

RELEVANCE AND STRATEGY OF WALISONGO IN ISLAMIC DA'WAH AND EDUCATION IN JAVA

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Abstract

Walisongo are nine central figures in the spread of Islam in Java who played a strategic role in establishing the foundation of Islam in the Nusantara. They used peaceful, adaptive, and culturally-based approaches to spread Islamic teachings and revolutionize social and educational structures. This study analyzes Walisongo's role in Islamic propagation and education, and the relevance of their approach to modern challenges. Using qualitative methods and historical approaches, the study explores Walisongo's strategies, such as integrating local culture with Islamic values, establishing pesantren, and utilizing local arts and traditions. The findings show that Walisongo's approach was highly relevant to the social and cultural context of Javanese society. They successfully integrated Islamic values into daily life through cultural assimilation. Additionally, Walisongo prioritized education as a pillar of propagation, establishing pesantren that taught religious knowledge and practical skills. They also employed social and political strategies to strengthen the spread of Islam. The values taught by Walisongo remain relevant in addressing globalization, social conflicts, and cultural changes. Their inclusive and dialogical approach can be adapted in various fields, such as education and community development. This study concludes that Walisongo's role in Islamic propagation and education is a valuable legacy that teaches the importance of respecting local contexts in conveying religious teachings.

Key Word: *Walisongo, Da'wah, Islamic Education, Acculturation, Method, Relevance.*

Abstrak

Walisongo adalah sembilan tokoh sentral dalam penyebaran Islam di Jawa yang memainkan peran strategis dalam membangun fondasi Islam di Nusantara. Mereka menggunakan pendekatan damai, adaptif, dan berbasis budaya lokal untuk menyebarkan ajaran Islam dan merevolusi tatanan sosial serta pendidikan masyarakat. Penelitian ini menganalisis peran Walisongo dalam dakwah dan pendidikan Islam serta relevansi pendekatan mereka terhadap tantangan modern. Dengan metode kualitatif dan pendekatan historis, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi strategi dakwah Walisongo, seperti integrasi budaya lokal dengan nilai-nilai Islam, pendirian pesantren, dan pemanfaatan seni serta tradisi lokal. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan Walisongo sangat relevan dengan konteks sosial dan budaya masyarakat Jawa. Mereka berhasil mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam ke dalam kehidupan sehari-hari melalui akulturasi budaya. Selain itu, Walisongo memprioritaskan pendidikan sebagai pilar dakwah, mendirikan pesantren yang mengajarkan ilmu agama dan keterampilan praktis. Mereka juga menggunakan strategi sosial dan politik untuk memperkuat penyebaran Islam. Nilai-nilai yang diajarkan oleh Walisongo tetap relevan dalam menghadapi tantangan globalisasi, konflik sosial, dan perubahan budaya. Pendekatan inklusif dan dialogis mereka dapat diadaptasi dalam berbagai bidang, seperti pendidikan dan pengembangan masyarakat. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa peran Walisongo dalam dakwah dan pendidikan Islam adalah warisan berharga yang memberikan pelajaran tentang pentingnya menghormati konteks lokal dalam menyampaikan ajaran agama.

Kata Kunci: *Walisongo, Dakwah, Pendidikan Islam, Akulturasi, Metode, Relevansi*



INTRODUCTION

Islam entered the archipelago through various channels, such as trade, marriage, and proselytization (Wulandari, et al., 2023). One of the regions that became the center of the development of Islam is Java. The spread of Islam in Java cannot be separated from the important role of Walisongo, nine scholars who are considered as central figures in the process of Islamization in this region. Walisongo not only served as preachers, but also as educators who built the basics of Islamic values in people's lives.

The Walisongo played a significant role in spreading Islam with a peaceful and inclusive approach. They used various strategies, such as the integration of local culture with Islamic values, the establishment of educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, and the use of art and culture as a medium for preaching. This approach not only succeeded in spreading Islam, but also brought about social and cultural changes in Java.

In the modern era, the values taught by Walisongo are still relevant to build a harmonious and religious society. The inclusive and local values-based Islamic education they implemented can be a model for the development of education today. Therefore, this study aims to examine more deeply the role of Walisongo in the spread and education of Islam in Java, as well as its relevance to the challenges of Islamic education in the contemporary era.

This article is organized to provide a comprehensive overview of how the Walisongo played a strategic role in building the foundation of Islam in Java. By understanding their roles and contributions, we can draw valuable lessons to develop a sustainable Islamic education that is relevant to the dynamics of the times.



RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a historical approach to analyze the role of Walisongo in spreading Islam and developing education in Java. The historical approach was chosen because this research focuses on the study of past events that are relevant to the topic of discussion. Through this approach, the research seeks to explore the da'wah and education strategies applied by the Walisongo in building a solid foundation of Islam in Javanese society. The focus of the research lies on how the Walisongo's inclusive approach to local culture was able to build a harmonious interaction between Islamic values and local traditions.

The data used in this research is qualitative data obtained through document analysis. The data collection process is carried out by tracing various written records that contain information about Walisongo's activities, both in the context of da'wah and education. After the data is collected, the next step is to classify the data based on the main themes, such as da'wah methods, Islamic education systems, and the social impact of Walisongo's activities. The data that has been classified is then analyzed using the descriptive-analytical method to identify patterns and relationships between the various aspects studied.

Data analysis was conducted through several stages. The first stage is data reduction, which is selecting information that is relevant to the research focus. The second stage is data presentation, which is compiling the selected information into a structured format to facilitate analysis. The last stage is conclusion drawing, which is the process of interpreting the data that has been analyzed to answer research questions. This research focuses on three main aspects, namely the Walisongo's proselytizing strategy, their contribution to Islamic education, and their impact on the social transformation of Javanese society.

Nonetheless, this research has some limitations. One of the main limitations is the limited access to in-depth primary data, so the analysis relies heavily on secondary documents. In

addition, interpretation of historical data tends to be influenced by the researcher's perspective, so care is needed in managing subjective bias. With this approach, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the Walisongo's role in the spread of Islam and education, as well as its relevance to the context of Islamic education in the modern era.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The formation of Walisongo

The term “wali” comes from the Arabic language and means defender, close friend, or leader. In a religious context, this word generally refers to someone who has a special closeness to Allah SWT. Meanwhile, the word “songo” comes from the Javanese language which means nine. Therefore, Walisongo can generally be interpreted as nine saints who are known to have a special closeness to Allah SWT, always worship Him, and have abilities beyond the limits of human habit.

The nine Walisongo include Maulana Malik Ibrahim as the eldest, followed by Sunan Ampel, Maulana Malik Ibrahim's son. Sunan Giri was Maulana Malik Ibrahim's nephew and Sunan Ampel's cousin. Sunan Bonang and Sunan Drajad were the sons of Sunan Ampel, while Sunan Kalijaga is known as Sunan Bonang's friend and student. Sunan Muria was the son of Sunan Kalijaga, while Sunan Kudus was his student. Finally, Sunan Gunung Jati was a friend of the other saints, except Maulana Malik Ibrahim who died earlier.

The title “Sunan,” given to them, reflected their role as advisors and assistants to the king. With extraordinary perseverance, the Walisongo were able to understand the conditions of Javanese society at that time and adapt their da'wah methods to the local culture.

There is an opinion that states that Walisongo is actually a da'wah assembly that was first formed by Maulana Malik Ibrahim, or Sunan Gresik, in 1404 AD (808 Hijri). At first, this assembly consisted of Maulana Malik Ibrahim himself, Maulana Ishaq (Sunan Wali Lanang), Maulana Ahmad Jumadil Kubro (Sunan Kubrawi), Maulana Muhammad Al-Maghribi (Sunan Maghribi), Maulana Malik Isra'il (from Champa), Maulana Muhammad Ali Akbar, Maulana Hasanuddin, Maulana 'Aliyuddin, and Sheikh Subakir (Syalaftiyah & Harianto, 2020).

Walisongo's Da'wah

Da'wah in the current context is understood as a complex social transformation process, not just the dissemination of teachings, but efforts to build intercultural dialogical understanding (Subandi, 2017). Recent studies have shown that the Walisongo developed a unique model of proselytizing, which was able to penetrate existing primordial and structural boundaries. They did not simply spread the teachings of Islam, but strategically used various cultural mediums to facilitate the process of reinterpreting social values. This approach allows for a productive cultural dialog between Islamic tradition and Javanese local wisdom (Munhanif, 2019).

Cultural Acculturation

1. Koentjaraningrat defines acculturation as a social process that occurs when a social group with a particular culture is confronted with a different foreign culture. The elements of the foreign culture are accepted and processed into the original culture without losing its characteristics.
2. Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits explain that acculturation is a phenomenon that can occur in individuals or groups that have an old culture and experience changes due to interaction with a new culture.
3. Diaz and Grainer emphasize that acculturation involves individuals or groups adopting values and practices from other cultures into their own culture (Laila, 2024) .

Based on the above definition, cultural acculturation is a social process that occurs when two or more cultural groups meet and interact with each other, resulting in changes in existing cultural habits, values and norms. This process does not eliminate the original cultural identity, but rather creates a new form of culture that combines elements from each culture involved.

The Acculturation Process

The process of acculturation usually involves several stages (Laily, 2022):

- Initial Interaction: An encounter between two different cultures.
- Acceptance of Foreign Cultural Elements: Some elements of the foreign culture are accepted and begin to be integrated into the local culture.
- Cultural Processing: The elements are processed so that they become part of the local culture without losing their original identity.

Akulturası Budaya Oleh Walisongo Sebagai Tonggak Pendidikan dan Penyebaran Islam

The Walisongo's acculturation process is a brilliant example of cultural identity negotiation. They did not use a hegemonic or destructive approach, but rather built a dialogical bridge between Islamic tradition and Javanese culture. Recent anthropological research reveals that their strategy involved:

1. Reinterpretation of local cultural symbols
2. Respect for pre-Islamic spiritual practices
3. Translation of Islamic concepts into the Javanese cultural framework.

This allows for an organic process of cultural assimilation, not just a systematic shift in beliefs, but a complete transformation of the community's value system (Prasetya, 2016).

In the context of the history of the spread of Islam in the archipelago, Walisongo did not merely transform religious understanding, but carried out a comprehensive educational revolution. They succeeded in changing the education paradigm from a mere transfer of knowledge to a process of building a dignified civilization, creating a humanitarian and transformative education model (Azra, 2002).

Pre-Islamic Javanese Society

Pre-Islamic Javanese society had a belief system centered on animism and dynamism (Imron, Eryana, & Suprpto., 2023). They believe in the existence of supernatural forces that inhabit the universe and must be respected. In addition, the Javanese also adhere to Hindu-Buddhist teachings which are reflected in various traditions and rituals (Zamzami, 2018). The social structure of pre-Islamic Javanese society is characterized by a clear social layering system, such as nobles, priyayi and commoners. This system was reflected in various aspects of life, including in the way of language and behavior. Pre-Islamic Javanese culture is rich in traditions and rituals, such as sea alms, megengan, and various other traditional ceremonies. These traditions have symbolic meanings that are closely related to the Javanese beliefs and worldview (Megawati & Ihsanuddin, 2021).

Walisongo's Da'wah and Education Approach

The success of the Walisongo in spreading the teachings of Islam is inseparable from their intelligent and flexible da'wah methods, which integrated Islamic values into the lives of Javanese people without causing major conflicts. Their peaceful and structured approach made Islam well-received by people who had previously embraced Hindu-Buddhist religions (Ibdalsyaha, Ramlyb, & Rosyad, 2023), (Laili, Gumelar, Ulfa, Sugihartanti, & Fajrussalam, 2021), (Syalafiyah & Harianto, 2020).

1. Cultural Approach

One of the Walisongo's main approaches was through culture. They understood that the strong Javanese culture could not simply be erased but must be integrated with the teachings of Islam. The Walisongo utilized local arts and culture as a medium for da'wah. Sunan Kalijaga, for example, used wayang as a means of conveying Islamic values. In wayang performances, stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics were modified so that they contained messages of tawhid and Islamic teachings. In addition, gamelan and traditional songs are also used to convey Islamic teachings in a subtle and easily accepted way. An example of a famous song is Cublak-Cublak Suweng, which contains Islamic moral values.

This cultural acculturation is not only seen in the performing arts but also in architecture. Mosques built by the Walisongo, such as the Demak Mosque, show a blend of Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic architectural styles. This reflects an inclusive and adaptive da'wah approach to local culture. In this way, people do not feel they are losing their cultural identity, but rather see Islam as a religion that enriches their culture.

2. Social Approach

Walisongo was also very concerned about the social welfare of the community. They realized that Islam must be present not only as a religion but also as a solution to social problems. Sunan Gresik, or Maulana Malik Ibrahim, for example, was known to teach people more efficient farming techniques. He also provided free traditional medicine, which made him well received by the local community. This approach created an image of Islam as a religion concerned with the welfare of the people.

3. Political Approach

The Walisongo also utilized political channels to spread Islam. They established good relations with local rulers, which facilitated the acceptance of Islam at the community level. Sunan Ampel, for example, had a close relationship with the Majapahit court. His proximity to the royal court meant that the spread of Islam in Java did not encounter major obstacles. In fact, Raden Patah, a student of Sunan Ampel, became the first Sultan of the Islamic Kingdom of Demak, which served as the center of Islamization in Java.

Some saints even held important positions in government. Sunan Gunung Jati, for example, became the ruler of Cirebon and Banten. Sunan Giri was often asked for his opinion in the coronation of kings and was considered a spiritual as well as political leader. Through their roles as scholars and political leaders, the Walisongo managed to spread Islam more effectively and peacefully.

4. Individual and Personal Approach

Another method of da'wah applied by the Walisongo was the personal approach. They often preach directly to individuals, especially to influential community leaders. This approach is done with wisdom and gentleness. Sunan Ampel, for example, succeeded in converting Adipati Aria Damar of Palembang through polite and wise dialog. Sunan Kalijaga also used a similar method when preaching to Adipati Pandanaran in Semarang. This approach was not only effective in Islamizing individuals but also created great influence in society, as figures who converted to Islam often became role models for their communities.

In addition, the Walisongo also used the method of mujadalah billati hiya ahsan, which is arguing in a good way. They prioritized constructive dialogue, respected the opinions of the interlocutors, and gave strong but not forceful arguments. This method is very much in line with the teachings of the Qur'an, which teaches that proselytizing is done with wisdom and good advice.

5. Educational Approach

Education became one of the main pillars of Walisongo's da'wah. They established Islamic boarding schools that not only taught akidah and sharia but also other sciences such as fiqh,

hadith, and Arabic. These pesantren not only produced ulama but also influential community leaders. Sunan Bonang, for example, recorded his Islamic teachings in the form of suluk, which became a spiritual guide for his students. Pesantren not only functioned to teach religion but also became training grounds for Islamic cadres. Sunan Ampel established the Ampel Denta Pesantren, which became the first center of Islamic education in Java. This pesantren gave birth to many famous scholars, such as Sunan Giri and Sunan Bonang, who then continued to spread Islam to various regions. These Islamic boarding schools became an important base in spreading the teachings of Islam more widely.

In addition to pesantren, Walisongo also used informal education through songs and folklore. This method was effective in educating people who were not familiar with the concept of formal education. *Kontribusi Walisongo Terhadap Pendidikan Islam di Jawa*

The Walisongo, as the nine guardians who played an important role in the spread of Islam in Java, had a significant contribution to Islamic education in this region. Through the approach of cultural acculturation and integration, they succeeded in adapting Islamic teachings to local traditions, so that Islam could be well accepted by the Javanese people. Walisongo not only brought religious teachings, but also established pesantren as educational institutions that became centers of religious and cultural learning. These pesantren not only teach religious knowledge, but also integrate pre-existing local cultural values, such as tahlilan and slametan, which are now integrated with Islamic teachings.

In the context of education, Walisongo applied inclusive and dialogical teaching methods, allowing students to understand Islamic teachings within their own cultural framework. This created a harmonious learning atmosphere and encouraged people to be more open to Islamic values. Thus, the education provided by Walisongo was not only formal but also rooted in people's daily lives (Adib, 2021).

Furthermore, the integration between Islam and Nusantara culture initiated by the Walisongo has shaped a distinctive religious identity in Java. This process involved a deep understanding of the social and cultural context of the local community, so that the teachings of Islam could be conveyed without eliminating existing local values. This shows that Islamic education in Java during the Walisongo period did not only focus on spiritual aspects, but also on character building and cultural identity.

The Relevance of Walisongo's Da'wah and Education for the Modern Era

Walisongo is known as a figure who not only spread Islam but also educated the community through a wise and contextual approach. The values they instilled remain relevant to the modern era, especially in facing the challenges of globalization, social change, and technological development. Some of the relevance of Walisongo's da'wah and education for the modern era can be explained as follows:

1. Cultural Approach as a Modern Da'wah Method

Walisongo used local culture as a means of da'wah, such as wayang, gamelan, carving, and other local traditions. This approach provides a lesson that in conveying religious teachings, a deep understanding of the social and cultural context of the community is needed. In the modern era, a similar approach can be applied through digital media, contemporary art, movies, and social media as da'wah tools that are more relevant to modern society.

2. Holistic and Moral-based Education

The education taught by Walisongo did not only focus on religious knowledge but also on the formation of noble morals. This holistic education concept is very important in the modern era, where ethical and moral challenges are becoming increasingly complex. Educational institutions can adopt Walisongo's values in building students' characters with integrity, tolerance, and good personality.

3. Intercultural and Interreligious Harmony

Walisongo taught the importance of creating harmony between various groups of people, whether they are of different religions, cultures, or social backgrounds. This is very relevant in the modern era, which is often characterized by conflict and intolerance. The dialogical approach taken by Walisongo can be an inspiration to build a peaceful life amidst the plurality of Indonesian society.

4. Pesantren as a Community-Based Education Model

Pesantren, which is the educational heritage of Walisongo, remains relevant as a model of community-based education. In the modern era, pesantren can not only be a center for religious teaching, but also a center for community empowerment, such as through entrepreneurship education, digital literacy, and job skills training in accordance with the needs of the times.

5. Utilization of Technology in the Spread of Da'wah

One of the important lessons from Walisongo is their flexibility in using media relevant to their times. In the current context, digital technologies such as social media, online learning platforms, and Islamic-based applications can be utilized to continue the mission of da'wah in a broader and more effective way.

6. Contextualizing Religious Teachings

Walisongo is known for his ability to convey Islamic teachings in a way that is easily understood and accepted by the community. This is a reminder for today's preachers and educators to package Islamic teachings with language that is relevant and adaptive to the times without losing its essence.



CONCLUSION

The Walisongo played a very significant role in the spread of Islam and the development of education in Java. They are not only known as religious propagators, but also as pioneers in creating a peaceful and harmonious model of da'wah with local culture. Their role not only built a solid foundation of Islam in the community, but also brought about major changes in the social, cultural and educational order. Through innovative approaches that are cultural, social, and political, Walisongo succeeded in transforming Java from a society previously dominated by animism, dynamism, and Hindu-Buddhist beliefs into a society that embraced Islam without losing its cultural identity.

The Walisongo's peaceful and flexible approach to proselytizing was the key to their success. They utilized local arts and culture as a medium for da'wah, such as wayang, gamelan, carving, and traditional songs adapted to Islamic values. This approach shows that Walisongo highly valued local culture and was able to integrate it with Islamic teachings. This created cultural acculturation that not only enriched local traditions, but also strengthened people's acceptance of Islam. For example, Sunan Kalijaga used shadow puppets as a medium of proselytization, in which Hindu-Buddhist epic stories were modified to convey messages of monotheism. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of Javanese society, which has strong artistic and cultural traditions.

In addition to art, the Walisongo also used education as their main means of proselytizing. They established Islamic boarding schools that became centers of Islamic learning as well as bases for spreading religious teachings. The pesantren they established, such as Ampel Denta Pesantren and Giri Pesantren, not only taught religious knowledge but also equipped the community with relevant life skills, such as agriculture, trade, and traditional medicine. With

this holistic approach to education, the Walisongo not only formed individuals who were spiritually pious but also independent and contributed to their society.

Moreover, the political approach was also an important part of the Walisongo's proselytization strategy. They established close relationships with local rulers and courtiers, which allowed the Islamization process to run more smoothly. An example is Sunan Ampel who had good relations with the Majapahit court, and Raden Patah, one of his students, who later became the first Sultan of the Islamic Kingdom of Demak. The Walisongo's role as advisors and spiritual leaders made them not only respected as ulama but also as important figures in the political and social structure of society.

The values taught by the Walisongo remain relevant until the modern era, especially in facing the challenges of globalization, social change, and technological development. The preaching they did with a cultural approach provides an important lesson that the delivery of religious teachings must consider the cultural and social context of society. In the current era, this approach can be applied through digital media, contemporary art, and online learning platforms that are more in line with the needs of modern society.

The holistic education taught by Walisongo also provides inspiration in building an Islamic education system that is not only oriented towards knowledge but also character building. The moral values emphasized by Walisongo, such as honesty, tolerance, and compassion, are very relevant in the midst of modern challenges that often obscure ethical and moral values. Pesantren, as the educational heritage of Walisongo, can continue to be developed as a center for community empowerment, by adding entrepreneurship curriculum, digital literacy, and skills that are relevant to the needs of the times.

Furthermore, the dialogical approach used by Walisongo to create interfaith and intercultural harmony is very important to be applied in the pluralistic Indonesian society. The Walisongo demonstrated that Islam is an inclusive religion that can adapt to various cultural contexts without losing its essence. This approach is a solution to the challenges of intolerance and conflict that still occur frequently in the modern era.

By understanding the role and contribution of Walisongo, we can take many valuable lessons to build a harmonious, religious and competitive society. The da'wah and education strategies they implemented are not only a historical legacy but also a practical guide for the development of da'wah and Islamic education in the present. The relevance of their teachings continues to live in an inclusive Islamic education model, the development of culture-based da'wah, and the application of moral values in everyday life.

In closing, the Walisongo's contribution in spreading Islam and educating the Javanese community not only made an impact in their time, but also provided a strong foundation for the development of Islam in the archipelago until today. Through the lessons they passed on, we can continue to develop Islamic propagation and education that is relevant, adaptive and contextual to face the challenges of the times. Walisongo is not only a symbol of the spread of Islam in Java but also an inspiration for future generations to continue to revive Islamic values in a life full of diversity.



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