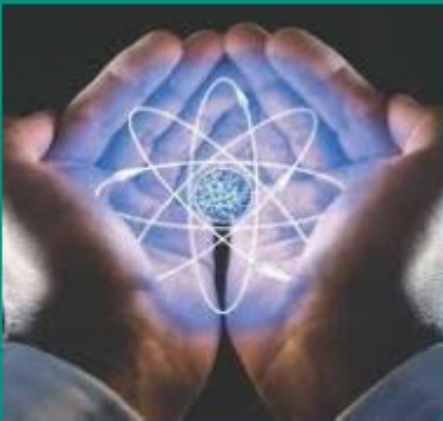


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By Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo

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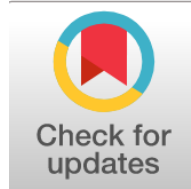
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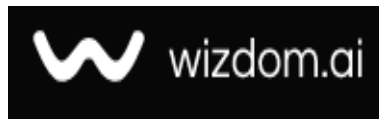
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Harmonization Of Islamic Religious Education Curriculum In Private Schools Of Thai And Indonesia

Harmonisasi Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam di Sekolah Swasta Thailand dan Indonesia

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Abstract

General background: Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in shaping moral character and religious identity within diverse sociocultural contexts. **Specific background:** In Southeast Asia, countries like Indonesia and Thailand have distinct educational and religious frameworks, posing unique challenges in aligning national curriculum policies with local needs. **Knowledge gap:** Limited comparative research exists on how private Islamic schools implement PAI curricula under differing national systems. **Aims:** This study investigates how PAI curriculum policies are harmonized across national and local levels in MA Tanwirul Qulub, Indonesia, and Tarbiyatul Wathan, Thailand. **Results:** Findings reveal that Indonesia applies a top-down model emphasizing curriculum flexibility under the Independent Curriculum, allowing local adaptations. Conversely, Thailand uses a bottom-up approach where private schools independently develop PAI content within a secular national framework, balancing state requirements with local religious needs. **Novelty:** This study offers a rare cross-national qualitative comparison of curriculum harmonization in Islamic private schools, capturing both central policy dynamics and grassroots practices. **Implications:** The research suggests the need for adaptive curriculum policies that uphold Islamic values while accommodating sociopolitical contexts, promoting inclusive and locally relevant religious education in multicultural societies.

Highlight :

- The study compares PAI curriculum policies in private schools in Indonesia and Thailand.
- Indonesia implements a top-down approach, while Thailand uses a bottom-up model based on local needs.
- Harmonization aims to balance national policies with local religious identities and needs.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is an integral part of the education system aimed at shaping student's whole character. In practice, PAI not only contains religious aspects but also serves as a means to build national identity, morality, and personality of the nation's identity, morality, and personality. Therefore, the preparation and implementation of the PAI curriculum needs to be carefully designed and structured from the highest policy level to its implementation in the field.

In the era of globalization, the challenges of religious education are increasingly complex, including in terms of curriculum policies. Countries like Indonesia and Thailand, which have different demographic and ideological backgrounds, face their own challenges in managing the PAI curriculum. Therefore, studying how to harmonize curriculum policies is important to ensure that regulations from the central government can work together in supporting diversity and national integration.

Harmonization is basically a process of creating harmony between various different elements to achieve order and unity within a system. In a social context, harmonization is referred to as social order, which is a consistent pattern of relationships and behaviors in order to achieve shared goals. This concept illustrates that harmonization is not about standardization, but about building bridges between differences towards understanding and cooperation.

Fonkeng (2007) and Tchombe (1999) points out that in the context of education politics, harmonization requires curriculum alignment that is described concretely through a syllabus and work scheme that can be understood in two official languages. This approach is very relevant when comparing education practices across countries such as Thailand and Indonesia (Ngalim, 2014). In the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum, harmonization has a deeper meaning. It is not only unifies the learning material, but also harmonizes the vision of education, basic religious values, and policy direction from the central level to the smallest educational unit. In Thailand and Indonesia, two countries with different histories and religious background, harmonizing the PAI curriculum is a strategic effort to adapt Islamic teachings to local socio-cultural conditions without losing the universal value of Islam.

From an epistemological perspective, harmonization in the PAI curriculum also requires harmony in the way of thinking: how Islamic knowledge is taught, the teaching methods used, and how those values are internalized by students (Insuasti & Zapata-Jaramillo, 2024). Therefore, a harmonious curriculum should not be trapped in delivering material in a dogmatic or textual way, but also encourage reflective thinking, intercultural dialogue, and the strengthening of Islamic values such as tolerance, justice, and compassion. Thus, the harmonization of the PAI curriculum in both countries becomes important step in shaping a generation of Muslims who are not only ritually obedient, but also spiritually and socially mature.

In the educational literature, the curriculum is understood as a structured and planned tool to achieve educational goals. Abuddin Nata (1997:123), citing Crow and Crow, the curriculum is defined as a teaching design or systematically arranged set of subjects aimed to completing an educational program and obtaining formal recognition such as a diploma. This definition shows that the curriculum is not only a collection of subject matter, but also reflects the direction and policy of education that a nation aspires to achieve.

Nidawati adds that the curriculum is an educational program developed based on applicable norms and designed in systemic manner. This perspective emphasized that the curriculum is not solely the result of academic preparation, but is also a product of policy decisions that reflect the direction of a country's educational ideology (Nidawati, 2021).

The curriculum represent the responsibility of educational institutions in regulating content, objectives, and learning methods (Ratih Rizki Pradika, 2020). This confirms that behind the formulation of a curriculum there are policy that affect both the formulation process and the implementation. In this context, educational institutions cannot be separated from the influence of policies at the national, provincial, and local levels.

In some aspects, the education system in Thailand is not significantly different from that of Indonesia (Hadini et al., 2023). Thailand also implements a nine-year compulsory education system, which can be completed through formal, non-formal, or informal schools. This system provides opportunities for the Muslim community in Thailand to establish and develop their own Islamic educational institutions. The Islamic education curriculum in Thailand, especially in the Patani region, has received legal recognition through the Private Sector Schools Law of 2007 Article 4, which states that formal schools are educational institutions responsible for setting educational objectives, learning methods, curriculum, learning duration, and evaluation criteria as graduation requirements (Harahab & Rajab, 2022).

The religious education curriculum is closely linked to the state-issued policies. According to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, the term of policy originates from the word "wise", which means intelligent and thoughtful. In the field of education, policies serve as strategic guidelines or principles that direct the implementation of learning process, including those related to the PAI curriculum (King, 2025).

Nichols states that policy is the result of decisions made toughfully and carefully by the highest authorities (Anwar Muhhamad Emnis, 2014). In the context of Islamic education in Thailand and Indonesia, PAI's curriculum policies reflects the role of the state in directing the religious identity of tis citizens through education. Therefore, understanding these curriculum policies is crucial to explaining how PAI is practically implemented at educational level.

In practice, the policy of the education curriculum in Indonesia follows a decentralized structure. The central government through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religion Affairs, formulates the national curriculum, while local governments and educational units are given authority to develop local content curriculums (Wakhidah & Erman, 2022). This allows flexibility for educational institution to adapt to the local social, cultural, and religious contexts of their respective regions.

Meanwhile, in Thailand, Islamic education is mainly developed in the Muslim-majority southern regions such as Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Thailand's national education system does not formally include Islamic religious lessons within its national curriculum structure. However, the Thai government allows Islamic private schools the flexibility to develop their own PAI curriculum based on the needs of the local Muslim community.

Based on interviews with Thai teachers (July 20, 2024), Islamic education policies in Thailand have emerged as the result of the ongoing tension between the demands of local Muslim identity and the government's nationalist agenda. The PAI curriculum in private Islamic schools reflects a form of negotiation, aiming to preserve Islamic identity while also meeting Thailand's national standards of education.

The Thai government's policy requires Muslim students to study both general and religious education within a single system that integrates national cultural values and promotes an understanding of the country's dominant Buddihst ideology (Wijayanti & Widhanarto, 2019). Although these policies are formulated at the national level, their implementation is largely determined by flexibility at the school level. This is where the challenge of harmonization policies between central and local levels.

In Indonesia, the PAI curriculum is regulated nationally by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, with relatively uniform content standards applied across the region. However, provincial and district/city governments are authorized to include additional local content based on the regional characters. Furthermore, schools have the autonomy to develop their own internal curriculum, known as educational unit operational curriculum (KOSP), as part of their implementation of educational autonomy.

Policy harmonization in Indonesia generally follows a top-down pattern, where the central goverment establishes the basic framework while provide space for local to adjust the implementation. For example, in areas with based on Islamic boarding schools, the PAI curriculum is often supplemented by nahwu, shorof, tafsir, or other local religious studies.

On the other hand, in Thailand, private Islamic schools such as Yala develop the PAI curriculum independently. Subjects such as aqidah, fiqh, Qur'anic studies, and Islamic history are taught structurally even though these subjects are not required by the government. In fact, some schools enrich their class with additional lessons, such as Arabic calligraphy, the Malay language, and the use of standardized Indonesian textbooks.

The inclusion of religious subjects in the curriculum of private Islamic schools in Thailand shows a horizontal harmonization between school policies and the needs of local Muslim communities. Although these subjects are not regulated at the national level, their presence is strongly legitimized by local Muslim community.

This bottom-up approach which is implemented in Thailand creates unique dynamics. Schools are required to deal with government regulations, which generally emphasize secular principles, and the religious aspirations of the local community. As a results, schools relish broader autonomy in curriculum development. However, this autonomy also facing challenges, particularly concerning the consistency of quality standards and the availability of educational resources.

According to study by Nuruzzahri (2023), Islamic education in Thailand places greater emphasis on the preserving Islamic identity and culture within the dominance of the Buddhist national system. The curriculum tends to be flexible and contextual to local needs (Setiarini, 2024). This contrasts with Indonesia, where Islamic education is more integrated into the national education system through standardized national curricula.

First-hand teaching experience in the Yala region of Southern Thailand shows that, despite the exclusion of PAI is from the national curriculum, local teachers continue to deliver PAI content with dedication. They independently design curricula that incorporate key subjects commonly taught in Indonesia, such as aqidah, fiqh, and Islamic history. This shows the enduring dedication of the Muslim community in Southern Thailand to preserving their religious identity through education.

An additional distinctive feature is the use of Malay-language textbooks that adopt the strandard structure of Indonesian educational materials. This not only facilitates for students to understand the subject, but also reinforces the cultural and historical connections between Muslim communities in southern Thailand and

Indonesia, especially those in Sumatra and Kalimantan.

Within this context, the harmonization of PAI curriculum policies between Indonesia and Thailand should be understood as a complex and dynamic process. Harmonization does not imply uniformity in curriculum content, but rather, it emphasizes alignment in educational visions, regulations, and policy implementation across multiple levels, ranging from national, provincial, regional, and institutional.

Vertical harmonization in Indonesia is decent due to the centralized and unified structure of the educational bureaucracy. However, challenges arise when central policies do not fully accommodate the diverse social and religious dynamics at the local level. In contrast, Thailand faces a different set of challenges, particularly in reconciling the state's religiously neutral policies with the educational needs of the Muslim community.

Therefore, it is important to develop a responsive and adaptive PAI curriculum policy framework at all administrative levels. While the central government should provide a overarching guidelines, but leave sufficient flexibility must be granted to provincial, regional, and schools authorities to adapt and innovate according to their specific contexts and community needs.

This study is motivated by the author's interest in examining how Islamic religious education is implemented in two countries with distinct social and religious backgrounds: Thailand and Indonesia. Both nations are part of the broader Islamic tradition in Southeast Asia and share a long-standing history of Islamic educational development. However, their current educational environments differ significantly. The Tarbiyatul Wathon School in Thailand operates within a Muslim minority context, requiring it to adjust with non-Islamic national education policy. In contrast, MA Tanwirul Qulub in Indonesia benefits from its location within Muslim-majority society, where the development of religious curricula and receives community support.

The selection of these two schools was based on their distinctive approaches to aligning Islamic religious education curricula with their respective national education policies. Tarbiyatul Wathon demonstrates the ability to maintain its Islamic identity despite operating within a predominantly non-Muslim sociocultural environment. Meanwhile, Tanwirul Qulub showed how the tradition of pesantren can coexist with and adapt to the standardized national curriculum in a Muslim-majority context.

This study seeks to examine how PAI curriculum policies are designed, socialized, and implemented from the national level down to the schools level in both Indonesia and Thailand. The main focus of this study is to analyze the common points and differences between the curriculum policies made by the central government and their implementation at the Islamic private school level.

By investigating policy processes from top-down (government to schools) and bottom-up (school to government) perspectives, this research aims to offer concrete recommendations for Islamic education policymakers and education practitioners. These recommendations are intended to support the development of curriculum harmonization model that is not only compliant with national regulations but also contextually relevant and sustainable in the long term.

A number of previous studies have discussed Islamic religious education in the context of national policy and school practices, such as the study by Setiarini (2024) which highlights the flexibility of the PAI curriculum in Thailand, and Wakhidah and Erman (2022) which examines the autonomy of curriculum implementation in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Nuruzzahri (2023) emphasizes the importance of Islamic education as a tool for preserving identity in minority communities. However, most of these studies only focus on one country or highlight general aspects of the curriculum without considering the dynamics of cross-level policy harmonization in a comparative manner. Few, if any, studies have deeply compared how PAI curriculum policy harmonization is implemented in private Islamic schools in Indonesia and Thailand using a qualitative approach that captures the dynamics from the central level to the educational unit level. This is where the urgency and novelty of this research lies namely, presenting a cross-national perspective in understanding how the PAI curriculum can be harmonized with vastly different social, cultural, and policy contexts. Thus, this research is expected to fill a gap in the literature while contributing to the discourse on the harmonization of Islamic education policies at the Southeast Asian regional level.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, selected for its relevance in providing an in-depth understanding of the harmonizing process of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum policies in two countries: Indonesia and Thailand. The research focuses specifically on two Islamic private schools: MA Tanwirul Qulub in Lamongan (Indonesia) and Tarbiyatul Wathon in Yala (Thailand). A qualitative approach allows the researchers to understand the meaning behind curriculum policies and their implementation from the perspective of education practitioners in the field.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting and seeks to interpret phenomena through the use of various data collection methods. Erickson (1968) further emphasizes that qualitative research aims to narratively describe the action and the impact of these actions on the lives of the

subjects involved (Albi Anggito & Johan Setiawan, 2018). In this context, the research aims to comprehensively depict the formulation, implementation, and contextual adjustment of PAI curriculum policies from the national to local levels, as practiced in the selected schools.

This research was conducted over a period of two to three months, utilizing three main data collection techniques: in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis (Kosim et al., 2023). Interviews were conducted directly with school principals, vice principals in charge of curriculum, and PAI teachers at both schools. Interviews are conducted with semi-structured guidance to allow for more open-ended, reflective discussion, enabling a deeper exploration of participant perspective. Observation techniques were used to directly examine the teaching and learning processes, both within and outside the classroom, with particular attention to how PAI curriculum policies are enacted in practice. Meanwhile, document analysis was carried out on official school documents including curriculum structure, syllabus, learning implementation plans (RPP), and relevant education policy documents from both local and national authorities.

The data analysis in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification (Sugiyono, 2011: 246-247). Data reduction involves selecting, focusing, and simplifying data obtained from the field to facilitate meaningful analysis. Data presentation is conducted through the construction of descriptive narrative that illustrate the relationship among components of curriculum policy across various levels. Meanwhile, conclusions occur continuously throughout the research process, enabling the identification of emerging patterns, relationships, and insight based on collected data.

The location of the research conducted in two different countries: Indonesia and Thailand, provides a valuable perspective on how each country formulates and implements PAI curriculum policies within private education units. The research sites, MA Tanwirul Qulub and Tarbiyatul Wathon, were selected purposively because both represent Islamic private schools with distinct local characteristics and relatively autonomous approach to curriculum implementation, despite under national educational regulations.

By applying this methodological framework, this study aims to explore the processes of PAI curriculum formulation and harmonization from the national level down to the to school levels. The results are expected to contribute to the development of adaptive and contextual of PAI curriculum policy, especially relevant in cross-border education context such as those between Indonesia and Thailand.

To clarify the flow and stages of this research, the following is a research process diagram that visually illustrates the steps taken by the researcher, from the planning stage to the drawing of conclusions. This diagram helps to provide a comprehensive overview of the research process in a systematic and structured manner.

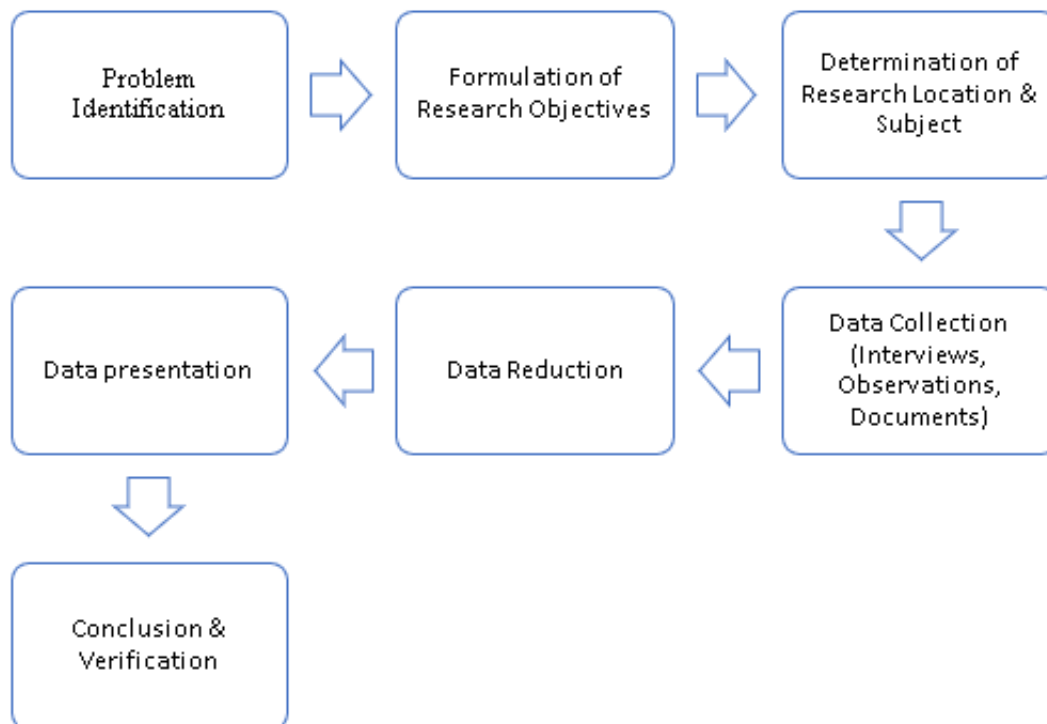


Figure 1. *Research Process Flow*

In addition, to maintain the validity and reliability of the data, this study used source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data obtained from various informants, such as school principals, vice principals, and PAI teachers. Meanwhile, method triangulation was carried out by combining data from interviews, observations, and document analysis to ensure the consistency and credibility of the information. Furthermore, the researcher also conducted member checking, which involves confirming the interpretation of data with informants to avoid misperceptions or researcher bias. These steps are crucial in qualitative research to ensure that the data obtained truly reflect the reality on the ground and strengthen the validity of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. CURRICULUM POLICIES OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN THAILAND AND INDONESIA

1.1 PAI Curriculum Policy in Indonesia

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic position within Indonesia's national education system. This is reflected in the curriculum policy, which is systematically designed at the national level and implemented contextually at the provincial and district/city levels. The formulation of the national PAI curriculum policy refers in Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, particularly Article 36, Paragraph 3, which states that curriculum development must align with national education standards to achieve the broader goals of national (Afiyah, n.d.). At the regional level of governments, such as East Java Province and Lamongan Regency, adopt the central policy while considering local socio-cultural characteristics and local educational needs.

In the implementation of education in Indonesia, the role of the provincial government extends beyond the mere technical execution of central policies. They are granted a degree of autonomy to adjust the curriculum to local needs. Each region certainly has different social, cultural, and educational needs (Mukhibat et al., 2024). This flexibility allows provinces authorities to develop supplementary curricula or local content deemed relevant to the local context. However, the policy must remain aligned with the national curriculum to ensure coherence with the national education system.

Alignment between national and regional curricula is usually achieved through mechanism such as syllabus adjustments, the development of learning materials based on local wisdom, and the provision of teacher training programs that emphasize integrative approaches. In the context of Islamic religious education, for example, provincial government may introduce locally relevant content, such as the study of kitab kuning (classical Islamic text), mawaris (Islamic inheritance law), or understanding of religious traditions prevalent in the community such as aswaja. However, national competency standards remain the primary benchmark to ensure equitable educational quality across regions. Collaboration between the central and regional governments is the key of creating harmonious and contextual curriculum.

At the national level, the major shift in education policy has been introduced in the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka). Designed as an enhancement to the 2013 Curriculum, this policy aims to improve the quality of national education (Situmorang et al., 2023). The Independent Curriculum provides flexible and contextualized learning, encouraging students to explore concepts more deeply while strengthen core competencies. Under this framework, teachers including PAI teachers, are granted greater pedagogical autonomy to select learning materials and methods that align with student interest, needs, and local relevance (Safarnaa, 2022). This approach is in line towards differentiation principle and student-centered learning.

Moreover, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is part of government's broader effort to realize the vision of freedom to learn, initiated by the Ministry of Elementary and Secondary Education. The goal is to accelerate the development the achievement of the quality of human resources who are superior, have character, and have high literacy and numeracy (Devi Zuzianti, 2023). In this context, PAI is expected to play an active role in the formation of students' noble character, including honesty, responsibility, and tolerance, as an integral part of the Pancasila student profile.

At the provincial level, East Java as one of the regions with the highest number of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, play significant role in the success of the implementation of Independent Curriculum, especially in PAI subjects. The East Java Provincial Government through the Education Office and the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, actively supports this effort by providing technical guidance and professional training for PAI teachers. The provincial focus in the strengthening of religious moderation, the integration of local wisdom into the learning process, and the connection between religious materials and character development.

As a well-established center of Islamic boarding school (pesantren) education, East Java's approach to PAI curriculum development is deeply influenced by local Islamic traditions. Teachers across madrasah and Islamic schools combine the national curriculum with pesantren values such as simplicity, sincerity, and critical thinking. This integrative model stimulates an inclusive understanding of Islam, offering a concrete example of

harmonization between the national curriculum and the local pedagogical practices, an approach that is relevant within Indonesian's pluralistic society.

At the district level, Lamongan Regency is an example of localized PAI curriculum adaptation. The Education Office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Lamongan suggest schools to develop operational curricula that align with their specific vision and student needs. For example, MA Tanwirul Qulub Sungelebak, implements a national curriculum while incorporating local content such as the study of the kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts), daily worship practices, and moral education based on students' live experiences.

The PAI curriculum in Lamongan is strategically designed to produce students who not only understand Islamic teachings but are also capable of contextually applying those values in everyday life. This aligns with the Independent Curriculum's emphasis on project-based learning and character building. Furthermore, the local government also encourages collaboration between schools, communities, and religious leaders to promote an Islamic education model that is moderate, inclusive, and socially engaged.

In term of content, the PAI Curriculum in Indonesia is built upon four foundational pillars: faith, worship, morality, and Islamic history and culture (Zulkifli, 2024). Under the Independent Curriculum, these elements are no longer taught separately and normatively. Instead, they are combined into a student-centered learning approach, where students are encourage not only to comprehend religious values cognitively but also experience and internalize them through real-life application.

The main goal of the PAI curriculum in Indonesian schools is to nurture individuals who are faithful, pious, morally upright, and capable to living harmoniously within a pluralistic society (Setiarini, 2024). Religious education serves not only to reinforce spiritual values but also to instill principles of humanity, democracy, and civilization. In this regard, the PAI curriculum is expected to function as a guiding framework for students as they face challenges at the local, national, and global levels.

The urgency of integrating religious education into formal education system is very high in the context of modernity and value disruption. PAI plays a critical role as a moral and ethical foundation for students, educating not only their spiritual aspect but also provides them with the social and ethical skills required for community life. Consequently, the position of PAI within the national curriculum is both vital and strategic.

As conveyed by Rahmasyah, the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum represents a necessary transformation to enhance the quality of national education (Afiyah, n.d.). The curriculum must be diversified and continuously developed in response to the evolving demands of the era. This principle also applies to the PAI curriculum, which must remain responsive to dynamic socio-religious challenges while maintaining its core values.

Tarihoran further emphasizes that curriculum development should be align with the philosophical foundations of education, the goals of the state, and the socio- cultural needs of the community (Situmorang et al., 2023). In this case, PAI, as an integral component of the national curriculum, is required to remain adaptive to social and technological changes, without compromising its identity as a moral and character development.

The multi-level implementation of curriculum policy from national to regional levels allow productive harmonization. Schools are able to operate within a national policy while preserving local identities and Islamic values embedded in the community. Through this model, the PAI curriculum in Indonesia becomes increasingly dynamic, relevant, and contextual.

In conclusion, the implementation of the PAI curriculum through the Independent Curriculum offers significant opportunities for strengthening character education and developing students' personalities. The harmonization of policy across national, provincial, and regional levels-as demonstrated in East Java Province and Lamongan Regency is a concrete example of collective commitment to developing a humanistic, transformative, and contextually relevant religious education system. Through this approach, Islamic religious education in schools not only instructs but also educates and guides students to become holistic human beings.

1.2 PAI Curriculum Policy in Thailand

Islamic Religious Education in Thailand is quite unique and complex position. Although the country is predominantly Buddhist, a significant Muslim population resides in the southern regions such as Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. While the formulation of the PAI curriculum under the authority of the centralized national education system, its implementation is significantly influence by the socio-cultural and political dynamics of Muslim-majority regions (Setiarini, 2024). Therefore, Islamic education in Thailand serves not only as an academic process but also as a vital instrument in maintaining the cultural and religious identity of minority Muslim communities.

From a legal standpoint, Thailand's national education policy is governed by the National Education Act of B.E 2542 (1999). Article 6 of the Act emphasizes that education should able to develop all aspects of the human person-physical, spiritual, intellectual, moral, cultural, and traditional-to form harmonious living in multicultural society (Ajmain, 2022). This principle underpins the national curriculum, which is applied to all formal educational

institutions, including private Islamic schools. Consequently, the PAI curriculum in Thailand is not a separate or isolated system, but rather a component of a broader effort to integrate Islamic values with Thai national identity.

Islamic education in Thailand is implemented through two main models: pesantren and Islamic Private Schools (Hadini et al., 2023). Pesantren refers to informal, community-based institution that focus on classical of study, including subjects such as fiqh, tauhid, tafsir, and hadits. These institutions operate with considerable flexibility in curriculum design, teaching methods, and assessment practices. The Private School Act of 2007, Article 4, recognizes this model by granting non-formal schools the autonomy to define their own educational approaches.

In contrast, Islamic Private Schools are part of the formal education system, combining the Thai national curriculum with the Islamic religious curriculum. These schools are required to teach general subjects such as mathematics, science, and the Thai language alongside religious studies. In exchange, they receive subsidies from the Thai government, which encourages the integration of national and religious education system (Wijayanti & Widhanarto, 2019). The structure of learning in these schools is typically scheduled in two sessions: Islamic studies are taught in the morning (08.00-12.00), followed by general subject in the afternoon (13.00-16.00).

The integrative approach to Islamic Religious Council of Thailand receives institutional support from the Islamic Religious Council of Thailand, the official institution responsible for issuing fatwas, overseeing religious education policies, and ensuring compliance with Islamic education. Function as an intermediary between Muslims community and the Thai government, the Council plays a key role in shaping a PAI curriculum that align with Islamic principles while remaining compatible with the national educational ideology. In this capacity, the Council grant legitimacy to religious educational materials and certifies that PAI teachers meet the required professional and religious qualifications.

Despite this structural support, significant challenges persist in the field. One of the most crucial challenges is the resistance from segment of the Muslim population, especially in southern provinces in Thailand such as Yala (Muhajarah, 2016). These communities perceive the dominance of the Thai national curriculum as a potential threat to their Islamic and cultural identity. The extensive incorporation of Thai language and cultural content in Islamic schools is seen by some as undermining the uniqueness and authenticity of local Islamic traditions. This tension indicates the need for curriculum implementation to be culturally sensitive and contextually adaptive, especially in regions with strong Islamic heritage.

As one of the provinces with the largest Muslim population, Yala plays a pivotal role in the localized implementation of the PAI curriculum policies. The provincial government, in collaboration with the Islamic Education Office and local religious leaders, participates in sustained discussions to design and adapt educational content. Notably, several Islamic private Schools in Yala have supplemented the national curriculum with local curriculum modules, which include lessons in local Islamic history, Malay-Patani traditions, and the religious practices of the Southern Thai Muslim community. This indicates that although the national curriculum is followed, schools endeavor to uphold local identity through culturally responsive teaching.

The purpose of PAI education in Thailand are highly strategic. Beyond delivering religious knowledge, the PAI curriculum pursues to cultivate morally upright, religiously committed individuals who are capable of peaceful coexistence in pluralistic society. This vision aligns with the integrationist educational policy introduced by King Chulalongkorn V in the late of the 19th century. His policy emphasized the teaching of Thai language, arithmetic and local culture, even within Muslim communities, as a form of social integration (Yunardi, 2016). Schools established during that era were design to produce loyal and productive citizens.

It is also important to highlight that education in Thailand, including Islamic education is bound by the government's policy mandating nine-year of compulsory education. Within this context, Islamic Private Schools are required to structure their curriculum in alignment with national education standard while simultaneously addressing the spiritual and cultural needs of Muslims students. As a result, a dynamic negotiation emerges between the demands of government regulations and the religious aspirations of the Muslim community.

Despite various challenges, the PAI curriculum in Thailand has demonstrated a degree of flexibility in responding both national interest and community needs. Although tensions occasionally arise between the central government and local stakeholders, the integrative model adopted has proven effective in reducing conflict and enhancing the quality of Islamic education. This shows that Islamic education can coexist and flourish within a secular national framework, provided there is a shared commitment to dialogue, respect for diversity, and inclusive participation.

Thus, the formulation and implementation of the PAI curriculum in Thailand represent a complex but constructive negotiation between the objectives of the state and identity needs of Muslim community. From the national level, through the Islamic Religious Council, to provinces such as Yala, various actors contribute to shaping an Islam education system that is inclusive, moderate, and responsive to socio-cultural realities. This is a critical insight: curriculum harmonization across religious and cultures is achievable only through openness, adaptability, and respect for diversity.

To clarify the dynamics of harmonizing Islamic Education (PAI) curriculum policies in both countries, the following flowchart illustrates the differences in approach between Indonesia and Thailand. In Indonesia, the policy process

tends to be top-down, starting with the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education formulating the national curriculum, which is then disseminated to the provincial and district/city levels, and finally adapted by educational institutions such as MA Tanwirul Qulub. Meanwhile, in Thailand, the approach is more bottom-up, where private Islamic schools like Tarbiyatul Wathan develop curricula based on the needs of the local Muslim community, then align them with central government standards to maintain formal legitimacy.

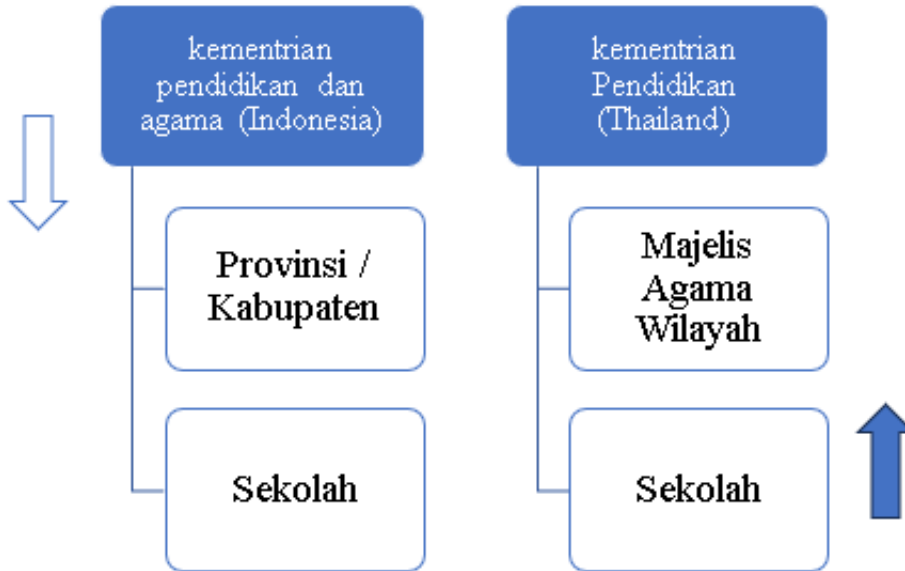


Figure 2. Curriculum policy flow in Indonesia and Thailand

B. Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Policy in Tarbiyatul Wathan Thailand and MA Tanwirul Qulub Indonesia

Religious education in Islamic private institutions plays a significant role in preserving Islamic values within multicultural societies. This is evident in two institutions examined in this study: Tarbiyatul Wathan Private School in Thailand and MA Tanwirul Qulub in Indonesia. Both originated from traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and later evolved into formal educational institutions managed under foundation-based governance. Although they share a similar origin and vision, the two institutions differ notably in their organizational structures, curriculum system, and implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) policies which influenced by the distinct socio-political and educational systems of their respective countries.

Tarbiyatul Wathan Private School was initially founded in 1954 as a Islamic Boarding School (pesantren), and received formal approval from the Thai government in 1967 to establish a structured school system under the same name. A unique feature of this institution is its unified foundation structure, in which all educational levels from kindergarten to high school are managed by the same organizational structure and teaching staff. While the curriculum is differentiated by level, administrative and pedagogical management remains centralized and integrated.

In contrast, MA Tanwirul Qulub in Indonesia shares a similar background, having been established by K.H. Fadlil Marzuki as a pesantren and further developed by his descendants in response to the growing demand for formal education (Principal of MA Tanwirul Qulub, 2025). However, its institutional structure is more decentralized compare with Tarbiyatul Wathan. Although operating under the same foundation, each school unit (e.g., MA, SMA, MTs, SDI) is managed independently, reflecting Indonesia's characteristically fragmented yet flexible managing the curriculum.

A further distinction lies in their learning schedules. In Thailand, both public and private schools follow a uniform national schedule mandated by the government: classes run from 08:00 to 16:00, five days a week. For Islamic schools such as Tarbiyatul Wathan, religious education is conducted in the morning (08:00-12:00), followed by general subjects in the afternoon. This structured division reflects the Thai government's attempt to balance religious and secular education, particularly in Muslim-majority regions (Principal of Tarbiyatul Wathan Thailand, 2024).

On the other hand, Indonesia does not enforce a standardized national study time system. Educational institutions are granted flexibility to determine their own school hours based on local needs, provided they meet the minimum

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instructional hours stipulated by national education authorities. While many schools continue to applied a six-day school week, variations are permitted. Nevertheless, the allocation of time for religious instruction remains compulsory and is monitored by both the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The PAI curriculum in Indonesia holds an important position within the national education system. In both public and private schools, Islamic religious subjects are mandatory even in non-religious public schools. This aligns with Indonesia's identity as a Muslim-majority nation and reflects the government's commitment to shaping students with strong religious values and noble character. This policy is evidence of the strong role of the curriculum for PAI as a cornerstone of national character-building efforts.

In contrast, the implementation of the PAI curriculum in Thailand is more regionally focused. It is only applied in provinces with Muslim-majority populations, such as Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. Public schools outside these areas are not required to teach PAI, in line with Thailand's predominantly Buddhist demographic. As a result, Islamic education is primarily developed through private Islamic schools, which receive government subsidies provided that they also deliver general education in accordance with national academic standards.

In terms of governance, Indonesia's PAI curriculum is supervised by two key government institutions: the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education, both of which are actively involved in the evaluation, revision, and development of the curriculum to ensure its relevance to contemporary challenges. At MA Tanwirul Qulub, for instance, PAI instruction extends beyond the national curriculum to include traditional kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts), Arabic language instruction, and pesantren-based cultural practices (Curriculum, 2025). This demonstrates the school's capacity to integrate national educational mandates with local Islamic traditions.

Meanwhile, in Thailand, the PAI curriculum in private Islamic institutions such as Tarbiyatul Wathan is regulated by the Thai Ministry of Education, with additional input from the Islamic Religious Council of Thailand. The government establishes a general curricular framework, while the Religious Council is tasked with developing and standardizing Islamic content in alignment with accepted creedal and sharia interpretations. Nevertheless, this arrangement is not without challenges. In southern Thailand, political tensions and security issues have led to concerns among some Muslim communities, who perceive the integration of religious and public education as a form of cultural assimilation that could erode their Islamic identity (Chairman of PCINU Thailand, 2024).

Despite the differences in governance and implementation, the PAI content taught in both MA Tanwirul Qulub and Tarbiyatul Wathan shares several similarities, including aqidah, fiqh, Islamic history, and Qur'anic studies. In Thailand, the curriculum is further enriched with subjects such as nahwu and sharaf (Arabic grammar), tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), Arabic calligraphy, and Malay language. Some schools even offer specialized Arabic classes to strengthen students' religious literacy. Notably, many textbooks used in southern Thailand are written in formal Indonesian, highlighting the cultural and historical ties between the Malay-Patani region and Indonesia (Malay language teacher, n.d.).

To comprehend both the differences and similarities between the PAI curricula in Thailand and Indonesia, it is essential to examine how each institution structures its curriculum. Tarbiyatul Wathan which located in southern Thailand, adopts a hybrid approach by integrating the national curriculum set by the Thai government with a local Islamic curriculum developed by the Muslim community. In contrast, MA Tanwirul Qulub in Indonesia follows the national curriculum provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, while also incorporating traditional pesantren elements that reflect its Islamic educational heritage. The differences in curriculum management and subject composition in these two institutions are illustrated more clearly in the following table, which compares the curriculum structures implemented at Tarbiyatul Wathan and MA Tanwirul Qulub.

Structure of the PAI Curriculum in Thailand (Tarbiyatul Wathan)	Structure of the PAI Curriculum in Indonesia (MA Tanwirul Qulub)
Tauhid	Mandatory
Morals	Belief in Ethics
The Qur'an	The Qur'an Hadith
Hadith	History of Islamic Culture
History of Islam	Jurisprudence
Jurisprudence	Specialization
Arabic	Nahwu Shorof
Malay	Aswaja
Interpretation	Mustholah Hadith
Nahwu Shorof	Faroidl
	The Yellow Book
	Tahfidz

Table 1. Differences in the structure of the PAI curriculum in Thailand and Indonesia

From the table, it is clear that there are differences in the structure of the PAI curriculum between schools in Thailand and Indonesia. At Tarbiyatul Wathan School in Thailand, there are eight subjects directly related to Islamic education, each taught separately and in considerable depth. In contrast, schools in Indonesia particularly those not affiliated with Islamic boarding schools typically offer only four compulsory PAI subjects: Qur'an-Hadith, Fiqh, Aqidah-Akhlak, and Islamic Cultural History. However, because MA Tanwirul Qulub operates under the auspices of a pesantren, its curriculum has been enriched with additional components. These include the study of kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts) and religious instruction rooted in local traditions, which are integral to its learning system. This illustrates that the institutional context and background of a school significantly influence the depth and diversity of PAI content delivered.

In Indonesia, the evaluation and revision of the PAI curriculum are conducted periodically. The government, through mechanisms such as teacher training, textbook updates, and national assessments, continues to enhance the quality of religious education. These efforts are designed to address contemporary challenges such as radicalism, intolerance, and moral decline among students. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum represents a concrete step in this educational reform, including within the realm of religious education.

Conversely, in Thailand, religious education policies tend to be more stable, with fewer drastic changes. This is because religious education in Thailand is closely tied to political and national security concerns. The Thai government adopts a cautious approach when introducing new policies in this domain, particularly in conflict-prone regions. Nevertheless, private Islamic schools continue to improve the quality of their religious instruction by developing teaching materials independently and fostering international collaborations with religious institutions, including those in Indonesia.

Education policy in Thailand especially concerning Islamic schools reflects a centralistic framework combined with strong social oversight. Islamic schools are seen as partners of the government in promoting national integration, while simultaneously serving as custodians of Muslim cultural and religious identity. As such, education policy in regions like Yala must be sensitive to local socio-cultural contexts to ensure that religious education functions not merely as a state instrument, but also as a vehicle for empowering Muslim communities.

Overall, the comparison between Tarbiyatul Wathan Thailand and MA Tanwirul Qulub Indonesia shows that although both are in the context of ideologically and demographically different countries, both try to carry out the function of Islamic religious education to the maximum. Differences in the organizational structure of foundations, the study time system, and the role of the state in curriculum supervision indicate that harmonization between religious education and general education can be achieved with a diverse model, as long as it is based on the universal values of education.

Understanding the curriculum dynamics in these two institutions highlights that the success of Islamic religious education does not solely depend on curriculum content. Instead, it is equally shaped by the socio-political context, community engagement, and institutional adaptability in translating Islamic values into students' everyday lives. Both schools exemplify how private Islamic educational institutions respond to the challenges of globalization and secularization while preserving the authenticity of their religious identity and educational mission.

CONCLUSION

This study presents a comprehensive comparison of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum systems and implementation in Indonesia and Thailand, highlighting efforts toward harmonization by private Islamic schools in both countries. In Indonesia, PAI holds a strategic and integral role within the national education framework. It is a compulsory subject at all levels of education, in both public and private institutions. The government, through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, plays an active role in developing and updating PAI policies, most recently through the introduction of the Merdeka (Independent) Curriculum. This curriculum promotes flexible learning, character development, and responsiveness to local cultural and religious contexts. Policy harmonization in Indonesia follows a top-down approach, where the central government establishes the core framework, and local authorities and schools are granted the autonomy to adapt and enrich it with localized content. The overarching goal of PAI is to cultivate holistic individuals faithful, devout, morally upright, and capable of coexisting in a pluralistic society, thereby positioning religious education as a moral compass amid modern challenges.

In contrast, Thailand offers a distinct and more complex landscape for PAI, owing to its predominantly Buddhist population. PAI is not mandated nationwide but is offered primarily in Muslim-majority regions such as Yala and Pattani, typically through private Islamic schools. The PAI curriculum in Thailand is integrative, combining religious and secular subjects, and is jointly overseen by the central government and the Islamic Religious Council of Thailand. While the state provides funding and curricular oversight, it also grants autonomy to private Islamic schools to develop religious content tailored to the local Muslim community. The main challenge lies in preserving Islamic identity within a national system inclined toward assimilation and Buddhist norms. Consequently, curriculum harmonization in Thailand follows a bottom-up pattern, where community-driven initiatives play a critical role in shaping religious education.

The comparison between two case-study institutions MA Tanwirul Qulub in Lamongan, Indonesia, and Tarbiyatul Wathan Private School in Yala, Thailand - illustrates both convergence and divergence. Both schools share roots in Islamic boarding traditions and are managed by religious foundations, reflecting a deep commitment to Islamic values. However, they differ in organizational structure, pedagogical systems, and curriculum implementation differences shaped by their respective national contexts. MA Tanwirul Qulub applies the Merdeka Curriculum and supplements it with boarding school (pesantren)-specific content such as Arabic and classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning). It operates within a decentralized, flexible institutional model. In contrast, Tarbiyatul Wathan follows a more centralized and integrative curriculum, with clear divisions between religious and general studies. It incorporates advanced religious subjects such as nahwu-sharaf, tafsir, and Malay, and even uses Indonesian textbooks to reinforce cultural and linguistic affinity with the broader Malay-Muslim world.

Despite the differing approaches and challenges, both schools demonstrate consistent commitment to delivering quality religious education that is responsive to the needs of students and local communities. They exemplify how private Islamic institutions can navigate national education policies while preserving their religious identity and mission. Ultimately, this study concludes that cross-border curriculum harmonization does not imply content uniformity. Rather, it involves aligning vision, policy, and implementation across governance levels. The effectiveness of Islamic religious education depends not solely on central regulations, but also on schools' capacity to contextualize teaching, foster inclusivity, and engage religious communities in meaningful, participatory dialogue.

In conclusion, the results of this study have important implications for the development of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum in private schools, particularly in cross-border contexts such as Indonesia and Thailand. Therefore, it is recommended that education policymakers in both countries provide more flexibility for private Islamic schools in implementing the national curriculum. An adaptive, contextual, and responsive curriculum that addresses local needs should be developed while maintaining the core values of Islam, such as ethics, tolerance, and spirituality. School administrators are also encouraged to foster collaboration between teachers, community leaders, and curriculum designers to create educational content that is not only locally relevant but also globally oriented. These recommendations are expected to encourage the emergence of a more dynamic and inclusive model of Islamic education, in line with the challenges of a multicultural society in the modern era.

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