

Islamic Education Policies in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran (A Comparative-Analytical Study)

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Abstract

This study provides a comparative analysis of Islamic education policies in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran, focusing on how ideological, political, social, and cultural factors shape their respective educational systems. Using a qualitative-comparative approach and policy analysis framework, the research examines three main dimensions: ideological foundations, institutional structures, and curricular orientations. The findings reveal that each country embodies a distinct model of the relationship between religion and the state: Indonesia adopts a plural-religious inclusive model integrating Islamic education into the national system through collaboration between the government and religious organizations; Malaysia applies an integrative-identitarian model in which Islamic education serves as a tool for national identity formation and moral development under strong state coordination; while Iran represents a theocratic-ideological model where Islamic education functions as an instrument for ideological reproduction and moral governance under clerical leadership. Despite their differences, all three systems share a common goal—to produce morally upright, knowledgeable, and socially responsible citizens. However, challenges persist regarding the balance between religious authenticity and modernization, as well as between state control and educational autonomy. This study contributes to comparative Islamic education research by highlighting the epistemological and ideological dynamics that shape educational reforms in diverse Muslim-majority contexts, offering a novel framework for understanding how Islamic education evolves amid globalization and modern statehood.

Keywords: Islamic Education Policy, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran, Comparative Study, Religion and State, Education Reform, Ideology, Modernity.



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Introduction

Islamic education constitutes a fundamental institution in the formation of Muslim individuals and civilization. It functions not only as a medium for the transmission of religious knowledge but also as a vehicle for shaping moral values, ideological orientations, and the cultural direction of a nation. In the contemporary context, Islamic education across Muslim-majority countries faces increasingly complex challenges, including the globalization of knowledge, the secularization of public policy, and demands for the modernization of national education systems (Azra, 2012:17; Hefner, 2020:4). Nevertheless, each country responds to these dynamics in different ways, depending on the social, political, and ideological contexts in which it operates. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran represent three distinct models of Islamic education policy, all of which position religion as a source of values and as an orientation for human development.

In Indonesia, the Islamic education system has developed along two major trajectories: state-based formal education and traditional pesantren-based education. Since the early twentieth century, pesantren have served as autonomous centers of Islamic learning, deeply rooted in the *kitab kuning* tradition and classical Islamic scholarship. Following independence, however, the state sought to integrate Islamic educational institutions into the national education system through various policies, including Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren (Azra & Afrianty, 2019:55). These policies signify a paradigmatic shift: pesantren are no longer regarded merely as non-formal educational institutions but are legally recognized as integral components of the national education system, possessing distinctive curricula and pedagogical methodologies.

Nevertheless, this integration has generated epistemological tensions between the intellectual orientation of pesantren and the modern paradigm of national education. Pesantren tend to preserve a *turāth* (classical heritage)-based epistemology centered on the mastery of fiqh, tafsīr, and taṣawwuf texts, whereas the national education system promotes rationalization and professionalization. In this context, Islamic education policy in Indonesia seeks to strike a balance between preserving Islamic scholarly traditions and embracing educational modernity (Azra, 2012:91). The religious moderation approach promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs reflects this effort, emphasizing that Islamic education must reinforce values of tolerance and pluralism without undermining a solid foundation of Islamic scholarship (Hefner, 2020:9).

In Malaysia, Islamic education policy exhibits a more centralized character and is grounded in a strong state role. Since independence, Islam in Malaysia has been constitutionally positioned as the official religion of the federation. Through institutions such as the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and the State Islamic Religious Councils (*Majlis Agama Islam Negeri*), the government exercises significant control over curriculum development, certification of religious teachers, and accreditation of Islamic educational institutions (Hashim & Langgulung, 2010:43). Islamic education in Malaysia has evolved within a framework that integrates Islamic values with national development, in line with the vision of *Islam Hadhari* introduced in the early 2000s.

In addition to the formal, state-regulated system, Malaysia also maintains a traditional *pondok* education system comparable to Indonesia's pesantren. However, Malaysian government policy has encouraged *pondok* institutions to transform into formal educational entities through programs such as *Sekolah Agama Rakyat* and *Maahad Tahfiz Integrasi*. These initiatives aim to integrate religious and academic education within a unified curriculum (Rosnani, 2011:118). From a public policy perspective, Malaysia has been relatively successful in positioning Islamic education as both an instrument of national identity formation and a means of enhancing economic competitiveness. Nonetheless, challenges persist in maintaining a balance between state control over religious education and the epistemological autonomy of Islamic institutions (Hashim & Langgulung, 2010:50).

In contrast to Indonesia and Malaysia, Iran presents a highly distinctive model of Islamic education policy characterized by a close relationship between religion and the state. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, education became a primary instrument for realizing the ideology of *wilāyat al-faqīh* (the guardianship of the jurist). Within the Iranian system, two parallel educational tracks coexist: the formal education system under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, and the autonomous *hawzah 'ilmiyyah* system under the authority of senior clerics (*marja' al-taqlīd*) (Fischer, 2003:137; Larijani, 2015:204). Centered in the cities of Qom and Mashhad, the *hawzah* system preserves traditional methods of Islamic education, including *talaqqī* and intensive textual discussion of classical works. However, in the post-revolutionary period, the relationship between the *hawzah* and the state has grown increasingly close. The state provides financial support, regulatory frameworks, and social legitimacy to the *hawzah*, while clerics occupy integral positions within the political structure of the state (Rahman, 2018:122). This policy has created a symbiotic relationship between scholarly authority and political authority—an arrangement rarely found in other Islamic education systems. Nevertheless, several studies indicate that such integration may also have consequences, particularly the potential

erosion of the *hawzah*'s scholarly autonomy due to its entanglement with state structures (Larijani, 2015:210).

Conceptually, the comparison among Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran reveals three distinct models of Islamic education policy in regulating the relationship between religion and the state. Indonesia represents an inclusive-pluralistic model, in which the state recognizes and supports Islamic education without adopting it as a state ideology. Malaysia exemplifies an integrative-identitarian model, positioning Islam as a central element of national development and ethno-religious pride. Iran, by contrast, embodies a theocratic-ideological model, in which Islamic education serves as the foundation for political legitimacy and social transformation.

Although all three countries are grounded in Islamic principles, the direction of their educational policies and institutional structures is profoundly shaped by historical, political, and ideological factors. Indonesia emerged from a context of pluralism and democracy, resulting in education policies that are accommodative of diversity. Malaysia was shaped by identity politics and the dominance of Malay-Muslim ethnicity, leading Islamic education to function as a tool of nation-building. Iran, on the other hand, is driven by revolutionary ideology that positions religion as the basis of power, transforming education into a mechanism for reproducing state ideology (Fischer, 2003:139; Hefner, 2020:15).

Despite the growing body of literature, several gaps remain insufficiently addressed in comparative studies of Islamic education policy. First, much of the existing scholarship focuses primarily on institutional or curricular aspects, without adequately examining how ideological and epistemological dynamics shape policy orientations in each country (Abdalla, 2020:32). Second, cross-national studies of Islamic education often treat the Middle East and Southeast Asia as separate analytical contexts, despite their mutual influence within the global circulation of Islamic educational ideas (Hefner, 2020:17). Third, limited attention has been paid to the dialectical relationship between traditional systems (*pesantren*, *pondok*, *hawzah*) and national education systems as interacting entities rather than isolated domains.

This article seeks to address these gaps by offering a comparative analysis of Islamic education policies in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran through an integrative approach that combines historical, institutional, and ideological dimensions. Rather than merely comparing policy structures and curricula, this study examines how each country constructs the relationship between Islamic scholarly authority and state power within the context of modernity. This approach is expected to provide deeper insight into how Islamic education has transformed from a traditional institution into a dynamic instrument of social and political development in the twenty-first century.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach using policy analysis as its primary methodological framework. The main focus of the research is to examine similarities and differences in Islamic education policies in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran in terms of: (1) ideological foundations, (2) institutional structures, and (3) curricular orientations. Data were collected through a comprehensive literature review and an analysis of official documents, including national education laws, ministerial regulations, and Islamic education policy documents from the three countries. In the Indonesian context, the primary sources include Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and regulations issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs concerning *madrasah* and *pesantren*. For Malaysia, data were drawn from the Education Act 1996 and Islamic education policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM) and the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). In the case of Iran, the study relies on the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Articles 30 and 44) and policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education as well as the *Hawzah 'Ilmiyyah* of Qom.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques applied to policy documents in order to identify ideological values, institutional arrangements, and the objectives of Islamic education

in each country. Secondary data from academic journals, UNESCO reports, and previous empirical studies were employed to strengthen the interpretation and facilitate cross-national comparison of policy patterns. The analytical findings were then organized within a comparative framework informed by the policy borrowing and lending model (Phillips & Ochs, 2003:453), which examines how educational policies are adopted, adapted, or selectively borrowed by states in accordance with their socio-political contexts. This approach enables the identification of key determinants of Islamic education policy in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran, including state ideology, colonial history, the role of religious scholars, and the extent of government intervention.

Results and Discussions

1. Islamic Education Policy in Iran

Islamic education policy in Iran represents one of the most distinctive models in the modern Muslim world. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, education has served as a strategic instrument for building a society that is not only intellectually capable but also morally and spiritually grounded. The transformation of an education system that had previously adopted a secular orientation under the Pahlavi regime into a fully Islamized system was intended to instill revolutionary values and to reinforce the Islamic identity of the nation (Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:111).

Within the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Articles 3 and 30 affirm the state's obligation to provide free primary and secondary education while embedding Islamic principles throughout the educational process (Syakharani et al., 2022:44). Accordingly, education in Iran is not conceived as a neutral domain but rather as an ideological arena for shaping the “revolutionary individual”—a citizen who is faithful, morally upright, productive, and loyal to the principles of *Wilāyat al-Faqīh*, namely the leadership of Islamic jurists as the supreme authority of the state (Rapono, 2021:55).

Ideologically, Iran's education policy is rooted in Shi'a Islamic doctrine, which positions the *'ulama* as guardians of societal values and moral order. The concept of *Wilāyat al-Faqīh* thus extends beyond the political sphere and permeates educational policymaking. As a result, education is framed as a means of moral purification of the nation and as an instrument for reinforcing the theological legitimacy of the state (Rapono, 2021:57).

The philosophy of education in Iran explicitly rejects the dichotomy between religious knowledge and worldly sciences. All branches of knowledge are understood to possess a *tawhīdic* orientation, recognizing that knowledge originates from God and must ultimately return to Him. Consequently, the curriculum is expected to reflect the unity of knowledge (*'ilm*), faith (*īmān*), and action (*'amal*). The Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran works in close coordination with the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution to ensure that all educational policies, textbooks, and curricula align with the vision of revolutionary Islam (Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:114).

At the same time, Qur'anic values serve as the primary foundation for defining the objectives of national education. Among these objectives are the formation of morally virtuous individuals, mastery of modern scientific knowledge, and a strong social commitment to justice (*'adl*) and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*). These principles are operationalized through policies such as the integration of moral education at all levels of schooling and the development of textbooks that are rich in religious content (Aprida, Asha, & Fakhruddin, 2024:8).

The Iranian education system is structured into three main levels: six years of primary education, three years of lower secondary education, and three years of upper secondary education. Upon completion, students may proceed to higher education or vocational schools. This structure is nationally regulated by the Ministry of Education, which exercises full authority over curriculum design, teacher training, and academic evaluation (Syakharani et al., 2022:46).

One of the defining characteristics of Iran's education system is the integration of religious and general sciences. Every textbook—whether in mathematics, biology, or physics—is required to incorporate moral and religious values. This reflects the *tawhīdic* worldview that scientific knowledge must not be separated from ethics and faith (Aprida et al., 2024:9).

Islamic subjects—such as Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), creed (*‘aqidah*), Islamic history, and Islamic work ethics—are taught at all levels of education. At the secondary level, the subject “Islamic Thought” constitutes a core component of the curriculum, emphasizing rational analysis of religious teachings. Its objective is to cultivate critical thinking skills while maintaining strong religious commitment (Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:117).

In addition to general education, the Iranian government has strengthened vocational education grounded in Islamic values in order to produce a productive and morally responsible workforce. This model, referred to as technical-Islamic education, balances skills training with instruction in ethics and social responsibility (Syakharani et al., 2022:48). Accordingly, the Iranian education system is not only academic in orientation but also spiritual and pragmatic.

The city of Qom occupies a central position in Iran’s Islamic education system. It is home to the *Hawzah ‘Ilmiyyah* of Qom, the largest center of Shi’a Islamic scholarship and clerical training in the world. The *hawzah* functions both as a producer of religious discourse and as a supplier of human resources for state bureaucracy and educational institutions (El-Razy, Asari, & Badaruddin, 2022:79).

The *Hawzah ‘Ilmiyyah* not only teaches classical Islamic disciplines such as *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, and logic, but also develops studies in social sciences, philosophy, and Islamic political thought. Many graduates of Qom later assume key positions within the Ministry of Education or serve as lecturers at national universities. In this way, the relationship between the state and the *‘ulama* becomes symbiotic: the state provides financial and political support, while the *‘ulama* offer moral and ideological legitimacy (El-Razy et al., 2022:82). The influence of Qom is also evident in the national school curriculum, as many textbooks are authored or approved by Qom-based scholars to ensure conformity with Islamic teachings and the spirit of the Islamic Revolution (Raponi, 2021:61). Accordingly, the city of Qom may be regarded as the “spiritual heart” of Iran’s education policy.

Iran implements a highly centralized system of educational supervision. All educational policies, textbooks, and evaluation methods must receive approval from the Supreme Council of National Education operating under the coordination of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:119). Assessment practices are designed not only to measure students’ academic performance but also to evaluate their moral conduct and religious commitment. National examinations include religious subjects, while student progress reports document social behavior and adherence to religious discipline. This approach underscores the principle that educational success in Iran is assessed through the simultaneous integration of spiritual and intellectual integrity (Syakharani et al., 2022:49).

Teachers play a pivotal role as moral mentors within this system. The recruitment of teachers is conducted through a rigorous selection process that takes into account ideological alignment and religious integrity. Prior to entering the classroom, teachers are required to undergo Islamic pedagogical training organized by governmental bodies in collaboration with religious institutions (Aprida et al., 2024:10). Although Iran’s Islamic education policy has remained relatively stable, several challenges have emerged over the past decade. First, tensions have arisen between the need for scientific innovation and the strictness of ideological control. Some scholars argue that an overly normative education system may constrain intellectual freedom and limit students’ scientific creativity (Aprida et al., 2024:13). Second, globalization and technological advancement have necessitated reforms in teaching methods and curricula. In response, the government has begun to introduce digital learning systems, update science textbooks, and open limited avenues for international collaboration with universities abroad (Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:121). Third, disparities in educational quality between urban and rural regions remain a persistent challenge. Policy centralization has at times resulted in suboptimal implementation in underdeveloped areas. To address this issue, Iran has initiated partial decentralization reforms, granting provinces greater flexibility to adapt curricula to local contexts (Syakharani et al., 2022:50).

Within the geopolitical context, education also functions as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. Iran offers scholarships to international students, particularly from Muslim-majority countries, to pursue studies in Qom or Tehran. These programs serve as a form of soft power aimed at expanding

Iran's intellectual and cultural influence (El-Razy et al., 2022:84). Overall, Iran's Islamic education policy represents an integrative model that intertwines religion, the state, and knowledge. Education is positioned as both an ideological and spiritual instrument for shaping a learned and morally grounded generation. Centralized policymaking through the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution ensures ideological coherence, while collaboration with religious institutions such as Qom reinforces spiritual authenticity.

Nevertheless, this system also faces an enduring dilemma between ideologization and modernization. Iran's future challenge lies in maintaining a delicate balance between steadfast Islamic values and the demands of global innovation. Should this balance be successfully achieved, Iran's education system may offer a valuable model for the Muslim world, demonstrating how religious values and scientific advancement can coexist and mutually reinforce one another (Aprida et al., 2024:15; Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:122).

2. Analysis of Factors Influencing Islamic Education Policy in Iran

Islamic education policy in Iran is the product of a complex dialectic between religion, politics, culture, and social realities. Education is not merely understood as an instrument for human development, but also as a mechanism for reproducing the ideology of the Islamic Revolution. In the post-1979 period, educational institutions have played a crucial role in transmitting Islamic values and religious nationalism that form the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:112). Social, political, cultural, and religious factors interact dynamically in shaping the direction of educational policy. The social dimension reflects evolving societal needs; the political dimension structures power relations and ideological control; the cultural dimension provides identity and historical continuity; and the religious dimension serves as the primary source of values and moral legitimacy. Together, these four factors shape Iran's distinctive education system—religious, centralized, and nationalist, yet adaptive to modernity (Syakharani et al., 2022:45).

a. Social Factors

From a social perspective, Iran faces a major challenge in the form of a youth population boom that dominates its demographic structure. This condition compels the government to provide broad and equitable access to education for all citizens. Accordingly, primary and secondary education are mandated and fully funded by the state as a social right of every citizen (Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:115). Rising public awareness of the importance of education has also driven policies aimed at expanding public schools and vocational institutions. The government emphasizes vocational education linked to Islamic ethics—a concept that integrates economic needs with religious morality (Syakharani et al., 2022:47).

Moreover, Iranian society has a long-standing tradition of reverence for knowledge ('ilm) and religious scholars ('ulama). This social attitude strengthens the legitimacy of Islamic education policies. Enduring traditions of religious discussion, scholarly gatherings (majālis al-'ilm), and Islamic literacy activities facilitate the integration of Islamic values into the national curriculum (Rapono, 2021:56). Educational policy also reflects social changes resulting from urbanization and increased female participation in education. The government has expanded educational opportunities for women while continuing to emphasize principles of modesty and the centrality of family roles as part of Islamic values (Aprida, Asha, & Fakhruddin, 2024:9). Thus, social factors in Iran function as drivers of educational transformation that respond to the demands of a modern society without relinquishing religious identity.

b. Political Factors

Politics exerts a profound influence on Iran's education policy. Following the 1979 Revolution, education was explicitly utilized as a tool to reinforce the legitimacy of revolutionary Islamic ideology. The state positioned education as a primary arena for cultivating loyalty to the principle of Wilāyat al-Faqīh, namely the leadership of Islamic jurists within the political system (Rapono, 2021:60). To ensure ideological consistency, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution was established as the central authority overseeing curriculum direction and the supervision of Islamic values in schools and

universities. This council holds the power to review textbooks, revise instructional materials, and verify the conformity of educational content with the principles of the Islamic Revolution (Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:118).

Educational policy in Iran is also highly centralized. Nearly all strategic decisions—from curriculum design to teacher recruitment—are determined by the central government. This centralization aims to prevent the dissemination of non-revolutionary ideologies and to maintain national ideological unity (Syakharani et al., 2022:49). However, such strong political control presents a dilemma: while it safeguards ideological coherence, it also constrains academic freedom. In response to these critiques, the government has introduced limited decentralization policies, granting universities and research institutions greater space for scientific innovation under the supervision of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (Aprida et al., 2024:12). Consequently, political factors play a dual role as both ideological guides and institutional regulators of the national education system.

c. Cultural Factors

Culture constitutes a vital element in shaping the character of Islamic education in Iran. Iran's rich Persian intellectual heritage—from the classical period through the Islamization of knowledge—provides a strong cultural foundation for the national education system. The longstanding tradition of madrasah education in major cities such as Isfahan, Mashhad, and Qom has embedded both scholarly and spiritual values within Iranian society long before the revolution (El-Razy, Asari, & Badaruddin, 2022:78).

In the post-revolutionary era, education policy has sought to integrate this intellectual heritage with the spirit of Islamic nationalism. History and literature textbooks highlight classical figures such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā as exemplars of Persian Muslim scholars who embodied both rationality and religiosity (Rapono, 2021:63). This effort aims to foster pride in Islamic-Persian civilization while resisting Western intellectual dominance perceived as secular.

The incorporation of local culture into education is also evident in school activities that feature religious symbols and traditional commemorations. Observances such as 'Āshūrā', Arba'īn, and Nowruz are imbued with renewed spiritual meanings aligned with Islamic values. This reflects Iran's cultural flexibility in integrating national traditions with religious ideology (El-Razy et al., 2022:80).

d. Religious Factors

Religion constitutes the most dominant and distinctive dimension of Iran's education system. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, religious scholars ('ulama) have occupied strategic positions in the formulation of education policy. They view education as the primary medium for shaping a pious and revolutionary society (Rapono, 2021:58).

The Ḥawzah 'Ilmiyyah of Qom serves as both a symbol and a center of religious authority in education. This institution not only produces clerical elites but also supplies the theological and moral foundations upon which state policies are built. Many officials within the Ministry of Education and administrators of national universities are alumni of Qom (El-Razy et al., 2022:85).

Educational curricula at all levels are required to include religious studies, Islamic creed ('aqidah), and moral instruction. The objective is to cultivate students who are faithful, knowledgeable, and morally upright. This approach reflects the integration of intellectual and spiritual dimensions within education (Riadi & Andriesgo, 2019:122). In addition, local religious institutions such as mosques and Islamic social organizations play a role in non-formal education programs, including Islamic work ethics training and social activities. These initiatives extend the reach of Islamic education to grassroots communities, reinforcing the nation's socio-religious character (Syakharani et al., 2022:51).

Nevertheless, the dominance of clerical authority within the educational bureaucracy also poses challenges, particularly the limited diversity of religious interpretations. Some scholars argue for the need for more open and pluralistic interpretations to ensure that Islamic education in Iran becomes more inclusive and responsive to contemporary intellectual dynamics (Aprida et al., 2024:15).

3. Islamic Education Policy in Malaysia

Malaysia is a Muslim-majority country in which Islam functions not only as the official religion of the state but also as a moral, social, and political foundation for national policymaking, including education policy. Since gaining independence in 1957, Malaysia's education system has been oriented toward strengthening national identity through the Islamization of education and the integration of Islamic values into the national curriculum (Zaitun, 2011:127). Islamic education in Malaysia is not merely aimed at producing knowledgeable citizens, but also at forming well-balanced Muslim individuals who embody both spiritual and intellectual dimensions. This principle is articulated in the National Education Philosophy (*Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan*), which defines education as an effort to develop holistic individuals—intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically—based on faith in and obedience to God (Aslindah, 2015:17). Islamic education policy in Malaysia has evolved in response to national social and political dynamics. Through collaboration between the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM) and the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), the government has developed an education system that emphasizes the integration of general and religious education (Rachma, 2017:41).

During the British colonial period, Malaysia inherited a Western-oriented, secular education model. However, following independence, the government promptly initiated curricular reforms to reaffirm Islam as the moral foundation of education. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Islamic resurgence (*kebangkitan Islam*) further encouraged the state to adopt comprehensive Islamization policies, including the establishment of modern Islamic higher education institutions such as the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in 1983 (Aslindah, 2015:19).

These policies were grounded in the belief that education constitutes a strategic instrument for strengthening national identity and fostering a morally grounded society. Consequently, the state assumes an active role in regulating curriculum content, teacher training, and religious educational institutions under the authority of respective state Islamic religious administrations (Zaitun, 2011:130). The philosophy of Islamic education in Malaysia is rooted in the view that knowledge cannot be separated from religious values. Every discipline is expected to lead toward the recognition of divine unity and the reinforcement of social morality. Principles such as *tawhīd* (monotheism), justice (*'adl*), and trustworthiness (*amānah*) form the foundation of the national curriculum framework (Rachma, 2017:44).

Structurally, Islamic education in Malaysia encompasses three main levels: preschool (*tadika*), primary education (national schools and religious schools), and secondary education (lower and upper secondary). Islamic higher education is provided through national universities. At the primary level, Islamic Education is a compulsory subject for Muslim students, allocated a minimum of 120 minutes per week. Since the 1980s, this subject has been reinforced through a curriculum emphasizing Islamic creed (*'aqidah*), worship (*'ibadah*), ethics (*akhlāq*), and the prophetic biography (*sīrah nabawiyyah*) (Aslindah, 2015:18).

Malaysia operates two main models of religious education: (1) *Sekolah Agama Rakyat* (SAR), which are community- and foundation-managed religious schools, and (2) *Sekolah Agama Negeri* (SAN), which fall under the authority of state Islamic religious departments. Both models receive government support in the form of subsidies, teacher provision, and curriculum alignment with national education policies (Zaitun, 2011:136). In addition, the government has developed the Integrated Religious School (*Sekolah Agama Integrasi*, SAI) model, which combines the national curriculum with religious studies. These schools, comparable to Indonesian madrasahs, have become a popular option among urban Muslim families (Zaitun, 2011:137).

Institutionally, Islamic education policy in Malaysia is administered under two ministries: (1) the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM), which oversees primary and secondary education, and (2) the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT), which governs university-level education (Aslindah, 2015:21). Beyond these ministries, JAKIM plays a coordinating role in Islamic education nationwide, particularly in curriculum development, certification of religious teachers, and educational da'wah activities.

At the higher education level, Malaysia hosts several prominent institutions specializing in Islamic studies, including IIUM, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM), and Kolej Universiti Islam Selangor (KUIS). These universities offer internationally recognized programs in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and Islamic communication (Aslindah, 2015:20). The government also encourages private initiatives, such as Sekolah Islam Al-Amin and Sekolah Islam Adni, to expand innovation in Islamic education grounded in moral values and global competencies (Rachma, 2017:46).

The Islamization of education in Malaysia was systematically pursued during the administration of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (1981–2003). This policy affirmed Islam as a guiding framework for national development and was implemented through programs integrating Islamic values into science, economics, and technology education (Zaitun, 2011:129). One of the most strategic initiatives was the establishment of Bank Islam Malaysia (1983) and IIUM (1983), serving as concrete symbols of the Islamization of both the economy and education. Through these policies, the government sought to cultivate a generation capable of global competitiveness without abandoning Islamic principles (Rachma, 2017:48).

Within the education sector, Islamization has been implemented through several key measures: (1) increasing instructional hours for religious education across all primary and secondary schools; (2) applying an integrative curriculum that bridges religious knowledge and scientific disciplines; (3) establishing Islamic research institutes at universities; and (4) embedding professional ethics based on Shari'ah principles across all fields of study (Aslindah, 2015:23). These policies are not merely ideological but also pragmatic, as they contribute to strengthening social cohesion within Malaysia's ethnically plural society. Education thus functions as an instrument of national unity while remaining anchored in Islam as the identity of the majority population (Rachma, 2017:49).

Despite the advanced development of Malaysia's Islamic education system, several challenges persist. First, globalization and digital transformation necessitate pedagogical and curricular reforms that are more adaptive and innovative. Second, there is a continuing need to balance educational modernization with the preservation of traditional Islamic values (Rachma, 2017:50). In response, the government has strengthened the implementation of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, which emphasizes the integration of Islamic values, digital competencies, and multicultural character formation. This initiative extends the vision of Islamization toward *rahmatan lil-'ālamīn*, promoting an Islamic education that is **inclusive, moderate, and globally relevant** (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023).

4. Analysis of Factors Influencing Islamic Education Policy in Malaysia

Islamic education policy in Malaysia has been shaped and continues to evolve through a complex interaction of social, political, cultural, and religious factors. Social factors relate to the aspirations of the Muslim community for upward mobility and educational relevance; political factors provide policy direction and state legitimacy; cultural factors anchor identity and intellectual heritage; and religious factors establish values, moral foundations, and religious institutions as the core basis of policy. By examining each of these factors and their mutual interactions, it becomes possible to understand why Islamic education policy in Malaysia has developed distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from those of other countries.

a. Social Factors

Demography and social mobility. As a country with a predominantly Malay-Muslim population, Islamic education within the national education system functions as an important channel for strengthening the quality of Muslim human capital and reducing social inequality. Research indicates that religious schools and Islamic education streams have become increasingly attractive to Malaysian Muslim communities seeking an educational model that combines religious values with modern skills and competencies (Ismail et al., 2019:3–4).

Awareness of modernity and twenty-first-century challenges. Recent studies suggest that Islamic education policy in Malaysia has begun to accommodate challenges related to digital

transformation, scientific advancement, and globalization. For instance, Helmiati and Arfan (2025) found that strategies such as ICT integration, teacher professionalism, and the integration of science and Islam are being strengthened to ensure the continued relevance of Islamic education in the global era (Helmiati & Arfan, 2025:2). As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, Malaysia also faces social pressures to ensure that Islamic education not only reinforces Muslim identity but also contributes to national harmony. For example, public discourse has called for the expansion of religious education alternatives for non-Muslims to promote inclusivity (The Vibes, 2023). These dynamics compel policymakers to strike a balance between affirming Islamic identity and accommodating social pluralism.

b. Political Factors

The Malaysian government utilizes Islamic education as an instrument for nation-building and the construction of Malay-Muslim identity. Policies such as the integration of Islamic values into the National Education Philosophy illustrate how state politics shape and legitimize the direction of Islamic education (Ismail et al., 2019:5–6).

In recent decades, particularly through the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the state has emphasized that Islamic education should be integrated with universal values and twenty-first-century competencies. Helmiati and Arfan (2025:3) note that this policy framework includes curriculum reform, improvements in teacher quality, and the integration of science and Islam to ensure that Muslim youth are globally competitive.

In the Malaysian context, Islamic affairs fall under the jurisdiction of state governments, while general education is administered by federal ministries. This division creates institutional complexity in the formulation and implementation of Islamic education policy. For instance, the introduction of the “40 Hadith of Imam al-Nawawi” module by the Ministry of Education sparked controversy related to issues of religious freedom and inclusivity (FSSPX News, 2023). Political and governance factors thus play a decisive role in shaping how Islamic education policies are regulated and implemented.

c. Cultural Factors

Malay-Islamic intellectual traditions and efforts to integrate religious and secular knowledge form a central foundation of Islamic education policy in Malaysia. Zamri et al. (2024:12), in their study of integrated Islam–Science teaching models, demonstrate that Malaysia’s Islamic education framework is not limited to adding religious subjects, but also seeks to transform the epistemological foundations of education itself.

Islamic education policy is closely linked to the preservation of Malay culture and the Malay language as the primary medium of instruction. Religious education delivered through Islamic schools and *tahfiz* institutions has developed as an alternative cultural pathway that is increasingly recognized within both formal and informal education systems (Kamarudin, Abdul Halim & Zakaria, 2023:161). The growing number of *tahfiz* schools and the integration of *tahfiz* curricula with academic subjects reflect the influence of religious culture on educational choices. This trend affects policy formulation, implementation, and the supervision of religious educational institutions, reinforcing the cultural dimension of Islamic education policy.

d. Religious Factors

Within Malaysia’s constitutional framework, Islam is recognized as the religion of the Federation, and each state is governed by a Sultan or Islamic Religious Head who oversees religious affairs, including Islamic education. Consequently, Islamic education policy operates within a religious legal and institutional framework that strengthens the role of religious values and ‘*ulamā*’ institutions in education (Zanariah & Lee, 2023:7).

Programs such as KAFA and Islamic Education within national schools illustrate the active role of religious institutions in shaping education policy (Ismail et al., 2019:10). However, controversies arise when religious modules are perceived as promoting ideological agendas that are insufficiently inclusive or incompatible with the rights of other communities (The Vibes, 2023). In recent years, Islamic education policy in Malaysia has increasingly emphasized the concept of *wasatiyyah* (moderation) and

inclusive Islamic education. Muslih et al. (2024:480) examine how Islamic Education teachers at the primary level understand and convey moderation in classroom practice, indicating a shift from mere value inculcation toward the development of tolerant and socially productive citizens.

These four factors do not operate independently but interact dynamically in shaping Islamic education policy in Malaysia. For example, social pressures related to digitalization and twenty-first-century relevance drive reforms in Islamic education; political actors respond through national policy frameworks; cultural factors ensure that reforms remain grounded in Malay-Muslim identity; and religious factors guarantee the continued involvement of religious values and institutions. The resulting policies can thus be characterized as *adaptive-ideological*: open to innovation while firmly maintaining religious identity.

A concrete illustration of this dynamic can be seen in the study by Hashim and Dorloh (2024:90) on the implementation of Integrated Islamic Education (IIE) in Islamic secondary schools. Their findings show that while schools generally respond positively to the integration of knowledge, they face challenges related to teacher certification and examination systems that remain overly focused on academic performance. This suggests that despite progressive policy frameworks, institutional and social factors continue to pose significant challenges in practice.

5. Islamic Education Policy in Indonesia

Islamic education occupies a strategic position within Indonesia's national education system. Pasal 31 Ayat 3 UUD 1945, which states that "the national education system shall enhance faith, piety, and noble character in order to enlighten the life of the nation," the state bears responsibility for formulating and implementing Islamic education policies as an integral part of the national education framework. These policies encompass the provision of Islamic religious education in public schools, the recognition of madrasahs as part of the national education system, and the development of non-formal Islamic education through pesantren and other religious institutions. As demonstrated by studies in Indonesia, Islamic education policy has undergone several phases—from the Old Order and the New Order to the Reform era—each marked by significant regulatory and policy orientation shifts (Samsuriadi, 2017:xx).

Within the national framework, the state perceives Islamic education not merely as the transmission of religious knowledge, but as a comprehensive process of character and moral formation, aimed at producing individuals who are morally upright, faithful, and equipped with competencies to confront future challenges. Accordingly, Islamic education policy in Indonesia can be understood as an integrative effort that brings together religious values, national education objectives, and human development.

Several key regulations underpin Islamic education policy in Indonesia. These include Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System (Sisdiknas Law), which establishes religious education and belief in the One Almighty God as integral components of national education (Sutrisno, Arifi, & Sabarudin, 2024:22). This law is supported by various government regulations and ministerial decrees that govern the content of Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam / PAI) in public schools, madrasah accreditation, and the institutional strengthening of pesantren. For example, Humaedi and Hartono (2021) examined the allocation of instructional hours for PAI in public schools from 1950 to 2013, demonstrating the progressive formalization and strengthening of Islamic education policy (Humaedi & Hartono, 2021:320–321).

Post-Reform era policies further emphasize educational quality, service delivery, character development, and alignment (link and match) with contemporary societal needs (Ulum, 2023:26). These regulatory foundations affirm that Islamic education policy in Indonesia is national in scope and fully integrated into the national education system, rather than functioning as a separate religious subsystem.

Islamic education policy in Indonesia encompasses several major dimensions. First, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is mandated as a compulsory subject in public primary and secondary schools (elementary, junior high, and senior high schools) for Muslim students, with curriculum content and instructional hours regulated by the government (Humaedi & Hartono, 2021:330). Second,

madrasahs (MI, MTs, and MA) are formally recognized as part of the national education system and operate as a parallel formal track, receiving government regulation, funding, and accreditation equivalent to general schools (Nurmiati, 2023). Third, non-formal Islamic education, such as pesantren and tahfiz schools, continues to expand and has increasingly been regulated more systematically as an integral component of Islamic education policy (Asy'arie et al., 2024:270).

In addition, the integration of character education and religious moderation has become a growing focus of national policy in response to challenges posed by pluralism and globalization (Ulum, 2023:28). For instance, research by Asy'arie et al. (2024) indicates that Islamic education policies in schools and madrasahs have been oriented toward shaping students' religious understanding, moral values, and psychological and social development (Asy'arie et al., 2024:266–267).

Madrasahs and pesantren play distinctive roles within Indonesia's Islamic education system, and state policy positions both as essential components. Madrasahs are acknowledged as a formal educational pathway equivalent to general schools, with standardized accreditation, public funding, and integration into the national curriculum (Mizani, 2013:xx). Pesantren, as traditional Islamic institutions, have experienced significant policy transformation. Government policy increasingly recognizes modern pesantren that integrate religious and general education, accompanied by expanded regulatory and financial support. For example, the article "Policy Analysis of Islamic Education in Modern Pesantren" (2025) demonstrates that modern pesantren have successfully combined traditional and modern systems, reflecting a more adaptive policy orientation (2025:2330).

Nevertheless, the dualism of curricula and educational systems—between general schools and madrasahs or pesantren, which sometimes pursue differing orientations—continues to pose challenges for policy integration (Ulum, 2023:30). Furthermore, the need to adapt to global developments, including technological integration, twenty-first-century competencies, and religious moderation, remains a pressing concern in Islamic education policy (Asy'arie et al., 2024:273). In response, recent policy directions have increasingly emphasized inclusive, contextual, and adaptive models of Islamic education that are responsive to global challenges and Indonesia's plural social context.

Overall, Islamic education policy in Indonesia is grounded in a national legal framework that encompasses public schools, madrasahs, and religious institutions. Its scope includes Islamic religious instruction in public schools, formal recognition of madrasahs, and growing attention to pesantren and religious moderation. However, its implementation continues to face significant challenges related to quality, integration, and relevance in the modern world. Therefore, future policy directions should focus on strengthening the quality of Islamic education, expanding access and equity, and ensuring adaptive responsiveness to global and pluralistic contexts.

6. Analysis of Factors Influencing Islamic Education Policy in Indonesia

a. Social Factors

Islamic education policy in Indonesia is shaped through a complex interaction of social, political, cultural, and religious factors. These four dimensions operate simultaneously and complement one another, giving rise to a distinctive national education system in which religion is not separated from the project of national character building. As noted by Sutrisno, Arifi, and Sabarudin (2024:115), Islamic education functions not only as an instrument for religious instruction but also as a means of moral formation for citizens.

From a social perspective, Islamic education policy is rooted in the needs of Muslim communities to achieve social mobility and equitable access to education. As the majority population, Indonesian Muslims face persistent disparities in educational access across regions. Consequently, government policy has sought to strengthen madrasahs and pesantren as competitive centers of learning capable of addressing regional inequalities (Sutrisno et al., 2024:118).

Social and technological transformations in the twenty-first century have also influenced how Islamic educational institutions adapt to changing conditions. Humaedi and Hartono (2021:321) observe that changes in the allocation of instructional time for Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama

Islam, PAI) in public schools between 1950 and 2013 reflect social pressures to ensure that religious education is not merely normative but also functionally relevant to character development.

Moreover, Indonesia's plural social composition constitutes a significant social factor shaping Islamic education policy. Ulum (2023:28) emphasizes that Islamic education policy is designed not solely for strengthening individual faith, but also for fostering tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and a form of religious nationalism that remains compatible with Indonesia's pluralistic social fabric.

b. Political Factors

Political dynamics exert a strong influence on the direction of Islamic education policy. Since the enactment of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, the position of religious education has been constitutionally recognized within the national education framework (Sutrisno et al., 2024:119). This regulation provides political legitimacy for the state to regulate PAI curricula and to support religious educational institutions through funding mechanisms and accreditation systems.

Center–regional relations add another political dimension. Many madrasahs and pesantren are managed by local foundations, while quality standards are determined by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Asy'arie, Maulidah, Nurwahyuni, and Sulalah (2024:270) note that policy synchronization between central and regional authorities often encounters obstacles, particularly in curriculum implementation and learning evaluation.

Islamic education policy also frequently becomes an arena of moral politics. Ulum (2023:30) explains that shifts in government leadership often bring changes in policy orientation, especially concerning religious moderation and character education. In the post-Reform era, governments have tended to position Islamic education as a vehicle of identity politics aimed at reinforcing public moral values and national cohesion.

c. Cultural Factors

Indonesia's rich cultural heritage, deeply rooted in the tradition of Islam Nusantara, significantly shapes the character of Islamic education policy. Madrasahs and pesantren have long constituted part of the nation's cultural legacy, predating the establishment of the modern education system (Mizani, 2013:52).

This cultural dimension is evident in the formal recognition of pesantren as a distinctive Indonesian educational institution. Through Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, the state has positioned these institutions as integral components of the national education system without erasing their traditional character. According to Asy'arie et al. (2024:272), pesantren represent symbols of Indonesia's Islamic cultural autonomy, integrating spirituality, morality, and nationalism within a single educational ecosystem.

Furthermore, local culture and regional languages continue to be preserved within Islamic education curricula. Ulum (2023:29) emphasizes that national curriculum policy allows space for local contexts to be integrated with Islamic values, thereby ensuring that education remains culturally grounded and socially relevant.

d. Religious Factors

Religious considerations constitute the philosophical and ideological foundation of Islamic education policy in Indonesia. The primary objective is to cultivate faith (iman), piety (taqwa), and noble character among learners, as stipulated in Article 3 of the National Education System Law (2003). This orientation is reinforced through PAI curricula that prioritize spiritual development and social ethics.

According to Asy'arie et al. (2024:274), religious education policy in schools and madrasahs shapes not only students' religious cognition but also their affective and social dimensions. In recent years, the government has increasingly emphasized religious moderation and inclusive Islam as core components of educational policy. Ulum (2023:31) explains that the paradigm of moderation has become a national policy direction in response to concerns about radicalism and intolerance.

Religious policy is also manifested in state support for modern pesantren, where religious education is integrated with general education. This approach indicates that religion functions not

merely as curricular content but as a moral framework and pedagogical orientation guiding Islamic education in Indonesia.

In sum, the analysis of social, political, cultural, and religious factors demonstrates that Islamic education policy in Indonesia is a complex historical and social product. Social factors drive equity and modernization; political factors provide legitimacy and policy direction; cultural factors ensure continuity of national-Islamic identity; and religious factors supply the core values and ultimate objectives of education. Together, these forces shape an Islamic education policy that is integrative, adaptive, and deeply embedded in Indonesia's plural and evolving societal context.

7. Comparative Analysis of Islamic Education Policies in Iran, Malaysia, and Indonesia

The three countries—Iran, Malaysia, and Indonesia—share a fundamental commitment to positioning Islam as a source of moral and spiritual values within their educational policies. However, the character and direction of Islamic education policy in each country are profoundly shaped by state ideology, political structure, socio-cultural systems, and dominant religious interpretations. Iran situates Islamic education within a Shi'i theocratic framework that is fully integrated with the state system; Malaysia employs Islamic education as an instrument for reinforcing Malay-Muslim identity under a constitutional monarchy; while Indonesia places Islamic education within the pluralistic framework of Pancasila, as an integral component of the national education system.

In other words, the principal differences among the three countries do not lie in whether Islamic education is considered important, but rather in how Islam is articulated, institutionalized, and implemented within their respective education systems (Sadeghi, 2022:534; Rachma, 2017:43; Ulum, 2023:26).

8. Ideological and Legal Foundations

Iran adopts Islam as the singular ideological foundation of state policy. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the education system was reoriented to produce a generation loyal to the principle of Wilāyat al-Faqīh (the guardianship of the jurist) and to instill an understanding of Islam not merely as a moral doctrine but as a comprehensive state ideology. Education policy is directly regulated by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and the Ministry of Education, with curricula integrating Shi'i theology, revolutionary ideology, and moral education (Sadeghi, 2022:538).

Malaysia, by contrast, follows an integrative model. Islam is recognized as the official religion of the state under Article 3 of the Federal Constitution, yet the education system remains national and inclusive in character. The National Education Philosophy emphasizes the holistic development of individuals—intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically (Rachma, 2017:44). Islamic education policy in Malaysia is administered primarily by two institutions: the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) and the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). The relationship between the state and religion is symbiotic: the state employs Islam to reinforce national identity, while religious institutions gain bureaucratic legitimacy and institutional support (Hashim & Dorloh, 2024:87).

Indonesia, through Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, positions religious education as an integral part of the national education system. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System affirms that religious education is the right of every student in accordance with their faith and is the responsibility of the state (Sutrisno, Arifi, & Sabarudin, 2024:5). Although Indonesia is not a religious state, Islamic education occupies a strategic position under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which administers madrasahs, pesantren, and Islamic higher education institutions (Ulum, 2023:28).

This comparison highlights three distinct ideological orientations: (1) Iran's theocratic-revolutionary ideology, (2) Malaysia's Islamic-national-modern ideology, and (3) Indonesia's pluralistic-religious-inclusive ideology. These ideological foundations decisively shape the scope, orientation, and institutional space of Islamic education policy in each country.

9. Institutional Structure of Islamic Education

Structurally, all three countries maintain diverse Islamic education institutions, yet they differ significantly in terms of integration with the national education system. In Iran, all forms of education—

general and religious—are placed under strict state supervision. Schools and universities are required to incorporate religious instruction and revolutionary ideology. Institutions such as Hawzah Ilmiyah Qom and Imam Khomeini International University serve dual functions as academic centers and as sites for clerical cadre formation. The national curriculum mandates instruction in Qur’anic exegesis, Ja’fari jurisprudence, Islamic history, and revolutionary studies (Mir-Hosseini, 2021:417). In this context, Islamic education is not merely a subject, but the overarching ideological framework of the entire education system.

In Malaysia, Islamic education operates through three main channels: (1) national schools where Islamic Education is a compulsory subject for Muslim students; (2) state and community-based religious schools (SAN and SAR); and (3) Islamic higher education institutions such as the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Kolej Universiti Islam Selangor (KUIS). This system allows for the integration of religious and general knowledge through the paradigm of Islamization of Knowledge. Research indicates that this integrative approach strengthens the identity of the modern Muslim citizen, while also generating administrative challenges related to curriculum coordination and governance (Zamri et al., 2024:15).

In Indonesia, Islamic education is structured across three layers: (1) Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in public schools; (2) madrasahs (MI, MTs, MA) as formal institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs; and (3) pesantren as religious institutions that have gained formal legal recognition through Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren (Asy’arie, Maulidah, Nurwahyuni, & Sulalah, 2024:270). This structure reflects a democratic and participatory model, in which Islamic education is not monopolized by the state but emerges from collaboration between government authorities and civil society.

From a comparative perspective, Iran represents a model of total centralization, Malaysia exemplifies coordinated state–religion governance, and Indonesia demonstrates a collaborative and decentralized approach to Islamic education policy.

10. Comparative Analysis of Factors Influencing Islamic Education Policy

a. Social Dimension

In Iran, social factors are dominated by sectarian homogeneity and strong ideological control. Islamic education functions primarily as a mechanism to reinforce national unity and maintain loyalty to the Islamic state. Consequently, space for pluralism in religious thought remains relatively limited (Khosravi, 2022:82). Malaysia presents a more balanced pattern. Islamic education serves as a means of social mobility for the Malay–Muslim population and as a symbol of national social cohesion (Helmiati & Arfan, 2025:3). However, within a multiethnic society, this system has also faced criticism for potentially widening the social gap between Muslim and non-Muslim communities (Ismail et al., 2019:6). Indonesia encounters a different set of social challenges, characterized by religious, economic, and regional pluralism. Islamic education policy is therefore directed toward maintaining a balance between strengthening religious faith and promoting national social integration. The Ministry of Religious Affairs’ Religious Moderation Program, launched in 2019, represents a policy response to social demands for reinforcing tolerance and interreligious harmony.

b. Political Dimension

Politics exerts a direct influence on the orientation of Islamic education policy. In Iran, Islamic education is employed as an instrument for reproducing revolutionary ideology. The state exercises control over curriculum content, teacher recruitment, and school leadership appointments to ensure loyalty to the values of the Islamic Revolution (Sadeghi, 2022:540). In Malaysia, Islamic education policy functions as a source of political legitimacy for the ruling elite—particularly the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)—by affirming Islam as a core element of national identity. The Islamization of education was significantly strengthened during the Mahathir Mohamad era through the establishment of institutions such as the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Bank Islam Malaysia (Rachma, 2017:46). In contrast, Indonesia adopts a democratic and compromise-oriented political approach to Islamic education. The government involves major Islamic organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, in the formulation of curricula and religious education policies.

Islamic education is not instrumentalized as a tool of political power, but rather positioned as a moral foundation for national development.

c. Cultural Dimension

Culturally, Iran is oriented toward the clerical tradition and Shi'i heritage; Malaysia toward Malay-Islamic culture and communitarian values; and Indonesia toward the pesantren tradition and the tolerant, syncretic character of *Islam Nusantara*. Iran emphasizes the ideology of martyrdom, justice, and obedience to the *marja' al-taqlid* (Mir-Hosseini, 2021:428). Malaysia prioritizes *adab*, social discipline, and the image of a progressive Muslim society (Hashim & Dorloh, 2024:91). Indonesia foregrounds *akhlak al-karimah* and the humanitarian values embedded in Pancasila. Empirical studies indicate that all three countries face similar challenges in responding to globalization and the secularization of education. Iran seeks to adapt Islamic education to modern science without compromising ideological foundations (Sadeghi, 2022:545); Malaysia promotes Integrated Islamic Education to harmonize Islamic values with technological advancement (Hashim & Dorloh, 2024:93); while Indonesia mainstreams digitalization in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and strengthens religious moderation initiatives (Ulum, 2023:31).

Tabel 1.
Comparative Overview of Islamic Education Policy

Aspect	Iran	Malaysia	Indonesia
Ideology	Shi'i Theocracy (<i>Wilayat al-Faqih</i>)	Islam as the official religion	Pancasila (plural-religious)
Institutional Structure	Highly centralized (Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution)	Dualistic (MOE & JAKIM)	Decentralized (Ministry of Religious Affairs & Ministry of Education)
Social Function	Doctrinal and ideological consolidation	Malay-Muslim identity formation	National cohesion and moral development
Reform Orientation	Ideological Islamization of science	Moderate Islamization of knowledge	Character integration and religious moderation
Religion-State Relations	Fully integrated	Symbiotic	Complementary-pluralistic

Iran represents a state-religion model, Malaysia exemplifies a religion-state-national model, and Indonesia reflects a plural-religious state model. Together, these cases demonstrate that Islamic education plays a strategic role in nation-building; however, its effectiveness depends on the ability to balance religious values, political interests, and humanistic principles. Ideally, Islamic education should not function merely as an ideological instrument, but as a comprehensive framework for cultivating individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, ethical, and globally competitive.

Conclusion

Islamic education in Iran, Malaysia, and Indonesia exhibits diverse configurations shaped by each country's ideological foundations and political structures. Iran represents a theocratic model in which Islam functions as the sole source of law, politics, and education. Malaysia presents an integrative pattern that positions Islam as both a national identity and a moral foundation for development. Indonesia, by contrast, adopts a plural-religious model, whereby Islamic education is incorporated into the national education system without negating religious diversity. These differing orientations indicate that state ideology is a decisive factor in determining the direction and character of Islamic education policy.

From an institutional and implementation perspective, the three countries demonstrate varying patterns in the relationship between religion and the state. Iran operates a fully state-controlled system; Malaysia follows a coordinated approach between religious authorities and the Ministry of Education;

while Indonesia adopts a collaborative model involving the state, civil society, and major Islamic organizations. Despite these differences, all three systems share a common objective: to cultivate individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, and morally grounded through an education system guided by Islamic values.

In the context of globalization and modernization, all three countries face similar challenges—namely, maintaining a balance between spiritual values and the demands of contemporary society. The future of Islamic education therefore requires a renewed orientation that moves beyond an exclusive emphasis on religious doctrine toward the development of critical thinking, twenty-first-century skills, and the capacity for constructive engagement with the modern world. In this sense, Islamic education in Iran, Malaysia, and Indonesia reflects three distinct paths toward a shared aspiration: the construction of a humane civilization that is religiously grounded, intellectually vibrant, and socially just.

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