



Education System in Indonesia

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental aspect of national development and improving the quality of human resources. The history of education in Indonesia has undergone significant changes since the colonial era to the modern era. The method used in this research is qualitative literature with a historical approach. Data analysis uses literature review techniques. During the Dutch colonial period, access to education was very limited and was only given to the native elite to meet the labor needs of the colonial government. The policy of educational dualism during the Dutch colonial period was a policy that differentiated education for Europeans and natives. This policy was applied in various aspects, such as curriculum, language of instruction, facilities, and opportunities to continue education. These inequalities resulted in social and economic disparities that continued after Indonesia's independence. After the proclamation of independence in 1945, the government began to expand access to education by establishing primary and secondary schools in various regions. In the New Order era, the education system was more centralized with a curriculum that emphasized the values of nationalism and state ideology. In the Reform Era, the education system faced new challenges, such as the gap in facilities between urban and rural areas, limited financial resources, and the demand to adapt to educational developments.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the important aspects in nation building efforts and creating a superior and quality generation (Fitria, 2024; Nurwahyuni & Hudaidah, 2021; Wurdianto et al., 2024). The history of education in Indonesia has its roots from the colonial era to the present, where various educational policies and systems continue to develop according to the needs of the times. The history of education in Indonesia began long before independence. The Dutch colonialism era that lasted for centuries has had a significant impact on Indonesian education (Dedi Presli Halawa et al., 2023; Febrianti et al., 2023; Herdiansyah & Kurniati, 2020; Sanga & Wangdra, 2023; Soraya, 2020).

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In the early 20th century, the Dutch colonial government established high schools that limited access to education for indigenous people, education was formed for colonial interests where only a handful of indigenous elites had the opportunity to access formal education (Abdi Ridhotullah et al., 2024; Kamalasari et al., 2024; Muhammad Fakhriansyah & Intan Ranti Permatasari Patoni, 2019; Putra Daulay et al., 2021; Sinaga et al., 2024; Yuniendel, 2024). Education was more directed at producing a workforce that suited the needs of the colonial government without paying attention to the needs and interests of the indigenous people in general. This resulted in inequalities in education and knowledge gaps between different groups of people. After the proclamation of independence in 1945, education became one of the top priorities for the newly formed Indonesian government. The main reason was to build human resources capable of filling a role in the country's development process. In the early period of independence, the Indonesian government tried hard to improve access to education by establishing various primary and secondary schools across the country. During the New Order era, education in Indonesia also underwent several policy and curriculum changes. Education was organized in a more centralized manner, with a more directed and structured curriculum education was organized in a more centralized manner, with a more directed and structured curriculum. The New Order government emphasized education as a tool to instill state ideology and build a sense of nationalism (Adibah, 2021; Alam, 2020; Anwar, 2019; Datumula, 2021; Fadhila & Miftah, 2024; Ichsan, 2021; Nirmala & Zalnur, 2023).

In its development, Indonesia's education system also faces serious challenges (Amelia, 2023). In addition to financial constraints, education inequality between urban and rural areas. The majority of schools located in urban areas generally have more adequate facilities, good school environments and qualified teachers compared to schools in rural and remote areas. This creates an education gap that affects access and quality of education for children in rural and remote areas. In addition, in this era of globalization, education in Indonesia must also adapt to the rapidly changing world in order to develop and produce qualified individuals who are able to compete in this global era.

In conclusion, the development of education in Indonesia has been a complex and challenging journey (Setiyorini & Setiawan, 2023). The historical background influenced by colonialism, commitment to achieving educational equality, and adaptation to cultural diversity are important elements in the history of Indonesian education. History shows that while there has been significant progress, there is still much work to be done to address educational inequality, financial challenges and global changes. With a deeper understanding of the history and development of education in Indonesia, we can contribute to efforts to improve the quality of education and prepare young Indonesians for a challenging future.

METHODS

In this study the authors used library research or literature research methods (Akmal et al., 2024; Amiri & Ahmadi, 2023; Engkizar et al., 2023; Engkizar, Jaafar, et al., 2025; Istiqamah et al., 2024; Nuha et al., 2024). Data collection is carried out by researchers using literature in the form of literature such as articles, journals, and several other research results related to the object of this research. In collecting data, the author uses the help of the internet to trace various references to previous research books and journals that are in accordance with the topic of research discussion. To get the intended reference, researchers used several keywords, such as education history, education system, education policy. From these various keywords, researchers are looking for relevant data sources related to the title of this research

(Engkizar et al., 2024; Engkizar, Muslim, et al., 2025; Guspita, Rahman, et al., 2025; Ikhlas et al., 2025; Rahawarin et al., 2024; Uldiman et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

History of education in Indonesia

Colonial Era

During the colonial period, education in Indonesia experienced significant changes due to the influence of European and Asian colonial powers. Before the arrival of Europeans, education in the archipelago was dominated by a traditional religion-based system, especially in Islamic boarding schools for Muslims, as well as local culture-based education in the form of informal education in the family and community environment (Fitriani et al., 2023; Guspita et al., 2025; Azzahra et al., 2025; M. Wahib et al., 2022; Mustafa et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025). However, the arrival of Europeans such as the Portuguese, Dutch and later the Japanese brought major changes in a more structured but discriminatory education system.

The Portuguese were one of the first colonial powers to influence the education system in Indonesia, especially in the areas they controlled such as Maluku. The education system during this time was heavily oriented towards the spread of Catholicism, with educational institutions established by missionaries to teach Christianity to the local population. The education provided tended to be limited to religious aspects, with little attention to science or other practical skills.

After the Portuguese, the Dutch took power and introduced a more structured but highly discriminatory education system. Education during this period was aimed at fulfilling colonial interests by preparing a skilled workforce for colonial administration and maintaining Dutch hegemony in Indonesia. Education for the indigenous population was very limited and not on par with the education provided to Europeans and the indigenous elite. Some forms of schools established by the Dutch colonial government include: Europeesche Lagere School, an elementary school for European children and the native elite; Hollandsch-Inlandsche School, an elementary school for upper-class native children; Schakel School, a transitional school for native children who wanted to continue to Dutch-language schools; and First and Second Class Schools, schools for lower-class native children with very limited facilities and curriculum. The education provided to the natives was more oriented towards basic skills and compliance with colonial rule. The goal was not to educate the people, but to create a workforce loyal to the Dutch colonial government.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Dutch began to implement Ethical Policy which aimed to provide education for more indigenous people. This program encouraged the opening of new schools such as Sekolah Rakyat (Volkschool) and Sekolah Guru (Kweekschool). However, despite the increase in access to education for the natives, this education system remained discriminatory and aimed to educate the natives to become skilled laborers in the colonial system, rather than to create individuals who were independent and critical of colonialism.

After the Dutch surrendered to Japan in 1942, Japan took control of Indonesia and brought its own changes to the education system. The Japanese military government disbanded all schools that used the Dutch language and replaced them with an education system that emphasized Japanese (Nihongo) as the language of instruction. The main purpose of education during the Japanese occupation was to instill a spirit of pro-Japanese nationalism and support Japan's war interests in Asia. The curriculum focused on discipline, loyalty to the Japanese Emperor (Tenno Heika), hard work, as well as military training and technical skills that supported the war economy.

Existing schools were converted into Gokumin Gakkō (Folk Schools) for elementary school-aged children, while secondary education was only available to a handful of people. Higher education hardly developed, as Japan emphasized practical skills training over intellectual development. Despite the authoritarian and ideological nature of the Japanese education system, there was increased access for natives as the previous, highly discriminatory system was abolished. However, this improvement was not aimed at educating the Indonesian people at large, but rather to support Japan's military and administrative interests in Southeast Asia.

Overall, education in the colonial era under the Portuguese, Dutch and Japanese was mostly used as a political tool to maintain colonial power. The educational disparities that occurred during this period had a major impact on the social structure in Indonesia, creating layers of society with unequal access to education and economic opportunities.

The Independence Era

After Indonesia gained independence in 1945, the national education system began to be built with various complex challenges. Much of the education infrastructure was destroyed by the war, the number of available teaching staff was very limited, and there were few resources to support the new education system (Lutfiya et al., 2025).

First, the main challenge faced by the Indonesian government was the deterioration of education infrastructure. Many schools were damaged during the war of independence, so the educational facilities available were minimal. In addition, limited learning facilities such as books and stationery are also an obstacle in the learning process. Secondly, the shortage of educators became a serious problem. Many teachers were killed in the war or displaced due to the ongoing conflict. In addition, the existing teaching staff do not have an even standard of competence, so the quality of education in various regions is unbalanced. Third, the lack of resources and funds is also a major obstacle in the development of the national education system. The newly independent government was still focusing on economic and political stabilization, so the budget allocation for education was very limited. As a result, many schools still suffer from a lack of facilities, as well as difficulties in paying educators. To overcome these challenges, the Indonesian government began to formulate a more inclusive and nationalist education policy.

First, the government established national schools to ensure greater access to education for all Indonesians. Destroyed schools were rebuilt, while new schools were established to accommodate more students. Secondly, the national curriculum began to be designed with an emphasis on national, cultural and religious values that reflected the Indonesian identity. The curriculum not only covered general science, but also taught moral and civic education to shape the character of an independent and sovereign nation. Third, the government also tried to increase the number of teaching staff through teacher training and education programs. Teacher education institutions are being established to produce more qualified educators, so that the standard of education in Indonesia can be more equitable.

Despite facing various obstacles, education in the early days of independence had a very important impact on the development of the nation. The national education system that began to be built not only aimed to improve people's intelligence, but also became a tool to strengthen the sense of unity and nationalism. Education also became a means for people to understand their rights and obligations as citizens in building a newly independent nation.

In its development, the national education system continued to undergo reforms and adjustments in accordance with the social, political and economic dynamics in Indonesia. The education reforms that followed were part of an ongoing

effort to create an education system that was more equitable, high quality and relevant to the needs of the nation.

Reformation Era

After President Soeharto left office and was replaced by President BJ Habibie, the reform era or era of change began in 1998. The most significant change is the existence of regional autonomy which includes educational autonomy. At this time, education was given the widest possible space to develop freely (Shofa et al., 2020). In fact, the rules of the new order era were reviewed and if there were rules that hindered, they would be revoked. This reform era demands the return of popular sovereignty that was lost during the New Order era. By itself, national education must also be restored to its function. The form of the curriculum became competency-based as well as the form of education implementation changed from centralized (old order to decentralized). At that time the government carried out the mandate of the 1945 Constitution by prioritizing the education budget of at least 20% of the state budget. Based on Law No. 20 of 1999 concerning regional government, which was later strengthened by Law No. 25 of 1999 concerning the financial balance between the center and the regions, education was led to the development of locality where diversity was very much considered and the community could participate actively in the implementation of education units.

Analysis of Education in Indonesia from the Colonial Era, Early Independence, and Reform

Education in Indonesia has undergone significant developments from the colonial period to the reform era. During the colonial era, education was reserved only for certain groups, creating long-lasting social inequalities. After independence, the government tried to build a more inclusive national education system, despite facing various challenges in terms of infrastructure, teaching staff and limited funding. Meanwhile, education reform brought decentralization policies that provided space for regions to develop education systems according to local needs, but still faced obstacles in equitable distribution of education quality. Frequent curriculum changes are a challenge in education, where the government must ensure that curriculum changes can be implemented properly without causing confusion for educators and students.

Education System Dualism

In Indonesia, education is carried out by 2 institutions, namely the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which have the same goal of educating the nation's life. This dualism system has existed since the colonial period. So that educational institutions in Indonesia are grouped into public schools and religious schools. Religious schools create religious scholars who are smart in sharia science, but lack in mastering general science. Vice versa, a chemistry professor, competent in his field, but a layman for religious affairs.

The word “dualism” is a combination of two Latin words, “dualis” or “duo” and ‘ismus’ or “ism”. “Duo” gives the word the meaning of two while “ismus” serves to form the name of a verb. Dualism is two principles that contradict each other. In terminology, dualism can be defined as two different and conflicting principles or understandings. Therefore, dualism is the state of being two and it is a system or theory based on two principles that state that there are two substances. With this meaning, educational dualism is the separation of the education system between Islamic education and general education that separates religious awareness and science or general science.

During the Dutch colonization, educational institutions organized by the Dutch East Indies Government only 6% of the indigenous population could attend Dutch East Indies government schools and they came from the priyayi circles. On the other hand, there were educational institutions organized by the community

(Pesantren and Madrasah). For non-priyayi people, they received education in pesantren and madrasah. Due to the political pressure of the Dutch East Indies government, Islamic schools and madrasahs were in their own box and camp. A. Murni Kawakib in her book *Pesantren and Globalization* states First, the dualism of the formal education system in Indonesia has been going on since the Dutch colonial era, namely on the one hand there is a Dutch government education system, and on the other hand there is a traditional Islamic education system (namely pesantren). Second, the two types of education systems are also distinguished in terms of objectives. The Dutch Government School was intended to produce low-level administrative workers to be employed in the Dutch Government. Meanwhile, the pesantren was intended as a place of learning and training for students (santrinya) based on the yellow book (classical texts in Arabic)

School Education

During the Dutch East Indies colonial period there was an educational institution for the natives, however, only 6% of the natives were able to attend the Dutch East Indies government school and they came from the privileged class. The background to the emergence of this education was based on several interests for the Dutch such as: to improve their knowledge related to general sciences and knowledge of Indonesian society, the need for domestic servants from the indigenous population so that they are given sufficient education, wanting to gain sympathy from the indigenous population because of the educational services provided, missionary interests, and so on. Its policy in the field of education is inseparable from its colonial political pattern. The reason for organizing teaching education is more emphasized on the interests of the colonial government than the interests of the colonized people.

The organization of education in government schools in the Dutch East Indies was basically a reflection of the Dutch colonial education system. The general characteristics and institutional forms applied in these schools were the realization of the education system they programmed. The link between politics and education complicated the Dutch colonial education system. The desire to apply the principle of discrimination led to many types of schools. In outline, some of the educational institutions that existed during the Dutch colonial era are as follows;

First, the Meer Uit gebreid lager school, which is a continuation of the Dutch language primary school. The length of study is three to four years, the first was established in 1914 and is intended for the native and foreign eastern groups. Since the Japanese era until now it has been called junior high school. Actually, since 1903 a mulo course for Dutch children has been established, lasting two years. Second, Algemene Middelbare School is a general secondary school continuation of mulo in Dutch and is intended for sons of the earth and foreign East. The length of study was three years and the first one was established in 1915. AMS consists of two departments (afdeling- section), Section A (cultural knowledge) and Section B (natural knowledge), during the Japanese era it was called high school, and since independence it has been called SMA.

Third, the Hoobere Burger School or high citizen school is a secondary school continuation of the Europese Lagere School which is provided for Europeans, aristocrats or prominent figures. The language of instruction is Dutch and oriented towards Western Europe. Fourth, the carpentry school (Amachts leergang), which is a local language school and accepts graduates of the third grade (five years) or advanced school (vervolgsschool). This school was established with the aim of educating craftsmen. established in 1881. Fifth, the carpentry school (Ambachtsschool) was a Dutch-language carpentry school with a school length of three years and accepted graduates of HIS, HCS or schakel. The aim was to educate

and produce foremen, including car mechanics, machinists, electricians, carpenters and stone masons.

Sixth, the technical school (*Technish Onderwijs*) was a continuation of the *Ambachtsschool*, in Dutch, and lasted three years. The school aimed to educate Indonesian personnel to become supervisors, a kind of intermediate technical personnel below engineers. Seventh, Trade Education (*Handels Onderwijs*). The aim was to meet the needs of rapidly growing European companies. Eighth, Agricultural Education (*Landbouw Onderwijs*) In 1903, an agricultural school was established that accepted graduates of Dutch-language primary schools.

Then after independence, the education system that took place during the Dutch colonial period (and during the Japanese colonial period) was still influenced and duplicated by the early Indonesian government (although there were some adaptations) and continued to undergo changes from one period to another (from the Old Order to the current Reform order). Laws on the National Education System, from the New Order to the Reform era. The Law is an integrated set of rules or provisions of all educational units and activities that are related to one another to seek their own achievement in the hierarchy of law in Indonesia is the implementation of the Constitution, the Constitution itself is an elaboration of the state constitution.

The preamble of the 1945 Constitution states that one of the goals of the Republic of Indonesia is to educate the nation. To achieve this goal, the government and people of Indonesia are trying to build and develop education as much as possible. The efforts made in developing this education are. The initial effort was to form the Education and Teaching Research Committee (P4) in 1946 when the Minister of Education and Culture was led by Mr. Soewandi. The committee was led by Ki Hajar Dewantara. This committee was tasked with reviewing the basics, content, structure, and the entire education and teaching effort. The Education Law itself was then born in 1950 through Law No. 4 of 1950 under the name of the Law on the Basis of Education and Teaching in schools. This UUPP consists of 17 chapters and 30 articles. In the UUPP, the objectives and basics of education are stated.

In addition to education for the *priyayi*, there are educational institutions organized by the community (*pesantren* and *madrasah*). For the non-*priyayi* community, they received education in *pesantren* and *madrasah*. *Pesantren* is intended as a place of learning and training for students (*santrinya*) based on the yellow book (classical texts in Arabic).

Islamic religious education in Indonesia did not receive serious attention from the colonial government. The Dutch government focused more on developing secular education that was more beneficial to colonial interests. Education in schools established by the colonial government was dominated by Western teachings and aimed at preparing a skilled and educated workforce in the colonial economic system. However, although the colonial government restricted Islamic religious education in official schools, the *ulama* and *santri* maintained the tradition of religious education through *pesantren* institutions. *Pesantren* are centers of Islamic religious education managed independently by *kiai*, with a curriculum that focuses on the teachings of the *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, *fiqh*, and *Sufism*. In this context, *pesantren* became the main means of preserving Islamic teachings and developing religious knowledge for the Indonesian people. During the colonial period, *pesantren* not only became educational institutions, but also functioned as centers of resistance against Dutch influence. Some *pesantrens* in Java, such as *Pesantren Tremas* and *Pesantren Kauman*, became the center of the nationalist struggle against Dutch colonialism. Therefore, although Islamic religious education was not formally recognized by the

colonial government, Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren played an important role in maintaining the religious and cultural identity of the community.

Since the Ethical Policy (1900-1920) was implemented in Indonesia, education has been directed towards making Indonesia part of Western culture through the politics of cultural association. There was even the idea of assimilation, which aimed to give the colonies the same social and political structure as the Netherlands. Snouck Hurgronje, the Dutch advisor on Islamic affairs in Indonesia, who realized the dangers of Pan-Islamism, urged Indonesians to be influenced away from the idea of Pan-Islamism by providing Western education through association with the Netherlands. Van Deventer's Ethical Policy was principally opposed to the materialistic exploitation of the past and had to replace the laissez faire attitude of liberalism with government intervention in economic affairs, improving irrigation to increase agricultural production, encouraging transmigration from the overpopulated island of Java. But all these improvements would be in vain without mass education. Ethical politics in its purest sense was actually implemented by only a handful of people. It was not long before the tide turned and the enthusiasm of the adherents of Ethical Politics began to be controlled by the all-powerful Dutch corporations and constrained by financial calculations. Ethical politics became a tool in the hands of the giant corporations that dominated the government. Ethical politics presents a beautiful slogan to cover up the exploitative methods of big capital. Individuals may behave ethically towards the Indonesian people, but companies are not based on ethical motives but on economic ones. Eventually the word "ethical" took on a bland meaning in Indonesia and caused derision among the Dutch. The welfare of the Indonesian people did not come. Good education remained limited to the upper classes. For the masses education was kept as low and simple as possible, with almost no escape to further education for a better position.

The unappreciative attitude of Western (Dutch) imperialists towards Islamic educational institutions including Islamic boarding schools is reflected in the 19th century Western writers in giving a description and impression of one of the educational institutions that is somewhat "strange", and specifically emphasizes the differences with Western schools. The Dutch Colonial Education Inspection even viewed pesantren education as not very important. Therefore, the situation and statistics of pesantren were always incomplete in education reports. Even after 1927, such forms of education were not included in the official reports of the Dutch colonial government at all. Although the Dutch colonial government claimed to be neutral towards religion, this was not the case with the issuance of the Teachers' Ordinance (Stadsblaad 1905 No. 550) which contained the obligation for every Islamic education organization to obtain a written permit from the regent or an official of equal position. Each teacher was also required to keep a complete list of students with all information which had to be sent periodically to the relevant official.

Such strict and constant supervision of Islamic religious teachers was perceived as a restriction on their independence. This was mainly because the implementation of the regulation was entrusted to bumiputera chiefs who, for their own reasons, could easily refuse to grant the necessary permits. More tragically, the regulations also restricted the material taught. This was seen as restraint without clear boundaries. In 1932, the Dutch colonial government issued a regulation on the supervision of private schools (Toezicht Ordonnantie Particulier Onderwijs) through Stadsblaad 1932 No. 494, more popularly known as the Wilde Scholen Ordonnantie. The ordinance stipulated that teachers who wanted to teach in subsidized private schools had to seek permission from the local district officer. Applicants had to be alumni of government schools or subsidized private schools and would not disturb the peace

and order of the colonial government. The Ordinance was also intended to prevent political influence in private schools called 'wild schools'.

In 1972 and 1974, President Soeharto issued Presidential Decree No. 34/1972 and Presidential Instruction No. 15/1974, which were considered to weaken and alienate madrasahs and national education, which led to a strong Muslim reaction. To reduce this reaction, a Joint Decree of three ministers, namely the Minister of Religious Affairs, the Minister of Education and Culture, and the Minister of Home Affairs, was issued in 1975 which aligned the level of madrasahs with public schools, namely Madrasah Ibtidaiyah which is at the same level as elementary schools, Madrasah Tsanawiyah which is at the same level as junior high schools, and Madrasah Aliyah which is at the same level as high schools. The Joint Decree of the three ministers was essentially to improve the quality of education in madrasahs. In the 1975 Joint Decree, Chapter I Article I, it is stated that, "What is meant by madrasah in this Joint Decree is an educational institution that makes Islamic religious subjects as a basis given at least 30% in addition to general subjects".

Madrasahs at each level are more numerous, at around 70%. However, the position of religious subjects still plays a very important role as stated in the 1984 curriculum of madrasah aliyah, around 30%. With the issuance of the Decree of the Three Ministers, madrasahs entered a new era, namely the era of equality and equality between madrasahs and schools, as shown in the chart below. As a result of the increase in civil effect, madrasa certificates are the same as general certificates, as stated in Chapter II Article 2 of the decree. The essence of the decree is that 1) madrasah certificates have the same value as public school certificates of the same level/equivalent; 2) Madrasah graduates can continue to upper-level public schools; 3) Madrasah students can transfer to public schools of the same level. Prior to the issuance of the 1975 Joint Ministerial Decree, there was a fundamental difference between madrasah graduates and public school graduates.

Analysis of School, Pesantren or Madrasah Education

From the above explanation, it can be understood that the dichotomy between "religious" and "general" sciences has created a duality in the formal education system in Indonesia, namely schools and madrasahs. Schools are perceived as "educational institutions that organize general science education", organized and managed by the Ministry of National Education. Meanwhile, madrasahs are perceived as "institutions that organize religious science education", organized and managed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. From these two schools, there is a perception that schools run by the Ministry of National Education are perceived as "general", non-religious, or "secular", but advanced, leading-edge, and modern. Meanwhile, schools run by the Department of Religious Affairs are perceived as "religious" and religious, but underdeveloped, closed to the advancement of science and technology, and traditional.

CONCLUSION

The Indonesian education system in the reform era experienced several curriculum changes. Starting from the 1999 curriculum which is a continuation of the 1994 curriculum with minor changes. 2004 Curriculum or Competency Based Curriculum. 2006 Curriculum or Education Unit Level Curriculum. 2013 curriculum which aims to prepare Indonesian people to become human beings who have the ability to live as good citizens, creative, innovative, productive and able to compete for the advancement of state civilization and even the world. In Indonesia, education is carried out by 2 institutions, namely the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which have the same goal of educating the nation's life. This dualism system began during the colonial period. So that educational institutions in Indonesia are grouped into public schools and religious schools (madrasah or

pesantren). This dualism of education in Indonesia basically has the same goal, but has two different educational concepts where public schools focus on general learning materials such as science, social studies, language and so on, while madrasah or pesantren education focuses on religious sciences such as fiqh, hadith, sharia and so on.

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