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Reviving the Spirit of Kenusantaraan: Transformation of Educational Institutions as the Foundation for a Civilized National Identity

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the urgency and forms of transformation within Indonesia's educational institutions in reviving the spirit of Nusantara identity as a foundation for a civilized national identity. Nusantara education, rooted in institutions such as surau, meunasah, mosque, pesantren, and madrasah, possesses a distinctive spirit that unites knowledge, spirituality, and local wisdom, yet has experienced erosion due to shifting policies across historical eras, competing paradigms of Islamic thought, and the pressures of global modernization and digitalization. This research employs a qualitative approach through library research, using content analysis of relevant literature on educational institutions, spirituality, and socio-cultural transformation. The findings indicate that successful institutional transformation is not one that uproots institutions from their socio-cultural foundations, but one that positions local wisdom as a basis for adapting to contemporary demands, including technological integration and strengthened pedagogical competence. The primary challenges lie in human resource readiness, inclusivity, and responsiveness to legal and global geopolitical contexts. This study concludes that a civilized national identity can only be achieved through education that remains rooted in Nusantara identity while staying open to responsible renewal.*

Keywords: *Educational Transformation, Nusantara Identity, National Identity*

I. INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia was born from a civilizational womb far older than the nation-state itself. Long before the modern schooling system was introduced, Nusantara society had developed a distinctive educational ecosystem, surau,

meunasah, mosque, pesantren, and madrasah (Faridi & Firmansyah, 2024; Firmansyah et al., 2022), rooted in local culture and imbued with grounded Islamic values. Studies on the typology of traditional and modern management in pesantren governance (Tobroni & Firmansyah, 2022; Firmansyah et al., 2023) show that Islamic educational institutions consistently exist in a productive tension between preserving heritage and adapting to the demands of the times.

The long trajectory of Indonesian education has also been shaped by paradigmatic shifts driven by political power and diverse currents of Islamic thought. Religious education policies across different eras (Firmansyah et al., 2023; Bakar et al., 2024) illustrate how the state has helped shape the direction of national education, while the diversity of Islamic paradigms, fundamentalism, modernism, and liberalism (Firmansyah, 2023; Nurhakim et al., 2023), has generated tensions in formulating an educational format suited to the Indonesian context.

An anthropological approach to Islamic education underscores the importance of internalizing values through local ethnic cultural practices, both among indigenous communities in remote areas and within established Islamic communities (Firmansyah et al., 2023; Firmansyah et al., 2022; Tobroni et al., 2024). Education, therefore, cannot be reduced to mere curriculum transfer; it must be understood as a concrete, contextual socio-cultural-religious process (Firmansyah et al., 2023; Khozin & Firmansyah, 2024).

Spirituality emerges as a crucial element functioning as a paradigm of peace, fostering moderation, tolerance, and the mitigation of social-religious conflict (Tobroni et al., 2023; Firmansyah & Idris, 2024). The strengthening of brotherhood (ukhuwah) and communal solidarity values (Firmansyah et al., 2025; Al Hallaj et al., 2026) serves as a counterbalance to identity fragmentation in the public sphere, aligning with the reactualization of practical Sufism as a foundation for social ihsan (Al Hallaj et al., 2026).

This challenge grows more complex amid the transformation of learning technology, digital literacy, and the role of artificial intelligence in supporting students' learning independence (Firmansyah & Humaidi, 2022; Nasution & Firmansyah, 2026; Nusantara et al., 2026). Such transformation should strengthen, rather than replace, the value foundations long nurtured by the Nusantara

educational tradition, including the formation of noble character (Syamsuddin & Firmansyah, 2025; Jati et al., 2026), the strengthening of educators' pedagogical competence (Elmirna et al., 2026), and the creation of inclusive and equitable learning environments for vulnerable groups (Firmansyah & Ikwan, 2026; Firmansyah, 2026).

From this constellation of issues, the transformation of Indonesia's educational institutions constitutes a civilizational endeavor demanding profound epistemological awareness. A reconstruction is needed that reconnects the roots of Nusantara identity with contemporary demands, positioning local wisdom epistemology as a counter-narrative to anthropocentrism and global homogenization (Firmansyah & Khalil, 2026; Anam et al., 2026), and serving as an anchor that keeps educational transformation from becoming uprooted from a civilized national identity.

II. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach in the form of library research, aimed at examining in depth the concept of transforming Indonesia's educational institutions within the framework of reviving the spirit of Nusantara identity as the foundation for a civilized national identity. This approach was chosen because the issues under study are conceptual-philosophical in nature, requiring critical exploration and analysis of ideas, concepts, and thought that have developed within the body of knowledge on education, Islam, and Nusantara culture, rather than direct field data collection.

The data sources in this research consist of secondary data obtained from various relevant literature, including scholarly journal articles, prior research findings, and conceptual studies addressing themes related to educational institutions, spirituality, local wisdom, and socio-cultural transformation. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques, involving steps such as literature collection, thematic reduction and categorization, critical interpretation, and the drawing of conclusions presented in a descriptive-analytical manner to formulate a coherent conceptual construction regarding the transformation of education grounded in the spirit of Nusantara identity.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Urgency of Reviving the Spirit of Nusantara Identity

The findings of this review indicate that Nusantara educational institutions, surau, meunasah, mosque, pesantren, and madrasah, have from the outset functioned as spaces for character formation that unite the dimensions of knowledge, spirituality, and local wisdom (Faridi & Firmansyah, 2024). Shifts in educational orientation resulting from policy dynamics across different eras (Firmansyah et al., 2023; Bakar et al., 2024), as well as differing paradigms of Islamic thought that have developed over time (Firmansyah, 2023; Nurhakim et al., 2023), reveal that the spirit of Nusantara identity is vulnerable to erosion by modernization currents unaccompanied by historical-cultural awareness. This condition affirms that reviving this spirit is not merely nostalgic sentiment but an urgent necessity to preserve the coherence of the nation's educational identity amid global homogenization.

The strengthening of spirituality as a paradigm of peace (Tobroni et al., 2023) and the anthropological approach within Islamic education (Firmansyah et al., 2023; Firmansyah et al., 2022) provide evidence that local values remain relevant as instruments for mitigating social-religious conflict, as similarly reflected in the strengthening of brotherhood (ukhuwah) and mutual cooperation at the community level (Firmansyah et al., 2025; Firmansyah & Idris, 2024). The revitalization of Nusantara's spirit thus serves a dual role: preserving the roots of identity while simultaneously functioning as a mechanism of social cohesion amid diversity.

Forms of Institutional Transformation as a Foundation for National Identity

Institutional transformation is evident in the shift of pesantren management patterns from traditional toward more modern models without losing their value foundation (Tobroni & Firmansyah, 2022), as well as in the socio-cultural-religious modernization strategies implemented by various Islamic educational institutions (Firmansyah et al., 2023; Khozin & Firmansyah, 2024). The internalization of values through local ethnic cultural symbols (Tobroni et al., 2024) and educational practices grounded in indigenous community wisdom (Firmansyah et al., 2022) reinforce the argument that successful transformation is transformation that does

not uproot institutions from their socio-cultural foundations, but instead treats those foundations as a basis for adaptation.

At the same time, the integration of learning technology and digital literacy (Firmansyah & Humaidi, 2022; Nasution & Firmansyah, 2026), along with the use of artificial intelligence to support learning independence (Nusantara et al., 2026), demonstrates that instrumental modernization can proceed in harmony with value strengthening, provided it is directed toward reinforcing—rather than replacing, the foundations of students' character and spirituality (Syamsuddin & Firmansyah, 2025; Jati et al., 2026). The foundation of national identity, in this sense, is built through the synergy between technical-managerial renewal and the preservation of substantive values.

Challenges and Strategies Toward a Civilized Nation

The primary challenge lies in strengthening educators' pedagogical competence (Elmirna et al., 2026) and creating inclusive learning environments for vulnerable groups (Firmansyah & Ikwan, 2026; Firmansyah, 2026), given that institutional transformation unaccompanied by human resource readiness risks generating new disparities rather than equitable outcomes. Furthermore, the complexity of education's relationship with legal, policy, and global geopolitical contexts (Bakar et al., 2024; Anam et al., 2026) demands that educational institutions be not only inward-looking but also responsive to external dynamics that influence the direction of national education policy.

Strategies that can be pursued include strengthening local wisdom epistemology as a counter-narrative to anthropocentrism and global homogenization (Firmansyah & Khalil, 2026), developing a holistic, cross-disciplinary spiritual education model at the higher education level (Khozin & Firmansyah, 2024), and cultivating religious moderation as a foundation for coexistence (Firmansyah & Idris, 2024). Collectively, these strategies converge on a single point: that national civility can only be achieved through education rooted in Nusantara identity while remaining open to responsible renewal.

IV. CONCLUSION

This review affirms that the transformation of Indonesia's educational institutions cannot be separated from the effort to revive the spirit of Nusantara identity as a foundation for a civilized national identity. The erosion of this spirit, driven by shifting policy orientations, competing paradigms of religious thought, and the pressures of global homogenization, demonstrates that reviving local values is not a nostalgic gesture but a substantive necessity for maintaining the coherence of the nation's educational identity. Spirituality, local wisdom, and cultural symbols have proven their relevance not only as markers of heritage but as living instruments for fostering social cohesion and mitigating conflict in an increasingly fragmented public sphere.

At the institutional level, meaningful transformation emerges not from abandoning tradition in favor of modernization, nor from resisting technological and managerial renewal altogether, but from a deliberate synthesis of the two. Institutions that successfully evolve are those that treat their socio-cultural roots as a foundation for adaptation rather than an obstacle to it, integrating digital literacy, technological tools, and contemporary pedagogical models while keeping character formation and spirituality at the core of the learning process. This synthesis illustrates that renewal and rootedness are not inherently in tension; they can be mutually reinforcing when transformation is pursued with intentionality.

Nevertheless, realizing this vision requires addressing substantial structural challenges, particularly in strengthening educators' pedagogical capacity, ensuring inclusive access for vulnerable groups, and situating educational institutions within broader legal, policy, and geopolitical contexts that shape national direction. The strategies discussed, from strengthening local wisdom epistemology to cultivating religious moderation and holistic spiritual education, converge on a shared conclusion: that a civilized national identity is not achieved through modernization alone, nor through the preservation of tradition in isolation, but through an educational transformation that is simultaneously rooted in Nusantara identity and responsibly open to change. Future inquiry grounded in direct engagement with primary sources and field-

based evidence would further strengthen and refine the conceptual framework proposed in this review.

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