

Colonial Classification of Islamic Education in the Netherlands East Indies, 1882–1927

Dedi Irama ^{1*}, Emy Herawati ¹

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Al-Quraniyah Manna Bengkulu Selatan, Indonesia



dediirama299@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

This study examines how Islamic education was discursively constructed within colonial knowledge and administration in the Netherlands East Indies between 1882 and 1927. Using qualitative historical critical discourse analysis informed by the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), the study analyzes five primary colonial documents produced within orientalist scholarship, educational administration, military-academic circles, and government institutions. The analysis focuses on nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and diachronic changes in representations of pesantren, religious schools, kiai, santri, and religious teachers. The findings reveal a gradual shift from describing and translating Islamic educational institutions to quantifying them, incorporating them into administrative classifications, evaluating them through standards of modernity, and placing them under systems of supervision. Colonial representations were not uniformly negative: some documents acknowledged the reach of Islamic educational networks and the authority of religious teachers, while others differentiated pesantren from Islamic schools considered more compatible with modern institutional forms. Categories such as Mohammedaansch godsdienstonderwijs also carried regulatory consequences through teaching permits, pupil registration, inspection, and the Goeroe-ordonnantie. The study shows that colonial power operated not only through formal educational policy but also through the authority to name, classify, evaluate, and regulate legitimate forms of education. It contributes a diachronic account of how administrative language shaped the position of Islamic education within the colonial order.

Keywords: Colonial Education; Discourse-Historical Approach; Dutch East Indies; Islamic Education; Pesantren

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INTRODUCTION

Studies on colonial education show that schools function not only as learning spaces, but also as a means of forming categories, standards of progress, and governance of colonized societies (Jansen et al., 2025; Kirchgasler, 2025). In practice, numbers, classifications, and policy language can make certain groups or educational institutions easier for the state to recognize, compare, and regulate (Lo & Wang, 2024; Steiner-Khamisi et al., 2024). The problem is that the relationship between the colonial education system and local education does not occur simply through acceptance or rejection, but also through adaptation, negotiation, and inequality in determining which forms of knowledge are considered legitimate (Sakata et al., 2024; Zembylas, 2024a). In the context of the Dutch East Indies, Islamic education, especially Islamic boarding schools, religious schools, kiai, students, and religious teachers, has been widely discussed in terms of policy, modernization, and resistance, but has not been widely studied as an object

formed through the colonial language itself. This gap matters because terms such as *priesterschool*, *godsdiensschool*, and *Mohammedaansche school* are not just names; they show how colonial knowledge and governance structures placed Islamic education within them.

Previous research has shown that Muslim religious authority and education in colonial times were shaped through the complex relationship between local practices and categorizations made by colonial governments (Baldoza, 2022; Iankovskaia, 2023). Other studies show that the practice of Islamic education also took place through the transmission of texts, didactic traditions, and knowledge networks that developed outside the formal colonial school structure (Iankovskaia, 2024; Maulani, 2025). At the same time, colonial intervention in Islamic libraries, manuscripts, and collections changed patterns of ownership, circulation, and access to local intellectual resources (Darmawan & Hijjas, 2025; Nurtawab, 2025). The collection and reorganization of manuscripts by colonial administrators also shows that colonialism worked through the management of knowledge and changes in people's relations to their intellectual heritage, not just through direct political policies (Sunliensyar, 2025; Yahya, 2025).

This study uses the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as the main framework for reading the relationship between language, historical context, intertextuality, and discourse change, so that the colonial category is not understood as a neutral term, but rather as part of the discursive practices formed in power relations (Soudien, 2025; Tang & Li, 2026). Within this framework, the naming and classification of education is understood as an epistemic process that can form a hierarchy of knowledge and establish measures about education that are considered advanced, legitimate, or backward (Kirchgasler, 2025; Woldegiorgis, 2025). Quantification, statistics, and administrative language are further read as government tools that allow educational institutions to be recognized, compared, regulated, and monitored through policy mechanisms (Lo & Wang, 2024; Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2024). This reading at the same time avoids the simple opposition between colonialists and natives by placing education as an arena where epistemic domination, adaptation, and negotiation take place simultaneously (Jansen et al., 2025; Zembylas, 2024a).

Previous studies have discussed colonial Islamic education through policy, modernization, resistance, text transmission, and intellectual networks. However, research still has limited diachronic tracing of how Islamic education in the Dutch East Indies was formed through colonial languages, especially through term changes, administrative classifications, measures of modernity, and supervision. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the discursive construction of Islamic education in colonial documents in the colonial period 1882–1927 with a Discourse-Historical Approach, focusing on the representation of Islamic boarding schools, religious schools, *kiai*, students, and religious teachers, as well as changes in discourse regarding educational hierarchy, legitimacy of knowledge, modernity, and state authority. This research contributes by positioning colonial administrative classification and language as central in shaping Islamic education's place in colonial historiography.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a historical critical discourse analysis design to examine the construction of Islamic education in the colonial discourse of the Dutch East Indies period 1882–1927. The analysis applies the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), which situates language in a socio-political context and examines the history of text production, intertextuality, interdiscursiveness, and power relations. Terms such as *pesantren*, *Mohammedaansche school*, *godsdiensonderwijs*, *priesterschool*, and *Inlandsch onderwijs* are analyzed not just as administrative categories, but as discursive choices that name, classify, and position institutions, actors, and knowledge in the colonial order (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; Rheindorf, 2022). The historical perspective of DHA is also used to trace the changes, continuities, and transformations of discourse between documents as the institutional, political, and social contexts change (Tang & Li, 2026; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Corpus and Data Sources

The research data are a documentary primer on the Netherlands that directly discusses *pesantren*, *Sekolah agama Islam*, *kiai*, *santri*, *guru agama*, and *pendidikan pribumi*. The main corpus consists of five documents, namely L.W.C. van den Berg, *De Mohammedaansche geestelijkheid en de geestelijke op Java en Madoera* (1882); *Het Mohammedaansche bedstdienstonderwijs op Java en Madoera and de aande aane Arabische boeken* (1887); General five-year report of the inlandsch onderwijs in Nederlandsch-Indië (1921); C. Spat, *De Islâm en zijn beteekenis voor Nederlandsch-Indië* (1925); as well as *Verslag van Bestuur en Staat van Nederlandsch-Indië* (1927). The five documents were chosen because they came from different arenas of colonial knowledge production, including orientalist studies, educational administration, education of colonial officials, and government reports. The diversity of source types helped avoid relying on a single document type and allowed comparison of discourse constructions across institutions.

Document Selection

Document selection is purposive and based on relevance to the research question. Documents are included if they meet four criteria: they were produced during the colonial period; contain explicit discussions of Islamic education or the actors involved in it; have a verifiable provenance, author or producing institution, and year of publication; and are available in digital form that allows re-examination of the source pages. The selection is not intended to produce a corpus that statistically represents the entire colonial archive, but to obtain documents with a high density of information on the classification, evaluation, legitimacy, modernization, and supervision of Islamic education. This kind of approach is in accordance with the analysis of qualitative documents that emphasize the relevance, authenticity, credibility, and usefulness of the document to the purpose of the research (Morgan, 2022). Since colonial documents were also shaped by racial and imperial hierarchies and the institutional conditions under which they were produced, the selection and reading of sources were carried out taking into account the position of the author, recipient, context of production, importance, intention, and possible omission of information in each document (Hyman & Mundy, 2023; Zeman, 2023).

Data Collection

Documents are obtained through digital libraries, government repositories, university collections, and online archives that provide copies of historical sources. Each document is recorded by title, author or institution, year, document type, digital location, page number, and context of production. Initial searches use the terms *pesantren*, *Mohammedaansche school*, *Mohammedaansch godsdienstonderwijs*, *godsdienstschool*, *Koranschool*, *priesterschool*, *santri*, *Inlandsch onderwijs*, and *toezicht*, then expand based on terms found during reading. The use of digital archives still takes into account possible bias due to the selection, continuity of documents, digitization process, and archive catalog structure so that digital sources are not treated as a complete representation of the entire archive that has ever been produced (Kim, 2022). OCR search results are also not directly used as data because character recognition errors can result in lost, changed, or undetectable words; any findings are therefore double-checked on the original page image (Burchardt, 2023).

Data Analysis

The analysis begins with a thorough reading of each document to identify the sections that name, define, classify, compare, evaluate, or organize Islamic education. Relevant citations are entered into an analysis matrix containing the document code, year, page, original Dutch text, translation, paragraph context, actors discussed, categories of analysis, and initial interpretation. The analysis then follows DHA's five main strategies, namely nomination, to identify the way in which Islamic boarding schools, Islamic schools, *kiai*, students, and religious teachers are named or categorized; predication, to identify characteristics or judgments attached to those actors and institutions; argumentation, to uncover argumentation patterns that justify classification, modernization, intervention, or supervision; perspectivisation, to look at the position of actors who gain authority in defining education; and intensification and mitigation,

to find out how risks, differences, legitimacy, or threats are strengthened or refined (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).

Diachronic and Intertextual Analysis

The analysis did not stop at identifying words or discursive strategies in each document. The results of the coding were then compared diachronically to trace continuity and change in the construction of Islamic education between 1882 and 1927. Comparisons focused on changes in how *pesantren* were categorized, the shift between the terms *priesterschool*, *godsdiensonderwijs*, and *Mohammedaansche school*, the emergence of a distinction between forms of education described as old and modern, and the growing relationship between religious education and state supervision. Intertextual analysis also traced whether certain terms, classifications, and argumentation patterns were reproduced, modified, or abandoned in subsequent documents. This kind of cross-temporal reading is important in DHA because a discourse construction is not only formed in a single text, but develops through diachronic and intertextual relationships between documents (Tang & Li, 2026).

Text Translation

The initial analysis preserved the original Dutch terms so the analytical meaning was not lost in translation. Terms such as *Mohammedaansch godsdiensonderwijs*, *priesterschool*, *godsdienschool*, *Inlandsch onderwijs*, and *toezicht* were retained at the coding stage and translated after the context of their use was understood. The selected quotations were then translated into Indonesian and, for international publications, English, with the original form included on first mention. The translation considered not only lexical equivalence but also sentence context, the term's position in colonial classifications, and its use in other documents, so the distinction between literal meaning and discursive function could be maintained.

Visual Documentation

Historical photographs serve as supporting contextual documentation, not the main unit of the CDA. Visual materials include documentation of Qur'an schools in Aceh, *suraus* in Minangkabau, religious teaching schools in Lintau, and Koran schools in Java, drawn from museum collections or verified archives. Photographs help readers understand the physical environment of Islamic education, the configuration of learning spaces, and the social context when the documents were produced. The composition of images, clothing, body positions, gazes, and other visual elements were not systematically encoded because the study was limited to the text-based historical CDA. These restrictions are important to maintain consistency between the research questions, the form of data, and the analytical approaches used (Ong et al., 2024).

Credibility and Criticism of Sources

The credibility of the analysis is maintained through source triangulation, contextual triangulation, trail audits, and negative-case analysis. The representation of Islamic education in orientalist works is compared with education administration reports and official government documents, and the interpretation is examined alongside the context of educational policy and developments in the same period. The entire process of citation selection and coding is recorded in a matrix so that the relationship between the source, page, DHA strategy, and interpretation can be traced. Citations that do not fit the dominant pattern are also analyzed so that the research results do not only confirm the initial assumptions. Systematic triangulation is important in DHA to increase the transparency, traceability, and evidential strength of interpretation (Tang & Li, 2024). Colonial documents are therefore not treated as an objective record of Islamic education, but as historical sources that simultaneously record and produce certain institutional perspectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of five primary documents shows that colonial discourse represented Islamic education in changing ways during 1882–1927. These changes do not show a uniform pattern of negative assessment. Some documents acknowledge the breadth of the Islamic education network, the authority of the *kiai*, and the social influence of its alumni. However, diachronically, the practice shifts from naming and description to classification, assessment

based on measures of modernity, and administrative supervision. Based on the strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, and perspectivisation in the DHA, three main patterns were found: the construction of Islamic education through colonial categories, the formation of a hierarchy between forms of education that were considered old and modern, and the expansion of government authority through educational classification and supervision.

Table 2. Summary of Discourse Analysis Findings

Sumber	Bukti utama	Strategi DHA	Temuan
Van den Berg (1882)	<i>priesterschool, pesantren, santri, goeroe, kiah, bedelmonnikken</i>	Nomination; predication	Local categories are described through European religious vocabulary
Van den Berg (1886)	14,929 Religious Schools and 222,663 Students	Nomination; quantification	Islamic education is constructed as a countable educational population
Departement van Onderwijs en Eeredienst (1920)	<i>Mohammedaansche scholen</i>	Categorisation; perspectivisation	Islamic identity becomes an administrative category of education
Spat (1925)	<i>grove onkunde, priesterscholen, middeleeuwsche, scholen met den Koran, toezicht</i>	Predication; argumentation	Modernity is a measure of evaluation; classification is related to supervision
<i>Verslag van Bestuur en Staat</i> (1927)	Muhammadiyah, school with the Qur'an, Goeroe-ordonnantie	Perspectivisation; argumentation	The boundary between educational-religious activities and political activities is determined through the perspective of the state

Naming and Categorization of Islamic Education

Van den Berg describes Islamic education by retaining several local terms while translating them into categories familiar to colonial readers. In the discussion of the continuing education of students, *pesantren* are placed in the category of *priesterscholen*, while the actors in it are still recorded using the terms *santri*, *goeroe*, and *kiah* (Van den Berg, 1882, p. 22). The use of the term *local* suggests that Van den Berg was aware of the social structure of Islamic education, but the term *priesterschool* places *pesantren* in the analogy of European religious institutions. This tension is even more apparent when some of the students who move around after leaving the education center are compared to *bedelmonnikken* or beggar monks (Van den Berg, 1882, p. 27). In the nomination strategy, *pesantren* and their actors are thus not removed as a local category, but are moved within the framework of colonial interpretation; whereas the use of *bedelmonnikken* works as a predication because it adds a certain characterization to the way of life of some students. However, the same document also records the reputation of several *pesantren* and the relationship between institutional authority and the ability of the *kiai* who lead them. Therefore, the D1 data do not support the conclusion that *pesantren* as a whole are described as worthless institutions. A more precise finding is that the reality of Islamic education is translated through a taxonomy that derives in part from the European religious experience.



Figure 1. Teacher and pupils of a Qur'anic school in Aceh, Sumatra, 1899.

Source: Christiaan Benjamin Nieuwenhuis, Rijksmuseum, object no. BI-F-1895-9, Public Domain.

Van den Berg's subsequent study turned this naming practice into quantification. Citing official statistics in 1885, he mentioned about 15,000 godsdienstschole with about 230,000 students in Java and Madura. A more accurate record of the figures shows 14,929 schools and 222,663 students, with the Yogyakarta residency not included in the calculation (Van den Berg, 1886, p. 519). Quantification turns a diverse educational network into a single population, read through the number of schools and pupils. This process is further formalized in the *Algemeen vijfjarig verslag van het inlandsch onderwijs in Nederlandsch-Indië*. The Department of Education report provides a separate category, "Mohammedaansche scholen", starting on page 36, while the category openbaar en bijzonder is placed in the next section (Departement van Onderwijs en Eeredienst, 1920, p. 36). Within the framework of the DHA, the change shows that the nomination has evolved into an administrative categorisation. Islamic education is not only described from the outside, but is included in the official structure of government knowledge through categories determined by the colonial administration.



Figure 2. Mosque and school for religious instruction in Lintau, Tanah Datar, West Sumatra, ca. 1891-1895.

Source: Rijksmuseum, object no. RP-F-AA3192-AZ, Public Domain.

Hierarchy of Knowledge and Modernity

The evaluative distinction becomes more explicit in Spat's work. When discussing elementary religious education, Spat uses the expression *grove onkunde* to describe the low religious knowledge of a part of society that receives only limited instruction (Spat, 1925, p. 9). However, his assessment of Islamic education is not entirely homogeneous. At a higher level of education, he explains that some students study religious science for many years and then influence the environment to which they return. Even to the earlier colonial terminology, Spat makes corrections. He argues that calling the institution a *priesterscholen* is inappropriate

because pesantren do not specifically train people to occupy religious positions, as the analogy of "priest" in the European tradition assumes (Spat, 1925, p. 10). This data matters because it shows an internal shift in colonial discourse: the categories used in the late nineteenth century were not simply accepted in 1925.

Such terminological corrections, however, did not eliminate the hierarchy. Spat stated that pesantren received fewer rewards than before, as access to modern education in "our style" widened. In the same section, pesantren education was associated with een middeleeuwsche beschouwing der menschenwereld, or a medieval worldview. It was considered not to encourage associating indigenous life with contemporary civilization (Spat, 1925, pp. 10–11). After this assessment, Spat discussed a type of institution he called different in nature: scholen met den Koran. These schools combined primary school subjects with Arabic, Qur'an recitation, and Islamic teachings, and in some places used teachers brought in from Egypt and Tunis (Spat, 1925, p. 11). The opposition that formed was therefore not as simple as Western education versus Islamic education. The D4 discourse results in a hierarchy within Islamic education itself: pesantren are placed in relation to the past, while institutions that adopt school structures, general subjects, and organizations closer to the modern form of school are placed in a different category. The strategy of predication and argumentation here makes "modernity" not just a marker of time, but a measure for assessing the form of education.

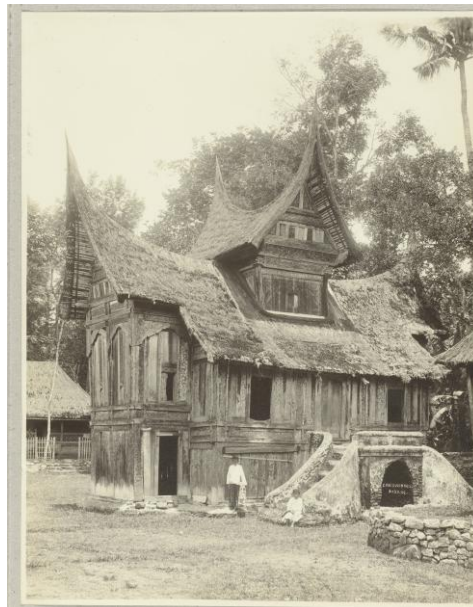


Figure 3. Minangkabauische Surau in Baso, ca. 1891–1912.

Source: Christiaan Benjamin Nieuwenhuis, Rijksmuseum, object no. RP-F-2001-17-297, Public Domain.

The findings also show that modernity is conditional. Islam as the basis of education does not automatically position a school outside the modern system. Schools met den Koran can provide Islamic lessons as well as general lessons and, under certain conditions, enter into the government-recognized educational mechanism (Spat, 1925, pp. 11–13). Thus, the stronger discursive line is not Islamic/non-Islamic, but the distinction between forms of education that are seen as compatible or incompatible with colonial institutional standards. This explains why the corpus does not support the generalization that the colonial government rejected all Islamic education. What emerges is a process of selection and differentiation: certain forms of education gain greater recognition when their organization and curriculum more closely match the pattern of schools considered modern.

Classification and Supervision of Education

The hierarchy of education in D4 is not separate from the administrative mechanism. Spat explains that the *Mohammedaansch godsdienstonderwijs* in Java and Madura is supervised by the government under the *Goeroe-ordonnantie*. Teachers need written permission, must state the type of teaching, and must maintain a register of students' names. Government officials and commissions appointed to run it implement supervision (Spat, 1925, p. 12). In the draft regulatory changes Spat discusses, the pattern of supervision shifts from preventive permits to a more repressive system of notifications, framed as protecting public order (Spat, 1925, pp. 12–13). Here, the strategy of argumentation works through the topos of public order: government involvement is justified not as an assessment of the right or wrong of Islamic doctrine, but as a need to maintain order.

The distinction of education categories again determines the form of supervision applied. Spat explained that the *scholen met den Koran* that received government subsidies fell under the supervision of ordinary education, while special religious education was subject to its own supervision rules (Spat, 1925, p. 13). This means terms such as *godsdienstonderwijs* and *schoolonderwijs* are not just linguistic variations. These categories have administrative consequences for who can teach, the required form of registration, who has the right to enter the educational space, and the form of intervention the government can carry out. In this corpus, the power relationship is therefore seen not only through evaluative expressions, but through the colonial administration's ability to define the category and its regulatory consequences.

A 1927 government report expanded the issue to Islamic organizations. *Muhammadiyah* was noted for educational activities and for establishing schools that combined general teaching with the *Qur'an*. However, when the organization opposed the implementation of the *Goeroe-ordonnantie*, the action was discussed in relation to political activities (*Ministerie van Koloniën*, 1927). The perspectivisation strategy matters here because the government's report positions the state as the party that draws the boundary between activities categorized as religious education and those considered to have entered the political sphere. Thus, resistance to education policy is not only read as a difference of pedagogical views, but can change the discursive position of Muslim organizations in the eyes of the government.

Shifts in Colonial Discourse, 1882–1927

Diachronic comparisons show that discourse changes through several layers stacked on top of each other. In 1882, *pesantren* became mainly the object of description and translation, when local categories such as *pesantren*, *santri*, *goeroe*, and *kiahi* were described through European terminological frameworks (Van den Berg, 1882, pp. 22–27). In 1886, Islamic education became an object of quantification increasingly, through the counting of schools and students on the scale of Java and Madura (Van den Berg, 1886, p. 519). By 1920, the process had become an administrative classification, as can be seen from the placement of *Mohammedaansche scholen* as an official category in education reports (*Departement van Onderwijs en Eeredienst*, 1920, p. 36). In 1925, the discourse developed towards evaluation and differentiation, when *pesantren* were compared with modern education and *scholen met den Koran*, while at the same time being placed in a mechanism of supervision (Spat, 1925, pp. 9–13). In 1925, the discourse developed towards evaluation and differentiation, when *pesantren* were compared with modern education and *scholen met den Koran*, while at the same time being placed in a mechanism of supervision (*Ministerie van Koloniën*, 1927).

The findings suggest that colonial relations to Islamic education did not work primarily through a single negative label that was constantly repeated. Van den Berg acknowledged a vast network of education, while Spat even corrected the use of the term *priesterschool* and acknowledged certain outcomes of *pesantren* education. However, changes across documents reveal another, more fundamental consistency: the authority to name, categorize, measure progress, and establish forms of supervision increasingly concentrates in the colonial knowledge apparatus. Thus, the main transformation from 1882–1927 can be formulated as a shift from Islamic education as described to education that is calculated and classified, then evaluated and regulated. Its discursive hierarchy does not always emerge through explicit

insults, but through the authority to determine which forms of education are considered elementary, modern, subsidizable, subject to supervision, or shifted from the realm of religious education to the realm of politics.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that classification became an important mechanism in producing colonial knowledge about Islamic education. The shift from *priesterschool* in 1882, the quantification of *godsdiensscholen* in 1886, to the administrative category of *Mohammedaansche scholen* in 1920 shows how Islamic education became increasingly readable, comparable, and state-managed. In the history of imperial education, the formation of educational categories was indeed closely related to the colonial government's efforts to organize social differences and determine the position of colonized groups in the structure of government (Ballantyne, 2023; Swartz, 2023). Categories such as native education are also not neutral because they distinguish education that is positioned as a standard from education that is specifically attached to indigenous people (Holland, 2023; Paisley, 2023). The production of such categories also shows who had the authority to define the forms of education that were considered legitimate in colonial historiography and administration (Odugu, 2023; Wong, 2023). However, these categories are not always passively accepted, as local actors can also negotiate and leverage colonial education for their own benefit (Neuhaus, 2023; Sumantri et al., 2025). Thus, the classification of Islamic education in the Dutch East Indies reflects the relationship between state knowledge production and Muslim community negotiation.

The second finding shows that modernity is an important measure in distinguishing Islamic forms of education in the colonial period. The 1925 document distinguishes *pesantren* from *scholen met den Koran*, which combines religious teaching with modern school structures and subjects, so that the colonial school model serves as a reference for progress. A similar pattern is found in various colonial contexts, when modern education was used as a standard to assess the education of colonized societies (Asipbaeva et al., 2026; Neuhaus, 2023). However, local communities do not always passively accept the model, but can adapt it for their own social and educational interests (Ellinghaus & Judd, 2023; Marsden, 2023). In the context of the Dutch East Indies, this condition shows conditional modernity, which is when Islamic education gains greater legitimacy if its structure and curriculum are close to the form of modern schools, while other forms of education are judged based on their proximity to the standard (Matemba, 2024; Zembylas, 2024b). The emergence of the *Koran met den-Koran* school is therefore more appropriately understood as a form of negotiation against colonial modernity, not as a loss of the identity of Islamic education (Neuhaus, 2023; Sumantri et al., 2025).

The third finding shows that the classification of education goes hand in hand with the expansion of state supervision. When Islamic education is categorized as *Mohammedaansch godsdiensonderwijs*, it triggers administrative consequences, including teaching permits, student registration, inspections, and the application of the *Goeroe-ordonnantie*. This kind of practice is in line with the imperial educational pattern that uses record-keeping, categorization, and regulation to manage colonized groups (Ballantyne, 2023; Holland, 2023). In the corpus, supervision is legitimized through the concept of *openbare orde*, so that state intervention is placed as an effort to maintain order, not to interfere with religious doctrine. These administrative procedures also determine who can teach and how the state recognizes educational activities (Kasper et al., 2025; Paisley, 2023). Its political dimension can be seen when Muhammadiyah's rejection of the *Goeroe-ordonnantie* is represented as a political activity, showing that the boundaries between education, religion, and politics are also determined through a colonial perspective (Neuhaus, 2023; Sumantri et al., 2025). The supervision of Islamic education therefore operates through administrative classification, the legitimacy of public order, and the determination of the limits of legitimate action.

A reading of colonial documents shows that the position of Islamic education was shaped not only through policy and supervision, but also through the practice of naming, grouping, and setting standards of progress. In the context of imperial education, this practice was part of producing colonial knowledge that determined how colonized societies were recognized and

governed (Ballantyne, 2023; Swartz, 2023). Administrative terms such as Mohammedaansche scholen thus not only function as technical labels, but also place Islamic education within a specific colonial knowledge and administrative structure (Boridczenko, 2024; Odugu, 2023). Changes between documents show a fairly clear pattern: pesantren are first described, then calculated, classified, assessed through measures of modernity, and finally entered into a surveillance mechanism. However, the colonial government did not fully determine this direction. The development of modern Islamic schools and the rejection of Goeroe-ordonnantie suggest that Muslim actors also negotiate, use, and challenge state-established boundaries (Neuhaus, 2023; Sumantri et al., 2025; Asipbaeva et al., 2026). Within this framework, the history of Islamic education in colonial times appears as an arena for the struggle for authority to determine the legitimate form of education, the measure of progress, and the limits of state intervention in religious life.

The novelty of this research lies in the use of the Discourse-Historical Approach to trace the changes in the discourse of Islamic education from description, quantification, administrative classification, modernity evaluation, to colonial surveillance. These findings show that power works not only through policy, but also through categories that determine which forms of education are considered legitimate and modern. Historiographically, this research encourages the reading of Islamic education beyond the traditional-modern or colonial-resistant dichotomy. The limitation lies in relying on five main documents from 1882–1927, most of which came from colonial actors, so Muslim voices are not directly represented. Further research needs to include the Muslim press, archives of Islamic organizations, and indigenous sources to compare colonial discourse with the counter-discourse of Muslim society.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Islamic education in the Dutch East Indies during 1882–1927 was not only an object of policy, but also an object of colonial knowledge. Islamic boarding schools, religious teachers, students, and Islamic schools were first recognized through descriptive categories, then increasingly placed in a system of classification, calculation, assessment of modernity, and administrative supervision. Thus, the question of how Islamic education was constructed, the hierarchy formed, and how its discourse changed can be answered through one main pattern: colonial power established categories that determined how Islamic education was understood, compared, and regulated. In this process, modernity did not function as a neutral measure, but as a standard that distinguished forms of education considered more advanced from those considered lagging. However, the process was not entirely one-sided; the emergence of modern Islamic schools and the rejection of Goeroe-ordonnantie show that Muslim actors had room to negotiate. This research implies that we must read the history of Islamic education not only through policy and resistance, but also through the administrative language and categories of knowledge that shaped Islamic education's position within colonial structures.

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