



Journal of Educational Sciences

Journal homepage: <https://jes.ejournal.unri.ac.id/index.php/JES>



P-ISSN
2581-1657

E-ISSN
2581-2203

The Role of Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab in Islamic Education in Tanjungbalai City

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 15 March 2025

Revised: 20 March 2025

Accepted: 24 March 2025

Published online: 24 March 2025

Keywords:

Contribution

Islamic Education

Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab

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Article Doi:

Doi <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.9.2.p.999-1007>

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the contributions and role of Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab in Islamic education in Tanjungbalai City. As a scholar and educator, he played a crucial role in establishing the Gubahan Islam educational institution and spreading Islamic values within the community. The aim of this study is to analyze Syekh Ismail's intellectual journey, his contributions to Islamic education, and the challenges he faced in developing the Islamic education system. This research employs a historical method with a descriptive qualitative approach through literature studies, interviews with educational figures, and historical document analysis. The findings indicate that Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab was not only an educator but also a leader who advocated for education based on tauhid and ethics. Despite challenges from Dutch colonial rule and limited resources, he remained committed to building an Islamic education system that continues to have an impact today. This study underscores the significant role of Islamic scholars in the development of Islamic education and provides new insights into the contributions of local figures in the history of education in Indonesia.

1. Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia has a long history influenced by the role of scholars and Muslim intellectuals in spreading knowledge and building a society rooted in morality and wisdom (Azra, 1999). One of the key figures in the history of Islamic education in North Sumatra, particularly in Tanjungbalai City, is Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab. He is known as a scholar, educator, and fighter who made significant contributions to developing the Islamic education system in the region (Wahid et al., 2017).

From the perspective of Islamic education, scholars play a strategic role in shaping an education system based on Islamic values (Muhaimin, 2008). The development of Islamic education in Tanjungbalai cannot be separated from the contributions of scholars who served as educators, thinkers, and reformers of Islamic education (Abdullah, 2016). History has shown that scholars have played

a crucial role in educating the Muslim community and shaping a civilization founded on Islamic principles (Adiguna, 2022). Therefore, Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab's contributions are vital in understanding the growth of Islamic education in the region.

Islamic education is not only a means of transferring religious knowledge but also a tool for shaping the character and morality of the Muslim community (Azra, 2006). A well-established education system produces generations with deep Islamic insight, high moral values, and the ability to adapt to changing times. In the historical context of Islam in Indonesia, many scholars have played a role in building an education system based on Islamic values (Baiti & Razzaq, 2017). Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab was one of the scholars who utilized education as a means of preaching and struggle, leaving a lasting legacy in the field of education.

Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab had a progressive vision for education. He understood that Islamic education must address contemporary challenges and remain relevant to the needs of the Muslim community. Therefore, he not only established educational institutions but also introduced reforms in teaching methods and the dissemination of religious knowledge (Hamzah, 2019). As a scholar, he emphasized the importance of education based on the Qur'an and Hadith, while instilling moral values in the younger generation to ensure they become individuals who benefit society.

This study focuses on exploring Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab's contributions to Islamic education, particularly in Tanjungbalai City. Several aspects examined in this research include his intellectual journey, contributions to Islamic education, and the challenges he faced in promoting Islamic education amidst complex social, political, and economic conditions. Through this research, a deeper understanding of the role of scholars in Islamic education can be obtained, as well as how their intellectual legacy remains relevant in the development of Islamic education in Indonesia (Rezka, 2020).

Additionally, this study aims to provide inspiration for academics, educators, and policymakers in developing an Islamic education system that is more inclusive and responsive to contemporary needs. Historically, Islamic education has faced various challenges, both internal and external. Therefore, by understanding Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab's struggle in building Islamic education, valuable lessons can be drawn for the improvement of Islamic education systems in the future.

This study also highlights how Islamic education in Tanjungbalai City has evolved alongside social and political changes in Indonesia. The city has a long history of Islamic education, and the presence of Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab was a major factor in its development. As a scholar with broad knowledge, he was able to establish an educational system that not only focused on religious knowledge but also addressed contemporary challenges with a more inclusive and community-oriented approach. Thus, this research aims to delve deeper into the role and contributions of Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab in Islamic education and provide new insights into how Islamic education can continue to develop and

benefit society at large. This study also emphasizes the importance of synergy between Islamic education and social, economic, and political developments in building a more advanced and competitive Islamic civilization.

2. Methodology

This study employs a historical approach using a descriptive qualitative method. A literature review was conducted by analyzing various sources, including books, journals, and historical documents relevant to the role of Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab. Additionally, interviews with historians, religious figures, and educators were conducted to gain a broader perspective on his contributions to Islamic education. Document analysis techniques were also applied in this study by examining manuscripts, historical records, and publications discussing Syekh Ismail's life journey and his role in the field of education. The historical method used in this research enables a comprehensive analysis of the development of Islamic education in Tanjungbalai City, as well as the role played by Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab in establishing and preserving the Islamic education system in the region.

3. Result and discussion

The Intellectual Journey of Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab

Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab was born in Kom Bilik, Bagan Asahan, and grew up in a religious environment. He received his early education in Tanjungbalai before continuing his studies in Mecca and at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. There, he specialized in various branches of Islamic studies and returned to his homeland with a grand vision to develop Islamic education in Tanjungbalai (Azra, 1994). His studies in Mecca provided him with deep insights into the classical Islamic education system, which was based on halaqah (study circles) and madrasah institutions.

Meanwhile, at Al-Azhar University, he studied under the guidance of renowned scholars, gaining a broad understanding of Islamic thought, including fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), tauhid (Islamic monotheism), tasawuf (Sufism), and social sciences relevant to contemporary developments (Husnel, 2004). With his extensive educational background, Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab introduced various educational reforms in Islamic education in Tanjungbalai, aiming to modernize and strengthen its foundation. A historical black-and-white photograph of Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab (1897–1977), an influential Islamic scholar and educator from Tanjungbalai, Indonesia, can be seen in figure 1.



Figure 1. Photo of Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab (1897-1977)

He is depicted wearing traditional Islamic attire, including a turban or peci (cap) and a long robe, symbolizing his deep knowledge and dedication to Islamic education. His expression reflects wisdom and determination, showcasing his role as a teacher, religious leader, and reformer who contributed significantly to the development of Islamic education in his region. The background of the photo may feature a mosque, a madrasah, or a simple scholarly setting, emphasizing his lifelong commitment to spreading Islamic knowledge.

Contributions to Islamic Education

Upon returning from Egypt, Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab immediately began his role as an educator and scholar in Tanjungbalai. One of his initial efforts was the establishment of Gubahan Islam, an educational institution that served as a center for Islamic learning for the local community. This institution not only focused on religious education but also provided general education aligned with Islamic values (Anas, 2019).

The image showcases the front view of Yayasan Perguruan Gubahan Islam, an Islamic educational institution in Tanjungbalai, Indonesia. The entrance features a large signboard with bold yellow lettering on a white background, indicating the institution's name and the levels of education it offers, including MDTA, MTS, and MA, along with its accreditation status. The address, Jalan Jenderal Sudirman No. 72, Kota Tanjungbalai, is also displayed. The school is surrounded by a green-colored wall with yellow trim, giving it a traditional yet welcoming appearance. In the background, a green building with signage is visible, likely part of the school's infrastructure. Trees partially cover the upper part of the structure, adding a natural element to the setting. There is also a banner on the wall congratulating students on their achievements, reflecting the institution's dedication to education and student success. Overall, the entrance gives a modest yet inviting impression, aligning with the school's role in Islamic education and community development.



Figure 2. Gubahan Islam School as seen from the front

The interior view of Gubahan Islam School showcases a serene and structured learning environment designed to support Islamic and general education. The space features classrooms with traditional and modern elements, adorned with Islamic calligraphy and educational posters. A prayer hall or mosque may be present, providing students with a dedicated place for worship and spiritual growth. The open areas and hallways are designed to encourage collaborative learning and a sense of community among students and teachers.



Figure 3. Gubahan Islam School as seen from the inside

In addition to establishing educational institutions, Syekh Ismail was also actively engaged in writing Islamic books and delivering lectures to the community. One of his most renowned works is *Burhān al-Ma‘rifah*, which discusses the fundamentals of tawhid (Islamic monotheism) and ethics (MUI, 1983). This book became an important reference in Islamic education in Tanjungbalai and its surrounding areas, demonstrating that he was not only a teacher but also a productive Islamic scholar and thinker.

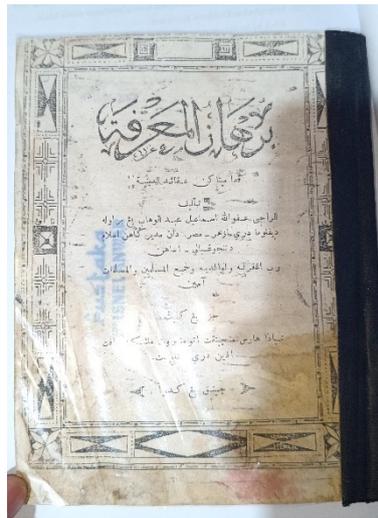


Figure 4. The book *Burhān al-Ma'rifah* by Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab

The teaching methods used by Syekh Ismail were highly innovative for his time. He combined the traditional halaqah method with a modern approach based on discussion and critical text analysis (Azra, 2006). This approach enabled students to gain a deeper and more applicable understanding of Islamic teachings in their daily lives. An interview with the Chairman of MUI Tanjungbalai revealed that the educational methods implemented by Syekh Ismail had a significant impact on shaping the character and Islamic understanding of the local community.



Figure 5. Interview with the Chairman of MUI Tanjungbalai

Moreover, the results of interviews with the Headmasters of MTS and MA Gubahan Islam show that the values inherited from Syekh Ismail are still applied in the educational system of these institutions, proving that his legacy remains relevant to this day.



Figure 6. Interviews with the Headmasters of MTS and MA Gubahan Islam

Overall, Syekh Ismail's contributions to Islamic education reflect a strong dedication to character development, intellectual advancement, and moral reinforcement within society, establishing him as one of the key figures in the history of Islamic education in Tanjungbalai.

Challenges in Developing Islamic Education

In carrying out his mission, Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab faced various challenges, both external and internal. One of the greatest challenges was pressure from Dutch colonial rule, which still had significant influence in North Sumatra (Hamzah, 2019). The colonial government viewed Islamic education as a threat, as it had the potential to ignite nationalist awareness among the Muslim community.

Apart from political pressure, limited resources also posed a major obstacle to the development of Islamic education. Inadequate learning facilities, a shortage of trained teachers, and limited access to books and teaching materials were among the challenges that needed to be addressed (Hifni et al, 2023). However, through his strong determination, Syekh Ismail managed to overcome these difficulties by mobilizing community support and establishing a community-based education system (Wahid et al., 2017).

Another challenge was the emergence of different religious understandings within society, including fatalistic beliefs that tended to encourage passivity toward social change. Syekh Ismail sought to counter this view by emphasizing the importance of education as a tool for building an advanced and competitive Islamic civilization.

4. Conclusion

Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab made a significant contribution to Islamic education in Tanjungbalai through the establishment of educational institutions, the writing

of Islamic texts, and his struggles against social and political challenges. Despite facing various obstacles, he remained committed to developing a sustainable Islamic education system rooted in Islamic values. His role as a scholar, educator, and leader had a profound impact on the development of Islamic education in the region. By emulating his struggles and dedication, future generations are expected to continue advancing Islamic education, ensuring its adaptability to modern challenges while preserving the essence of Islamic teachings. For future research, it is recommended to further examine the educational methods implemented by Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab, the influence of his thoughts on the Islamic education system in Tanjungbalai, and the relevance of his teachings in the context of contemporary Islamic education. Additionally, further studies can explore how the educational institutions he founded have evolved over time and how their role has shaped the character and Islamic thinking of the local community.

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How to cite this article:

Sirait, A. S., Al Farabi, M., & Sapri. (2025). The Role of Syekh Ismail Abdul Wahab in Islamic Education in Tanjungbalai City. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(2), 999-1007.
