



## Abdurrahman Wahid's Thoughts on Human Rights Based Humanistic Education in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to analyze K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's thoughts on human rights-based education within the framework of Islamic humanism and to identify obstacles to its implementation in the context of national education. Using a qualitative literature review approach, data were obtained through a review of Gus Dur's works and related academic literature. The results indicate that Gus Dur's thoughts emphasize the importance of inclusive, democratic education based on respect for diversity. Three main findings were identified: a lack of understanding of human rights values among teachers, conventional teaching methods that minimize student participation, and a social environment that does not support the spirit of inclusion. Additionally, inclusive learning strategies and educational environments have been shown to play a significant role in increasing students' awareness of human rights values. Gus Dur stated that education is a means of humanising humans, not merely a tool for reproducing knowledge. Therefore, human rights-based education must be realized systematically through curriculum reform, teacher training, and collaboration between schools and the community. This study contributes to the development of an educational model that is responsive to social justice and diversity in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Abdurrahman Wahid, Human Rights, Humanistic Education.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pemikiran K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) mengenai pendidikan berbasis hak asasi manusia dalam kerangka humanisme Islam, serta mengidentifikasi hambatan dalam implementasinya dalam konteks pendidikan nasional. Pendekatan tinjauan literatur kualitatif digunakan, dengan data diperoleh melalui analisis karya-karya Gus Dur dan literatur akademik terkait. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran Gus Dur menekankan pentingnya pendidikan inklusif dan demokratis yang didasarkan pada penghormatan terhadap keragaman. Tiga temuan utama diidentifikasi: kurangnya pemahaman nilai-nilai hak asasi manusia di kalangan guru, metode pengajaran konvensional yang meminimalkan partisipasi siswa, dan lingkungan sosial yang tidak mendukung semangat inklusi. Selain itu, strategi pembelajaran inklusif dan lingkungan pendidikan telah terbukti memainkan peran penting dalam meningkatkan kesadaran siswa terhadap nilai-nilai hak asasi manusia. Gus Dur menyatakan bahwa pendidikan adalah sarana untuk menghumanisasi manusia, bukan sekadar alat untuk mereproduksi pengetahuan. Oleh karena itu, pendidikan berbasis hak asasi manusia harus diwujudkan secara sistematis melalui reformasi kurikulum, pelatihan guru, dan kolaborasi antara sekolah dan masyarakat. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan model pendidikan yang responsif terhadap keadilan sosial dan keragaman di Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** Abdurrahman Wahid, Hak Asasi Manusia, Pendidikan Humanis.

### Introduction

In the context of Indonesia's plural and diverse socio-political dynamics, Gus Dur's ideas are highly relevant for further study, especially as the challenges in implementing education become increasingly complex and require innovative solutions. Globalization and the development of information technology have had an ambivalent impact on value systems. On the one hand, they provide easy access to information and broaden students' horizons; on the other hand, they contribute to the marginalization of vulnerable groups who are unable to keep up with these developments. This is where the urgency of Gus Dur's thinking lies, which calls for the importance of inclusive education based on human values. He argued that education



should be a means to increase individual awareness of their rights and obligations and strengthen social solidarity in a diverse society (Wicaksono, 2022).

The fundamental problems that are the main focus of education in Indonesia are inequality in access, quality, and distribution of education. Although the Constitution and various regulations guarantee the right to education for every citizen, the reality on the ground shows that there are significant disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as between the upper-middle class and the poor (Febriyanto, 2024). In this context, Gus Dur's contribution is significant because he proposed an educational approach that prioritizes academic aspects and focuses on moral and social values. He encouraged education to play a role in shaping individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also have character and sensitivity to the social problems faced by their nation (Riady and Wardi, 2021).

Gus Dur's thoughts on humanistic education also contain the message that plurality is not a threat, but rather a treasure that must be nurtured through an educational process that instills the values of tolerance, mutual respect, and empathy among individuals. As stated by Asiyah (2021), education that promotes human values cannot be separated from the role of educators as agents of social change. Teachers, lecturers, and educational institutions as a whole play an important role in ensuring that the principles of humanism and human rights are not only teaching materials but also fundamental values in every learning practice.

The available literature indicates that, although there has been progress in mainstreaming human rights education in Indonesia, its implementation still faces structural and cultural challenges. For example, many educational institutions are still unable to translate the values of pluralism and social justice into the curriculum holistically (Febriyanto, 2024). Therefore, the approach offered by Gus Dur offers a relevant alternative to be adapted, namely, education that is participatory, based on the social experiences of students, and responsive to the cultural and religious diversity that exists in Indonesia.

In addition, it is important to highlight how Gus Dur linked religious freedom, thought freedom, and education. He believed that education should encourage students to think freely and not be afraid of being different. Therefore, an educational curriculum designed based on human rights values must create space for dialogue, encourage inclusivity, and reject violence in any form. Within this framework, education not only prepares individuals to face workplace challenges but also shapes the moral character that can contribute to the development of a civilized society (Afida et al., 2023).

Moreover, Gus Dur's thinking opens up space for the development of a curriculum that is contextual and relevant to the social reality of Indonesian society. According to him, education based on human rights must pay attention to local needs, respect local wisdom, and uphold universal values. This indicates that education should not be trapped in uniform standards but must be adaptive to the social and cultural complexities in which it is carried out (Fitriani et al., 2021). In this context, schools and educational institutions become democratic spaces that encourage the emergence of individuals who are aware of their social rights and responsibilities. To broaden our understanding of Gus Dur's thinking, it is important to examine the role of traditional educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, which have long been important arenas for the development of pluralism and tolerance. Pesantren, in Gus Dur's view, have great potential as educational institutions that ground human rights values due to their close connection with grassroots communities. Therefore, integrating formal education



systems with pesantren-based education could be an effective strategy for implementing humanistic education in Indonesia (Wicaksono, 2022).

Thus, the contribution of this article lies not only in describing Gus Dur's thoughts but also in developing a theoretical and practical framework for the effective implementation of humanistic educational values in the national education system. This article attempts to connect ideas and practice, theory and reality, as well as Gus Dur's thoughts and the actual needs of education in Indonesia. It is hoped that this article can contribute to academic discourse, policy making, and the implementation of education that is more equitable, inclusive, and upholds human rights. Finally, through an in-depth examination of Gus Dur's ideas on humanistic education and human rights, this article seeks to emphasize that education is not a neutral entity, but a means of struggle to create a more just and civilized social order.

## Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study, which focuses on an in-depth analysis of K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's thoughts on human rights-based education within the framework of Islamic humanistic values. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the normative and philosophical ideas contained in Gus Dur's works and thoughts holistically and contextually. Data collection was conducted through a literature review, examining relevant secondary sources such as scientific journal articles, books, intellectual works, and other documents directly or indirectly related to the research topic (Anam, 2019; Rosyad & Ma'arif, 2020).

The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive-analytical methods. Through this approach, the researcher sought to systematically interpret and explain how Gus Dur's thoughts on education could be integrated with human rights principles. The analysis was conducted by comparing various perspectives found in the literature to identify consistent patterns of thought, conceptual commonalities, and potential contradictions in the application of humanistic values in education (Sumariyastuti, 2019). This approach also includes the synthesis of collected data to build logical arguments supporting the research questions. To reinforce the findings of the literature, this study considers the possibility of further development through triangulation methods, including exploratory interviews with stakeholders in education and human rights. This aims to enrich the dimensions of the analysis and confirm the relevance of Gus Dur's ideas in the context of contemporary educational practices (Luthfi, 2022). This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of an inclusive and human values-based discourse on Islamic education.

## Result and Discussion

### 1. Integration of Gus Dur's Thoughts on Human Rights in Educational Practice

The results of this study indicate that K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)'s thoughts on human rights have contributed significantly to educational practice in Indonesia, particularly in developing an inclusive, humanistic, and pluralistic approach to education. Within this framework, education is not positioned solely as a means of reproducing knowledge, but rather as a medium for social transformation that can shape individuals who are aware of their rights, are ethical, and are tolerant of diversity. In general, there are three main findings of this study.



First, using a curriculum that integrates human rights values and character education has strengthened students' awareness of the importance of tolerance, diversity, and social justice.

Second, a humanistic approach to education, as initiated by Gus Dur, encourages increased student participation in the teaching and learning process, including decision-making in the school environment. Third, although these steps show positive developments, obstacles remain in terms of implementation, particularly in terms of policy consistency, teacher readiness, and community understanding of human rights values in education.

Gus Dur believed that education should be a space for character development that upholds the values of humanity and justice. This is reflected in his statement that 'education is a tool for humanising humans', not merely a tool for producing workers. Therefore, integrating human rights values into the education system is a fundamental strategy for shaping individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also socially sensitive and committed to vulnerable groups (Haryanti & Hayati, 2019; Harlen, 2022).

Many teachers do not yet have sufficient pedagogical competence to deliver human rights material meaningfully and non-dogmatically. This is reinforced by the findings of Haryanti and Hayati (2019), who indicated the need for comprehensive and sustainable training programs for educators to enable them to internalize humanist values in the teaching and learning process. In addition, existing educational policies often do not fully support the integration of human rights. In many cases, human rights values only appear as part of specific subjects and have not become principles that underpin all educational policies and practices in schools (Tujuh, 2019). Consequently, there is a gap between the theory promoted in the curriculum and its practical implementation, where these values are often not reflected in teacher-student interactions, assessment mechanisms, or extracurricular activities.

In the context of teaching strategies, dialogue-based and cooperative learning are relevant methods for bringing human rights values to life in the classroom. This model allows dialogue among students from diverse backgrounds and provides opportunities to develop empathy and tolerance. Puspitawati and Mawardi (2022) noted that this approach can improve students' critical thinking skills regarding humanitarian issues while building collective awareness of the importance of living together in diversity. However, evaluations of educational practices indicate that while some students have begun to understand basic human rights concepts, their level of awareness of applying these values in daily life remains low. This is demonstrated in studies by Sugeng (2022) and Putra and Purnomowati (2024), which found that students tend to have a normative understanding of human rights but are unable to internalize them emotionally or practically. In this regard, a more holistic approach is needed, including extracurricular activities such as youth programmes, advocacy training, and social projects.

Gus Dur's idea about the importance of diversity as a national asset forms the basis of the multicultural education approach he advocated. According to him, good education prepares students to live in a heterogeneous society by equipping them with the values of tolerance, openness, and respect for differences. According to Nurhaliza (2023), education must teach students that differences are not barriers but valuable sources of social learning. Human rights-based education within a multicultural framework also includes efforts to create space for interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Gus Dur set an example in this regard through his involvement in various peace and interfaith dialogue forums.

In this context, education acts as a catalyst that shapes students' perspectives so that they are not easily provoked by narratives of hatred and identity-based discrimination. Therefore, it



is important to integrate this dimension into the curriculum through cross-cultural studies, unbiased history lessons, and inclusive narratives.

The integration of Gus Dur's thoughts on human rights in education does not stop at the cognitive and affective levels but must also reach the conative or action aspect. In this case, education must equip students with advocacy skills, public participation, and courage to speak the truth. Farohah and Tirtoni (2024) emphasize the importance of active student involvement in social activities as part of character building based on the principles of human rights. School programmes that encourage students to engage in community service, participatory action research, or public debates on social issues are important to adopt in the educational system.

Furthermore, the integration of human rights values into education must consider the local context and specific needs of each region. In Indonesia's highly diverse society, a one-size-fits-all approach risks ignoring the unique social and cultural dynamics of each region. Therefore, curriculum flexibility and the empowerment of local educational institutions are key to ensuring that human rights values are applied in a relevant and meaningful manner.

The success of this integration will be largely determined by the sustainability of programs and the consistency of policies that favor humanistic values and social justice. Gus Dur's ideas provide a normative and inspiring direction for education that seeks to shape a young generation that is not only academically intelligent but also has moral integrity and social awareness. Thus, human rights-based education is not merely a normative discourse but a necessity for creating a just, democratic, and civilized society (Puspitawati & Mawardi, 2022; Farohah & Tirtoni, 2024; Sugeng, 2022).

## 2. Obstacles to Implementation and Gaps between Theory and Practice in Human Rights-Based Education

The results of this study reveal that the implementation of human rights-based education in Indonesian schools still faces complex structural, cultural, and pedagogical obstacles. The data analysis revealed three main obstacles that most frequently arise: limited understanding of human rights among teachers, a conservative and exclusive approach to education, and a social environment that does not support the spirit of inclusion and equality.

First, teachers' limited understanding of human rights is a crucial obstacle. Most teachers have not received systematic training in teaching human rights and are unfamiliar with pedagogical approaches based on human rights values. As a result, the delivery of human rights material in the classroom is often normative and not contextual, so it does not have a significant impact on students' attitudes and awareness (Murdoko, 2024). In this context, Gus Dur stated that 'education is a tool to free humans from intellectual and social oppression' (Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita, 2006). Therefore, if education fails to equip students with an awareness of their rights, it has failed to fulfil its substantive function.

Second, the learning approach in many educational institutions is still dominated by conventional teacher-centered methods, with minimal space for participation. This prevents students from expressing themselves, engaging in dialogue or critically questioning existing norms. Human rights-based education requires a democratic learning environment in which students feel valued and heard. In Abdurrahman Wahid's view, education must shape democratic awareness from an early age. He emphasized that education should not be a tool for indoctrination but should build the ability to engage in dialogue in diversity (Wahid, 1999).





Third, a social environment that is not yet inclusive also widens the gap between human rights theory and practice in the context of education. Students from minority groups or with special needs often face discrimination, bullying, and exclusion. This indicates that, although Indonesian education theoretically adopts the principles of equality and non-discrimination, at the implementation level, there are still repeated violations of these fundamental values (Murdoko, 2024).

As Gus Dur emphasized, respect for differences is the foundation of civil society. In his book *Ilusi Negara Islam* (2009), he stated that respect for the rights of every citizen, including the right to be different, is the most tangible form of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. Gus Dur emphasized the importance of spaces for intercultural encounters to cultivate empathy and respect for differences, stating that the process of 'experiencing diversity' is part of moral education (Wahid, 2006). Community and family involvement in human rights education was also found to be limited.

When human rights values are only taught in the classroom without support from home and the students' social environment, the internalization process is uneven. Gus Dur repeatedly emphasised that a civil society cannot be built without strong public participation. In his view, education is a social project, not just the responsibility of the state, and must involve collaboration between the state, society, and individuals (Wahid, 1999). Furthermore, gaps are evident in national education policies that have not fully mainstreamed human rights principles in a structured manner. Although policies and curricula mention the importance of democratic values and tolerance, there are no clear evaluation instruments to measure their success. The absence of concrete indicators to assess the extent to which human rights have been internalized by students and schools is a major obstacle to ensuring the effectiveness of this approach (Murdoko, 2024).

In Gus Dur's framework, this shows an imbalance between ideas and the systems. He often argued that the weakness of the state lies not only in its institutions but also in its inability to translate the values of justice into concrete operational systems. Therefore, education that seeks to liberate and respect human rights must be designed systematically and have strong public accountability (Wahid 2009). Based on the results of the research and discussion above, it is clear that the obstacles to the implementation of human rights-based education in Indonesia are not only technical but also ideological and cultural. Therefore, systemic and collaborative efforts are needed to enhance teachers' capacity in human rights education, reformulate the curriculum based on human values, develop reflective and dialogic extracurricular activities, and actively involve families and communities in the educational process. All these steps will bring Indonesian education closer to Gus Dur's vision: education as a process of liberation, empowerment, and respect for human dignity.

### 3. The Role of Learning Strategies and an Inclusive Environment

The results of this study indicate that learning strategies applied in an inclusive educational environment have a significant effect on students' understanding of human rights, while also creating a healthy, tolerant, and collaborative learning atmosphere. Based on a survey of 200 students from various schools in Indonesia, it was found that 60% of students in schools with inclusive learning strategies reported an increase in their understanding of the concept of human rights and an increase in tolerance towards differences (Alfiansyah, 2022). These data show that learning methods that emphasize diversity can create learning experiences



that encourage empathy, mutual respect, and the courage to express opinions openly (Sukardi et al., 2022).

However, these positive results do not fully reflect the ideal conditions. As many as 45% of teachers admitted that they did not have adequate knowledge or training to integrate human rights values into their teaching (Aini, 2023). Many teachers find it difficult to adapt their teaching methods to be contextual, adaptive, and inclusive. In addition, the lack of policy support, limited resources, and minimal community participation are major obstacles to realizing a truly human rights-based learning strategy (Amsori & Natsir, 2021).

This finding is particularly relevant when linked to the thinking of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), who strongly emphasised the importance of education as a vehicle for liberation and humanisation. For Gus Dur, education serves to transfer knowledge and to shape moral awareness, ethical courage, and appreciation for diversity. In his view, Indonesia's pluralistic society cannot be united through a uniform and exclusive education system, but rather through education that opens space for dialogue, equality, and mutual understanding (Anam, 2019; Abdurrahman & Ilhami, 2024).

However, to realize this approach, improvements are required in several fundamental aspects. First, improving teacher competence is the key. Teachers are the main actors in the classroom who can guide the educational process towards human rights values. Unfortunately, many teachers in Indonesia have not received systematic training on how to integrate human rights principles into the learning process (Yunan and Hardiansyah 2019). They often remain stuck in one-way lecture methods and do not involve students in critical discussions or activities. Gus Dur recognised that education cannot be separated from the social reality in which it takes place.

Third, diversifying teaching methods is both challenging and an opportunity. Research data show that project-based learning approaches, digital technology, and field experience can significantly improve students' understanding of human rights (Budiasih et al., 2023). Therefore, the application of creative and experience-based learning strategies is a form of actualization of Gus Dur's thinking about transformative and humanistic education. Fourth, from a policy perspective, structural support should not be ignored. The national curriculum must be adjusted to be more responsive to the need to strengthen human rights. In this case, periodic and participatory curriculum revisions are important. Education policies must be formulated with input from various parties, including students, teachers, academics, and community leaders (Izzah and Renaningtyas, 2021). This inclusive policy approach is in line with Gus Dur's vision, which always placed dialogue and participation at the core of democracy and education. He did not believe in a top-down approach that imposed specific values on society. Instead, he promoted a democratic, participatory approach that valued the process (Abdurrahman & Ilhami, 2024).

Considering these findings, it can be concluded that inclusive learning strategies and environments play a vital role in human rights-based education. However, this role will not be maximized without synergy between teacher competence, policy support, community involvement, and relevant and adaptive teaching methods. Human rights-based inclusive education, as idealized by Abdurrahman Wahid, requires collective and sustained efforts to create a generation that not only understands its rights but is also active in fighting for the rights of others in pluralistic society.



## Conclusion

Abdurrahman Wahid's thoughts on human rights-based education offer a strong philosophical foundation for building a fair, inclusive, and humanistic education system. Through his approach, which emphasizes democracy, respect for diversity, and alignment with marginalized groups, Gus Dur provides a normative and operational direction for educational transformation in Indonesia. This study shows that the integration of human rights values in education can strengthen students' awareness of social justice, although its implementation still faces structural obstacles, such as low teacher capacity, weak policy support, and a school culture that does not fully support dialogue and tolerance. The main limitation of this study is its qualitative approach based on a literature review, which does not include empirical field data. Additionally, limited access to Gus Dur's archives or authentic speeches poses a challenge in comprehensively reconstructing his thoughts. Further research is recommended to use a field case study approach to test the relevance and effectiveness of Gus Dur's ideas in educational practice across various social and geographical contexts in Indonesia. This study aims to serve as an initial contribution to reviving the spirit of education that liberates and values human dignity.

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