

Islamic Higher Education and Human Capital Development

(The Study of Ma'had Aly As Education Training for 'Ulama')

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Abstract. Islamic boarding schools as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia have played a very significant role, especially in providing cadres of ulama in particular and human resources who are moral in general. However, the role of the pesantren is felt to be depleting, due to the influence of the culture of industrialization and globalization. The decline in the role and function of the pesantren raises concerns and anxieties among the Ulama because it worries about the extinction of the repertoire of Islamic sciences and of course it seriously endangers the future of Muslims. From here the Ulama felt important and immediately formed an institution that specifically actively prepared cadres of Ulama who had honesty, scientific sincerity, and amaliah. On this basis, Ma'had 'Aly was founded. Ma'had ly Aly was formed in order to prepare ulama cadres' who have scientific integrity, amaliah and khuluqiyah who are of high quality and have strategic values oriented to justice, equality, openness, honesty, trust, and popularism. Ma'had ly Aly in addition to maintaining the scientific tradition that has become a characteristic of pesantren for many years, Ma'had 'Aly also tried to make updates on aspects of the curriculum and learning methods in boarding schools.

Keywords: Ma'had Aly, Education Training, 'Ulama' and Islamic boarding school.

1. Introduction

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia have played a very significant role, especially in providing cadres of ulama in particular and human resources who are moral in general. However, the role of the pesantren is felt to be depleting, due to the influence of the culture of industrialization and globalization. The decline in the role and function of the pesantren raises concerns and anxieties among the Ulama because it worries about the extinction of the repertoire of Islamic sciences and of course it seriously endangers the future of Muslims. From here the Ulama felt important and immediately formed an institution that specifically actively prepared cadres of Ulama who had honesty, scientific sincerity, and piety. On this basis, Ma'had 'Aly was founded. Ma'had Aly was formed in order to prepare ulama cadres' who have scientific integrity, piety, and honorable behavior. who are of high quality and have strategic values oriented to justice, equality, openness, honesty, trust, and popularise. Ma'had Aly in addition to retaining the scientific tradition that has become a characteristic of pesantren for many years, it also tried to make updates on aspects of the curriculum and learning methods in pesantren.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Meaning of Ma'had Aly

Ma'had Aly Islamic boarding school is actually still an Islamic boarding school which many people know. As having been known, an Islamic boarding school is one of the oldest Islamic education institutions in Indonesia. Moreover, it is said that Islamic boarding school is placed as an Islamic education institution which is different from (read: has certain unique features) to education institution in general [1]. But, because of certain historical reasons, Islamic boarding school is usually simple and traditional. After it is developed to be an Islamic education institution it tends to be unique and modern.

Ma'had Aly is an Arabic term whose meaning is an advanced Islamic boarding school. *Ma'had Aly* is a kind of effort to develop academic tradition in an Islamic boarding school which has been done since the 80s. It is initiated from takhassus study programs which have been implemented ten years in Islamic boarding schools.

The idea of its founding is based on the need to improve the quality of education at advanced Islamic boarding school which is hoped to produce Islamic scholars, or at least *fuyaha'* cadets in the development of science and technology recently. Besides still holding scientific tradition which has become a unique feature of Islamic boarding school for years, *Ma'had Aly* also tries to develop curriculum and methodology of learning.

In another word, *Ma'had Aly* is found to prepare who possess scientific integrity, qualified behavior, and *Khuluqiyah*, and has strategic points as it is oriented to justice, equivalence, openness, honesty, trust, and democracy

2.2 The Orientation of Ma'had Aly

Ma'had Aly was formally founded on 21 February 1990 in Sukorejo Situbondo by KH. As'ad Syamsul Arifin. That advanced Islamic boarding school was then known as "*Al-Ma'had 'Aly Lil Ulum al-Islamiyah Qism al-Fiqh*". The support from the Indonesian government through Decision Letter (Ina: Surat Keputusan/SK) from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, SK Menag RI No. 284/2001 makes its existence stronger and stronger. The Letter was issued after considering that advanced Islamic boarding school is important to fulfill the need of Islamic scholars from Islamic society.

Ma'had Aly is founded to provide Islamic scholar cadres with qualified scientific integrity, behavior, and *khuluqiyah*, and has strategic points as it is oriented to justice, equivalence, openness, honesty, trust, and democracy *Ma'had Aly* was founded based on the following reasons: (1) The ability of Islamic knowledge, which is systematically arranged, to function both as religion, faith teaching, and culture, the way of life which has been developed by Islamic people around the world from time to time, (2) the ability of Islamic knowledge to cope with problems of life especially actual problems which Islamic people have, and (3) the ability of Islamic scholars to collect a part of Islamic knowledge with his knowledge about age problems, as a scaffolding guide for Islamic followers, to realize strong sequences of guiding activity which can dynamically developed.

As having been explained above, *Ma'had Aly* is purposed to produce Moslem generation with competence and performance to cope with problems of Islamic people this time and then

especially law and education problems. Formally, *Ma'had Aly*'s programs are aimed at producing Islamic scholars with good intellect, deed, and beneficial knowledge.

Considering its programs, the curriculum of *Ma'had Aly* is also integration between Islamic boarding school and higher education curriculum. This conclusion is made based on its curriculum which covers 3 groups of study; ideology spreading, developing, and social action.

The mission of *Ma'had Aly* is as the center of study and cadre process of professional Moslems who are able to solve religious and social problems as well as transform Islamic and social values so that pious individual and society can be realized.

3. Discussion

3.1 The Convergence of Islamic Boarding School and Higher Education

Education at *Ma'had Aly* is intended to synthesize education at Islamic boarding school (Pondok Pesantren –PP) and higher education (Perguruan Tinggi –PT). In the next explanation, the writer uses PP and PT for those two educations. In fact, joining those two educations is not easy since both have a different tradition in education. PT is the symptom of the city but PP is the symptom of the village. PT is identical with modernity but PP is identical with traditional style/way. PT usually uses liberal paradigm but PP tends to be conservative and relies on *Kiai*, title or reference for a venerated scholar/teacher of Islam [2].

Nevertheless, all those dichotomies are recently argued. Some circles of society even refuse it. This refusal is not without reason. Most of them use real argumentation found from PP and PT practices in Islamic education in Indonesia.

First reason, thinker figures both politic, education, and even science mostly have Islamic boarding school educational background. *Second*, today's time there are many Islamic boarding schools which experience change, culturally and structurally. The appearance institutions which claim themselves as modern Islamic boarding schools are proof that Islamic boarding schools are not static. *Third*, The prestige label (Indonesia: *wah*) for PT does not mean that it is better than PP. Moreover, based on self-reliance in terms of institution, management, and education curriculum, Islamic boarding schools are more self-reliant. *Fourth*, Most people agree that in the course of education history in Indonesia, the Islamic boarding school has become a kind of *local genius*. Meanwhile, Martin Van Bruinessen says Islamic boarding school as one of the great traditions [3].

One thing we must aware of is that the convergence of traditional and modern design is not an odd thing but a must. Islamic boarding school education produces a generation who 'only know' traditional way [3]. Meanwhile, higher education produces a secular generation. In another word, it can be said that each creates a limp generation. PT is strong in ratio and skill but minus in moral. Otherwise, PP is strong is morality but minus in rational tradition. PP is able to produce generations with good moral but weak intellectual.

How is the curriculum design of 'synthesis' education at *Ma'had aly*?. It must be noted that usually, the Islamic boarding school does name its curriculum because the curriculum is usually known as an informal education institution. But *Ma'had Aly* uses it. It has been used since that institution was .initiated. In the first discussion of its founding at K.H. Khatib Habibullah, they had mentioned learning materials or syllabus, teacher, etc [4]. Besides, documents of some *Ma'had Alys* use the word *curriculum* clearly. This is normal since the first design of *Ma'had Aly* is to synergize and integrate the curriculum of Islamic boarding school and higher education. It can be

observed from some explanation about the curriculum which generally covers three things, i.e., ideology, development, and action/social studies.

The curriculum of *Ma'had Aly* education is aimed at balancing the mastery of theoretical Islamic science and contemporary issues with practical skills. The combination of curriculum implemented at *Ma'had Aly* is directed at producing Moslem with good science mastery who is ready to play his roles in social life besides having good moral and personality[5].

3.2 Criticizing the Establishment of Tradition

As an Islamic higher education institution which waited and hoped of its products, its accurateness in meeting the needs and hopes of society is important. It means that the existence and development of *Ma'had Aly* in the future is determined by the achievement of its vision-mission and its ability to suffice the hope of Moslem society.

As having been explained in the previous part, regardless of its old age Islamic boarding schools is still considered as the center of education, preaching, and service to the Islamic community in Indonesia. Moreover, Malik Fajar, using David C. Korten's term, sees Islamic boarding school as 'people center development'. According to him, the Islamic boarding school is the only Islamic education institution which is close to and understands low-level society [2]. This fact may make Islamic boarding school is acknowledged as a system and an educational institution which has the root of history and unique features. The existence of Islamic boarding school so far is still acknowledged by society surrounded by science and technology which are getting sophisticated Nevertheless; Islamic boarding school is still able to show its originality, unity, self-reliance in the education system, and management. The explanation about the strengths of Islamic boarding school does not mean to neglect its weaknesses.

Malik Fajar [2] notes some weaknesses of Islamic boarding school. *First*, it is a centralized hierarchical leadership centered to *Kiai*. *Second*, it employs one-way communication. *Third*, disorientation; Islamic education tends to be less responsive to the speed of social reality development. Some say those three things show characteristics and strengths rather than weaknesses [1].

How does *Ma'had Aly* see above statements? The writer finds some important notes about *Ma'had Aly*, especially in Situbondo. *First*, the New way of thinking is developing. Critical and down to earth studies to understand *the yellow book* is being implemented accurately. *Babon*/main book which is usually considered sacred as a religious guide, without being brave of criticizing and it is only memorized and implemented, is adapted to and communicated in line with the present condition. It brings pros and cons among people.

Second, Learning method at *Ma'had Aly* does not implement method used at Islamic boarding school today's time. The study of *yellow books* does not use *bandongan* and *sorogan* [6] anymore. It is done through 'exposure and hermeneutic' as the most contemporary understanding method [7]. Based on the finding, *Ma'had Aly* implements lecturing system through *al-tadris* method (tutorial from lecture), *mudarosah* (discussion), *naqd* (critics) and social action [4]. All texts include al-Qur'an and al-Hadits is communicated with concrete reality in society in the form of dialectic. It does not stop there, the *santris* also re-expose the trace of knowledge which forms design and course of Islamic thought in the past times.

Actually, learning method at *Ma'had Aly* keeps changing beyond the limit of Islamic boarding school. *Ma'had Aly* tries to change 'reading technique' from textual to contextual, from the product of thought orientation to process of thought formation (*ushul fiqh*), from language orientation to substance, from seeing the text as a sacred thing to a usual thing. The implementation of expose and hermeneutic method at *Ma'had Aly* then motivates *santris* to study main sources. Consequently, they can learn the books written by western thinkers directly. They do not only learn from the books of Syatibi, al-Subkhi, al-Syafi'i, etc. but also the thought of Hans George Gadamer (hermeneutic), Ferdinand de Saussure (linguistic), Michael Foucault (epistemology), Roland Barthes (semiology), etc.

Third, *Ma'had Aly* does not follow feudal-centralistic leadership of a *Kiai*, but its model of the management system is more accommodative. The fast development of the liberal and radical way of thinking among *Ma'had Aly*'s *santris* cannot be separated from the support of the director and his vice.¹ Moral support from guardians is important to grow freedom of thought of *santris*. Moreover, it is said that both director and his vice protect *santris* to the re-study intellectual tradition which is considered permanent and give religious guarantee to expose and rearrange old tradition so that 'something different' can be found. Those prove to show that *Ma'had Aly* does not follow centralistic leadership from a *Kiai* but the modern one.

Fourth, besides all those three facts, all activities at *Ma'had Aly* are based on two important things, i.e. mastering learning materials through lecturing system, like the one implemented at higher education, as well as possible and keep searching the relationship between learning materials and social reality. All *santris* must take part in the studies about social reality, with law nuance or contemporary behavior of society. Kinds of activities showing the use of those basics are *fiqh siyiyasah*, a seminar on law, religious comparative study, and community service.

4. Conclusion

Based on the explanation in the previous parts, it can be concluded that *Ma'had Aly* is a kind of Islamic higher education which study and develop Islamic and contemporary sciences by still holding Islamic boarding school tradition nuance. *Ma'had Aly* seems to converge the strengths of 'higher education' and Islamic boarding school. The convergence does not limit to the curriculum but also learning the system, learning source, management, and science tradition. Although the change has not totally done because it has not been a deconstructive change, for Islamic boarding school, it is considered 'great change'[8].

Nevertheless, that synergic Islamic education is an Islamic education system which Islamic society has been dreamt of for a long time. It's conducive learning, the spirit of *santris*, curriculum, and social support will be able to realize an ideal higher Islamic boarding school which Islamic society hope in the future. Some say if the number of young people (read: *santris* at *Ma'had Aly*) with that spirit is getting more-more and their idea influence more and more Islamic boarding schools, next twenty years we will see something 'different' from people at Islamic boarding school.

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