

## Comparison of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam

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**Abstract:** This research is motivated by the importance of understanding the role of Islamic education in preserving and developing Malay-Islamic civilization in the archipelago, particularly in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam, which, despite having the same Islamic historical roots, have developed within different national policy and philosophical frameworks. The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the Islamic education systems in both countries, examine the integration of Islamic values with local culture, and evaluate their contribution to the formation of Islamic civilization character and identity. The methodology used is a descriptive qualitative approach through literature study and comparative analysis of policy documents, academic journals, official reports, and relevant classical and contemporary literature. The results show that Indonesia has developed pluralistic and decentralized Islamic education through Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and Islamic universities that are adaptive to modern science and technology, while Brunei emphasizes vertically integrated Islamic education under the Malay Islamic Beraja (MIB) philosophy, with a focus on uniformity of values, loyalty to religion and the king, and socio-political stability. The novelty of this research lies in mapping Islamic educational values that connect tradition and modernity in their respective national contexts, while offering a cross-country comparative perspective that supports the strengthening of Islamic civilization. The implications of this research show that Islamic education not only plays a role in preserving spiritual and cultural values, but also serves as a strategic instrument in nation-building, research development, and regional collaboration to strengthen the position of Islamic civilization in the era of globalization.

**Keywords:** Islamic education, comparative, Malay civilization, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam



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## Introduction

Islamic education plays a fundamental role in shaping the identity, morals, and civilization of Muslims. In the Malay-Archipelago region, Islamic educational institutions are not only a means of passing on religious knowledge, but also a vehicle for preserving spiritual, social, and cultural values that are deeply rooted in society. Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam, as Muslim-majority countries with a long history of Islam, display different patterns of Islamic education in terms of institutionalization and implementation strategies, even though they are both rooted in local traditions. In Indonesia, Islam arrived in the 13th century through trade routes and the preaching of scholars from Gujarat, Arabia, and Aceh, resulting in a humanistic model of education that synergizes local values and Islamic teachings (Azra, 2004). Meanwhile, in Brunei, Islam has been the official religion since the 14th century and is the foundation of the modern state based on Malay Islam Beraja (MIB) (Ismail, 2018).

In the era of globalization and modernization of education, both countries face challenges in maintaining Islamic cultural values. Islamic education, which was once the center of character building, must now adapt to the penetration of digital technology, secularization of values, and changes in social orientation. Indonesia has demonstrated adaptation through the transformation of Islamic boarding schools and madrasas into integrative models that combine modern science and spiritual values (Nata, 2015; Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019), while Brunei maintains the purity of values through a centralized education system based on royal policy, but faces limitations in innovation (Hassan, 2016; Zulkifli, 2022). This phenomenon shows that the Islamic civilization of the Archipelago is dynamic and contextual, making comparative studies important to understand the application of Islamic values in modern education systems without losing their Islamic spirit.

Previous literature reviews emphasize the diversity and similarities between the two education systems. Islamic education in Indonesia has developed through traditional institutions such as Islamic boarding schools and madrasas, to modern Islamic universities, emphasizing the integration of religious and scientific knowledge and community independence (Azra, 2004; Nata, 2015). In Brunei, Islamic education is integrated into the national system through the MIB philosophy, emphasizing unity between religious values, Malay culture, and loyalty to the monarchy (Ismail, 2018; Hassan, 2016; Zulkifli, 2022). A comparative approach shows that Indonesia emphasizes flexibility and adaptation to social change, while Brunei emphasizes stability of values and orthodoxy. Both models contribute to the preservation of Malay-Islamic civilization, albeit with different strategies (Roslan & Ahmad, 2020; Rahim, 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

Although many studies discuss Islamic education in each country, there is a gap in research related to a comprehensive comparative analysis between Indonesia and Brunei, particularly in the context of the integration of values, institutions, and educational orientation towards modernity. This gap highlights the need for research that not only describes the education system but also assesses its relevance and contribution to strengthening Malay-Islamic civilization in the digital age. The novelty of this research lies in its cross-country comparative approach, which highlights the differences and similarities in Islamic education strategies in the context of modernity, as well as the concept of moderate and adaptive Malay Islamic education.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on three main theories: first, the theory of Islamic education as social transformation, which views education as a tool for reconstructing a civilized society (Rahardjo, 1999); second, the theory of the integration of knowledge and values, which emphasizes the unity between knowledge, spirituality, and ethics (Abdullah, 2017); third, the theory of Malay-Islamic civilization, which places Malay culture as a container for the contextualization of Islamic values in social life (Rahim, 2019). Based on this framework, this study hypothesizes that Islamic education models in Indonesia and Brunei have different approaches to the integration of values and modernity, but both play a role in strengthening the Malay-Islamic civilization identity.

The purpose of this study is to describe the history and development of Islamic education in both countries, analyze educational models and policies comparatively, identify fundamental values that are still preserved, and provide conceptual contributions to the development of an Islamic education paradigm based on Malay cultural values and moderate Islamic principles. , this study is expected to enrich the knowledge of Islamic education, provide input for strengthening the socio-religious identity

of the Malay-Achipelago community, and serve as a strategic reference for the development of education policies that are adaptive to global changes.

## **Research Method**

This study uses a comparative qualitative approach with conceptual analysis, as it focuses on the study of Islamic education systems in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam to understand their contribution to the formation of Malay-Islamic civilization. The type of data used is secondary data obtained from national and international scientific journals, academic books, official government documents, as well as classical and contemporary literature related to Islamic education and Malay civilization. Data collection was carried out through literature study and documentation techniques as well as scientific text analysis (content analysis), with thematic categorization based on history, education systems, civilization values, and Islamic education policies. The data was analyzed using a thematic and comparative approach to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in Islamic education practices in both countries, while interpreting the conceptual meaning behind Islamic education policies, structures, and values that could serve as a model for strengthening Islamic civilization in the archipelago.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Islamic Education and Malay Civilization in Indonesia**

The results of the study show that the Islamic education system in Indonesia has pluralistic and dynamic characteristics. The development of Islamic education in this country reflects a blend of classical scholarly traditions and institutional modernization. Pesantren, as the oldest educational institutions, play an important role in instilling religious values, while madrasahs and Islamic universities represent adaptations to the national education system. The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, plays an active role in curriculum development, accreditation, and the development of education quality based on Islamic values.

In contrast, the Islamic education system in Brunei Darussalam is more centralized and integrated under state policy. Education in Brunei is based on the philosophy of Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), which places Islam as a moral guide and national identity. The Islamic education curriculum in Brunei is formally designed and strictly controlled by the government through the Ministry of Education and the Majlis Ugama Islam Brunei (MUIB). Each level of education is aimed at shaping individuals who are faithful, have noble character, and are loyal to the monarchy and Malay values.

From a comparative perspective, both countries have the same goal, namely to develop individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, and have good character. However, there are significant differences in terms of implementation. Indonesia emphasizes community independence and diversity in educational institutions, while Brunei focuses on the integration of Islamic values into national policy. These differences show that Islamic education is able to adapt to the social and political contexts of each country without losing the substance of its Islamic values.

First, Historical Background and Development. Islamic education in Indonesia has very strong roots in the history of the formation of the Malay-Achipelago civilization. Since the 13th century AD, Islam came to the Nusantara archipelago through trade, proselytizing, and marriage, especially through the role of Arab, Gujarati, and Persian scholars and merchants (Azra, 2004). In this context, Islam became not only a religious system but also a social and cultural system that shaped the Malay-Indonesian identity. The early educational institutions that became the forerunners of Islamic education in Indonesia were pesantren, surau, and dayah. These three institutions not only functioned as places of religious instruction but also as centers for the formation of moral leadership and Islamic scholarship. Through the pesantren, a generation of scholars emerged who played an important role in missionary work, politics, and social transformation in various regions. During the Dutch colonial era, Islamic education was under pressure due to colonial government policies that marginalized religious-based educational institutions. However, the emergence of figures such as KH. Ahmad Dahlan, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, and Haji Agus Salim marked the rise of modern Islamic education organized through organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Persatuan Islam.

Second, the Contemporary Islamic Education System. After independence, Islamic education in Indonesia entered a new phase with the integration of the madrasah and pesantren systems into the national education system. Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System became the basis for this integration. Madrasahs now have the same status as public schools, while pesantren are recognized as part of the formal and non-formal education system through Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren. The Ministry of Religious Affairs plays an important role in formulating policies and curricula for Islamic education that are oriented towards a balance between religious knowledge (tafaqquh fi al-din) and general knowledge (science, technology, social studies). State Islamic universities such as UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, and UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang have transformed into globally-oriented research and innovation institutions. In addition, the strengthening of the digitization of Islamic education has also become a hallmark of the modern era. Pesantren are now beginning to implement e-learning systems, digital libraries, and information technology-based education management. The concept of Islamic Digital Civilization is developing as a new narrative in the development of modern Islamic civilization in Indonesia.

Third, Civilizational Values in Indonesian Islamic Education: Indonesian Islamic education contains distinctive Malay civilizational values, such as:

- a. Balance between knowledge and manners – as taught by the scholars of the archipelago.
- b. Religious moderation (wasathiyyah) – a fundamental principle in Indonesian Islamic education, rejecting extremism and intolerance.
- c. Integration of knowledge ('ilm) and action ('amal) – emphasizing the unity between theory and social practice.
- d. Institutional independence – Islamic boarding schools and madrasas grow from the community and for the community.
- e. These values form the foundation of a dynamic Malay-Islamic civilization in Indonesia that is open to progress while remaining rooted in spirituality and local culture.

### **Islamic Education and Malay Civilization in Brunei Darussalam**

Islamic education in Brunei Darussalam is based on the Malay Islamic Beraja (MIB) philosophy, which unites the Malay national identity, Islamic values, and the constitutional monarchy system as moral, social, and political foundations. This philosophy permeates all aspects of life, including education, so that the national curriculum emphasizes Islamic religious education from elementary to secondary levels. The national education system SPN21 (21st Century National Education System) integrates religious education with the general curriculum, aiming to shape a generation that is knowledgeable, moral, and productive. The main Islamic educational institutions in Brunei include Sekolah Ugama, Institut Tahfiz Al-Qur'an Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah (ITQSHHB), and Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), which emphasize religious knowledge, tahfiz Al-Qur'an, and the integration of classical and contemporary studies, respectively. The government provides full support through education subsidies, the appointment of teachers as civil servants, and curriculum supervision by the Islamic Education Council. The distinctive characteristics of Brunei's Malay-Islamic civilization are reflected in loyalty and obedience to the king as zillullah fil-ardh, the prioritization of religious education as a moral and cultural foundation, the integration of Islam and Malay identity with Malay as the language of instruction, and the application of social discipline and hierarchical values that emphasize manners and respect. This education system has succeeded in maintaining continuity between religion, culture, and politics, while facing the challenges of modernization and globalization, especially in the aspects of research and innovation in contemporary Islamic education.

### **Comparative Analysis of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam and Conceptual Implications**

A comparative analysis of Islamic education in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam reveals significant similarities and differences, which in turn have conceptual implications for the development of Malay-Islamic civilization.

First, the similarities. Both Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam consider Islam to be the core of Malay civilization. They share similarities in the following aspects:

- a. State recognition of Islamic education as part of the national system.
- b. The integration of religious values, Malay culture, and national development.
- c. A focus on character building (akhlaq al-karimah) and a balance between religious knowledge and science.
- d. The involvement of religious scholars and institutions in education policy. Both countries also uphold the values of manners and moderation as the foundation of peaceful and inclusive Islamic education.

Second, points of difference. However, there are fundamental differences in the institutional context and policy philosophy:

- a. Basic philosophy: Indonesia develops Islamic education within the framework of Pancasila pluralism, while Brunei does so within the MIB paradigm based on Islam as the state ideology.
- b. Institutional structure: Indonesia has a decentralized system of Islamic education managed by the community (pesantren, madrasah), while Brunei manages it centrally by the state.
- c. Approach to modernization: Indonesia encourages the integration of science and the digitization of Islamic education, while Brunei places greater emphasis on stability of values and religious orthodoxy.

Third, Conceptual Implications. This comparative analysis shows that Islamic education plays a strategic role in maintaining and expanding the Malay-Islamic civilization. There are three important conceptual implications:

- a. Reconstruction of the Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago – it is necessary to develop an educational model that combines the spiritual strength of Brunei and the social dynamics of Indonesia.
- b. Integration of Values and Technology – future Islamic education must integrate Islamic values with digital and modern scientific competencies.
- c. Regional Collaboration – the establishment of a network of Islamic universities and Islamic boarding schools in the Malay region can strengthen Islam's position as the axis of global civilization.

Thus, the results of this study show that Malay-Islamic civilization is not static, but continues to evolve with the times. Islamic education, both in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam, is a key instrument in maintaining the continuity of values, strengthening national identity, and building a superior Islamic civilization in the era of globalization.

## Conclusion

This study confirms that Islamic education is a strategic pillar in preserving, developing, and passing on Malay-Islamic civilization in the archipelago, particularly in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam, which, despite having similar historical roots—interactions between Islam, Malay culture, and traditional socio-political structures—have developed within different national policy and philosophical frameworks. In Indonesia, Islamic education has developed in a pluralistic and decentralized manner through Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and Islamic universities as centers of moral and intellectual transformation. It is adaptive, open to science and technology, and seeks to combine Islamic values with the spirit of nationalism within the framework of Pancasila. In contrast, in Brunei Darussalam, Islamic education is rooted in the philosophy of the Malay Islamic Beraja (MIB) state, which places Islam as the basis of state ideology and is controlled vertically by the government to ensure uniformity of values, discipline, and loyalty to religion and the king. Conceptual analysis shows that the Islamic civilization of the Archipelago displays a balance between tradition and modernity, integration between religion, culture, and education, and global relevance as a model of synergy between spirituality, intellectuality, and nationalism in the digital age. The implications of this study emphasize the need for collaboration between countries in the development of Islamic education, the integration of Islamic values with digital transformation, and the strengthening of civilization-based educational research. Its limitations lie in the use of secondary data and literature studies without direct field observations, so further research is recommended to conduct comparative field studies, develop an adaptive Nusantara education model for globalization, and build regional academic networks to strengthen the position of Islamic education as an instrument for sustainable civilization development.

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