

## Empowerment of Islamic Education Through Political Synergy in Southeast Asia Especially in Indonesia-Malaysia

Lalu Muhammad Salikurrahman<sup>1\*</sup>, Muhammad Zainul Ilham<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta & IAIH NW Lombok Timur, NTB

[\\*Email: 23913057@students.uii.ac.id](mailto:23913057@students.uii.ac.id)

Articel Received: 20/08/2024; Accepted: 06/09/2024

### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the importance of political synergy in empowering Islamic education in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on the relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia. The two countries, as the main centres of Islamic education in the region, have great potential to work together in strengthening and developing education systems based on Islamic values. The research method used is qualitative with the Library Research approach. Through an in-depth literature analysis, this study explores how political synergy between the two countries can improve the quality and relevance of Islamic education in the context of global challenges. The study finds that structured and directed political cooperation between Indonesia and Malaysia can enrich education policies, strengthen the curriculum, and advance the position of Islamic education on the international stage. This research also highlights the importance of integrating educational policies and strategies that are in line with the sustainable development goals, to be able to produce inclusive and sustainable Islamic education. This finding is expected to be a reference for policymakers and academics in developing a political synergy model that can be applied in other countries in the Southeast Asian region*

**Keywords:** Islamic Education, Political Synergy, Southeast Asia.

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pentingnya sinergi politik dalam memberdayakan pendidikan Islam di Asia Tenggara, dengan fokus khusus pada hubungan antara Indonesia dan Malaysia. Kedua negara, sebagai pusat utama pendidikan Islam di kawasan ini, memiliki potensi besar untuk bekerja sama dalam memperkuat dan mengembangkan sistem pendidikan yang berbasis nilai-nilai Islam. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan Library Research. Melalui analisis literatur yang mendalam, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana sinergi politik antara kedua negara dapat meningkatkan kualitas dan relevansi pendidikan Islam dalam konteks tantangan global. Studi ini menemukan bahwa kerjasama politik yang terstruktur dan terarah antara Indonesia dan Malaysia dapat memperkaya kebijakan pendidikan, memperkuat kurikulum, serta memajukan posisi pendidikan Islam di panggung internasional. Penelitian ini juga menyoroti pentingnya integrasi kebijakan dan strategi pendidikan yang selaras dengan tujuan pembangunan berkelanjutan, sehingga mampu menghasilkan pendidikan Islam yang inklusif dan berkelanjutan. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat menjadi acuan bagi pembuat kebijakan dan akademisi dalam mengembangkan model sinergi politik yang dapat diterapkan di negara-negara lain di kawasan Asia Tenggara.

**Kata Kunci :** Pendidikan Islam, Sinergi Politik, Asia Tenggara.

### A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has long been a fundamental pillar in shaping social, cultural, and intellectual identities in Southeast Asia, with Indonesia and Malaysia at the centre (Akbar et al. 2022). These two countries, which have the largest Muslim populations in the region, have developed rich and diverse Islamic education systems, ranging from traditional Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia to integrated religious schools

in Malaysia. However, amidst the tide of globalization and rapid technological advancements, Islamic education now faces a major challenge in maintaining its relevance while remaining faithful to its basic principles.

These challenges include the need to modernize curricula, improve the quality of teaching, address infrastructure and resource constraints, standardize accreditation systems, ensure the relevance of graduates to the job market, and counteract the threat of radicalization and extremism (Aripin and Nurdiansyah 2022; Fadhilah et al. 2024; Zaini 2022). Faced with this complexity, political synergy between Indonesia and Malaysia emerged as a promising potential strategy. The two countries have a long history of strong bilateral relations, but the full potential of this cooperation in the context of Islamic education empowerment has not been fully explored or utilized (Allès and Tho Seeth 2021; Mason 2023; Ni'am 2023). Political synergy in this case refers to deliberate coordination and cooperation between the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia in formulating policies, sharing resources, and implementing programs aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of Islamic education. It involves not only the ministries of education and religion of both countries, but also educational institutions, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders.

This research aims to explore in depth how the political synergy between Indonesia and Malaysia can be a catalyst for the empowerment of Islamic education in Southeast Asia. The main focus is to investigate existing and potential cooperation mechanisms, opportunities for knowledge transfer and best practices, challenges in implementation, potential impacts on the quality of education, and synergy models that can be adapted by other countries in the region. The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders in developing effective strategies to empower Islamic education through regional cooperation. By analyzing concrete examples of successful cooperation and identifying areas for improvement, this study aims to contribute to the development of a model of political synergy that can improve the quality of Islamic education not only in Indonesia and Malaysia but also throughout Southeast Asia.

Through in-depth exploration, this research aims to pave the way for a more integrated and collaborative approach to facing the challenges of Islamic education in the modern era. Therefore, it is hoped that a balance can be created between the modernization of education and the preservation of the rich Islamic intellectual tradition that has long been a characteristic of this region so that Islamic education can continue to develop and make a positive contribution to society in the global era.

## B. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative method with a Library Research approach to analyze political synergy in the empowerment of Islamic education in Indonesia and Malaysia. The research process includes data collection through comprehensive literature searches, selection of sources based on relevance and credibility, and content analysis to identify key themes. Information from various sources is then synthesized to form a coherent understanding of the research topic. Validation of

findings is carried out through source triangulation to ensure the validity of the results. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the complexity of the issues being studied, as well as the identification of implications and recommendations for future policy development.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Harmonization of Islamic Education Policy between Indonesia and Malaysia.

The harmonization of the Islamic Education Policy between Indonesia and Malaysia has undergone significant development as a result of the close political synergy between the two countries (Zamroni et al. 2020). This harmonization process covers various important aspects of the Islamic education system, aiming to improve the quality, relevance, and competitiveness of Islamic education in both countries as well as in the Southeast Asian region. One of the key elements of this harmonization is the development of a joint curriculum. A team of experts from both countries collaborated to design a comprehensive curriculum framework, which combines the strengths of each education system. The curriculum includes the study of the Quran and Hadith, fiqh, aqidah, and Islamic history, while also incorporating modern subjects such as science, technology, mathematics, and foreign languages. This approach aims to produce graduates who are not only proficient in Islamic sciences but also competent in fields relevant to global demands (Grzywacz 2020).

Standardization of teacher qualifications is another main focus in policy harmonization (Alarashi 2021). The two countries have agreed on a set of core competencies that teachers in Islamic educational institutions must have. It includes mastery of religious material, modern pedagogical abilities, information technology skills, and cross-cultural understanding. Joint teacher training programs are held regularly, allowing for the exchange of knowledge and best practices between educators from the two countries. In addition, a standardized teacher certification system has also been developed, allowing for the mobility of teaching staff between Indonesia and Malaysia. The system of mutual recognition of academic diplomas and degrees is another important aspect of this harmonization. Both countries have developed mechanisms to evaluate and recognize Islamic educational qualifications obtained in other countries. This not only facilitates the academic mobility of students and researchers but also opens up opportunities for graduates to find work or continue their studies in both countries without significant administrative barriers.

Harmonization also includes the development of a joint quality assurance system (Mustafa, Baharuddin, and Saifuddeen 2021). A joint evaluation team was formed to assess and accredit Islamic educational institutions in both countries, using mutually agreed criteria. This helps to improve the overall standard of education and ensures consistency of quality across the institution. In terms of research and development, the two countries have established a joint research fund to support collaborative projects in the field of Islamic studies. This has led

to an increase in the number and quality of scientific publications, as well as innovations in Islamic teaching and learning methodologies.

Policy harmonization also touches on the aspect of educational technology (Ramlan 2020). A joint online learning platform was developed, allowing students from both countries to access high-quality educational resources and participate in virtual classes together. This not only expands access to quality Islamic education but also facilitates cultural exchange and understanding between students from both countries. More than that, policy harmonization also includes joint efforts in combating radicalism and extremism through education. Programs that promote moderate and tolerant Islam are jointly developed and integrated into the curriculum in both countries. Challenges in this harmonization process include differences in legal and administrative systems, variations in religious interpretation, and resistance from some traditionalist groups. However, through continued dialogue and strong political commitment, the two countries continue to work to overcome these obstacles.

The results of this policy harmonization have begun to be seen in improving the quality of graduates, increasing academic and professional mobility, and strengthening the position of Indonesia and Malaysia as centres of excellence in Islamic education at the global level. This harmonization is not only beneficial to both countries but also a potential model to be applied in other ASEAN countries, paving the way for wider integration of Islamic education in the Southeast Asian region.

## **2. Political synergy between Indonesia and Malaysia in integrating Islamic values and modernity.**

The integration of Islamic Values and Modernity has become a major focus in the political synergy between Indonesia and Malaysia, resulting in a significant transformation in the approach to Islamic education in both countries (Sholichuddin, Putu Muchtar, and Ratna 2023). This intensive dialogue and exchange of ideas facilitated by bilateral cooperation has paved the way for the development of innovative educational models, which effectively bridge Islamic traditions with the demands of the modern world.

One of the key aspects of this integration is the reformulation of the Islamic education curriculum. A team of experts from both countries collaborated to design a syllabus that combines traditional Islamic teachings with contemporary knowledge (Hadiz and Teik 2011). New subjects such as Islamic Ethics in the Digital Age, Contemporary Fiqh and Global Issues, and Science and Technology in Islamic Perspectives were introduced. This approach aims to equip students with a deep understanding of their religion, while also providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in the global marketplace.

In the aspect of teaching methodology, there has been a significant shift from a memorization-based learning model to a more critical and reflective approach (Ziegenhain 2018). Teachers are trained to use interactive teaching methods that encourage students to analyze and apply Islamic teachings in a modern context.

Class discussions, research projects, and case studies become integral components in the learning process, allowing students to explore the relevance of Islam in the face of contemporary issues such as climate change, bioethics, and artificial intelligence.

The integration of technology in Islamic education is also a priority (Means 2017). The digital learning platform was developed together, providing access to high-quality Islamic educational resources online. These include a digital library of Islamic classics, interactive online courses on various aspects of Islamic studies, and a virtual discussion forum that allows for the exchange of ideas between students from different backgrounds. Integration efforts also include the development of programs that encourage critical thinking and innovation in the Islamic context. Competitions such as the "Islamic Innovation Challenge" are organized, where students are asked to develop technological solutions to social problems based on Islamic principles. This not only encourages creativity but also strengthens students' understanding of the relevance of Islamic teachings in addressing modern challenges.

In terms of research, the two countries have established joint study centres that focus on the integration of Islam and modern science. Innovative research is carried out, such as the exploration of scientific concepts in the Quran and Hadith, the development of Islamic economic models by the digital era, and the study of Islamic bioethics in the context of medical technology advancement (Abdullah 2017). Cultural and academic exchange programs are also strengthened, allowing students and teachers to experience first-hand the diversity of Islamic interpretations and practices in neighbouring countries. This helps to broaden horizons and promote a more nuanced understanding of Islam in a regional and global context.

There are many challenges in this integration process. Resistance from conservative groups who fear the erosion of traditional values must be overcome through ongoing dialogue and concrete demonstrations that modernity and Islamic values can go hand in hand (Gallagher 2016). Limited resources and infrastructure, especially in remote areas, are also obstacles to the equitable implementation of this integrated approach. However, the results of these integration efforts are beginning to be seen. Graduates from Islamic educational institutions in both countries demonstrate a better ability to compete in the global job market, while still maintaining their Islamic identity. They also demonstrate a deeper understanding of contemporary issues and the ability to provide relevant Islamic perspectives in global discussions.

This integration model developed by Indonesia and Malaysia has attracted international attention, with many other Muslim countries interested in adopting a similar approach. This opens up opportunities for both countries to become global leaders in the modernization of Islamic education. The integration of Islamic values with modernity through political synergy between Indonesia and Malaysia has resulted in a holistic and innovative approach to education. This approach not only

prepares the Muslim generation to face global challenges but also strengthens the relevance and attractiveness of Islamic education in the modern era. While there are still challenges to be overcome, the steps that have been taken show great potential for positive transformation in the Islamic education landscape in the region and even in the Muslim world at large.

#### D. CONCLUSION

Political synergy between Indonesia and Malaysia has proven to be an effective catalyst in empowering Islamic education in both countries. Through the harmonization of education policies, the strengthening of institutional capacity, and the integration of Islamic values with modernity, the two countries have succeeded in significantly improving the quality and relevance of Islamic education. This collaboration has resulted in a more comprehensive curriculum, higher teaching standards, and a more holistic approach to education. The result is graduates who not only have a deep understanding of Islam but are also equipped with the skills necessary to compete in the global era.

Although there are still challenges in implementation, this cooperation model shows great potential to be implemented in other ASEAN countries. This paves the way for the wider empowerment of Islamic education in the Southeast Asian region, strengthening the position of Indonesia and Malaysia as centres of excellence in Islamic education at the global level. Political synergy in the context of Islamic education has proven to be an effective strategy to face the challenges of modernity while maintaining Islamic values, creating a relevant and competitive educational model in today's world.

#### E. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise is due to Allah SWT for His blessings and grace, allowing this paper to be completed successfully. May peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad SAW, his family, and his companions. As the first author, Lalu Muhammad Salikurrahman would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have supported the writing of this paper. I also extend my sincere appreciation to the Islamic University of Indonesia (Universitas Islam Indonesia), which has served as the foundation of my education and provided the necessary facilities and support for this research and writing. My heartfelt thanks also go to my colleagues and family, who have continually offered moral support and motivation during the entire writing process. I realize that this paper is far from perfect, and I welcome any constructive criticism and suggestions from readers for future improvement. I hope this work will be beneficial for the advancement of knowledge and contribute positively to society.

#### F. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdullah, M. Amin. 2017. "Islam as a Cultural Capital in Indonesia and the Malay World: A Convergence of Islamic Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11(2):307-28. doi: 10.15642/JIIS.2017.11.2.307-328.

- Akbar, Azhar Moeloek, Tsania Rahma, Yehezkiel Lemuel, Debby Fitriana, Tiara Rizki Annesha Fanani, and Rosa De Lima Gita Sekarjati. 2022. "Moral Education and Pancasila in Encouraging the Prevention of Intolerance in the Era of Globalization: Experiences of Indonesia and Malaysia." *Jurnal Panjar: Pengabdian Bidang Pembelajaran* 4(2):223–82. doi: 10.15294/panjar.v4i2.55050.
- Alarashi, Akram Hussein. 2021. "The Concept of Harmonization and Unification of the Law in Malaysia: An Islamic Appraisal." *Journal of Integrated Sciences* 2(1):14–26.
- Allès, Delphine, and Amanda Tho Seeth. 2021. "From Consumption to Production: The Extroversion of Indonesian Islamic Education." *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 9(2):145–61. doi: 10.1017/trn.2021.6.
- Aripin, Syamsul Aripin Syamsul, and Nana Meily Nurdiansyah. 2022. "Modernization of Education: A New Approach and Method in Learning Islamic Religious Education." *TADRIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 17(1):100–117.
- Fadhilah, M. N., A. Fawaid, R. S. Basyirah, and ... 2024. "Comparison of Character Education in the Education Curriculum in Indonesia and Malaysia." ... : *Jurnal Pendidikan ...*
- Gallagher, Paul. 2016. *Contemporary Islamic Discourse in the Malay-Indonesian World: Critical Perspectives*. Vol. 46.
- Grzywacz, Anna. 2020. "Indonesia's (Inter)National Role as a Muslim Democracy Model: Effectiveness and Conflict between the Conception and Prescription Roles." *Pacific Review* 33(5):728–56. doi: 10.1080/09512748.2019.1585387.
- Hadiz, Vedi R., and Khoo Boo Teik. 2011. "Approaching Islam and Politics from Political Economy: A Comparative Study of Indonesia and Malaysia." *Pacific Review* 24(4):463–85. doi: 10.1080/09512748.2011.596561.
- Mason, R. 2023. "Indonesia and Malaysia: Transnationalism and Islamic Leadership." *Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates*.
- Means, Gordon P. 2017. "The Role of Islam in the Political Development of Malaysia." *Religions and Missionaries around the Pacific, 1500-1900* 11–31. doi: 10.4324/9781315244686-2.
- Mustafa, Zainun, Azizan Baharuddin, and Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen. 2021. "Islam, Science and Education: Delving into the Progress, Collaboration and Biases." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 11(2):44–68. doi: 10.32350/jitc.112.03.
- Ni'am, Syamsun. 2023. "Islam, Moderation, and Prospects Indonesian Islamic Education for the World." 161–91. doi: 10.2991/978-2-38476-044-2\_17.
- Ramlan, Shazny. 2020. "Implementing Islamic Law to Protect the Environment: Insights from Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia." *Asia Pacific Journal of Environmental Law* 23(2):202–30. doi: 10.4337/APJEL.2020.02.05.
- Sholichuddin, Muhamad Afrizal, Nicky Estu Putu Muchtar, and Rizky Dwi Ratna. 2023. "The Relationship of Islam and The State in Contemporary Islamic Political Discourse in Indonesia." *Dirasah International Journal of Islamic Studies* 1(2):78–88. doi: 10.59373/drs.v1i2.11.
- Zaini, Achmad. 2022. "Modernizing Islamic Education in the Most Populated Muslim

World." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 16(1):175–96. doi:  
10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.1.175-196.

Zamroni, Mukhamad Ilyasin, Hasan Baharun, and Moch Tohet. 2020. "Multicultural Education in a Religious Life: Developing Harmony among Religions in Southeast Asia." *Proceedings of the International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management* (August).

Ziegenhain, Patrick. 2018. "Islam and Nation-Building in Indonesia and Malaysia." *Asien* 146:78–95.