

BUYA HAMKA'S HISTORICAL THOUGHT AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze Buya Hamka's historical thought, identify the educational values contained within it, and explain its relevance to Islamic education in Indonesia. The research employed a qualitative approach through library research. Data were collected from Buya Hamka's works and various relevant academic sources and analyzed using content analysis and descriptive-analytical methods. The findings reveal that Hamka viewed history not merely as a record of past events but as a means of understanding Sunnatullah, developing human awareness, and drawing lessons for life. His historical thought is founded on three main principles: tawhid as a spiritual foundation, reason as an instrument for critically and objectively understanding historical facts, and morality as the primary value derived from historical events. The educational values embedded in this perspective include strengthening faith, fostering noble character, encouraging critical thinking, promoting exemplary conduct, developing responsibility, and building awareness in shaping civilization. The study concludes that Buya Hamka's historical thought remains highly relevant to Islamic education in Indonesia, particularly in nurturing learners who possess knowledge, strong character, and a balanced integration of intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions amid the challenges of modernization.

Keywords: Buya Hamka; Historical thought; Islamic education; Educational values.

INTRODUCTION

History holds an essential position in human life as a means to understand the trajectory of civilization, reflect on past experiences, and draw lessons to face present and future challenges (Nurhakiky & Mubarak, 2019). In the Islamic perspective, history is understood not merely as a series of elapsed events, but also as a domain containing values of faith, morality, spirituality, and exemplary conduct that serve as life guidelines (Ramadhan, Ramadhani, Anggoro, & Prakosa, 2024). Consequently, historical study occupies a strategic position in Islamic education due to its role in fostering historical consciousness, strengthening Islamic identity, and shaping the character of learners (Rama, 2023).

One prominent scholar who devoted significant attention to historical study was Buya Hamka. Beyond his reputation as an Islamic scholar (*ulama*), man of letters, and educator, Hamka was a thinker who viewed history as a critical component in shaping human civilization (Fitri, 2020). According to Hamka, history should not be reduced to a record of past occurrences; rather, it must be interpreted as a medium to comprehend Sunnatullah and extract wisdom applicable to daily life (Nurhakiky & Mubarak, 2019). This perspective is reflected across his various works that integrate historical, Islamic, and educational dimensions, thereby positioning history as an instrument for moral cultivation, faith reinforcement, and societal civilization building (Putra & Nasution, 2022).

Various issues confronting Islamic education in Indonesia such as the erosion of student character, declining moral consciousness, and the tendency of learning processes to prioritize cognitive achievements over spiritual and ethical values highlight the urgent need to re-strengthen

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educational values. Within this framework, Buya Hamka's historical thought becomes highly relevant for examination because it offers a vision that positions history as a learning medium capable of expanding knowledge while simultaneously building character, strengthening faith, and instilling religious awareness.

Previous studies have examined Buya Hamka from diverse perspectives, including Islamic education, character education, Islamic modernism, and historiography. However, research specifically addressing the intersection between Buya Hamka's historical thought and the development of Islamic education in Indonesia remains relatively limited. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this academic gap through an analysis of Buya Hamka's historical thought and its relevance to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to reconstruct Buya Hamka's historical thought as a conceptual foundation for developing Islamic education in Indonesia. Unlike prior studies that tended to analyze Hamka's views on education, character, or historiography in isolation, this study integrates these three dimensions by examining Hamka's perspective on history as a pedagogical tool embedded with faith, moral values, exemplary leadership, and civilization building. Furthermore, this study analyzes the relevance of these values in addressing contemporary challenges in Islamic education, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of Hamka's historical thought.

Based on the foregoing context, this research focuses on three main research questions: (1) What is historical thought according to Buya Hamka? (2) What educational values are contained within Buya Hamka's historical thought? and (3) What is the relevance of Buya Hamka's historical thought to Islamic education in Indonesia? In alignment with these questions, this study aims to analyze Buya Hamka's historical thought, identify the educational values embedded therein, and explain its relevance to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs historical and biographical approaches within a library research framework. The historical approach is utilized to examine the development of Buya Hamka's historical thought within the context of his era, whereas the biographical approach aims to understand the relationship between Hamka's life trajectory, intellectual background, and personal experiences with his thoughts on history and Islamic education (Wijaya, 2019). Library research was selected because all data utilized in this study were derived from relevant written sources.

The research focus centers on analyzing Buya Hamka's historical thought along with its relevance to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. The object of study encompasses Hamka's philosophy of history, his biographical background and intellectual evolution, and his perspectives on Islamic education. The analysis further explores the connection between his thoughts and various contemporary challenges facing Islamic education in Indonesia.

Data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered from Buya Hamka's core works related to history, education, and Islamic thought, such as *Sejarah Umat Islam* (History of the Islamic Ummah), *Tasawuf Modern* (Modern Sufism), and *Lembaga Budi* (Institute of Character). Secondary data were retrieved from academic journal articles, books, undergraduate theses, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, and other literature pertinent to the research topic.

Data collection was executed through documentation studies by identifying, gathering, and evaluating literature relevant to the study's scope. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using content analysis integrated with a descriptive-analytical technique (Wilson, 2011). The analytical process involved data reduction, thematic categorization, interpretation of Hamka's concepts of history, and contextual analysis regarding their relevance to Islamic education in Indonesia. The findings are presented systematically to provide a comprehensive portrayal of Buya Hamka's intellectual contribution to Islamic education in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Buya Hamka

Buya Hamka, whose full name was Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, was born on February 17, 1908, in Sungai Batang, Maninjau, West Sumatra. He emerged from a family of Islamic scholars (*ulama*) who played a pivotal role in the development of Islamic reform (*tajdid*) in Minangkabau. His father, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (also known as Haji Rasul), was a prominent reformer active in the Muhammadiyah movement who held a deep concern for the renewal of Islamic thought. This religious and intellectual family environment exerted a profound influence on shaping Hamka's character and worldview from an early age (Susanti, 2025).

Hamka's intellectual trajectory was developed not only through formal schooling but also through disciplined self-directed learning (autodidacticism). He studied at Sumatra Thawalib and Diniyyah School Padang Panjang, where he mastered various Islamic traditional disciplines, including *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis), Hadith, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and the Arabic language. In addition, his avid reading habits broadened his horizons in history, philosophy, literature, and modern Islamic thought. This continuous learning process forged Hamka into a Muslim intellectual with a broad perspective and a prolific writing capacity (Karima, 2025).

Hamka's journeys to Yogyakarta and Mecca represented critical milestones in his intellectual growth. In both locations, he engaged with emerging ideas of Islamic reform. These experiences reinforced his conviction that Islamic education must adapt to contemporary developments without abandoning the foundational values of Islamic teachings. This dynamic outlook subsequently informed many of his literary works, missionary activities (*da'wah*), and educational initiatives (Shobahussurur, 2009).

Beyond his reputation as an *ulama* and scholar, Hamka was actively engaged in organizational work, education, journalism, and *da'wah*. His contributions to Muhammadiyah were realized through diverse community empowerment and educational development programs. He co-founded the Tabligh School (*Kulliyatul Muballighin*), an institution designed to train Islamic preachers who possessed both sound religious understanding and broad social awareness. In journalism, Hamka led the editorial boards of *Pedoman Masyarakat* and *Panji Masyarakat*, which served as prominent media platforms for disseminating Islamic ideas, educational insights, and social reform to the public.

Hamka's contribution to Islamic development in Indonesia was further highlighted by his community leadership through lectures, publications, and organizational roles. His appointment as the first General Chairman of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) signified wide recognition of his intellectual authority and leadership capability. Furthermore, his involvement in developing the Al-Azhar Mosque in Jakarta transformed the institution into a vibrant hub for education, preaching, and community development rather than a place of worship alone (Shobahussurur, 2009).

Hamka's dedication to scholarship persisted even during his political imprisonment during the Old Order era. Under incarceration, he continued writing *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, which later became one of the most influential Quranic commentaries in Indonesia. This endeavor demonstrates Hamka's steadfastness in advancing knowledge and spreading Islamic values through written scholarship.

As a scholar, literary figure, historian, and Islamic thinker, Hamka authored numerous works spanning religion, history, education, Sufism, philosophy, and literature. Among his widely known works are *Tasawuf Modern*, *Falsafah Hidup*, *Lembaga Hidup*, *Lembaga Budi*, *Sejarah Umat Islam*, and *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. Through these writings, Hamka demonstrated that Islamic teachings maintain an intrinsic link to character building, intellectual growth, and social well-being. Hamka's life background, intellectual experiences, and multi-faceted contributions significantly influenced his formulation of historical and educational thought. For Hamka, education was not merely oriented toward the acquisition of knowledge, but also toward moral formation, spiritual strengthening, and the development of moral responsibility. This perspective serves as a vital

foundation for understanding the enduring relevance of Buya Hamka's historical thought to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia today (Aisyi, Mahmudah, & Murdan, 2026).

Buya Hamka's Philosophy of History

Every historian inherently views the past through a specific lens, a lens that constitutes their philosophy of history. It is not merely a method, but a reflection of how a thinker interprets patterns, causality, and ultimate purpose behind events. Through this framework, a figure's historical perspective can be examined deeper. In the landscape of Islamic historiography in Indonesia, H. Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah familiarly known as Buya Hamka stands out not merely as a chronicler of past events, but as a philosopher of history who successfully emancipated himself from the hegemony of secular Western positivism (Jambak, 2017). Hamka firmly rejected the reduction of history into a mere heap of chronological dates, dry descriptions, or empirical data reconstructions on paper. For Hamka, history possesses spiritual, theological, humanistic, and teleological dimensions moving dynamically and linearly under the overarching laws of Allah's decree, known as *Sunnatullah* (Fadhly, 2017).

Buya Hamka's historical thought did not emerge in a vacuum. It was shaped by interrelated foundational principles that serve as a framework for understanding human history: the theological pillar (*tawhid*), the rational pillar (reason), and the ethical pillar (morality). (Jambak, 2017) As he expressed in *Ensiklopedia Buya Hamka: Percikan Pemikiran, Penafsiran, Pemahaman, dan Imajinasi Autentik Buya Hamka*:

Tawhid is the soul of Islam, its essence, and the core of all worship in Islam. Tawhid, or belief in the Oneness of Allah, leads to a unity of purpose for all creation. Tawhid is the core of Islamic teaching. Through *tawhid*, a true believer refuses to bow before anything other than Allah. For him, there is no place for fear, hope, or awe except toward Allah Swt. Good character (*akhlak*) is the disposition of the messengers and noble individuals—a steadfast and resilient character. This morality is further strengthened by a central doctrine: destiny (*qadar*). Humans—from the fertilization of the mother's egg by the father's seed, incubated in the womb until birth, growth, struggle, and eventual death—traverse a path that has been laid out. Such is the tapestry of life we observe, and such is the life of all creation according to their respective decrees (Dzaljad, 2019).

Reading this quote highlights a distinct characteristic of Hamka's thought: he does not isolate *tawhid* from *akhlak*, nor *akhlak* from history. All three constitute a single unified breath faith, character, and the earthly trajectory of human life. Among the three pillars supporting Hamka's philosophy of history, *tawhid* is the most deeply rooted. It is not merely a religious dogma, but a comprehensive worldview of reality: that behind the turmoil of human history, there resides a Divine Will governing all things. Hamka views Allah Swt as the *Causa Prima* (the Primary Cause) behind every movement, rise, and fall in human history (Jambak, 2017).

Hamka identifies the governing law of history as *Sunnatullah* Allah's decree that operates objectively, consistently, and without exception. In *Sejarah Umat Islam*, he repeatedly illustrates how great civilizations like Rome and Persia did not fall solely due to enemy swords, but because they violated the social laws established by Allah: justice, unity, and integrity of leadership (Hamka, 2016). The human journey from initial creation, through the zenith of a civilization, to its collapse is governed by this immutable, fixed, and objective law (Hakim, 2017).

Here, Hamka directly diverges from Karl Marx. While Marx identified economics as the driving engine of history, Hamka viewed it merely as one of the wheels, not the driver. For Hamka, history cannot be explained through production statistics or class structures alone. There exist moral and spiritual dimensions that exert a far more decisive influence on the trajectory of a civilization (Jambak, 2017). A nation that upholds justice and preserves unity will endure, whereas a nation experiencing moral decay will be consumed by its own ruin (Hamka, 2016).

A compelling dimension of Hamka's concept of *tawhid* within a historical context is its implication for humans as historical actors. Humans are neither passive spectators nor sole

directors. Man is a *khalifah fi al-ardh*, Allah's representative whose decisions leave indelible footprints both in world history and in the ledger of the afterlife (Nurdianah, 2022). Consequently, *tawhid* does not induce fatalistic passivity; rather, it awakens the realization that human actions bear profound consequences.

Hamka's formulation of *tawhid* leads to an interesting fact often overlooked: Hamka prevented his theological foundation from slipping into fatalism associated with the *Jabariyah* doctrine. *Jabariyah*, a school of thought that treats humans as helpless puppets of fate, was rejected outright by Hamka. Instead, he assigned reason (*akal*) a highly elevated role in analyzing and reconstructing the past. This demonstrates Hamka's commitment to objectivity; he demanded rigorous and rational source criticism (Fitri, 2020). Hamka's primary motivation for writing monumental works such as *Sejarah Umat Islam* and *Perkembangan Kebudayaan Islam* stemmed from his academic distress over the dominance of Western colonial historians (*orientalists*).

According to Hamka's critique, Western orientalist frequently harbored Eurocentric biases that obscured objective facts and deconstructed the history of the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) to weaken the self-esteem and mentality of the Muslim community (Hakim et al., 2020). Therefore, Hamka employed rational analysis as an instrument for historical decolonization demystifying historical records from irrational myths, superstitions, and folklore while liberating the mind of the Indonesian people from the shackles of colonial inferiority (Fitri, 2020). Hamka understood that distorted history was not merely an academic error; a twisted narrative produces generations alienated from their own identity.

This leads to the ultimate pillar envisioned by Hamka: *akhlak* (*morality*), where his intellectual framework achieves its ultimate purpose. Hamka argued that the primary purpose of writing and studying history is not a mere cognitive transfer of knowledge. For Hamka, history is not a report; it is a mirror. Those who look into it honestly will derive *i'tibar* deep lessons extending far beyond memorizing dates and names as well as a living source of moral example (*uswah hasanah*) for present and future generations (Hakim, 2017).

In Hamka's perspective, history carries a prophetic and educational mission. Studying history means undertaking an inner journey to extract *ibrah* (profound wisdom). When Hamka narrated the heroism of Islamic figures, the struggles of the *ulama*, and the resilience of the sultans across *Nusantara*, his primary objective was to transmit moral energy, integrity, and noble character into the hearts of young Indonesians (Hakim et al., 2020).

When Hamka recounted the collapse of a dynasty, he did not dwell solely on counting military forces or economic conditions. He consistently investigated where the moral fabric of leaders and society began to fracture (Hamka, 2016). Hamka's insight on this matter is straightforward yet profound: a nation that has lost its morality need not wait for external enemies to destroy it, for it will collapse from within. At this juncture, one might ask: what is the utility of this historical philosophy if no generation inherits it? Hamka anticipated this question. For him, a history rich in *i'tibar* acquires meaning only when a generation is educated to read it correctly, internalize it honestly, and apply it courageously. Thus, discussing Hamka's philosophy of history without addressing his thoughts on Islamic education leaves the narrative incomplete.

Relevance of Historical thought to Islamic Education According to Buya Hamka

According to Buya Hamka, Islamic education is a process of developing attitudes and personalities characterized by noble character (*akhlak mulia*) to achieve national progress founded upon *Tawhid* (Ani, 2024). In his view, the primary aim of education is to cultivate *insan kamil* the complete human being who maintains a balance between reason, heart, and action, consistently upholding faith (*aqidah*) and morality across all life aspects. In Hamka's thought, education is not merely rational, but also moral and spiritual, aimed at shaping pious individuals whose behavior aligns with Islamic teachings (Lathifah, Mursalin, Khotimah, & Hidayat, 2025).

To comprehend Hamka's educational thought, it is essential to trace his life background and intellectual journey. A thinker's views do not emerge spontaneously; they are forged in response to contemporary societal dynamics. Hamka was born in West Sumatra in 1908 into an

environment immersed in reformist Islamic traditions. His father was a pioneer of the Islamic reform movement influenced by Muhammad Abduh of Egypt (Amir & Rahman, 2025). Hamka grew up within a reformist setting that emphasized rationality, critical thinking, and openness to scientific progress while remaining anchored to the Quran and Sunnah. This background cultivated his conviction that Islam and modern knowledge are not antagonistic, and that Islamic education must address modern challenges without forfeiting its identity.

Hamka was not only a theorist but also a profound critic of the educational realities of his era. He criticized the educational system inherited from Dutch colonialism, which dichotomized religious knowledge and secular sciences. This division was not only un-Islamic but also socially harmful. Education oriented exclusively toward material advancement produces intellectually capable individuals who lack moral orientation (Basyit, 2019). Furthermore, Hamka criticized traditional *pesantren* systems that encouraged blind imitation (*taqlid*). For Hamka, Islam is a religion that exalts reason and encourages independent thought. An educational system that suppresses intellectual freedom contradicts the spirit of Islam itself (Azizah & Imawan, 2025).

More than four decades after his passing, Hamka's educational thought remains relevant as a critique of current conditions in Indonesia. Character crises manifested in rampant bullying, corruption among educated elites, and youth violence demonstrate that the modern educational system has struggled to shape well-rounded human beings. Education has turned excessively toward academic achievements while neglecting the deepest dimension of pedagogy: moral and character formation (Kumalasari & Wibowo, 2021). Herein lies the relevance of Hamka's *insan kamil* concept. In the Era of Society 5.0, where technology occupies the center of human life, there is an urgent need for individuals who are spiritually and morally grounded, not merely digitally skilled. Hamka's vision of balancing reason, heart, and spirit provides a solid philosophical foundation for re-evaluating Indonesian Islamic education, including within the framework of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Emancipated Curriculum) (Lathifah et al., 2025).

Beyond policy considerations, the relevance of Hamka's thought is reflected in his promotion of intellectual freedom within an Islamic framework. Hamka recognized Islam as a faith that affirms the intellect; hence, sound education should train students to think logically and exercise independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), rather than passively adopting legacy opinions without comprehension (Kasmuri, Candra, Ghofur, & Nasution, 2023). This perspective is pertinent given that some Islamic educational institutions maintain rigid instructional models, while radicalism occasionally arises from limited critical thinking and a lack of religious inclusiveness (Nurhakiky & Mubarok, 2019). Thus, Hamka's synthesis of reason and revelation offers a framework for fostering an inclusive, critical, yet faithfully grounded Islamic education.

Hamka's relevance is also visible in his historic critique of traditional *pesantren* systems, an issue now addressed through the transformation of modern *pesantren*. Many contemporary *pesantren* integrate religious curricula with general sciences, mirroring Hamka's rejection of educational dichotomy (Ayu & Sari, 2025). This transformation demonstrates that Hamka's thought was not merely an abstract ideal, but a viable vision realized within Indonesian Islamic educational practices. Regarding educators, Hamka asserted that teachers must serve not merely as instructors, but as living role models for their students (Cahyani & Zahwa, 2024). This principle serves as an essential reminder amid professional ethics violations involving educators in Indonesia. Strengthening teacher character, as emphasized by Hamka, demands collective attention so that educational values are transmitted holistically through both instructional content and personal example (Cahyani & Zahwa, 2024).

Ultimately, Hamka himself represented a living embodiment of the *insan kamil* concept he conceptualized. As a figure who mastered diverse fields spanning Quranic exegesis, literature, history, and philosophy while remaining steadfast in faith, Hamka demonstrated that integrating knowledge and faith is achievable (Alfian, 2019). Nevertheless, because Hamka's thought is conceptual, continuous efforts are needed to translate his principles into concrete policies, curricula, and classroom practices so that his ideas extend beyond theoretical discourse (Naili, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Buya Hamka's historical thought views history not merely as a chronicle of past events, but as a medium for understanding *sunnatullah* and deriving actionable life lessons (*ibrah*). This perspective is anchored upon three primary pillars tawhid, reason, and morality which serve as the basis for interpreting historical processes and shaping human character. The educational values embedded in this framework encompass strengthening faith, cultivating noble character, fostering critical thinking, promoting exemplary conduct, and instilling social responsibility. Consequently, Buya Hamka's historical thought maintains strong relevance to the advancement of Islamic education in Indonesia by emphasizing a balance between intellectual knowledge, faith, and moral character in shaping students equipped to navigate contemporary challenges without abandoning Islamic principles.

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