



## Analysis of Islamic Education System Policies in Indonesia during the Reform Era

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### Abstract

Education plays a key role in determining the future of a nation. Changes in the education subsystem are necessary to keep pace with the development of the times. Islamic education in Indonesia has developed since the arrival of Islam in the 7th century AD, through various methods such as trade, culture, and education. The history of Islamic education policies in Indonesia covers the period from the pre-independence era to the reform era. During the pre-independence period, Islamic education faced discrimination due to colonial political interests. After independence, Islamic education began to receive attention, especially during the Old Order and New Order periods. The positive impact of New Order policies, which were centralized, was the implementation of educational standardization. This was followed by a shift in political policies during the reform era, from centralization to decentralization, which brought changes to Islamic education policies and had a positive impact, including formal recognition of Islamic educational institutions and increased community participation.

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### Introduction

Talking about Education is the same as talking about the future of a country. If the vision of education is not accurate, the welfare and progress of the nation are at stake. Therefore, changes in the education subsystem are completely normal, as they are necessary to keep pace with the development of the times. Good education can improve the standard of living for the nation itself. The Islamic education system in Indonesia has undergone changes and developments over time. History records that Islamic education in Indonesia has been in progress since the arrival of Islam in Indonesia, which, according to the Makkah theory and Maritime theory, occurred in the 1st century AH or 7th century AD (Suryanegara, 2012) <sup>[10]</sup>. The spread of Islam in Indonesia was carried out through various methods, including marriage, trade, culture, medicine, and education. Along with the spread of Islam, there was also a transformation of Islamic education values (Rifai, 2011) <sup>[9]</sup>.

As a great nation, Indonesia has a long history of Islamic education policies, from the pre-independence period to the reform era. During the pre-independence period, the policies of the Dutch or Japanese government toward Islamic education were highly discriminatory, as part of their colonial politics. Discrimination against Islamic education was also due to the colonizers' concerns about the Muslim population, which was the majority in Indonesia. As history shows, Muslims strongly opposed both Dutch and Japanese colonialism (Hoddin, 2020) <sup>[2]</sup>. The end of Dutch and Japanese colonial rule marked a new chapter in the policy of Islamic education in the history of an independent Indonesia. Indonesia's independence, which occurred on August 17, 1945, marked the beginning of a government led by Ir. Soekarno, known as the Old Order, which used Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution as the basis for shaping the national education system, including Islamic education policies (Ismail, 2016) <sup>[3]</sup>. The Old Order government gave serious attention to Islamic education, both in public and private schools. However, due to the country's unstable condition caused by the tug-of-war of interests between state leaders with differing ideologies, the implementation of Islamic education policies was hindered.

This was followed by the New Order government in 1966, continuing the Old Order, led by Soeharto. With the same educational goals as the Old Order, national education system policies, including Islamic education, were implemented in a centralized manner. This policy had both positive and negative impacts on Islamic education. One of the positive impacts was the standardization of madrasah education to match general schools and introducing curriculum reforms (Hoddin, 2020) [2].

It cannot be denied that the development regulations in education in Indonesia are closely linked to Indonesia's political system. The education system can change depending on who the government is, which gives the impression that with every change in president or minister, the education system or curriculum will undergo changes, even if it's just replacing the operational terms in the Indonesian education curriculum or due to large-scale budget projects. Such changes are not problematic if they are based on evaluations of societal needs or adapting to global developments, so that Indonesian society can keep pace with technological advancements and international interactions. Therefore, during the reform era, Indonesia's education system ideally underwent a drastic shift from centralization to decentralization, in line with the political policies of the government at the time. Education policies, which were previously controlled by the central government, were transferred to local governments.

This paper examines the development of Islamic education system policies in Indonesia during the reform era, identifies the opportunities and challenges that arose, and provides recommendations to improve the effectiveness of these policies.

### Methodology

This research is a literature study with a qualitative approach that is descriptive in nature. The researcher describes, reveals, and explains the government's policies on Islamic education during the reform era. It then identifies points of convergence from the collection of primary data obtained, and also involves secondary data, including the researcher's own opinions. Data collection is carried out using documentary techniques for documentary studies. The technique or method of data analysis in this study is content analysis, which is a research methodology that uses a set of procedures to draw valid conclusions from a book or document.

### Results

#### A. Islamic Education Policies in the Reform Era

The reform era, which began in 1998, marked a major change in various aspects of life in Indonesia, including in the field of Islamic education. Previously, Islamic education, particularly madrasahs and pesantren, were often viewed as alternative educational institutions with limited access to policy support and resources. However, the reform opened new opportunities for Islamic education to be recognized, strengthened, and developed as an integral part of the national education system.

This policy change began with the enactment of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System (Sisdiknas). The law also included the Madrasah Law, Pesantren, and Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious and Religious Education. The reform era was also marked by the implementation of education decentralization, with Laws No. 22 of 1999 and No. 32 of 2004 on Government

Decentralization (Tilaar, 2002) [11].

However, this decentralization brought diverse impacts. In areas with sufficient budgets, Islamic education received optimal support, such as the development of modern madrasahs, provision of technological facilities, and quality teacher training. On the other hand, in underdeveloped areas, budget limitations often became an obstacle to improving the quality of Islamic education. Many madrasahs still lack classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and other facilities. This quality gap reflects the challenges faced by policymakers in ensuring the equitable distribution of Islamic education across regions during that time.

Furthermore, the reform of Islamic education policies also focused on curriculum modernization. The Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) from the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) was implemented in madrasahs. The government also made efforts to improve the quality of educators through teacher certification. Although the reform of Islamic education policies has brought many positive changes, significant challenges still persist, such as the quality gap in education between advanced and underdeveloped regions, limited infrastructure, and the low quality of educators. Therefore, synergy between the central government, local governments, communities, and other stakeholders is necessary to ensure that Islamic education can develop evenly and sustainably.

In conclusion, the reform of Islamic education policies has provided stronger recognition of madrasahs and pesantren as part of the national education system. This change has encouraged curriculum modernization, improved teacher quality, and the decentralization of education management. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, educator competency, and the education quality gap remain unresolved issues that need to be addressed.

#### B. The Role of Pesantren and Islamic Educational Institutions in the Reform Era

The Reform Era, which began in 1998, brought significant changes to the world of Islamic education in Indonesia, including for pesantren and other Islamic educational institutions. The reform created a more democratic and open climate, where pesantren, which had long been considered traditional education, began to receive more formal recognition within the national education system. This change was marked by the enactment of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which stated that Islamic education, including pesantren, is an integral part of the education system in Indonesia. Since then, pesantren have not only focused on religious education but have also undergone a transformation towards integrated education. Pesantren began incorporating religious studies with general subjects such as mathematics, science, technology, and foreign languages. This transformation opened up significant opportunities for students to acquire the skills needed in the era of globalization. On the other hand, regulations such as Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Affairs further strengthened the position of pesantren as institutions that provide formal, non-formal, and informal education. With this formal recognition, graduates of pesantren have wider access to pursue higher education or enter the workforce (Muhaimin, 2009) [5].

In its development, many pesantren have modernized to meet the challenges of the times. This modernization process covers several aspects, including the integration of technology into the learning process. Pesantren began

utilizing the internet, digital devices, and e-learning to improve the quality of education. Additionally, pesantren have diversified their educational programs, adding entrepreneurial skills, information technology, and foreign languages, making pesantren graduates more prepared to face the professional world. This modernization has brought pesantren out of the traditional stigma and positioned them as more inclusive and competitive educational institutions. In addition to its role as an educational institution, pesantren also plays a significant social role. Pesantren contribute to shaping the character of the younger generation by strengthening moral values, ethics, and spirituality. Moderate Islamic values are taught to build a tolerant and just society. Moreover, pesantren are also active in community empowerment programs, such as microeconomics, skills training, and health education. This shows that pesantren not only focus on classroom learning but also contribute to social development in their communities. However, despite their significant role, pesantren still face various challenges (U. Zuhdi, 2013) <sup>[16]</sup>.

One of the main challenges is the limitation of facilities, especially for pesantren located in remote areas. Many pesantren still lack basic infrastructure such as proper classrooms, laboratories, and libraries. Additionally, the quality of educators is also a serious issue. Many teachers in pesantren have not received adequate training, causing their competencies to often lag behind those in general education institutions. Another challenge is funding. Most large pesantren still depend on community donations, which often hinders infrastructure development. Amid these challenges, the role of pesantren and Islamic educational institutions is crucial. As institutions that focus not only on knowledge but also on character and moral development, pesantren are key pillars in shaping a quality, ethical, and globally-ready younger generation (Mardhatillah, 2020) <sup>[4]</sup>. With the right policy support, synergy between the government, society, and pesantren managers can further strengthen the strategic role of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia.

### **C. Opportunities and Challenges in the Implementation of Islamic Education Policies in the Reform Era**

The implementation of Islamic education policies in the reform era faces various challenges in achieving the goals of equity and quality improvement. One of the most prominent challenges is the imbalance in the distribution of resources between madrasahs and public schools. Although madrasahs play a crucial role in Islamic education in Indonesia, many teachers in madrasahs still receive lower incentives or allowances compared to those in public schools. This is due to the uneven allocation of funds, where public schools receive more attention from the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture, while madrasahs are under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which has limited funding. The impact is felt not only by teachers who lose motivation but also by students who receive teaching of suboptimal quality (Ridwan, 2014; N. Zuhdi, 2005) <sup>[8, 15]</sup>.

In addition to the issue of incentives, another challenge is the lack of teacher training to adapt to the new competency-based curriculum. The competency-based curriculum policy demands that teachers have adequate pedagogical skills and a deep understanding of the material being taught. However, the reality on the ground shows that many teachers in madrasahs, especially in remote areas, have not received adequate training. The limited availability of continuous

training programs and the difficulty in accessing training locations are major barriers for these teachers. As a result, many teachers struggle to implement the new curriculum effectively, leading to less effective learning and an inability to achieve the desired goals.

Another equally important challenge is the lack of basic facilities in madrasahs, particularly in rural areas. Studies show that about 60% of madrasahs in rural areas still face limitations such as inadequate laboratories, libraries, and classrooms. This lack of infrastructure significantly affects the quality of learning, especially in practical science subjects and student literacy development. These limitations are due to the limited budget for the development of Islamic education infrastructure and the focus of development often being directed more toward urban areas. As a result, students in rural madrasahs experience a gap in access to proper learning facilities compared to students in public schools or urban areas (Tilaar, 2004) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Nevertheless, the reform era also brought several opportunities for the development of Islamic education. The decentralization policy opened up space for local governments to play an active role in the development of madrasahs (N. Zuhdi, 2005) <sup>[15]</sup>. Support from the community and non-governmental organizations has also increased, both in the form of additional funding and assistance in managing madrasahs. Furthermore, the development of information technology offers innovative solutions to overcome the limitations in teacher training and learning resources for students. By utilizing technology, teachers can participate in online training, and students can access a wider range of learning materials (Mardhatillah, 2020) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Given these challenges and opportunities, collaborative efforts between the government, the community, and other stakeholders are essential to ensure the effective implementation of Islamic education policies. Equity in resource distribution, improvement of teacher training programs, and the development of madrasah infrastructure must be prioritized. With these steps, it is hoped that Islamic education in Indonesia will continue to progress and meet the demands of the times in the reform era.

### **D. The Implications of Reform Era Education Policies on the Quality of Islamic Education**

The education policies of the reform era have had a significant impact on the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia. The reform era, which began in the late 1990s, marked the emergence of democratic freedoms, decentralization, and various public policy reforms, including in the field of education. In the context of Islamic education, these policies have had both positive and negative implications for quality improvement. One of the positive implications of reform-era education policies is the strengthening of regional autonomy, which provides madrasahs and other Islamic educational institutions the opportunity to manage their resources more flexibly. Educational decentralization allows local governments to actively support the development of madrasahs through budget allocations and policies that are more attuned to local needs. This has the potential to improve the quality of Islamic education services, particularly in regions that prioritize strengthening religious-based educational institutions (Widjaja, 2003) <sup>[13]</sup>.

Additionally, the reform policies have opened opportunities for collaboration between the public sector and the

community. Many madrasahs have started receiving support from various parties, including non-governmental organizations, educational foundations, and the private sector. With active community participation, madrasahs have the chance to improve infrastructure, provide supporting facilities, and enhance teacher competence through training and ongoing education. This support is crucial for improving the quality of learning in madrasahs.

However, the reform era also brought a number of challenges that have impacted the quality of Islamic education. One of the main challenges is the disparity in access to educational resources. While regional autonomy allows more flexibility in education management, many regions face budgetary constraints, making it difficult to fully prioritize madrasahs. As a result, there is a quality gap between madrasahs in urban areas and those in rural areas. Madrasahs in rural areas still face various limitations, such as inadequate basic facilities, limited access to technology, and low qualifications of educators (M. Zuhdi, 2018) <sup>[14]</sup>.

The reform policy that encourages the implementation of a competency-based curriculum also has a significant impact on the quality of Islamic education. This curriculum requires teachers to have more adaptive and innovative teaching abilities, with an emphasis on developing critical thinking skills and student competencies. However, many madrasah teachers still struggle to implement this curriculum due to insufficient training and supporting facilities. This has resulted in a situation where the learning process in madrasahs has not yet been able to compete fully with public schools. On the other hand, the reform era also provided opportunities for the integration of Islamic values into the national education system. Islamic education, which was previously often viewed as a marginal sector, began to receive greater recognition and a more significant role in national education policies. This integration provided space for madrasahs to strengthen their identity as educational institutions that balance the development of moral, religious, and scientific values (U. Zuhdi, 2013) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Overall, education policies in the reform era have had dual implications for the quality of Islamic education. On one hand, there are opportunities to improve the quality of education through autonomy, community collaboration, and the integration of Islamic values. On the other hand, there are still challenges that need to be addressed, such as disparities in resources, a lack of teacher training, and insufficient supporting facilities (Rahmat, 2020) <sup>[6]</sup>. To ensure that these policies can significantly improve the quality of Islamic education, it is essential to establish synergy between the central government, local governments, and all stakeholders in Islamic education.

### Discussion

The reform era brought significant changes to Islamic education policies in Indonesia, particularly through the formal recognition of madrasahs and pesantrens as integral parts of the national education system. Laws such as Law No. 20 of 2003 and Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 have encouraged curriculum modernization, improvement of educator quality, and decentralization of education management. Pesantrens have also undergone transformation by integrating religious and general knowledge, utilizing technology in learning, and contributing to social development within the community. However, various challenges persist, such as limited facilities, disparities in

education quality between advanced and underdeveloped regions, and low incentives for educators in madrasahs.

This era also opened opportunities for collaboration between the government, communities, and the private sector to support Islamic education. With adequate synergy and support, madrasahs and pesantrens can continue to grow, address challenges related to infrastructure and resources, and provide quality and inclusive education. Islamic education policies during the reform era offer hope for nurturing a young generation that excels academically, possesses strong moral and spiritual values, and meets global demands without losing its Islamic identity.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The Islamic education policy during the reform era, which implements a decentralization system, has brought positive impacts, as evidenced by the formal recognition of Islamic educational institutions and the increased participation of the community. However, issues such as resource disparities and policy implementation remain challenges for this policy. According to the author's recommendations, to improve the effectiveness of Islamic education policies in the reform era, synergy is needed between the central government, local governments, and the community in terms of scope, budget allocation in accordance with the needs for Islamic education in all regions; intensive training for teachers in Islamic educational institutions to enhance their competence; strengthening collaboration between the government, the private sector, and the community to support pesantren and madrasah education; and improving infrastructure in underdeveloped areas to reduce disparities in the quality of education. Thus, the Islamic education system in Indonesia is expected to function effectively and inclusively.

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