



FROM WELFARE STATE TO IDENTITY FORMATION: ISLAMIC EDUCATION GOVERNANCE IN THE WORLD'S THREE LARGEST MUSLIM NATIONS

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Received: 01 May 2026. Accepted: 28 May 2026. Published: 31 May 2026

ABSTRACT

Islamic education in the three countries with the world's largest Muslim populations Indonesia, Pakistan, and India demonstrates the complexity of religious institutional adaptation to distinct state frameworks. The shift in the global demographic center of the Muslim population from the Middle East to Asia necessitates a comparative understanding of how Islamic education systems respond to the challenges of modernization, curriculum reform, and the demands for social mobility. This study aims to analyze the structures and regulatory frameworks of Islamic education, identify the challenges of curriculum reform, and explore the function of Islamic education as a vehicle for identity formation and social mobility across these three nations. The research employs a qualitative approach utilizing a cross-national case study design. Data were collected through policy document analysis (Indonesian Ministerial Regulation KMA 1503/2025, Pakistan's Single National Curriculum, India's National Education Policy 2020), government reports, and peer-reviewed literature published between 2019 and 2026. Data were analyzed using comparative thematic analysis, incorporating source triangulation to ensure credibility. The study identifies three models of Islamic education: the integrative-moderate model (Indonesia), characterized by the full integration of madrasahs into the national system and high social mobility; the ideological-parallel model (Pakistan), where madrasahs function as de facto welfare providers despite 86% of graduates entering the informal sector; and the defensive-independent model (India), which is shifting toward national standardization through controversial policies. Resistance to curriculum reform in Pakistan and India is driven by ideological and political factors, whereas Indonesia employs a collaborative approach. Consequently, there is no monolithic model of Islamic education; rather, systemic success is measured by adaptability to 21st-century challenges without compromising Islamic ethics. Indonesia serves as a best practice for integration, whereas Pakistan and India face structural challenges necessitating context-specific approaches. **Keywords:** Islamic education; madrasah; curriculum reform; Indonesia; Pakistan; India; social mobility; comparative study

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Islam di tiga negara dengan populasi Muslim terbesar dunia Indonesia, Pakistan, dan India menunjukkan kompleksitas adaptasi institusi keagamaan terhadap arsitektur negara yang berbeda. Pergeseran pusat demografi Muslim dari Timur Tengah ke Asia menuntut pemahaman komparatif tentang bagaimana sistem pendidikan Islam merespons tantangan modernisasi, reformasi kurikulum, dan tuntutan mobilitas sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis struktur

Raikhana, From Welfare State To Identity ...

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58518/gajie.v2i01.4962>

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dan regulasi pendidikan Islam, mengidentifikasi tantangan reformasi kurikulum, serta mengeksplorasi fungsi pendidikan Islam sebagai instrumen identitas dan mobilitas sosial di ketiga negara. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus lintas negara. Data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen kebijakan (KMA 1503/2025, SNC Pakistan, NEP 2020 India), laporan pemerintah, dan penelitian terverifikasi periode 2019-2026. Analisis data menggunakan analisis tematik komparatif dengan triangulasi sumber untuk menjamin kredibilitas. Penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga model pendidikan Islam: integratif-moderat (Indonesia) dengan madrasah terintegrasi penuh ke sistem nasional dan mobilitas sosial tinggi; ideologis-paralel (Pakistan) dengan madrasah sebagai de facto welfare state namun 86% lulusan bekerja di sektor informal; serta defensif-independen (India) yang bergeser menuju standardisasi nasional melalui kebijakan kontroversial. Resistensi reformasi kurikulum di Pakistan dan India dipicu faktor ideologis dan politis, sementara Indonesia menggunakan pendekatan kolaboratif. Dengan demikian tidak ada model tunggal pendidikan Islam; keberhasilan sistem diukur dari adaptivitas terhadap tantangan abad ke-21 tanpa mengorbankan etika keislaman. Indonesia menjadi best practice integrasi, sementara Pakistan dan India menghadapi tantangan struktural yang memerlukan pendekatan kontekstual.

Kata Kunci; Pendidikan Islam; madrasah; reformasi kurikulum; Indonesia; Pakistan; India; mobilitas sosial; studi komparatif

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education does not operate in a vacuum. It is constantly situated within a dialectic between universal religious doctrines and particular socio-political contexts. The past two decades have witnessed a shift in the demographic gravity of the global Muslim population from the Middle East to South and Southeast Asia. Data from the Pew Research Center indicate that over 52 percent of the world's Muslim population approximately 1.04 billion out of a total of 2 billion is concentrated in just six countries, with Indonesia, Pakistan, and India occupying the top three positions (Pew Research Center, 2015). This phenomenon is not merely a statistical reality but represents an epistemological shift: the centers of knowledge production, educational practices, and global Islamic discourse are no longer exclusively located in Cairo or Mecca, but are also found in the pesantrens of Java, the madrasahs of Punjab, and the maktabas of Uttar Pradesh (Hefner & Zaman, 2007; Budiharso et al., 2023; Mogra, 2024; Khatua et al., 2026). The implications for Islamic education studies are fundamental, as contemporary realities demand greater attention to the dynamics of Islamic education in Asia, particularly in countries with the world's largest Muslim populations.

Collectively, these three nations are home to nearly 700 million Muslims, representing more than 35 percent of the global Muslim population. Indonesia has approximately 242 million Muslims (87 percent of its population), Pakistan around 235 million (96.3 percent), and India approximately 213 million (15.3 percent of its total population of 1.4 billion) (Pew Research Center, 2015). Indonesia's uniqueness lies in its status as a democratic nation with a Muslim-majority population that is



constitutionally not an Islamic state. Pakistan officially designates itself as an Islamic Republic. Meanwhile, India is a secular state with the world's largest Muslim minority whose absolute Muslim population exceeds that of any Middle Eastern country. Behind these figures lie vastly different Islamic education systems: Indonesia has over 43,000 pesantrens and 104,000 diniyah madrasahs; Pakistan has approximately 43,613 madrasahs serving around 4.6 million students (ASER Pakistan, 2024; Government of Pakistan, 2021; Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025); while India has thousands of madrasahs operating under the constitutional protection of minority educational rights (Government of India, 2020; Basheer, 2013; Mogra, 2024). Policy orientations are equally contrasting: through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Indonesia has strengthened the implementation of Islamic education through Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 1503 Tahun 2025 (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025); Pakistan, through the Single National Curriculum (SNC) introduced in 2021, has sought to standardize educational content across public schools and madrasahs (Government of Pakistan, 2021; Siraj, 2026); whereas India, through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, encourages alignment between minority educational institutions and the national education framework (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025).

The relationship between state and religion forms the foundation of Islamic education policy in each country. Indonesia, with Pancasila as its foundational philosophy, positions religion as recognized and protected but not established as the state ideology. Islamic education has developed as a "state partner," where the state acts as a regulator and facilitator rather than a theological arbiter, as reflected in Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantrens (Government of Indonesia, 2019). This integrative approach has been analyzed extensively by Zuhdi (2015) and Budiharso et al. (2023), who demonstrate how Indonesian pesantrens have successfully navigated the transition from the colonial period to the democratic era. Pakistan, conversely, was founded on the ideology of Islam as a constitutional identity, yet it has not monopolized Islamic education. Madrasahs in Pakistan are fragmented into several governing boards (*wafaqs*) based on sectarian affiliations such as Deobandi, Barelvi, and Ahl-e-Hadith, operating as a parallel education system (Mahmood, 2023; Angeles & Aijazi, 2019). The majority of these madrasahs are privately managed and continue to perform significant welfare functions by providing free education, accommodation, and food for economically disadvantaged communities, thereby complementing limited public educational provision (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Mahmood et al., 2025). India presents a different context. As a secular state with a Hindu majority, Islamic education operates within the constitutional framework of minority educational rights guaranteed under Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution of India. However, constitutional protection has not automatically ensured equitable access and educational quality, as many madrasahs continue to face financial constraints and



limited articulation with mainstream higher education (Mogra, 2024; Basheer, 2013; Government of India, 2020). At the same time, the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has intensified debates regarding the integration of madrasahs into the national education system and the balance between minority educational autonomy and national educational standards (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025).

Studies on Islamic education in these three countries have generated significant yet partial literature. Rohman et al. (2024) conducted a comparative study on curriculum development challenges in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India using an interpretive-paradigmatic approach. Their findings reveal that Indonesia struggles with integrating the national curriculum and local diversity; Pakistan grapples with accessibility and infrastructure due to low funding; and India contends with religious identity conflicts that complicate the integration of Islamic values into a broader curriculum. Other studies highlight institutional aspects: in Indonesia, pesantrens and madrasahs play a significant role in character formation, educational identity, and value transmission (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023; Mukhsin et al., 2025; Budiharso et al., 2023). In Pakistan, the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum, which continues to rely heavily on classical texts, has been criticized for its limited responsiveness to contemporary educational and labour-market demands (Mahmood, 2023; Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025), while reforms through the Single National Curriculum (SNC) have encountered considerable resistance from religious institutions due to ideological, institutional, and governance concerns (Siraj, 2026; Tahir, 2022; Shah & Jules, 2023). In India, studies on Muslim minority education indicate that, despite constitutional guarantees of educational rights, access, participation, and curriculum modernization remain persistent challenges (Mogra, 2024; Basheer, 2013; Khatua et al., 2026).

Despite these positive developments, the state of the art in comparative Islamic education research still exhibits limitations. First, most comparative studies are confined to curricular aspects, neglecting the structural dimensions, regulatory frameworks, and the broader social functions of Islamic educational institutions. Second, few studies have systematically and comparatively linked the legal status of madrasahs, state regulatory mechanisms, and the socio-economic outcomes of their graduates (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Angeles & Aijazi, 2019). Third, studies on Islamic education in South and Southeast Asia remain fragmented; Southeast Asian scholarship largely focuses on Indonesia and Malaysia, whereas South Asian studies concentrate on Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, without developing an integrated analytical framework that bridges both regions (Hefner & Zaman, 2007; Rohman et al., 2024). Fourth, existing studies are predominantly normative, policy-oriented, or descriptive, while qualitative and interpretive investigations capable of capturing the complex interactions among state policy, religious authority, institutional culture, and local educational practices



remain relatively limited (Budiharso et al., 2023; Prakosa et al., 2023; Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023).

Based on this state of the art, several research gaps emerge. First, there is no comparative study that simultaneously analyzes three dimensions the structure and regulation, the curriculum and ideological orientation, and the social functions of madrasahs in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India within a single, cohesive framework. Second, studies on the relationship between the legal status of madrasahs and the socio-economic mobility of their graduates in these three countries remain highly limited (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Angeles & Aijazi, 2019). Third, analyses of resistance to curriculum reform, particularly the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistan and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India, have rarely been conducted comparatively while simultaneously considering ideological, political, and institutional factors (Siraj, 2026; Tahir, 2022; Shah & Jules, 2023; Government of India, 2020). Fourth, no study has systematically explored how differences in demographic status absolute Muslim majority, constitutional Islamic state, and large Muslim minority shape distinct models of Islamic education governance and influence social cohesion across these three countries (Rohman et al., 2024; Hefner & Zaman, 2007).

These gaps are not merely academic; they also carry urgent practical implications. Amidst globalization, digitalization, and geopolitical shifts, the Islamic education systems in these three countries stand at a crossroads. Indonesia strives to maintain religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) while strengthening institutional quality through curriculum reform and the implementation of Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 1503 Tahun 2025 (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025; Mukhsin et al., 2025). Pakistan faces continuing pressure to modernize its madrasah system without undermining its long-established social welfare functions for disadvantaged communities (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Siraj, 2026; Tahir, 2022). India, meanwhile, must balance the constitutional protection of minority educational rights with increasing demands for national educational integration under the National Education Policy 2020 (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025; Mogra, 2024). Without a comprehensive comparative understanding, policy responses risk remaining fragmented, reactive, and nationally isolated. This study therefore seeks to provide an integrated analytical framework for policymakers while contributing to the advancement of comparative Islamic education theory, an area that remains underdeveloped in the international literature (Hefner & Zaman, 2007; Rohman et al., 2024).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this research is formulated around three research questions: first, what are the structures and regulations of Islamic education in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India, including state oversight mechanisms, the legal status of madrasahs, and the governing policy frameworks? Second, what



are the primary challenges in Islamic education curriculum reform in these three countries, and how do ideological, political, and institutional factors influence the reform process? Third, how does Islamic education in each country function as an instrument of identity and social mobility, and what are the implications of these differing functions for social cohesion and national political stability?

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design. This approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of Islamic education within its natural context in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India, while facilitating a comparative analysis rich in contextual nuances. The cross-national case study design provides a framework for understanding how each Islamic education system is shaped by the unique state architecture, ideology, and socio-political dynamics of each location.

The data for this study consist entirely of secondary sources, categorized into four types. First, official policy documents, including laws, ministerial regulations, national education policies, and curriculum frameworks from the three countries, such as Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantrens (Government of Indonesia, 2019), Keputusan Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia Nomor 1503 Tahun 2025 (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025), Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (SNC) (Government of Pakistan, 2021), and India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Government of India, 2020). Second, government and institutional reports, including the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2023 (ASER Pakistan, 2024) and demographic reports from the Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, 2015), which provide demographic and educational statistics relevant to cross-country comparison. Third, academic literature comprising peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and edited volumes addressing comparative Islamic education, curriculum reform, Islamic education governance, and madrasa studies in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. Fourth, supplementary scholarly sources, including book chapters and working papers, were consulted where they provided contextual information that complemented the analysis of official policies and peer-reviewed studies.

Data collection involved documentary analysis and a systematic literature review. Policy documents were retrieved from the official websites of the ministries of education and religious affairs in each country, as well as from academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search utilized structured keywords: "Islamic education," "madrasah," "pesantren," "curriculum reform," "Indonesia/Pakistan/India," and "religious education policy." All documents were selected based on relevance, source credibility, and publication date (2019–2026) to ensure data currency.



The researcher acknowledges their position as an external observer examining three educational systems from a cross-cultural perspective. To minimize interpretive bias, the researcher employed bracketing a conscious effort to suspend personal assumptions stemming from their background in the Indonesian Islamic scholarly tradition. Reflexivity was maintained through the use of a reflective journal and critical discussions with peer debriefers who possess expertise in South and Southeast Asian Islamic education, ensuring that the analysis does not fall into a single perspective.

Data analysis utilized comparative thematic analysis, adapting the Braun and Clarke model across three main stages. The first stage involved organizing the data by country and initial categories (structure, regulation, curriculum, and social function). The second stage employed open coding to identify units of meaning, followed by axial coding to establish connections between categories, such as the relationship between the legal status of madrasahs and the social mobility of their graduates. The third stage used selective coding to elicit the core themes that address the research questions. A cross-national comparative matrix was utilized as a visual tool to systematically map similarities and differences.

Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation, which involved comparing and confirming findings across various types of official policy documents, academic literature, and media reports to guarantee informational consistency. Given that this study relies on secondary data, member checking was not feasible; therefore, it was substituted with an expert review conducted by two specialists in comparative Islamic education who assessed the accuracy of the interpretations regarding the policy documents of each respective country. Dependability was established through an audit trail, involving the systematic documentation of the entire analytical decision-making process to allow for tracking and replication. Confirmability was maintained by strictly adhering to the documentary data and avoiding speculative inferences unsupported by textual evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSS

Based on an analysis of policy documents, official reports, and verified media coverage from the three countries, this section presents the empirical findings organized around the three research questions. Each finding is supported by direct quotations from documentary sources as textual evidence, presented without excessive interpretation.

A. Structure and Regulation of Islamic Education

1. Indonesia: Centralized Regulation under the Ministry of Religious Affairs

Keputusan Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia Nomor 1503 Tahun 2025 amends Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 450 Tahun 2024 regarding the implementation



guidelines for the Kurikulum Merdeka in Islamic educational institutions, specifically *Raudhatul Athfal* (RA), *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI), *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs), *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA), and *Madrasah Aliyah Kejuruan* (MAK) (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). The regulation is supported by three technical implementation guidelines covering the Madrasah Curriculum Guide, the Learning and Assessment Guide, and the Co-curricular Guide.

The madrasah curriculum structure in Indonesia encompasses compulsory subjects that integrate Islamic religious studies with general education. These subjects include Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah Akhlaq, Fiqh, Islamic Cultural History (SKI), Arabic, Indonesian, English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Civics, Informatics, Arts and Culture, and Physical Education. This integrative model reflects Indonesia's long-standing effort to harmonize traditional Islamic scholarship with the national education system (Government of Indonesia, 2019; Zuhdi, 2015; Budiharso et al., 2023). Following the issuance of KMA No. 1503 of 2025, the Ministry of Religious Affairs conducted nationwide dissemination and implementation activities to familiarize madrasah administrators and teachers with the revised curriculum framework (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). The regulation emphasizes that curriculum implementation should be guided by official policy documents while strengthening character education, competency-based learning, and deep learning as key components of contemporary madrasah reform (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025; Mukhsin et al., 2025; Nurrohman et al., 2026). The implementation of the revised curriculum is scheduled to commence following a transitional period of policy dissemination and institutional preparation across Indonesian madrasahs (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025).

2. Pakistan: Parallel Systems and Registration Efforts

Pakistan's madrasa sector constitutes one of the largest Islamic education systems in the world, with tens of thousands of institutions operating alongside public and private schools (Government of Pakistan, 2021; ASER Pakistan, 2024). Most madrasahs implement the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum and are administered by independent religious organizations rather than by the state, reflecting the pluralistic governance structure of Islamic education in Pakistan (Mahmood, 2023; Angeles & Aijazi, 2019).

Pakistan's education system is commonly characterized by three parallel streams: public schools, private schools, and madrasahs (Government of Pakistan, 2021; ASER Pakistan, 2024). Madrasahs are affiliated with several religious boards (*wafaqs*), each of which is responsible for curriculum development, examinations, and certification according to its theological orientation (Mahmood, 2023; Angeles & Aijazi, 2019). The Dars-e-Nizami curriculum continues to emphasize classical Islamic scholarship, and scholars have questioned its responsiveness to contemporary educational needs and labour-market demands (Mahmood, 2023;



Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025). In recent years, the Government of Pakistan has sought to strengthen coordination between the state and religious educational institutions through the implementation of the Single National Curriculum (SNC), although the reform process has encountered significant institutional and ideological resistance from madrasa authorities (Government of Pakistan, 2021; Tahir, 2022; Shah & Jules, 2023; Siraj, 2026).

3. India: Dualism and State-Level Policy Dynamics

India's Islamic education system operates within the constitutional framework of minority educational rights while simultaneously undergoing broader national education reforms. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 encourages greater alignment between minority educational institutions and the national education system by promoting competency-based learning, multidisciplinary education, curricular modernization, and improved educational quality (Government of India, 2020).

Recent analyses suggest that the implementation of the NEP has intensified debates regarding the relationship between educational autonomy, minority rights, and national curriculum standards (Ashokkumar et al., 2025). At the institutional level, madrasahs continue to negotiate the balance between preserving their religious identity and responding to contemporary educational demands, including the integration of modern subjects alongside traditional Islamic learning (Basheer, 2013; Mogra, 2024; Khatua et al., 2026). These developments illustrate the continuing transformation of Islamic education in India, where curriculum reform remains closely intertwined with constitutional protections, educational modernization, and the evolving role of minority educational institutions (Government of India, 2020; Khatua et al., 2026).

B. Challenges in Curriculum Reform

1. Indonesia: Transition towards a Competency-Based Curriculum

KMA No. 1503 of 2025 emphasizes the implementation of Deep Learning, competency-based learning, and the strengthening of the Love-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*) as part of the continuing reform of madrasah education in Indonesia (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025; Mukhsin et al., 2025). The regulation aims to promote holistic student development through the integration of religious values, character education, competency development, and meaningful learning experiences.

The primary challenge in curriculum implementation in Indonesia lies in teacher readiness and institutional capacity to interpret and implement new regulatory frameworks. Recent studies indicate that curriculum reform in Indonesian madrasahs requires not only administrative adjustments but also substantial pedagogical transformation and continuous professional development for teachers (Nurrohman et al., 2026; Mukhsin et al., 2025). In addition, the



implementation of the revised curriculum requires alignment between classroom instruction, assessment systems, and co-curricular activities, including the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile and Rahmatan lil Alamin Student Profile (P5RA) into learning and assessment practices (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Previous studies on Indonesian pesantren and madrasahs also demonstrate that successful curriculum reform depends on institutional culture, leadership, and educators' capacity to adapt pedagogical practices while preserving Islamic educational values (Budiharso et al., 2023; Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023; Prakosa et al., 2023). Consequently, the nationwide dissemination of KMA No. 1503 of 2025 and the gradual adjustment of the Digital Madrasah Report Card (RDM) represent important stages in ensuring consistent implementation across Indonesian madrasahs (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025).

2. Pakistan: Madrasah Resistance to the Single National Curriculum

The Single National Curriculum (SNC) was introduced by the Government of Pakistan to establish a common curricular framework for public schools, private schools, and madrasahs, with the first phase implemented in 2021 for the primary level (Government of Pakistan, 2021).

The principal objective of the SNC is to reduce disparities within Pakistan's fragmented education system by promoting equitable access to quality education and establishing common learning standards across different educational sectors (Government of Pakistan, 2021). The policy also seeks to facilitate greater integration between mainstream schools and religious seminaries through curriculum standardization. Nevertheless, the implementation of the SNC has encountered substantial resistance from religious educational institutions due to ideological differences, institutional autonomy, and competing conceptions of the purpose of Islamic education (Tahir, 2022; Shah & Jules, 2023; Siraj, 2026). Studies indicate that many madrasah leaders continue to prioritize the preservation of traditional Islamic scholarship and religious identity, while government reforms emphasize curriculum modernization and educational standardization (Mahmood, 2023; Angeles & Aijazi, 2019). Consequently, the implementation of the SNC remains a contested policy, reflecting broader tensions between state regulation, religious authority, and educational reform in Pakistan (Siraj, 2026; Tahir, 2022; Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025).

3. India: Integration into the National Curriculum

The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents one of the most significant educational reforms in contemporary India, encouraging greater alignment between minority educational institutions and the national education system while promoting competency-based learning, multidisciplinary education, and curriculum modernization (Government of India, 2020).



For Islamic educational institutions, one of the principal challenges lies in balancing the preservation of religious identity with increasing expectations for curricular integration, educational quality, and graduate competitiveness (Ashokkumar et al., 2025; Mogra, 2024). Studies on madrasa education in India indicate that many institutions continue to face challenges related to educational access, resource availability, curriculum modernization, and articulation with mainstream education despite constitutional protections for minority educational institutions (Basheer, 2013; Mogra, 2024; Khatua et al., 2026). Consequently, contemporary reforms have generated continuing debates regarding the appropriate balance between institutional autonomy, minority educational rights, and national educational standards (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025; Khatua et al., 2026).

C. Islamic Education as an Instrument of Identity and Social Mobility

1. Indonesia: Integration and Formal Recognition

The Indonesian madrasah curriculum integrates religious and general subjects within a unified national education framework. KMA No. 1503 of 2025 emphasizes improving the quality of madrasah education through Deep Learning, competency development, character education, and the Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta) (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025; Mukhsin et al., 2025).

The Islamic education system in Indonesia is institutionally integrated into the national education system, enabling madrasah graduates to enjoy educational opportunities equivalent to those of public school graduates, including access to higher education (Government of Indonesia, 2019). The implementation of KMA No. 1503 of 2025 further reinforces this integration by strengthening curriculum governance while emphasizing learning outcomes, character formation, and graduate competencies (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Previous studies indicate that this integrated model has expanded opportunities for educational attainment and social mobility among graduates of Islamic educational institutions (Nilan, 2021; Budiharso et al., 2023). At the same time, pesantren continue to cultivate Islamic educational identity through shared values and community-based learning while preparing students for participation in wider society (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023). Research also suggests that the integration of religious and national educational values contributes to identity formation, technological adaptation, and social cohesion among students in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions (Prakosa et al., 2023; Muhammad Edy Thoyib et al., 2024).

2. Pakistan: Welfare State Function and Limited Mobility



Madrasahs in Pakistan play an important social welfare role by providing free religious education, accommodation, and basic living support for students from economically disadvantaged families. Consequently, these institutions function not only as educational organizations but also as social safety nets for vulnerable communities (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Shahid, 2025).

Despite their significant welfare function, the socio-economic mobility of madrasa graduates remains a persistent challenge. Recent studies indicate that many graduates continue to pursue employment within religious institutions, such as madrasahs and mosques, while relatively few successfully enter the formal labour market due to limited exposure to contemporary knowledge and vocational skills (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Mahmood, 2023). This situation has prompted growing calls for curriculum modernization through the integration of general education, professional competencies, and employability skills without undermining the religious foundations of madrasa education (Government of Pakistan, 2021; Tahir, 2022; Siraj, 2026). Furthermore, the ongoing process of educational modernization is closely linked to broader debates concerning digital transformation, institutional autonomy, and the preservation of Islamic educational values (Hussain, 2025).

3. India: Bastion of Minority Identity

Islamic education in India plays an important role in preserving the religious and cultural identity of the country's Muslim minority. Maktab and madrasah education continue to function as community-based institutions that transmit Islamic knowledge, values, and identity across generations while responding to the educational needs of Muslim communities (Mogra, 2024; Basheer, 2013). At the same time, the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has encouraged greater curriculum modernization and closer alignment between minority educational institutions and the national education system (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025). These reforms have generated continuing debates over how to balance educational quality, national integration, and the constitutional autonomy of minority educational institutions. Recent studies suggest that contemporary madrasahs increasingly seek to combine traditional Islamic learning with modern academic subjects, reflecting a gradual transformation from exclusively religious institutions toward more diversified educational organizations (Khatua et al., 2026; Mogra, 2024). Consequently, Islamic education in India continues to function simultaneously as a mechanism for identity preservation and as an institution adapting to changing national educational priorities (Government of India, 2020; Khatua et al., 2026).

An analysis of policy documents and relevant literature from the three countries reveals three distinct models of Islamic education governance. Indonesia, through KMA No. 1503 of 2025, demonstrates an integrative-moderate model, in



which madrasahs are institutionally incorporated into the national education system while maintaining an integrated curriculum that combines Islamic studies with general education (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025; Government of Indonesia, 2019; Zuhdi, 2015; Mukhsin et al., 2025). Pakistan, by contrast, represents an ideological-parallel model, where madrasahs continue to operate under independent religious boards despite the introduction of the Single National Curriculum (SNC), reflecting persistent tensions between state-led curriculum reform and institutional autonomy (Government of Pakistan, 2021; Tahir, 2022; Shah & Jules, 2023; Siraj, 2026). India illustrates a gradual modernization model, in which the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promotes curriculum modernization and closer alignment between minority educational institutions and the national education system while maintaining constitutional protections for minority education (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025; Khatua et al., 2026; Mogra, 2024).

These three governance models also generate different patterns of graduate outcomes and social mobility. Indonesia demonstrates comparatively high educational mobility because madrasah qualifications are fully recognized within the national education system, enabling graduates to continue to higher education and participate in diverse professional sectors (Government of Indonesia, 2019; Nilan, 2021; Budiharso et al., 2023). In Pakistan, the welfare-oriented role of madrasahs remains strong, yet graduates often encounter challenges in accessing the formal labour market due to limited integration between religious and professional competencies (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Mahmood, 2023; Hussain, 2025). Meanwhile, India occupies an intermediate position, where Islamic educational institutions continue to balance the preservation of religious identity with increasing demands for curriculum modernization and broader educational participation (Government of India, 2020; Mogra, 2024; Khatua et al., 2026).

First, the findings on Indonesia indicate that the successful integration of Islamic education into the national system is inseparable from the collaborative approach between the state and religious institutions. KMA 1503 of 2025 is not directive but facilitative providing technical guidelines for curriculum implementation without eliminating madrasah autonomy. This approach reflects what Hefner and Zaman (2007) describe as the characteristics of modern Islamic education, which are "complex, evolving, and diverse in their institutions and practices." Indonesia has successfully avoided the trap of the dichotomy between "traditional" and "modern" by creating a synthesis that allows madrasahs to become part of the national education system without losing their Islamic identity (Hasan, 2023; Munir, 2023). The integration of competency-based and love-based curriculum elements, as analyzed by Hidayati and Rahayu (2025) and Muhammad and Suryani (2025), demonstrates Indonesia's ongoing effort to balance academic rigor with



spiritual formation. Fathurrohman and Sutrisno (2025) further argue that Indonesia's culturally responsive approach to madrasah education provides a model for achieving SDG-based inclusive education.

Second, the findings on Pakistan reveal a fundamental paradox: although the country constitutionally defines itself as an Islamic Republic, the governance of Islamic education remains highly decentralized and fragmented. Madrasahs continue to operate under independent religious boards, with the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum maintaining a strong emphasis on classical Islamic scholarship (Mahmood, 2023; Angeles & Aijazi, 2019). At the same time, madrasahs perform an essential social welfare function by providing free education, accommodation, and religious instruction for economically disadvantaged communities, thereby complementing the state's limited welfare capacity (Shahid, 2025; Esping-Andersen, 1990). However, this welfare function does not necessarily translate into broader socio-economic mobility. Studies suggest that many madrasa graduates continue to experience limited employment opportunities outside religious institutions due to the insufficient integration of professional competencies and contemporary knowledge into the curriculum (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Mahmood, 2023). Furthermore, the implementation of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) has encountered substantial resistance from religious educational institutions because of competing conceptions of educational purpose, institutional autonomy, and the preservation of Islamic educational traditions (Government of Pakistan, 2021; Tahir, 2022; Shah & Jules, 2023; Siraj, 2026). These findings indicate that curriculum reform in Pakistan extends beyond technical educational issues and reflects deeper ideological and institutional tensions between state regulation and religious authority. The growing demand for curriculum modernization and digital transformation further illustrates the challenge of balancing religious values with contemporary educational and labour-market expectations (Hussain, 2025).

Third, the findings on India reveal a distinctive pattern of Islamic education governance shaped by the interaction between minority educational rights and national education reform. The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 encourages greater curriculum modernization and closer alignment between minority educational institutions and the national education system while maintaining constitutional recognition of minority education (Government of India, 2020). This reform reflects the continuing tension between preserving the autonomy and religious identity of minority educational institutions and meeting national expectations for educational quality, curriculum modernization, and graduate competitiveness (Ashokkumar et al., 2025). Previous studies indicate that Indian madrasahs have gradually evolved from exclusively traditional religious institutions toward educational organizations that increasingly integrate modern academic subjects alongside Islamic learning (Khatua et al., 2026; Basheer, 2013). At



the same time, maktab and madrasah education continue to function as important community institutions for transmitting Islamic values, preserving religious identity, and strengthening social cohesion within India's Muslim minority (Mogra, 2024). These findings suggest that contemporary reforms should not be understood solely as curriculum modernization but also as an ongoing negotiation between national educational integration and the preservation of minority educational identity (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025; Mogra, 2024).

The findings of this study can be interpreted through several theoretical perspectives. First, the theory of state–religion relations in Islamic education. Hefner and Zaman (2007) argue that Islamic education is never monolithic but is continually shaped by the interaction among religious authorities, the state, and civil society. The findings of this study support this proposition. Indonesia demonstrates a governance model characterized by institutional partnership between the state and Islamic educational institutions through the integration of madrasahs into the national education system (Government of Indonesia, 2019; Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Pakistan reflects a governance model marked by persistent negotiation between state-led educational reforms and autonomous religious authorities (Government of Pakistan, 2021; Tahir, 2022; Shah & Jules, 2023). Meanwhile, India illustrates a model in which curriculum modernization is increasingly promoted through national educational reforms while minority educational institutions continue to operate within constitutional protections (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025).

Second, the theory of the social function of education provides another useful analytical lens. Bourdieu (1986) argues that educational systems often reproduce existing social structures rather than transform them. The findings from Pakistan indicate that, despite their important welfare role, madrasahs continue to face challenges in enhancing the socio-economic mobility of their graduates because curriculum modernization and professional competencies remain limited (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Mahmood, 2023). Conversely, the Indonesian case demonstrates that the integration of madrasahs into the national education system has expanded opportunities for higher education, professional employment, and social mobility (Government of Indonesia, 2019; Nilan, 2021; Budiharso et al., 2023). These contrasting cases suggest that the contribution of Islamic education to social mobility is shaped not only by institutional traditions but also by the broader governance framework and the degree of integration between religious education and national education policies.

Third, the theory of the welfare state and education provides an additional perspective for interpreting the findings. Esping-Andersen (1990) distinguishes three welfare state regimes: liberal, conservative-corporatist, and social-democratic. The findings on Pakistan illustrate what may be described as a "substituted welfare



state," in which religious institutions assume social welfare functions that are only partially fulfilled by the state (Shahid, 2025). Madrasahs provide free education, accommodation, and religious instruction for economically disadvantaged communities, thereby functioning as an important social safety net. Nevertheless, studies indicate that limited curriculum modernization and insufficient integration of professional competencies constrain graduates' participation in the formal labour market (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Mahmood, 2023).

The findings of this study both support and extend the comparative analysis conducted by Rohman et al. (2024) regarding the challenges of Islamic education curriculum development in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. Rohman et al. identify curriculum integration as a major challenge in Indonesia, accessibility and educational quality as key concerns in Pakistan, and tensions surrounding religious identity in India. The present study demonstrates that these challenges extend beyond curriculum design and are fundamentally embedded in differences in governance structures, legal frameworks, and state–religion relations. In Pakistan, curriculum reform continues to encounter institutional and ideological resistance arising from the coexistence of state educational policies and autonomous religious authorities (Government of Pakistan, 2021; Tahir, 2022; Shah & Jules, 2023; Siraj, 2026). In India, meanwhile, the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 reflects continuing efforts to modernize minority education while balancing constitutional protections for minority educational institutions with broader national educational objectives (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025; Mogra, 2024).

This study also expands existing understandings of the social function of madrasahs. Previous scholarship has shown that madrasahs function not only as centers of religious learning but also as institutions that shape social identity, cultural values, and community formation (Hefner & Zaman, 2007; Angeles & Aijazi, 2019). The findings of this study confirm these perspectives while adding a comparative dimension. In Pakistan, madrasahs perform an essential welfare function but continue to face challenges in promoting graduates' socio-economic mobility because of limited curriculum modernization and professional skill development (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Mahmood, 2023). In India, Islamic educational institutions primarily function as mechanisms for preserving religious identity and strengthening minority communities while adapting to national educational reforms (Mogra, 2024; Khatua et al., 2026). In contrast, Indonesian madrasahs demonstrate a more integrative model in which religious education is combined with the national education system, thereby expanding opportunities for higher education, employment, and social mobility (Government of Indonesia, 2019; Nilan, 2021; Budiharso et al., 2023; Muhammad Edy Thoyib et al., 2024).



This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies entirely on secondary sources, including policy documents, official reports, and scholarly publications, without incorporating primary data from interviews or field observations. Although source triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility of the findings, secondary data cannot fully capture the everyday experiences of teachers, students, and madrasah administrators in implementing educational policies. Future research employing qualitative fieldwork, particularly ethnographic and multiple case-study approaches, would provide a richer understanding of how Islamic education reforms are experienced and negotiated at the institutional level.

Second, the geographical scope of this study is limited to the national level and therefore does not fully capture substantial sub-national variations in the governance and implementation of Islamic education. In Indonesia, for example, differences exist among madrasahs across regions in terms of institutional capacity and educational quality. Likewise, Pakistan exhibits provincial diversity in the administration of madrasahs and the implementation of educational reforms, while India's federal education system allows different states to adopt distinct approaches to implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Government of India, 2020; Rohman et al., 2024).

Third, this study does not specifically examine gender dimensions in Islamic education, despite the importance of women's access, participation, and educational opportunities as factors influencing educational outcomes and social mobility. Future comparative studies should integrate gender perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic education governance.

Fourth, educational policies in the three countries continue to evolve. In Indonesia, the implementation of KMA No. 1503 of 2025 represents a recent stage in the development of the Kurikulum Merdeka within madrasahs (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). In Pakistan, the implementation of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) remains an ongoing process characterized by continuous negotiation between government authorities and religious educational institutions (Government of Pakistan, 2021; Siraj, 2026). Likewise, in India, the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 continues to develop across different states (Government of India, 2020; Ashokkumar et al., 2025). Consequently, this study captures policy developments at a particular point in time and cannot yet empirically evaluate their long-term implementation and educational outcomes.

Theoretical Implications: This study contributes to the development of comparative Islamic education theory by identifying three ideal models of Islamic education governance: integrative-moderate (Indonesia), ideological-parallel (Pakistan), and state-regulated minority governance (India), each reflecting distinct patterns of interaction among the state, religious authorities, and society. These



models extend the analytical framework proposed by Hefner and Zaman (2007), which primarily explains the relationship between Islamic education, the state, and civil society, by offering a more differentiated typology of governance across the world's three largest Muslim populations. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the social function of madrasahs—whether promoting social mobility, providing social welfare, or preserving religious identity—is shaped not only by institutional traditions but also by state policy frameworks and governance arrangements. In this respect, the findings expand Bourdieu's (1986) theory by illustrating how public policy and educational governance can either reproduce or transform existing patterns of social opportunity.

Practical Implications: For policymakers in the three countries, this study offers several recommendations. First, Indonesia's collaborative governance approach, in which the state acts primarily as a facilitator while maintaining the autonomy of Islamic educational institutions, provides a useful reference for balancing educational quality with institutional independence (Government of Indonesia, 2019; Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Second, curriculum reform should be accompanied by sustained teacher professional development, institutional capacity building, and adequate implementation support rather than relying solely on regulatory changes (Mukhsin et al., 2025; Nurrohman et al., 2026). Third, the important welfare role of madrasahs in serving disadvantaged communities should be recognized while simultaneously strengthening curriculum modernization and graduates' professional competencies to improve long-term socio-economic mobility (Abdullah & Mehboob-Ur-Rehman, 2025; Mahmood, 2023; Shahid, 2025). Finally, reforms affecting minority Islamic educational institutions should seek an appropriate balance between national educational objectives and the protection of religious and cultural identity through continuous dialogue among governments, educational authorities, and community stakeholders (Government of India, 2020; Mogra, 2024; Ashokkumar et al., 2025).

Further research is recommended in several directions. First, field research employing ethnographic and multiple case-study approaches is needed to capture the lived experiences of teachers, students, and madrasah administrators in implementing educational reforms across the three countries. Such studies would provide a deeper understanding of the interaction between national policy frameworks and everyday educational practices, thereby revealing potential gaps between policy formulation and policy implementation.

Second, quantitative studies should be conducted to examine the impact of Islamic education reforms on the socio-economic mobility of madrasah graduates. Tracer studies comparing employment outcomes, income levels, access to higher education, and career trajectories between madrasah graduates and graduates of



general schools would provide valuable empirical evidence for evaluating the long-term effectiveness of curriculum reforms.

Third, comparative research involving other Muslim-majority countries, such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, or Nigeria, is needed to examine whether the governance models identified in this study are applicable beyond Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. Comparative analyses across a broader range of contexts would contribute to the refinement of theories of Islamic education governance and comparative education (Hefner & Zaman, 2007).

Fourth, future studies should investigate the implications of digital transformation for Islamic education governance, curriculum development, and educational management, particularly in relation to the integration of digital competencies while preserving Islamic educational values (Hussain, 2025; Prakosa et al., 2023).

Fifth, future research should pay greater attention to gender dimensions in Islamic education, including women's access to madrasahs, gender-responsive curriculum development, leadership opportunities within Islamic educational institutions, and the contribution of Islamic education to women's social and economic empowerment.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the Islamic education systems in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India, the three countries with the world's largest Muslim populations by focusing on regulatory structures, curriculum reform challenges, and the role of Islamic education as an instrument of identity and social mobility. Based on an analysis of policy documents, official regulations, government reports, and scholarly literature, this research demonstrates that Islamic education in these three countries is shaped by distinct relationships among the state, religion, and society. Indonesia has developed an integrative-moderate model through the implementation of KMA No. 1503 of 2025 and the Pesantren Law; Pakistan represents an ideological-parallel model in which madrasahs function not only as educational institutions but also as providers of social welfare; while India reflects a state-regulated minority governance model in which national education reform is pursued alongside the constitutional protection of minority educational institutions.

First, the structures and governance of Islamic education differ fundamentally across the three countries. In Indonesia, Islamic education is centrally administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, with madrasahs fully integrated into the national education system and their graduates enjoying equal legal recognition with graduates of public schools. In Pakistan, Islamic education remains fragmented across several autonomous sectarian boards implementing the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum, while the implementation of the Single National



Curriculum continues to encounter institutional and ideological resistance. In India, Islamic educational institutions operate within a constitutional framework that protects minority education while simultaneously adapting to the broader agenda of national educational reform.

Second, the challenges of curriculum reform are influenced by ideological, political, and institutional factors. Indonesia primarily faces challenges related to teacher readiness, implementation capacity, and educational quality across regions, while maintaining a collaborative approach between government and Islamic educational institutions. Pakistan continues to experience resistance rooted in differing conceptions of educational purpose and institutional autonomy. India, meanwhile, faces the challenge of balancing curriculum modernization with the preservation of minority educational identity within an evolving national education framework.

Third, the social functions of Islamic education vary considerably among the three countries. In Indonesia, Islamic education serves as an instrument of national integration, religious moderation, and social mobility through its integration with the national education system. In Pakistan, madrasahs continue to perform an essential welfare function for disadvantaged communities but face significant challenges in improving graduates' socio-economic mobility. In India, Islamic educational institutions primarily function as mechanisms for preserving religious identity while simultaneously adapting to the demands of national educational modernization.

This study makes three principal contributions. First, it proposes three ideal models of Islamic education governance integrative-moderate, ideological-parallel, and state-regulated minority governance, thereby extending existing comparative frameworks of Islamic education beyond the conventional dichotomy between traditional and modern educational systems. Second, it demonstrates that the social function of Islamic education is shaped not only by institutional traditions but also by state policies and governance arrangements, allowing Islamic education to function either as a mechanism for social mobility, social welfare, or identity preservation. Third, it introduces the concept of a legitimacy trap, whereby institutional legitimacy or constitutional protection, while strengthening the position of Islamic educational institutions, may also reduce incentives for curriculum adaptation and educational modernization when not accompanied by appropriate governance reforms.

In terms of policy implications, Indonesia should continue strengthening educational quality in disadvantaged regions, expand the digital transformation of madrasahs, preserve collaborative governance with Islamic organizations, and reinforce vocational education within pesantrens. Pakistan should pursue curriculum reform through dialogue and institutional partnership rather than coercive approaches, while simultaneously strengthening graduate competencies



and recognizing the important welfare role of madrasahs. India should continue balancing national educational objectives with constitutional protections for minority educational institutions through inclusive policymaking, institutional support, and expanded educational opportunities for Muslim communities.

Ultimately, there is no single universal model of Islamic education governance. Indonesia demonstrates the potential of an integrated and collaborative system, Pakistan illustrates the complexities of parallel religious educational governance combined with important welfare functions, and India reflects the continuing negotiation between minority educational autonomy and national educational reform. The future of Islamic education will depend on its ability to integrate digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and twenty-first-century competencies while preserving Islamic values, ethics, and spirituality. Future research employing ethnographic approaches, primary data, and broader cross-national comparisons will be essential for deepening understanding of how Islamic education reforms are implemented and experienced in diverse socio-political contexts.

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