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A Comparison of Islamic Education Systems in Indonesia and Malaysia: Similarities, Differences, and Challenges in the Modern Era

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Abstract

Islamic education plays an important role in developing religious values, moral character, and intellectual competence. Indonesia and Malaysia share similar Islamic educational foundations but differ in educational governance, institutional structures, and curriculum implementation. These differences and the challenges of globalization and digital transformation highlight the need for comparative research. This study aims to examine the similarities, differences, and challenges of Islamic education systems in both countries. It employs a qualitative comparative approach through library research. Data were collected from academic publications, government policies, curriculum documents, and institutional reports, then analyzed using descriptive and comparative techniques. The findings reveal similarities in educational foundations and objectives, alongside differences in governance, institutional arrangements, and curriculum orientation. Both countries also face challenges related to digital transformation, teacher professionalism, curriculum relevance, and educational quality. This study concludes that Indonesia and Malaysia have distinct strengths and institutional characteristics that offer opportunities for mutual learning. Strengthening educational cooperation, curriculum innovation, and digital literacy is essential to developing adaptive and sustainable Islamic education systems while preserving Islamic values in the modern era.

Keywords: Islamic Education; Indonesia; Malaysia; Comparative Education.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education plays an important role in shaping individual character, moral values, intellectual development, and social responsibility within Muslim societies. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Malaysia represent two significant countries in the development of Islamic education due to their Muslim-majority populations and shared historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds.[1] Both countries have developed Islamic educational institutions from traditional systems, such as pesantren and pondok, into more structured educational institutions integrated into their respective national education systems. However, differences in historical experiences, political structures, educational

[1] Dinata Firmansyah, Ilzamudin Ma'mur, and Agus Gunawan, "Pendidikan Islam Di Seluruh Dunia: Komunitas Dan Keberagamannya," *Jurnal Darussalam: Jurnal Pendidikan, Komunikasi Dan Pemikiran Hukum Islam* 16, no. 2 (April 2025): 18–38, https://doi.org/10.30739/darussalam.v16i2.3644.

policies, and institutional governance have resulted in different approaches to organizing Islamic education. In principle, Islamic education encompasses not only the transmission of religious knowledge but also the integration of spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social dimensions through the concepts of *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. In the modern era, these objectives face increasing challenges associated with globalization, technological advancement, digital transformation, and the growing demand for educational quality.[2]

The Islamic education systems in Indonesia and Malaysia demonstrate similarities in their fundamental objectives, particularly in strengthening religious understanding, developing moral character, and integrating Islamic values into educational practices. Nevertheless, significant differences can be identified in their institutional structures, educational governance, and curriculum implementation.[3] Indonesia manages Islamic education through various institutions, including pesantren, madrasahs, Islamic schools, and Islamic higher education institutions, with the involvement of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and national education authorities. Meanwhile, Malaysia organizes Islamic education through national educational institutions, religious schools, and state religious authorities under a governance structure involving both federal and state institutions.[4] These differences raise important questions concerning the effectiveness of educational management, curriculum integration, institutional coordination, and the capacity of both countries to respond to contemporary educational developments. Without an appropriate understanding of these challenges, Islamic education may experience difficulties in maintaining its religious identity while ensuring academic relevance and competitiveness in the modern era.[5]

Previous studies have examined various aspects of Islamic education in Indonesia and Malaysia. Mas'ud, Fuad, and Zaini explored the historical evolution and orientation of Islamic education in both countries, highlighting the influence of colonial experiences and political

[2] Ali Mas'ud, Ah Zakki Fuad, and Achmad Zaini, "Evolution And Orientation of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 13, no. 1 (June 2019): 21–49, https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2019.13.1.21-49.
[3] Devi Ristyana Puji Lestari, Nurul Istiq'faroh, and Hitta Alfi Muhimmah, "Studi Perbandingan Sistem Pendidikan Di Indonesia Dengan Malaysia," *Pendas : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 9, no. 3 (September 2024): 1442–54, https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v9i3.15773.
[4] Mutiara Rajagukguk et al., "Analisis Sistem Pendidikan: Perbandingan Sistem Pendidikan Di Indonesia Dan Malaysia," *Dharmas Education Journal (DE_Journal)* 5, no. 2 (December 2024): 1360–67, https://doi.org/10.56667/dejournal.v5i2.1640.
[5] Wilda Razaqna, "Perbandingan Sistem Pendidikan Di Malaysia Dan Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia," *Jurnal Generasi Tarbiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 1 (April 2024): 56–64, https://doi.org/10.59342/jgt.v3i1.481.

developments on their educational systems.[6] Haryanto discussed similarities and differences in the development of Islamic education, particularly in relation to national educational policies.[7] Furthermore, Munastiwi and Marfuah examined the implementation of Islamic education learning management in Indonesian and Malaysian primary schools, focusing on planning, implementation, and evaluation.[8] These studies provide valuable insights into the historical and institutional development of Islamic education. However, previous research has generally emphasized historical development or specific aspects of educational management and implementation. Therefore, a more integrated comparative analysis is necessary to examine the interconnected dimensions of educational governance, institutional structures, curriculum orientation, and contemporary challenges. The novelty of this study lies in connecting these dimensions to understand how Indonesia and Malaysia maintain their Islamic educational identities while adapting to the demands of modernization and digital transformation.

This research is important because Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia are increasingly required to develop graduates with strong religious understanding, intellectual competence, and digital literacy while responding to globalization and technological advancement. This study aims to compare the Islamic education systems in both countries by identifying their similarities, differences in educational governance, institutional structures, and curriculum orientation, as well as the challenges they face in the modern era. Employing a qualitative comparative approach through library research and document analysis, this study examines relevant scholarly publications, educational policies, and institutional documents. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of comparative Islamic education and provide practical insights for policymakers and educational practitioners in improving educational quality, strengthening institutional governance, and developing adaptive and sustainable Islamic education systems while preserving their respective religious and cultural identities.

[6] Mas'ud, Fuad, and Zaini, "Evolution And Orientation of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia."
[7] Budi Haryanto, "Comparison of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia: Perbandingan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia Dan Malaysia," *Adabiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 1 (September 2015): 81–98, https://doi.org/10.21070/ja.v1i1.166.
[8] Erni Munastiwi and Marfuah, "Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia: Comparison of Islamic Education Learning Management Implementation," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (August 2019): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2019.81.1-26.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using a comparative approach to examine the Islamic education systems in Indonesia and Malaysia. The research was conducted through library research, focusing on the analysis of scholarly publications, academic books, government regulations, educational policies, curriculum documents, and institutional reports related to Islamic education in both countries. Data were collected through documentation techniques by identifying, selecting, and reviewing relevant primary and secondary sources published by educational institutions, government authorities, and academic researchers. The data consist of qualitative information concerning educational governance, institutional structures, curriculum orientation, and contemporary challenges. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive and comparative analysis techniques, involving data reduction, data classification, interpretation, and systematic comparison between the two countries. The findings were subsequently analyzed to identify similarities, differences, and educational challenges, as well as to formulate conclusions regarding the development of Islamic education systems in Indonesia and Malaysia in the modern era.[9]

RESULTS

The results of this study are presented through a comparative analysis of the Islamic education systems in Indonesia and Malaysia, focusing on their fundamental characteristics, institutional arrangements, curriculum implementation, and responses to contemporary educational developments. Based on the analysis of relevant academic literature, educational policies, and institutional documents, the findings are organized into five main aspects:

1. Similarities in the Foundations and Objectives of Islamic Education

The comparative analysis reveals that Indonesia and Malaysia share fundamental similarities in the foundations and objectives of Islamic education. Both countries emphasize the development of students' religious understanding, moral character, spiritual awareness, and intellectual abilities. Islamic education in both contexts is not merely oriented toward the acquisition of religious knowledge but also aims to shape individuals who demonstrate Islamic values in their daily lives. This orientation reflects the principles of tarbiyah, ta'lim, and ta'dib,

[9] John W. Creswell et al., "Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation," *The Counseling Psychologist* 35, no. 2 (March 2018): 236–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390.

which emphasize holistic human development through the integration of knowledge, faith, and morality. Furthermore, both countries maintain Islamic educational institutions at primary, secondary, and higher education levels, although their institutional arrangements differ. These similarities indicate that Indonesia and Malaysia share a common educational vision rooted in Islamic teachings, particularly in developing individuals who possess religious commitment and social responsibility.[10]

2. Differences in Educational Governance and Institutional Structures

The findings indicate that the most significant differences between Indonesia and Malaysia can be identified in their educational governance and institutional structures. In Indonesia, Islamic education is administered through a relatively diverse institutional framework involving the Ministry of Religious Affairs and national education authorities. Islamic educational institutions include pesantren, madrasah's (MI, MTs, and MA), Islamic schools, and Islamic higher education institutions. This arrangement provides opportunities for institutional diversity and the development of different educational models. In Malaysia, Islamic education operates through a governance structure involving federal educational authorities and state religious authorities. The Ministry of Education Malaysia plays an important role in managing Islamic education within the national school system, while state religious institutions also have responsibilities in the administration of certain religious schools and educational programs. Therefore, Indonesia demonstrates institutional diversity through its various educational pathways, whereas Malaysia reflects a governance arrangement characterized by coordination between federal and state-level authorities.[11]

3. Differences in Curriculum Orientation and Learning Implementation

The comparison also identifies differences in curriculum orientation and learning implementation between the two countries. In Indonesia, Islamic education is delivered through religious subjects integrated into the national curriculum, particularly in madrasahs, where students study subjects such as the Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, Islamic Cultural History, and Arabic. Islamic educational institutions also have opportunities to develop curriculum characteristics according to their institutional identities and educational

[10] Erni Munastiwi and Marfuah, "Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia: Comparison of Islamic Education Learning Management Implementation," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (August 2019): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2019.81.1-26.
[11] Julius Tito Kurniawan and Timbul Dompak, "Perbandingan Sistem Pendidikan: Sistem Pendidikan Indonesia Dan Malaysia," *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Ilmu Sosial Dan Teknologi (SNISTEK)* 6 (September 2024): 226–31.

needs. In Malaysia, Islamic education is incorporated into the national school curriculum and is supported by specific educational policies and curriculum development arrangements. Both countries emphasize the integration of Islamic values into teaching and learning, but they differ in curriculum organization, institutional authority, and implementation mechanisms. Research comparing Islamic teacher education curricula also identifies differences in academic structures, credit requirements, and curriculum management between Indonesian and Malaysian higher education institutions. These findings demonstrate that curriculum development in both countries reflects different educational governance systems and institutional priorities.[12]

4. Challenges of Islamic Education in the Modern Era

The analysis further reveals that Indonesia and Malaysia face several similar challenges in developing Islamic education in the modern era. The first challenge concerns digital transformation, particularly the integration of information technology into teaching, learning resources, and educational management. Islamic educational institutions are required to improve digital literacy among teachers and students while ensuring that technological development remains consistent with Islamic ethical values. The second challenge relates to educational quality and teacher professionalism. Differences in institutional resources, teacher competencies, and access to educational facilities may affect the quality of Islamic education. The third challenge concerns curriculum relevance, particularly the need to integrate religious knowledge with scientific, technological, and social developments. Furthermore, globalization creates additional demands for Islamic educational institutions to maintain religious identity while preparing students to participate in an increasingly competitive and multicultural society. These challenges indicate that educational modernization requires not only technological adaptation but also improvements in institutional governance, curriculum development, and human resource capacity.[13]

5. Comparative Findings between Indonesia and Malaysia

Overall, the comparative findings demonstrate that Indonesia and Malaysia share similar religious foundations and educational objectives but differ in their governance arrangements,

[12] Ahmad Ismail et al., "Comparison of Undergraduate Religious Education Curriculum in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (June 2024): 315–37, https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i2.4903.
[13] Alwazir Abdusshomad, Benny Kurnianto, and Nawang Kalbuana, "Between Memorization and Critical-Transformative Pedagogy: Translating Islamic Religious Education Reform in Indonesia and Malaysia," *J-PAI: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 12, no. 2 (June 2026), https://doi.org/10.18860/jpai.v12i2.41966.

institutional structures, and curriculum implementation. Indonesia offers a relatively diverse Islamic education system through pesantren, madrasahs, and Islamic educational institutions, while Malaysia implements Islamic education through a framework involving federal and state-level educational authorities. Both countries recognize the importance of integrating Islamic values with contemporary knowledge, although their institutional approaches and curriculum management differ. In responding to modern challenges, both systems require stronger digital integration, improved teacher competencies, curriculum innovation, and sustainable quality assurance. These findings suggest that neither educational system can be considered universally superior, as each has particular strengths and limitations shaped by its national context. Instead, comparative learning between the two countries provides opportunities to identify effective educational practices and develop more adaptive Islamic education systems in Southeast Asia.[14]

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Indonesia and Malaysia share fundamental principles in the development of Islamic education, particularly in strengthening faith, developing moral character, and integrating religious knowledge with intellectual development. These similarities reflect the common Islamic educational philosophy rooted in the concepts of tarbiyah, ta'lim, and ta'dib, which emphasize the holistic development of human beings. However, the implementation of these principles is influenced by different historical, political, and institutional contexts.[15] This indicates that Islamic education is not merely a religious process but also an educational system shaped by the social and national characteristics of each country. Therefore, the similarities between Indonesia and Malaysia represent a shared Islamic educational foundation, while their differences demonstrate the flexibility of Islamic education in responding to different national circumstances.

The differences in educational governance and institutional structures reveal distinct approaches to managing Islamic education. Indonesia demonstrates a diverse institutional system through pesantren, madrasahs, Islamic schools, and Islamic higher education institutions, with responsibilities distributed across relevant national authorities. Meanwhile,

[14] Kurniawan Dwi Saputra et al., "Historical Continuity and Changes: Understanding the Dynamics of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Jurnal Tarbiyatuna* 13, no. 2 (December 2022): 107–18, https://doi.org/10.31603/tarbiyatuna.v13i2.7345.
[15] Mas'ud, Fuad, and Zaini, "Evolution And Orientation of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia."

Malaysia implements Islamic education through a governance framework involving federal and state-level institutions. These differences influence curriculum management, institutional coordination, and educational implementation. In terms of curriculum, both countries seek to integrate Islamic values with general knowledge, although they apply different structures and mechanisms.[16] This comparison suggests that institutional diversity in Indonesia and administrative coordination in Malaysia offer different opportunities and challenges for improving the effectiveness and quality of Islamic education.

Furthermore, the challenges faced by both countries indicate that modernization requires Islamic educational institutions to balance technological development with the preservation of Islamic values. Digital transformation, teacher professionalism, curriculum relevance, and educational quality are important issues that require continuous attention. In this context, the integration of digital technology should not merely focus on improving learning efficiency but also strengthen critical thinking, digital literacy, and ethical responsibility among students.[17] Similarly, curriculum development needs to connect religious knowledge with scientific and technological developments without reducing the fundamental objectives of Islamic education. These challenges demonstrate that the sustainability of Islamic education depends on the ability of educational institutions to adapt to modern developments while maintaining their religious and moral foundations.

Overall, the comparison indicates that neither Indonesia nor Malaysia provides a universally superior model of Islamic education, as each system has particular strengths shaped by its national context. Indonesia offers institutional diversity and flexibility, while Malaysia provides a governance structure involving coordination between federal and state authorities. Both countries can benefit from mutual learning, particularly in strengthening institutional management, improving curriculum integration, developing teacher competencies, and expanding digital learning innovation. The findings also reinforce the importance of developing an Islamic education system that is adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable. Thus, cooperation and comparative learning between Indonesia and Malaysia may contribute to strengthening the quality and relevance of Islamic education in Southeast Asia in the modern era.

[16] Haryanto, "Comparison of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia."
[17] Sonya Putri Nelta, Mislaini, and Ashavira Julian Dias, "Perbandingan Sistem Pendidikan Di Indonesia Dan Pendidikan Di Malaysia," *Jurnal Ilmu Manajemen Dan Pendidikan | E-ISSN : 3062-7788* 1, no. 3 (December 2024): 49–61.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic education systems in Indonesia and Malaysia share fundamental objectives rooted in Islamic values, particularly in developing faith, moral character, and intellectual competence. However, both countries demonstrate differences in educational governance, institutional structures, and curriculum implementation, reflecting their respective historical, political, and national contexts. Indonesia is characterized by institutional diversity through pesantren, madrasahs, and Islamic educational institutions, while Malaysia adopts a governance framework involving federal and state-level authorities. Despite these differences, both countries face similar challenges in the modern era, particularly digital transformation, teacher professionalism, curriculum relevance, and educational quality. Therefore, mutual learning and educational cooperation between Indonesia and Malaysia are essential for developing Islamic education systems that are adaptive, innovative, and sustainable while maintaining their religious identity and fundamental values.

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