

---

## Education and New Direction of Islam Nusantara: Towards Humanitarian and Sustainable Development

---

### Mushlihin

Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial, Universitas Negeri Jakarta  
e-mail: [mushlihin@unj.ac.id](mailto:mushlihin@unj.ac.id)

### Sari Narulita

Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial, Universitas Negeri Jakarta  
e-mail: [sari-narulita@unj.ac.id](mailto:sari-narulita@unj.ac.id)

### Rihlah Nur Aulia

Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial, Universitas Negeri Jakarta  
e-mail: [rihlah-nuraulia@unj.ac.id](mailto:rihlah-nuraulia@unj.ac.id)

---

*Naskah diterima: 31 Maret 2021; direvisi: 30 Juli 2021; disetujui: 30 Juli 2021*

---

### Abstrak

Tulisan ini mengkaji peran pendidikan Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia (UNUSIA) Jakarta dalam mengembangkan istilah Islam Nusantara (IN) yang masih diperdebatkan, yang tampaknya masih dalam proses menjadi. Secara khusus, penelitian ini mencoba untuk memahami pertanyaan tentang arah mana universitas membuat beberapa pengembangan untuk masa depan IN, dan bagaimana ia membentuk IN dalam keberadaan yang berkelanjutan. Melalui beberapa pengamatan kurikulum dan program pembelajaran IN dan wawancara mendalam, penelitian ini secara analitis melihat penggunaan studi multidisiplin yang lebih luas untuk arah masa depan IN yang baru, dan mempelajari beberapa kegiatan akademik yang diluncurkan untuk mempertahankan keadaan IN secara nasional dan secara global. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa universitas, untuk pengembangan IN di masa depan dan berkelanjutan, mengarahkannya untuk menangani masalah kemanusiaan, dan melakukan penelitian yang lebih luas dan kerja sama akademik di seluruh dunia yang mengarah ke pusat peradaban Islam di dunia.

*Kata kunci: Islam Nusantara, pendidikan tinggi Islam, Nahdlatul Ulama*

### Abstract

This paper examines the educational roles of Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama University (UNUSIA) Jakarta in developing a highly debated term of Islam Nusantara (IN), which apparently remains in the process of becoming. In particular, this study attempts to understand the questions of what direction to which the university makes some developments for the future of IN, and how it forms IN in sustainable existence. Through some observations of curriculum and learning programs of IN and in-depth interviews, this study analytically looks into the use of wider multidisciplinary studies for a new future direction of IN, and it studies some academic activities launched to sustain the state of IN nationally and globally. This study demonstrates that the university, for future and sustainable development of IN, directs it to deal with humanitarian issues, and conducts a broader research and worldwide academic cooperation leading to be the center of Islamic civilization in the globe.

*Keywords: Islam Nusantara, Islamic Higher Education, Nahdlatul Ulama*

## **Introduction**

As one model of many Islamic faces, Islam Nusantara apparently for many decades had been manifested in the archipelago. It might be understood as a model of thought, understanding and practice of Islamic teachings by taking into account local traditions and culture. In this regard, it is able to express a model of Islam that is unique to the archipelago and differentiates it from other Islamic models in the Middle East, India, Turkey and other places around the globe. In the academic world, the term of Islam Nusantara is not a new term either. It has been known for a long time, including those introduced by several authors, including: Azyumardi Azra (Azra A. , 2015) with the title “*Islam Nusantara: Global and Local Network,*” and Nor Huda (2013) “*Islam Archipelago Social History of Islamic Intellectuals in Indonesia.*” However, these two writers explain that Islam Nusantara still in the historical point of view has not discuss much on the methodological aspect.

The term Islam Nusantara became more popular because it became the main theme of the 33rd Congress of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Jombang, East Java which took place from August 1-5 2015. While NU represented Indonesia's mainstream Muslims, Islam Nusantara was increasingly publicized in the wider Indonesian Muslim community, penetrating urban to rural communities. The determination of the main theme of Islam Nusantara in the congress was in response to the deteriorating image of Islam on the international stage and even tended to be evaluated negatively, due to cases of violence committed in the name of Islam, including murder, hostage, bombing and so on.

The identity of the perpetrators of these radical acts and the blasphemy of Islam creates a false assumption that Islam teaches violence, bloodshed, heinous acts, cruel and sadistic treatment, barbaric acts, and other dehumanizing acts. In fact, Islam is clearly not the kind. It inherently teaches more about peace, harmony, tolerance and openness. Unfortunately, these wonderful teachings are under-emphasized, so that they are less well known by the international community. Likewise, the majority of Muslims prioritize peace over violence. Uniquely, the acts of violence committed by a handful of Muslims have attracted negative-pejorative attention from the international community, which is then justified as the characteristics of Islam.

Seeing the above developments, Islam Nusantara can be considered as an alternative model of thought, understanding and practice of humanist and friendly Islamic teachings, either in geographical, social or cultural spheres. As a new term, for most Muslims in Indonesia, Southeast Asia and the world, the meaning of Islam Nusantara needs to be

adequately explained so that it is easy to understand. And at the same time, Islam Nusantara remains a term that is still developing.

Current studies seem to focus and explore Islam Nusantara extensively on its relationship to history, Islam, and local tradition. They neglect the new development initiated by UNUSIA which enhance IN to new direction. It is in this regard, this study aims to understand how Islam Nusantara was developed by UNUSIA through its systematic educational efforts.

### **Research Method**

This research was conducted through several steps, starting from planning and formulating the research problem, making some documentation, research analysis, and writing a description of how to develop Islam Nusantara through educational programs launched by UNUSIA. The stages of planning and formulating the research problem were carried out by collecting data on the new direction and sustainability of Islam Nusantara. The data collection was done in the form of literature study, observation and interviews. After the primary and secondary data had been collected, they were then thoroughly analyzed. This analysis stage is to analyze the content that has been planned with the current situation. This stage analyzes whether the content to be included has met scientific needs in providing an understanding of the focus of the study.

### **Research Findings and Discussion**

#### **UNUSIA and the Development of Islam Nusantara**

Educational development is one of the priorities in the NU organization. Since its establishment in 1926, NU has established various educational units, such as *Madrasah Diniyah Awaliyah*, *Ibtidaiyah*, *Tsanawiyah*, *Mulallimin Wustha* and *Ulya*. NU has as well been intensively involved in various community-based education policy formulations. However, many of those types of educational institutions does not belong absolutely to the Nahdlatul Ulama organization, including universities. In 1998 in order to develop higher education, the Nahdlatul Ulama Board (PBNU) formed a foundation called the Nahdlatul Ulama Higher Education Foundation through decree of PBNU Number 929/A.II.03/6/1998. In 1999, this foundation furthermore collaborated with NU leaders to plan the establishment of the in Nahdlatul Ulama University (UNU). This idea began to be realized in the first step of the establishment of the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic College in 2003.

In 2010, based on the results of the PBNU Plenary Meeting in Wonosobo, it was mandatory for higher education management to use the legal entity of the Nahdlatul Ulama

Association. Therefore, the Nahdlatul Ulama Higher Education Foundation dissolved itself and all of the foundation's assets including STAINU Jakarta were managed directly by the Nahdlatul Ulama Association. In organizing higher education, the PBNU established the Nahdlatul Ulama Higher Education Organizing Body which became an extension of the Nahdlatul Ulama Association in carrying out the task of replacing the foundation and working on the establishment of the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama University in Jakarta.

In 2015, the University Operating Permit was granted through the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 557 / E / O / 2014 with 10 (ten) Study Programs. And In 2016, through the recommendation of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia and the recommendation of the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, the Nahdlatul Ulama board issued a decree on the merger of STAINU Jakarta to the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama University. Through the Decree of the Director General of Higher Education, STAINU Jakarta Officially became the Islamic Faculty of the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama. With this merger, the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama University manages 16 Study Programs. Until today, the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama University has continued to be developed towards a leading university both within NU and at the national level.

Furthermore, the implementation of UNUSIA Jakarta is supported by several legal aspects which include: 1) Decree of the Minister of Law and Human Rights of the republic of Indonesia Number: AHU-119.AH.01.08 of 2013 concerning the approval of the Amendment to the Articles of Association and Supervisory of the Nahdlatul Ulama Association, abbreviated as NU; 2) Deed Number 04 dated April 10, 2013 drawn up before Notary Munyati Sulam, SH; 3) Decree of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board dated September 15, 2016 No. 98 / A.II.04.d / 09/2016 concerning the Ratification of the Structure of the DKI Jakarta Nahdlatul Ulama Higher Education Organizing Agency (BPPPTNU); 4) Recommendation of the Directorate General of Islamic Education of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia No. 544 / Dj.I / Dt.IV / PP.03.2 / 02/16 concerning the Merger of STAINU Jakarta to UNU Indonesia Jakarta; 5) Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 557 / E / O / 2014 concerning the Establishment Permit of the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama University in Central Jakarta City, Province of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta which is organized by the Nahdlatul Ulama Association; 6) Recommendation of the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education dated January 4, 2017 No. II / C / KL / 2017 concerning the Unification of the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic College to the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama

University; 7) Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education dated September 4, 2017 Number: 4814 of 2017 concerning Permit to Change the Name of the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic College Jakarta to become the Faculty of Islamic Religion at the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama University; 8) Decree of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board No. 201 / B.II / 07/11/2015 concerning the Merger of the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic High School (STAINU) Jakarta to the Nahdlatul Ulama University (UNU) Indonesia Jakarta; and 9) Decree of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board regarding the UNUSIA STATUTA.

It is within the UNUSIA, Islam Nusantara is mainly developed. The university is obviously characterized by Islam Nusantara since it is the mandate of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU) to the university. In this regards, Islam nusantara is a kind of special task to develop and pursue. Currently, under the Faculty of Islam Nusantara, there have been undergraduate, master and doctorate programs. And the responses to these programs are quite extensive and enthusiastic from Indonesian Muslim students, especially those who coming from members of the Nahdlatul Ulama.

To develop Islam Nusantara, all students in all three levels of studies are required to make scientific papers on the subject of Islam and the Indonesia culture. These two subjects in the UNUSIA seem to have become one breath in the scholarship of Islam Nusantara. It develops the Islamic scientific treasures of the archipelago and contributes to the progress of the Indonesian nation and state.

Furthermore, the UNUSIA development is very important because what is being built is diversity, in which Islam Nusantara is shaped to respect differences of color, race and religion, promoting tolerance, peace and harmony in life among various communities.

### **Developing Islam Nusantara**

Since Islam Nusantara currently remains in the process of becoming, UNUSIA carries out some approaches in order to form and evolve Islam Nusantara to become an established and stable discipline of science. Among other things, the university seems to mainly utilize three approaches in building Islam Nusantara. First, the historical-anthropological approach. This approach defines Islam Nusantara as the distinctive Islam of Indonesia and the Islamic culture of the archipelago. In the first sense of the term Islam Nusantara is understood as a distinctly Indonesian-style Islam, a combination of theological Islamic values with the values of local traditions, culture and customs in the country. In this context, the culture of a certain region or country occupies an equal position with Arabic culture in absorbing and carrying out Islamic teachings. Furthermore,

the Islam Nusantara is seen as an Islam that only belongs to Indonesia, namely a heterogeneous Islamic style of the Archipelago. One region to another has its own characteristics, but has the same spirit. Similarity of breath is the essence and wisdom of the long journey of Islam for centuries in Indonesia, which at least has undergone four phases of development until it has been internalized in Nusantara society.

The second approach used to understand Nusantara Islam is the sociological-anthropological-historical approach. In this regards, Nusantara Islam is understood as what is called factual Islam. In this context, Islam Nusantara is considered as a religious expression of Nusantara Muslims that he gets and understands from Alquran and hadith. This is through the process of factualizing teachings that cannot be separated from the socio-historical background of the Indonesian Muslim community. So people with different backgrounds will also bring up different religious styles, so that it will give rise to many faces of Islam around the world according to the background and culture of the people that exist.

The third approach is the historical-philological approach. It views Islam Nusantara as an independent, empirical Islam. Islam Nusantara is an empirical Islam, distinctive as a result of interaction, contextualization, indigenization, translation, universal Islamic vernacular with social, cultural and literary realities in Indonesia. Islam Nusantara is not only about culture and history, but also the ecology that exists in the archipelago. This can be proven from several Indonesian literary texts that use Malay, Arabic and Javanese. Islam Nusantara is able to create a new writing that integrates Arabic and Javanese / Malay, which is called Pegon. Furthermore, using the same approach, Islam Nusantara is furthermore understood as a typical Indonesian thought which is historically, based on philological data (the text in handwritten form), the Islamic people of the Archipelago (Melayau family) have been able to interpret their teachings according to the context, without causing physical warfare and rejection from the community.

### **New Direction of Islam Nusantara**

Current development demonstrates that Islam Nusantara developed by UNUSIA remains to engage in studies of Islam, culture and nationality. In fact, the problems faced by Indonesia and the world today are increasingly complex. In order to realize the development of Islam Nusantara in the academic realm, the study requires the cooperation of many parties related to academic research in the study of Islam Nusantara. In addition, academic activities are also needed to strengthen Nusantara Islamic studies through a

number of research activities. Apart from being strengthened as a spirit of preaching, Islam Nusantara Islam is needed as well to be strengthened academically as a scientific discipline.

It is in line with this awareness, Faculty of Islam Nusantara held the Nusantara Islam Symposium in February 8, 2020 to respond to the challenges and attempt to direct Islam Nusantara to a new direction. This symposium was an effort to discuss Nusantara Islam in responding to the latest issues of Islam and nationality and responding to global challenges.

Academically, Islam Nusantara still leaves holes that must be covered immediately. Various challenges have also come to question the idea of Nusantara Islam, whether it is really able to answer issues of Islam and nationality in the context of nowness and hereeness. Among other fundamental weaknesses of Islam Nusantara Islam as a science in the academic world is the lack of topics involved. They mainly remain limited to around theological studies, Islamic law, tradition and history. Recent important issues such as injustice that directly touch the fate of the people, like matters of agriculture, climate change, excess development, urbanization, farming, and labor are almost untouched (Suaedy, 2020).

After the holding of the symposium, the Faculty of Islam Nusantara followed up the result and carried out a series of discussions planning for a new direction of the future of Islam Nusantara, There are a number of strategic themes that will be deepened in the development of Islam Nusantara, namely: Textual-Material Sources and Religious Authorities in Islam Nusantara, Archipelago Islamic Perspectives on Minorities, Disabilities and Women, Archipelago Islamic Perspectives on Agrarian Affairs, Agriculture, and Climate Change, Archipelago Islamic Perspectives on Philanthropy, Justice and Poverty Alleviation.

### **Islam Nusantara and Sustainability**

To widely develop a sustainable Islam Nusantara, the UNUSIA through its Faculty of Islam Nusantara conducted various efforts. Among other things, the faculty launched the Journal of Islam Nusantara. It aimed at sharing Islamic studies based on the archipelago, disseminating the studies of worldwide academics and researchers on the Islamic and archipelago themes. In addition, It gathers research results on the same theme, enriches academic networks and develops scientific treasures, especially on Islamic and archipelagic studies at the international level. The launch of the journal was attended by academics from various parts of the world, Asia, Europe, to Africa. They are Maryam Ait Ahmad, senior lecturer at Ibnu Thufail University Morocco and Chairwoman Indonesian-

Moroccan Brotherhood, Morocco; Mahmoodreza Esfandiar, Professor of the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Encyclopedia Islamica Foundation, Tehran and Chancellor of Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Islamshahr Branch, Iran; and Saskia Schaefer, Senior Researcher at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany.

To support the development of Islam Nusantara sustainability, UNUSIA strengthens its intellectual human resources by calling all the Nahdlatul Ulama's academics and researchers who are both currently studying at home and abroad to jointly develop and help UNUSIA. Not only education management experts, but also specialists from various educational background are needed to evolve Islam Nusantara in dealing with religious and social problems.

Furthermore, in order to be widely acknowledged and accepted, Islam Nusantara offers a variety of solutions to global communities in an effort to create world peace and unity, especially in creating harmony within the Muslim community. In this regard, UNUSIA with Islam Nusantara attempts to take part in shaping Indonesia as one of the sources of inspiration for Islamic countries in the world in dealing with religious conflicts and creating peace.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude the aforementioned discussion, this study reveals that there are three important parts explored related to the development of Islam Nusantara at UNUSIA. It evolves some approaches, new future direction and sustainability of Islam Nusantara. The university applies mainly the historical approaches which cover anthropological, sociological and philological histories. It seems that the three approaches successfully build the historical foundation for the formation of Islam Nusantara. However, they likely fail to widely develop Islam Nusantara for the current situation and challenges. Fortunately, UNUSIA through its Faculty of Islam Nusantara, is fully aware of this circumstance, and therefore, it plans to design Islam Nusantara to respond to today humanitarian issues like climate change, poverty, minority, disability, lands conflict, philanthropy using wider multidisciplinary approaches with establishing many academic collaboration. Finally, to make Islam Nusantara more sustainable, It is developed academically supported by various specialists of different scientific backgrounds, and promoted both at home and abroad as an alternative answer to today social problems, especially matters related to conflict and peace building.

## Bibliography

- Alford, P. (12 December 2015). *Nahdlatul Ulama: Indonesia's antidote to Islamism's feral Fringe*, in: *The Australian*.
- Anam, F. K. (2015). *Mabadi 'Asyrah Islam Nusantara Memahami Sepuluh Prinsip Tema Peradaban Indonesia dan Dunia*. Malang: Darkah Media.
- Arifianto, A. R. (2017., January). Islam Nusantara & Its Critics: The Rise of NU's Young Clerics., *RSIS Commentary*, 018.
- Azra, A. (2002). *Islam Nusantara Jaringan Global dan Lokal*. Bandung: : Mizan.
- Azra, A. (2002. ). *Islam Nusantara Jaringan Global dan Lokal*, Bandung: Mizan.
- Azra, A. (2015). *Jaringan Islam Nusantara*. In A. S. Aziz, *Islam Nusantara dari Ushul Fiqh hingga Paham Kebangsaan* . Bandung:: Mizan.
- Basya, M. H. (2007). *Islam Moderat di Asia Tenggara*. In D. H. Sucipto, *Islam Madzhab Tengah Persembahan 70 Tahun Tarmizi Taher*. Jakarta: : Grafindo Khazanah Ilmu.
- Bizawie, Z. M. (2015). *Islam Nusantara Sebagai Subjek dalam Islamic Studies: Lintas Diskursus dan Metodologis*. In A. S. Aziz, *Islam Nusantara dari Ushul Fiqh hingga Paham Kebangsaan*. Bandung: : Mizan.
- Bruinessen, Martin van, 2018. *Indonesian Muslims in a Globalizing World: Westernisation, Arabisation, and Indigenising Responses*, in: *RSIS Working Paper*, No. 311.
- Eliraz, Glora, 2016. *Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama: A Tolerant, Inclusive Message to the Arab Middle East*, in: Middle East Institute, 14 October.
- Evers, Hans-Dieter, 2016. *Nusantara: History of a Concept*, in: *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 89, no. 1.
- Ghozali, Abdul Moqsith. 2015. *Tafsir atas Islam Nusantara: Dari Islamisasi Nusantara sampai Metodologi Islam Nusantara*. Hasil Penelitian 2016. UIN Jakarta
- Hamsyah, Junaidi. 2015. *Epistemologi Pendidikan Islam Nusantara: Studi Interpretatif-Symbolik atas Peran Kampus, Pesantren dan Lembaga Adat*. Jurnal Studi Keislaman. Vol. 15. No. 2. Desember.
- Hosen, Nadirsyah, 2016. *Islam Nusantara: a local Islam with global ambitions? In: New Mandala*, 26 February.
- Huda, Nor. 2013. *Islam Nusantara Sejarah Sosial Intelektual Islam di Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Arruzz Media.
- Keith Loveard, Keith, 2016. *Daesh, Islam Nusantara and shades of grey*, in: *New Mandala*, 14 January.
- Lucking, Mirjam, 2016. *Beyond Islam Nusantara and 'Arabization' Capitalizing 'Arabness' in Madura, East Java*, in: *Asien* 139.
- Luthfi, Khabib Muhammad. 2016. *Islam Nusantara: Relasi Islam dan Budaya Lokal*. Jurnal Shahih, Vol. I. No. 1. Januari-Juni 2016
- Maarif, Ahmad Syafii. 2009. *Islam dalam Bingkai Keindonesiaan dan Kemanusiaan Sebuah Refleksi Sejarah*. Bandung: Mizan Bekerjasama dengan Maarif Institute.

Mansurnoor, I.A., 2009. *Revivalism and Radicalism in Southeast Asian Islam: A Pattern or an Anomaly?* in: *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 11, no. 1

Muhajir, Afifuddin. 2015. *Meneguhkan Islam Nusantara Untuk Peradaban Indonesia dan Dunia*. Dalam Akhmad Sahal dan Munawir Aziz (Eds.), *Islam Nusantara dari Ushul Fiqh hingga Paham Kebangsaan*. Bandung: Mizan.

Qomar, Mujamil. 2012. *Fajar baru Islam Indonesia? Kajian komprehensif Atas Arah Sejarah dan Dinamika Intelektual Islam Nusantara*. Bandung: Mizan.