

## Development of Islamic Educational Institutions in Brunei Darussalam: Challenges and Prospects

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### Abstract :

*This article discusses the development of Islamic educational institutions in Brunei Darussalam in the social, political, and cultural context of the country. As a country that adheres to an Islamic monarchy system, Brunei Darussalam makes Islamic education an integral part of the national education system. This study aims to examine the dynamics of the growth of Islamic educational institutions, from basic education to higher education, and the government policies that support it. On the other hand, this article also highlights the various challenges faced, such as globalization, the development of information technology, and the need for competent teaching staff. Nevertheless, the prospects for Islamic education in Brunei remain bright along with the government's strong commitment to making this country a Zikir State based on Islamic values. This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with an analysis of official documents, academic literature, and data policies. The results of the study indicate that the success of the development of Islamic education in Brunei is highly dependent on the ability of educational institutions to adapt to changing times without abandoning the principles of Islamic law.*

**Keywords :** Islamic Education, Brunei Darussalam, Educational Institutions, Challenges, Prospects.

### Abstrak :

Artikel ini membahas perkembangan lembaga pendidikan Islam di Brunei Darussalam dalam konteks sosial, politik, dan budaya negara tersebut. Sebagai negara yang menganut sistem monarki Islam, Brunei Darussalam menjadikan pendidikan Islam sebagai bagian integral dari sistem pendidikan nasional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dinamika pertumbuhan lembaga-lembaga pendidikan Islam, mulai dari pendidikan dasar hingga pendidikan tinggi, serta kebijakan pemerintah yang mendukungnya. Di samping itu, artikel ini juga menyoroti berbagai tantangan yang dihadapi, seperti globalisasi, perkembangan teknologi informasi, dan kebutuhan akan tenaga pengajar yang kompeten. Meskipun demikian, prospek pendidikan Islam di Brunei tetap cerah seiring dengan komitmen kuat pemerintah untuk menjadikan negara ini sebagai Negara Zikir yang berlandaskan nilai-nilai Islam. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif dengan analisis terhadap dokumen resmi, literatur akademik, dan data kebijakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan pengembangan pendidikan Islam di Brunei sangat bergantung pada kemampuan adaptasi lembaga-lembaga pendidikan terhadap perubahan zaman tanpa meninggalkan prinsip-prinsip syariat Islam

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan Islam, Brunei Darussalam, Lembaga Pendidikan, Tantangan, Prospek.

## INTRODUCTION

Brunei Darussalam is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that officially implements the Islamic monarchy system of government. Islam is used as the basis of the state and affects all aspects of life, including its education system. Islamic education in Brunei is not only a complement, but a major component in the formation of the nation's character. The state's commitment to Islam can be seen in the development of educational



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institutions based on sharia values. This is an important foundation in understanding the direction of national education in Brunei (Alfi et al., 2023).

Since the beginning of its independence, Brunei has set a vision to become a "Zikir Country", which is a country that makes Islam the main guideline. Islamic education is a strategic means to realize this vision through fostering a young generation of faith and knowledge. Various Islamic educational institutions, ranging from elementary to tertiary levels, have been systematically built and developed. This process also involves the integration of the religious curriculum and general knowledge (Aminuddin & Kamaliah, 2022). The goal is to create kamil people who are able to play a role in national and global development.

Islamic education in Brunei has long historical roots, starting from informal teaching in suraus and mosques. Over time, Islamic educational institutions have undergone a transformation to become more formal and structured. The government takes an active role in shaping an education system that is in accordance with the demands of the times, but still based on Islamic teachings. This step reflects the country's seriousness in maintaining the sustainability of Islamic values in the world of education. The history of this development is an important background in understanding the current situation (Efendi et al., 2022).

Currently, Islamic educational institutions in Brunei consist of various levels, such as religious schools, madrasas, and Islamic higher education institutions. Each level has a complementary role in producing a superior generation of Muslims. The government through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Agama) continues to update the curriculum and improve the quality of teachers. This effort aims to ensure that Islamic education in Brunei remains relevant and competitive. The quality of these institutions is an indicator of the success of the national education system (Susyanto, 2022).

Despite having a strong commitment, Islamic education in Brunei is inseparable from various challenges. The development of globalization and the rapid flow of information require the education system to continue to adapt. On the other hand, there are concerns about the influence of outside cultures that can weaken Islamic values. Therefore, there needs to be a balanced strategy between openness to progress and protection of traditional values. This challenge must be answered with appropriate and sustainable policies (Zufiroh & Basri, 2023).

The availability of qualified educators is also an important issue in the development of Islamic education. Many institutions face difficulties in recruiting teachers and lecturers who are not only proficient in religious science, but also able to integrate modern technology and learning methods. For this reason, the development of the professionalism of educators is the government's main agenda. Training and sending teaching staff abroad is one of the solutions taken. This effort is expected to improve the quality of Islamic education as a whole (Indriani & Firdian, 2021).

On the other hand, technological advances can be a great opportunity for the development of Islamic education. The use of digital technology in the teaching and learning process allows for wider and more efficient access. Brunei has begun to adopt digital platforms in several Islamic education programs, including online classes and digital teaching materials. This kind of innovation shows that Islamic education in Brunei is not lagging behind the times. However, its implementation still requires evaluation and strengthening of infrastructure capacity (Sopiansyah et al., 2021).

In addition to internal challenges, Brunei is also faced with external dynamics that affect the direction of Islamic education. Cooperation with other countries, especially in the Islamic world, opens up opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and experience.

Islamic educational institutions in Brunei are often involved in international forums that discuss the issue of Islamic education. This participation strengthens Brunei's position as a small country that has a significant contribution to Islamic da'wah and education. This enriches insights and increases the credibility of educational institutions in the eyes of the world (Mardiah Astuti et al., 2023).

The prospects for the development of Islamic education in Brunei are quite promising when viewed from state policies and public support. The government continues to allocate large budgets and resources for the development of this sector. The community also showed high enthusiasm in sending their children to Islamic educational institutions. The social environment that supports Islamic values is the main strength in maintaining the continuity of education. This is an important capital to face future challenges (Rizka Zulmi et al., 2024).

The balance between the preservation of tradition and innovation is the key to the success of Islamic education in Brunei. Educational institutions are required to not only teach religious knowledge textually, but also to be able to relate it to the reality of contemporary life. Islamic education must produce graduates who are not only obedient, but also productive and creative. The blend of spirituality and intellect is the expected characteristic of this system. Therefore, sustainable education reform is absolutely necessary (Dwiyani, 2023).

Considering these various factors, it is important to study more deeply the development of Islamic educational institutions in Brunei Darussalam. This article will systematically discuss the journey of Islamic education in the country, the challenges faced, and the future prospects. This study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic education discourse, both locally and globally. In addition, it can be a reference for other countries in building contextual and competitive Islamic education. This research also opens up a space for reflection on the direction of Islamic education development in the modern era.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to examine the development of Islamic educational institutions in Brunei Darussalam. Data was collected through library research which included books, scientific journals, official reports from the government of Brunei Darussalam, and policy documents related to Islamic education. In addition, secondary data from official websites such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Brunei were also analyzed to get an up-to-date picture of the Islamic education system and policies in the country. Data analysis is carried out thematically by highlighting historical, institutional, policy, and challenges and future prospects. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and comparison between relevant literature in order to obtain an objective and in-depth understanding of the topic being studied.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Islamic educational institutions in Brunei Darussalam have a long history that began with informal education in suraus and mosques. This teaching tradition is deeply rooted in the culture of Brunei's Malay-Muslim community that has been going on for centuries. Religious education was initially carried out simply, focusing on the teaching of the Qur'an, faith, and basic fiqh. The existence of local religious leaders is the main driver in the spread of Islamic knowledge. Over time, this education system began to undergo updates and formalities (Syukri, 2023).

A major transformation in Islamic education occurred when the Brunei government began to design a national education system that brought together a general and religious curriculum. Since 1956, official religious schools have been established under the

supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (KHEU). Religious education is provided in parallel with general education, especially at the elementary level. The students take religious lessons in the afternoon session after completing the general lessons in the morning. This system is referred to as the "Two-Session System" or *dual education system* (Listiani & Ariyanto, n.d.).

To date, the Islamic education system in Brunei consists of several institutions, including the Agama Primary School, the Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkiah Tahfiz Al-Qur'an Institute, and the Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). UNISSA is the center of Islamic higher education in Brunei and has academic programs based on sharia, Islamic economics, comparative sects, and so on. With these institutions, Brunei is able to nurture cadres of Muslim scholars and scholars who are relevant to the needs of the times.

The Government of Brunei is very serious in the development of Islamic education by providing full support both in terms of budget and policy. For example, all religious education from primary to secondary levels is fully subsidized by the government. This shows the country's commitment to forming a generation that understands Islam deeply. In addition, religious teacher training is periodically carried out to improve the quality of teaching. The government also sends teachers and students abroad for further studies.

However, despite much progress, Islamic education in Brunei faces a number of challenges. One of them is the limited number of highly qualified religious teachers, especially for specific subjects such as tafsir, hadith, and fiqh muqaran. This problem is an obstacle in the development of the quality of education in several regions. The government has tried to address this by recruiting overseas graduates and strengthening domestic religious teacher education programs.

Another challenge comes from the flow of globalization and digitalization which has a direct impact on the younger generation. Free access to the internet and social media brings with it values that are not always in line with Islamic principles. This requires Islamic educational institutions to play a more active role in the formation of students' character and morals. A curriculum approach is needed that is not only cognitive, but also affective and psychomotor in religious teaching. (Kurnia Sofiani et al., 2024)

In terms of curriculum, Brunei implements a national standard curriculum that includes Islamic education as the main component. However, in practice, there is a need to constantly update the material to suit the current context. Topics such as the digital economy from an Islamic perspective, social media ethics, and minority fiqh need to be introduced in order for Islamic education to remain relevant. UNISSA and related institutions began to pioneer in this direction through seminars and syllabus updates.

In terms of institutional management, Brunei shows relatively stable and efficient governance. Islamic educational institutions are centrally regulated under the KHEU, thus allowing for good supervision and standardization. This is one of Brunei's advantages compared to other countries that have a fragmented Islamic education system. This centralization also makes it easier to apply national policies evenly to all religious schools.

Another advantage is the integration of Islamic values into school life as a whole. In religious schools in Brunei, religious activities such as tadarus, congregational prayers, and regular recitation are part of daily activities. This creates a strong religious culture in the educational environment. Character and spirituality development is not only taught, but also practiced in the daily lives of students and teachers.

Public participation in Islamic education is also high, reflected in the interest of parents in sending their children to religious schools. In some areas, there is even a queue to enter well-known institutions such as the Tahfiz Institute. This enthusiasm strengthens the role of the community in supporting the success of Islamic education. Synergy

between schools, the government, and the community is an important key in maintaining the sustainability of this education system.

The government's policy in supporting Islamic education is also in line with the state's ideology. As a country based on the Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB), all public policies are directed to strengthen the Islamic identity of the community. Therefore, Islamic education is a priority in human resource development. Stable political support helps to strengthen this system in the long run (Listiani & Ariyanto, n.d.).

However, innovation is still needed in teaching methods so that Islamic education is not monotonous and rigid. The use of educational technology such as multimedia-based learning, interactive Qur'an applications, and e-learning platforms has begun to be introduced. Teachers are required to have digital competence in order to be able to convey religious material in an interesting and contextual way. Digital transformation is an inevitable imperative.

The prospects for Islamic education in Brunei are bright because they are supported by a clear state vision and policy consistency. The existence of institutions such as UNISSA also strengthens Brunei's position in the Islamic higher education network in the Southeast Asian region. In the long term, Brunei has the potential to become a regional center for Islamic studies if it is able to increase the capacity of international research, publication, and collaboration. This requires serious investment in infrastructure and human resources (Dwiyani, 2023).

In addition to formal education, Brunei also encourages non-formal and informal education in the form of lectures, religious courses, and da'wah activities. These programs reach the wider community and strengthen the understanding of Islam outside of the classroom. Family education is also a concern, with the government developing Islamic household guidance modules. It reflects a comprehensive approach in the development of the ummah through education in these various fields.

Overall, the development of Islamic educational institutions in Brunei shows a positive direction despite being faced with a number of challenges. Strategies to strengthen the curriculum, improve the quality of teachers, and integrate technology are important keys in answering these challenges. With full support from the government and community participation, Islamic education in Brunei has great potential to become a model of contemporary Islamic education that balances tradition and modernity.

## **CONCLUSION**

The development of Islamic educational institutions in Brunei Darussalam shows significant progress in line with the government's strong commitment to making Islam the main foundation of nation building. Through a structured education system, supportive policies, and active community participation, Brunei has succeeded in building quality Islamic educational institutions from elementary to tertiary levels. Despite challenges such as globalization, limited educators, and the need for curriculum innovation, the outlook for Islamic education in Brunei remains bright. By continuing to strengthen the integration between Islamic values and the development of modern technology and knowledge, Brunei has the potential to become one of the successful and sustainable models of Islamic education in the Southeast Asian region.

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