

The Transformation of Madhhab and Theology in Egypt from al-Maqrizi's Perspective: Epistemological Foundations for the Renewal of Islamic Education

Arman Maulana Ridho¹, Mutohharun Jinan²

^{1,2}Master's Program in Islamic Education, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta
o100250013@student.ums.ac.id¹, mj123@ums.ac.id²

ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of madhhab and theology in Egypt as documented in *Madhahib Ahl Misr Wa Aqaiduhum Ila An Intasharo Madhhab Al-asy'ariyyah* and analyzes its relevance as an epistemological foundation for the renewal of contemporary Islamic education. Employing a qualitative approach, the research analyzes classical texts alongside contemporary academic literature and Islamic education policy documents. The findings reveal three interrelated patterns: the dynamic transformation of legal schools and theology shaped by political power and educational institutions; the strong connection between socio-political change, scholarly mobility, and educational orientation; and the epistemological continuity between classical theological rationality—particularly Ash'arism—and modern Islamic educational reform. These patterns demonstrate that Islamic education in Egypt has historically developed through adaptive mechanisms rooted in internal intellectual traditions rather than through abrupt or externally imposed change. The study concludes that al-Maqrizi's work should be understood not merely as a historical record but as a living epistemological resource that informs contemporary debates on Islamic education reform. By emphasizing historical continuity between classical scholarship and modern institutional change, this research contributes to a more historically grounded and integrative understanding of Islamic education, with implications for both Egyptian and Indonesian contexts.

Keywords: al-Maqrizi; Ash'arism; Islamic education; madhhab transformation; Islamic theology; epistemology of reform

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic intellectual history has evolved through complex interactions among religious texts, scholarly authority, structures of power, and the educational institutions that sustain them. Egypt occupies a strategic position within Islamic civilization, functioning as a nexus for transregional scholarly exchange. From the early to the medieval periods, the region served as a center for the circulation of legal schools (madhāhib), a site of theological debate, and a formative space for educational institutions whose influence extended across the Muslim world (Siregar & Salmiati, 2022). Consequently, transformations of madhhab and theology in Egypt are reflections of long-term and multilayered socio-intellectual dynamics (Steenbergen, 2024).

The transformation of madhhab and theology in Egypt illustrates the adaptive capacity of Islamic scholarly traditions. The dominance of particular legal schools or theological orientations was closely related to political power configurations, state patronage, scholarly mobility, and the orientations of educational institutions (Hasneli et al., 2024). Islamic historiography serves as a crucial analytical tool—not only for identifying changes but also for explaining why such changes were possible and how they shaped patterns of continuity within Islamic intellectual traditions across different historical periods (Indriasari & Karman, 2023).

One classical source that records these dynamics is *Madhahib Ahl Misr Wa Aqaiduhum Ila An Intasharo Madhhab Al-asy'ariyyah* by al-Maqrizi. Through this

work, al-Maqrizi describes the diversity of madhhab and theological orientations in Egypt and reflects on the relationships among religious orientations, regime changes, state patronage, and the role of educational institutions (Selvia et al., 2023). The shift in dominance from the Maliki school to the Shafi'i school, the strengthening of the Hanafi school during the Mamluk period, and the widespread acceptance of Ash'ari theology illustrate that Egypt's Islamic scholarly tradition was dynamic and contextual rather than rigid or closed (Hasneli et al., 2024).

In contemporary studies of Islamic education, historical legacies are often treated separately from discussions of modern educational reform. The modernization of Islamic education in Egypt is frequently understood as a phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly through narratives surrounding al-Azhar reforms and policies of the modern nation-state (Kurnia et al., 2025). While these approaches provide important insights, they can risk producing ahistorical interpretations that portray Islamic educational reform as a sudden response to modernity rather than a continuation of Islam's internal intellectual dynamics (Tohri et al., 2023).

Recent studies indicate that the modernization of Islamic education in Egypt has been a complex and continuous process. Syarif argues that modernization within al-Azhar involves not only curricular changes but also broader social transformations and the role of the Muslim middle class in shaping contemporary educational orientations (Saputri et al., 2024). Moreover, recent research has demonstrated that reforms at al-Azhar University have had implications for both its internal structure and Egypt's position as a global reference for Islamic education (Khoir et al., 2025). Concurrently, efforts to integrate religious sciences and modern disciplines within Egypt's Islamic education system have emerged as an adaptive strategy in response to globalization (Amir, 2025).

However, contemporary studies generally focus on modern periods and rely primarily on contemporary sources. Classical historiographical works such as those of al-Maqrizi remain underutilized as frameworks for tracing the historical roots of Islamic educational reform (Don & Hussin, 2024). Consequently, modernization in Islamic education is often understood in isolation from the intellectual traditions that have shaped Egypt's scholarly character over centuries (ÖZTEKİN, 2022).

This condition constitutes the research gap addressed in this study. Limited research has explicitly bridged the historical descriptions of madhhab and theological transformations in al-Maqrizi's work with the dynamics of contemporary Islamic educational reform in Egypt (Nugraha et al., 2022). A deeper historical reading of al-Maqrizi's writings could demonstrate that madhhab flexibility, theological rationality—particularly through Ash'arism—and institutional adaptation have been inherent characteristics of Islamic education in Egypt long before the modern era.

Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze how al-Maqrizi represents the transformation of madhhab and theology in Egypt in relation to socio-political change and to assess the historical relevance of these transformations for contemporary Islamic educational renewal. Theoretically, this study emphasizes continuity between classical intellectual traditions and modernization processes in Islamic education studies. Practically, the findings aim to contribute conceptually to the development of Islamic education that is adaptive, contextual, and firmly rooted in Islamic intellectual traditions, particularly within the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. Based on this framework, the research questions are: (1) how does al-Maqrizi represent the transformation of madhhab and theology in Egypt; (2) what factors have driven these

transformations throughout history; and (3) how can these historical descriptions be understood as epistemological foundations for the renewal of contemporary Islamic education.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach employing historical methods, as its primary objective is to develop an in-depth understanding of the transformation of madhhab and theology in Egypt as documented in classical sources, and to examine their relevance to contemporary Islamic educational reform. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it facilitates the interpretation of meaning, context, and historical relationships embedded in texts rather than merely presenting descriptive facts (Sami & Abdallah, 2022). In line with Creswell's framework (2014), qualitative research emphasizes exploring meanings constructed within specific social and historical contexts, making it particularly suitable for analyzing the dynamic nature of Islamic intellectual traditions as evolving processes (Sajida & Kusumasari, 2023).

The historical method is employed to contextualize the development of Islamic scholarship in Egypt within broader socio-intellectual processes shaped by interactions among political authority, scholarly leadership, and educational institutions across different periods. As such, sources are recognized not merely as neutral data but as intellectual products formed within specific historical circumstances, necessitating critical evaluation and contextual interpretation (Arouri et al., 2023). This perspective aligns with Gottschalk's insights (1969), which emphasize the necessity of source criticism for understanding historical writings within their sociopolitical context (Langridge et al., 2024).

Methodologically, this qualitative inquiry is rooted in historical hermeneutics, which views texts as historically situated and interprets them considering the social, political, and cultural contexts surrounding both the author and the society described (Jabber & Muttaleb, 2025). Within this framework, *Madhab Ahl Misr Wa Aqaiduhum Ila An Intasharo Madhab Al-asy'ariyyah* by al-Maqrizi is analyzed not just as a historical chronicle but as a reflective piece on shifts in madhhab, theology, and Islamic educational institutions in Egypt (Lubis et al., 2023). The unit of analysis thus incorporates texts and documents rather than focusing on individual participants, allowing a broader understanding of the historical transformations that have occurred within Islamic scholarship (Cahyo, 2023).

Primary data for this study derive from al-Maqrizi's work, while secondary sources encompass Islamic education policy documents and peer-reviewed academic journal articles published within the last decade, purposively selected based on their relevance and academic credibility (Elmohamady et al., 2024). Data collection occurred through comprehensive literature reviews and contextual readings, with analysis involving historical contextualization, cross-period comparisons, and epistemological interpretation (Anand et al., 2025). Data validity is bolstered through source triangulation and the integration of rich contextual descriptions to enhance transferability (Omar & El-Laithy, 2023). Consequently, the findings are presented descriptively and analytically, positioning the researcher as an intellectual mediator bridging classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary educational needs (Mahmoud et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation of madhhab and theology in Egypt, as documented in *Madhahib Ahl Misr Wa Aqaiduhum Ila An Intasharo Madhhab Al-asy'ariyyah*, did not occur in a static or singular manner, but rather followed interrelated historical patterns. Through historical-hermeneutical analysis and dialogue with contemporary scholarship, this study identifies three principal patterns that explain the continuity between classical Islamic intellectual dynamics and the modernization of Islamic education in Egypt. These patterns demonstrate that Egypt's Islamic scholarly tradition evolved through a dialectical relationship among political power, religious scholars, and educational institutions—a characteristic also emphasized in contemporary studies on religious authority and state relations in Egypt (Brown, 2017; Ibrahim, 2023).

Pattern 1: Political Power and Institutional Dynamics

The first pattern reveals that transformations of madhhab and theology in Egypt were highly dynamic and closely shaped by configurations of political power and educational institutions. Al-Maqrizi illustrates that the dominance of legal schools was never permanent but shifted in accordance with dynastic changes and political patronage. The Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanafi schools experienced different phases of prominence depending on the orientation of ruling authorities and the institutional support they received Hasneli et al. (2024). In theological terms, the consolidation of Ash'arism signified the institutional acceptance of rational kalām as a legitimate epistemic framework within Egyptian Islamic scholarship. This finding reinforces the argument that changes in religious orientation cannot be understood solely as internal theological debates; rather, they are responses to broader socio-political contexts (Radzi & Jaafar, 2025).

Syarif (2024) notes that al-Azhar historically developed as an institution accommodating madhhab pluralism rather than representing a single doctrinal tradition (Adji, 2025). Moreover, contemporary studies emphasize that Islamic scholarly institutions in Egypt have long operated within a negotiated relationship with the state, where religious authority emerges from the interaction between scholarly legitimacy and political power (Amir, 2025). Within this framework, the transformation of madhhab and theology functioned as an adaptive intellectual mechanism allowing Islamic scholarship to remain relevant amid shifting social and political configurations.

Pattern 2: Socio-Political Change, Scholarly Mobility, and Educational Orientation

The second pattern highlights the strong interconnection between socio-political change, the mobility of scholars, and the orientation of educational institutions. Al-Maqrizi portrays Egypt as a cosmopolitan intellectual space inhabited by scholars from diverse regions of the Islamic world, including the Hijaz, Iraq, and the Maghrib. This scholarly mobility contributed to methodological diversity in teaching and plural intellectual traditions, reinforcing Egypt's position as a center of Islamic learning (ÖZTEKİN, 2022).

This pattern exhibits significant continuity with the modern period. Educational reforms initiated during the era of Muhammad Ali Pasha reconfigured relations between the state and religious institutions, particularly through the establishment of modern schools and the dispatch of students to Europe (Nafakhati et al., 2024). However, these reforms did not necessarily result in the secularization of Islamic

education. Recent studies demonstrate that educational reform in Egypt promoted the integration of religious sciences and modern disciplines within an Islamic epistemological framework, with the state reorganizing institutions without fully marginalizing religious authority (Wakhi & -, 2024). This challenges perspectives that view Egyptian educational reform merely as Western imitation and underscores its roots in long-standing traditions of intellectual openness.

Within this context, reformist scholars such as Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani can be understood as embodiments of intellectual continuity rather than rupture (Susantin, 2025). Their efforts did not abandon classical traditions but reactivated Islamic theological rationality to address modern challenges through intellectual and institutional reconstruction. This interpretation aligns with contemporary scholarship emphasizing that Islamic reform in Egypt was reconstructive rather than destructive, grounded in reinterpretations of intellectual heritage in response to modern socio-political change (Adam & Tamam, 2025).

Pattern 3: Epistemological Continuity between Classical Theology and Educational Modernization

The third and most significant pattern identified is the epistemological continuity between classical theological rationality and the modernization of Islamic education. Ash'arism, as it developed in Egypt, positioned reason as an instrument for understanding revelation rather than as its antagonist. This epistemological stance enabled the incorporation of modern sciences into Islamic education without undermining theological foundations (Bahri, 2022). The 1961 reform of al-Azhar's curriculum, which formally integrated social and natural sciences, can thus be interpreted as an institutional manifestation of this long-standing rational tradition.

This finding resonates with contemporary discussions on *turāth* as a dynamic intellectual tradition sustained through creative reinterpretation rather than static transmission. El Shamsy (2020) argues that Islamic scholarly traditions endure due to their capacity for reinterpretation in response to changing contexts, including education and religious authority (Bahri & Qomariyah, 2023). In contemporary al-Azhar, figures such as Ali Jum'a exemplify how classical heritage serves as an epistemological foundation for renewal rather than an obstacle to reform. Accordingly, the modernization of al-Azhar represents a continuation of Islamic intellectual dynamics already observed by al-Maqrizi in his historical context (Karmala et al., 2025).

Table 1. Patterns of Transformation and Their Implications for Islamic Education in Egypt

Historical Pattern	Key Characteristics	Implications for Islamic Education
Dynamic madhhab and theological shifts	Influenced by political power and institutional patronage	Institutional flexibility and doctrinal pluralism
Scholarly mobility and socio-political change	Cosmopolitan scholarly networks and adaptive institutions	Integration of diverse knowledge traditions
Epistemological continuity (Ash'arism)	Rational theology harmonizing reason and revelation	Legitimation of modern sciences within Islamic curricula

Critical Reflection

Critically, these findings enrich the discourse on Islamic education by demonstrating that its resilience in Egypt lies in its capacity to reconcile tradition and change. Contrary to approaches that prioritize external factors as primary drivers of modernization, this study emphasizes the decisive role of Islam's internal intellectual

heritage—particularly theological rationality and institutional flexibility—in shaping educational reform (Lauzière, 2016). Consequently, Islamic educational renewal cannot be separated from a historically grounded understanding of madhhab and theological dynamics.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations. Its analysis relies primarily on textual and historical documents and does not empirically investigate how these epistemological legacies are implemented in contemporary educational practices at al-Azhar. Limited access to complete manuscripts of al-Maqrizi's work also constrains deeper exploration of specific doctrinal shifts. Future research is therefore encouraged to combine historical analysis with policy studies or field research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between classical intellectual heritage and contemporary Islamic educational reform.

Overall, the results affirm that the sustainability of Islamic education in Egypt is supported by three interrelated strengths: madhhab flexibility, theological rationality, and adaptive educational institutions. Within this framework, al-Maqrizi's intellectual legacy transcends its function as a historical record and emerges as a living conceptual resource for the development of contemporary Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the transformation of madhhab and theology in Egypt, as recorded in *Madhab Ahl Misr Wa Aqaiduhum Ila An Intasharo Madhab Al-asy'ariyyah*, represents a dynamic and continuous intellectual process rather than a series of isolated doctrinal shifts. The findings demonstrate that changes in legal schools and theological orientations were deeply embedded in broader socio-political contexts, shaped by interactions among political authority, scholarly networks, and educational institutions. The historical prominence of Ash'ari theology, in particular, illustrates the development of an epistemological framework that reconciles reason and revelation, enabling Islamic scholarship in Egypt to remain adaptive across different historical periods.

Furthermore, this study establishes that contemporary reforms in Islamic education—especially within al-Azhar—should not be interpreted as abrupt responses to modernity or external influence. Instead, they constitute a continuation of long-standing intellectual traditions characterized by flexibility, pluralism, and rational engagement with changing realities. Al-Maqrizi's historiographical work thus functions not only as a descriptive historical source but also as an epistemological foundation for understanding the internal logic of Islamic educational renewal. By emphasizing historical continuity, this research contributes to Islamic education studies by reinforcing the importance of integrating classical intellectual heritage into contemporary reform discourses, particularly in contexts such as Egypt and Indonesia.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed. First, future studies on Islamic educational reform should more systematically incorporate classical historiographical sources as epistemological frameworks, rather than relying exclusively on modern policy documents and contemporary narratives. Such an approach would help avoid ahistorical interpretations of Islamic education modernization. Second, Islamic educational institutions—particularly in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia—may draw conceptual lessons from Egypt's experience by strengthening curricular models that integrate religious sciences and modern disciplines within a coherent Islamic epistemology. Third, further research is

recommended to complement historical-textual analysis with empirical studies, including policy analysis and fieldwork within Islamic educational institutions, to assess how classical epistemological principles are operationalized in contemporary educational practices. This integrative approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between intellectual heritage and educational reform.

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