Volume 3 Number 2 (2025) E-ISSN: 2986-6502
July-December 2025 DOI: 10.37680/ssa.10974
Page: 345-362

Social Science Academic

Negotiating Islamic Tradition and the State: Madrasah Curriculum Transformation in Indonesia from Colonialism to Reformasi

Ahmad Salim[1], Imam Suyuti[1]

[1] Universitas Alma Ata, Yogyakarta; Indonesia

Received: 21/10/2026 Revised: 17/11/2025 Accepted: 31/12/2025

Abstract

This study examines the historical transformation of the madrasah curriculum in Indonesia from the colonial period to the Reform Era, treating curriculum not merely as a list of subjects but as a dynamic construction shaped by religious authority, political change, state policy, pedagogical practice, and social demand. Using a qualitative approach based on literature analysis and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with madrasah educators and stakeholders, the study traces how madrasah negotiated their Islamic identity while responding to national educational expectations. Under colonialism, several reform-oriented madrasah selectively incorporated general subjects, while many traditional institutions still emphasized religious sciences. After independence, the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1946 laid the institutional foundation for formalizing madrasah. The New Order's 1975 Joint Decree of Three Ministers aligned the madrasah curriculum more closely with public schools by increasing general subjects while preserving religious instruction. In the Reform Era, Law No. 20 of 2003 affirmed madrasah as part of the national education system, while subsequent policies encouraged diversification and competency-based learning. It concludes that the madrasah curriculum has evolved through continuous negotiation between Islamic tradition, state regulation, and modern educational demands, enabling madrasah to remain distinctive Islamic institutions while participating in national development.

Keywords Madrasah Curriculum; Islamic Education; Curriculum Transformation; Indonesian Education Policy; National Education System.

Corresponding Author
Ahmad Salim
Universitas Alma Ata, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; ahmadsalim0305@almaata.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The historical development of the madrasah curriculum in Indonesia reflects a long and complex negotiation between Islamic educational traditions, state formation, colonial and postcolonial politics, and changing conceptions of modern education. Madrasah have never been static institutions. They emerged, developed, and transformed within shifting social and political landscapes, responding to the needs of Muslim communities while gradually engaging with broader national educational structures. In the Indonesian context, madrasah occupy a distinctive position because they combine Islamic religious education with general education, although the form, proportion, and philosophical meaning

© 2025 by the authors. This is an open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY NC) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

of this combination have varied significantly across historical periods (Ibrahim, 2019; Syar'i, Hamdanah, & Akrim, 2020).

Historically, madrasah in Indonesia were largely initiated by Muslim communities, ulama, and Islamic organizations before they were formally integrated into the national education system. During the colonial period, Islamic education developed mostly outside the main structure of Dutch colonial schooling, which prioritized Western-style education for administrative and social purposes. This marginal position did not mean that Islamic education disappeared. On the contrary, pesantren, surau, langgar, and later madrasah became important spaces for the preservation of Islamic knowledge, religious authority, and community-based education. However, the development of madrasah was not uniform. Some reform-oriented madrasah, especially those influenced by Islamic modernist movements, began to introduce general subjects and more organized classroom systems, while many traditional institutions continued to emphasize classical Islamic sciences, Arabic texts, and religious formation (Rahmat, 2014; Syarif, 2020).

The establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1946 marked a significant turning point in the institutional history of madrasah. After independence, the Indonesian state faced the challenge of building a national education system that could accommodate religious identity, citizenship, and national unity. Madrasah were gradually positioned not merely as community-based religious institutions, but also as educational institutions contributing to the formation of Indonesian Muslim citizens. This process of formalization continued through various policy milestones, including the 1975 Joint Decree of Three Ministers and the 1989 National Education System Law, which strengthened the equivalence of madrasah with public schools and opened wider opportunities for madrasah graduates to continue their education in other formal institutions (Marwazi & Abid, 2021; Mas'ud, 2013; Syar'i et al., 2020).

The transformation of madrasah cannot be understood only as a technical change in curriculum structure. It also represents a broader struggle over the meaning of Islamic education in a modern nation-state. Madrasah have had to maintain their Islamic character while responding to state demands for standardization, national integration, academic quality, and employability. This dual orientation has often created tension, but it has also become the source of madrasah's distinctive identity. On the one hand, madrasah are expected to preserve religious knowledge, moral formation, and Islamic values. On the other hand, they are required to provide students with general knowledge, scientific literacy, civic competence, and skills relevant to contemporary social life (Azra, 2004; Fathurrohman, Arif, & Sirait, 2023; Ihsan et al., 2024).

This dual role became especially visible during the New Order era. Through the 1975 Joint Decree of Three Ministers, madrasah were encouraged to align more closely with public schools by increasing

the proportion of general subjects while maintaining Islamic religious instruction. The policy is often interpreted as a major step in the modernization and standardization of madrasah education. It helped improve the formal status of madrasah, allowed their graduates to access higher levels of education more easily, and reduced the perception that madrasah were inferior to public schools. At the same time, the policy also generated debates about the possible weakening of religious content and the risk of reducing madrasah's distinctive Islamic orientation (Ibrahim, 2019; Kirana, 2018; Ritonga, 2022).

The Reform Era introduced another important phase in madrasah development. The enactment of Law No. 20 of 2003 affirmed madrasah as part of the national education system and recognized MI, MTs, MA, and MAK as educational institutions equivalent to their public-school counterparts. However, the Reform Era should not be understood simply as the full decentralization of madrasah governance to local governments. Unlike many public schools, madrasah have remained closely connected to the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Therefore, curriculum flexibility in the Reform Era is better understood as diversification within the national education framework, rather than complete regional autonomy. This flexibility has allowed madrasah to respond to local needs, community expectations, and national curriculum standards while continuing to preserve their Islamic identity (Asiah et al., 2023; Ihsan et al., 2024; Nurdiansyah & Hudriyah, 2021; Sari et al., 2020).

In contemporary Indonesia, madrasah also face new educational demands associated with globalization, digital transformation, religious moderation, and twenty-first-century competencies. The curriculum is increasingly expected to support critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, technological literacy, and social tolerance, without disconnecting students from Islamic ethical foundations. This expectation has expanded the meaning of madrasah curriculum beyond the conventional division between religious and general subjects. Curriculum now includes pedagogical approaches, assessment systems, school culture, institutional management, and the broader educational ecology in which students learn to become both religiously grounded and socially competent citizens (Mahsusi et al., 2024; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Randa & Arsyam, 2022; Salim, Mukhibat, Hayani, Wafa', & Assalihee, 2023).

The concept of curriculum itself has long been understood in multiple ways. Bobbitt (1918) defines curriculum as a sequence of planned experiences, while Tyler (1949) views it as a structured plan for learning. Taba (1962) emphasizes curriculum as a design that responds to learners' needs and social change, whereas Saylor, Alexander, and Lewis (1981) describe it as the total effort of the school to influence student learning. Dewey's perspective further reminds us that curriculum should be meaningful, experiential, and connected to students' lived realities (Dewey, 1986). These perspectives are particularly relevant to the study of madrasah because the madrasah curriculum is not merely a

formal document. It is an evolving educational practice shaped by religious epistemology, state policy, community expectations, and the changing demands of Indonesian society.

Previous studies have examined various aspects of madrasah education, including policy transformation, curriculum modernization, local wisdom, digital adaptation, and religious moderation. Syar'i et al. (2020) highlight the historical development of madrasah education in Indonesia, while Sudarto (2023) emphasizes the need for continuous reform to maintain relevance in a changing educational landscape. Badriah and Sukati (2021) discuss the integration of local wisdom in madrasah learning, and Randa and Arsyam (2022) examine the transformation of Islamic education in response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Meanwhile, Mukhibat et al. (2024) analyze the development of religious moderation curricula in Indonesian higher education, offering insight into how Islamic educational institutions respond to contemporary social and ideological challenges.

Building on these studies, this article analyzes the transformation of the madrasah curriculum in Indonesia from the colonial period to the Reform Era. It argues that the madrasah curriculum has developed through continuous adaptation to political authority, national education policy, community needs, and changing pedagogical expectations. The article does not reduce curriculum to the balance between religious and general subjects, but also examines the broader dimensions of teaching methodology, assessment practices, institutional identity, and socio-political context. By doing so, this study offers a historically grounded understanding of madrasah as resilient Islamic educational institutions that have continuously negotiated between tradition and modernity, religious identity and national integration, as well as local relevance and global educational demands.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the transformation of the madrasah curriculum in Indonesia from the colonial period to the Reform Era. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand curriculum transformation not merely as a technical change in subject composition, but as a historically situated process shaped by religious authority, state policy, institutional adaptation, pedagogical practice, and socio-political change. The study combined literature-based historical analysis with Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in order to construct a more comprehensive understanding of how madrasah curricula have evolved across different periods.

The literature study was used as the primary strategy for reconstructing the historical and policy trajectory of madrasah curriculum transformation. This method enabled the researchers to identify, compare, and synthesize relevant scholarly works, policy documents, and historical accounts related to Islamic education and madrasah development in Indonesia (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). The sources

analyzed in this study included academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and official government documents. These materials were obtained from digital libraries, online journal databases, and institutional websites relevant to Islamic education, curriculum studies, and Indonesian education policy.

The literature search was conducted using several keywords, including "madrasah curriculum," "Islamic education in Indonesia," "madrasah history," "colonial education policy," "Islamic education during the New Order," and "Reform Era madrasah curriculum." The selected literature was reviewed based on its relevance to the research focus, its contribution to understanding curriculum transformation, and its connection to specific historical periods. Particular attention was given to sources that discussed the relationship between madrasah education, state policy, curriculum structure, teaching practices, and the changing position of Islamic education within the national education system.

In addition to the literature study, Focus Group Discussions were conducted to enrich the analysis with contemporary perspectives from madrasah-related educational actors. The FGDs involved twelve participants from different madrasah levels, including Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), and Madrasah Aliyah (MA), as well as participants with experience in educational management and research. The inclusion of participants from different institutional levels was intended to capture a broader range of views regarding curriculum relevance, implementation challenges, institutional adaptation, and the continuing negotiation between religious and general education in madrasah.

To protect participant confidentiality, each participant and institution was given an anonymous code. The participant distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. FGD Participant Details

Participant Code	Institution Type	Institution Code
P1	MI	IN01
P2	MTs	IN02
P3	MA	IN03
P4	MI	IN04
P5	MTs	IN05
P6	MA	IN06
P7	MI	IN07
P8	MTs	IN08
P9	MA	IN09
P10	MI	IN10
P11	MTs	IN11
P12	MA	IN12

The data analysis was conducted through two interconnected stages: content analysis of literature sources and thematic analysis of FGD data. First, the literature was analyzed using content analysis to

identify key patterns, concepts, and historical shifts in the transformation of madrasah curricula (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The analysis focused on several recurring dimensions: curriculum content, the balance between religious and general subjects, teaching methodology, assessment practices, state policy, institutional recognition, and the socio-political context of each historical period. The sources were then categorized according to major historical phases, namely the colonial period, early independence, the New Order era, and the Reform Era.

Second, the FGD data were analyzed thematically. The discussion data were recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify recurring themes related to participants' perceptions of curriculum relevance, pedagogical challenges, institutional constraints, and the practical negotiation between Islamic identity and national education standards. The coding process was conducted by identifying meaningful statements, grouping similar ideas into categories, and developing broader themes that corresponded to the study's analytical focus. These themes were then compared with findings from the literature analysis in order to identify points of convergence, divergence, and contextual nuance.

Triangulation was applied by comparing documentary evidence, scholarly literature, and FGD findings. This process was used to strengthen the credibility of the analysis and to reduce the risk of relying on a single type of data source (Patton, 2015). Through triangulation, the study was able to examine whether historical claims found in the literature were consistent with contemporary perceptions and experiences of madrasah educators and education stakeholders. Ethical considerations were also observed throughout the research process by maintaining participant anonymity, using institutional codes, and presenting the findings in a way that did not expose personal or institutional identities.

Overall, the methodological design allowed this study to examine madrasah curriculum transformation as both a historical and educational phenomenon. The literature analysis provided the historical and policy foundation, while the FGDs offered practical insights into how curriculum transformation is perceived and experienced within madrasah contexts. By combining these two sources of evidence, the study seeks to provide a balanced account of madrasah curriculum development from the colonial period to the Reform Era.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The transformation of the madrasah curriculum in Indonesia cannot be understood as a linear replacement of religious education by general education. Rather, it should be read as a long process of negotiation among Islamic tradition, community needs, colonial and postcolonial state policies, and changing educational demands. Across different historical periods, madrasah institutions adapted their curriculum in diverse ways. Some changes were driven by external political pressure, while others

emerged from internal reform movements within Muslim communities. This historical complexity shows that madrasah have functioned not only as institutions for transmitting Islamic knowledge, but also as adaptive educational spaces that responded to broader social, political, and intellectual transformations.

3.1. Madrasah Curriculum during the Colonial Period

During the Dutch colonial period, Islamic education occupied a marginal position in relation to the formal colonial school system. Dutch educational policy prioritized Western-style schooling, especially for administrative and social purposes, while Islamic educational institutions largely developed outside the main structure of colonial education. Madrasah, pesantren, surau, and other forms of Islamic learning therefore became important community-based spaces for preserving religious knowledge, Islamic identity, and social solidarity. However, this marginalization did not produce a single uniform response among Islamic educational institutions. The development of madrasah during this period varied across regions, organizations, and ideological orientations.

Several reform-oriented madrasah began to introduce selected general subjects, such as arithmetic, literacy, basic sciences, and practical knowledge, alongside religious instruction. This integration should not be understood as a universal feature of all madrasah during the colonial period, but rather as a characteristic of certain modernist and reformist Islamic educational movements. These institutions attempted to respond to the practical needs of Muslim communities while maintaining their Islamic foundation. In contrast, many traditional Islamic learning institutions continued to emphasize classical religious sciences, Arabic texts, fiqh, theology, and moral formation. Therefore, the colonial period marked the beginning of curricular diversification within Islamic education rather than a complete transformation of all madrasah into modern schools (Kirom & Imamiyah, 2021; Syar'i et al., 2020).

The inclusion of general subjects in some madrasah was not merely a technical adjustment in subject composition. It reflected a deeper educational negotiation: how could Muslim communities acquire useful worldly knowledge without losing their religious identity? In this sense, curriculum adaptation became a strategy of survival, resistance, and selective modernization. Madrasah did not simply imitate colonial schools. Instead, they appropriated certain elements of modern schooling, such as structured classes, graded learning, and general subjects, while embedding them within an Islamic moral and epistemological framework. This selective adaptation allowed reformist madrasah to remain rooted in Islamic values while preparing students to face the practical demands of colonial society (Hakiemah & Sudirman, 2020; Rohman, 2022; Sunhaji, 2017).

Teaching practices during this period were also shaped by the institutional character of each madrasah. In more traditional settings, learning was often centered on religious texts, oral transmission,

memorization, recitation, and close teacher-student relations. In reform-oriented madrasah, however, classroom organization and instructional methods gradually became more structured. Teachers began to combine religious explanation with practical examples drawn from students' social environment. This pedagogical shift did not eliminate traditional Islamic methods, but it introduced new forms of learning that connected religious knowledge with everyday realities.

Assessment practices during the colonial period were similarly diverse and largely internal to each institution. Since madrasah were not fully integrated into the colonial examination system, evaluation was usually conducted according to institutional norms and teacher authority. Religious knowledge was often assessed through recitation, oral questioning, memorization, and mastery of religious texts. In madrasah that had introduced general subjects, assessment of general knowledge was usually less standardized and depended on the capacity of individual institutions. Thus, colonial-era assessment reflected the autonomous and community-based character of madrasah education, while also revealing the limits imposed by their exclusion from the formal colonial education structure (Gusman, 2021; Sudarto, 2023).

3.2. Madrasah Curriculum in the Early Independence Period

The early independence period marked an important transition in the position of madrasah within Indonesian society. After 1945, the newly independent state faced the task of constructing a national education system that could integrate diverse religious, cultural, and regional communities into a shared national project. In this context, madrasah were increasingly seen not only as religious institutions, but also as contributors to nation-building. Islamic education became part of a broader effort to form citizens who were religiously grounded, morally responsible, and committed to the newly established Indonesian state.

The establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1946 provided an institutional foundation for the gradual recognition and development of madrasah. This did not immediately make madrasah fully equivalent to public schools, but it marked the beginning of state involvement in Islamic education. Through this institutional channel, madrasah began to be positioned within the emerging framework of national education while still maintaining their Islamic character. The curriculum during this period therefore reflected a dual orientation: preserving Islamic teachings and supporting national consciousness (Mas'ud, 2013; Rahmat, 2014; Syar'i et al., 2020).

In curricular terms, madrasah after independence increasingly incorporated elements related to citizenship, national identity, and social responsibility. Islamic teachings were connected with the ethical demands of living in an independent nation. Students were encouraged to understand their religious obligations while also recognizing their role as members of the Indonesian nation. This

development reflected the broader historical context in which religion and nationalism were not necessarily seen as opposing forces, but as two sources of moral and social legitimacy in the construction of postcolonial Indonesia (Rahmat, 2014; Sunhaji, 2017).

Pedagogically, the early independence period strengthened the social role of madrasah as institutions of moral formation and civic orientation. Teachers did not merely transmit religious doctrines; they also contributed to shaping students' awareness of social duty, community service, and national responsibility. However, it is important to avoid overstating the uniformity of pedagogical change during this period. Madrasah remained diverse. Some institutions adopted more organized classroom systems and broader subjects, while others maintained traditional modes of religious instruction. The central feature of this period was not pedagogical uniformity, but the growing alignment between Islamic education and the ideals of national development (Kirom & Imamiyah, 2021; Sudarto, 2023; Syar'i et al., 2020).

Assessment practices during the early independence period continued to reflect the dual character of madrasah education. Religious mastery remained central, particularly in subjects related to Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, Arabic, and Islamic morality. At the same time, the growing importance of national education encouraged madrasah to pay greater attention to general knowledge and civic understanding. Evaluation practices were still not fully standardized across institutions, but the direction of change was clear: madrasah were gradually moving from purely community-based religious institutions toward educational institutions with a more formal relationship to the national system (Hakiemah & Sudirman, 2020; Makmur et al., 2021; Ritonga, 2022).

3.3. Madrasah Curriculum during the New Order Era

The New Order era represented a decisive phase in the formal integration of madrasah into Indonesia's national education system. One of the most important policy milestones was the 1975 Joint Decree of Three Ministers, commonly known as SKB 3 Menteri. This policy sought to strengthen the equivalence between madrasah and public schools by increasing the proportion and quality of general subjects in madrasah while maintaining Islamic religious instruction. In many accounts, this policy is associated with the curriculum composition of approximately 70 percent general subjects and 30 percent religious subjects. More precisely, the policy aimed to ensure that the quality of general education in madrasah was comparable to public schools, while Islamic religious education remained a defining characteristic of madrasah (Kirana, 2018; Ritonga, 2022; Syar'i et al., 2020).

This policy had major implications for the status and function of madrasah. Before this period, madrasah were often perceived as institutions with limited access to broader academic and occupational pathways. Through curriculum standardization and formal recognition, madrasah graduates gained

wider opportunities to continue their education in public institutions and participate more fully in national development. The New Order's curriculum policy therefore improved the formal credibility of madrasah and helped reduce the institutional gap between madrasah and public schools.

At the same time, this transformation generated tension. On the one hand, the increased proportion of general subjects strengthened madrasah academically and socially. On the other hand, it raised concerns among some Muslim educators that the distinctiveness of madrasah as Islamic educational institutions might be weakened. The central issue was not simply the number of religious or general subjects, but the philosophical question of how madrasah could integrate national educational standards without losing their Islamic epistemological and moral orientation. This tension became one of the defining features of madrasah curriculum development during the New Order period (Alfarisi & Bakar, 2022; Nuwairah, 2023; Suhendra, 2020).

The philosophy underlying New Order curriculum reform was closely related to national integration and state-led modernization. Education was viewed as an instrument for producing disciplined, loyal, and development-oriented citizens. Madrasah were expected to contribute to this national project by producing graduates who possessed both Islamic morality and general knowledge. This dual expectation positioned madrasah within a broader developmental framework: they were no longer viewed only as religious institutions, but also as part of the national machinery of educational modernization.

Teaching methodologies during the New Order also began to shift in response to curriculum standardization. As madrasah were required to teach more general subjects, teachers had to adapt to more structured instructional models similar to those used in public schools. Lesson planning, classroom organization, textbook use, and subject-based teaching became more prominent. This did not mean that traditional Islamic pedagogies disappeared, but it did mean that madrasah teachers increasingly had to combine religious instruction with formal pedagogical techniques associated with modern schooling. The demand for teacher competence also increased, especially in relation to general subjects such as science, mathematics, social studies, and language (Hakiemah & Sudirman, 2020; Makmur et al., 2021; Sukardi, 2010).

Assessment practices during the New Order era became more standardized. As madrasah were increasingly aligned with the national education system, evaluation was no longer limited to internal religious assessment. Students were expected to demonstrate competence in both religious and general subjects. Written examinations, standardized evaluation procedures, and national academic benchmarks became more important. This shift contributed to the formal legitimacy of madrasah, because their graduates could be measured according to standards comparable to public-school students. However, it also introduced a new challenge: madrasah had to preserve meaningful religious

formation while meeting increasingly formalized academic requirements (Basri, 2017; Ma'sadah, 2011; Sunhaji, 2017).

3.4. Madrasah Curriculum in the Reform Era

The Reform Era, beginning in 1998, introduced a new context for Indonesian education. Democratization, decentralization, globalization, and curriculum reform reshaped expectations toward educational institutions, including madrasah. The enactment of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System further affirmed the position of madrasah within the national education framework. Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Madrasah Tsanawiyah, Madrasah Aliyah, and Madrasah Aliyah Kejuruan were formally recognized as equivalent to their public-school counterparts. This legal recognition strengthened the status of madrasah as integral components of the national education system rather than peripheral religious institutions (Asiah et al., 2023; Nurdiansyah & Hudriyah, 2021; Sari et al., 2020; Sudarto, 2023).

However, the Reform Era should not be interpreted simplistically as the full decentralization of madrasah governance to local governments. While broader education reform encouraged decentralization and curriculum diversification, madrasah remained closely linked to the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Therefore, the transformation of madrasah curriculum during the Reform Era is better understood as diversification within a national and ministerial framework. Madrasah gained greater space to respond to local needs, institutional identity, and community expectations, but this flexibility operated within national curriculum standards and the regulatory framework of Islamic education policy.

Curriculum reform in the Reform Era also shifted attention from subject composition to competence, learning process, and student development. The introduction of competency-based approaches, the Education Unit Level Curriculum, Curriculum 2013, and later curriculum adjustments encouraged madrasah to develop learning that was more contextual, participatory, and oriented toward students' competencies. In this context, the curriculum was no longer understood merely as a fixed list of subjects, but as a framework for developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, religious character, and social responsibility.

Teaching methodology in madrasah during the Reform Era increasingly reflected broader pedagogical trends in Indonesian education. Student-centered learning, contextual teaching, group discussion, project-based assignments, and active learning became more prominent in curriculum discourse. These approaches were intended to move learning beyond rote memorization toward critical understanding, problem-solving, collaboration, and practical application. In madrasah, such methods also created opportunities to connect Islamic teachings with contemporary social issues, scientific

literacy, digital culture, and everyday moral decision-making (Fikri, 2020; Nasir, 2021; Nuwairah, 2023; Randa & Arsyam, 2022).

Assessment practices also changed significantly, especially in the later Reform Era. Competency-based curriculum reforms encouraged assessment to move beyond the measurement of factual recall. Teachers were increasingly expected to assess students' understanding, reasoning, attitudes, skills, and ability to apply knowledge in meaningful contexts. Performance-based assessment, portfolios, project work, collaborative tasks, and the evaluation of higher-order thinking skills became increasingly relevant. In madrasah, this shift opened space for a more holistic assessment model that could evaluate both academic competence and religious-moral formation (Gunawan, Zohriah, & Saputra, 2023; Hafiza & Dahlan, 2022; Ritonga, 2022; Sunaryo, Kholid, A, & Fauzan, 2021).

The Reform Era also brought new challenges. Madrasah were expected to respond to technological development, religious moderation, social diversity, global competition, and changing labor-market demands. These expectations required madrasah to strengthen not only curriculum content, but also institutional management, teacher competence, digital readiness, and learning culture. In this context, madrasah curriculum transformation became increasingly multidimensional. It involved not only the balance between religious and general subjects, but also the integration of Islamic values with scientific thinking, citizenship, tolerance, technological literacy, and life skills.

3.5. Cross-Period Analysis: Continuity, Adaptation, and Institutional Resilience

Across the colonial period, early independence, the New Order era, and the Reform Era, the madrasah curriculum shows both continuity and change. The continuity lies in the persistent effort to preserve Islamic identity, religious knowledge, and moral formation. Despite changing political regimes and curriculum policies, madrasah have continued to define themselves through their Islamic character. This religious foundation distinguishes madrasah from public schools and gives them a specific cultural and educational legitimacy within Muslim communities.

The change lies in how madrasah have adapted their curriculum to changing historical circumstances. During the colonial period, some reform-oriented madrasah selectively integrated general subjects as a response to social needs and colonial marginalization. In the early independence period, madrasah participated in the formation of religious and national consciousness. During the New Order, state policy pushed madrasah toward formal equivalence with public schools through curriculum standardization and stronger general education. In the Reform Era, madrasah entered a more complex phase marked by legal recognition, curriculum diversification, competency-based learning, and the demand to respond to twenty-first-century challenges.

This historical trajectory demonstrates that madrasah curriculum transformation has never been purely pedagogical. It has always been tied to power, identity, legitimacy, and social function. Curriculum became the medium through which madrasah negotiated their place in Indonesian society. When the state demanded standardization, madrasah adjusted. When communities demanded religious authenticity, madrasah preserved Islamic content. When modern society demanded scientific literacy, citizenship, and employability, madrasah expanded their educational orientation. This adaptive capacity explains why madrasah have remained relevant across different political regimes.

The transformation also shows that the distinction between "religious" and "general" knowledge is too simple to explain madrasah education. In practice, madrasah have continuously attempted to mediate between the two. The most important question is not only how many hours are allocated to religious or general subjects, but how these domains are integrated pedagogically, epistemologically, and institutionally. A madrasah curriculum becomes meaningful when Islamic values inform the ethical orientation of learning, while general knowledge equips students to participate intelligently and responsibly in modern society.

3.6. Future Direction of Madrasah Curriculum

The future of madrasah curriculum depends on its ability to maintain a productive balance between tradition and transformation. Madrasah cannot abandon their Islamic identity, because this identity is the source of their distinctiveness and social legitimacy. At the same time, madrasah cannot remain confined to traditional subject transmission if they are to prepare students for contemporary realities. The challenge is not to choose between Islamic tradition and modern education, but to develop a curriculum model in which both can mutually enrich one another.

For this reason, future curriculum development in madrasah should emphasize integration rather than mere addition. General subjects should not be treated as external elements added to religious education, and religious subjects should not be reduced to symbolic identity markers. Instead, curriculum design should encourage meaningful dialogue between Islamic ethics, scientific literacy, social responsibility, technological competence, and critical thinking. Such an approach would allow madrasah to produce graduates who are not only religiously knowledgeable, but also intellectually capable, socially responsible, and prepared to contribute to national and global life.

Policy support remains crucial. Madrasah require adequate teacher development, curriculum resources, institutional funding, digital infrastructure, and assessment systems that reflect their dual mission. Without such support, curriculum reform risks becoming merely administrative. The long history of madrasah curriculum transformation shows that madrasah have the capacity to adapt, but adaptation must be supported by coherent policy, institutional capacity, and pedagogical innovation.

In sum, the history of madrasah curriculum in Indonesia reveals a resilient educational tradition that has continuously negotiated between Islamic authority, state policy, community expectation, and modern educational change. From the colonial period to the Reform Era, madrasah have transformed not by abandoning their religious foundation, but by reinterpreting that foundation in response to new historical demands. This capacity for adaptation is what enables madrasah to remain important institutions in Indonesia's educational landscape and to contribute uniquely to the integration of faith, knowledge, citizenship, and national development.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the transformation of the madrasah curriculum in Indonesia has been shaped by continuous negotiation among Islamic tradition, community needs, state policy, and modern educational demands. From the colonial period to the Reform Era, madrasah have adapted to changing socio-political contexts while maintaining their Islamic identity.

During the colonial period, some reform-oriented madrasah began to include selected general subjects, while many traditional institutions continued to emphasize religious sciences. After independence, the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1946 strengthened the institutional position of madrasah within the Indonesian state. In the New Order era, the 1975 Joint Decree of Three Ministers became a major milestone in aligning madrasah with public schools through stronger inclusion of general subjects while preserving religious instruction. In the Reform Era, Law No. 20 of 2003 further affirmed madrasah as part of the national education system and encouraged curriculum diversification, competency-based learning, and more contextual pedagogy.

The findings indicate that madrasah curriculum transformation should not be reduced to the proportion of religious and general subjects. It also involves pedagogy, assessment, institutional identity, religious values, and social function. Madrasah have remained resilient because they are able to mediate between Islamic knowledge and modern educational requirements. Therefore, future curriculum development should strengthen the integration of Islamic ethics, scientific literacy, civic responsibility, critical thinking, digital competence, and social tolerance. This adaptive capacity positions madrasah as important institutions in Indonesia's national education system and as contributors to the integration of faith, knowledge, and modern life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors express their gratitude to Universitas Alma Ata, Yogyakarta, for its academic support. Appreciation is also extended to the madrasah educators, education managers, and research participants who contributed through the Focus Group Discussions. Their insights enriched the analysis

of madrasah curriculum transformation in Indonesia. Any remaining limitations are the responsibility of the authors.

REFERENCES

Alfarisi, S., & Bakar, Y. A. (2022). SKB 3 Menteri dan Implikasinya pada Pendidikan Islam. *Al-Fikr: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *8*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.47945/alfikr.v8i1.286

Asiah, S., Huda, M., Muttaqin, S., Saepudin, D., Subchi, I., & Zada, K. (2023, May 26). *Islamic Education Policy in Indonesia in the Age of Reformation*. Paper presented at Proceedings of the 5th International Graduate Conference in Islam and Interdisciplinary Studies, IGCIIS 2022, 19-20 October 2022, Mataram, Lombok, Indonesia. Retrieved from https://eudl.eu/doi/10.4108/eai.19-10-2022.2329067

Azra, A. (2004). *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern "Ulama" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. Allen & Unwin.

Badriah, L., & Sukati, S. (2021). Intergrasi Kearifan Lokal dalam Pembelajaran di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Se-Kabupaten Bantul Yogyakarta. *JMIE (Journal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Education)*, *5*(1), 46–66. https://doi.org/10.32934/jmie.v5i1.184

Basri, H. (2017). Disorientasi Pendidikan Madrasah di Indonesia. *Potensia: Jurnal Kependidikan Islam*, *3*(1), 61–81. https://doi.org/10.24014/potensia.v3i1.3470

Bobbitt, F. (1918). *The Curriculum*. Houghton Mifflin.

Dewey, J. (1986). Experience and Education. *The Educational Forum*, *50*(3), 241–252. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131728609335764

Fathurrohman, R., Arif, M., & Sirait, S. (2023). Concept and Implementation of Islamic Education in Islamic Education Institutions in Indonesia. *Dayah: Journal of Islamic Education*, *6*(1), 114–129. https://doi.org/10.22373/jie.v6i1.16356

Fikri, I. F. (2020). Dimensi Post-Tradisionalisme Islam dalam Madrasah: Konvergensi Turāth Islam dan Modernitas Barat. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education Studies)*, *8*(1), 75–96. https://doi.org/10.15642/jpai.2020.8.1.75-96

Gunawan, A., Zohriah, A., & Saputra, A. (2023). Does Indonesia's Inclusive Curriculum Education Sustainability in Privat Madrasah Program? *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, *12*(2), 489–503.

Gusman, M. (2021). Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam Indonesia (Analisis Kritis Perkembangan pada Aspek Kurikulum dan Sumber Daya Manusia). *Al-Fikru: Jurnal Ilmiah*, *15*(2), 143–161. https://doi.org/10.51672/alfikru.v15i2.85

Hafiza, K., & Dahlan, Z. (2022). The Dynamics of Madrasah in North Sumatra in The Reform Time (1998-2021). *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*. https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v5i1.2058

Hakiemah, A., & Sudirman, S. A. M. (2020). Distingsi dan Identitas Islam pada Madrasah: Tinjauan Kebijakan Kurikulum Madrasah. *Manageria: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, *5*(1), 19–40. https://doi.org/10.14421/manageria.2020.51-02

Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *15*(9), 1277–1288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687

Ibrahim, B. (2019). Madrasah Transformation Into Modern Educational Institutions During The New Order. *Istawa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *4*(2), 196–216. https://doi.org/10.24269/ijpi.v4i2.2006

Ihsan, I., Pabbajah, M., Abdullah, I., & Hidayati, H. (2024). The contestation of national and religious curricula in Indonesia's madrasas since the passage of the UUSPN. *Educational Studies*, *50*(4), 434–447. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2021.1958757

Kirana, D. (2018). Enhancing Religious Education: An Attempt to Counter Violent Extremism in Indonesia. *Studia Islamika*, *25*(1), 199–206. https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v25i1.7284

Kirom, A., & Imamiyah, I. (2021). Pendidikan Madrasah di Indonesia dalam Potret Waktu: Studi atas Sejarah Perkembangan Madrasah di Indonesia. *Maharot: Journal of Islamic Education*, *5*(2), 117–136. https://doi.org/10.28944/maharot.v5i2.435

Machi, L. A., & McEvoy, B. T. (2009). *The Literature Review: Six Steps to Success*. Corwin Press.

Mahsusi, Hudaa, S., Fahmi, M., Kusen, Haryanti, N. D., & Wajdi, M. B. N. (2024). Achieving excellence: The role of digital transformation in madrasah management and Islamic culture. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, *11*(1), 2304407. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2304407

Makmur, A., Abduh, M. A., Hasbullah, H., & Abduh, A. (2021). Madrasah: Quality and Social Change (Case Study in Banjarmasin Indonesia). *Al-Fikra: Jurnal Ilmiah Keislaman*, *20*(1), 55–67. https://doi.org/10.24014/af.v20i1.10709

Marwazi, M., & Abid, M. H. (2021). Traditional Madrasah, State Policies and The Rise of Integrated Islamic Schools in Jambi. *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, *15*(1), 75–102. https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2021.15.1.75-102

Ma'sadah, M. (2011). Madrasah: Perkembangan, Modernisasi dan Implikasinya. *Al Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, *1*(2), 6–6. https://doi.org/10.36835/hjsk.v1i2.348

Mas'ud, Abd. R. (2013). Politics of The Nation and Madrasah's Policy. *Edukasi: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama Dan Keagamaan*. https://doi.org/10.32729/edukasi.v11i3.414

Mukhibat, M., Effendi, M., Setyawan, W. H., & Sutoyo, M. (2024). Development and evaluation of religious moderation education curriculum at higher education in Indonesia. *Cogent Education*, *11*(1), 2302308. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2302308

Nasir, M. (2021). Curriculum Development and Accreditation Standards in the Traditional Islamic Schools in Indonesia. *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research*, *3*(2), 37–56. https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2020.3

Nurdiansyah, N. M., & Hudriyah, H. (2021). Policy and Implementation of Education Management Based on Madrasah. *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, *5*(1), 14–27. https://doi.org/10.33650/al-tanzim.v5i1.1416

Nuwairah, K. M. (2023). Perkembangan Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam di Madrasah 2013-2023 (Studi di Madrasah Tsanawiyah). *Al-Falah: Jurnal Ilmiah Keislaman dan Kemasyarakatan*, *23*(2), 149–161. https://doi.org/10.47732/alfalahjikk.v23i2.272

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Rahmat, R. (2014). Madrasah Sebagai Lembaga Pendidikan Islam (Sistem dan Perkembangannya Sebelum dan Sesudah Kemerdekaan). *Rihlah: Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan*, *1*(01), 53–68. https://doi.org/10.24252/rihlah.v1i01.649

Randa, M., & Arsyam, M. (2022). Transformation of Islamic Religious Education in the Revolution 4.0 Era. *International Journal of Science and Society*, *4*(4), 676–686. https://doi.org/10.54783/ijsoc.v4i4.616

Ritonga, M. A. (2022). Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam Indonesia Perkembangan Kurikulum Madrasah serta Dampak Positif dan Negatifnya. *Edu-Riligia: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Islam Dan Keagamaan*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.47006/er.v5i2.12915

Rohman, A. (2022). Implementing Pesantren (Boarding School)-based Curriculum to Preserve Madrasas in the Post-truth Era in Indonesia. *KnE Social Sciences*, *7*(14), 54–63. https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i14.11953

Salim, A., Mukhibat, M., Hayani, A., Wafa', M., & Assalihee, M. (2023). Madrasah as Habitus for Increasing Tolerance in Multi-Religious Society. *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan*, *21*(2), 148–162. https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v21i2.6341

Sari, Y., Zaini, M., & Laili, N. (2020). Eksistensi Madrasah di Era Kontemporer Perspektif Ilmu Pendidikan Islam. *Jurnal Al-Qiyam*, *1*(2), 83–90. https://doi.org/10.33648/alqiyam.v1i2.130

Saylor, J. G., Alexander, W. M., & Lewis, A. J. (1981). *Curriculum Planning for Better Teaching and Learning*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Sudarto. (2023). Madrasah Education Reform In Indonesia. *Maqolat: Journal of Islamic Studies*, *1*(1), 18–24. https://doi.org/10.58355/maqolat.v1i1.4

Suhendra, A. (2020). Posisi Madrasah dan Pesantren dalam Politik Pendidikan di Indonesia. *Darul Ilmi: Jurnal Ilmu Kependidikan Dan Keislaman*, *8*(01), 79–94. https://doi.org/10.24952/di.v8i01.2704

Sukardi, I. (2010). Politik Pendidikan Madrasah di Indonesia Pasca Kemerdekaan: 1945 – 2003. *Ta'dib: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *15*(02), 165–212. https://doi.org/10.19109/td.v15i02.72

Sunaryo, U., Kholid, I., A, M., & Fauzan, A. (2021). The Performance of Madrasah Aliyah Principals in Lampung Selatan Regency, Indonesia. *International Journal of Advanced Research*. https://doi.org/10.21474/ijar01/13105

Sunhaji, S. (2017). Between Social Humanism and Social Mobilization: The Dual Role of Madrasah in the Landscape of Indonesian Islamic Education. *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, *11*(1), 125–144. https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2017.11.1.125-144

Syar'i, A., Hamdanah, H., & Akrim, A. (2020). The Development of Madrasa Education in Indonesia. *Revista Argentina de Clínica Psicológica*, *XXIX*(4), 513–523.

Syarif, F. (2020). The History of Madrasa Development in Indonesia. *Tsaqofah & Tarikh: Jurnal Kebudayaan Dan Sejarah Islam*, *5*(1), 23–40. https://doi.org/10.29300/ttjksi.v5i1.2856

Taba, H. (1962). *Curriculum Development; Theory and Practice*. Harcourt, Brace & World.

Tyler, R. W. (1949). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Retrieved from http://archive.org/details/basicprinciple00tyle.