

Character-Based Management Strategies in Islamic Education: Comparing Madrasah Policies in Indonesia and Malaysia

Asyfh Laily Fauziah^{1*}, Muhammad Yusuf², Aulia Putri Rohmawati³, Ahmad Syukri⁴
^{1,2,3} Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris State Islamic University Samarinda, ⁴ University of Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and compare character-based Islamic education management strategies in madrasah institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. Utilizing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this research explores how education policies integrate Islamic values as a foundation for student character development. The novelty of this research lies in the specific comparison between the flexibility of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum and the structured Naqliyyah-Aqliyyah Curriculum in Malaysia. The results indicate that Indonesia emphasizes creativity and the strengthening of religious Pancasila student profiles, while Malaysia implements structured national curriculum standards supported by significant government regulatory backing. Significant differences were found in curriculum load; the Indonesian system has a broader scope that tends to be administrative, whereas the Malaysian system is more focused on relevant subjects. These findings emphasize that successful character internalization requires synergy between government policies, teacher role modeling, and social environment support.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan membandingkan strategi manajemen pendidikan Islam berbasis karakter pada lembaga madrasah di Indonesia dan Malaysia. Menggunakan pendekatan Systematic Literature Review (SLR), penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana kebijakan pendidikan mengintegrasikan nilai Islam sebagai fondasi kepribadian siswa. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada analisis spesifik mengenai fleksibilitas Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia dibandingkan dengan struktur Kurikulum Naqliyyah-Aqliyyah di Malaysia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Indonesia menekankan pada kreativitas dan penguatan profil pelajar Pancasila yang religius, sementara Malaysia menerapkan standar kurikulum nasional yang terstruktur dengan dukungan regulasi pemerintah yang signifikan. Perbedaan mencolok ditemukan pada beban kurikulum; sistem Indonesia memiliki cakupan luas yang berisiko administratif, sedangkan Malaysia lebih fokus pada materi relevan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa keberhasilan internalisasi karakter memerlukan sinergi antara kebijakan, keteladanan pendidik, dan dukungan lingkungan sosial.

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* Corresponding Author:

Asyfh Laily Fauziah

asyfhlailyfauziah13@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Education stands as the fundamental pillar of modern society, playing a vital role in accelerating the economic, social, and cultural development of a nation (Edison, 2021; Sumarni et al., 2023). Within contemporary global discourse, education is no longer perceived merely as an instrument for the transfer of cognitive knowledge; rather, it is viewed as the cornerstone for fostering a sustainable and ethical human civilization (Murdianto, 2024). In nations with a predominantly Muslim population, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, educational institutions bear a dual responsibility to harmonize intellectual advancement with spiritual and religious values (Azisi & Qotrunnada, 2021; Noor, 2022). Nevertheless, the current quality of human resources is significantly challenged by the effectiveness of educational systems, which frequently struggle to maintain pace with the rapid transformations of the modern era (Wulandari et al., 2021).

Islamic education emerges as a conscious and strategically planned endeavor to cultivate students who are not only cognitively competent but also possess moral integrity grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith (Aris, 2022; Suradi, 2022). The role of this educational paradigm encompasses holistic character development, wherein the values of faith (*iman*) and piety (*taqwa*) are internalized into daily behavior, enabling students to navigate global challenges effectively (Pitri et al., 2025; N. Fadhilah et al., 2024). Despite these objectives, contemporary realities reveal systemic failures in character management, evidenced by moral decadence in the digital age manifesting as widespread corruption, violence, and intolerance (Ahmadi & Koyyimah, 2024). Such phenomena indicate that existing character curricula have yet to fully function as a resilient moral fortress (Azhari, 2024).

Theoretically, character development within the *madrasah* context can be analyzed through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes the critical interaction between individuals and their surrounding environments. Student character does not evolve in a vacuum; it is profoundly influenced by a microsystem that includes the school, family, and broader societal culture (Mufidah et al., 2022). In a *madrasah* setting, a religious environment must be systematically engineered to facilitate the habituation of Islamic values, such as honesty and accountability (Sujarwo, 2024). Consequently, the integration of the formal curriculum and school culture serves as the primary key to transforming abstract values into tangible actions by the students (Mariana & Helmi, 2022).

Complementing this ecological perspective, Social Constructivism Theory asserts that moral values are acquired through social interaction and the modeling provided by authority figures (Edison, 2021). Within the *madrasah* context, teachers occupy a central role as *muaddib* character educators who provide living examples for students in their daily lives (Sujarwo, 2024). Effective character pedagogy does not occur solely through verbal explanations in the classroom; instead, it flourishes through the direct observation of educators' behaviors and the employment of participatory, dialogical methods (Pitri et al., 2025). This reinforces the understanding that character education is an active process involving both cognitive reasoning and emotional engagement simultaneously.

Indonesia and Malaysia, as two neighboring nations sharing a common heritage, possess unique yet distinct approaches to implementing character education within *madrasahs* (Afida et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024). Although they share similar cultural roots, the ideological differences between *Pancasila* in

Indonesia and Islam as the official state religion in Malaysia create contrasting policy dynamics in field execution ([Razagna, 2024](#)). Indonesia currently prioritizes character integration through the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum), which emphasizes flexibility, creativity, and the strengthening of the religious "Pancasila Student Profile" ([M. N. Fadhilah et al., 2024](#)). Conversely, Malaysia implements a more structured national standard characterized by the integration of *naqliyyah* (revealed) and *aqliyyah* (rational) sciences, which is fully supported by robust government regulations ([Afif & Zalnur, 2024](#)).

Recent literature indicates that the focus on character reinforcement in Indonesia is legally regulated through national education policies that prioritize spiritual strength and noble character (*akhlak mulia*) ([E. S. Sari et al., 2021](#)). On the other hand, the Malaysian government treats moral and Islamic education as state instruments to ensure social stability and citizen integrity, supported by significant fiscal allocations ([Nazriyah & Ma'ani, 2024](#)). These structural differences and variations in budgetary support directly influence how Islamic values are translated into school activities, as well as their overall effectiveness in responding to the challenges of the digital sphere, which frequently undermine social control over the younger generation ([Firmansyah et al., 2025](#)).

However, notwithstanding the various regulations established, a substantial gap remains between macro-level policies and micro-level implementation in both nations ([Noor, 2022](#)). In Indonesia, decentralization and the extensive scope of curriculum materials are often perceived as a burden on teachers, thereby hindering a substantive deepening of character development ([Masyfu', 2017](#)). Conversely, Malaysia faces challenges in character standardization amidst the complex dynamics between national schools and national-type schools (*sekolah jenis kebangsaan*) ([Afif & Zalnur, 2024](#)). Consequently, there is an urgent necessity to evaluate whether flexibility on one hand, or rigid standardization on the other, is more effective in producing graduates with robust moral resilience.

The primary issue identified in various previous studies is the lack of sharp comparative analysis regarding how specific national ideological foundations transform technical management strategies within *madrasahs* ([Amalita et al., 2024](#)). The majority of existing research focuses exclusively on cognitive learning outcomes or implementation within a single country, failing to capture the broader perspective of transnational policy competition ([M. N. Fadhilah et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, the role of digital technology in character management within *madrasahs* in both countries is still frequently viewed as a challenge rather than a strategic opportunity ([Wulandari et al., 2021](#)).

Therefore, this research aims to critically examine the comparative strategies of character-based Islamic education management in Indonesian and Malaysian *madrasahs* through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach ([M. Sari & Asmendri, 2020](#)). The primary focus of this study lies in the effectiveness of the curriculum, the strategic role of educators as *uswah hasanah* (exemplary role models), and the impact of state regulatory support on the success of value internalization ([Sujarwo, 2024](#)). The uniqueness of this research resides in its attempt to synthesize the most recent policy data (2020–2025) to identify patterns of commonality and divergence in management strategies amidst global disruption.

The analytical results of this qualitative library research are expected to provide strategic recommendations for developers of more adaptive and applicable character education models. By examining the best practices from the flexibility of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Indonesia and the structural firmness of the curriculum in

Malaysia, it is hoped that a synthesis of a management model will emerge that is capable of addressing the challenges of educational quality disparity. ultimately, the strengthening of character education based on Islam in *madrasahs* must be viewed as a long-term investment for the sustainability of national civilization in both countries.

METHOD

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify, evaluate, and interpret all relevant research findings concerning Islamic education management strategies in fostering character development within Indonesian and Malaysian *madrasahs*. The utilization of the SLR protocol is intended to minimize researcher bias and provide a transparent, systematic, and replicable overview of the existing literature ([M. Sari & Asmendri, 2020](#)). The research procedure commenced with the formulation of research questions focusing on the comparison of curriculum policies, the implementation of Islamic values, and the multifaceted challenges of character development in both nations.

The initial stage of this protocol involved a comprehensive literature search through reputable digital databases, including Google Scholar, Garuda, and Scopus, utilizing specific keywords such as: "Islamic Education," "Character Development," "Madrasah in Indonesia," and "Islamic Education in Malaysia." The researcher established rigorous selection criteria to maintain data actuality, particularly regarding the newly implemented *Kurikulum Merdeka* policies ([M. N. Fadhilah et al., 2024](#)). The detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature Selection

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Document Type	Peer-reviewed scientific journal articles and official policy documents.	Non-peer-reviewed articles, opinion pieces, or articles without direct relevance.
Timeframe	The last 5 years (2020–2025) for journals and 10 years for books.	Documents published outside the established timeframe.
Research Focus	Management strategies, curriculum, and character development in Indonesian/Malaysian <i>madrasahs</i> .	General education outside the <i>madrasah</i> context or Islamic education in other countries.
Language	Indonesian and English.	Languages other than Indonesian and English.

The literature selection process was conducted through a quality assessment stage, involving a rigorous examination of abstracts and methodologies to ensure the validity of the findings ([M. Sari & Asmendri, 2020](#)). Visually, the article screening process followed a systematic workflow: (1) initial identification from databases; (2) screening based on titles and abstracts; (3) eligibility assessment of full-text documents; and (4) determination of the final number of articles utilized in the synthesis. The selected references were then mapped based on thematic focuses, such as general approaches, student values, curriculum frameworks, and government policies.

Data that met the selection criteria were subsequently extracted and strategically categorized to identify divergent patterns between the Indonesian system, which is founded upon *Pancasila*, and the Malaysian system, which designates Islam as the official state religion (Noor, 2022; Razaqna, 2024). This categorization allows for a more nuanced understanding of how these differing national ideologies shape educational management at the institutional level.

The synthesis was performed using a comparative qualitative analysis technique to critically examine the implications of policy and the substantive implementation of character development in the field (Amalita et al., 2024). To minimize subjectivity in the decision-making process, the validity of the findings was ensured through document triangulation and cross-checking among credible literary sources (Ahmadi & Koyyimah, 2024). Ultimately, the results of this comprehensive process are intended to serve as a strategic reference for developing character education models that remain adaptive to the multifaceted challenges of global disruption.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Character-Based Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia

Character education within the *madrasah* environment constitutes a systematic endeavor to cultivate exemplary individuals whose personalities align with both sublime religious values and national identity (Edison, 2021; Murdianto, 2024). In Indonesia, the essence of this education is strategically directed toward mitigating moral degradation such as corruption and violence through the integration of religious values within the formal curriculum (Ahmadi & Koyyimah, 2024; Wulandari et al., 2021). Specifically, the *madrasah* curriculum in Indonesia encompasses subjects such as Al-Qur'an Hadith, Fiqh, and Akidah Akhlak, which are synergized with the Strengthening of Character Education (*Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* or PPK) program (Mariana & Helmi, 2022). The primary objective is to foster the "Pancasila Student Profile," characterized by religious devotion, creativity, and independence (M. N. Fadhilah et al., 2024).

Conversely, Malaysia establishes a fundamental objective to develop a holistic Muslim personality spiritually, physically, emotionally, and intellectually enabling individuals to live harmoniously in both the worldly life and the hereafter (Afif & Zalnur, 2024). The cultivation of character in Malaysia is implemented comprehensively through the integration of traditional sciences (*naqliyyah*) and rational sciences (*aqliyyah*) (Azisi & Qotrunnada, 2021). A fundamental distinction is observed in policy orientation; while Indonesia's national character formation is heavily influenced by the *Pancasila* ideology, Malaysia positions Islam as the official state religion, serving as the primary foundation for social stability instruments and citizen integrity (Nazriyah & Ma'ani, 2024; Razaqna, 2024).

Matrix and Analysis of Educational Management Policies

A synthesis of the literature reveals significant disparities in management structures and government support frameworks between the two nations (Afida et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024).

A striking disparity is observed in student learning loads. In Indonesia, the curriculum tends to be administrative and expansive, requiring students to master a complex and wide-ranging array of subject matter (Sujarwo, 2024). This "breadth" of material often becomes a double-edged sword that hinders the substantive deepening of character development, as educators' energy is largely consumed by fulfilling cognitive and administrative requirements (Amalita et al., 2024). In contrast,

the Malaysian curriculum is more strategically focused on relevant content, providing students with the flexibility to explore their interests deeply without marginalizing nationally standardized moral formation (Afif & Zalnur, 2024).

Table 2: Comparative Matrix of Islamic Education

Comparative Aspect	Indonesia	Malaysia
General Approach	Daily integration & Pancasila-based Nationalism	Structured learning & Universal Islamic Values
Value Focus	Religiosity, discipline, & patriotism	Piety, justice, & integrity
Curriculum	<i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> (Creativity-oriented)	National Standards (Focus on relevant content)
Policy	Decentralization & Teacher Certification	Strong regulatory support & Budgetary allocation

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Budgetary Support and System Stability

Malaysia possesses a distinct advantage in the stability of its substantial government budgetary support, which ensures the quality of instruction in *aqidah* (creed), *ibadah* (worship), and the understanding of classical texts (Nazriyah & Ma'ani, 2024). This financial backing facilitates the uniform integration of digital technology in delivering religious values across the educational spectrum (Firmansyah et al., 2025).

Conversely, Indonesia faces the challenges of decentralization, which has resulted in disparities regarding infrastructure quality and teacher competence between urban and rural regions (E. S. Sari et al., 2021). Although the Indonesian government provides support through teacher certification programs, the uneven distribution of educational quality remains a primary obstacle to achieving character standardization across all *madrasahs* (Masyfu', 2017).

Implementation of Educator Exemplariness (*Uswah Hasanah*)

The exemplary conduct of teachers (*uswah hasanah*) is recognized as the most effective instrument for value internalization within *madrasahs* in both nations (Pitri et al., 2025; N. Fadhilah et al., 2024). Teachers function as *muaddib* (educators of manners), who do not merely transmit theoretical knowledge but actively demonstrate integrity, responsibility, and discipline in their daily lives (Sujarwo, 2024).

In Malaysia, the boarding school environment serves as an intensive character laboratory where continuous 24-hour interaction between teachers and students occurs, thereby reinforcing the process of value habituation (Afif & Zalnur, 2024). In Indonesia, this role is supported by daily routine activities, such as congregational prayers (*salat berjamaah*) and the communal recitation of the Qur'an

(*tadarus*), which serve as essential vehicles for instilling spiritual discipline ([Mariana & Helmi, 2022](#)).

Theoretical Discussion: Analysis Through Ecological and Constructivist Perspectives

Theoretically, the success of character management in Malaysia is profoundly supported by the reinforcement of the "microsystem" within the perspective of educational ecology, where a controlled environment consistently strengthens value internalization ([Mufidah et al., 2022](#)). The boarding school environment creates a cohesive educational ecosystem that facilitates sustainable character formation through constant immersion.

Meanwhile, Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka* more closely reflects a social constructivist approach, where moral values are acquired through active interaction, creativity, and student reflection on modern challenges ([N. Fadhilah et al., 2024](#)). This indicates that character learning is not merely normative in nature, but is also contextual and adaptive to the shifting demands of the contemporary era.

Nevertheless, both systems encounter analogous challenges in the digital age. The unstoppable flow of information necessitates that teachers enhance both their pedagogical and moral competencies to remain a steadfast compass for their students ([Wulandari et al., 2021](#)). The integration of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) with technological mastery presents a significant opportunity for both nations to produce a generation of Muslims who are not only technically proficient but also possess spiritual resilience ([Firmansyah et al., 2025](#)).

Ultimately, the synergy between macro-level government policies and micro-level exemplary leadership within schools serves as the decisive factor in the success of Islamic education in shaping national integrity ([Noor, 2022](#)).

CONCLUSION

Islamic education plays a fundamental and strategic role in shaping the character of students within *madrasahs*, both in Indonesia and Malaysia. As a primary instrument for instilling ethical and spiritual values, Islamic education in both nations positions personality development as the cornerstone of their respective national education systems. The findings of this research indicate that despite differences in policy structures and ideological foundations where Indonesia is anchored in *Pancasila* and Malaysia designates Islam as the official religion both consistently place Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, and integrity as fundamental elements in producing an exemplary generation. The successful implementation of character-based Islamic education in *madrasahs* is highly determined by the comprehensive integration of the curriculum, the role of teachers as exemplary models (*uswah hasanah*), and the application of active learning methods within the process of student value habituation.

Comparatively, the educational system in Malaysia is perceived to be more balanced in integrating skills and character through a nationally standardized curriculum, whereas Indonesia, through the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, provides significant space for creativity and independent learning, despite being confronted with a relatively complex material load. As a concrete policy implication, governments in both countries must continue to pursue sustainable innovation, particularly in leveraging digital technology to strengthen morality in the global era. For stakeholders in Indonesia, it is recommended to conduct an evaluation of the curricular burden to focus more intensively on reinforcing spiritual values without being overwhelmed by extensive administrative aspects. Furthermore,

strengthening the synergy between educational institutions, government regulations, and the social environment is crucial to creating an ecosystem that ensures the holistic and sustainable growth of student character. As a concluding note, this research has limitations as a literature study (SLR); therefore, future research is expected to explore field data more deeply to enrich the perspective of transnational character management.

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