

Transformation of education in Minangkabau: A comparison of the educational concepts of Abdullah Ahmad (1878-1933) and M. Sjafei (1893-1966)

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Abstract

Education in Sumatra has been going on since the entry of Islam into Minangkabau. Through surau, education became part of the value system of Minangkabau society that succeeded in producing great scholars and santri. Surau is a typical tafaquh fi al-din space in the Minangkabau realm. Along with the changes that occurred in the order of society, the role of surau as an Islamic educational institution began to fade, replaced by educational concepts from the Minangkabau renewal figures themselves. Abdullah Ahmad and M. Sjafei emerged as educational reformers in Sumatra. The concept of education developed and slowly replaced the role of surau as a place to educate the children of Nagari Minangkabau. This article tries to describe the transformation of Islamic education that occurred in Minangkabau, which is important because it became the forerunner of the transition period of colonialism and independence that affected education in the archipelago, by photographing the ideas and concepts of education of Abdullah Ahmad and M. Sjafei. The research method used is a qualitative method with a literature review approach and takes a character study analysis. The main data sources are taken from books, articles, papers, and writings that discuss the characterization of Abdullah Ahmad and M. Sjafei. This article concludes that the concept of education brought by Abdullah Ahmad became a turning point in the overall educational modernization movement in Minangkabau, especially in religious education. This movement also became the root of the change in the education model of Surau which was very monumental in the past towards the madrasa model with an academic curriculum design that was much different from the design in Surau. The education offered by M. Sjafei became a turning point in the movement of the skills education model in Minangkabau. His concept focuses on productive education that hones the talent-based skills of the nation's children. Although he does not specialize in academic education, the development of his students is still oriented towards a good religious lifestyle and religious personality, in accordance with the religious culture of the Minangkabau people.

Keywords: *Abdullah Ahmad; Education; M. Sjafei; Minangkabau.*

Abstrak

Pendidikan di Sumatera sudah berlangsung sejak masuknya Islam ke bumi Minangkabau. Melalui surau, pendidikan menjadi bagian dari tata nilai

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kehidupan masyarakat Minangkabau yang berhasil melahirkan para ulama dan para santri hebat. Surau menjadi ruang *tafaqquh fi al-din* yang khas di ranah Minangkabau. Seiring dengan perubahan-perubahan yang terjadi pada tatanan masyarakatnya, peran surau sebagai lembaga pendidikan Islam mulai memudar, tergantikan dengan konsep-konsep pendidikan dari tokoh-tokoh pembaruan Minangkabau itu sendiri. Adalah Abdullah Ahmad dan M. Sjafei yang muncul sebagai tokoh pembaruan pendidikan di tanah Sumatera. Konsep pendidikannya berkembang dan perlahan menggantikan peran surau sebagai tempat mendidik anak-anak Nagari Minangkabau. Artikel ini mencoba menggambarkan transformasi pendidikan Islam yang terjadi di Minangkabau, di mana hal tersebut menjadi penting karena menjadi cikal bakal masa peralihan masa penjajahan dan kemerdekaan yang mempengaruhi pendidikan di Nusantara, dengan memotret gagasan dan konsep pendidikan Abdullah Ahmad dan M. Sjafei. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan kajian pustaka dan mengambil analisis studi tokoh. Sumber data utama diambil dari buku, artikel, makalah, dan tulisan-tulisan yang membahas tentang ketokohan Abdullah Ahmad dan M. Sjafei. Artikel ini mendapatkan kesimpulan bahwa Konsep pendidikan yang dibawa Abdullah Ahmad menjadi titik balik dalam gerakan modernisasi pendidikan secara keseluruhan di Minangkabau, khususnya pada pendidikan agama. Gerakan ini pun menjadi akar dari perubahan pendidikan model surau yang sangat monumental dahulunya menuju model madrasah dengan desain kurikulum bercorak akademik jauh berbeda dengan desain di Surau. Adapun pendidikan yang ditawarkan M. Sjafei menjadi titik balik dalam gerakan model pendidikan ketrampilan di Minangkabau. Konsepnya berfokus pada pendidikan produktif yang mengasah *skill* berbasis talenta anak bangsa. Meskipun ia tidak mengkhususkan diri pada pendidikan akademis, namun pembinaan para pelajarnya tetap berorientasi pada gaya hidup beragama yang baik dan berkepribadian agamis, sesuai dengan kultur budaya masyarakat Minangkabau yang agamis.

Kata kunci: Abdullah Ahmad; M. Sjafei; Minangkabau; Pendidikan.

Introduction

The history of each country has characterized the education of its people. Each is influenced by religion, philosophy, culture, and even the customs of the people. Indonesia, as a Muslim majority country, also has its own characteristics in terms of Islamic education in its society, although it is not easy to research in depth. However, from the discussion of the authors on the theme of the history of Islamic education, they agree that the journey of Islamic education in Indonesia was present and born along with the arrival of Islamic teachings in the archipelago (Saputra, 2021). In this case, the community has a considerable share and role in giving birth to Islamic education in Indonesia (Yunus, 1992).

From the existing historical records, Islamic education in the archipelago is polarized on two sides, namely the style of educational reform that developed in Minangkabau and the traditional style that maintains culture and religious

traditions in Java. However, in addition to these two patterns, there are also national-based educational patterns whose ideas and ideas are able to influence people who have been polarized with the two previous patterns (Syafri, 2022a). All of these were born from the community and developed for the benefit of the community itself.

Education originating from the community can be seen in the development of *surau* in Minangkabau. This educational institution emerged as a form of concern for the knowledgeable community and the scholars to improve the fate of society through education and teaching. In the Minangkabau social structure, *surau* is part of a tribal unity that cannot be separated from the unity of the *rumah gadang* unit in the life of the Minangkabau people. According to Azyumardi Azra (2017), *surau* can be considered as a *tafaqquh fi al-din* space that is typical of Minangkabau land. Even Mahmud Yunus (1992) sees it as an organized and sustainable education. This means that *surau* occupies a very important position in the educational process in society, even before the arrival of Islam (Azra, 2017).

Along the way, the role of *surau* as an educational institution in Minangkabau faded, along with the changes that occurred in the society. From a place to build the character and mentality of Minangkabau youth, it turned into just a place to learn to read the Qur'an. From learning by using the *halaqah* system turned into a class system with benches, chairs, and blackboards. From a place to learn religious knowledge only, it turned into a place of general learning, although religious lessons were still inserted. This change occurred because of the educational modernization movement among intellectuals in Minangkabau.

This change is explained by Dobbin (Azra, 2017), that in the span of 1780-1790s *surau* was still able to cope with new developments that occurred in Minangkabau society, especially in responding quickly to various problems caused by the development of trade. The spread of secular education in the form of *Nagari* schools did not destroy *surau* education. On the contrary, *surau* managed to incorporate some of its educational characteristics into the *Nagari* system. The decline of *surau* education was only felt with new developments and educational modernization movements among the Minangkabau community as a whole, not because of the development or competition from secular schools. This means that *surau*, which was able to survive the Dutch secular education system, was eventually crushed in the face of the modernization of education driven by the Young People of the time.

This change began to occur at the beginning of the 20th century, marked by the movement of religious people who built modern religious schools, changing the traditional *surau* system with a modern Dutch colonial-style education

system that was classical, graduated, and had a curriculum (Yasmansyah & Iswantir, 2021). *Surau Jembatan Besi* in Padang Panjang, for example, became the forerunner of the highly influential Thawalib school in Minangkabau (Yasmansyah & Iswantir, 2021; Alfurqon, 2019). *Surau* as a typical Minangkabau education place began to be abandoned, and Islamic teachers began to split. The condition of *Nagari* under Dutch colonial rule also gave enthusiasm to young people to change the concept of education that took place in the community. There were four young figures known as the "four sets" who were students of Sheikh Ahmad Katib al-Minangkabawi, namely Muhammad Jamil Jambek, Abdullah Ahmad, Sheikh Muhammad Thaib Umar, and Abdul Karim Amrullah (Rifauzi, 2019). They played a role in changing education in Minangkabau and influenced the development of education in the area (Alfurqon, 2019).

The modernization of education has significant implications. Education that was originally traditional began to be tinkered with and led to modern education in accordance with the times and the development of science. Old ideas that are considered irrational, customs, institutions, and so on are trying to be adapted to the progress of modern science and technology (Fadhil, 2007). According to research conducted by Rini Rahman (2015), the modernization of education in Minangkabau has three patterns. First, represented by Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad (1878-1933) with *Adabiyah* School which adopted Dutch education. Second, represented by Abdul Karim Amrullah (1878-1945) who maintained the characteristics of *surau* by conducting modernization oriented to the Middle East, or called *madrasah* style modern education. Third, represented by Zainuddin Labay al-Yunusiah (1890-1924) and Rahmah al-Yunusiah (1900-1969) who established modern education in the style of a vocational school (*takhassus*)—although not yet perfect—oriented to the needs of the community.

Abdullah Ahmad as a figure of the Young People at that time can be said to be the main figure of modernization whose movement focused on changing thinking in the field of education, improving the existing education system in the community, then changing it into a new education system which according to him aims to improve the quality of education in Minangkabau (Syamsuddin, 2015). His movement developed widely and gave birth to educational institutions that have their own characteristics and are ready to be offered to the Minangkabau community. In the next period, Mohammad Sjafei (1893-1966) emerged as a young person who saw the potential and talents of Minangkabau children. He offered skillbased education as a form of education that is independent, independent, achievement, active, creative and productive (Syafri, 2022b). Armed with strong idealism about the formation of the soul of the nation's children, he educated Minangkabau children with a talent-based

education pattern. The emergence of these two figures can be seen as a form of awareness of the nation's children to raise the dignity of their country as a form of their nationalism.

The developments that occurred in Minangkabau are quite interesting to study and analyze, because many national independence figures came from there. They grew up in an educational environment that was dynamic, independent, religious, and had strong local cultural traditions. This research tries to map the work of Abdullah Ahmad and M. Sjafei as influential figures of the Young People in the development of education in Minangkabau, especially about the concepts of education offered by them at that time. It is hoped that by mapping the educational concepts of the two figures, we can see the roots of the revival of education in the archipelago and the starting point of national education.

Research Methods

In this study the authors used a qualitative research method, which is a research method that aims to gain an understanding of reality through an inductive thinking process (Adlini et al., 2022). The approach used is a literature review to examine in focus and depth about the themes to be discussed by understanding and studying theories from various literature or references (Darmalaksana, 2020). This approach the author considers the most effective and efficient for analyzing the field of educational thought. Meanwhile, the analysis used takes character study analysis as the research subject. In the field of educational thought, this character study approach is most suitable for systematically examining the thoughts or ideas of a Muslim thinker, either in whole or in part (Harahap, 2011).

Data collection in this literature review research is to find sources and construct from various sources such as books, journals and research that has been done (Haryono, 2023). To obtain representative data in the analysis of this research, the author searches, collects, reads, and analyzes data sources that have relevance to the research problem, especially those related to Abdullah Ahmad and M. Sjafei as the central point of modernization figures in Minangkabau. The research steps used in this literature review-based qualitative research include preparing the necessary equipment, preparing a working bibliography, organizing time and reading and recording research materials. While the chosen analysis method uses content analysis and descriptive analysis.

Results and Discussion

A. The Condition of Education in Minangkabau in The Past

Since the beginning of Indonesian independence, many educated Minangkabau people have taken part in the proclamation and establishment of the Republic of Indonesia. Some names such as Mohammad Hatta, Sutan Syahrir, Haji Agus Salim, Mohammad Yamin, Tan Malaka, M. Natsir are national figures who have been named National Heroes. However, not all of these great people from Minangkabau became National Heroes. Some of them became politicians, writers, filmmakers, religious leaders, scientists, and educational figures (Matanasi, 2016). This makes the process of education and teaching in Minangkabau quite interesting to observe.

Minangkabau is a nickname for one of the indigenous ethnic groups of the archipelago in central Sumatra. Geographically, the distribution of the Minangkabau ethnic group covers the entire mainland of West Sumatra, half of Riau, the northern part of Bengkulu, the western part of Jambi, the west coast of North Sumatra, the southwest coast of Aceh and Negeri Sembilan in Malaysia (Wikipedia) Minangkabau refers to a cultural and geographical entity characterized by language use, customs that adhere to a matrilineal kinship system and Islamic religious identity (Sanusi, 2020). Its cultural customs are strongly colored by the teachings of Islam with the principle "*Adat Basandi Syara', Syara' basandi Kitabullah*" (Custom is based on the law, the law is based on the Qur'an) (Fajria & Fitrisia, 2024).

This also affected the education and teaching system there. Through *surau*, education developed as a space for *tafaqquh fī al-dīn* and became part of the life of the Minangkabau people. According to Mahmud Yunus (1992), the origin of *surau* as an Islamic educational institution was raised by Sheikh Burhanuddin (1646-1704) at the end of the 17th century. He established a *surau* in his hometown, Ulakan Pariaman. In this *surau*, Syaikh Burhanuddin taught Islam and educated several students who eventually played an important role in the development of Islam in Minangkabau. It can be said that it was Sheikh Burhanuddin who pioneered an Islamic education system through *surau* in an organized and sustainable education, in a large *surau* built as an educational institution (Yunus 1992; Azra, 2017; Syafri, 2022a).

Surau as a traditional Islamic educational institution has the same function as *Pesantren* in Java, *Meunasah* in Aceh, and *Pondok* in Malaysia. According to Samsul Nizar (2013), there are at least four types of educational models that have developed in society since the entry of Islam. These four models have played

their functions and roles in accordance with the demands of society and its evolving era, namely *surau*, *meunasah*, *pesantren*, and *madrasah*. In its position as an educational institution, *surau* is very strategic, both in the process of developing Islam and understanding Islamic teachings. *Surau* has even been able to produce great Minangkabau scholars and foster the spirit of nationalism, especially in repelling Dutch colonialism.

Along the way, the role of *surau* as an educational institution faded. Unlike *pesantren* in Java that still exist today, *surau* slowly collapsed and its position was replaced by *madrasah* as an educational institution for the Minangkabau community. From the author's previous research, there are at least two main causes that caused *surau* to be unable to maintain its function as an educational institution. First, the discrimination that occurred due to Dutch colonial education policy caused the decline of education in *surau*. The Dutch considered *surau* and all its teachings as a group that was hostile to them. Therefore, the Dutch were always looking for effective ways to monitor and control the influence of *surau* and make it isolated. Secondly, there is a modernization movement in society that results in changes in social norms, patterns of social behavior, and all aspects of social life. *Surau* grows and develops in a conflictual and dynamic sociocultural environment. Its open nature makes new elements coming from outside quickly cause changes (Syafri, 2022a).

On the one hand, the development of education in Minangkabau cannot be separated from the polemics that occurred between the Old People and the Young People. Abdul Karim Amrullah, Abdullah Ahmad, and Muhammad Jamil Jambek, who represented the Young People, often criticized the Old People. Discussions between the two sides were often organized to get accurate answers, although sometimes it was very difficult to unite. From *surau* to *surau*, there were always differences of opinion between the Young and the Old. Because they did not want to get involved in debates over differences about *tariqah* and *furu'iyah*, because it would only lead to the division of society, Sheikh Sulaiman al-Rusuli on behalf of the Old People agreed with Abdul Karim Amrullah as the representative of the Young People to unite their determination to spread Islam anywhere and anytime, that the issues of *khilafiyah* remain *khilafiyah*, not *bid'ah*, and following one of the four *madzhab* is the absolute way for people who are not *mujtahid*. With the unity of the Young and the Old, the power of Islam in Minangkabau was greatly feared by the Dutch. They did not want the history of the Padri War with the leadership of Imam Bonjol, which succeeded in uniting the adat and the Padri, so that they became overwhelmed by it. There was no other way for them but to scatter the power of Islam by removing important influential figures (Ulum, 2017).

The role of young people in the education modernization movement in Minangkabau is quite significant. They made educational innovations that were adapted to the situation and conditions that occurred at that time, where what they did was able to divert the attention of the Minangkabau community from *surau* education. The young people who came from Makkah began to arrive in Minangkabau at the end of the 19th century. *Surau*, which was driven by the old people, began to be criticized by their renewal movement, which attacked the teachings of *surau*, which they considered as *bid'ah* and *khurafat*. A dramatic change from the Young People's group was the establishment of a new seed of Islamic educational institution in Minangkabau, known as *madrasah*. At first, the early Young People's *madrasah* were very similar to *surau*. In line with the modernization taking place in the Minangkabau educational environment, a class system was introduced in the *surau* that were converted into *madrasah*. The curriculum of *fardhu kifayah* sciences also began to be incorporated into the existing education system, until it took the form of a 'Combination School', a public school that included religious subjects in its curriculum (Azra, 2017; Syafri, 2022a).

This was also realized by the *surau* leadership who knew that it was very difficult to maintain the traditional *surau* education system in the midst of the strong currents of the *madrasah* system. Some *surau* were converted into religious schools alongside the traditional *surau*. The traditionalists also published magazines to convey their messages, such as *Suluh Melayu* in Padang (1933), *Al-Mizan* in Maninjau (1928), and others. In a meeting of the Old Ones, they decided to modernize all existing *surau* according to the model developed by the Young Ones. However, whatever kind of modernization the Old Ones did to the *surau*, it would slowly wash away the original nature of *surau* education itself. This shows that the Old People no longer have any alternative in maintaining the existence of *surau* education, other than reorganizing it in line with various new developments in Minangkabau society (Azra, 2017).

The Young People's group also made their educational institutions a partner with the colonial government in its efforts to improve the welfare of the Minangkabau people. Although in the 1920s the Dutch began to closely monitor all activities of the Young People's group, by then they had already exerted a profound influence on Minangkabau society with their *madrasah* and schools. When the Dutch imposed the Teacher Ordinance (1928) and the Wild School Ordinance (1932) on Minangkabau, opposition arose not only from the Old People but also from the Young People. The Ordinance, which was principally aimed at curbing religious *surau* and *madrasah* education, eventually united the Old and Young in their opposition to it. When the Dutch later withdrew the

ordinance, the Young People resumed their educational reform movement, but not the Old People and their *surau*. They were unable to maintain the existence of the *surau*, which gradually declined and faded away.

This shows that since its inception *surau* was not easily crushed by Dutch colonial pressure and their secular school style. In fact, *surau* was crushed by its own movement for change, the modernization of education. However, what happened at that time can be understood because Dutch colonial policies were unfavorable to the development of education in the archipelago in general, and in Minangkabau in particular, although the ideas and movements of renewal had a major impact on the role and function of *surau*, which is cultural in nature.

B. Abdullah Ahmad (1978-1933): Education Modernization Figure from Minangkabau

The Young People's success in changing the *surau* education system into a *madrasah* cannot be separated from the role of Abdullah Ahmad as the main figure of the Young People at that time. He was contemporary with Sheikh Karim Amrullah - the father of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA) - who was known as a prominent figure among the Young People. Abdullah Ahmad was born and raised in an affluent educational environment. At that time, in the early 20th century, education in Minangkabau had only two levels, namely the level of teaching the Qur'an and the level of book recitation. The teaching was carried out in mosques, *surau* with *halaqah* learning techniques, where teachers and students both sat in a circle in carrying out the teaching and learning process, as previously explained.

Abdullah Ahmad was the son of Haji Ahmad, a religious teacher and merchant. He lived in a well-off family. So when he was 17 years old (1895), he went to Makkah to continue studying. At that time, the country's children who had a high spirit of learning and came from well-off families continued their education to Makkah or Egypt as the center of world Islamic knowledge. In Makkah itself there was already a community of Jawi scholars (*Bilâd al-Jâwah*), namely a community of scholars and students from the archipelago who settled in Makkah to deepen religious knowledge. They seek knowledge from world scholars who have expertise in the field of Islamic sciences after receiving a simple and limited educational process in their homeland. Some of them were trusted to teach at the Grand Mosque because of their intelligence, diligence and depth in studying. Just mention a few names such as Shaykh Ahmad Khatib Minangkabawi *rahimahullah*, Kiai Mahfudz Tremas *rahimahullah*, Kiai Nawawi Al-Bantani *rahimahullah*, Shaykh Ahmad Al-Fathani *rahimahullah*, Kiai Kholil Bangkalan *rahimahullah*, and others who became teachers at the Grand Mosque.

In Makkah, Abdullah Ahmad became a student of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Minangkabawi. He educated the sons of Minangkabau who studied in Haramain to be critical of a problem, especially religious issues, and the development of religion in Minangkabau. Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Minangkabawi also always monitored the development of his student's da'wah there. It was from this interaction that later aroused Abdullah Ahmad's desire to improve the condition of Minangkabau society through education. After four years of struggling with knowledge in Makkah, he returned to his homeland and began preaching.

Upon his return from Makkah, Abdullah Ahmad began to take part in the world of education. In 1899, he began teaching at Surau Jembatan Besi in Padang Panjang. From here he began to observe and think about the condition of education that occurred in Minangkabau. At that time, education in Minangkabau experienced a decline due to Dutch colonization. Although *surau* and mosques still existed to carry out the educational process, it was done simply and with limitations due to Dutch pressure and the social conditions of the community. This is what then aroused Abdullah Ahmad's awareness to come up with the idea of the *Adabiyah* School educational institution in 1907, the first modern educational institution in Padang Panjang that uses a classical system. The education curriculum combines religious and general sciences such as reading, writing and arithmetic.

While in Padang, Abdullah Ahmad did many activities that had to do with improving his intellectual quality. He had many discussions and interactions with educated people such as students of government high schools in Padang, doctors' schools in Jakarta, and helped the Jong Sumatranen Bond organization movement. This interaction was done through face-to-face meetings or correspondence. He also often communicated through letters with his teacher in Makkah, Sheikh Ahmad Katib Minangkabawi, and some of his friends from Makkah, Sheikh Jalaluddin, the leader of *al-Iqbal* and *al-Imam* magazines in Singapore. This interaction was quite influential on his personal characteristics. This can be seen from his ideas and ideas in his various activities in the educational, social and religious fields, so that he appeared as a respected educator figure in his time (Nata, 2005).

Adabiyah School underwent a transformation in the form of teaching due to conditions that forced it to close and move to Padang in 1909. Abdullah Ahmad thought that there was a more dynamic, open-minded educational atmosphere, and had wider access to the outside world. However, if in Padang Panjang the school carried a religious school that included general sciences, then *Adabiyah* School in Padang became a public school that included religious sciences as a

compulsory subject. According to Nillian R. Roof, as quoted by Fachri Syamsuddin, *Adabiyah* School Padang (1909) was more perfect than *Adabiyah* School Padang Panjang because in 1908 Abdullah Ahmad conducted a comparative study to Al-Iqbal Al-Islamiyah *madrasah* in Singapore which had just been founded by Usman Efendi Rafat from Egypt in 1907. This *madrasah* modeled many of the lesson plans developed in Egypt and the Western world. The students were native Malays, from both towns and villages. Those who graduated from this *madrasah* later emerged as the pioneers of Islamic organizations in the Malay Peninsula and effectively served as the dividing agent between the reformers and the old guard who were reluctant to accept change. In addition, Abdullah Ahmad also exchanged ideas with Sheikh Taher Jalaluddin Al-Azhari. It was this *sheikh* who motivated and directed him regarding the style of education that should be chosen, namely following the measures and references that existed in Egypt (Syamsuddin, 2015).

In addition, responding to the social conditions of the Minangkabau community, in 1919 Abdullah Ahmad gathered Minangkabau religious leaders in Padang Panjang to form an association called the Islamic Religious Teachers Association (PGAI) as a forum to improve the fate of Islamic religious teachers and education and educate the nation's children. At that meeting, Abdullah Ahmad was trusted by the first chairman of PGAI. This position was entrusted to him until his death. Through PGAI, he had the desire to educate the nation's children. He also wanted to establish secondary and tertiary schools as a form of carrying out this desire. In 1931, he succeeded in establishing an Islamic Secondary School called 'Normal Islam' and led the school for two years until his death in 1933. As for the Islamic High School that he aspired to, it could only be realized after he passed away, namely before 1940.

Abdullah Ahmad died on Friday, November 24, 1933 in Padang. During his lifetime, praise and support for Abdullah Ahmad were numerous. However, criticism and reproach were also present. Although there were some parties who did not like what he did in terms of education policy, especially those related to his willingness to cooperate and receive assistance from the Dutch colonial government, his ideas and ideas at that time were born as a solution to the conditions of his society which he thought needed innovation and renewal in the colonial era.

From the life history of Abdullah Ahmad, the author argues that in fact the modernization movement carried out by Abdullah Ahmad cannot be fully said to be a *surau* renewal movement. What he did indirectly changed the nature of Islamic education—represented by *surau*—and replaced it with a Dutch-style

education system. The process of fostering student character, which is the mainstay of the education process in *surau*, began to be abandoned, leaving only teaching that is only a transfer of knowledge (cognitive). However, what Abdullah Ahmad did can be understood to deal with the unfavorable policies of the Dutch colonial government towards the development of education in the archipelago in general, and in Minangkabau in particular, although Abdullah Ahmad's ideas and movements had a major impact on the system and institutional model of Islamic education in Indonesia.

C. M. Sjafei (1893-1966): Talent-Based School Initiator

The modernization of education in Minangkabau continued to grow. *Surau* began to be abandoned, replaced by *madrrasah*, modern vocational schools, and schools affiliated with the Dutch colonial. One that caught the attention of the Minangkabau community was a school known as the Ruang Pendidik (*Indonesische Nederlandsche School*) Kayutanam or INS Kayutanam with M. Sjafei as its figurehead. This education was born from the idealism of a Sjafei who wanted his nation to be free from colonialism. The independence that Sjafei meant had a broad meaning, namely freedom of thought, action, making choices, and thinking based on reality (Hastuti, 2020).

Sjafei was born in Pontianak to a Javanese woman named Sjafiah on October 31, 1893. His intelligence and enthusiasm for education have been seen since he was a child. Although he was not registered as a school student at that time, little Sjafei always took the time to listen to lessons through the classroom window, after he sold his mother's cakes. His persistence attracted the attention of Marah Sutan, a teacher who taught there, who eventually adopted him as a son (Navis, 1996; Syafri, 2022b). Marah Sutan was an educator from Padang who dedicated himself to several corners of the country teaching at the People's School for the good of his nation's children. Marah Sutan had a high idealism towards education for his country. For him, education in government schools (Dutch) would not foster the character of a diligent, enterprising and productive nation. Government education (Dutch) only fosters a slave spirit and lacks solidarity. According to Marah Sutan, "only through proportional education can the Indonesian nation elevate its dignity in a just and prosperous society" (Navis, 1996). It was this idealism that he passed on to Sjafei, who grew up under Marah Sutan's upbringing and guidance.

Under Marah Sutan's care, Sjafei grew up like a son of Minangkabau. He absorbed his adoptive father's hopes for the children of his nation, about Marah Sutan's desire to free his country from colonialism. Although Marah Sutan came from a modest family, he always tried to send Sjafei and his two other adopted

children to the best education. Sjafei himself was educated at Sekolah Raja, a Dutch-owned teachers' school in Bukittinggi. Marah Sutan never demanded anything of Sjafei. He let Sjafei grow with his talents as he told him before he left, "Be thou what be thou". Sjafei understood this sentence to mean that schools are meant to hone students' intelligence and intellect, not to mold them into other human beings (Navis, 1996).

After completing his education in 1914, Sjafei was offered to teach at HIS Padang. However, he refused and chose to teach at the Kartini School in Jakarta. One of the reasons for his decision was to follow the advice of Doctor Sutomo, the leader of Budi Utomo, who argued that it was better to teach at Kartini School in order to help educate girls because of its relevance to the ideals of advancing the Indonesian nation (Navis, 1996). Sjafei's gathering with national figures at that time can be said to be a means to finalize their shared ideals.

Since childhood, Sjafei was a man who did not like to sit idly by. He loved painting, crafts and other handwork. He developed this interest while attending the Sekolah Raja. Therefore, when he became a teacher, he took the time to take a painting course from the HBS drawing teacher. During this time she also improved her Dutch language skills, so that when she was 18 months old she received a certificate of completion and the right to teach in a secondary school with good grades. His enthusiasm for the handicraft curriculum was supported by fellow teacher Miss C.M. Vanger, who had a certificate as a French and handicraft teacher (Navis, 1996). Sjafei's curriculum materials also received support from the school leadership of Kartini School. At a handicraft exhibition at the NIOG congress in 1920, the handicrafts of Kartini School students received the highest praise.

However, according to Marah Sutan, Miss Holland's handicraft lessons were not relevant to the general needs of Indonesian girls. Handicrafts such as sewing, embroidering, and knitting only serve as leisure time fillers. The handicrafts needed are those that are economically productive and in accordance with the conditions of the Indonesian nation. So when she was sent to the Netherlands, the study plan to obtain the *hoofdacte*, main certificate of education, was diverted to courses such as handicrafts, music, and painting. For him, the teacher's training at the Sekolah Raja was enough. The *hoofdacte* required of a public school teacher was only for the need to obtain a higher position and salary. His teaching experience at Kartini School gave him the conviction that the education system and methods in Dutch government schools would not elevate the nation's dignity as an independent human being in an independent country. His association with youth organizations such as Budi Utomo and the Insulinde Party also added to

Sjafei's conviction that the issue of proper education for Indonesian children was crucial in achieving the independence of his nation (Navis, 1996).

Sjafei's mission in the Netherlands was to find out the dynamics that made the Dutch strong and advanced and also to learn what crafts supported them. In the land of windmills, Sjafe'i entered a private school to explore the teaching of expression (handwork, drawing, and sound art). He did not choose to enter a formal school with the assumption that he could learn his field of interest well, deeply and quickly (Hastuti, 2020; Fauzi, 2022). She also visited almost all industrial centers and vocational schools for her studies. For educational practice, he taught at a lower school in Mookhoek, Rotterdam. In his spare time, he wrote many Arabic and Latin reading textbooks for lower schools. These were later published by J.B. Wolters, Jakarta.

In addition, Sjafei was active in the Indonesian youth organization in the Netherlands "Indonesisch Vereeniging" and became editor of the education section of the organization's magazine. It was there that he met Mohammad Hatta who questioned, "why do you have to go to the Netherlands to learn handicraft education, when there are folk crafts all over Indonesia?"

According to Sjafei, handicraft lessons and handicraft education are two different things. Handicraft lessons can be provided through courses or training that function for labor skills. While handicraft education functions to arouse interest in crafts and willingness to work. That's why he came to the Netherlands, looking for the right education system and methods to use for his people. Sjafei's belief in the importance of handicraft education was expressed in the First Congress of the "Persatuan Guru Bumiputera Sumatera" in 1928 in Bukittinggi, after his return from the Netherlands. The topic of his presentation was later accepted as a congress resolution (Navis, 1996). However, Hatta and Sjafei found the same view, that an independent nation is a nation that is educated as an independent nation. Not only by its spirit, but also by its intellectual level and the ability to become an independent nation in the economic field. The nation's economy can be upheld if it has industry. Industry can only be managed by a nation that has a mentality of diligence, tenacity, thoroughness, and discipline.

After returning from the Netherlands in 1925, Sjafei further established himself in the field of education. Although while in the Netherlands he came into contact with political movements and discussed with famous politicians of his time, including Hatta, Monuntu, Sukiman and Subardjo, he argued that the meaning and function of education for a nation that wanted to be independent was no less important than political movements. Leaving political activities was his choice, considering that the political movement that originally aimed to

achieve independence had turned into a struggle for leadership within the party, resulting in many disputes that caused divisions between fellow political leaders and their followers.

Slowly Syafei became known as an educational figure because of his broad insight and ability to construct education in various aspects based on love for the country. Although he was a product of a Dutch school, Syafei often criticized colonial education in his country. According to him, colonial education distanced Indonesians from their society, from their nation and from their culture. He also said indirectly that the higher a person's schooling, the more distant his sense of social concern, and the higher his dependence on superiors (Navis, 1996). He also made observations on the concept of education as a result of his comparative studies from several countries in Europe, especially in the Netherlands. His conclusion was that the education that the Dutch realized in the archipelago was far different from the learning system and design that prevailed in the Netherlands. It can be likened, the school that was realized in the colony was not to advance, but to make the people slaves and servants of the colonizers. With this perspective, Syafei founded the Ruang Pendidik INS Kayutanam in Pariaman, a talent-based school. The INS Educator became a forum for Syafei to realize his ideals to build his nation by involving potential Minangkabau human and natural resources.

M. Syafei was appointed Minister of Education and Culture during the Sjahrir Cabinet Era. Although he only lasted two years, he managed to improve existing schools and open several schools for the benefit of the country's children. Until the end of his life, Syafei continued to develop ideas and ideas of education with a national character. His education movement has similarities with Ki Hajar Dewanagara, the Father of Indonesian Education. This means that these two contemporaries did not talk about education for the sake of religious curriculum design but for national needs, although their ideas also talked about religious education.

D. Comparative Concept of Educational Thought of Abdullah Ahmad and M. Syafei

Minangkabau can be said to be a tribe thirsty for school education. This is evidenced by the movement to send their children to school after the First World War. Initially this movement was for economic reasons related to the opportunity to become a government employee with a fixed salary and better than being a farmer. However, along with the development of schools established by the Dutch, an additional reason emerged which later became the general opinion of most people. Those who went to school were called "educated people". High

school graduates were called "intellectuals". To send their children to a Dutchlanguage school meant that they were entering a new world called "progress". Those who did not go to school were seen as "conservatives".

Abdullah Ahmad was born and grew up in such a stereotypical society. The community of his renewal movement was referred to as "Kaum Muda" or "Kaum Pembaru" as their distinction from the adherents of the old teachings (Navis, 1996). When modernizing education in *surau*, he used the label 'school' in the name of his school, *Adabiyah* School. Labeling his school with this name indirectly established him as part of the young people who wanted a change in the education system in Minangkabau society. He offered Dutchstyle education for the Minangkabau people, without exception, but still included religious education in it. He did not even hesitate to change the name of his school to HIS *Adabiyah* so that his school could continue to move forward according to the needs of the time. Although what Abdullah Ahmad did invited a lot of criticism from others, what he did could be said to be a form of survival from the educational discrimination carried out by the Dutch government against the children of his people.

The *Adabiyah* School education model could develop because of the community's dissatisfaction with the formal schools provided by the Dutch. Because these schools only teach general knowledge, while religious learning is not taught (Farabi, 2020). In addition, the education taught in formal Dutch schools is also felt to instill a westernized character which is not in accordance with the Minangkabau community environment which is thick with Islamic values. According to Rini Rahman (2015), Abdullah Ahmad's educational style adopted the Dutch colonial education pattern or called modern education in the style of Dutch schools. Even *Adabiyah* School is considered a pioneer of the national education model that combines religious and general education. This is also recognized by Fachri Syamsuddin (2015), a professor of the *Ushuluddin* Faculty of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in his research that *Adabiyah* School was founded by adopting absolutely the system and methods of Dutch low education. The difference is that in this school Islamic religious subjects are taught as compulsory subjects. This happened in 1915 when *Adabiyah* School decided to change its name to *Hollandsch Maleische School* (HMS) or *Hollandsch Indlandsch School* (HIS) *Adabiyah*.

When the name changed to HMS/HIS, *Adabiyah* began to be subsidized by the Dutch colonial government in the form of funds and teachers, namely three Dutch people, one as principal, and two as ordinary teachers. This indicated that the institution had been recognized as part of the Dutch colonial education

system. The difference was that if the schools established by the Dutch were secular (regardless of religious teachings), then the Adabiyah School still maintained Islamic values, especially still including the lessons of the *Al-Qur'an* and *Al-Sunnah* (Noer, 1982; Abdullah, 1989).

When viewed in educational aspects, Abuddin Nata (2005) classifies three aspects that encompass Abdullah Ahmad's educational thought. First, Institutional Aspects; HIS *Adabiyah* educational institution is considered a new chapter in educational reform that influences the establishment of modern Islamic educational institutions that are not only limited to elementary school level, but also secondary school level to high school. Another feature of the modernity of this institution is the selection of teachers who have qualifications equivalent to those of teachers who teach in Dutch schools and must also be an idealist and full of ideals for the progress of the colonized nation.

Second, Aspects of Teaching Methods; Abdullah Ahmad introduced many new teaching methods in the learning process at *Adabiyah* School. Among the famous ones is the debate or discussion method. At that time, this method was a new thing in the world of Minangkabau education. Students were encouraged to think critically and express their opinions openly as an exercise in thinking. In addition, there are methods of reward and punishment, exemplary methods, and methods of play and recreation.

Third, Curriculum Aspects; *Adabiyah* School at the beginning of its establishment was patterned after a religious school with a modern system, namely a classical system with benches, tables, blackboards, and other facilities. *Adabiyah* School also has a lesson plan (curriculum) that is arranged in such a way, including religious lessons and general lessons such as natural science, arithmetic, History, and even Dutch. The curriculum concept used is an integrated education curriculum, which combines general knowledge with religious knowledge and language in the education program as stated in each teaching plan. For Abdullah Ahmad, both Arabic and Dutch play an important role in order to achieve the ideals of reform and transfer knowledge through efforts to translate knowledge from foreign languages (Dutch) into Indonesian (Malay).

According to Rini Rahman (2015), there are several points of Abdullah Ahmad's thoughts on education. First, it calls for equal distribution of education. This is a reaction to the discriminatory Dutch policy in the field of education. Indigenous people do not get reasonable learning opportunities except for the *priyayi* class. Second, the need for curriculum integration between religious and general sciences. According to Abdullah Ahmad, both Arabic and Dutch play a

very important role in order to achieve the ideals of renewal and in the context of translating knowledge that was originally in foreign languages into Malay (Indonesian). Third, alternative sources of funding are needed. Fourth, the idea of modernity, namely the openness in accepting students at *Adabiyah* from all levels of society, which is important to be Muslim. The teachers were also selected teachers who had the same weight as teachers in Dutch schools. This had the aim of making *Adabiyah's* HIS graduates equal to those of the HIS implemented by the Dutch government, even though at that time the Dutch version of the HIS system was not ideal for indigenous Muslims. Fifth, Expanding the use of teaching methods. The teaching methods used by *Adabiyah* were not only lectures but also debating clubs, which were discussion methods that gave students the opportunity to be creative. This method provided the widest possible opportunity for students to ask questions and dialogue openly about various matters concerning religious matters which at that time were considered very taboo and less civilized. This was done as an effort to change the old way that placed students passively and was given less freedom, while more time was used by the teacher. In addition, the methods of reward and punishment, play and recreation were also used.

Another influential figure in Minangkabau education was M. Sjafei. Although not of Minang blood, he grew up and lived in a Minangkabau family and society, which indirectly shaped him into a Minang youth. His mind absorbed everything that developed in Minangkabau society. The principles of independence and national self-reliance taught by Marah Sutan, his adoptive father, were deeply rooted. So, when he created the Ruang Pendidik INS Kayutanam in 1926, his educational concept directed students to be independent, hard-working and independent-minded. The school was non-diploma with its educational focus on skills and talents. At that time the world economic recession after the First World War had caused a lot of unemployment among the educated. Therefore, there was a need for alternative schools so that students were encouraged to open their own businesses and would not become unemployed candidates (Navis, 1996).

Ruang Pendidik INS Kayutanam became an educational institution that was different from the educational institutions that mushroomed at that time in Minangkabau. Some of the schools that existed at that time included *Adabiyah* School founded by Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad in Padang in 1909, *Madras* School founded by Sheikh M. Thaib Umar in 1910 in Batusangkar, *Madrasah Diniyah* founded by Zainuddin Labai Al-Yunusi in Padang Panjang in 1915, *Arabiyah* School founded in Bukittinggi in 1918 by Sheikh Abbas Ladang Lawas, Sumatra *Thawalib* School in 1918 by Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah, and there was a

special *Diniyah* school for women founded by Rahmah El Yunusiyah in 1923. It was under these conditions that INS Kayutanam was born by Sjafei.

From the outset, Sjafei's educational goals were also the goals of education at INS, the nature school he founded with great idealism. The education he wanted was to educate the nation to become dynamic, active, creative and productive human beings with a high work ethic, to then place science and technology afterwards. According to him, education should also instill and nurture the following human traits: Belief in God Almighty, Ability to develop talents, Belief in oneself, Moral, Responsible for the safety of the country and the nation, Active minded, Have creative power, Intelligent, logical, and rational, Sharp and critical feelings, Persistent or tenacious, Perseverance in trying, Self-confidence, Honesty, and have a Pancasila life attitude (Navis, 1996). From the data analysis above, it can be seen that there are similarities between Sjafei's concept of education and Ki Hajar Dewantara's concept. They both see education in humans, especially in the soul that must be nurtured (Syafri, 2022a). For Sjafei, education of the soul is highly prioritized because that is where all knowledge and skills reside. According to him, "If necessary, let there be little knowledge but a great soul, rather than great knowledge but a small soul" (Navis, 1996).

Ruang Pendidik INS Kayutanam chooses to be independent, self-reliant, and unaffiliated with any group, so as not to reduce its nationalistic character. Because this can affect the concept of independent education which is instilled into the character of the students. Although Sjafei and the other initiators realized that this would encounter many difficulties in the development process, the process of overcoming these problems actually became a concept of independent and independent character education that would be emulated by students.

From the observations of these two different figures, it can be seen that Abdullah Ahmad and M. Sjafei chose different paths in implementing their educational concepts, although their goals were the same, namely to raise the dignity of the nation by educating the Minangkabau people to be equal to developed nations. Graduates of *Adabiyah* School and INS Kayutanam were both projected to provide the much-needed government employees. Some of the differences that the author can conclude from the two are as follows:

1. Abdullah Ahmad is more oriented towards cognitive (academic) education, while Sjafei on psychomotor education (skills) and affective formation (soul).
2. Abdullah Ahmad's curriculum type is the Academic Subject Curriculum. He divided his curriculum into two, general education and religious education. The general education curriculum follows the curriculum set by the Dutch Colonial government, while the religious education follows the education in

the modified *surau*. The type of Sjafei's curriculum can be said to be a combination of the Humanistic Curriculum and the Social Construction Curriculum. He did not take the Dutch curriculum at all. Because for him education is to educate talent and train the human spirit. Therefore, his curriculum is more focused on skills and arts education and bases it on a good religious life.

3. The learning process in Abdullah Ahmad's educational concept is classical, using chairs, tables and blackboards. The teaching methods used are the lecture method and the discussion/debate method. While Sjafei's learning process is non-classical, although he still uses chairs, tables, and blackboards if needed. The method is more of a drill method, field work method, and group work method.
4. Abdullah Ahmad opted for a subsidized financing system from the Dutch Colonial government. His school also routinely received teacher assistants from Dutch schools. Sjafei, on the other hand, opted for self-financing, with donations from parents and even from his own money. His teachers were drawn from those who shared the vision and mission of INS Kayutanam.
5. The evaluation of Abdullah Ahmad's educational concept is by test and oral exam, while Sjafei does not use specific evaluation in his concept. He only looks at the development of talents and skills possessed by his students.

Table 1. Comparison of Education Concepts of Abdullah Ahmad and M. Sjafei

	Destination	Curriculum Contents	Methods	Evaluation
Abdullah Ahmad	Educating the country's children through academic education	Reading, Math, Dutch, General Knowledge, Religious Knowledge	Lecture Method, Discussion Method	Written Exam
M. Sjafei	Educating the country's children through talent and skill education	Fine arts, Literature, Music, Drama, Sports, Religious life	Drill Method, Field Work Method, Group Work Method	Monitoring the development of children's talents

Source: Research Analysis Results

From the table above, it can be seen that the differences in the direction of education of Abdullah Ahmad and M. Sjafei are different in determining the concept of learning. However, what the two Nusantara education figures did was a form of criticism of the Dutch colonial government. Abdullah Ahmad, for example, felt unacceptable when people were forced to attend Dutch schools that negated religion. Whereas the culture of the Minangkabau people is strong in

Islamic teachings. The establishment of *Adabiyah* School can be called a form of 'refinement' of the existing education in the midst of Minangkabau society at that time, namely combining the Dutch education curriculum and religious education. The choice of this concept, according to the author, could be because Abdullah Ahmad had a religious education background who wanted religious sciences to be recognized in the Dutch education system in the archipelago.

Meanwhile, Sjafei prefers the anti-mainstream movement by not including the Dutch curriculum at all, when at that time many folk schools copied the Dutch curriculum. Sjafei has a Dutch educational background, and even studied there. However, he strongly criticized Dutch education in the archipelago. According to him, the education offered by the Dutch is the worst form of education in their home country. The curriculum that was prepared was not aimed at educating the Indonesian people to develop, but to prepare them to become capable and loyal amtenars. Indeed, at that time there were also vocational schools established by the Dutch, but the curriculum was to educate payroll workers, not to educate skilled humans who had the will to work and were independent.

Conclusion

The concept of education brought by Abdullah Ahmad became a turning point in the overall educational modernization movement in Minangkabau, especially in religious education. This movement also became the root of the change in the education model of *surau*, which was very monumental in the past, towards the *madrrasah* model with an academic curriculum design that was far different from the design in *Surau*. The education offered by M. Sjafei became a turning point in the movement of the skills education model in Minangkabau. His concept focuses on productive education that hones the talent-based skills of the nation's children. Although he does not specialize in academic education, the development of his students is still oriented towards a good religious lifestyle and religious personality, in accordance with the religious culture of the Minangkabau people.

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