figure 1. Kampong school or Village school part of the colonial program in Kedu in 1910 (KITLV 1402780, n.d.).

In contrast to organizational activists and the penghulu, structural mobilization by merchant actors and Islamic educators tended to rely more on internal trade networks and teacher-student relationships (*sanad*). Nevertheless, the construction of meaning and identity they developed aimed toward objectives largely similar to those of organizational actors. The structural mobilization actions

undertaken by these actors propagated the aims of the Arab school movement to their groups and sympathizers, as Cohen (1985) depicted, including autonomy, plurality, wisdom derived from past experience, consideration of the formal state, and a market economy. Therefore, Arab schools must use the European education system so that their graduates can be accepted as employees. This adoption promotes urban Muslim children to study at Arab schools.

Arab School and Its Development

The term Arab school (*Arabische school*) referred to religious schools located near mosques or in the Kauman quarters (*Bintang Islam*, 1927; Hisyam, 2001). In *Fragmenta Islamica*, the Arab school was the designation used by Betawi society for madrasahs that bore Arab or Egyptian characteristics and were influenced by European educational models (Pijper, 1984). Movement actors selected the Arab school as an 'educational vessel' for primary school-age children who had graduated from *Langgar* but did not continue to pesantren, or for children who were unwilling or unable to attend government schools. The Arab school movement was alternative in nature, providing religious education to children who lacked access to learning, whether in Pesantrens or village schools. According to Pijper (1984), Arab schools offered curricula nearly equivalent to those of formal schools, encompassing religious instruction, arithmetic, reading, writing, regional languages, Arabic, and history, so that graduates could serve as religious officials.

The development of Arab schools in south-Central Java was generally influenced by the existence of madrasah Jamiat Khair in Jakarta in 1901, madrasah in Pekalongan from 1903, and madrasah Mamba'ul Ulum in Surakarta in 1906 (Mandal, 2002; Steenbrink, 1986). The establishment of Arab schools also constituted a reaction to the teacher ordinance policy pursuant to *Staatsblad* 1905 No. 550, which was perceived as discriminatory toward native schools, as it mandated educational permits, periodic student reporting, and supervision of instructional materials (Untung, 2013). More specifically, the emergence of Arab schools in south-Central Java was a response to concerns of segments of the Muslim community in Banjarnegara about the establishment of *Kerasulan Sadrach* at the Pekalongan-Banjarnegara border in 1890 (Ahmad, 1991). The first Arab school movement emerged in Kauman, Banjarnegara, when the family of a religious bureaucrat, *Kiai Haji* Ichsan, founded the madrasah Kidul Mesjid in 1906 (Ahmad, 1991). *Kiai Haji* Ichsan's action coincided with the efforts of Assistant Resident of Kebumen, L.N. van Meeverden, to allocate village granary funds for teachers' salaries in village schools in Karanganyar Regency (Kebumen) in 1906 (Anonim, 1977). The establishment of madrasah Kidul Mesjid constituted a reaction to the

government's plan, which demonstrably commenced with the founding of village schools throughout all regions of Indonesia in 1907 (Steenbrink, 1986), including the establishment of the Bumiputera school (*Inlandsche School*) *Angka Loro* (second class/*tweede klasse*) at Banjarnegara in 1907 (Ahmad, 1991).

The Arab school movement in south-Central Java was also spurred by the advancements of the Chinese community, supported by Christian missionary organizations (*Zending*), which successfully established *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan* (THHK) schools with a curriculum modeled after the *Europeesche Lagere School* (ELS), such as one in Parakan district, Temanggung, in 1908 (Wardani, 2021). The Islamic reformist movement in south-Central Java gained further momentum with the establishment of Sarekat Islam (SI) branches, including one in Banjarnegara under the leadership of *Kiai Haji Ichsan* in 1913 (Hisyam, 2001). According to Korver (1982), multiple branches of Sarekat Islam were founded in 1913, including those in Cilacap, Purbalingga, Wonosobo, Kutoarjo, Purworejo, Parakan, Muntilan, Temanggung, and Magelang. Korver further noted the establishment of SI branches in Brebes and Gombong in 1914, and in Kebumen in 1915.

With the support of Sarekat Islam, madrasah Kidul Mesjid had enrolled 300 students by 1914 (Hisyam, 2001). The initiatives of *Kiai Haji Ichsan*, Penghulu of Banjarnegara, were succeeded by *Raden Tumenggung Iskandar*, Penghulu of Temanggung, who founded the Arab school, madrasah Tamrin al-Sibyan, on 1 September 1915 in Kauman, Temanggung. Within a year, the school's enrollment had reached 180 students (Hisyam, 2001). In Bumiayu, several merchants affiliated with Sarekat Islam, including *Haji Mahfuz*, *Haji Manfari*, *Badri*, *Burhan*, and an Arab named *Salim Marfadi*, helped establish the Arab school, madrasah Ta'allumul Huda, in 1917 (Busyairi, 2012). This institution was the only formal school in Bumiayu that emphasized Arabic language instruction, led by a Koja (Arab-Indonesian) teacher from Pekalongan named *Usman* (Athoillah, 2021).

In 1918, activists from Sarekat Islam Banjarnegara established madrasah Darul Ma'arif, led by *Muhammad Fadlullah Suhaimi* (Ahmad, 1991). In July 1919, Sarekat Islam also founded madrasah Al'Islamijah in Magelang under the leadership of *Sech Mochamad Ali Koedoes*, encouraging Sarekat Islam members to enroll en masse (*Oetoesan Hindia*, 1919). Meanwhile, the Purworejo branch of Sarekat Islam advanced Islamic education by incorporating Dutch language instruction into the Arab school in Sangubanyu (*Boedi Oetomo*, 1922). By 1927, tensions arose between Sarekat Islam activists in Banyumas-Kedu and the *Tiong Hoa Kie Tok Kauw Hwee* (THKTKH), a Chinese organization that established branches in Wonosobo and Purwokerto. The rivalry centered on competing for influence and public support in

the Dieng Highlands, particularly along the Pekalongan-Wonosobo-Banjarnegara route (Ahmad, 1991).

In 1927, the Sarekat Islam movement continued to develop Arab schools in Sokaraja, Banyumas (Ahmad, 1991; *Bintang Islam*, 1927). On 2-5 February 1928, Sarekat Islam figures such as *Haji Agus Salim*, H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, and others assembled at madrasah Darul Ma'arif when attending the *Sarekat Islam Afdeling Pandoe* (SIAP) congress. Sarekat Islam in Banjarnegara subsequently established a special committee to develop four-year Madrasah Diniyah studies in nearly every village (Ahmad, 1991).

In 1914, Arab groups and the Cilacap community also established Arab schools in Cilacap and Banjarnegara. The curriculum employed corresponded to that of Madrasah Jamiat Khair in Betawi (Alwi Al-Masjoer, 2005). The Al-Irsyad Association of Bumiayu, with actors such as Husein Al-Yazidi, also founded Al-Irsyad school in Dukuh Turi, Bumiayu, on 14 October 1918 (Badjerei, 1996). Al-Irsyad school in Cilacap was likewise established on 9 July 1922, followed by the founding of Al-Irsyad school in Purwokerto in 1931 (*Al-Jaum*, 1931; Badjerei, 1996).

The Arab school movement in south-Central Java was also undertaken by *Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah*, as exemplified by the designation of the *Kweekschool Moehammadijah*-owned primary school initiative in Muntilan by *Kiai Haji Ahmad Dahlan* in 1914 (Fatkhah, 2024). *Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah* also provided support to the Purworejo-Klampok community in Banjarnegara in 1920, which offered instruction in women's self-sufficiency by bringing teachers from Jatibarang, Brebes (*Sinar Hindia*, 1920). The principal actor in the Muhammadiyah Arab school movement was *Kiai Haji Abu Daldiri*, who served as consul of the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership in Banyumas (Fathony, 2023).

The Muhammadiyah movement not only established Arab schools but also trained teachers for them in 1930 through the founding of the *Sekolah Guru Rakyat* in Purbalingga Wetan and *Sekolah Wustha Mu'alimin* in Ajibarang (Fathony, 2023; Suwarno & Kosasih, 2013). This movement likely constituted a reaction to the colonial policy that permitted village school students to continue to *Schakelschool* with a five-year curriculum in 1921 (Steenbrink, 1986). Until 1930, Muhammadiyah activists successfully established Arab schools such as Madrasah Diniyah in Bobotsari and Banjarnegara, as well as two Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Cilacap (Suwarno & Kosasih, 2013). In 1934, the Muhammadiyah figure *Kiai Haji Abu Darda* founded the *Wustha Mu'alimin* school in Purwokerto (Suwarno & Kosasih, 2013)

In 1936, Muhammadiyah activists established an Arab school in Sudagaran, Wonosobo. The school, known as *Hollandsch-Inlandsche School* (HIS), *met den Qoeran Moehammadijah* for native populations, with a Western educational model.

Its founder, the chairman of Muhammadiyah Wonosobo, *Kiai* Muhammad Toha, was supported by other activists, including *Kiai* Sulaiman, Mangun Sujana, Ali, Rahmat, and Tamam. The alumni of this Arab school in Sudagaran subsequently strengthened the formation of Muhammadiyah in Wonosobo (Shidiq et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, the Arab school movement developed by Jam'iyah Nahdlatul Ulama in south-Central Java was manifested in the establishment and management of several madrasahs in Sokaraja. One such institution mentioned by Zuhri (2013) was madrasah Al-Huda under the leadership of *Ustaz* Mursid, whose educational fees reached 25 cents. In Sokaraja, Jam'iyah Nahdlatul Ulama managed four Arab schools and primary schools with Dutch as the medium of instruction (*Islamistich Westerse School*). Several Arab schools were established in the Banyumas region in 1935, including madrasah Mamba'ul Ulum in Purwokerto, madrasah Al-Islamiyah in Kebarongan, and madrasah al-Khalidiyah in Sokaraja (Zuhri, 2013).

Nahdlatul Ulama activists in Wonosobo also established an Arab school named madrasah an-Nahdah, founded by *Raden* Ibrahim Ba'abud, *Kiai* Haji Hasbullah, *Kiai* Haji Abdullah Mawardi, *Kiai* Abu Jumrah, *Kiai* Haji Asy'ari (Kalibeber), Hasan Assaqaf, *Raden* Muhsin Ba'abud, and others. This madrasah was established near Kauman, Wonosobo, with a modern educational system and an emphasis on Arabic-language instruction (Athoillah, 2021). Another Arab school establishment movement emerged in Kauman Parakan in 1935, named Madrasah Al-Iman, founded by *Kiai* Haji Nawawi, the first chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama Parakan (Munarsih, 2019). Additionally, the Ahmadiyah Movement, which held congresses in Purwokerto during the period 1930-1933 (Noer, 1980), also constructed an Arab school in Binangun (Watumalang, Wonosobo), named madrasah Ahmadiyah. Its founder was an alumnus from Lahore, Pakistan, named *Kiai* Muhammad Sabitun (Shidiq et al., 2023).

Regarding non-religious actors, the Arab school development movement was initiated with the establishment of the initial madrasah al-'Ushriyyah at the Kauman Mosque in Purbalingga (Ahmadi, 2022). Subsequently, Dahlan Ba'abud founded madrasah al-Islamiyah in Bulus, Purworejo, in 1928. This madrasah introduced a classical system that employed classrooms, defined teacher roles, emphasized Arabic, and adopted European educational models (Athoillah, 2021; Faiqoh, 2017). The subsequent establishment of the Arab school was undertaken by Saqqaf al-Jufri, who founded madrasah Al-Iman in Kampung Jambon, Magelang, on 30 July 1932 for male and female students (Madrasah al-Iman, 1932).

Saqqaf al-Jufri's student, Yunus Muhammad Alwan, also established an Arab school in Muntilan. *Ustaz* Yunus was a Qur'anic exegesis instructor at the Kauman Mosque in Muntilan who founded madrasah Al-Iman in Benteng, Muntilan in 1937

(Athoillah, 2021). Another Al-Iman school alumnus, Abdullah Alatas, also established the Al-Iman Arab school in Parakan, Temanggung, on 16 July 1939 (Madrasah al-Iman, 1939). It is plausible that Abdullah Alatas collaborated with Nahdlatul Ulama Parakan actors, such as *Kiai Haji* Nawawi, who had earlier established an Arab school. This assertion stems from the fact that, until 1939, the Parakan District was predominantly populated by Nahdliyin adherents, according to Zuhri (2013). Abdullah Alatas established madrasah al-Iman in Margoyoso, Salaman (on the Magelang-Purworejo border) in 1940, which subsequently transformed into madrasah Ibtidaiyah in 1955 (Athoillah, 2021).



Figure 2. Abdullah Alatas with students of the Al Iman Arabic school in Parakan in 1939 (Madrasah al-Iman, 1939)

'Santri Baru' and Changes in Socio-Religious Identity

The presence of the Arab school movement throughout the first half of the 20th century opened new avenues for inland communities in south-Central Java to participate in modernization movements within Islam. Attending Arab schools made children in these urban environments more moderate, knowledgeable, respected, and receptive to the currents of socio-religious change. The teaching of Arabic to madrasah students fostered both personal and collective awareness that those in south-Central Java were part of the global Islamic community. Furthermore, Arabic instruction also enhanced awareness of global Muslim solidarity and contributed to the emergence of new social identities (Alwi Al-Masjoer, 2005; Athoillah, 2021). It is therefore unsurprising that madrasah alumni in south-Central Java participated in modernization movements, some of which were oriented

toward Western progress. One example is the Magelang community's movement to abolish the tradition of squatting before high officials in 1937 (*Het Nieuws van Den Dag*, 1937).

By the mid-20th century, nearly all cadres of religious associations, such as al-Irsyad, Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama, were graduates of Arab schools established by these organizations. The modern educational model of these Arab schools shaped a new character among its alumni, enabling them to participate in national movements and fostering awareness of their roles within religious communities both before and after independence. Many Arab school alumni in south-Central Java went on to become prominent figures in religious organizations, madrasah teachers, religious officials, and other religious-based professions. For example, several alumni of madrasah Kidul Mesjid included Sirad (son of *Kiai Haji Ahmad Dahlan*), who later became the director of madrasah Muallimin Yogyakarta; Noto Soewirjo, who led Muhammadiyah Banyumas; and Dardiri, who served as a member of the *Komite Nasional Indonesia* (KNI) Banyumas (Hisyam, 2001). The first cohort of madrasah Ta'allumul Huda, including *Kiai Haji Abdul Kahfi*, also became a prominent figure in the Muhammadiyah movement in Bumiayu (Busyairi, 2012). Meanwhile, Taufiqurahman, an activist from Darul Ma'arif Banjarnegara, was appointed Secretary General of Masyumi in 1945 (Ahmad, 1991).

The proponents of the Arab school movement actively engaged their networks to start 'opening' themselves to Islamic progress. They were starting the movements from families, *Langgar* communities, members and sympathizers of social organizations, and others, as 'arenas of structural mobilization' to foster an understanding of what Josep (1981) terms the 'Islamic world'. Through this mobilization, the movement gradually cultivated what (Ricklefs, 2006) describes as a moral community and religious environment. These socio-religious activists sought to address the educational needs of children who, unable to pursue further studies in pesantren, found an alternative in Arab schools.

Due to their function as an alternative form of education, Arab schools in south-Central Java continued to exist and develop even after Indonesia's independence, as evidenced by institutions such as madrasah Ta'allumul Huda in Bumiayu, madrasah Al-Iman and its branches in Magelang, madrasah al-'Ushriyyah in Purbalingga, and schools affiliated with major Islamic organizations such as Al-Irsyad, Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama. However, some Arab schools ceased operations before independence, including Al-Irsyad in Bumiayu, which closed after the 1931 earthquake (Badjerei, 1996). Darul Ma'arif in Banjarnegara was shuttered in 1942 after the Japanese occupation forces banned Sarekat Islam (Ahmad, 1991), while madrasah An-Nahdah in Wonosobo was forced to close the same year when

several of its high-ranking officials were arrested by Japanese troops (Shidiq et al., 2023). Madrasah Al-Iman in Parakan also temporarily closed in 1944, though it reopened in 1950 (De Locomotief, 1950).

Table 1. The development of Arabic schools in southern-Central Java from 1900 to the 1950s

Arabic school (Madrasah)	Location	Founder	Affiliation	Year
<i>Kidul Mesjid</i>	Kauman, Banjarnegara	KH. Ichsan	Penghulu, Sarekat Islam	1906
<i>Arabic School</i>	Cilacap	Group of Arab	Jamiat Khair	1914
<i>Kweekschool Moehammadijah</i>	Muntilan	-	Muhammadiyah	1914
<i>Sekolah Arab</i>	Banjarnegara	Group of Arab	Jamiat Khair	1914
Tamrin al-Sibyan	Kauman, Temanggung	RT. Iskandar	Penghulu	1915
Ta'alumul Huda	Bumiayu	H. Mahfuz	Sarekat Islam	1917
Darul Ma'arif	Banjarnegara	Muhammad Fadlullah Suhaimi	Sarekat Islam	1918
Al-Irsyad	Bumiayu	Husein al-Yazidi	Al-Irsyad	1918
Al'Islamiyah	Magelang	Sech Mochamad Ali	Sarekat Islam	1919
Sangubanyu Arabic School	Kutoarjo	-	Sarekat Islam	Before 1919
Al-Irsyad Arabic School	Cilacap	Group of Arab	Al-Irsyad	1922
	Sokaraja, Banyumas	-	Sarekat Islam	1927
Al-Islamiyah	Purworejo	Dahlan Ba'abud	Islamic Scholar	1928
Wustha Mualimin	Ajibarang	-	Muhammadiyah	1930
Madrasah Diniyah	Bobotsari	-	Muhammadiyah	Until 1930
Madrasah Diniyah	Banjarnegara	-	Muhammadiyah	Sampai 1930
Al-Irsyad	Purwokerto	Group of Arab	Al-Irsyad	1931
Al-Nahdah	Kauman, Wonosobo	Ibrahim Ba'abud and others	Nahdlatul Ulama	1932
Al-Iman	Magelang	Saqaf Al-Jufri	Ulama	1932
Wustha Mualimin	Purwokerto	KH. Abu Darda	Muhammadiyah	1934
Al-Iman	Parakan	KH. Nawawi	Nahdlatul Ulama	1935
Al Huda	Sokaraja, Banyumas	Ustaz Mursid	Nahdlatul Ulama	1935
Mamba'ul Ulum	Purwokerto	-	Nahdlatul Ulama	1935

Al-Islamiyah	Kebarongan, Banyumas	-	Nahdlatul Ulama	1935
Al-Khalidiyah	Sokaraja, Banyumas	-	Nahdlatul Ulama	1935
H.I.S <i>met den Qoeran Moehammadijah</i>	Sudagaran, Wonosobo	K. Muhammad Toha	Muhammadiyah	1936
Al-Iman	Kauman, Muntilan	Yunus Alwan	Al-Iman Magelang	1937
Al-Iman	Parakan	Abdullah Alatas	Al-Iman Magelang	1939
Ahmadiyah	Wonosobo	K. Sabitun	Ahmadiyah	1940
Al-Iman	Margoyoso, Magelang	Abdullah Alatas	Al-Iman Magelang	1940
Al-'Ushriyah	Kauman, Purbalingga	KH. Moh 'Ishom, KH. Ismail Sadjaji	Islamic Scholar	1949
<i>Arabic School</i>	Sucen juritengah, Purworejo	-	Nahdlatul Ulama	1953
<i>Arabic School</i>	Kranggan, Banyumas	Jakfar Al- Habsyi	Nahdlatul Ulama	1963

Source: Adapted from several sources such as Ahmad (1991), Ahmadi (2022), Al-Jaum (1931), Bintang Islam (1927), Boedi Oetomo (1922), Oetoesan Hindia (1919), Alwi Al-Masjoer (2005), Athoillah (2021), Badjerei (1996), Busyairi (2012), Fatkhan (2024), Hisyam (2001), Putri (2020), Redaksi (2020), Rohani etc.(2025), Shidiq etc. (2023), Suwarno & Kosasih (2013).

In the post-independence era, new Arab schools emerged in south-Central Java, such as the Arab school in Sucenjurutengah, Purworejo, established by Nahdlatul Ulama activists in 1953 (Putri, 2020). Another example is the school founded by Nahdlatul Ulama activist Ja'far al-Habsyi in Kranggan (Pekuncen, Banyumas) before 1968, which later transitioned into a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Redaksi, 2020). The diverse identities of these Arab schools, which had flourished since the early 20th century, ultimately faded after the government standardized madrasah education through the *Madrasah Wajib Belajar* (M.W.B.).

Another significant contribution of Arab schools was the emergence of new social patterns within Islam in south-Central Java. By attending madrasah, students gained recognition as 'new *santri*' (*santri baru*), alongside the existing pesantren's *santri*. Madrasah alumni could then occupy new social and religious roles previously reserved for pesantren graduates or government school alumni. This new social status further reinforced their collective identity, distinguishing them from the traditional pesantren-based *putihan* or *santri* as described by Ricklefs (2006), and setting them apart from the *abangan* group.

The Arab school movement also instilled in its alumni a new awareness of the importance of unity (*ukhuwah*) among religious activists, a sense that persisted even after independence. This sense of unity is why even traditionalist groups such as Nahdliyin were able to advance their organizations and political actions through the NU party up to the pre-*Orde Baru* period. The religious social positions held by Arab school alumni made madrasah graduates influential religious leaders within society. In south-Central Java, almost all activists in religious organizations, *Ulama*, and officials such as *penghulu* and *naib* were madrasah alumni. Their identity became increasingly pronounced and segmented into new religious elite groups on the eve of the 1955 elections.

CONCLUSION

The Arab school movement in south-Central Java in the early 20th century was carried out by the *Putihan/santri* group due to the "disparity in the education system," which was inferior to *pesantren* and colonial schools. They were also labeled *Abangan* if they pursued education at colonial schools and could not become government employees if they pursued education at *pesantren*. The *Putihan* group sought to modernize the religious education system, strengthen their collective identity as *Putihan*, and ensure that their graduates could work in the government. The actors were agents of change from among religious social organizations, activists, and various professions who demanded human rights, mobilized social networks, constructed meaning, established the legitimacy of a new social class as 'madrasah students' (*murid madrasah*), advocated for a new exclusive social order, and were autonomous or free from the control of colonial schools or *pesantren*. The Arab school movement succeeded in shaping a new character for the socio-religious landscape of south-Central Java until the 1950s, namely the transformation of the exclusive and traditional structures of the *Pesantren-Keraton* and *Langgar-Kampung* into the inclusive and modern structures of the *Madrasah-Pemerintah*. Arab school alumni succeeded in becoming a group of 'new religious *Priayi*' whose status was equal to that of *pesantren Ulama* and colonial officials.

The historical study, which emphasizes a social movement approach, has certainly succeeded in highlighting the collective power of white groups in institutionalizing their religious social life in the first half of the 20th century. However, methodologically, it has not yet revealed that the psychological and ideological aspects are also important in the context of new religious social movements that have developed, especially in third-world countries. This point certainly presents an important area for future research, especially for studies of Islam in south-Central Java in the 20th century, which still requires special attention.

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