



RENEWAL IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AHMAD AL-TAYYEB AND HAEDAR NASHIR

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas konsep pembaruan Islam kontemporer melalui kajian komparatif antara Ahmad al-Tayyeb dan Haedar Nashir. Perdebatan mengenai pembaruan Islam pada era modern cenderung dikaji secara parsial dalam konteks Timur Tengah atau Indonesia, sementara studi yang membandingkan model tajdid berbasis otoritas keagamaan global dan gerakan Islam modern Indonesia masih terbatas. Kesenjangan tersebut penting dikaji untuk memahami keberagaman orientasi pembaruan Islam dalam merespons tantangan modernitas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis cara kedua tokoh mendefinisikan pembaruan Islam, menghubungkan nilai-nilai otentisitas Islam dengan dinamika modern, serta mengidentifikasi persamaan dan perbedaan orientasi pemikiran keduanya. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dengan metode deskriptif, analitis, dan komparatif. Data penelitian diperoleh dari karya, pidato, dan dokumen pemikiran kedua tokoh yang dianalisis bersama literatur terkait tajdid, wasatiyyah, reformasi Islam, dan Islam Berkemajuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua tokoh sama-sama menolak ekstremisme dan sekularisasi modernitas, tetapi memiliki titik tekan yang berbeda dalam gagasan pembaruan Islam. Ahmad al-Tayyeb menekankan turath, moderasi Islam, kesinambungan tradisi keilmuan, dan dialog antaragama, sedangkan Haedar Nashir menonjolkan Islam Berkemajuan, transformasi sosial, pendidikan, serta pluralisme kewargaan. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pembaruan Islam berkembang secara kontekstual, etis, dan kelembagaan sesuai dengan lingkungan sosial masing-masing. Temuan ini menawarkan kontribusi baru berupa kerangka komparatif antara paradigma pembaruan Islam berbasis otoritas keagamaan Timur Tengah dan gerakan Islam modern Indonesia, sehingga memperluas pemahaman tentang pluralitas model tajdid Islam kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Pembaruan Islam, Tajdid, Islam Berkemajuan, Wasatiyyah, Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Haedar Nashir.*

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the concept of contemporary Islamic reform through a comparative study of Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir. Debates on Islamic reform in the modern era have often been examined separately within Middle Eastern or Indonesian contexts, while comparative studies exploring reform models based on global religious authority and modern Indonesian Islamic movements remain limited. This gap is important to address in order to understand the diversity of Islamic reform orientations in responding to the challenges of modernity. This study aims to analyze how both figures define Islamic reform, connect the values of Islamic authenticity with contemporary dynamics, and identify the similarities and differences in their intellectual orientations. The research employs a qualitative library-based approach using descriptive, analytical, and comparative methods. The data were collected from the writings, speeches, and intellectual documents of both figures, supported by literature on tajdid, wasatiyyah, Islamic reform, and Progressive Islam. The findings reveal that both figures



reject extremism and the secularization of modernity; however, they differ in their emphasis on Islamic reform. Ahmad al-Tayyeb highlights *turath*, Islamic moderation, the continuity of scholarly traditions, and interfaith dialogue, whereas Haedar Nashir emphasizes Progressive Islam, social transformation, education, and civic pluralism. The study confirms that Islamic reform evolves contextually, ethically, and institutionally in accordance with the social environments surrounding each intellectual tradition. This research offers a novel contribution by proposing a comparative framework between Islamic reform paradigms rooted in Middle Eastern religious authority and those emerging from modern Indonesian Islamic movements, thereby broadening the understanding of the plurality of contemporary *tajdid* models.

Keywords: *Islamic Reform, Tajdid, Progressive Islam, Wasatiyyah, Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Haedar Nashir.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic renewal (*tajdid*) has consistently occupied an important position in the development of Muslim intellectual traditions because it represents efforts to maintain the relevance of Islamic teachings amid changing historical and social realities. Rather than introducing a new religious framework, *tajdid* emphasizes reinterpretation, contextualization, and methodological refinement while preserving the Qur'an and Sunnah as normative foundations. Contemporary scholarship indicates that renewal increasingly intersects with debates on ideological polarization, shifting religious authority, and global transformation, making Islamic reform a continuing intellectual necessity in modern societies (Taufiq 2022; Hassan 2021; Saeed 2022). Within this context, studies on Islamic renewal remain largely fragmented across regional traditions, whereas comparative analyses connecting Middle Eastern religious authority and Southeast Asian reform movements are still limited. This article offers a novel contribution by positioning Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir within a single comparative framework to explain how different institutional environments shape contemporary models of Islamic renewal.

The urgency of Islamic renewal becomes more visible amid tensions between rigid religious interpretations and secular-oriented modernity. Exclusivist understandings of Islam may intensify identity conflicts and reduce constructive engagement with plural societies, while unrestricted adaptation to modernity risks weakening connections to classical scholarship and ethical foundations. Recent studies demonstrate that contemporary Muslim societies require renewal paradigms capable of responding to democratic participation, citizenship, humanitarian challenges, and institutional transformation without abandoning religious authenticity (Bromley 2022). In addition, the expansion of digital spaces has transformed religious communication patterns and challenged traditional authority structures, generating new debates regarding legitimacy, interpretation, and influence in Muslim communities (Mohiuddin 2023). Consequently, Islamic renewal today involves not only theological reinterpretation but also engagement with technological change, public discourse, and emerging forms of religiosity.

This article responds to those developments by examining two influential Muslim intellectual figures who represent distinct yet interconnected paradigms of reform: Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir. Ahmad al-Tayyeb, as Grand Imam of al-Azhar, is associated with moderation (*wasatiyyah*), preservation of scholarly traditions (*turath*), and interfaith dialogue. Several recent studies indicate that his thought prioritizes balancing renewal with continuity through reinterpretation of inherited traditions and moderation-oriented discourse (Safitri 2024; Ainudzaky et al. 2025). Meanwhile, Haedar Nashir develops the concept of *Islam Berkemajuan*, emphasizing educational advancement, civic ethics, and social responsibility as instruments of



Islamic transformation (Arifin, Mughni, & Nurhakim 2022; Abdullah 2024). Unlike approaches centered solely on doctrinal renewal, both figures illustrate that contemporary *tajdid* increasingly operates through institutions, public engagement, and ethical responses to societal change.

The comparison between Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir is significant because it bridges experiences of Islamic renewal emerging from different sociocultural and intellectual settings. Al-Tayyeb reflects a model rooted in scholarly authority, moderation, and preservation of religious sciences, whereas Nashir advances a model oriented toward progressive Islam and organized social transformation (Baihaki & Jauhari 2025). Although studies on Ahmad al-Tayyeb have explored themes of moderation, *turath*, and religious authority, and research on Muhammadiyah has highlighted *Islam Berkemajuan* as a progressive paradigm, these discussions have generally been conducted separately. Explicit comparative studies integrating both intellectual traditions within one analytical framework remain scarce. This limitation creates a conceptual gap in understanding how contemporary Islamic renewal develops across different institutional and geographical contexts.

Previous studies on Islamic renewal have predominantly examined reformist figures such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Sayyid Qutb, Fazlur Rahman, and Nurcholish Madjid. Their contributions are commonly associated with rationalism, contextual interpretation, educational reform, and Muslim responses to modernity. More recent scholarship has expanded the discussion toward moderation, digital Islam, transnational intellectual networks, and progressive Islamic movements. However, limited attention has been given to comparative inquiries that simultaneously analyze Arab and Indonesian experiences of Islamic renewal, particularly through the interaction between authoritative religious institutions and organized Islamic movements. This unresolved gap restricts broader understanding of the plurality of contemporary *tajdid* models. Therefore, comparative analysis becomes important to reveal how Islamic reform adapts to varying historical, social, and institutional circumstances.

Based on these considerations, this study investigates how Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir conceptualize Islamic renewal and how their ideas converge or diverge in addressing contemporary Muslim challenges. The article aims to explain the conceptual foundations of *tajdid*, analyze the renewal perspectives of both figures within their institutional contexts, and identify similarities and differences through comparative analysis. The significance of this research lies not only in comparing two influential Muslim thinkers but also in proposing a broader conceptual perspective that repositions *tajdid* beyond theological discourse toward a multidimensional framework involving religious authority, education, institutional responsibility, civic coexistence, and ethical engagement in plural societies. By comparing al-Tayyeb and Nashir, this article argues that contemporary Islamic renewal becomes more meaningful when fidelity to religious tradition is integrated with critical reasoning, social responsiveness, and adaptation to global change.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative library research approach using descriptive, analytical, and comparative methods to examine the concepts of Islamic renewal (*tajdid*) in the thought of Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir. Library research was selected because the object of analysis consists of ideas, texts, and intellectual discourses rather than observable social behavior. The descriptive approach was used to explain the meaning of *tajdid* and reconstruct the intellectual background of both figures, while the analytical approach was

applied to interpret concepts such as *turath*, *wasatiyyah*, *ijtihad*, moderation, education, and social transformation. The comparative approach was employed to identify similarities and differences between the two models of renewal in terms of epistemological foundations, institutional orientation, and responses to contemporary Muslim challenges. Primary sources consisted of books, official speeches, institutional documents, and published writings directly associated with Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir. Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and academic studies on Islamic reform, moderation, and contemporary Muslim thought, with emphasis on literature published within the last ten years to ensure conceptual relevance and alignment with recent scholarly developments. Older references were included selectively when considered foundational to discussions on *tajdid* and Islamic renewal.

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques by identifying, selecting, classifying, and organizing literature relevant to the research objectives. The selection of literature followed three criteria: (1) conceptual relevance to Islamic renewal and contemporary Muslim thought; (2) direct discussion of Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Haedar Nashir, or related institutional frameworks; and (3) academic credibility indicated by publication in scholarly books, institutional documents, or peer-reviewed journals. The analytical process proceeded through several stages. First, data reduction was conducted by excluding literature that did not directly address Islamic renewal, moderation, *turath*, *Islam Berkemajuan*, or comparative Islamic thought. Second, the remaining literature was categorized into thematic groups, including concepts of *tajdid*, religious authority, moderation, educational reform, institutional transformation, and social engagement. Third, thematic synthesis was performed to connect recurring ideas and identify patterns within each figure's intellectual perspective. Fourth, the study analyzed Ahmad al-Tayyeb's approach through *turath*, moderation, and dialogue, followed by analysis of Haedar Nashir's perspective through *Islam Berkemajuan*, education, and social transformation. Finally, both perspectives were compared to identify convergences and divergences in responding to contemporary Muslim challenges.

To enhance methodological transparency and credibility, source triangulation was applied by comparing primary texts with contemporary academic interpretations, institutional publications, and recent scholarly discussions addressing Islamic renewal. This process aimed to reduce interpretive bias and strengthen consistency between original ideas and secondary analyses. The findings were subsequently interpreted narratively to formulate a comparative framework explaining how Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir represent distinct yet complementary paradigms of *tajdid*, namely heritage-centered renewal and institution-centered social transformation within contemporary Muslim societies. Through this procedure, the study seeks to provide a more systematic explanation of how different sociocultural and institutional contexts shape contemporary models of Islamic renewal.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis identified that contemporary *tajdid* is constructed through four interconnected dimensions: continuity with Islamic sources, critical engagement with inherited tradition, contextual responsiveness to social change, and institutional implementation of renewal. These dimensions repeatedly appeared across literature discussing Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Haedar Nashir, and contemporary debates on Islamic reform. The findings indicate that *tajdid* is no longer understood merely as doctrinal correction but increasingly as an effort to maintain Islamic relevance amid educational, political, and social transformation. This shift suggests a

broader movement in contemporary Muslim thought, where renewal is measured not only by interpretive legitimacy but also by institutional capacity and social impact.

The findings reveal that Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir share common normative foundations by positioning the Qur'an and Sunnah as primary references for renewal. However, differences emerge regarding the operational orientation of *tajdid*. Ahmad al-Tayyeb prioritizes preservation of *turath*, scholarly continuity, and interpretive discipline, whereas Haedar Nashir emphasizes institutional reform, civic engagement, and organized social transformation. These differences indicate that Islamic renewal develops through plural epistemological pathways shaped by distinct historical experiences and institutional environments rather than through a singular universal model.

The study further demonstrates that moderation functions as an important principle within both frameworks, although expressed differently. In al-Tayyeb's perspective, moderation appears through *wasatiyyah*, interreligious dialogue, and resistance to extremism. In Nashir's framework, moderation is embodied in civic participation, educational reform, and coexistence within plural societies. Therefore, moderation in contemporary Islamic thought increasingly shifts from abstract theological positioning toward practical mechanisms for managing diversity and strengthening social cohesion.

The comparative analysis additionally shows that institutional settings significantly influence the practical expression of *tajdid*. Al-Tayyeb's model is closely associated with al-Azhar as a center of religious authority emphasizing scholarly formation and preservation of inherited knowledge. Conversely, Nashir's model demonstrates renewal through Muhammadiyah institutions operating in education, healthcare, humanitarian services, and community empowerment. Rather than repeating distinctions summarized in Table 1, these findings emphasize that institutionalization determines whether renewal remains discursive or evolves into sustainable social practice.

Table 1. Comparative Dimensions of Islamic Renewal in Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir

Dimension	Ahmad al-Tayyeb	Haedar Nashir
Main orientation	Renewal through <i>turath</i> , <i>wasatiyyah</i> , scholarly authority, and interreligious dialogue.	Renewal through <i>Islam Berkemajuan</i> , institutional da'wah, education, welfare, and civic transformation.
Epistemological foundation	Genealogical and textual: Qur'an, Sunnah, <i>kalam</i> , <i>fiqh</i> , Arabic sciences, and Azhari interpretive discipline.	Socio-normative and institutional: Qur'an, Sunnah, Muhammadiyah <i>tajdid</i> , social ethics, and public welfare.
Meaning of moderation	Hermeneutical and theological moderation rejecting extremism, <i>takfir</i> , and separation from inherited scholarly traditions.	Civic and social moderation promoting tolerance, peaceful citizenship, social service, and constructive national participation.
Educational function	Producing competent scholars and protecting religious discourse from shallow interpretations.	Producing enlightened citizens and strengthening institutions through schools, universities, hospitals, and social movements.
Primary arena	Global religious discourse, al-Azhar authority, Muslim-Christian dialogue, and preservation of Islamic heritage.	Indonesian Muslim society, Muhammadiyah institutions,

Dimension	Ahmad al-Tayyeb	Haedar Nashir
Main contribution	Demonstrates that renewal can preserve continuity of tradition while responding to modern crises such as extremism and interreligious conflict.	democratic citizenship, and social transformation. Demonstrates that renewal can become a concrete social infrastructure addressing education, health, poverty, and public ethics.

Based on the comparative findings, this study proposes an integrative conceptual model of contemporary *tajdid* consisting of two complementary dimensions: (1) *heritage-centered renewal*, emphasizing epistemic continuity, scholarly legitimacy, and moderation; and (2) *institution-centered transformation*, emphasizing organizational adaptation, social responsibility, and public welfare. The interaction between these dimensions forms a dynamic framework through which Islamic renewal maintains fidelity to tradition while responding to contemporary realities.

Discussion

The findings indicate that contemporary *tajdid* increasingly operates beyond doctrinal reinterpretation and expands into domains of education, citizenship, institutional reform, and social ethics. This tendency supports arguments that contemporary Muslim thought has shifted from theology-centered debates toward broader concerns involving governance, pluralism, and public morality (Duderija, 2022). The significance of this transformation lies in redefining Islamic renewal as a multidimensional process in which religious legitimacy is evaluated not only through textual fidelity but also through responsiveness to social realities. Consequently, the comparison between Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir reflects two trajectories of renewal shaped by different institutional settings rather than opposing ideological commitments. Studies on Muhammadiyah’s cultural theology further demonstrate that contemporary Islamic reform increasingly integrates religious values with social adaptation and civic engagement (Nasution et al., 2025).

Moderation constitutes one of the strongest intersections between both figures, although its operational meanings differ. Al-Tayyeb interprets moderation through *wasatiyyah* aimed at reducing extremism, preserving scholarly discipline, and preventing fragmented religious interpretation. Institutional descriptions of Ahmad al-Tayyeb emphasize his role in promoting interreligious dialogue, scholarly continuity, and balanced religious understanding within global Islamic discourse (Dar al-Ifta, n.d.). Meanwhile, Haedar Nashir associates moderation with civic ethics, social participation, and constructive citizenship. Previous studies emphasize that justice, consultation (*shura*), and social responsibility remain central to democratic coexistence in Muslim societies (Suryana & Sumarta, 2025), suggesting that moderation increasingly functions as a practical ethic of governance rather than merely a theological principle.

Educational institutions emerge as crucial mechanisms for sustaining renewal. Al-Tayyeb regards education as protection of scholarly authority and disciplined interpretation, whereas Nashir views education as an instrument for societal transformation and long-term empowerment. Existing studies demonstrate that Muhammadiyah education combines religiosity, openness, ethics, and modernization (Hanipudin, 2020; Sami'in & Rahman, 2024). This orientation is consistent with analyses of Islam Berkemajuan, which portray educational and organizational institutions as vehicles for producing socially engaged and ethically

responsible Muslim communities (Pani Dias, 2024). The present findings therefore extend previous scholarship by arguing that educational institutions mediate the transformation of normative Islamic values into enduring civic and institutional practices.

The comparison also reveals different understandings of the relationship between religion and social change. Nashir's concept of *Islam Berkemajuan* emphasizes visible societal outcomes through welfare programs, healthcare, education, and humanitarian initiatives. Previous literature notes that Haedar Nashir's reformist thought places organizational adaptation and social benefit at the center of Islamic renewal, making institutional effectiveness an important indicator of religious relevance (Pani Dias, 2024). In contrast, al-Tayyeb's orientation underscores preservation of epistemic continuity and legitimacy rooted in inherited scholarly traditions. These distinctions imply that sustainable renewal requires balance between intellectual authority and measurable social contribution, because reform lacking institutional embodiment risks remaining symbolic.

Another important implication concerns changing patterns of religious authority in digital environments. Contemporary Muslim communities increasingly negotiate legitimacy through online platforms and digital communication (Lipková, 2024; Isnaini, 2026). In this context, al-Tayyeb's emphasis on scholarly continuity may function as a corrective to fragmented digital religiosity, whereas Nashir's institutional networks offer adaptive mechanisms for disseminating moderate Islamic values across broader audiences. The cultural foundation of *Islam Berkemajuan* identified by Nasution et al. (2025) suggests that institutional adaptability becomes increasingly important in maintaining Islamic relevance amid shifting social and technological conditions. This indicates that future models of *tajdid* may require integration among traditional authority, institutional outreach, and digital engagement.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study lies in proposing that contemporary Islamic renewal cannot be adequately explained through a single paradigm of reform. Instead, *tajdid* emerges through interaction between heritage-centered renewal—emphasizing continuity, moderation, and scholarly legitimacy—and institution-centered transformation—emphasizing social engagement, organizational responsiveness, and public welfare. The intellectual authority represented by Ahmad al-Tayyeb and the reformist institutional orientation associated with Haedar Nashir together illustrate complementary rather than competing pathways of renewal (Dar al-Ifta, n.d.; Pani Dias, 2024; Nasution et al., 2025). This integrative framework expands previous discussions on Islamic reform by connecting Arab religious authority and Indonesian Islamic movements within one comparative model. Accordingly, the novelty of this study rests not merely on comparing Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir, but on formulating a multidimensional conceptual approach for understanding contemporary *tajdid* across diverse sociocultural and institutional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that contemporary Islamic renewal (*tajdid*) develops through the interaction between intellectual continuity and institutional transformation. The findings indicate that *tajdid* should not be understood merely as doctrinal reinterpretation, but as an epistemic, ethical, and social process connecting Islamic sources with contemporary realities. In this perspective, sustainable renewal requires balance between scholarly legitimacy, moderation, educational development, and practical engagement in responding to social challenges. The study therefore confirms that contemporary Islamic reform becomes more effective when preservation of tradition and transformative institutional action operate simultaneously.

The principal theoretical contribution of this research lies in proposing a comparative framework that integrates *heritage-centered renewal* and *institution-centered transformation* as two complementary dimensions of contemporary *tajdid*. This framework broadens discussions on Islamic reform beyond theological debates toward issues of education, religious authority, institutional responsibility, and social transformation. Although limited by its qualitative library approach and focus on two contemporary Muslim figures, the study provides a foundation for future empirical and comparative research across wider Muslim contexts. The novelty of this study rests not only on comparing Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Haedar Nashir, but also on formulating an integrative conceptual model connecting Arab religious authority and Indonesian Islamic reform movements within a unified analytical perspective on contemporary Islamic renewal.

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