

## RAHMAH EL YUNUSIYAH AND THE REFORM OF MUSLIM WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN MINANGKABAU (1922–1969)

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Received December 17, 2025; Revised February 22, 2026; Accepted February 22, 2026; Published February 23, 2026

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of Rahmah El Yunusiyah in reforming Muslim women's education in Minangkabau between 1922 and 1969 by situating her contribution within the broader context of Islamic educational modernization in Indonesia. The research aims to analyze her socio-intellectual background, the institutional development of Diniyah Putri, and the structural impact of her educational model on women's socio-religious roles. This study employs a historical research method, including heuristics (source collection), source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Data were obtained primarily from written sources such as books, academic journals, theses, and archival materials, supported by limited observation and interviews. All sources were critically examined to ensure authenticity, credibility, and relevance. The findings indicate that Rahmah El Yunusiyah's reform was rooted in her dissatisfaction with the co-educational system of Diniyah School, which inadequately addressed women-specific religious issues. In response, she established Al-Madrasah lil Banat (Diniyah Putri) in 1923 as a women-centered Islamic institution. Her educational model integrated religious sciences (fiqh, tauhid, hadith), general subjects, vocational training (weaving, sewing, midwifery), and a boarding school system to foster discipline and moral formation. This integrated system functioned as a strategic response to colonial educational dualism while maintaining Islamic epistemological foundations. The study concludes that Rahmah's reform represented a holistic modernization project that repositioned Muslim women as "mother-educators" and intellectual agents, significantly contributing to the transformation of Islamic women's education in Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic educational reform, Muslim women's education, Rahmah El Yunusiyah, Diniyah Putri, Minangkabau society*

### INTRODUCTION

Education reform in Muslim societies has historically emerged as a response to social transformation, colonial encounters, and internal intellectual renewal. The growth of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia cannot be separated from the broader movement of Islamic reform (*tajdid*) that developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Reformist thinkers viewed education as a strategic instrument to reconstruct Muslim society, both at the doctrinal and institutional levels. As stated by Dermawan et al. (2024), Islamic reform is closely related to modernization, particularly through reinterpretation and contextualization of Islamic teachings in response to changing social realities. In this regard, educational reform became a central arena for redefining religious authority, social roles, and communal progress.

Within the Indonesian context, the reform of Islamic education also developed as a

response to the dualistic educational system introduced during Dutch colonial rule. The establishment of secular Western schools created a structural separation between religious and general education (Adib, 2022). This dualism generated intellectual and social tensions within Muslim communities, prompting reformers to modernize madrasah institutions while maintaining Islamic identity. Educational reform was therefore not merely pedagogical transformation but also a socio-religious movement aimed at revitalizing Muslim society. As Harahap (2025) and Hestivik et al. (2024) emphasize, historical change is often driven by intellectual actors whose ideas correspond to the needs of their time.

Despite the dynamic development of Islamic educational reform, women's access to religious education remained limited in the early twentieth century. Although Minangkabau society recognized a matrilineal kinship system, women's participation in formal religious scholarship was still restricted. Studies on Islamic educational reform in West Sumatra, such as those conducted by Abdullah (2016) and Najmi (2016), primarily focus on male reformist figures and institutional modernization. Meanwhile, broader discussions on women and Islam often emphasize theoretical debates on gender and emancipation (Ulandari, 2017; Wahyuni, 2017), rather than examining localized models of Islamic-based women's education.

Several scholars have discussed Rahmah El Yunusiyah's contribution to women's education. Rohmatun Lukluk Isnaini (2016) highlights her dedication as a female ulama in establishing Islamic education for women. Abdullah (2016) describes her as the "Kartini of Padang Panjang," while Najmi (2016) compares her educational struggle with Kartini from a historical-cultural perspective. Ulandari (2017) further analyzes her progressive leadership in Islamic education. However, these studies tend to examine Rahmah either from biographical, leadership, or gender perspectives separately. A comprehensive historical analysis that situates her role within the broader framework of Islamic educational reform and examines the structural impact of her integrated educational system remains relatively limited (Firmansyah, 2022; Fitriyanti et al., 2026).

Although previous studies have acknowledged Rahmah El Yunusiyah's contribution to women's Islamic education, a significant research gap remains in understanding her reform as a structured model of Islamic educational modernization within the socio-historical context of Minangkabau between 1922 and 1969. Existing scholarship tends to emphasize her biographical narrative (Abdullah, 2016), her comparison with Kartini (Najmi, 2016), or her leadership and gender perspective (Ulandari, 2017; Rohmatun Lukluk Isnaini, 2016). However, limited attention has been given to analyzing how her educational model systematically responded to colonial educational dualism (Adib, 2022), how it integrated religious and general sciences within a boarding school system, and how it reshaped women's socio-religious roles in a matrilineal yet religiously patriarchal society. Therefore, a historical-analytical examination that connects her intellectual foundation, institutional reform, and long-term educational impact remains insufficiently explored.

This study positions Rahmah El Yunusiyah within the broader discourse of Islamic

educational reform in Indonesia by integrating historical methodology (Harahap, 2025; Hestivik et al., 2024) with gender and educational modernization analysis. Unlike prior works that treat her as an isolated female figure, this research situates her within the continuum of Islamic reform movements in West Sumatra and the transformation of madrasah institutions in the early twentieth century (Dermawan et al., 2024; Fauzi et al., 2025). By examining her integrated educational system—combining religious instruction, general education, vocational skills, and boarding school discipline—this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic-based women’s education developed as part of a broader reformist agenda rather than merely as a gender response movement.

The potential novelty of this research lies in its analytical reconstruction of Rahmah El Yunusiyah’s educational reform as a holistic modernization project rooted in Islamic principles rather than Western feminist paradigms. It highlights her pioneering implementation of an integrated boarding school model for Muslim women, the incorporation of vocational training into religious curricula, and her strategic response to colonial educational dualism. By bridging intellectual history, institutional development, and socio-cultural transformation, this study aims to (1) examine Rahmah’s socio-intellectual background, (2) analyze her role in reforming Muslim women’s education in Minangkabau, and (3) evaluate the structural impact of her educational system between 1922 and 1969. Through this approach, the study seeks to enrich the historiography of Islamic educational reform and women’s empowerment in Indonesia (Fitriyanti et al., 2026; Dermawan et al., 2024).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a historical research method supported by literature review, observation, and in-depth interviews. The literature method refers to a series of activities related to collecting library data, reading, recording, and managing research materials (Mappasiara, 2018). Literature study is conducted after determining the research topic and formulating research questions, and before field data collection begins (Adib, 2022). Since this research aims to analyze past events concerning the role of Rahmah El Yunusiyah in reforming Muslim women’s education in Minangkabau (1922–1969), it applies the historical method. According to Harahap (2025), the historical method seeks to reconstruct and reinterpret past events within their socio-cultural context. Similarly, Hestivik et al. (2024) define historical research as a systematic set of procedures for effectively collecting historical sources, critically evaluating them, and synthesizing findings into written form.

In conducting historical research, several essential stages must be undertaken to ensure academic validity. As emphasized by Dermawan et al. (2024), historical inquiry involves four principal steps: source collection (heuristics), source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (historical writing). Source collection in this study involved classifying materials into written sources, oral sources, and material sources. However, this research primarily relies on written sources, particularly books, scholarly

journals, theses, and credible online publications related to Islamic educational reform and Rahmah El Yunusiyah. Literature study was conducted in several libraries, including the Library of Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta, the Regional Library (BPAD), and Ignasius Library Yogyakarta. These sources were critically examined to assess authenticity, credibility, and relevance to the research topic (Firmansyah, 2022).

Data collection procedures began with preparatory stages, including developing research concepts, selecting relevant data, and designing observation and interview guidelines. Although the research was strengthened by observation and interviews, it predominantly utilizes secondary data sources. Secondary data were obtained indirectly through the examination of books, academic journals, magazines, newspapers, and other documented materials. Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher applied systematic historical criticism to evaluate source reliability, followed by interpretative analysis to reconstruct Rahmah El Yunusiyah's educational reform within its socio-historical context. The final stage consisted of synthesizing findings into a structured historical narrative in accordance with established historical research methodology (Dermawan et al., 2024; Harahap, 2025).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Background of Rahmah El Yunusiyah's Life**

Rahmah El Yunusiyah was born on Friday, 29 December 1900, in a traditional rumah gadang in Bukit Surungan, Padang Panjang. She was the youngest child of Syekh Muhammad Yunus and Rafiah (commonly called Ummi). From this marriage, five children were born: Zainuddin Labay (1890–1924), Mariah (1894–1972), Muhammad Rasyad (1895–1956), Rihana (1898–1968), and Rahmah El Yunusiyah (1900–1969). From an early age, Rahmah was known for her strong determination and firm character. She displayed independence and perseverance, traits that later shaped her reformist vision. As a child, she was fond of domestic and practical skills such as cooking, handicrafts, cutting, and sewing her own clothes—skills that would later influence the vocational orientation of her educational model (Qolbi, 2018).

Rahmah did not receive formal elementary education because her father passed away during her childhood. Nevertheless, her intellectual development was nurtured within the family environment and through interaction with local ulama. She learned reading, writing, and arithmetic from her elder brothers, particularly Zainuddin Labay El Yunusy and Muhammad Rasyad. Both brothers had attended Government Schools and had studied under Syekh Abbas Abdullah of Padang Japang, Payakumbuh. Through their guidance, Rahmah gained access to structured knowledge and modernist Islamic thought. This early exposure significantly shaped her intellectual foundation and reformist orientation (Abdullah, 2016).

Her passion for reading and learning further strengthened her intellectual capacity. Zainuddin Labay owned books in various languages, including Dutch, German, and Arabic, which Rahmah studied intensively. Although many of these books were later lost during the Indonesian independence struggle, they contributed substantially to her

intellectual growth. During her adolescence, Rahmah actively attended religious lectures and sermons held in various surau in Padang Panjang. At that time, approximately eight surau conducted regular religious study sessions. The teachings primarily focused on worship ('ibadah), faith (iman), and monotheism (tauhid). Rahmah critically compared the teaching styles and intellectual breadth of different scholars, demonstrating early analytical ability and dissatisfaction with superficial religious instruction (Najmi, 2016).

At the age of fifteen, Rahmah enrolled in Diniyah School, founded by her brother Zainuddin Labay El Yunusy. Due to her prior religious education at home and in surau, she was admitted directly into the third class. The school implemented a co-educational system, where male and female students studied together. This environment exposed Rahmah to broader social interaction and intellectual exchange, allowing her to discuss Islamic law and social relations with both teachers and peers. However, she gradually became dissatisfied with the co-educational format, particularly because issues concerning women (fiqh al-nisa') were not discussed openly and comprehensively. Teachers often felt reluctant to explain women's religious matters in mixed classrooms. This dissatisfaction led Rahmah, along with Rasuna Said, Nanisah, and Djawana Basyir (Upik Jepang), to form a special study group and pursue deeper religious learning at Surau Jambatan Besi (Isnaini, 2016).

Rahmah and her colleagues became the first female students formally accepted into the Surau Jambatan Besi, which had previously been attended exclusively by male students. Their participation was acknowledged by Hamka, who noted Rahmah's leadership among her peers. Despite this progressive step, Rahmah still felt that women's issues were inadequately addressed. Consequently, she requested private lessons from Syekh Abdul Karim Amrullah at his residence in Gatangan, where she studied Arabic, fiqh, usul fiqh, and women-related religious matters more intensively. After the 1926 Padang Panjang earthquake destroyed many religious institutions, Rahmah continued her studies under several prominent ulama, including Tuanku Mudo Abdul Hamid Hakim, Syekh Abdul Latif, Syekh Muhammad Djamil Jaho, and Syekh Daud Rasyidi. In addition to religious sciences, she studied midwifery and health care—initially from her maternal aunt and later from Dr. Sofyan and Dr. Tazar—gaining both theoretical and practical skills. She also learned traditional weaving (ATBM) in centers such as Silungkang and Pandai Sikek, along with sewing skills. These vocational competencies were eventually integrated into the curriculum of Diniyah Putri, reflecting her holistic vision of women's education (Dermawan et al., 2024).

## **2. Rahmah El Yunusiyah's Role in Reforming Muslim Women's Education in Minangkabau**

Rahmah El Yunusiyah's reformist role in Muslim women's education was rooted in her critical experience within the co-educational system of Diniyah School led by her brother, Zainuddin Labay El Yunusy. Although Diniyah School represented Islamic modernization in Minangkabau, it did not adequately address women-specific religious concerns due to the mixed-gender classroom environment. Rahmah observed that

discussions concerning women's religious matters were often limited and not conveyed openly. Motivated by this dissatisfaction, she independently sought deeper religious instruction from several prominent Minangkabau ulama—an uncommon initiative for women in the early twentieth century. Alongside religious sciences, she pursued practical knowledge through private learning, which later became foundational to her educational reform. With her brother's support, she established a dedicated institution for women on 1 November 1923, marking the beginning of structured Islamic education specifically designed for Muslim women in Indonesia (Dermawan et al., 2024; Firmansyah, 2022).

#### **a. Establishing “Al-Madrasah lil Banat”**

At its inception, the institution was named Al-Madrasah lil Banat, meaning “School for Girls.” During the Dutch colonial period, it was also referred to as “Diniyah School Putri,” while the local community in Padang Panjang called it “Sekolah Etek Amah” or “Sekolah Menyesal School.” The latter designation reflected the regret of married women who had not received education in their youth and sought literacy later in life. Officially founded on 1 November 1923 with approximately 71 female students, the school initially focused on eradicating illiteracy among married women between 1923 and 1926. In addition to reading and writing, students were taught Islamic subjects such as tauhid, fiqh, and hadith. The earliest classes were conducted in the veranda of Pasar Usang Mosque (now Masjid Asliyah), located opposite Rahmah's residence in Lubuk Mata Kucing. As enrollment increased, Rahmah rented a two-story shop-house, using the ground floor as classrooms and the upper floor as a dormitory for students (Isnaini, 2016).

As the institution developed, the composition of students shifted, with increasing enrollment of adolescent girls rather than married women. Responding to this transformation, Rahmah reorganized the educational structure into two divisions: literacy classes for married women and structured classroom-based education for young girls equipped with desks, chairs, and blackboards. Religious subjects such as fiqh and hadith were primarily provided to young female students, while married women focused on literacy skills. The school operated in a rented house in Pasar Usang for approximately four years before expanding further. In 1962, Rahmah initiated the formal articulation of the institution's educational philosophy by appointing a team of teachers to formulate its objectives. The resulting formulation emphasized the implementation of education based on Islamic teachings to form Muslim women with strong Islamic character who would become competent and active “mother-educators,” responsible for societal and national welfare in devotion to Allah. This institutional vision reflects Rahmah's broader reformist ambition to reposition women as central actors in religious, social, and educational transformation (Dewi et al., 2024; Harahap, 2025).

#### **b. Factors Encouraging Rahmah to Struggle for Women's Education**

Rahmah El Yunusiyah's commitment to women's education was deeply rooted in her familial, intellectual, and socio-religious background. She was the youngest child of Syekh Muhammad Yunus, a qadhi and expert in Islamic astronomy (ilmu falaq) from Pandai Sikek, and Rafi'ah of the Sikumbang clan. Her grandfather, Syekh Imaduddin,

was a prominent Naqshbandi scholar in Minangkabau. This lineage placed Rahmah within a respected religious tradition that valued Islamic scholarship. Although her father passed away when she was still young, the intellectual environment within her family continued to shape her development. Her brothers, particularly Zainuddin Labay El-Yunusiy—the founder of Diniyah School and a recognized reformist figure in West Sumatra—played a crucial role in her education. Zainuddin’s mastery of foreign languages such as English, Arabic, and Dutch enabled Rahmah to access broader intellectual resources. She regarded her brother not only as a teacher but also as an inspirational figure who supported her aspirations. From an early age, Rahmah actively attended religious gatherings held in approximately eight rotating surau in Minangkabau, demonstrating her intrinsic motivation to pursue knowledge beyond domestic expectations (Abdullah, 2016; Qolbi, 2018).

Her formal involvement in Diniyah School, established on 10 October 1915, further shaped her awareness of women’s educational limitations. Through co-educational learning, she gained practical experience in social interaction and intellectual exchange with male students, discussing Islamic law, social relations (*muamalah*), and cultural matters. However, this experience simultaneously revealed structural shortcomings in addressing women-specific religious issues. Rahmah became increasingly critical of the co-educational system, perceiving that female students were not provided adequate space to explore matters related to women in Islam. Together with Rasuna Said, Nanisah, and Jawana Basyir (Upik Jepang), she formed a study circle and pursued advanced religious studies at Surau Jembatan Besi. Yet even there, she felt that questions concerning women were insufficiently answered. Consequently, she sought private instruction from Syekh Abdul Karim Amrullah in Gatangan, where she studied Arabic, *fiqh*, and *ushul fiqh* more intensively. Equipped with this knowledge, she established Al-Madrasatul Diniyah (Meisjes Diniyah School) on 1 November 1923 near Pasar Usang Mosque, initially enrolling 71 female students, mostly housewives and a few adolescent girls. The school operated under modest conditions—without desks, chairs, or blackboards—symbolizing both the material limitations and the pioneering spirit of her reform (Isnaini, 2016; Dermawan et al., 2024).

Rahmah’s struggle was not free from social resistance and institutional challenges. The establishment of a women-only Islamic school contradicted prevailing societal norms that confined women to domestic roles (“*sumur, dapur, kasur*”). Following the death of Zainuddin Labay in 1924, Muhammadiyah leaders in Padang Panjang proposed integrating Diniyah School into Muhammadiyah’s educational network under the name Aisiyah School or Fatimiyah School. Rahmah rejected this proposal, insisting on maintaining the institution’s independence. She continued expanding her knowledge by studying under prominent ulama such as Abdul Hamid Hakim, Syekh Daud Rasjidi, Syekh Abdul Latif Rasjidi, and Syekh Muhammad Djamil Djambek. Between 1931 and 1935, she pursued midwifery training at RSU Kayu Tanam and obtained a medical practice license. After the devastating Padang Panjang earthquake on 28 June 1926 destroyed school buildings, she rebuilt the institution using bamboo structures on land

endowed by her mother (Firmansyah, 2022). Dissatisfied with temporary facilities, she later developed permanent buildings and, after thirteen years, established Kuliyyatul Mu'allimat al-Islamiyah (KMI), an advanced program equivalent to senior Islamic secondary education. The boarding school system implemented there aimed to produce educated Muslim women capable of becoming "mother-educators" within society. Ultimately, Rahmah's persistent pursuit of knowledge and institutional reform reflected her conviction that education was the primary pathway to elevating women's dignity and social position (Harahap, 2025; Fitriyanti et al., 2026).

### **c. Rahmah El-Yunusiyah in Establishing the Educational Foundation of Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang**

Although Rahmah El-Yunusiyah had experienced the traditional surau model of Islamic education, she recognized that women's access within that system remained structurally limited. In Minangkabau's matrilineal society, women possessed privilege in inheritance (harta pusaka), yet their access to advanced religious knowledge was restricted compared to men. This paradox shaped Rahmah's reformist awareness. However, her approach differed significantly from Western feminist emancipation paradigms. Rahmah did not frame women's marginalization as a result of inherent patriarchal oppression within Islam. Instead, she believed that social limitations stemmed largely from cultural practices rather than Islamic doctrine itself. Her reform agenda was therefore not a project of "liberation" in the European sense, but rather an effort to restore women's position in accordance with Islamic teachings (Isnaini, 2016). She sought to reposition women as dignified and knowledgeable actors within religious and social life without opposing the cultural foundations of Minangkabau society.

Rahmah conceptualized women as central pillars of civilization, particularly in their role as mothers and primary educators within the family. For her, improving women's quality required a specialized educational system designed and taught by women themselves. She argued that co-educational systems limited women's ability to receive instruction suited to their specific needs. Therefore, she offered an integrated model combining religious sciences and general education, complemented by vocational training, enabling women to become productive members of society while remaining faithful to Islamic principles. In her view, enhancing women's social position could not depend on external intervention; it had to be pursued by women themselves through education. She emphasized that while functional differences between men and women might exist, such distinctions should not justify discrimination. By preparing women intellectually, morally, and practically, she envisioned them as "mother-educators" (ibu pendidik) whose influence would shape the worldview and character formation of future generations (Firmansyah, 2022; Fauzi et al., 2025).

Rahmah's educational foundation also reflected a lifelong learning philosophy. She established a structured educational continuum beginning with Freubel School (kindergarten level), followed by Junior School (equivalent to HIS), Madrasah Diniyah Putri (Ibtidaiyah and Tsanawiyah levels), and Kuliyyatul Mu'allimat al-Islamiyah (KMI) for teacher training. She even initiated higher education in the form of a Faculty of

Dirasah Islamiyah, along with literacy programs such as Menyesal School and vocational training including weaving schools. Her educational vision was deeply religious yet institutionally independent. When political currents—particularly through Rasuna Said—began influencing student activities and weakening religious discipline, Rahmah reaffirmed that school governance must remain under the authority of its founder to preserve its Islamic character. This stance demonstrated her prioritization of moral-religious formation over political activism. Her comprehensive educational philosophy, shaped by her own unconventional learning experiences and private studies under prominent modernist ulama, illustrates a coherent reform project grounded in Islamic epistemology and adapted to Minangkabau's socio-cultural context (Dermawan et al., 2024; Fitriyanti et al., 2026).

### **3. The Impact of Rahmah El Yunusiyah's Reform of Muslim Women's Education in Minangkabau**

The establishment of al-Madrasah lil Banat on 1 November 1923 marked a transformative moment in Muslim women's education in Minangkabau. Initially attended by 71 students—mostly married women—the institution operated once a week for three hours at Pasar Usang Mosque in Padang Panjang. Early instruction focused on Islamic religious subjects such as *aqidah*, *akhlaq*, and foundational linguistic tools (*ilmu alat*). Over time, the school's name evolved from Diniyah School Poeteri during the Dutch period to Sekolah Diniyah Puteri under Japanese occupation, and later became known as Perguruan Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang. The use of the term "Diniyah" emphasized its Islamic orientation while symbolically linking Rahmah's institution to her brother Zainuddin Labay's Diniyah School. This naming strategy also functioned as a reformist statement, attracting both modernist and traditionalist communities who previously believed women did not require formal education. By 1924, the school relocated to a rented house near the mosque, introduced desks and blackboards, and established a dormitory in 1925, marking the transition from a *halaqah* system to a structured classical classroom model (Dermawan et al., 2024).

A significant impact of Rahmah's reform was the implementation of an integrated educational system combining family education, formal schooling, and dormitory-based character formation. The boarding school model allowed theoretical knowledge—both religious and general—to be practiced and internalized under teacher supervision. Strict discipline governed students' daily lives, including dress codes, punctuality (arrival 15 minutes before class), and behavioral standards both inside and outside the classroom. This holistic system demonstrated Rahmah's conviction that education was not limited to cognitive instruction but included moral, spiritual, and social development. The dormitory functioned not only as residential space but also as a personal guidance institution, where teachers acted as parental figures and addressed students' personal concerns. This approach institutionalized moral supervision and reinforced the formation of responsible Muslim women (Hestivik et al., 2024; Harahap, 2025).

Another major reform impact was curricular modernization. Although religious

sciences remained central—such as fiqh, tafsir, tauhid, akhlaq, hadith, nahu, sharaf, ushul fiqh, ‘arud, and Islamic history—Rahmah gradually incorporated general subjects into the curriculum. By 1928, the madrasah had developed into a six-grade institution with 22 hours of weekly instruction, though still dominated by religious subjects (Dermawan et al., 2024). After the devastating 1926 Padang Panjang earthquake destroyed school facilities, Rahmah mobilized community support and fundraising efforts in Sumatra Utara. By 1928, a permanent building with seven classrooms and dormitories accommodating 275 of 350 students had been completed. Alongside infrastructural reconstruction, Rahmah expanded the curriculum to include Indonesian, English, Dutch, Latin writing, arithmetic, bookkeeping, profit-loss calculation, health sciences, natural sciences, human anatomy, geography, botany, zoology, and drawing. This curricular expansion reflected a synthesis of Islamic knowledge and modern scientific education (Fauzi et al., 2025; Fitriyanti et al., 2026).

The educational process was further strengthened through structured extracurricular and daily boarding activities. Formal classroom learning lasted six hours per day, followed by religious and character-building routines in the dormitory. Students read the Qur’an twice daily, performed five daily prayers in congregation, memorized lessons twice daily, and practiced sewing. Additional activities included swimming, music, weaving, handicrafts, speech training, and cooking. Discipline in time management, worship, rest, and communal responsibility was strictly enforced. Participation in student organizations cultivated leadership, mental resilience, and social competence. This system illustrates Rahmah’s commitment to producing well-rounded Muslim women who were intellectually capable, spiritually grounded, and socially disciplined (Dewi et al., 2024).

Vocational education became a distinctive feature of Diniyah Putri’s reform impact. Weaving lessons, for example, were not merely technical training but moral education emphasizing patience, precision, perseverance, and problem-solving—reflected in Minangkabau proverbs such as “kusut benang cari pangkalnya” (if thread is tangled, find its origin). Cooking lessons were designed to prepare women for responsible family life, emphasizing not superficial beauty but competence in household management combined with pleasant character. Arts education aimed to cultivate refinement, gentleness, and aesthetic sensitivity. These skill-based programs equipped graduates with practical competencies while reinforcing moral values, ensuring that alumni of Diniyah Putri could navigate social and economic challenges independently. Collectively, these reforms demonstrate that Rahmah El Yunusiyah’s educational project did not merely provide literacy for women, but established a comprehensive Islamic-modern educational system that reshaped the intellectual and social landscape of Muslim women in Minangkabau (Firmansyah, 2022; Sumiyati et al., 2026).

Recent studies in Indonesian Islamic education emphasize that reform movements in the early twentieth century were not merely institutional adjustments but strategic efforts to reconcile Islamic epistemology with modern educational systems. Islamic reform in Indonesia functioned as an intellectual movement aimed at reconstructing religious

authority and social organization through structured educational institutions (Dermawan et al., 2024). Likewise, modernization of madrasah education involved curricular integration, administrative reform, and the incorporation of general sciences without abandoning religious foundations (Fauzi et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the argument that Rahmah El Yunusiyah's educational reform should be situated within a broader Indonesian reformist trajectory that sought to overcome colonial educational dualism while preserving Islamic identity.

Furthermore, scholarship on gender and Islamic authority in Indonesia demonstrates that women's access to structured religious education has significantly reshaped socio-religious participation. The strengthening of women *ulama* networks in Indonesia is historically rooted in institutional educational initiatives that created formal spaces for female scholarship (Harahap, 2025). In addition, Islamic-based women's education in Indonesia represents an indigenous empowerment model grounded in religious legitimacy rather than Western feminist discourse (Firmansyah, 2022). These studies strengthen the conclusion that Diniyah Putri was not merely a local women's school but an early institutional model contributing to the long-term transformation of Muslim women's intellectual authority in Indonesia.

The novelty of this study lies in its analytical reconstruction of Rahmah El Yunusiyah's educational reform as a structured modernization project within the broader framework of Islamic reform in Indonesia. While recent studies have discussed women *ulama* and the transformation of Islamic authority in Indonesia, they generally focus on contemporary movements and networks rather than early institutional foundations (Harahap, 2025). Moreover, research on religious authority and reform dynamics in Indonesia often emphasizes macro-level political and ideological developments without specifically examining women-centered educational institutions as structural agents of reform (Dewi et al., 2024). This research therefore contributes a historical-analytical perspective by positioning Diniyah Putri as a systematic institutional response to colonial educational dualism and gendered religious limitations in Minangkabau society.

Another significant novelty of this study is its emphasis on Rahmah's integrated boarding school model that combined religious sciences, general education, vocational training, and moral discipline within a women-only framework. Contemporary discussions on curriculum integration in Indonesian madrasah tend to focus on present-day reforms rather than tracing their historical precedents (Hestivik et al., 2024). Similarly, studies on Islamic educational modernization often center on male reformist figures and *pesantren* networks, leaving women's institutional contributions underexplored (Fitriyanti et al., 2026). By examining the long-term structural impact of Diniyah Putri between 1922 and 1969, this study fills a historiographical gap and demonstrates that women were active architects of Islamic educational modernization in Indonesia.

This study also holds global significance by presenting an indigenous model of Islamic women's educational reform that integrates religious authenticity, institutional modernization, and socio-cultural adaptation without relying on Western feminist

paradigms. Indonesia's women *ulama* movement has gained international recognition as a model of faith-based gender empowerment rooted in Islamic tradition (Harahap, 2025). Moreover, Indonesia's experience illustrates a distinctive approach to negotiating Islam, gender, and modernity through educational reform rather than ideological confrontation (Sumiyati et al., 2026). By reconstructing Rahmah El Yunusiyah's reformist educational model, this research contributes to global discourse on Islam and gender by offering a historically grounded example of internally driven Muslim women's empowerment through education.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that Rahmah El Yunusiyah played a transformative role in reforming Muslim women's education in Minangkabau between 1922 and 1969 through the establishment of a structured, women-centered Islamic educational institution. Her reform was not merely a response to gender inequality, but a strategic effort to overcome colonial educational dualism and the limitations of co-educational religious instruction. By integrating religious sciences, general knowledge, vocational training, and a boarding school system within Diniyah Putri, she constructed a holistic model of Islamic education rooted in religious authenticity and socio-cultural relevance. Her educational vision repositioned Muslim women as "mother-educators" and intellectual agents capable of shaping both family and society, thereby contributing significantly to the broader trajectory of Islamic educational modernization in Indonesia.

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