

# The role of the muhammadiyah diaspora in global islamic education and the dissemination of progressive islam

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study describes the role of the Muhammadiyah diaspora in supporting global Islamic education and spreading progressive Islamic values. The research was carried out with a qualitative approach through literature studies, by collecting data from various literature, official documents, and online databases, which were then analyzed using content analysis techniques. The findings show that the Muhammadiyah diaspora plays an active role in organizing formal, nonformal, and informal education that is adjusted to the social, cultural, and political situation of the community in the destination country. The da'wah strategy implemented includes academic, cultural, and digital approaches, so that the message of Islam that is moderate, inclusive, and contextual can be conveyed widely. On the other hand, they face challenges in the form of limited resources, differences of internal views, strict government policies against religious minority groups, and negative stigma against Islam in some countries. Nevertheless, the diaspora is able to maintain its identity by strengthening internal communication, fostering cadres in an ongoing manner, establishing cross-organizational cooperation, and adapting to local culture without ignoring the basic principles of Islam. This study concludes that the Muhammadiyah diaspora has succeeded in combining tradition and modernity in its role as an agent of spreading progressive Islam, as well as opening up space for further research on the contribution of the next generation of the diaspora in the future.

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#### Introduction

The phenomenon of globalization in the modern era has accelerated the massive mobility of people across national borders. This condition has given rise to diaspora communities—groups of ethnic, religious, or national affiliations that reside outside their homeland while maintaining their cultural and spiritual identity. Within the Muslim world, diasporas not only play a role in preserving religious identity but also contribute to building transnational networks, disseminating moderate Islamic teachings, and bridging relations







between Muslim communities and the broader international society (Agustari & Ulinnuha, 2023).

In this context, Islamic education serves as one of the primary instruments used by Muslim diasporas to preserve their religious identity while simultaneously introducing Islam as a faith that brings mercy to all creation (rahmatan lil-'alamin) (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Studies have found that Indonesian Muslim communities in Australia have developed informal educational programs to nurture younger generations and introduce a moderate image of Islam to the local society. A similar trend was also observed by Lichterman (2005), who noted the contribution of Indonesian Muslim communities in the United States in establishing Islamic learning centers that are adaptive to their surrounding environments (Prasetiawati, 2017). These findings illustrate that education holds a highly strategic role in sustaining the cultural and religious vitality of Muslim diaspora activities (Manshuruddin, 2022).

In Indonesia, Muhammadiyah is widely recognized as one of the largest modern Islamic organizations that embodies the vision of Islam Berkemajuan or Progressive Islam (Arifin et al., 2022). This vision emphasizes the values of moderation, openness, respect for universal humanity, and the advancement of science and technology within the framework of Islamic ethics (Anam et al., 2022). For more than a century, Muhammadiyah has established thousands of educational institutions, hospitals, universities, and social foundations as a manifestation of its commitment to education and progressive Islamic da'wah (Qodir, 2019). In recent decades, Muhammadiyah cadres residing abroad have established Pimpinan Cabang Istimewa Muhammadiyah (PCIM) or Special Branch Leaders in various countries as an extension of the movement to promote Islam Berkemajuan globally (Ridho Al-Hamdi, 2022).

Nevertheless, scholarly studies that specifically examine the role of the Muhammadiyah diaspora at the international level remain limited. Previous research has predominantly focused on Muhammadiyah's contributions within the context of national education or on general portrayals of Indonesian Muslim diaspora activities abroad, without delving deeply into the specific role of the Muhammadiyah diaspora as agents of global Islamic education and the dissemination of Progressive Islam values (Setyabudi, 2019; Adebayo, 2015). Moreover, the dimensions of da'wah strategies, the challenges faced, and the ways in which Muhammadiyah identity is maintained within multicultural societies have not received sufficient scholarly attention.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by specifically exploring the contributions of the Muhammadiyah diaspora in strengthening global Islamic education through various implemented strategies, the obstacles encountered during the da'wah process, and the efforts made to preserve Muhammadiyah identity within international communities. This focused scope allows for a deeper understanding of how the dissemination of Progressive Islam values occurs in transnational contexts and contributes to enriching the academic discourse on the Indonesian Muslim diaspora and Muhammadiyah's da'wah strategies at the global level.

#### Method

This study employs a qualitative approach based on a literature review to explore the role of the Muhammadiyah diaspora in global Islamic education and the dissemination of Progressive Islam (Putra & Himad Ali, 2024). The data analyzed consist of secondary sources, including scholarly books, journal articles, reports of the Pimpinan Cabang Istimewa Muhammadiyah (PCIM) activities, organizational documents, and previous research findings relevant to the topic (Ridho Al-Hamdi, 2022). Data collection was carried out through comprehensive literature searches in libraries, the official Muhammadiyah website, and online databases such as Google Scholar and institutional academic repositories. The collected data were then processed using the content analysis technique, which involved identifying key issues, categorizing findings into thematic clusters, and organizing the discussion systematically (Miles et al., 2014). The conclusions were formulated through critical interpretation of the analyzed data by taking into account relevant theoretical frameworks and

previous empirical studies. This methodological approach allows for a holistic and contextual understanding of how the Muhammadiyah diaspora contributes to strengthening global Islamic education networks and promoting Progressive Islam values within transnational Muslim communities.

#### Results

# **Educational Activities of the Muhammadiyah Diaspora**

This section presents the main findings from the literature review concerning the role of the Muhammadiyah diaspora in global Islamic education and the dissemination of Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam). The findings are analyzed within the theoretical frameworks of diaspora studies (Cohen, 2022) and Islam Berkemajuan (Arifin et al., 2022). Furthermore, these findings are compared with prior research to highlight the contributions, distinctive characteristics, and broader implications of the Muhammadiyah diaspora's educational engagement in promoting global Islamic enlightenment.

# 1. Formal and Non-Formal Education

The Muhammadiyah diaspora in various countries carries out a wide range of educational activities adapted to local social, cultural, and political contexts. These activities include formal, non-formal, and informal education. Pimpinan Cabang Istimewa Muhammadiyah (PCIM) in several countries—such as Egypt, Australia, and the United States—has established formal and non-formal educational institutions to nurture young Indonesian Muslims living abroad. In Egypt, for instance, PCIM serves as a mentoring center for Indonesian students through scholarly discussions, Qur'anic interpretation classes, and leadership training programs (Siregar & Pasaribu, 2023). In Australia, the Muhammadiyah diaspora initiated weekend schools that teach not only religious knowledge but also Indonesian national values (Adebayo, 2015). Beyond these formal and non-formal initiatives, the Muhammadiyah diaspora also promotes informal education through weekly pengajian (religious study circles), thematic discussions, and interfaith dialogues (Ridho Al-Hamdi, 2022). Such activities function both as educational media and as platforms for building relationships with local communities (Lichterman, 2005).

#### 2. Utilization of Media and Technology

In addition to in-person gatherings, the Muhammadiyah diaspora also maximizes the use of digital media as a primary means for education and dakwah (Islamic propagation). This strategy enables the dissemination of Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam) values to a wider audience, transcending national and cultural boundaries. Various online platforms—such as official websites, YouTube channels, and social media accounts—are utilized to present religious and educational content that is locally contextualized yet firmly rooted in the principles of Islam Berkemajuan (Giannakas et al., 2023).

This technology-based approach has become increasingly significant, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when face-to-face interactions were severely limited due to social restriction policies (Hendriyani et al., 2021). Under such circumstances, the Muhammadiyah diaspora continued to carry out educational and dakwah (propagation) activities through virtual media—such as webinars, online classes, podcasts, and educational videos—which allowed them to reach a broader and more simultaneous audience. The use of digital media not only ensured the continuity of existing programs but also created new opportunities to engage with previously inaccessible communities through conventional means (Guspian et al., 2024).

Moreover, the use of digital technology has enabled more interactive communication with the international community, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The content produced is generally presented in visually engaging and communicative formats, often adapted to local languages and cultures, making it more easily understood and accepted by cross-cultural audiences. Consequently, this strategy demonstrates the Muhammadiyah diaspora's ability to adapt to contemporary developments while simultaneously strengthening its role in promoting a moderate, inclusive, and progressive Islam at the global level.

# Strategies for Disseminating Islam Berkemajuan

In addition to utilizing digital technology, the Muhammadiyah diaspora has also developed more comprehensive strategies for disseminating the values of Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam) on a global scale. Broadly speaking, these strategies encompass three main approaches—academic, cultural, and digital—which complement one another and are adapted to the local social, cultural, and political contexts (Faisol Hakim et al., 2023).

# 1. Academic Approach

Through the academic approach, the Muhammadiyah diaspora actively engages in various scholarly activities such as organizing international seminars, publishing articles in academic journals, establishing research collaborations with universities or educational institutions, and contributing to the development of moderate and contextual Islamic education curricula (Ardhianto et al., 2024). This approach functions not only as a medium for transmitting the values of Islam Berkemajuan but also as a platform for intellectual dialogue with the international academic community, thereby granting public legitimacy to Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic ideas (Setyabudi, 2019).

# 2. Cultural Approach

Meanwhile, the cultural approach is implemented through the use of Indonesian arts, culture, and traditions as accessible means of dakwah (religious outreach) for local communities (Nashihin & Dewi, 2019). Activities such as culinary exhibitions, art performances, cultural festivals, and intercultural dialogues serve as effective platforms to present Islam as a compassionate, inclusive, and humanistic faith aligned with universal values (Anam et al., 2022). This approach allows the messages of Islam Berkemajuan to be communicated in a more persuasive and relatable manner, as they are embedded in the everyday experiences of the local population (Arifin et al., 2022).

# 3. Digital Approach

On the other hand, the digital approach has gained increasing importance in line with advancements in communication technology (Amrullah, 2024). Through online platforms, the Muhammadiyah diaspora can disseminate religious and educational content to a broader and more diverse global audience across national boundaries. The materials are often presented in engaging, communicative, and easily accessible formats, thus enabling outreach to communities that were previously difficult to reach through conventional means.

These three approaches—academic, cultural, and digital—work synergistically to demonstrate the Muhammadiyah diaspora's adaptive capacity in responding to global dynamics while remaining grounded in the principles of a moderate, open, and progressive Islam (Saichu et al., 2025).

Through the academic approach, the Muhammadiyah diaspora actively participates in various scholarly activities, such as organizing international seminars, publishing articles in academic journals, establishing research collaborations with universities or local educational institutions, and contributing to the development of moderate and contextually relevant Islamic education curricula (Abdul Mu'ti, 2023). This approach functions not only as a medium for conveying the values of Islam Berkemajuan but also as a platform for fostering dialogue with the international academic community, thereby granting public legitimacy to Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic discourse (Setyabudi, 2019).

Meanwhile, the cultural approach is implemented through the use of Indonesian arts, culture, and traditions as accessible instruments of dakwah (religious outreach) that can be more easily accepted by local communities (Agustiar et al., 2024). Activities such as culinary exhibitions, art performances, cultural festivals, and intercultural dialogues serve as effective means to introduce Islam as a religion that is friendly, inclusive, and aligned with universal human values (Anam et al., 2022). Through this method, the messages of Islam Berkemajuan are communicated in a more persuasive and culturally resonant manner, as they engage directly with the everyday experiences and cultural sensibilities of the people (Arifin et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the digital approach has become increasingly vital in line with the rapid development of communication technologies (Abdurrahman & Badruzaman, 2023). Through online platforms, the Muhammadiyah diaspora disseminates religious and educational content to a broader and more diverse global audience across nations and cultures. The materials produced are typically presented in engaging, communicative, and easily accessible formats, enabling the movement to reach communities that were previously difficult to engage through conventional methods. These three approaches—academic, cultural, and digital—work synergistically to demonstrate the Muhammadiyah diaspora's adaptability in responding to global dynamics while consistently adhering to the principles of a moderate, open, and progressive Islam (Kusmidi, 2023).

# **Challenges Faced**

In fulfilling its role as an agent of global Islamic education and a promoter of Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam), the Muhammadiyah diaspora encounters a variety of challenges. These challenges can be categorized into two main sources: internal challenges, which originate from within the community itself, and external challenges, which arise from the broader social, cultural, and political contexts of the host countries. Internal Challenges

Internal challenges primarily consist of two key issues. The first is the limitation of resources. The relatively small number of Muhammadiyah diaspora cadres in various host countries, coupled with financial constraints, poses significant obstacles to the expansion of planned educational and dakwah (religious outreach) activities (Ridho Al-Hamdi, 2022). This scarcity of human and material resources often results in suboptimal implementation, as the workload tends to be concentrated among a few individuals while the limited funding restricts the scope and outreach of programs.

The second issue involves internal coordination. Differences in educational backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives among Muhammadiyah diaspora members occasionally lead to disagreements over program priorities (Ridho Al-Hamdi, 2022). Although such differences are natural within a diverse community, they remain a critical challenge that must be managed carefully. Failure to address these differences could weaken internal cohesion and hinder the achievement of collective goals. External Challenges

In addition to internal factors, the Muhammadiyah diaspora also faces a range of external challenges, which are often more complex. One of the most pressing is the regulatory environment of host countries (Muttaqien & Surwandono, 2024). In some nations, government policies toward minority religious groups are relatively strict, making it difficult to establish and manage Islamic educational institutions. Complex legal frameworks and administrative requirements can become time-consuming and resource-draining obstacles for diaspora-led initiatives.

Another major challenge stems from dominant cultural norms and societal perceptions. In Western contexts, in particular, negative stereotypes and prejudices against Islam persist (Agustari & Ulinnuha, 2023). The Muhammadiyah diaspora must navigate these misconceptions while simultaneously adapting to local cultural norms that may sometimes conflict with Islamic values. The ability to engage in cross-cultural communication effectively—preserving Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic identity while remaining open and adaptive to diverse social environments—becomes a crucial test of resilience and strategic capacity.

Overall, both internal and external challenges demand strategic preparedness, careful resource management, and a constructive adaptive approach that allows the Muhammadiyah diaspora to sustain its mission without compromising the fundamental values that define its movement.

# **Efforts to Preserve Identity**

Amid the various challenges faced, the Muhammadiyah diaspora consistently strives to

maintain its identity as a Muslim community firmly rooted in the values of Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam) (Ridho Al-Hamdi, 2022). These efforts are realized through a series of strategic actions aimed at strengthening internal solidarity while affirming their presence within the global community.

One of the key strategies involves strengthening internal communication between diaspora members and the parent organization in Indonesia. This communication is maintained regularly through virtual meetings, activity reports, and program consultations to ensure that all initiatives remain aligned with Muhammadiyah's core vision and mission. In addition, leadership development and cadre formation are prioritized through programs focusing on leadership training, ideological reinforcement, and the enhancement of crosscultural and interfaith dialogue skills (Ridho Al-Hamdi, 2022).

Beyond internal consolidation, the Muhammadiyah diaspora also seeks to adapt to their surrounding environment without compromising the foundational principles that guide their movement. This flexibility allows them to gain acceptance within local societies while maintaining Islam Berkemajuan as their collective identity. Support from international networks and collaboration with other Muslim organizations in host countries further strengthens their institutional presence and expands their influence.

Overall, these efforts demonstrate the Muhammadiyah diaspora's strong awareness of the need to preserve their identity while constructively adapting to global dynamics (Siregar & Pasaribu, 2023). A well-preserved identity enables them to continue serving as agents of a moderate, inclusive, and contextually relevant form of Islam in the international arena.

#### **Discussion**

The findings of this study affirm that the Muhammadiyah diaspora plays a significant role in supporting global Islamic education and disseminating the values of Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam) through adaptive strategies that align with contemporary developments. This role demonstrates the diaspora's ability to integrate Islamic traditions with the demands of global modernity, consistent with the concept of Islam Berkemajuan (Arifin et al., 2022) and the theory of diaspora as agents of change (Cohen, 2022).

Education serves as the primary medium through which the Muhammadiyah diaspora sustains Islamic identity while promoting a moderate, inclusive, and progressive image of Islam (Khozin et al., 2021; Qodir et al., 2023). Their educational activities—both formal and informal—are contextualized according to local sociocultural and political conditions. For instance, in Egypt, Australia, and the United States, programs such as pengajian (religious study gatherings), Qur'an interpretation classes, thematic discussions, and weekend schools not only deepen religious understanding among diaspora members but also illustrate how Islam can coexist harmoniously with universal human values (Saefurohman, 2023).

Beyond in-person education, the Muhammadiyah diaspora also utilizes digital media as a key dakwah strategy to expand the reach of Islam Berkemajuan across national borders. The use of social media, websites, webinars, and other online platforms has proven particularly effective during the COVID-19 pandemic, when face-to-face interaction was limited (Giannakas et al., 2023). This digital engagement allows continuous dakwah efforts while opening intercultural and interfaith dialogue with global audiences, including non-Muslims.

The strategies employed by the Muhammadiyah diaspora to promote Islam Berkemajuan can be categorized into three main approaches: academic, cultural, and digital. The academic approach involves participation in international conferences, scholarly publications, and research collaborations with local educational institutions (Qodir, 2019). The cultural approach leverages Indonesian arts, traditions, cuisine, and cultural festivals as accessible and appealing channels of dakwah (Anam et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the digital approach optimizes communication technologies to convey Islamic messages more widely, interactively, and attractively (Giannakas et al., 2023). The synergy of these three approaches reflects the diaspora's capability to deliver contextual Islamic messages without compromising fundamental principles.

Nevertheless, the Muhammadiyah diaspora faces both internal and external challenges. Internally, limitations in the number of cadres, resource constraints, and differences in educational background sometimes result in diverging program priorities (Ridho Al-Hamdi, 2022). Externally, strict local government regulations on minority religious groups and persistent negative stereotypes of Islam in some Western countries pose ongoing challenges (Agustari & Ulinnuha, 2023; Muttaqien & Surwandono, 2024).

Despite these obstacles, the diaspora has managed to address such challenges by strengthening internal communication with the central Muhammadiyah organization in Indonesia, continuously fostering leadership training, building partnerships with other Muslim organizations, and wisely adapting to local cultures while upholding the principles of Islam Berkemajuan. These efforts align with Qodir's (2019) perspective emphasizing the importance of engaging with modernity and pluralism while maintaining Islamic authenticity.

Overall, this discussion indicates that the Muhammadiyah diaspora has not only adapted successfully to global dynamics but also contributed significantly to promoting Islam as a rahmatan lil-'alamin—a universal mercy—on the international stage (Tasman Hamami, 2021). Furthermore, these findings open pathways for future research to explore the role of younger generations within the diaspora and to design more innovative and context-responsive dakwah strategies in the years to come.

#### Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the Muhammadiyah diaspora plays a significant role in advancing global Islamic education and promoting Islam berkemajuan (progressive Islam) through diverse activities, strategic approaches, and efforts to maintain their identity amid various challenges. First, the Muhammadiyah diaspora actively initiates and manages formal, non-formal, and informal educational programs adapted to the social, cultural, and political contexts of the host countries. These activities serve not only as a means to convey the values of progressive Islam but also as an avenue to strengthen community identity and solidarity among Indonesian Muslims abroad. Second, in disseminating the ideals of progressive Islam, the Muhammadiyah diaspora employs three main approaches: academic, cultural, and digital. These approaches are implemented complementarily, allowing the messages of Islamic propagation (da'wah) to become more contextual, inclusive, and relevant to the diverse needs of global communities. Third, the Muhammadiyah diaspora faces complex challenges, both internal and external. Internal challenges include a limited number of cadres, financial constraints, and coordination issues, while external challenges arise from strict government regulations in host countries and the persistent negative stigma toward Islam in certain Western contexts. Nevertheless, the diaspora has managed to address these obstacles through consistent internal communication, continuous cadre development, interorganizational collaboration, and the ability to adapt wisely to local cultures without compromising the fundamental principles of progressive Islam.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Muhammadiyah diaspora has successfully integrated Islamic traditions with the demands of global modernity, thereby positioning itself as an agent of moderate, inclusive, and progressive Islamic dissemination. This success underscores the continuing relevance of Muhammadiyah's vision of Islam berkemajuan and highlights the tangible contribution of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora to the international Islamic discourse. Furthermore, this study opens new avenues for future research to explore how the next generation of the Muhammadiyah diaspora will continue this role and how existing strategies can be further developed and applied in broader and more diverse global contexts.

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