

The Transformation of Islamic Education within the Nusantara Culture: A Comparative Analysis between Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract: This research examines the transformation of Islamic education in the archipelago culture, with a focus on Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam as models for the formation of Malay-Archipelago Islamic civilization. The background of the issue stems from the phenomenon of the integration of Islamic values with local cultures, which has been peaceful and adaptive since its early spread in Southeast Asia. The main objective of this research is to analyze the transformation process, explore the similarities and differences in the systems, institutional structures, and policies of Islamic education in Indonesia and Brunei, as well as examine the role of local culture in shaping the character and identity of Islamic education. Using a descriptive qualitative approach through literature study and comparative analysis, this research identifies the dynamics of policies, institutional structures, and Islamic education practices that are relevant in the context of the integration of religious values and local culture. The results show that Islamic education in both countries plays a central role as an instrument for character building, identity inheritance, and maintaining the continuity of Islamic civilization. Indonesia presents an inclusive, adaptive, and pluralistic model of Islamic education, while Brunei implements a centralized, stable system that is consistent with the principles of Melayu Islam Beraja. The novelty of this study lies in its comparative analysis, which confirms that both models of Islamic education have the potential to serve as references for the sustainable development of Islamic education in the Southeast Asian region. The implications of this study provide recommendations for strengthening the Islamic education system based on local cultural values as a strategy for facing the challenges of globalization and strengthening the identity of Muslims in the modern era.

Keywords: Islamic education, Nusantara culture, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, Islamic civilization

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Introduction

Islamic civilization in the archipelago is the result of a long process of interaction between Islamic teachings and local cultures that had been deeply rooted long before the arrival of Islam. Islam did not come to this region through military conquest, but through a peaceful process that emphasized preaching, trade, marriage, and social and cultural adaptation. This process gave birth to a distinctive form of Islamic civilization, known as Malay-Archipelago Islamic Civilization, which presents a moderate and tolerant face of Islam that is integrated with the traditional values of the local community. Among the various countries in this region, Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam are two important examples that show how Islam plays a role not only as a religious system, but also as a foundation of civilization that influences social order, education, law, and culture.

In the Indonesian context, Islam has been a moral and social force that has shaped the dynamics of nationality since its early spread in the 13th century. Through educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, prayer rooms, and madrasas, Islamic values have been widely disseminated and adapted to the character of the diverse local community. Pesantren, for example, not only function as places of religious education, but also as centers for character building, strengthening the community's economy, and preserving local culture. In its development, the Islamic education system in Indonesia has undergone significant transformations, from a traditional system to part of the national education system regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This integration demonstrates the ongoing adaptation between Islamic values and the modern system, without losing the local cultural roots that characterize it.

Unlike Indonesia, which has high social and cultural diversity, Brunei Darussalam presents a more centralized and homogeneous model. Islam is the official religion of the country, and the Islamic education system is managed directly by the royal family through the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama). Islamic education in Brunei is designed to be integrated into the national education system with a uniform curriculum based on the Shafi'i school of thought as the main reference in fiqh and religious teachings. This approach reflects the very strong role of Islam in state affairs and serves as the main instrument in maintaining Brunei's national identity as a Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB). Through this system, Brunei has succeeded in maintaining the continuity of Islamic values structurally and culturally in the life of its people.

Although these two countries differ in terms of their political and social systems, they share a commonality in making Islamic education a means of passing on Islamic civilizational values. Both Indonesia and Brunei demonstrate that Islamic education is not merely an activity of religious instruction, but also an instrument for character building, cultural strengthening, and community development. Islamic education in both countries plays an important role in maintaining continuity between Islamic teachings and local cultural identity, while also serving as a medium for adaptation to contemporary challenges, including globalization and modernization. The study of Islamic education in the context of the archipelago's culture is important because it illustrates how Islam interacts with cultural plurality without losing its spiritual and moral essence. In this context, Islamic education serves as a bridge between the normative values of Islamic teachings and the socio-cultural realities of society. Through a contextual and adaptive educational approach, universal Islamic values such as justice, honesty, mutual assistance, and tolerance can be internalized within the framework of diverse local cultures.

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with literature review and comparative analysis methods to understand these dynamics. The analysis focuses on Islamic education policies, institutional structures, and the role of culture in the education process in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. The main objective of this study is to identify the similarities and differences between the two Islamic education systems, as well as to evaluate the extent to which they contribute to the formation of character and identity among the Muslim communities in the archipelago.

Thus, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the transformation of Islamic education in the archipelago's culture, while also emphasizing that Islamic civilization in this region is the result of a harmonious integration between Islamic orthodoxy and local cultural values. Through this comparative analysis, the author seeks to show that both Indonesia and

Brunei Darussalam have great potential to become models of Islamic education that are rooted in tradition, yet remain relevant to modern global demands.

The objectives of this study are: First, to analyze the process of Islamic education transformation in the context of the archipelagic culture in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. Second, to identify the similarities and differences in the systems, institutional structures, and Islamic education policies in both countries. Fourth, to examine the role of local cultural values in shaping the character and identity of Islamic education in each country. Fourth, to evaluate the relevance of the Nusantara Islamic education model as inspiration for the development of sustainable Islamic education in the Southeast Asian region.

Research Methods

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach that focuses on literature studies and comparative analysis of the transformation of Islamic education in the context of the archipelago culture, particularly in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. Research data was obtained from various secondary sources, including scientific books, national and international journal articles, education policy documents, and official publications from government agencies in both countries. The analysis was conducted through a process of identification, classification, and interpretation of concepts, policies, and practices of Islamic education relevant to the integration of Islamic values and local culture. The analysis technique used was descriptive and comparative, starting with data reduction by selecting and simplifying important information, then presenting the data thematically based on main categories such as the education system, the role of culture, and institutional structure. Next, a comparative analysis between Indonesia and Brunei was conducted to identify similarities, differences, and specific characteristics that shape the Islamic education models in both countries. The final stage was drawing conclusions by linking empirical findings to Islamic education theory and Islamic values in the archipelago, thereby developing a relevant conceptual model as a contribution to this research.

Results and Discussion

Islamic Education as the Legacy of Islamic Civilization in the Archipelago

Islamic civilization in the archipelago is the result of a dynamic fusion between universal Islamic teachings and local cultural values that were already deeply rooted before the arrival of Islam. Islam spread peacefully in this region through trade routes, proselytizing, and harmonious social relations between Islamic scholars and the local community. Through a long process, Islam came to be understood not only as a religious system, but also as a moral, intellectual, and social foundation that shaped the character of the Archipelago's society. In this context, Islamic education served as the main medium for passing on Islamic values while strengthening local cultural identity. The Islamic education system in the Malay-Archipelago region not only aims to transfer religious knowledge but also to instill moral and ethical values that are in harmony with local customs. Thus, educational institutions such as *Islamic boarding schools* in Indonesia and religious schools in Brunei Darussalam are concrete representations of the integration between Islam and Malay culture. In Indonesia, the spread of Islam was accompanied by the establishment of traditional educational centers such as Islamic boarding schools and surau, which functioned as places of religious learning as well as social institutions. Meanwhile, in Brunei Darussalam, Islamic education grew alongside the role of the royal family in making Islam the main foundation of state life. Although these two education systems developed in different social and political contexts, they both emphasize that education is an important instrument in maintaining the continuity of Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia.

Islamic Education in Indonesia: Dynamics and Transformation

Indonesia has a long history of Islamic education development. Since the 13th century, religious-based educational institutions have emerged independently in various regions, especially in Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi. Islamic boarding schools are the oldest form of Islamic education in Indonesia. These institutions were born from the scholarly tradition of the ulama, who emphasized the importance of studying the classical Islamic literature and practicing a life based on morals. Pesantren are not only

religious institutions, but also centers of culture and character building. Kyai, as leaders of pesantren, play a central role, not only as teachers, but also as moral figures and social leaders. In its development, pesantren have undergone significant transformation from traditional to modern systems, introducing general education, technology, and foreign languages into the curriculum. This is part of the pesantren's strategy to adapt to the demands of the times without abandoning their Islamic identity and local values. In addition to pesantren, the madrasah system has also developed as a form of modernization of Islamic education. Madrasahs integrate religious studies with general education, creating a dual education model that suits the needs of modern society. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, plays an important role in institutionalizing Islamic education through curriculum regulation, institutional accreditation, and teacher standardization. The transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia can be seen from three main aspects: First, structurally, namely the inclusion of Islamic educational institutions into the national education system. Second, curricular, with the integration of religious and general knowledge into a single integrated system. Third, cultural, namely the adaptation of Islamic values to local traditions such as mutual cooperation, politeness, and tolerance. Thus, Islamic education in Indonesia reflects the integrative dynamics between Islamic teachings and the pluralistic culture of the archipelago.

Islamic Education in Brunei Darussalam: Integration and Institutionalization

Brunei Darussalam presents a centralized, planned model of Islamic education that is highly integrated with the state system. Since the reign of Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, Islamic education has been positioned as a main pillar in the national education system, in line with the *Malay Islamic Beraja (MIB)* state ideology. The MIB principle contains three fundamental elements: *Malay* as a cultural identity, *Islam* as the official religion, and *Beraja* as a constitutional monarchy system of government. The Islamic education system in Brunei is under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (KHEU), which works closely with the Ministry of Education. The structure of Islamic education in Brunei includes elementary, secondary, and higher education religious schools, all of which implement a uniform curriculum based on the Shafi'i school of thought. Every Muslim child is required to attend religious education for seven years after completing their general elementary education. The distinctive features of the Islamic education system in Brunei are: First, the total integration of religion and state, where Islamic education is an instrument for building loyalty to the Sultan and the state. Second, a centralized and uniform curriculum, ensuring a unified understanding of religion throughout the country. Third, a strong moral and spiritual orientation, emphasizing the development of character, discipline, and social responsibility.

In addition to formal educational institutions, Brunei also has the Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA) and the Islamic Da'wah Center, which are centers for the development of Islamic scholarship and da'wah. This system demonstrates the continuity between religious values and state policy, making Brunei a model of stable and structured Islamic education in the Southeast Asian region.

Similarities in Islamic Education in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam

Although different in socio-political context and institutional form, there are a number of fundamental similarities between the Islamic education systems in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. First, the same theological foundation and school of thought. Both countries adhere to the Shafi'i school of thought as the basis of Islamic law, which is the main foundation for teaching fiqh and aqidah. This similarity in madhab makes the religious approach in both countries relatively similar in terms of understanding law, worship, and morals. Second, the integration of religious values and local culture. Both Indonesia and Brunei demonstrate an extraordinary ability to integrate Islamic values with local culture. In Indonesia, Islam adapts to local traditions such as selametan, kenduri, and gotong royong. In Brunei, Malay culture has become a vessel for the expression of Islamic values, which are officially regulated in the MIB system. Third, similar educational goals. Both countries place Islamic education as a means of shaping Muslim personalities that are moral, knowledgeable, and socially responsible. Spirituality, morality, and nationalism are important parts of the educational vision. Fourth, contribution to national identity. Islamic education in both countries not only shapes pious individuals

but also strengthens national identity. In Indonesia, this is reflected in the moderate and inclusive principle of "Islam Nusantara." Meanwhile, in Brunei, the Islamic education system is an integral part of the state ideology.

Differences in Islamic Education in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam

A comparison between the two countries also reveals several significant differences in terms of institutional aspects, policies, and social contexts, including: First, institutional and management aspects. Indonesia has a pluralistic and open Islamic education system. Institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and private Islamic schools develop independently under government supervision. In contrast, Brunei implements a centralized system that is fully controlled by the royal family. Second, curriculum and learning approaches. In Indonesia, the Islamic education curriculum is flexible and adaptive, allowing for the integration of religious and general knowledge. Meanwhile, in Brunei, the curriculum is more uniform, with a primary focus on the formation of faith and Sharia based on the Shafi'i school of thought. Third, the role of the state and society. Fourth, Indonesia places Islamic education as part of a democratic system, where the community has room for participation in the establishment and management of educational institutions. In Brunei, the role of society is more limited because the education system is entirely under state control. Fifth, the socio-cultural context. Indonesia faces the challenge of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, so Islamic education must be inclusive and tolerant. Brunei, with its homogeneous society, is able to maintain the uniformity of Islamic values without significant social friction.

The Transformation of Islamic Education: A Comparative Perspective

The transformation of Islamic education in both countries shows the same direction—towards the integration of religious values, culture, and modernity. However, the form and speed of this transformation differ. In Indonesia, the transformation is organic and participatory, following the dynamics of a pluralistic society. The government plays more of a facilitating role, while educational institutions have a high degree of autonomy to innovate. This model allows Islamic education to grow adaptively in response to changing times, including developments in digital technology, the creative economy, and globalization. In contrast, in Brunei, the transformation is top-down, controlled by royal policy. Although the changes are slower, the stability and uniformity of the system ensure the unity of values and direction of Islamic education nationwide. Both illustrate two faces of Malay Islamic civilization: Indonesia presents a dynamic, open, and pluralistic Islam, while Brunei presents a centralized, stable, and institutionalized Islam.

The Role of Culture in Islamic Education

Culture plays an important role as a vehicle for the internalization of Islamic values. In Indonesia, a cultural approach is key to the success of Islamic preaching and education. For example, the use of traditional arts such as gamelan, wayang, and Islamic literature serves as a medium for moral and spiritual education. Islamic values are conveyed contextually, making them easily accepted by the community without causing cultural resistance. In Brunei, Malay culture is officially integrated with Islamic values within the framework of the MIB ideology. The Malay language is used as the language of instruction for religious education, strengthening both religious and national identity. Culture is not seen as an entity separate from Islam, but as a means of strengthening the understanding and practice of religion in everyday life. Thus, both Indonesia and Brunei prove that Islamic education cannot be separated from the cultural context. It is through local culture that Islamic values can be brought to life and passed down across generations.

Contribution to the Identity of Muslims in the Archipelago

Islamic education in both countries contributes greatly to shaping a distinctive Muslim identity in the archipelago—moderate, civilized, and open to differences. This identity is the result of a harmonization between Islamic orthodoxy and local wisdom values. In Indonesia, the emergence of the concept of Islam Nusantara has become a symbol of Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin, emphasizing a

balance between text and context, between sharia and culture. Islamic education is the foundation for shaping a tolerant and nationalistic Muslim generation. Meanwhile, in Brunei, the Islamic education system strengthens loyalty to Islamic and national values, shaping a religious, disciplined society that is obedient to the king. Although these two models have different approaches, they both contribute to maintaining the continuity of Islamic civilization in the Malay region.

Implications and Future Development Directions

The results of this study show that the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia and Brunei has great potential to become a model for the sustainable development of Islamic education in Southeast Asia. There are several important implications that can be drawn: First, the Integrative-Conservative model. Indonesia presents an integrative model that is flexible to global changes, while Brunei represents a stable and well-preserved conservative model. Both can complement each other as references for other countries. Second, empowerment of educational institutions. Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia and religious schools in Brunei have great potential to strengthen the character of the younger generation through values-based education. Third, regional policy. Inter-ASEAN Islamic education cooperation can be developed through curriculum exchanges, scholarship programs, and cross-border research to strengthen Southeast Asian Islamic identity. Fourth, the digitization of Islamic education. Digital transformation needs to be directed towards expanding access to Islamic learning without eliminating the cultural and spiritual values that characterize the Islamic civilization of the Archipelago.

Conclusion

Islamic education in the Nusantara region, particularly in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam, is the result of a long dialectic between Islamic teachings and local cultures that existed long before the arrival of Islam. Through a peaceful and adaptive historical process, Islam developed not as a force for cultural uniformity, but as a transformational force that blended with local traditional values. Islamic education became the main means of passing on these values as well as the foundation for shaping the character, morals, and identity of Muslim communities in both countries. The results of the analysis show that both Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam have fundamental similarities in making Islamic education a strategic instrument for civilization development. Both adhere to the same theological foundation, namely the Shafi'i school of thought, and place Islamic values as guidelines for ethics and social life. However, the dynamics of the transformation of Islamic education in the two countries have taken different paths and characteristics. In Indonesia, Islamic education has developed organically and participatively. Institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and Islamic universities grew from the roots of society and adapted to the times. Islamic boarding schools serve not only as centers of religious learning but also as forums for strengthening local culture, community economy, and religious moderation. The Indonesian Islamic education system is inclusive and adaptive, accommodating cultural plurality and the needs of modern society through the integration of religious and general knowledge.

Meanwhile, in Brunei Darussalam, Islamic education developed in a centralized and systematic manner under the control of the royal family. The full integration of religion and state created a homogeneous, stable, and unity-oriented education system. The Islamic education curriculum in Brunei is based on the principles of the Malay Islamic Beraja (MIB) ideology, which places Islam at the core of social, cultural, and political life. This system successfully instills loyalty to religion, the king, and the state, while maintaining uniformity in the understanding of religious across all levels of society. Although these two Islamic education systems differ in structure and approach, they share the same goal: to shape a generation of Muslims who are moral, knowledgeable, and have a strong identity as part of the Tamadun Islam Nusantara (Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago). The continuity between religious and cultural values is key to maintaining social harmony and strengthening the distinctive Islamic character of Southeast Asia—an Islam that is friendly, rooted in tradition, yet open to modernity.

From a comparative perspective, Indonesia presents a dynamic and pluralistic model of Islamic education, while Brunei presents a centralized and consistent model. The two complement each other in depicting a moderate, stable, and culturally rooted face of Malay Islam. These findings confirm that Islamic civilization in the archipelago is not the result of imitation of the Middle East, but rather the result of creative integration between universal Islamic values and local wisdom. Conceptually, this study reinforces the view that Islamic education plays a central role in civilization, capable of maintaining the continuity of tradition, shaping national character, and presenting Islam as an adaptive, humanistic, and sustainable civilizational force amid the currents of modern globalization.

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