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The Relevance of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's Ideas to Contemporary Women's Education in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of women's education in Indonesia through the educational thought of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah, a pioneering reformer who established the Diniyah Putri in Padang Panjang. Her initiatives emerged from a socio-historical context in which women had limited access to formal education due to patriarchal norms and colonial structures. The purpose of this study is to analyze Rahmah's holistic and integrative educational concept, which combines religious sciences, general knowledge, character formation, and practical life skills as a comprehensive system for empowering Muslim women. Using a qualitative approach with literature and historical methods, this research draws upon primary sources—such as archival records, biographical documents, and early curricula of Diniyah Putri—alongside secondary scholarly works. The findings reveal that Rahmah successfully shifted the paradigm of women's education from a domestic-centered model to a progressive framework that positions women as active agents in social and religious life. Her pedagogical model emphasizes moral integrity, intellectual competence, and social responsibility, making Diniyah Putri a pioneering institution of Islamic women's education in Southeast Asia. The study concludes that Rahmah's ideas remain highly relevant for contemporary educational development, offering a strategic foundation for strengthening the role of Muslim women as empowered, independent, and contributive members of society.

1. Introduction

Women's education is one of the key pillars of national development, as educated women make significant contributions across social, economic, and cultural spheres. Quality education for women directly influences family well-being, community empowerment, and the sustainable development of human resources. UNESCO emphasizes that increasing women's participation in education has a direct impact on a nation's social and economic progress (UNESCO, 2019).

However, the reality of women's education in Indonesia still faces various challenges. Several regions continue to show gender disparities in access to education, particularly in rural and remote areas (Rodin & Huda, 2020). In addition, certain social and cultural norms continue to limit women's opportunities to pursue higher education or participate actively in the public sphere. This situation indicates that, despite significant progress, strategic efforts are still needed to ensure that women receive equitable and high-quality education.

Ideally, women's education should be inclusive, holistic, and empowering, focusing not only on mastery of religious or domestic knowledge, but also on general knowledge, practical skills, and character building (Adib, 2023). This ideal education should produce women who are intelligent, independent, and ready to actively contribute to community development and religious outreach. This holistic educational concept aligns with the thinking of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah, who emphasizes the integration of religious knowledge, general knowledge, skills, and moral values in women's education. Several previous studies have discussed Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas in the context of women's education. For example, Helmi highlighted Rahmah's contribution to establishing Diniyah Putri as a progressive and holistic women's educational institution (Helmi, 2023), while Mulyanto & Wardatul Muslimah emphasized the integrative value of Rahmah's education (Mulyanto et al., 2025). However, some studies emphasize historical and curricular aspects, while analysis of the relevance of Rahmah's ideas to contemporary education is still limited.

This research gap raises questions about how Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas can be applied to address the limitations of women's access to education in the modern era, including in the context of digital literacy, gender equality, and social empowerment. This represents an important research gap to explore so that Rahmah's educational values and methods can be adapted to current educational needs. Furthermore, technological developments and digitalization in the contemporary era present both challenges and opportunities for women's education. Access to extensive information and various online learning platforms allows women to acquire knowledge more easily, but a digital divide remains that limits their participation, particularly in rural areas and underprivileged communities (UN Women, 2020). Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's holistic educational approach, which emphasizes adaptation to current developments and practical needs, can serve as a model for designing inclusive educational strategies, utilizing technology, while still emphasizing moral values and character.

Furthermore, quality women's education not only impacts individuals but also strengthens the capacity of society as a whole. Educated women are able to become agents of change in families, schools, and communities, and contribute to shaping progressive social norms based on gender equity (World Bank, 2018). In this context, Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas, which integrate religious knowledge, general knowledge, and practical skills, are relevant as the foundation of contemporary women's education, empowering them socially, economically, and spiritually, thus producing a generation of independent and globally competitive

women. The purpose of this study is to analyze the relevance of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas for contemporary women's education in Indonesia, with a focus on the integration of holistic educational values, methods, and concepts that can empower women to face modern challenges. This research is expected to provide recommendations for the development of more inclusive and adaptive curricula and policies for women's education.

The purpose of this study is to comprehensively analyze Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's educational ideas and their implementation in Diniyah Putri, by examining the historical-social context of its emergence, the holistic educational concept she developed, and its influence on the transformation of Islamic women's education in Indonesia. This research also aims to identify the relevance of Rahmah's values, principles, and educational methods for the development of contemporary women's education, particularly in addressing modern challenges such as digitalization, unequal access to education, and the need for women's empowerment. Thus, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the contribution of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's thinking as a model of inclusive, adaptive, and socio-spiritual empowerment-oriented women's education.

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with literature and historical study methods to understand Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas on women's education (Sugiyono, 2010). The qualitative approach was chosen because this study is exploratory and aims to analyze the concepts, values, and educational methods developed by Rahmah and their relevance to contemporary women's education. Data were collected from primary sources in the form of historical documents of Diniyah Putri, Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's biography, and academic publications discussing Islamic women's education. In addition, secondary data were obtained from scientific journals, previous research articles, and relevant Islamic education documents. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and thematic analysis approaches, where each piece of information was examined to find patterns, themes, and key concepts that reflect Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's holistic educational ideas (Faturokhmah, 2024). Furthermore, this study used source triangulation to increase data validity by comparing findings from literature, historical documents, and previous research. The results of the analysis are then presented in the form of a descriptive narrative explaining the transformation of women's education, the values developed by Rahmah, and their relevance to modern women's education.

3. Results and Discussion

The Historical and Social Context of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's Idea

At the beginning of the 20th century, Minangkabau was in a social situation undergoing significant change. Dutch colonialism not only brought a new economic

system but also influenced the educational patterns of the indigenous community. At that time, women's access to formal education was still very limited due to the dominance of patriarchal systems and social constructs that relegated women to the domestic sphere. Education for women was often considered unimportant, and some even considered it contrary to traditional values of decency. Amidst these conditions, Rahmah El-Yunusiyah was born and raised in Padang Panjang, known as a center of religious and Islamic thought renewal in West Sumatra. (Hamruni, 2004).

The Islamic renewal movement, driven by young Minangkabau people such as Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, Haji Rasul, and Zainuddin Labay, brought a new spirit to education (Furoidah, 2019). They rejected the traditional system that relied solely on surau (prayer halls), and initiated modern Islamic schools that combined religious and general education curricula. However, despite this growing spirit of renewal, women's education lagged far behind. It was in this context that Rahmah felt compelled to fill this gap (Yusutria & Hopid, 2021). She saw that women also had the right to receive equal education so they could play a role in building a progressive and civilized Islamic society.

Rahmah's family life significantly influenced the direction of her struggle. She came from an influential family of religious scholars, and her brother, Zainuddin Labay El-Yunusy, was known as the founder of the Madrasah Diniyah School for boys in Padang Panjang. Rahmah's experience witnessing limited access for women, coupled with her family's encouragement, fostered a critical awareness that women should be active subjects in education, not simply recipients of knowledge (Yusutria & Hopid, 2021). The Islamic educational values she learned from childhood, combined with her family's progressive views, formed the foundation for the birth of the idea of comprehensive Islamic-based women's education (Nur & Marlina, 1969).

The Minangkabau people have a matrilineal social system that uniquely accords women a respectable position in kinship and economic matters. However, this superiority does not necessarily guarantee equality in formal education. Rahmah observed a paradox between women's high social status in traditional customs and their limited access to religious education and general knowledge (Atlis & Roza, 2024). This paradox prompted her to make a breakthrough by establishing a women-only educational institution that focused not only on religious knowledge but also on life skills and a modern perspective. She wanted to develop Minangkabau women who were knowledgeable, independent, and actively involved in society without abandoning their Islamic and traditional values.

The establishment of the Madrasah Diniyah Putri on November 1, 1923, marked a significant milestone in the history of Islamic education in Indonesia (Zahra et al., 2024). This institution was not simply a learning platform for women, but a symbol of intellectual emancipation grounded in Islamic values. The curriculum developed by Rahmah emphasized a balance between religious knowledge, science, and practical skills such as health, sewing, and leadership. This approach reflected the

concept of holistic education that undivided the worldly and the hereafter (Yuliana, 2023). This made Diniyah Putri a pioneering Islamic women's educational institution in Southeast Asia, embracing a modern vision while remaining rooted in local Islamic traditions.

The social context at the time demonstrated that Rahmah faced various challenges, both from conservative groups who rejected formal education for women and from the colonial structures that dominated the public education system. She had to convince the community that education for women was not a threat to religious values, but rather strengthened the religious role and morality of the family (Isnaini, 2016). Through communication strategies and a religious approach, Rahmah successfully gained support from local religious leaders and the wider community. Her efforts paved the way for wider acceptance of women's education within Indonesian Muslim communities in the future.

Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas arose from the realization that a nation's progress is largely determined by the quality of its education, including education for women. She emphasized not only the importance of knowledge but also the integration of moral, spiritual, and social values (El-Yunusiyah, 1932). Rahmah asserted that educated women would be able to produce a moral generation, build quality families, and contribute to the advancement of society (Dermawan & Wirman, 2024). The spirit of renewal she instilled in Diniyah Putri continues and has become an important legacy in the history of Indonesian Islamic education (Adib, 2023). To this day, her ideas remain relevant for contextualization within a modern, equitable and competitive women's education system.

Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's Holistic Concept and Educational Method for Women's Empowerment

Essentially, Rahmah El-Yunusiyah promotes an educational vision that goes beyond the mere transfer of religious or general knowledge. She believes that education for women must integrate three main domains: scientific (cognitive), moral-spiritual, and practical/daily life. This concept aligns with the "mind, heart, and body" framework of holistic Islamic education (Nur Syahid, 2024). Thus, her educational model not only pursues academic excellence but also fosters pious, independent, and socially responsible character. More specifically, Rahmah emphasizes the importance of integrating religious knowledge with general knowledge. Various articles note that the curriculum at the institution she founded (Diniyah Putri) combines the study of the Quran, hadith, and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) with general subjects such as language, mathematics, and life skills (Atlis & Roza, 2024). With this approach, students learn not only to become "religious scholars" in the traditional sense but also to be prepared to face the challenges of the modern era.

Rahmah's holistic approach emphasizes a balance between intellectual development (knowledge and skills), moral-spiritual (Islamic values, character), and physical/practical aspects (life skills, work, leadership) (Arsip Diniyah Putri, 1937).

Studies on holistic education in Islam indicate that "accommodation of the mind, heart, and body" is important for creating a balanced human being (Nur Syahid, 2024). Rahmah believes that women who are only trained religiously or only equipped with practical skills will be incomplete. In its implementation, Rahmah implements a learning system that allows female students to be active, not just passive recipients. Learning methods in these girls' schools include group activities, discussions, skills training such as sewing or basic health, in addition to theoretical teaching (Dermawan & Wirman, 2024). Thus, her model helps develop the potential of female students so that they not only "survive" but also "thrive".

Character and moral aspects are core values in Rahmah's ideas. Acquiring knowledge is not the ultimate goal without developing strong morals and personality. In her work, Rahmah emphasizes that knowledgeable women must be able to serve as role models in their families and communities (Adib, 2022). Therefore, the education she designed prioritizes the development of pious, independent, and socially contributing individuals. Rahmah's ideas also demonstrate an orientation toward women's independence. Education not only transforms women into "scientists" or "teachers" but also empowers them to stand on their own two feet, economically, socially, and religiously (A. I. Hasibuan, 2023). This is achieved through the teaching of life skills and opportunities for female students to develop productive post-school activities.

Furthermore, the relevance of Rahmah's holistic ideas to the digital and global era is evident. The article states that Rahmah's thinking is worthy of contextualization for the 21st century because it combines knowledge, values, and skills to face modern challenges such as globalization and technology. Therefore, women's education that focuses solely on one dimension will be less relevant in the contemporary context. Furthermore, the integration of religion and general knowledge in the Rahmah model creates a space for inclusivity and social empowerment. Understanding that women are not merely domestic actors but agents of change, Rahmah initiated an education that enables women to take an active role in society and religion (Yeni Huriani, 2023). This model serves as a crucial foundation for transforming the paradigm of Islamic women's education in Indonesia.

The emphasis on "lifelong" learning and societal relevance is part of a holistic framework. One article notes that Rahmah encourages "learning from childhood to adulthood" and teachers/role models who understand their times. This illustrates that education does not only occur during school, but is a continuous journey. Ultimately, Rahmah's holistic educational model has strategic implications for the development of the current women's education system (Barizi, 2024; Dewi et al., 2024). The system needs to build a framework that focuses not only on academics but also on character, skills, and social relevance. Women's education must produce pious, intelligent, independent individuals who are able to synergize in national development. In this regard, Rahmah's ideas remain a powerful inspiration.

Rahmah El-Yunusiyah, the founder of Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang in 1923, was a pioneer of Islamic education for women in Indonesia. Amidst the dominance of patriarchy and limited access to education for women at that time, Rahmah believed that education was the right of every individual, regardless of gender. She emphasized the importance of education based on moral, religious, and national values, with the goal of developing individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess good character. Through this approach, Rahmah sought to empower women to play a strategic role as primary educators in families and communities (Fauzi & Hulawa, 2025). The educational method Rahmah developed was holistic and integrative, combining religious knowledge with general knowledge, life skills, and character development. This is reflected in the Diniyah Putri curriculum, which not only taught religious knowledge but also practical skills relevant to the social and economic needs of women at the time. This method aimed to create women who were independent, empowered, and able to contribute positively to society (Rodin & Huda, 2020).

Furthermore, Rahmah also emphasized the importance of contextual and adaptive education. She recognized that the challenges women face in education are constantly changing along with social and political dynamics (Rodin & Huda, 2020). Furthermore, Rahmah also emphasized the importance of contextual and adaptive education. She recognized that the challenges women face in education are constantly changing along with social and political dynamics (Rodin & Huda, 2020). Therefore, she advocated for education for women to remain relevant to the needs of the times and able to address existing challenges. In the modern context, the educational values and methods developed by Rahmah remain relevant to addressing the limited access to education for women. In this digital era, despite increasingly easy access to information, gaps remain in the quality of education and women's participation in higher and professional education. Therefore, a holistic, integrative, and adaptive educational approach such as that developed by Rahmah can serve as a model for designing inclusive and gender-equitable educational policies and programs (Mulyanto et al., 2025). This integrative approach aligns with the development of a competency-based curriculum that demands a link between spiritual literacy, numeracy literacy, and life skills, as implemented in the Merdeka Curriculum.

The Influence of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's Ideas on the Transformation of Islamic Women's Education in Indonesia

Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas had a significant influence on the direction of Islamic women's education in Indonesia, particularly in the early 20th century, when women's roles in the public sphere were still very limited. Through the Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang, she introduced a new paradigm that Islamic education for women should be integral, combining spiritual, intellectual, and social skills (Hirahmah, 2024). This model challenged the traditional view that women were only worthy of basic religious education for domestic purposes. Rahmah demonstrated that women could become independent, knowledgeable, and influential actors in society without losing their noble Islamic values.

The presence of the Diniyah Putri pioneered the establishment of various Islamic educational institutions for women in various regions of Indonesia.² Institutions such as the Madrasah Mu'allimat Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta, as well as Islamic women's schools in Sumatra and Java, drew heavily from Rahmah's system (Zahra et al., 2024). The curriculum, which combined religious and general subjects, became a reference for many modern Islamic boarding schools and madrasas. In this context, Rahmah not only championed equal access to education but also influenced the substance and direction of Islamic education, making it more humanistic and contextual to the times.

Furthermore, Rahmah's ideas contributed significantly to the Islamic modernization movement that began to grow in Indonesia in the early 20th century. She combined the spirit of renewal brought by figures such as Ahmad Dahlan and Hasyim Asy'ari with a women-centered approach (Rahmadhani, 2024). Rahmah demonstrated that women were not merely recipients of the benefits of modern Islamic education, but also creators of the educational system itself. This thinking helped strengthen the position of female ulama in Islamic discourse and opened up space for the emergence of a new generation of female educators in Indonesia.

One of the most influential aspects of Rahmah's ideas is her approach to the concept of education as empowerment (Eliza & Sari, 2024; Sharif & Januar, 2025). According to her, education should not stop at the transfer of knowledge, but must foster social awareness and the ability to solve societal problems (Mighfaza, M. Helmi, 2023). This model later became the foundation for the development of a women's Islamic education movement oriented towards community development, not simply the teaching of religious texts. Through its graduates, Diniyah Putri has produced female cadres active in social, da'wah, and political fields, expanding women's roles in the Islamic public sphere.

At the ideological level, Rahmah has also changed public perceptions of women's legitimacy in education and da'wah (Dennis, 2025). While female ulama were previously considered confined to the domestic sphere, Rahmah broke that barrier by becoming a sheikh, the highest title recognized by Al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1955. This international recognition was not only a symbol of personal honor but also affirmed the position of Indonesian women as pioneers of Islamic education worldwide (Hestivik et al., 2024). This had a psychological and sociological impact on the Muslim community in Indonesia, demonstrating that women possessed equal capacity to men in the fields of knowledge and spiritual leadership.

Rahmah's intellectual legacy extended beyond formal institutions and became embedded in Islamic educational thought in Indonesia. Many post-independence Islamic education policies adopted integrative principles similar to the Diniyah Putri system, such as a curriculum integrating religious and general knowledge, and a character education approach (Hidayatillah & Hakim, 2023). Furthermore, Rahmah's thinking inspired a discourse on women's education based on Islamic

values that empower, not restrict, them. She established a paradigm that the advancement of Muslim women strengthens Islamic civilization, not diminishes it.

Today, Rahmah's ideas remain relevant in addressing the challenges of women's education in the digital age. The integration of knowledge, faith, and good deeds she pioneered has become a crucial framework for modern Islamic education. Amidst the rapid flow of globalization, Rahmah's educational model serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining a balance between religious values and worldly competencies (Ichsan et al., 2020). Contemporary Islamic schools can draw inspiration from the spirit of Diniyah Putri to create women who are not only knowledgeable, but also empowered, creative, and socially responsible. Through her entrepreneurial journey, Rahmah El-Yunusiyah successfully carved out a broader transformation beyond just an educational institution. She created a system of values and a culture of Islamic education for women that continues to this day. Her thought process emphasizes that Islamic education is not merely about adapting to the times but also about leading change (Yusti Elida et al., 2024). Rahmah's ideas serve as proof that educational reform can begin with a single woman who possesses intellectual courage and sincerity in her missionary work.

In the context of contemporary women's education, the influence of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas is evident in several aspects that are now mainstreamed in national education policy. The integration of religious and general knowledge that she pioneered became the basis for the development of competency-based curricula, including the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes literacy, character, and 21st-century skills. Rahmah's emphasis on women's independence is also in line with gender equality trends and various women's empowerment programs such as Pre-Service PPG (Pre-Service Early Childhood Education), vocational training, and gender mainstreaming in education. Furthermore, Rahmah's pioneering model of social needs-based education and the formation of agents of change are reflected in the Holistic Integrative Early Childhood Education (PAUD) policy and the women's literacy movement promoted by the government. Thus, the influence of Rahmah's ideas did not stop in the colonial period, but became a conceptual inspiration for the development of the Indonesian women's education system in the modern era.

Implementation of the Rahmah Idea in the Diniyah Putri Institution

The implementation of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas in Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang provides concrete evidence of how women's education can be transformed into an independent, character-building system that integrates religious values and modern science. Established on November 1, 1923, Diniyah Putri emerged from Rahmah's concern about women's limited access to Islamic education. She observed that the educational system at that time was still male-oriented and tended to position women as passive objects of learning. Through this institution, Rahmah strived to produce Muslim women who were not only spiritually pious but also intelligent, independent, and socially empowered (Hestivik et al., 2024).

The Diniyah Putri curriculum was designed holistically, combining religious knowledge, general knowledge, and practical skills for life. Subjects such as tafsir (interpretation of the law), fiqh (jurisprudence), hadith (hadith), and Arabic were placed alongside general subjects such as English, history, and geography (Syaifullah Chaidir, 2012). Moreover, skills training such as sewing, cooking, and housekeeping are integrated not merely for domestic work, but as a form of independence and readiness for life in society. This idea demonstrates Rahmah's visionary thinking: education should not only develop intellectual intelligence, but also train women's social, emotional, and spiritual skills so they can stand on equal footing with men without losing their Islamic identity. Rahmah's integration of the religious-general curriculum aligns with the direction of current Indonesian education policy, particularly the Independent Curriculum, which prioritizes basic literacy, character, and 21st-century skills. Rahmah's approach, which combines religious knowledge, academics, and life skills, demonstrates that the holistic education model has actually been practiced long before it became mainstream in the modern education system.

In implementing the learning system, Rahmah applies participatory learning methods. She rejects mechanical memorization and replaces it with discussion methods, hands-on practice, and active student involvement in social activities and school organizations (Mansir & Tumin, 2020). Boarding school life is a crucial aspect that strengthens the integration between formal learning and character development. The dormitory is not just a place to live, but also a space for practicing leadership, independence, and social responsibility. Through activities such as deliberations, joint duty, and community service programs, female Diniyah Putri students are trained to become socially minded leaders accustomed to solving problems collectively. The participatory and experience-oriented learning patterns developed by Rahmah also align with the concepts of project-based education and experiential learning currently used in pre-service PPG and teacher development programs. By involving women as active subjects in the learning process, Rahmah's model opens up space for the development of female leadership an approach that is now a focus of women's empowerment programs in various Islamic educational institutions.

One of Rahmah's significant innovations was the placement of female teachers as key figures within the institution (Rahmayanti, 2023). This strategy not only strengthened women's position as subjects in education but also provided a concrete example that women could become educators and intellectual leaders. In the still patriarchal Minangkabau social context, this step was considered progressive. Rahmah believed that ideal education for women could only be fully provided by women who understood the conditions and needs of their own people. This fostered female solidarity, created a safe learning environment, and strengthened students' self-confidence.

In addition to focusing on cognitive and social aspects, Rahmah emphasizes the importance of character development and Islamic morality. She teaches values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility as the main foundation of education (Zain

& Mustain, 2024). Every activity at Diniyah Putri, both academic and non-academic, is aimed at strengthening the faith and morals of the students. In this regard, Rahmah combines the concept of tarbiyah (personality development) with modern education, which focuses on problem-solving. Education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but the process of developing moral and creative individuals. Rahmah's character development approach is also relevant to the Holistic Integrative Early Childhood Education (PAUD) model and the Character Education Strengthening Movement (PPK), which emphasizes the integration of moral values, social skills, and adaptive abilities. Rahmah's focus on moral development and social responsibility demonstrates that women's education must address the needs of society, not simply produce academically intelligent graduates.

The modernization of education is also reflected in Rahmah's adaptation to the Western education system without losing Islamic values. She studied the Dutch colonial education system and modern schools such as the Hollandsch-Inlandsche School (HIS), then adapted them to the Islamic context. The result was a progressive Islamic education model that taught modern sciences, foreign languages, and science, while remaining grounded in the values of the Quran and Sunnah (Hasibuan, 2013). Rahmah emphasized that the advancement of Muslim women lies not in imitating Western culture, but in the ability to integrate knowledge with faith. Diniyah Putri serves not only as an educational institution but also as a platform for women's social empowerment. Graduates become not only religious teachers but also community leaders, social activists, and educational figures in various regions of Indonesia (Syaifullah Chaidir, 2012). Many of them have established similar educational institutions outside of West Sumatra. This demonstrates that Diniyah Putri is a transformative model of Islamic education, transforming women from passive recipients into agents of social change.

The independence of this institution also symbolizes resistance against colonialism and structural dependency. Rahmah rejected funding from the Dutch colonial government, fearing that intervention would change the ideals of Islamic education for women.⁹ This independent stance made Diniyah Putri not only a symbol of intellectual progress, but also a symbol of cultural and ideological resistance against colonial domination that placed women in a second-class position. To this day, the educational system Rahmah El-Yunusiyah built at Diniyah Putri remains relevant. The values of integration, independence, and empowerment she instilled are important foundations for modern women's education. The boarding school model, the integration of religion and science, and character building have inspired many Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Rahmah's ideas demonstrate that Islamic education need not be conservative; it can be progressive, adaptive, and contextualized to current developments.

The Transformation of the Paradigm of Islamic Women's Education in Indonesia

The transformation of women's education in Indonesia in the early 20th century received significant impetus from the ideas of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah through the

establishment of the Diniyah Putri (female Islamic school) in Padang Panjang. The old educational paradigm, which positioned women as objects of education, taught to meet the domestic and spiritual needs of the family, began to shift to a model in which women became active, empowered subjects, and played a role in community development (Nasution et al., 2022). In the context of progressive educational theory, Rahmah's ideas can be linked to John Dewey, who emphasized education as a life experience that shapes individuals to actively participate in society. In other words, women's education was not merely the transfer of knowledge, but also the development of comprehensive social, moral, and intellectual capacities.

The social impact of this transformation was deeply felt in the Muslim community of West Sumatra and the surrounding areas. Graduates of the Diniyah Putri not only mastered religious knowledge but also possessed social, leadership, and practical skills that enabled them to contribute to various social, educational, and da'wah activities. The empowerment theory proposed by Kabeer (1999) is relevant to explain this, as education that empowers women increases their capacity to make strategic choices in social and professional life (Jenny, 2024). With competent graduates, society begins to recognize women's capacity as agents of change, not simply as domestic workers.

This paradigm shift also had a profound cultural impact. Diniyah Putri introduced an inclusive, independent, and collaborative learning culture for women. Dormitories and extracurricular activities provided spaces for female students to interact, lead, and develop creativity.⁵ Sociologically, this aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and cultural capital, where education shapes social norms, behaviors, and symbolic capital that enable women to negotiate their social position more effectively (Musarrofa, 2015). Compared to other women's educational institutions at the time, Diniyah Putri demonstrated a more progressive model. While many women's schools still focused solely on domestic education and religious memorization, Diniyah Putri integrated religious knowledge, general knowledge, and practical skills (Kahfi, 2025). This approach prepared Diniyah Putri graduates not only to face domestic challenges but also to take on public roles, including establishing other schools, engaging in social organizations, and participating in da'wah activities. This marked a paradigm shift in the education of Islamic women from "domestic educators" to "community educators."

This transformation also opened up a space for discussion about gender equality in Islamic education. The concept of gender-responsive education emphasizes that curriculum and learning methods must consider the needs, potential, and rights of women (Kahfi et al., 2024). Rahmah El-Yunusiyah pioneered the application of this principle long before the modern term was coined. She demonstrated that women could become empowered educational subjects, equal to men, without losing their Islamic identity. Furthermore, this paradigm shift impacted the broader social structure of society. The Diniyah Putri model demonstrated that women's education can strengthen Muslim communities, as educated graduates become advocates for children's education, moral mentors, and community leaders contributing to social development. This impact is also evident in the increasing number of women

establishing educational institutions in other regions, emulating the Diniyah Putri model, thus spreading the idea of women's empowerment through education.

Overall, the paradigm shift in Islamic women's education in Indonesia, pioneered by Rahmah El-Yunusiyah, demonstrates the integration of religious values, general knowledge, and social empowerment. This approach remains relevant today as an educational model that empowers women, expands their social roles, and affirms that Islamic education can be a vehicle for progressive social change. This transformation not only altered women's position in the classroom and home but also expanded their influence in the public sphere, inspiring contemporary educational policies.

The Relevance of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's Ideas for Contemporary Women's Education

Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas on women's education are highly relevant in the context of contemporary education, particularly in the modern era marked by globalization, digitalization, and gender equality (Yusti Elida et al., 2024). Rahmah's educational concept emphasizes the integration of religious knowledge, general knowledge, practical skills, and character development, which aligns with the theory of holistic education and women's empowerment. Becker's (1993) Human Capital Theory is relevant in this context, as women's education improves intellectual abilities and skills, which impact women's productivity and socioeconomic contributions (Sadariawati, 2017). Thus, Rahmah's ideas are not only historical but also have practical value in developing women's human resources today.

In the context of current Indonesian women's education policy, Rahmah's thinking finds relevance in various aspects of national education system reform. Her integration of religious and general knowledge aligns with the direction of the Independent Curriculum and competency-based curriculum, which emphasizes character building, basic literacy, and 21st-century skills. Rahmah's emphasis on women's independence also resonates with the gender equality agenda and women's empowerment programs such as Pre-Service PPG (Pre-Service Early Childhood Education), vocational training, and gender mainstreaming in education. Furthermore, Rahmah's holistic education model, which combines cognitive, spiritual, and life skills aspects, is highly relevant to the development of the Holistic Integrative Early Childhood Education (PAUD) policy and the women's literacy movement that the government continues to promote. Thus, the relevance of Rahmah's thinking is not merely normative, but has a direct relationship to the direction of women's education policy, needs, and practices in contemporary Indonesia.

Furthermore, the principle of empowering education is at the heart of Rahmah's ideas. The empowerment theory developed by Kabeer (1999) explains that women's empowerment through education encompasses three main dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements (Kahfi et al., 2024). Rahmah, through Diniyah Putri, has

put this concept into practice by providing equal access to education, participatory learning, and opportunities for women to develop social, leadership, and professional skills. Education not only transfers knowledge but also fosters women's capacity to make strategic decisions in their personal and social lives.

In the context of contemporary education, Rahmah's ideas are highly relevant in addressing the challenge of limited access to education, especially for women in remote areas or marginalized communities. This holistic and adaptive educational model can serve as a reference for modern schools and educational institutions in designing inclusive curricula oriented toward character development, digital literacy, and 21st-century skills (Septian Aristya, Zurqoni, 2023). Mezirow's (1997) Transformative Learning Theory can also be used to analyze this relevance, as empowering education aims to shift perspectives, increase critical awareness, and prepare women to face complex social changes (Rosmilawati, 2017).

Rahmah's ideas also support the concept of gender-responsive education, which is now a global concern in education. Education that considers women's needs and potential produces graduates who are competent, confident, and able to play an active role in the public sphere (Az-Zahra et al., 2024). Rahmah's approach, which combines religious and general knowledge, along with character development, provides a concrete example of how women's education can create a generation with a balance between spirituality, intellect, and social skills. Furthermore, the values instilled by Rahmah, such as discipline, social responsibility, leadership, and independence, remain relevant in developing women who are adaptive to current developments. In the digital age, these values serve as an essential foundation for digital literacy, innovation, and professional ethics. Holistic women's education, as exemplified by Rahmah, ensures that intellectual advancement does not sacrifice moral and social values, in line with the principle of integrated education widely adopted in modern educational curricula (Sayuti & Sitorus, 2025).

Practically, Rahmah's ideas can serve as a model for developing contemporary educational programs, including e-learning, project-based education, and women's leadership development activities. Educational institutions can emulate the integration of religious, general, and social skills curricula, so that women receive a balanced education relevant to global challenges. According to Rahmah, women's education is not merely an academic formality, but a comprehensive capacity-building process. Thus, the relevance of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's ideas for contemporary women's education is evident in three main aspects: increasing intellectual capacity (human capital), social empowerment (empowerment), and character and leadership development (transformative learning) (Nurlaelah et al., 2023). This concept demonstrates that good women's education is one that develops the full potential of individuals, empowers them to take on strategic roles, and enables them to contribute positively in a complex modern society.

4. Conclusion

Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's educational ideas have proven to be strongly relevant for the development of women's education in the modern era. This research shows that the holistic approach she developed—integrating religious knowledge, general knowledge, life skills, and character development—can produce intelligent, independent, and socially empowered women. Through participatory and contextual learning methods, Rahmah not only transfers knowledge but also empowers women as active subjects and leaders in society. These findings confirm that Rahmah's educational values, methods, and principles can serve as a model for women's education that is inclusive, progressive, and adaptive to the needs of the times. The holistic and empowering approach she pioneered provides direction for resolving contemporary issues, such as limited access to education, low female literacy, and the demands of 21st-century competencies. Thus, Rahmah El-Yunusiyah's intellectual legacy is not only historically significant but also strategic for formulating relevant policies and practices for women's education, rooted in moral-spiritual values, and capable of addressing global challenges.

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