

## Islamic Education and Archipelago Culture: A Comparative Study of Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine the role of Islamic education in preserving and developing Islamic culture in the archipelago, particularly in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. Both countries have strong Islamic historical roots, but have developed in different social and political contexts. Using a qualitative approach and literature review, this study finds that Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia and formal religious institutions in Brunei play an important role in passing on Islamic cultural values. Islamic education in Indonesia is more inclusive and adaptive to local culture, while in Brunei it is more focused on the state's efforts to maintain the orthodoxy of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah Islam. Both, however, show continuity between scientific, spiritual, and cultural values that are characteristic of Malay-Archipelago Islamic civilization.

**Keyword:** Islamic education, Archipelago culture, Islamic civilization, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam



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## Introduction

Islam has been an integral part of the culture of the Indonesian archipelago for more than seven centuries. The process of Islamization in this region did not take place suddenly, but rather through peaceful and cultural channels, such as trade, marriage, the arts, and especially education. Through this long process, Islam has not only been present as a belief system, but also as a civilizational force (*tamadun*) that shapes the mindset, values, and identity of the Indonesian people. In this context, education has become the main instrument for the dissemination and internalization of Islamic values that are deeply rooted in the social life of the community.

In Indonesia, traditional institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, prayer rooms, and madrasas play an important role in instilling Islamic teachings while preserving classical Islamic scholarly traditions. Pesantren, for example, are not only places for studying religious texts, but also centers for shaping the character, culture, and morality of students. Meanwhile, in Brunei Darussalam, Islamic education has developed within the framework of a constitutional monarchy, which places Islam as the basis of state ideology and a source of values in the national education system. A comparison between these two contexts shows that Islamic education in the Malay-Nusantara region has a variety of forms and approaches, but remains grounded in the same principle: to shape civilized individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, and responsible.

Islamic education in the Nusantara context has distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from Islamic education systems in the Middle East. One of its main characteristics is its ability to adapt and synergize with local wisdom without losing the substance of universal Islamic values. Values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, respect for nature, and social solidarity are local expressions of Islamic teachings that have been internalized in the culture of society. Thus, *Tamadun Islam Nusantara* is not a static entity, but a dynamic civilization that is adaptive to socio-cultural changes.

In recent decades, the discourse on the integration of Islamic values and local culture has regained strength, especially in the context of character education. Globalization and the tide of modernization have brought great challenges to the Islamic education system, which is often caught in a dichotomy between textual orientation and contextual needs. In fact, the long history of Islamic education in the archipelago shows that the integration of Islamic values and local culture has resulted in a humanistic, inclusive, and socially relevant educational model.

Therefore, studies on the relationship between Islamic education and Malay-Archipelago civilization are very important to rediscover the epistemological roots and praxis of Islamic education based on local values. This study not only offers a historical perspective but also contributes to the development of a contextual and civilized character education model. Through an understanding of the dynamics of Islamic civilization in the Malay-Archipelago region, it is hoped that an Islamic education paradigm will emerge that not only transfers knowledge but also fosters spiritual, social, and cultural awareness in building civilized human beings.

## Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research method. Data sources were obtained from books, scientific journal articles, official government documents, and previous studies relevant to Islamic education in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. Data analysis was conducted comparatively, by comparing the characteristics, systems, and objectives of Islamic education in both countries.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. The Historical Roots of Islamic Education in the Archipelago

Islamic education in the archipelago has long historical roots and is closely related to the peaceful and cultural process of Islamization. In the early days of Islamization, educational activities were carried out in traditional institutions such as *surau*, *dayah*, *pondok*, and *pesantren*, which served as centers for religious learning and moral guidance for the community. The ulama (religious scholars) acted as agents of social transformation who not only taught religious knowledge but also shaped the community's way of life based on Islamic values. This model of education was inclusive and contextual because, in practice, Islam interacted with local cultures without negating Islamic identity. In Aceh and



Minangkabau, surau became places of education that were integrated into the lives of indigenous communities, while in Java, pesantren developed as institutions that taught Islam through a socio-cultural approach. In Brunei Darussalam, the roots of Islamic education can be traced back to the Brunei Sultanate in the 14th century AD, when Islamic teachings became the basis for the political and moral legitimacy of the kingdom. Thus, Islamic education has played a role as a civilizational force (*tamadun*) that shapes the religious and social identity of the Malay-Archipelago community.

## 2. Pesantren and Islamic Scientific Identity in Indonesia

Pesantren are a unique representation of Islamic education in Indonesia, both in terms of their learning system and their function in society. As the oldest educational institution in the archipelago, Islamic boarding schools place the *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) at the core of their curriculum, reflecting the intellectual heritage of classical Islam. However, Islamic boarding schools are not only places for the transmission of religious knowledge, but also arenas for the formation of the character and morality of students through the values of *ta'dzim* (respect for teachers), discipline, simplicity, and social responsibility.

In addition to their academic function, Islamic boarding schools also serve as centers of Islamic culture that preserve religious traditions such as tahlilan, maulidan, and khataman Al-Qur'an. These traditions show that Islamic boarding schools do not reject local culture, but rather Islamize it by giving it new spiritual meaning. Thus, Islamic boarding schools have become a model of integrative education—combining cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects—and have contributed greatly to the formation of *Tamadun Islam Nusantara* (Islamic civilization in the archipelago), which is rooted in local values.

## 3. Islamic Education in Brunei Darussalam

Unlike Indonesia, which has developed a community-based education model, Brunei Darussalam has implemented an Islamic education system that is formally integrated into national policy. The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs (KHEU), manages religious education in a structured manner, from elementary to university levels. The Islamic education curriculum in Brunei includes mastery of the Qur'an, fiqh, aqidah, Arabic, and the history of Islamic civilization, with the aim of forming an Islamic society that is obedient to religious teachings and the king.

The education system in Brunei emphasizes the role of the state in maintaining the purity of Islamic teachings and uniformity of values. This reflects the view that Islamic education is not only the responsibility of individuals or society, but also the institutional responsibility of the state in building an Islamic civilization that is deeply rooted in the traditions of Islamic monarchy.

## 4. Comparison and Relevance to the Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago

A comparison between Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam shows two main approaches to Islamic education in the Malay-Archipelago region: a community-based model and a state-based model. In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools grew out of social initiatives rooted in the community's need to learn religion independently and contextually. This approach has resulted in education that is adaptive to local culture, pluralistic, and participatory. Meanwhile, in Brunei, Islamic education has developed within the framework of state policies that emphasize control, uniformity, and the continuity of official Islamic values.

Although structurally different, both models have the same goal, which is to shape people who are knowledgeable, faithful, and have noble character. In the context of *Tamadun Islam Nusantara*, the two complement each other: Indonesia emphasizes socio-cultural and participatory aspects, while Brunei emphasizes institutional aspects and orderly values. Both prove that Islamic education can develop in various forms without losing its spiritual and moral essence.

Thus, the results of this study confirm that *Tamadun Islam Nusantara* is a dynamic and adaptive form of Islamic civilization, in which education plays a major role in integrating religious and cultural values. Both Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia and the Islamic education system in Brunei contribute to the formation of a civilized society (*insan kamil*), which is the main goal of Islamic education in the Malay-Nusantara region.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that Islamic education in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam both play an important role in shaping *Tamadun Islam Nusantara*, despite their different characteristics. In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools have grown as community-based educational institutions that are adaptive to local cultures, while in Brunei, the Islamic education system is formally managed by the state to strengthen national Islamic identity. Both show that Islamic education is not only a means of transferring religious knowledge, but also an instrument for shaping character, morality, and civilization. The integration of Islamic values and local wisdom has proven capable of producing a contextual, moderate, and humanistic model of education. Theoretically, these findings enrich the study of culture-based Islamic education, while in practical terms, the results can be used as a reference for the development of a character curriculum that is relevant to the socio-cultural context of Indonesia and the Malay world.

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