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ISLAMIC FEMINISM IN WOMEN'S EDUCATION AT AISYIYAH AS THE INTELLECTUAL LEGACY OF AHMAD DAHLAN AND SITI WALIDAH

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ABSTRACT

In the early 20th century, Indonesian women faced limited access to education due to a strong patriarchal culture and a lack of opportunities for public participation. This study aims to examine and analyze Islamic feminism in Aisyiyah's women's education as the intellectual legacy of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and Nyai Siti Walidah, as well as its relevance to the development of gender-equitable Islamic education today. This study employs a qualitative method using the history of ideas approach and library research. Data were collected from the archives of the Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah organizations, biographies of key figures, and relevant journal articles, and were then analyzed using a descriptive-interpretive approach. The results of the study indicate that: first, Islamic feminism within Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah emerged as a religious response to gender inequality, not as an adoption of Western liberal feminism; second, the educational thought of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah positions women as equal subjects of education through the concept of the "four pillars of education"; third, the Aisyiyah tradition has translated these ideas into networks of formal and non-formal education as well as women's empowerment programs that continue to this day. This study affirms Aisyiyah as a model of education-based Islamic feminism and a religious movement that integrates Indonesia's sociocultural context with organizational practices. This intellectual legacy needs to be revitalized as the foundation for developing gender-responsive curricula and leadership development programs in Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: *Islamic feminism, Aisyiyah, Ahmad Dahlan, Siti Walidah, women's education.*

INTRODUCTION

In the early 20th century, Indonesian women were severely marginalized in terms of access to education, dominated by a patriarchal culture, and had low levels of public participation. The social system in place at that time placed women in a subordinate position beneath men, viewing their primary role as being in the domestic sphere as homemakers and as complements to men(Abdullah, 2019). Patriarchal culture permeated nearly every aspect of society, shaping social constructs that restricted women's freedom of movement and limited their basic rights, particularly the right to a proper education (Sakina & A, 2017). Most women were only permitted to attend school if they came from the nobility or the priyayi class, while women from the general populace were generally not allowed to pursue formal education. Even when the Ethical Policy began to open educational opportunities, access for women remained limited and fraught with social

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barriers due to discriminatory gender norms. These conditions resulted in most Indonesian women not being actively involved in the public sector, the bureaucracy, or politics (Nursaptini et al., 2020).

A shift in thinking about women began to emerge through the movements and ideas of reformers such as Kartini and Dewi Sartika. These two figures in the women's movement believed that education was the key to opening opportunities for women to develop, gain a broad range of knowledge, and elevate their status in social and cultural life (Abdullah, 2019). Besides Kartini and Dewi Sartika, who were pioneers of reform in women's education, Siti Walidah, together with Ahmad Dahlan, also spearheaded the reform of women's education based on Islamic teachings. As an educational reformer and the founder of Muhammadiyah, Ahmad Dahlan played a key role in opening access to education for women (Sitepu et al., 2025). Ahmad Dahlan believed that education is the right of every Muslim without gender discrimination, with the aim of enabling women to contribute to societal progress. His collaboration with his wife, Nyai Siti Walidah, laid the foundation for the Aisyiyah women's movement, which emerged as the first modern Islamic women's organization in Indonesia a platform for the development and empowerment of women under the auspices of Muhammadiyah (Muthrofin & Muchtar, 2023).

Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah had a deep commitment to Islamic education, particularly for women. They firmly believed that the world would not progress fully if women were confined to the kitchen (Mulya et al., 2025). Through the Aisyiyah organization, Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah championed women's education, providing them with opportunities to develop their potential and instilling progressive Islamic values. They were also active in disseminating scientific ideas through religious study circles and education, making them symbols of change for women within Muhammadiyah (Ulhaq et al., 2025). This organization champions progressive Islamic values, in which an "advanced" woman is understood as one who develops both structurally and culturally. Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah viewed that, from an Islamic perspective, an advanced woman is one who can achieve justice and equality with men without discrimination ('Aeni & Binaningrum, 2022).

Siti Walidah emphasized that Islam does not prevent women from studying, working, and participating in society. In fact, she views education as part of women's jihad in upholding humanistic values and social justice. The impact of the educational movement led by Siti Walidah through Aisyiyah has been far-reaching and profound. Aisyiyah has become a vital platform for women to access formal and non-formal education, including religious instruction, life skills, and basic literacy. From the outset, Aisyiyah's activities were designed to instill self-confidence, knowledge, and skills in women so they could play an active role in the public sphere(Fatimah et al., 2025). Therefore, this organization does not merely produce religious women, but also women who can lead and inspire those around them.

Aisyiyah, as an institution focused on women's education and empowerment in Indonesia, practices a unique and contextual form of Islamic feminism, distinct from

Western feminism, which tends to be liberal and secular. The practice of Islamic feminism in Aisyiyah emphasizes women's development within the framework of authentic Islamic religious values that are consistent with the local sociocultural context (Ulhaq et al., 2025) (Ulhaq et al., 2025). Furthermore, Aisyiyah plays a crucial role in expanding access to education for women as well as in their economic and social empowerment, which serves as a key pillar in strengthening women's position within a society that remains patriarchal (Nasution et al., 2025). A study of Aisyiyah and its role is highly relevant for understanding a model of local Islamic feminism unique to Indonesia, as this model represents the integration of religious teachings, culture, and women's aspirations as actualized within the Indonesian social context.

Previous studies have extensively examined the contributions of Siti Walidah and Ahmad Dahlan separately, whether from a biographical perspective, in terms of their organizational roles, or regarding their contributions to Islamic education (Mardiah et al., 2022; Muthrofin & Muchtar, 2023), However, these studies merely describe the lives and roles of the two figures in a descriptive manner, without using Islamic feminism as a basis for analysis; as a result, the concept of gender justice in the thought of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah remains implicit rather than explicitly articulated. Other studies have highlighted Aisyiyah as a progressive women's movement from sociological and institutional perspectives (Fatmawati et al., 2020; Seniwati & Lestari, 2019), This study focuses on describing the movement's organizational structure and its social impact, without tracing it back to the theological roots that underpin its legitimacy. Meanwhile, a media analysis-based study of the Suara Aisyiyah magazine further enriches our understanding of Aisyiyah's discourse during the early period of its movement. A study by Sofia (2021) traces the early concepts of community empowerment contained in the magazine during the era of the national movement, while Bariqi & Hadiyanti (2025) examine more specifically the discourse on gender equality discussed in the same magazine during the same period. Both studies demonstrate that the concepts of empowerment and equality are not recent developments but have been an integral part of Aisyiyah's identity since the organization's inception.

However, this media-based study is limited to an analysis of the discourse found in texts published by the organization, without tracing it back to the original sources of ideas that gave rise to this discourse, namely the thoughts of Aisyiyah's founders themselves. A study conducted by Yumna & Maksum (2024) reveals that Muhammadiyah supports the existence of the feminist movement or ideology itself, Aisiyah, as a women's movement within Muhammadiyah, serves as a foundation for gender equality no longer merely an organization but one that has reaffirmed its role in addressing contemporary women's issues. However, this study has not yet traced the origins of these organizations back to the founding ideas of Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah in a genealogical sense.

This study addresses this gap by positioning Aisyiyah's Islamic feminism as a discourse on gender equality grounded in the reinterpretation of Islamic texts rather than a rejection of them and developed as an integrative model that combines religious teachings, local culture, and educational practices, all of which can be directly traced back

to the thought of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah. Therefore, this study employs a "history of ideas" approach, as popularized by Lovejoy & Stanlis (2017), which traces the concept of the "unit-idea", that is, a fundamental idea that is elementary, recurrent, and dynamic as it traverses various thinkers and socio-historical contexts. Through this perspective, Ahmad Dahlan's theological view on the obligation to learn without gender bias is positioned as a "unit-idea," the trajectory of whose dissemination is investigated. This study specifically examines how this idea was transmitted, interpreted, and institutionally realized by Siti Walidah through the establishment of 'Aisyiyah and the training of female educators. The significance of this approach lies in its ability to map the transformation of ideas from the theological-discursive dimension into the realm of institutional practice. Furthermore, this study fills a research gap in previous media-centered studies by recontextualizing the discourse in the Suara 'Aisyiyah magazine within the historical roots of the idea.

Based on the above discussion, the researcher chose this topic because the ideas proposed by Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah regarding women's education play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality for women by establishing the Aisyiyah organization which focuses on education and women's empowerment grounded in Islam under the auspices of Muhammadiyah. Through the ideas and actions of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah which integrated religious education with modern knowledge women have gained broader and more open access to actively contribute and take leadership roles in social, economic, and religious spheres. This study aims to examine and analyze Islamic feminism in Aisyiyah's women's education as the intellectual legacy of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and Nyai Siti Walidah, as well as its relevance to the development of gender-equitable Islamic education today. The examination of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah's educational philosophy in this study is expected not only to provide in-depth insights into the historical and contemporary relevance of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah but also to serve as inspiration for advancing women's equality and developing an equitable education system in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomena experienced by the research subjects including their thoughts, attitudes, and actions within their historical context (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023). The data are presented in a narrative and descriptive form. Specifically, this study employs the history of ideas approach, as pioneered byLovejoy & J. Stanlis (2017), which traces the "unit-idea," an elementary concept that can transform across thinkers and socio-historical contexts, complemented by Skinner (1969), which emphasizes that ideas must be understood within the social, political, and linguistic context in which they are articulated. This approach is used to trace the thoughts, roles, and contributions of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah in the struggle for women's emancipation and education through the Aisyiyah organization. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include (1) the organization's periodicals, namely the October

1933 issue of the magazine Soeara 'Aisjijah (Vol. VIII, No. 10), which contains a report on the autonomous management of the movement's charitable activities by Aisyiyah branches, and the 1975 issue, which features coverage of Aisyiyah women's international involvement; (2) visual documentation, in the form of a photograph of the Aisyiyah Central Executive Board at the 17th Grand Congress in Yogyakarta (1939); (3) personal correspondence, specifically a letter from Prof. Dr. Tudjimah to the Aisyiyah Central Leadership (1972) regarding her experiences in the Netherlands; and (4) official curriculum documents, namely the Qa'idah Pengadjaran Kweekschool Muhammadiyah, which details the Muhammadiyah tiered educational system from the 1920s to the 1930s. All primary sources were obtained from the Muhammadiyah Museum collection at Ahmad Dahlan University on November 20, 2025. Secondary sources include biographies of key figures, journal articles, and relevant previous research findings. Data collection was conducted through documentary and literature reviews, supplemented by analyses contained within these sources. Data analysis was performed using a descriptive-interpretive approach, following the stages of heuristics (source collection), source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, to unpack the ideas of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah regarding education and women's emancipation within an Islamic framework.

External criticism was conducted to verify the authenticity and provenance of the three types of primary sources mentioned above. Soera Aisjijah is a copy of the original archive document, not a reprint or digital reproduction which has been verified directly at the Muhammadiyah Museum. Internal criticism assesses the credibility of the document's content by comparing information across different primary sources, for example, by cross-referencing claims regarding the institutional autonomy of Aisyiyah branches in the 1933 edition with a photograph of the 1939 leadership and cross-checking these against findings from verified secondary studies to avoid accepting one-sided claims from a single source. Interpretation is conducted within the framework of the "history of ideas" explained in the introduction, namely by tracing Ahmad Dahlan's theological premises as "unit-ideas" and situating them within the socio-historical context of their emergence and institutionalization through Aisyiyah, so that the facts gathered from various primary and secondary sources are woven into a coherent narrative, rather than merely a list of isolated facts. The final stage, historiography, involves writing the narrative resulting from this interpretation into the argumentative structure of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The History of Feminism and the Emergence of Islamic Feminism

Feminism is a movement born out of the need for liberation and justice for women. The emergence of feminism began in the 17th through the 20th centuries, when women spoke out in support of equal political rights for women; subsequently, the feminist movement emerged, initiated by the moral conscience of women in Europe who had experienced oppression (Yumna & Maksum, 2024). This movement sought to restore women's status as empowered beings living freely freedom that, of course, comes with

consequences, free from discrimination and oppression through education, awareness-raising, and the defense of women's rights, which had long been quietly stripped away by men(Warits, 2017). The feminist movement in Indonesia was initially pioneered by R.A. Kartini, who at that time opposed the practices of polygamy, forced marriage, and colonialism, and advocated for women's right to education. In 1912, the Poetri Mardika organization was founded as the first women's organization to advocate for women's rights. The First Women's Congress in Yogyakarta marked a significant milestone in the history of the women's movement in Indonesia, strengthening demands for women to achieve equal rights in various fields, including education, politics, and social life (Abdullah, 2019).

Feminism subsequently evolved into several distinct groups local, national, and global to align public understanding of its cause (Yumna & Maksum, 2024). In the context of the development of global feminism, Islamic feminism emerged as a theological response and social movement that seeks to align feminist principles such as social justice and gender equality with the framework of Islamic teachings. Islamic feminism offers an important perspective in the effort to achieve gender equality within Muslim societies. Islamic feminism fundamentally seeks to contextualize Islamic teachings to achieve autonomy for all humanity both men and women from all forms of oppression and subjugation (Bari et al., 2024). Muslim feminists believe that by eliminating oppression and subjugation, individuals can fully realize their potential in various aspects of life. This effort is aimed at realizing a peaceful and just social order, as a tangible manifestation of Islam's nature as *"Rahmatan Lil Al-'Amin"* (Yumna & Maksum, 2024).

In the development of Islamic feminism in Indonesia, figures such as Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah played important roles through the founding of Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah. Ahmad Dahlan and Aisyiyah promoted women's empowerment and education in accordance with Islamic teachings, without adopting Western liberalism, thereby creating a contextual model of Islamic feminism rooted in religious values and local culture. This movement has become a uniquely Indonesian model of Islamic feminism that seeks to harmonize religious values with the demands of gender equality and social justice (Utami & Afiyanto, 2022). Thus, the history of feminism in Indonesia is a long and contextual struggle, spanning from the colonial era to the modern era, reflecting the development of women's awareness of their rights and social roles, as well as the emergence of Islamic feminism as a local response to various social and cultural challenges.

Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah's Thoughts on Women's Education

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah, was fully aware of the importance of promoting the advancement of women; in fact, from the very beginning of his missionary work, he placed women in a position of honor (Mulya et al., 2025). K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah encouraged women to actively participate in religious study circles and religious education. Through platforms such as Wal' Ashri, held after

the Asr prayer; the Maghribi School, which offers courses for women beginning after the Maghrib prayer; and a religious study group called Sapa Tresnas (Ulhaq et al., 2025). Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah provided women with opportunities to gain religious knowledge and practical skills that would help them fulfill their roles and responsibilities as mothers, wives, and members of society(Muthrofin & Muchtar, 2023).

Ahmad Dahlan held a progressive view that women are equal to men in the context of participating in the advancement of religion and society. He encouraged women not only to focus on household matters but also to be active in social development. This vision took concrete form in 1914, when Dahlan, together with Siti Walidah, founded the "*Sapa Tresna*" association, the precursor to Aisyiyah, an organization that explicitly encouraged women to pursue education and attend school (Huda & Susanto, 2023). Dahlan's commitment to integrating general knowledge and religious studies in education is documented in the Qa'idah Pengadjaran Kweekschool Muhammadiyah, an original curriculum document from the 1920s–1930s that details a tiered learning system encompassing both fields of study (Muhammadiyah, 1924). This reformist idea, which involved women in society in the early 20th century, was no easy feat. However, Muhammadiyah had already pioneered women's rights equality, even before Western movements emerged, drawing strongly from the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Fatmawati et al., 2020). Siti Walidah's support in mobilizing women to pursue knowledge and engage in social activities in the public sphere was a revolutionary step. This policy underscores the progressive and inclusive nature of Muhammadiyah's theology. Furthermore, Ahmad Dahlan's commitment has opened up a wide range of roles for women, freeing them from exclusion and subordination a goal long championed by feminists (Yumna & Maksum, 2024).

As a wife, Siti Walidah accompanied and supported Ahmad Dahlan through her active participation in da'wah and the development of the Aisyiyah organization. Based on her experiences and observations of social dynamics, she formulated the concept of "four-center education" that is, education within the family, education within the school, education within the community, and education within places of worship (Utami & Afiyanto, 2022). The "four-pillar" concept is an organic unity that, when consistently applied, can shape a well-rounded individual personality. This idea must be understood in relation to Ki Hajar Dewantara's "Three Centers of Education" paradigm, which positions the family, school, and community as the three main pillars of students' character development (Ramazhana & Qurotula'yun, 2024) . The fundamental similarity between these two schools of thought lies in the view that the educational process must comprehensively involve the student's entire social ecosystem, rather than being limited solely to the classroom. However, a substantial difference is evident in the focus of character development: Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized nationalist-oriented aspects of patriotism, whereas Siti Walidah added places of worship as a fourth sphere in her concept of the Four Centers of Education (Azis & Zaini, 2024). This underscores that the spiritual-theological aspect is a central element of character development, holding equal standing with the other pillars. Through this approach, Siti Walidah demonstrates that women's

education is oriented toward fostering personal piety rooted in religious values, aligning with Ahmad Dahlan's theological perspective on gender equality in the pursuit of knowledge (Alfaien & Vashti, 2022). The "four-center" concept is not merely a pedagogical innovation but also contains a theological statement regarding women's equality in the realm of character development, including the religious sphere, which was previously dominated by men (Huda and Susanto, 2023). Siti Walidah realized this concept by establishing formal educational institutions. As a first step, she founded the Madrasah Ibtidhaiyah Diniyah Islamiyah, adopting the Dutch educational model (Mardiah et al., 2022).

The ideas of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah explicitly positioned women as equal partners and key pillars in the development of the nation and religion, rejecting views that confined women's roles solely to the domestic sphere. Siti Walidah's concept of gender equality stems from a critical reinterpretation of religious authority, a foundation that allows women to be positioned as equals without having to step outside the framework of Islam (Huda & Susanto, 2023). This vision, which expanded women's roles into the public sphere, not only transformed social perspectives of their time but also laid a solid theoretical foundation for the women's movement in Indonesia. Through the founding of Aisyiyah, Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah effectively worked together to shape a generation of educated, empowered women with strong spirituality, enabling them to become progressive agents of change in various sectors of life (Fatimah et al., 2025). The enduring legacy of this vision can be traced back to the discourse on the equal right to education, which was consistently championed in the magazine Suara Aisyiyah since the pre-independence period. This demonstrates that women's empowerment through education was not a fleeting idea but a long-term project that has been consistently institutionalized for nearly a century (Bariqi & Hadiyanti, 2025). Thus, the contributions of Ahmad Dahlan and Siti Walidah through Aisyiyah succeeded in elevating the status of women in Islam and, at the same time, provided a fundamental basis for women's empowerment on a broader national scale (Ulhaq et al., 2025).

Islamic Feminism in Aisyiyah

From the very beginning, Aisyiyah has focused on education by providing a modern educational system rather than the traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) that were common at the time. Aisyiyah's education is designed to enlighten the awareness of divine unity (ma'rifatullah), which revitalizes, enlightens, and liberates humanity from ignorance and poverty toward prosperity within the framework of social, national, and state life (Munawaroh et al., 2024). Aisyiyah, which carries out the mission of the tajdid (renewal) da'wah movement, has implemented enlightenment programs in various key areas, including religious understanding and practice, education, health, social services, economic empowerment, and other community initiatives, for the advancement of the Muslim community and the nation. Specifically, these tangible contributions are aimed at liberating, empowering, and advancing the lives of Indonesian women from the shackles of underdevelopment and discrimination through sustained, concrete actions

(Fatmawati et al., 2020).

Aisyiyah embodies Siti Walidah's feminist movement by focusing on social development, such as establishing schools, health centers, orphanages, and nursing homes, as well as providing economic skills training. These steps constitute a concrete strategy in the struggle to achieve gender equality in Indonesia. Siti Walidah pioneered a women's movement to deconstruct the Javanese philosophies of *"Swarga nunut neraka* katut" and *"kanca wingking*," which position women as passive followers of their husbands. She emphasized that women are complete, independent entities who have equal rights to access formal education and actively contribute to community life (Aldira et al., 2024).

The women's empowerment strategy championed by Aisyiyah as a form of Islamic feminism emphasizes a balance between religious and sociocultural interests. This approach is implemented through dialogue and the reconstruction of Islamic values that promote gender equality, respect for women's roles, and the involvement of women in various spheres of social life (Seniwati & Lestari, 2019). Thus, empowerment takes the form not only of enhancing individual capacity but also of actively involving women as agents of change in society, grounded in the Islamic principle of "*Rahmatan Lil-Alamin*" (Fatimah et al., 2025).

The historical impact of this practice has been significant, establishing Aisyiyah as a pioneer of an authentic and distinctly Indonesian Islamic feminist movement. This authenticity is supported by a long historical record, namely the discourse on equal rights for women to pursue education and perform righteous deeds, which has been consistently present in the magazine Suara Aisyiyah since the pre-independence era, long before the global discourse on Islamic feminism began to develop in Indonesia several decades later (Bariqi & Hadiyanti, 2025). Aisyiyah branches in various regions have managed charitable activities independently since the organization's inception, as directly stated in the October 1933 issue of Suara Aisyiyah. This institutional autonomy continued until the eve of independence, as shown in Figure 1, which documents the Hoofdbestuur of 'Aisyiyah presiding over an open session at the 17th Grand Congress in Yogyakarta (1939) and confirms that the branches of 'Aisyiyah had full autonomy in carrying out their activities under the guidance of Nyai Ahmad Dahlan (Soeara 'Aisjijah, 1933). Compared to previous research, which generally positions Indonesian Islamic feminism within a bipolar framework of secular feminism and conservative Islamism, the Aisyiyah model has instead followed a middle path that has consistently withstood pressure from both groups (Syamsiyatun, 2023). Therefore, the authenticity of this model is not merely a normative claim but the result of a continuous historical negotiation process that has spanned nearly a century.



Figure 1. The 'Aisyiyah Executive Board presiding over an open session at the 17th Grand Congress, Yogyakarta (1939).
(Source: Muhammadiyah Museum Collection, Yogyakarta)

The organization has successfully expanded access to education and skills training, strengthened networks of Muslim women, and encouraged women to play an active role in politics and social development in a progressive manner. Aisyiyah women's involvement in transnational social networks dates back to the 1970s, in 1972, an Aisyiyah member studying in the Netherlands documented her experience networking with women across national borders through The International Neighbourgroup in Leiden, while maintaining her Indonesian cultural identity amidst an international social circle (Tudjimah, 1972,letter to the Aisyiyah Central Board). Three years later, Aisyiyah women's involvement in social issues and social psychology was also documented as extending to the United States and Australia, as reported in the column "Aisyiyah's Role in the International Arena" (Soeara 'Aisjija, 1975).

Thus, the study of Aisyiyah's practices, strategies, and impacts not only provides insight into the development of an adaptive, contextual, and internally relevant form of Islamic feminism but also offers a framework that can be adopted by other Islamic educational institutions and movements in Indonesia in shaping the future of Muslim women. The results of the above analysis concretely substantiate the argument of novelty in this research. Ahmad Dahlan's theological premises and Siti Walidah's institutional strategies have been shown to operate in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner. Without institutionalization, theological ideas remain merely homiletic, while institutional structures lacking a theological foundation lose their religious grounding. These findings confirm that Aisyiyah's Islamic feminism was formed through a dual process occurring simultaneously, textual reinterpretation and institutional formation.

This pattern aligns with recent findings regarding the Muhammadiyah women's movement or, more broadly, Aisyiyah. Gender doctrine rooted in the theology of equality as an ethical agent (*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*) can truly be realized when activated through agency at the local level, rather than merely remaining a normative formulation (Rahmaniah et al., 2024); women-led reforms have also been shown to maintain legitimacy through a three-pronged strategy that combines textual reinterpretation, community engagement, and institutional collaboration (Zakka et al., 2025), while movements that integrate theological ideas into existing organizational structures, rather than relying solely on individual outreach, are able to achieve far more significant and sustainable social transformation (Arifin et al., 2022). However, according to previous literature reviews, an integrative perspective that explicitly links theological premises with institutional strategies as a single, mutually constitutive process, rather than two parallel developments, is still rarely articulated explicitly in the discourse on Islamic feminism in Indonesia.

In addition to this novelty, the potential for contemporary application of Aisyiyah's model of Islamic feminism is evident in their efforts to adapt to the challenges of the times including the digital age and global sociopolitical changes through teacher training workshops, curriculum enhancement, and advocacy for gender justice within the framework of Islamic values and local culture (Aizsya et al., 2026; Ulhaq et al., 2025). These findings have broader implications for the development of gender-responsive Islamic education beyond the contexts of Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah. In Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), for example, efforts toward gender empowerment are still hampered by the dominance of male figures in leadership positions, a lack of measurable indicators, and weaknesses in the regulatory framework of the Pesantren Law, making curriculum reform and teacher capacity building urgent structural needs (Mala et al., 2025). Islamic women's intellectual movements outside Muhammadiyah, such as the Congress of Indonesian Women Scholars (KUPI), have also developed similar approaches through the concept of mubadalah in educational leadership, substantive justice in access to education, and the principle of ma'ruf to address gender-based violence (Mutholingah & Shova, 2025). This indicates that the effort to align Islamic authority with gender justice is not the responsibility of any single organization. The challenges in the process of digitalizing gender discourse in the field of Islamic education are systemic and involve various organizations. Therefore, the Aisyiyah model can be considered one alternative, not the sole solution, in broader efforts to address issues of gender justice in Indonesia's Islamic education sector (Annisa et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study successfully achieved its objective, which was to examine and analyze Islamic feminism in Aisyiyah's women's education as the intellectual legacy of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and Nyai Siti Walidah, as well as to explore its relevance to the development of Islamic education that promotes gender equality today. The findings indicate that this feminism emerged as an authentic religious response to gender

inequality, not as an import of Western liberal thought, and that it was shaped through the simultaneous integration of Ahmad Dahlan's theological premises with Siti Walidah's institutional strategies, a dual process involving the reinterpretation of texts and the establishment of institutions embodied in the "four centers of education" (family, school, community, and place of worship) and has been sustained by Aisyiyah for nearly a century. Theoretically, these findings provide an integrative framework for the discourse on Islamic feminism in Indonesia, which views theological reasoning and institutional practices as mutually constitutive rather than as separate objects of analysis. In practical terms, this legacy offers a historically grounded model for designing gender-responsive curricula, leadership development programs, and educational policies in Islamic institutions. Nevertheless, this study has limitations because it relies on a library-based qualitative approach to the history of thought, as well as a limited collection of primary sources, most of which were drawn from the Muhammadiyah Museum's collection, and covers only specific periods (1933, 1939, 1972, 1975) rather than a continuous historical record; consequently, its findings remain specific to the context of Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah and cannot be generalized to Indonesian Islamic feminism as a whole. Further research is recommended to explore 'Aisyiyah archives in other locations and regions to test the generalizability of this integrative model, as well as to involve more informants from various 'Aisyiyah branches to strengthen field verification of the continuity of its institutional practices to the present day.

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