

Ahmad Dahlan's Vision of Social Justice: A Systematic Literature Review of the Theology of Al-Ma'un

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Abstract

This article examines how scholarship published up to 2020 constructs Ahmad Dahlan's vision of social justice through the theology of Al-Ma'un. Using a qualitative systematic literature review and thematic synthesis, it analyzes a verified core corpus of 15 peer-reviewed studies on Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah, Qur'anic social ethics, education, philanthropy, healthcare, and community empowerment. The review identifies four interconnected themes: Al-Ma'un as a critique of socially detached religiosity; religious learning as transformative praxis; compassion institutionalized through schooling, healing, and feeding; and the expansion from charitable relief toward empowerment, advocacy, and structural justice. The synthesis shows that Ahmad Dahlan did not leave a formal theological treatise entitled the theology of Al-Ma'un. The expression is better understood as a later interpretative category that systematizes his Qur'anic pedagogy and Muhammadiyah's subsequent social institutions. The article proposes an integrative framework linking Qur'anic moral criticism, ethical consciousness, transformative pedagogy, institutionalized compassion, capability development, and critical accountability. It further argues that institutional expansion cannot be equated automatically with social justice; accessibility, participation, dignity, and the agency of vulnerable communities are necessary evaluative criteria. The study contributes to Muhammadiyah studies by distinguishing Dahlan's documented practical legacy from later conceptual elaborations and by repositioning Al-Ma'un as both a foundation for organized service and a critical standard for evaluating Muhammadiyah institutions.

Keywords: Ahmad Dahlan; theology of Al-Ma'un; social justice; Muhammadiyah; Islamic philanthropy; transformative pedagogy

Muhammadiyah dan Periode Awal Politik Kenegaraan Indonesia

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana karya-karya ilmiah yang diterbitkan hingga tahun 2020 mengonstruksikan visi keadilan sosial Ahmad Dahlan melalui Teologi Al-Ma'un. Dengan menggunakan *systematic literature review* kualitatif dan sintesis tematik, penelitian ini menganalisis korpus inti yang telah diverifikasi, terdiri atas 15 artikel *peer-reviewed* yang membahas Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah, etika sosial Al-Qur'an, pendidikan, filantropi, layanan kesehatan, dan pemberdayaan masyarakat. Hasil telaah mengidentifikasi empat tema yang saling berkaitan, yaitu: Al-Ma'un sebagai kritik terhadap keberagamaan yang terlepas dari realitas sosial; pembelajaran agama sebagai praksis transformatif; pelembagaan nilai kasih sayang melalui pendidikan, pelayanan kesehatan, dan pemberian makanan; serta perluasan orientasi dari bantuan karitatif menuju pemberdayaan, advokasi, dan keadilan struktural.

Sintesis penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ahmad Dahlan tidak pernah meninggalkan sebuah karya teologis formal yang secara khusus berjudul *Teologi Al-Ma'un*. Oleh karena itu, istilah tersebut lebih tepat dipahami sebagai kategori interpretatif yang berkembang kemudian untuk mensistematisasi pedagogi Al-Qur'an yang beliau terapkan serta institusi-institusi sosial Muhammadiyah yang tumbuh sesudahnya. Artikel ini mengusulkan sebuah kerangka integratif yang menghubungkan kritik moral Al-Qur'an, kesadaran etis, pedagogi transformatif, pelembagaan kasih sayang, pengembangan kapabilitas, dan akuntabilitas kritis. Lebih lanjut, artikel ini menegaskan bahwa perluasan institusi tidak dapat secara otomatis disamakan

dengan terwujudnya keadilan sosial; aksesibilitas, partisipasi, penghormatan terhadap martabat manusia, serta penguatan daya bertindak (*agency*) komunitas rentan merupakan kriteria evaluatif yang harus dipenuhi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi bagi kajian Muhammadiyah dengan membedakan warisan praksis Ahmad Dahlan yang terdokumentasi dari elaborasi konseptual yang berkembang kemudian, sekaligus menempatkan kembali Al-Ma'un sebagai landasan bagi pelayanan sosial yang terorganisasi dan sebagai tolok ukur kritis dalam mengevaluasi institusi-institusi Muhammadiyah.

Kata-kata Kunci: Ahmad Dahlan; Teologi Al-Ma'un; keadilan sosial; Muhammadiyah; filantropi Islam; pedagogi transformatif.

INTRODUCTION

Surah Al-Ma'un establishes a direct relationship between religious commitment and responsibility toward people experiencing social deprivation. It condemns those who repel orphans, fail to encourage the feeding of people living in poverty, perform worship for public recognition, and withhold ordinary assistance (Qur'an 107:1-7). Within Muhammadiyah's intellectual and organizational history, Ahmad Dahlan's engagement with this surah has been interpreted as a foundational criticism of ritual religiosity detached from human suffering. Later scholars commonly describe this orientation as the theology of Al-Ma'un: a view of faith in which devotion to God must generate responsibility toward vulnerable and marginalized people (Huda, 2011; Qodir, 2008).

Dahlan's contribution was not limited to emphasizing the social content of the Qur'anic text. Accounts of his pedagogical practice repeatedly describe how he taught the same surah until his students understood that recitation and memorization were insufficient without assisting orphans and impoverished members of society. Although these accounts are transmitted through later recollections, the literature consistently uses them to represent a distinctive principle: religious knowledge remains incomplete until it becomes ethical action (Amirudin, 2018; Elhady, 2017; Suwarno, 2019). This principle shifted Qur'anic instruction from the transfer of textual meaning toward a form of practical learning in which interpretation, compassion, and action were inseparable.

The action-oriented interpretation of Al-Ma'un became closely associated with Muhammadiyah's development as a modern Islamic movement concerned with education, healthcare, philanthropy, and social welfare. Schools, hospitals, orphanages, charitable associations, and other public-service institutions transformed individual concern into organized and professionally managed action. The literature often summarizes these institutional expressions through the interconnected practices of schooling, healing, and feeding. Schooling addressed ignorance and unequal access to knowledge; healing responded to illness and barriers to treatment; and feeding encompassed material assistance, orphan care, and broader social protection (Qodir, 2008; Rohmansyah et al., 2019; Utami et al., 2019).

The social meaning of Al-Ma'un nevertheless extends beyond immediate charitable assistance. Qodir (2008) links the tradition with poverty advocacy, while Huda (2011) interprets its development through the concept of *mustad'afin* theology, which places

socially weakened and oppressed groups at the center of religious concern. Baidhawry (2017) locates the Al-Ma'un ethos within Muhammadiyah's broader vision of progressive Islam, emphasizing compassion, defense of marginalized communities, and the transformation of unjust conditions. These formulations indicate a conceptual movement from relief toward organized philanthropy, empowerment, advocacy, and structural interpretations of social justice.

The literature also places Dahlan's vision within a wider project of social reconstruction. His educational reform has been interpreted as a challenge to intellectual stagnation, feudal hierarchy, and social arrangements that restricted dignity and participation (Suswandari & Suwarno, 2010). Muhammadiyah education subsequently developed not merely as a means of transmitting doctrine but as an instrument for cultivating autonomous individuals and reconstructing society through humanitarian and cosmopolitan values (Khoirudin et al., 2020). Studies of PKU Muhammadiyah Hospital, orphanages, minority communities, and the response to COVID-19 show how the social ethic was adapted to institutional and historical circumstances (Ichsan, 2020; Rohmansyah et al., 2019; Utami et al., 2019; Wekke et al., 2019).

Despite these contributions, the literature remains fragmented. Historical studies focus on Dahlan and the origins of Muhammadiyah; educational studies emphasize humanism and pedagogy; institutional studies examine hospitals, schools, orphanages, or philanthropic organizations; and social-movement studies discuss empowerment and progressive Islam. This fragmentation obscures the conceptual relationship among Qur'anic interpretation, pedagogical action, institutional formation, and social justice. It also encourages two forms of overstatement: attributing a fully developed theology directly to Dahlan, and treating the existence or growth of Muhammadiyah institutions as sufficient evidence that social justice has been achieved.

A further problem concerns the historical status of the expression theology of Al-Ma'un. Dahlan did not leave a systematic theological treatise bearing this title. His legacy is reconstructed from accounts of Qur'anic teaching, speeches, actions, institutional initiatives, and the recollections of students and later writers. The expression therefore functions primarily as a later academic and organizational formulation that interprets his practical legacy. Distinguishing the Qur'anic text, Dahlan's documented practice, Muhammadiyah's institutional development, and later scholarly reconstruction is essential for both historical accuracy and conceptual clarity (Baidhawry, 2017; Huda, 2011; Suwarno, 2019).

This article systematically reviews literature published no later than 2020 to answer three questions. First, how does the literature explain the scriptural and ethical foundations of Dahlan's engagement with Al-Ma'un? Second, how is this interpretation translated into pedagogical and institutional practice? Third, how do later scholars extend its meaning from immediate charity toward empowerment and structural justice? The article contributes by reconstructing Al-Ma'un as a multilevel framework connecting

Qur'anic criticism, transformative pedagogy, institutionalized compassion, and critical accountability, while maintaining a clear distinction between Dahlan's practical legacy and later conceptual elaborations.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative systematic literature review to synthesize dispersed scholarship on Ahmad Dahlan, Surah Al-Ma'un, Muhammadiyah, philanthropy, education, healthcare, and social transformation. The review followed the general stages of planning, searching, selecting, appraising, extracting, and synthesizing evidence proposed for systematic reviews in the social sciences (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). PRISMA principles informed transparency in source identification and selection, although the review did not conduct a quantitative meta-analysis (Moher et al., 2009).

The review was bounded by an inclusive upper publication date of December 31, 2020. Earlier studies were retained when they contributed to the reconstruction of Dahlan's teaching, early Muhammadiyah history, or the conceptual development of Al-Ma'un. English- and Indonesian-language publications were considered. The analytical units were peer-reviewed journal articles that substantively addressed at least one of the following: Ahmad Dahlan's religious or educational thought; Surah Al-Ma'un in relation to Muhammadiyah; the theology or ethos of Al-Ma'un; Muhammadiyah's educational, healthcare, philanthropic, or welfare institutions; poverty advocacy; community empowerment; or progressive Islamic responses to vulnerability.

Candidate studies were located through multidisciplinary scholarly search tools, Indonesian journal portals, publisher websites, and backward and forward citation searching. Search terms combined variants of Ahmad Dahlan, Al-Ma'un, Muhammadiyah, social justice, poverty, philanthropy, orphan care, healthcare, schooling, empowerment, mustad'afin, and social transformation. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, followed by full-text assessment. Sources were excluded when they only mentioned the topic in passing, lacked verifiable publication information, were published after 2020, or did not contribute textual evidence to the review questions.

The revised manuscript reports a verified final corpus of 15 substantive journal articles published between 2008 and 2020. General references used to define social justice or explain review methodology, including Rawls (1971), Sen (2009), Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), Thomas and Harden (2008), Snyder (2019), Tranfield et al. (2003), and Moher et al. (2009), were not counted as review units. The legacy manuscript did not preserve database-specific identification and exclusion counts; consequently, this revision does not invent a numerical PRISMA flow. This limitation is reported explicitly and a non-numeric review pathway is used instead.

Table

Review Protocol and Eligibility Criteria

1

Component	Operational decision
Review design	Qualitative systematic literature review with thematic synthesis.
Principal focus	How literature up to 2020 constructs Ahmad Dahlan's vision of social justice through Al-Ma'un.
Temporal boundary	Publications issued no later than December 31, 2020.
Languages	English and Indonesian.
Eligible units	Peer-reviewed journal articles substantively addressing Ahmad Dahlan, Al-Ma'un, Muhammadiyah social institutions, philanthropy, education, healthcare, empowerment, or social justice.
Exclusions	Passing references, unverifiable publications, post-2020 sources, and studies unrelated to the review questions.
Final analytical corpus	15 substantive journal articles; theory and methodology references were not counted as review units.
Analytical method	Structured extraction, historical source criticism, coding, category development, and thematic synthesis.
Reporting limitation	The legacy search log did not preserve database-specific initial counts; no numerical PRISMA total was invented.

Note. The table reports the verified protocol contained in the revised manuscript. It does not reconstruct unavailable database-specific retrieval counts.

Quality and relevance appraisal were adapted to the heterogeneous character of the studies. Historical and conceptual publications were evaluated according to source attribution, argumentative coherence, engagement with earlier literature, and the distinction between evidence and interpretation. Empirical institutional studies were evaluated according to clarity of purpose, transparency of data and methods, consistency between evidence and conclusions, and relevance to the review questions. Quality appraisal determined the interpretive weight of each source rather than excluding every study with limitations.

A structured extraction matrix recorded bibliographic identity, research focus, context, representation of Ahmad Dahlan, interpretation of Al-Ma'un, form of social action,

institutional expression, principal argument, and limitations. The extracted material was analyzed through thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), supported by the flexible principles of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). Initial codes included criticism of ritualism, care for orphans, learning through practice, schooling, healing, feeding, organized philanthropy, empowerment, mustad'afin, structural injustice, institutional accountability, and later conceptual reconstruction.

Codes were grouped into descriptive categories and then developed into analytical themes. The review preserved contradictory evidence and distinguished repeated narratives from independent historical confirmation. In particular, multiple articles repeating the story of Dahlan's Al-Ma'un lesson were treated as a chain of transmission rather than as separate primary witnesses. The final synthesis generated four themes and an integrative framework linking scriptural ethics, transformative pedagogy, institutional embodiment, and social-justice development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

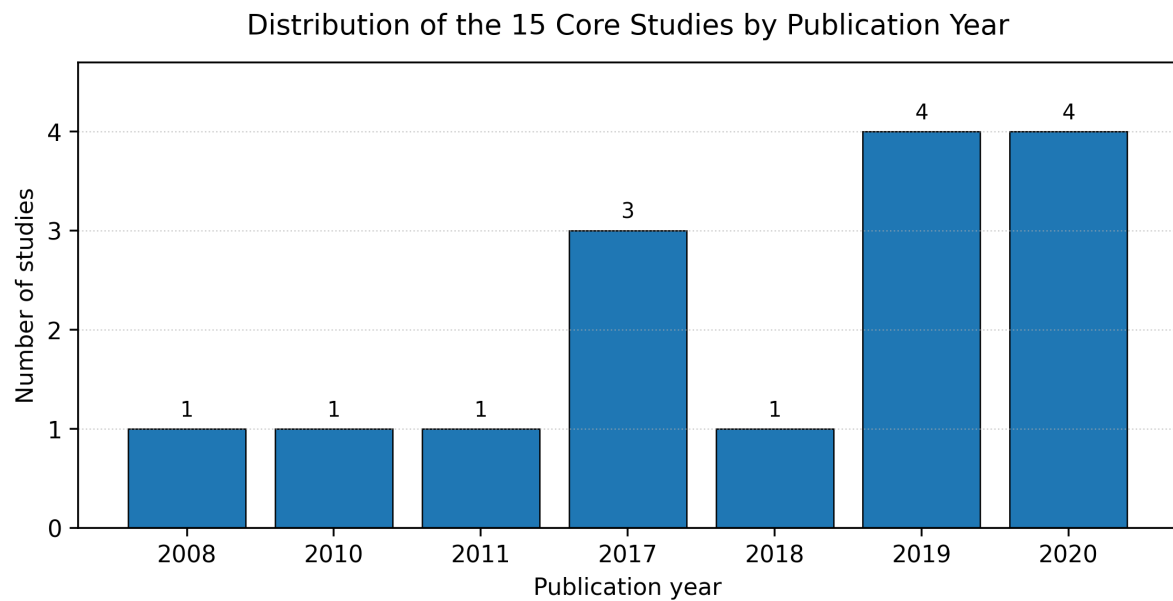
The 15 core studies span 2008-2020 and represent historical, conceptual, educational, institutional, and social-movement perspectives. Eleven of the 15 were published between 2017 and 2020, indicating that the explicit academic consolidation of Al-Ma'un as a framework for progressive Islam, institutional service, and social justice is relatively recent. Earlier works established the themes of poverty advocacy, educational reform, and mustad'afin theology; later works expanded the discussion toward humanitarian education, community empowerment, institutional sustainability, minority contexts, and pandemic response.

The literature does not provide a single uniform definition of the theology of Al-Ma'un. Instead, it presents a family of related interpretations: an ethic of care for orphans and impoverished people; a pedagogy that links religious understanding with action; a foundation for education, healthcare, and welfare institutions; and a framework for empowerment, advocacy, and structural justice. The synthesis therefore treats Al-Ma'un as an evolving interpretative tradition rather than a fixed doctrine.

Figure

1

Publication Distribution of the Core Analytical Corpus



Note. The figure includes the 15 substantive studies analyzed in the thematic synthesis. Methodological and general social-justice references are excluded.

Table

2

Characteristics and Contributions of the 15 Core Studies

Study	Primary focus	Context object or	Contribution to synthesis
Qodir (2008)	Poverty advocacy	Muhammadiyah and poverty	Extends Al-Ma'un from charity toward public advocacy.
Suswandari & Suwarno (2010)	Educational reform	Anti-feudal and modern education	Links Dahlan's education with dignity and participation.
Huda (2011)	Mustad'afin theology	Conceptual development	Broadens concern from poverty to socially produced weakness.
Baidhawiy (2017)	Progressive Islam	Qur'anic ethos	Connects Al-Ma'un with compassion and universal benefit.

Study	Primary focus	Context or object	Contribution to synthesis
Elhady (2017)	Social empowerment	Muhammadiyah reform movement	Highlights action-oriented interpretation and empowerment.
Fauzia (2017)	Charitable activism	Penolong Kesengsaraan Umum	Historicizes organized welfare and healthcare service.
Amirudin (2018)	Humanistic education	Dahlan's pedagogy	Frames learning as transformative social praxis.
Rohmansyah et al. (2019)	Philanthropic hadiths	PKU Muhammadiyah Hospital	Shows scriptural ethics translated into institutional healthcare.
Suwarno (2019)	Hermeneutic history	Birth of Muhammadiyah	Emphasizes thought expressed through practice and context.
Utami et al. (2019)	Institutional sustainability	Muhammadiyah orphanages	Connects social care with resource and governance capacity.
Wekke et al. (2019)	Minority context	West Papua	Shows adaptation of the social mission across local contexts.
Ichsan (2020)	Social-justice philanthropy	COVID-19 response	Demonstrates coordinated humanitarian

Study	Primary focus	Context or object	Contribution to synthesis
			mobilization.
Khoirudin (2020)	Community empowerment	Habitus, capital, and arena	Explains organizational conditions of empowerment.
Khoirudin et al. (2020)	Humanitarian education	Civilizational role of education	Connects education with cosmopolitan and capability development.
Qodir et al. (2020)	Progressive movement	Contemporary issues of the ummah	Expands the social mission to broader public problems.

Note. The table summarizes the substantive role of each study in the review; it does not imply that all studies used the same methods or evidentiary standards.

Theme 1: Al-Ma'un as a Critique of Socially Detached Religiosity

The first theme is Al-Ma'un as a critique of socially detached religiosity. Across the literature, the surah is read as challenging the separation of worship from responsibility toward people experiencing poverty, orphanhood, illness, and exclusion. The moral problem is not ritual as such, but ritual that produces no ethical consequences. Prayer, recitation, and doctrinal knowledge are expected to cultivate social sensitivity; when they coexist with indifference, religious performance becomes vulnerable to the criticism articulated in the surah (Baidhaw, 2017; Huda, 2011; Qodir, 2008).

This interpretation shifts the measure of piety from private observance alone toward public responsibility. Qodir (2008) argues that Muhammadiyah should respond actively to poverty rather than become absorbed in organizational routine. Huda (2011) broadens the concern through *mustad'afin* theology, directing attention to people whose capacities and participation are weakened by social, economic, political, or cultural arrangements. Baidhaw (2017) links the ethos with progressive Islam and a humanitarian orientation that crosses organizational and religious boundaries.

The literature thus supports a movement from social piety to social justice. Social piety expresses compassion and solidarity, while social justice asks whether social institutions expand access, dignity, and agency. The distinction is important because a community

may perform acts of charity without questioning the conditions that repeatedly produce deprivation. Al-Ma'un provides a moral starting point, but later interpretations extend that starting point into an institutional and structural inquiry.

Theme 2: Religious Learning as Transformative Praxis

The second theme is religious learning as transformative praxis. The most frequently reproduced narrative describes Dahlan repeatedly teaching Surah Al-Ma'un and refusing to recognize memorization as sufficient understanding. Students were expected to demonstrate comprehension by assisting people experiencing poverty (Amirudin, 2018; Elhady, 2017). Although the historical details rely largely on later recollections, the narrative consistently represents a pedagogical principle in which interpretation is completed through action.

This principle may be described as practical hermeneutics. The learner moves among text, social reality, moral judgment, and intervention. The Qur'anic text identifies a social problem; the learner recognizes a responsibility; and the meaning of the text is tested through concrete engagement. Suwarno (2019) emphasizes that Dahlan's thought was expressed predominantly through practice rather than a systematic written doctrine. Amirudin (2018) connects the approach with humanistic education, while Suswandari and Suwarno (2010) interpret Dahlan's educational reform as a challenge to feudal hierarchy and restricted participation.

Transformative pedagogy is important because moral principles do not automatically become sustained action. They must be interpreted, internalized, and connected to the learner's environment. Dahlan's reconstructed method forms students not merely as recipients of knowledge but as ethical actors. Education therefore becomes both a social service and the mechanism through which the Al-Ma'un ethos is transmitted across generations.

Theme 3: Institutionalized Compassion Through Schooling, Healing, and Feeding

The third theme is the institutionalization of compassion through schooling, healing, and feeding. These categories summarize Muhammadiyah's organized responses to ignorance, illness, hunger, orphanhood, and social vulnerability. Their importance lies in the transition from episodic generosity to durable institutions capable of delivering services over time.

Schooling addresses educational exclusion and the reproduction of disadvantage. Dahlan's educational reform combined religious and general knowledge and sought to cultivate individuals capable of participating in modern society. Later scholarship interprets Muhammadiyah education as a humanitarian and cosmopolitan contribution rather than merely an internal system of doctrinal transmission (Amirudin, 2018; Khoirudin et al., 2020; Suswandari & Suwarno, 2010). Education expands capabilities by developing knowledge, autonomy, and opportunities for participation.

Healing represents the translation of religious generosity into professional healthcare. Research on PKU Muhammadiyah Hospital shows how Qur'anic and prophetic teachings concerning generosity were contextualized in assistance for patients and in organized medical service (Rohmansyah et al., 2019). Fauzia (2017) situates *Penolong Kesengsaraan Umum* within the history of faith-based charitable activism, demonstrating how concern for general suffering was institutionalized during the colonial period. Healthcare requires compassion, but it also requires trained personnel, facilities, financing, and accountable administration.

Feeding encompasses food assistance, orphan care, social funds, and broader protection. Muhammadiyah orphanages move beyond isolated giving by providing shelter, education, and long-term care. Utami et al. (2019) show that the sustainability of these institutions depends on resource management and financial independence. Institutional care therefore adds organizational continuity to the ethical concern of *Al-Ma'un*, although sustainability must remain connected to the dignity and agency of beneficiaries.

Institutionalization is a major strength of the *Al-Ma'un* tradition because it transforms moral concern into organized public responsibility. It also introduces new risks. Institutions may become bureaucratic, financially exclusive, or more concerned with reputation and expansion than with vulnerable communities. The existence of an institution is evidence of service capacity, but not automatic evidence of social justice.

Theme 4: From Charitable Relief to Empowerment and Structural Justice

The fourth theme is the expansion from relief toward empowerment and structural justice. Direct assistance remains ethically necessary when people face hunger, illness, disaster, or displacement. However, several authors argue that *Al-Ma'un* should not be reduced to temporary or paternalistic charity. Qodir (2008) calls for poverty advocacy, while Huda (2011) expands the object of concern from the poor as recipients to the *mustad'afin* as groups weakened by unequal relationships and institutions.

Khoirudin (2020) analyzes Muhammadiyah's community empowerment through the interaction of habitus, capital, and social arena. His study indicates that transformation requires organizational resources, professional capacities, networks, and community participation. Wekke et al. (2019) show how Muhammadiyah institutions adapt their social mission in the Muslim-minority context of West Papua, reinforcing the importance of local context and universal humanitarian service.

Ichsan (2020) distinguishes conventional charity from social-justice philanthropy and examines Muhammadiyah's contribution to the COVID-19 response. A large-scale crisis requires more than isolated giving: it demands healthcare infrastructure, coordination, public communication, professional expertise, and sustained resource mobilization. Qodir et al. (2020) similarly position Muhammadiyah as a progressive Islamic movement responding to broad issues of education, public health, the environment, and peace.

The literature suggests a continuum rather than a simple opposition between charity and

structural justice: immediate relief, organized philanthropy, institutional service, capability development, empowerment, advocacy, and structural reform. Not every study documents all stages, and claims of structural transformation are often stronger at the conceptual level than in demonstrated long-term outcomes. The review therefore distinguishes structural potential from verified structural effect.

A further finding is that the expression theology of Al-Ma'un is itself part of this later expansion. Dahlan is not known to have authored a systematic work using the term. Later scholars use the category to connect his pedagogy, Muhammadiyah's institutions, and contemporary concepts such as transformative theology, mustad'afin theology, progressive Islam, and social-justice philanthropy. The term is analytically productive, but historical precision requires it to be described as a reconstruction of Dahlan's practical legacy rather than his exact formal terminology.

Table

3

Thematic Synthesis and Unresolved Tensions

Theme	Central claim	Representative sources	Unresolved tension
Socially responsible piety	Religious commitment is evaluated through responsibility toward vulnerable people.	Baidhawiy (2017); Huda (2011); Qodir (2008)	How should social piety be translated into institutional standards?
Transformative pedagogy	Understanding becomes complete through engagement and action.	Amirudin (2018); Elhady (2017); Suwarno (2019)	Historical memory is stronger than contemporaneous documentation.
Institutionalized compassion	Schools, hospitals, and welfare institutions sustain social responsibility.	Fauzia (2017); Rohmansyah et al. (2019); Utami et al. (2019)	Institutional growth may not ensure access, participation, or dignity.
Empowerment and structural	Relief develops toward capability,	Ichsan (2020); Khoirudin	Structural aspirations are

Theme	Central claim	Representative sources	Unresolved tension
justice	advocacy, and institutional reform.	(2020); Qodir et al. (2020)	documented more clearly than long-term structural effects.

Note. Representative sources indicate the strongest contributions to each theme; several studies contribute to more than one theme.

Discussion

The review shows that Ahmad Dahlan's vision of social justice emerges from a relationship among scripture, pedagogy, collective practice, and institution building. Its distinctiveness lies less in a formally articulated theory of justice than in a practical method that connects religious understanding with public responsibility. The theology of Al-Ma'un is therefore best understood as a multilevel interpretative framework: the Qur'anic text supplies moral criticism, Dahlan's pedagogy forms ethical actors, Muhammadiyah's institutions organize service, and later scholarship develops concepts of empowerment and structural justice.

This reconstruction clarifies the historical and analytical status of the concept. The Qur'anic level, the Dahlanian level, the institutional level, and the scholarly-reconstructive level are connected but not identical. The Qur'anic text cannot be reduced to one organizational interpretation. Dahlan's teaching cannot be reconstructed solely from institutions created after his lifetime. Muhammadiyah institutions change in response to new conditions, while later scholars introduce concepts that were not part of Dahlan's vocabulary. Treating Al-Ma'un as a Dahlanian interpretative tradition preserves continuity without denying conceptual development.

The synthesis also places transformative pedagogy at the center of the framework. Moral criticism does not move directly into institutions; it is mediated by the formation of actors who recognize vulnerability and accept responsibility. Dahlan's reported insistence on practice provides a mechanism through which religious knowledge becomes social agency. This insight has implications for Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan education: Al-Ma'un should not be taught only as an organizational story but as a method of reading social reality, reflecting on scripture, and designing responsible action.

Institutionalization is equally central. Individual compassion is limited by continuity, expertise, and scale. Schools, hospitals, orphanages, and philanthropic organizations allow service to persist beyond one person or moment. They create professional roles, budgets, rules, and public responsibilities. Yet institutionalization is not morally self-validating. The same process that expands service may produce bureaucracy, market exclusion, paternalism, and symbolic use of Al-Ma'un. The surah's criticism of religious

appearance without social responsibility can therefore be applied to organizations as well as individuals.

This point leads to the article's principal critical argument: institutional expansion is not identical to social justice. A hospital may provide advanced care while remaining inaccessible to poor patients. A school may offer high-quality education while fees exclude disadvantaged families. An orphanage may provide material protection while limiting the agency of children. Institutional ownership, size, or reputation cannot substitute for analysis of access, participation, dignity, accountability, and long-term capability development.

Rawls (1971) and Sen (2009) provide useful but non-identical lenses for clarifying this distinction. A Rawlsian emphasis directs attention toward the position of the least advantaged and the fairness of institutional arrangements. Sen's capability approach focuses on what people are actually able to do and become. These theories should not be projected backward as Dahlan's own system, but they help articulate evaluative questions already implicit in the reviewed literature: Do institutions expand real access? Do they strengthen agency? Do they alter the social position of vulnerable communities?

The continuum from relief to structural justice helps integrate competing interpretations. Immediate charity is not inherently opposed to justice; it becomes inadequate when it is treated as the final response. Organized philanthropy gives relief continuity, institutional service expands access, capability development strengthens autonomy, empowerment increases collective agency, and advocacy addresses the rules and relationships that reproduce deprivation. The Al-Ma'un tradition is theoretically strongest when these levels are connected rather than when charitable and structural approaches are treated as mutually exclusive.

The evidence up to 2020 is stronger for the existence and expansion of Muhammadiyah social services than for their long-term structural effects. This imbalance requires disciplined claims. The reviewed studies demonstrate institutional commitment, adaptation, and service capacity, but they provide less systematic evidence concerning changes in inequality, participation, or power. The article therefore describes Al-Ma'un as possessing structural potential while calling for empirical evaluation of whether particular institutions and programs achieve structural outcomes.

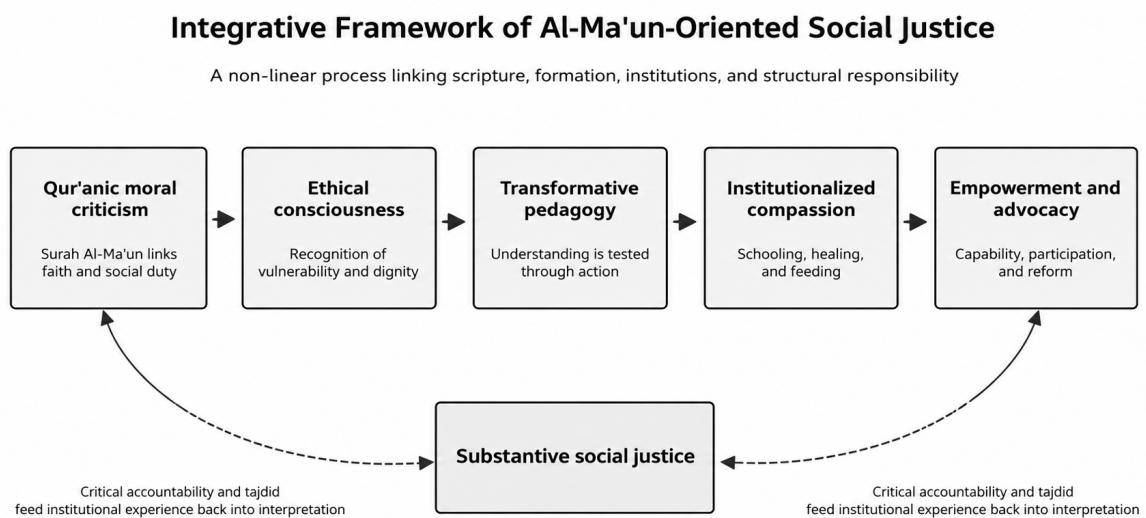
Universal humanitarianism forms another important dimension. Muhammadiyah's identity is particular, rooted in Islamic scripture and organizational memory, but its social services are frequently described as oriented toward the wider public (Baidhaw, 2017; Khoirudin et al., 2020; Wekke et al., 2019). Particular identity and universal benefit are not contradictory when religious commitment motivates service across organizational and religious boundaries. However, universalism must be demonstrated through inclusive policy and actual accessibility rather than presumed from institutional discourse.

The integrative framework in Figure 2 connects five domains. Qur'anic moral criticism identifies socially detached religiosity; ethical consciousness recognizes vulnerability and dignity; transformative pedagogy converts understanding into agency; institutionalized compassion organizes schooling, healing, and feeding; and empowerment and advocacy extend service toward social justice. Critical accountability and *tajdid* operate as feedback mechanisms. Institutional experience exposes new vulnerabilities and contradictions, encouraging reinterpretation, program revision, and organizational renewal.

Figure

2

Integrative Framework of Al-Ma'un-Oriented Social Justice



*Note. The arrows represent an analytical relationship rather than a fixed historical sequence. Critical accountability and *tajdid* create feedback from institutional experience to interpretation and practice.*

Four propositions summarize the framework. First, Al-Ma'un makes public responsibility a criterion for evaluating religious commitment. Second, transformative pedagogy mediates the relationship between scriptural ethics and social action. Third, institutionalization expands the reach and durability of compassion, but its contribution to justice depends on accessibility, competence, participation, and accountability. Fourth, the transition from service to structural justice requires the combination of assistance, capability development, empowerment, and advocacy. These are conceptual propositions for future research rather than statistically tested hypotheses.

The review contributes to Muhammadiyah studies in three ways. It distinguishes Dahlan's practical legacy from later theoretical reconstruction; integrates Qur'anic interpretation with organizational analysis; and repositions Al-Ma'un as a critical standard rather than only a legitimizing narrative. Institutions may invoke Al-Ma'un to explain their history, but the same concept should be used to ask whether their contemporary practices remain

oriented toward the mustad'afin.

Table

4

Conceptual Propositions and Suggested Empirical Tests

Proposition	Conceptual statement	Suggested research approach
P1	Al-Ma'un makes public responsibility a criterion for evaluating religious commitment.	Historical-conceptual analysis and comparative discourse studies.
P2	Transformative pedagogy mediates the relationship between scriptural ethics and social action.	AIK curriculum studies, service-learning evaluation, and educational ethnography.
P3	Institutionalization expands the reach of compassion, but justice depends on access, competence, participation, and accountability.	Comparative studies of schools, hospitals, orphanages, and philanthropic institutions.
P4	The transition from service to structural justice requires assistance, capability development, empowerment, and advocacy.	Longitudinal beneficiary-centered and policy-impact research.

Note. The propositions are theoretically derived relationships, not hypotheses statistically tested in this review.

Practical and Institutional Implications

The framework has direct implications for Muhammadiyah educational institutions. Schools, universities, cadre programs, and AIK courses should connect historical knowledge of Ahmad Dahlan with analysis of contemporary vulnerability. Service learning, community-based inquiry, and reflective projects can preserve the relationship between understanding and action. Such activities should not become ceremonial charity; students should examine causes, power relations, and the agency of affected communities. Institutional access also matters. Scholarships, cross-subsidies, inclusive admissions, and support for disadvantaged learners are more substantive expressions of Al-Ma'un than symbolic references in curricula alone.

Healthcare, philanthropic, and welfare institutions should integrate professional quality

with accessibility and dignity. PKU hospitals and related services require transparent mechanisms for assisting patients whose economic circumstances limit access. Philanthropic organizations should balance emergency relief with livelihood development, community organization, and advocacy. Orphanages should evaluate success not only through financial sustainability but also through child protection, psychological well-being, participation, and preparation for independent adulthood (Rohmansyah et al., 2019; Utami et al., 2019).

For Muhammadiyah leadership, *Al-Ma'un* should function as an operational and evaluative principle. Organizational success cannot be measured only through assets, enrollment, patient volume, revenue, or institutional rankings. Social-mission indicators should include accessibility, distribution of assistance, community participation, beneficiary agency, and responsiveness to underserved regions. Critical accountability does not weaken institutional identity; it protects institutions from becoming detached from the ethical criticism that originally inspired them.

For the wider field of Muhammadiyah studies, the review underscores the need to distinguish historical evidence from organizational memory, official positions from individual interpretations, normative claims from implementation, and institutional growth from social impact. Scholarship should remain normatively informed but avoid becoming exclusively celebratory. Critical analysis of access, professionalization, market pressures, beneficiary perspectives, and regional variation will strengthen both the academic credibility and institutional relevance of *Al-Islam* and Muhammadiyah studies.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations qualify the findings. First, the original search log did not retain database-specific identification and exclusion counts. The revised article therefore reports the verified final corpus of 15 studies but does not present an invented numerical PRISMA flow. Second, the literature on Ahmad Dahlan and *Al-Ma'un* is dispersed across journals, books, institutional documents, and archives that are not consistently indexed. Older Indonesian, Dutch, Arabic, and Javanese materials may therefore remain outside the review.

Third, many publications reproduce the narrative of Dahlan's repeated teaching of *Al-Ma'un* through later recollections. Repetition across articles should not be confused with multiple independent historical witnesses. Fourth, the sources are heterogeneous: historical and conceptual essays, institutional case studies, and social-movement analyses make different kinds of claims. The synthesis distinguishes their functions, but direct comparison remains limited. Fifth, publication bias may favor positive representations of Muhammadiyah institutions, while failed programs, community dissatisfaction, and internal criticism remain underreported.

Future research should prioritize four agendas. Historical work should identify the earliest documentary sources for the *Al-Ma'un* narrative and trace when the expression

theology of Al-Ma'un entered Muhammadiyah scholarship. Comparative institutional studies should examine how schools, hospitals, orphanages, Lazismu offices, and community programs interpret the ethos across regions. Beneficiary-centered and longitudinal research should evaluate access, participation, capability development, and changes in dependency. Finally, organizational studies should investigate how professionalization, market pressure, and financial sustainability affect the social mission of Muhammadiyah institutions.

The proposed framework can guide these studies without reducing theology to a narrow set of quantitative variables. Historical research, institutional ethnography, participatory evaluation, comparative case studies, and mixed-method designs can examine whether scriptural interpretation shapes organizational priorities, whether pedagogy develops social responsibility, whether access and participation strengthen empowerment, and whether advocacy contributes to structural change.

CONCLUSION

This review examined how scholarship published up to 2020 constructs Ahmad Dahlan's vision of social justice through the theology of Al-Ma'un. The synthesis shows that the concept is best understood as an evolving interpretative tradition rather than a fixed doctrine authored in a single theological text. Its foundation lies in the Qur'anic criticism of religious commitment detached from social responsibility; its pedagogical form appears in the insistence that understanding must be demonstrated through action; and its organizational form is visible in Muhammadiyah's schooling, healing, feeding, and wider social services.

The literature also documents an expansion from immediate charity toward organized philanthropy, capability development, community empowerment, advocacy, and structural justice. This expansion is intellectually legitimate when it remains historically transparent and preserves the central concern for people whose dignity, access, and agency have been weakened. Later concepts such as *mustad'afin* theology, progressive Islam, and social-justice philanthropy should therefore be treated as developments of Dahlan's practical legacy rather than his exact formal terminology.

The article's main contribution is an integrative framework linking Qur'anic moral criticism, ethical consciousness, transformative pedagogy, institutionalized compassion, and empowerment. It also emphasizes that institutional expansion is not automatically equivalent to justice. Muhammadiyah institutions embody Al-Ma'un most fully when they remain accessible, professionally competent, participatory, accountable, and oriented toward the capabilities of vulnerable communities.

Ahmad Dahlan's continuing significance lies in connecting faith with responsibility, knowledge with action, and compassion with institution building. The contemporary challenge is to ensure that the institutions inspired by this legacy do not merely preserve its name, but continue to confront new forms of exclusion and transform social service

into substantive social justice.

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