

## CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC STUDIES IN INDONESIA: AN INSIGHT AND INTERSECTION

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### **Abstrak**

*Artikel ini mengkaji perkembangan Studi Islam di Indonesia dari waktu ke waktu, dengan fokus pada topik-topik seperti bagaimana pemerintah Indonesia menanggapi subjek ini, peran yang dimainkan oleh pendidikan, masalah-masalah baru yang dihadapi oleh bidang ini, dan bagaimana globalisasi berdampak pada bidang ini. Hal-hal berikut ini akan dibahas sebagai bagian dari artikel ini: asal-usul dan evolusi bidang akademis Studi Islam; pengaruh kebijakan publik terhadap perkembangan Studi Islam; berbagai organisasi keagamaan yang bertanggung jawab atas penyebaran ajaran Islam; strategi penelitian dan jaringan keilmuan dalam Studi Islam di Indonesia; pengaruh pendidikan terhadap Studi Islam; dan berbagai masalah mendesak yang saat ini dihadapi bidang akademis tersebut.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Studi Islam, Islam, Indonesia, Studi Agama.*

### **Abstract**

*This article investigates the development of Islamic Studies in Indonesia over time, focusing on such topics as how the Indonesian government has responded to the subject, the role that education has played, the new problems that the field faces, and how globalization has impacted the field. The following will be discussed as part of this article: the origins and evolution of the academic field of Islamic Studies; the influence that public policy has had on the development of Islamic Studies; the various religious organizations that are responsible for the dissemination of Islamic*

*teachings; research strategies and scholarly networks in Indonesian Islamic Studies; the influence that education has had on Islamic Studies; and the many urgent issues that are currently confronting the academic field.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic Studies, Islam, Indonesia, Religious Studies.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic Studies in Indonesia has a long and varied history and can be best understood in terms of its development through state policies, religious institutions, scholarship networks, roles of education, emerging issues, and globalization<sup>1</sup>. This article explores the evolution of Islamic Studies in Indonesia throughout the past centuries, describing the origins, state policies, religious organizations, educational institutions, and emerging issues in Islamic Studies in Indonesia. Then, the article will consider the impacts of globalization and media on the development of Islamic Studies in Indonesia.

First of all, let us revisit the historical development of Islamic studies in Indonesia. Islam first came to Indonesia in the 13th century when Muslim traders traveled to the island nation. Indonesian scholars believe that Islam began to take a more permanent form in the 15th century when Muslim rulers established Islamic courts. From the 15th to the 19th century, Islamic education was initially based on the religious sciences of law and theology<sup>2</sup>, with a great emphasis on rote memorization

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<sup>1</sup> Mukrimin, "Islamic Parties and the Politics of Constitutionalism in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 6, Iss. 2 (2012): 367–390. <https://jiis.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/JIIs/article/view/114>

<sup>2</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Traditionalist and Islamist Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia," *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages*, (Amsterdam: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 217–246. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789048501380.009>. Robert W. Hefner, "Islam and

and study of the Qur'an<sup>3</sup>. As Indonesia continued to absorb and expand upon Islamic teachings, more scholarly works and venues for Islamic Studies began to appear. At the beginning of the 20th century, modern educational systems began to evolve and existing religious organizations such as Islamic universities and *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding schools) began to focus more intently on academic Islamic Studies programs. Collectively, this period marks the beginning of Indonesia's modern period of Islamic Studies.

Furthermore, it is crucial to delve deeper into the historical roots of Islamic Studies in Indonesia, which can be traced back to ancient kingdoms existing before the advent of Islam in the archipelago. During this earlier period, Arabic and Islamic studies were actively integrated into the educational curriculum within the royal courts of the sultanates. As Islam gradually made its way to the archipelago, its influence experienced a rapid and widespread expansion throughout the region. This transformative phase not only brought about the dissemination of Islamic teachings but also

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Institutional Religious Freedom in Indonesia," *Religions*, Vol. 12, Iss. 6 (2021). <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/6/415>

<sup>3</sup> Vincent J Houben, "Southeast Asia and Islam," *THE ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 588, Iss. 1 (2003): 149–170.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0002716203588001010>; Zaid Eyadat, "Islams: Between Dialoguing and Mainstreaming," *Sage Journals: Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 38, Iss. 4–5 (2012), 507–516 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453711435646>; M. Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community," *al-jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (2017): 391–426. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.391-426>; Julia D. Howell, "Muslims, the New Age and Marginal Religions in Indonesia: Changing Meanings of Religious Pluralism," *Sage Journals: Social Compass*, Vol. 52, Iss. 4 (2005): 473–493. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768605058151>.

established a comprehensive understanding and application of Islamic studies through religious doctrines and legal frameworks. Subsequent rulers played a pivotal role in fortifying the implementation of Islamic education and legal systems. This concerted effort resulted in the formation of various educational institutions, including Islamic universities, madrasahs, and religious associations, which became integral components of the educational landscape across the entire region. The enduring impact of these developments continues to shape the study and practice of Islamic Studies in Indonesia to this day.<sup>4</sup>

Then, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modern Islamic education began to take shape in Indonesia with the introduction of secular curricula in Islamic schools and universities<sup>5</sup>. Islamic scholars from many places paved the way for a modern Islamic educational system. The scholars set up curricula and methodologies for teaching Islamic studies such as Qur'anic studies, Fiqh or Islamic law, *aqidah* (Islamic belief), and philosophy. During this time, there was an increased emphasis on integrating Islamic teachings with principles of nationalism to gain more state-sanctioned acceptance of the faith. This resulted in an upsurge of organizations and universities dedicated to promoting Islamic republicanism, including the State Islamic Institutes in many provinces, Indonesia's first Islamic colleges, institutes, and

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<sup>4</sup> John T. Sidel, "It Takes a Madrasah?": Habermas Meets Bourdieu in Indonesia," *South East Asia Research*, Vol. 9, Iss. 1 (2001): 109–122. <https://doi.org/10.5367/000000001101297342>.

<sup>5</sup> John T. Sidel, "It Takes a Madrasah?": Habermas Meets Bourdieu in Indonesia." Minako Sakai, "Still Remembering the Origins: The Continuity of Syncretic Islamic Practice among the Gumay (Gumai) in South Sumatra, Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 45, Iss. 131 (2017): 44–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1274561>

universities<sup>6</sup>. These educational institutions provided courses related to Islamic history, philosophy, and laws, and were an important step in the development of Islamic Studies in the country.

In the post-independence period of the 1950s, Indonesian Muslim scholars began proposing the idea of an Islamic education system to bridge the gap between mathematics, science, and religious studies. This sparked a massive movement towards introducing Islamic-based curricula in elementary and secondary schools. By the late 1980s, there were several Islamic state schools and madrasahs operating across the nation<sup>7</sup>.

Today, there is an even wider array of universities and other institutions providing a variety of courses and degrees in Islamic Studies, ranging from basic courses in Islamic history and philosophy to more advanced courses in Qur'anic studies, Islamic law, and Islamic ethics.<sup>8</sup> These institutions, along with an ever-growing body of Muslim authors, publications, and content creators, contribute greatly to the continuing development of Islamic Studies within Indonesia.

In recent decades, Islamic Studies within Indonesia have progressed significantly due to advances in the country's

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<sup>6</sup>Karel Steenbrink, "Academic Study of Indonesian Islam: A Biographical Account, 1970-2014," *al-jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (2015): 337-365. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2015.532.337-365>; Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact, and Prospects for the World Community."

<sup>7</sup> Siti Asiah T., "Transformation of Islamic Education Quality through Regional Autonomy in Bone Bolango Regency, Gorontalo Province," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2017): 51. <https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/tarbiyah/index.php/JPI/article/view/1454>

<sup>8</sup> Claire Marie Hefner, "Model-Model Prestasi: Perempuan Muslim dan Otoritas Agama di Madrasah Modernis di Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (2016): 564-582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2016.1229266>

education system and the establishment of various universities and institutions. As a result, courses and degrees in Islamic Studies have grown in popularity among Indonesian students. An array of colleges and universities, from public colleges and universities to universities in across the world, offer a variety of Islamic Studies courses<sup>9</sup>.

At the basic level, Islamic Studies courses within Indonesia cover a range of topics, such as Islamic history, philosophy, and an introduction to the Qur'an. Sub-fields of these basic courses typically include Islamic law, Islamic morals, Islamic culture, and Islamic education. These introductory courses provide a strong foundation for further study in both classical and contemporary Islamic Scholarship. A movement towards higher levels of Islamic Studies education has been seen most notably in Indonesia's recently developed scientific-based Islamic Studies master and doctoral level degree programs<sup>10</sup>. These programs typically expand upon the core Islamic Studies materials at the undergraduate level, incorporating detailed treatments of primary texts in the field of Islamic Law, Islamic ethics, and Islamic history.

The development of Islamic Studies programs and courses within Indonesia has been positively impacted by a growing number of Muslim authors, publications, and content creators.

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<sup>9</sup> Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community". M. Amin Abdullah, "Religion, Science and Culture: An Integrated, Interconnected Paradigm of Science," *al-jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2014): 175–203. <https://aljamiah.or.id/index.php/AJIS/article/view/30>

<sup>10</sup> Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community"; Sidel, and Minako Sakai, "Still Remembering the Origins: The Continuity of Syncretic Islamic Practice among the Gumay (Gumai) in South Sumatra, Indonesia; Karel Steenbrink, "Academic Study of Indonesian Islam: A Biographical Account, 1970-2014."

With numerous Islamic writers and literary figures contributing to the increasing understanding of the Islamic faith within Indonesia, the development of Islamic Studies education in the country has significantly progressed over the years.<sup>11</sup> For example, through a variety of colleges, universities, and institutions, Islamic Studies within Indonesia continues to develop and expand each year, offering students an array of courses and degrees that span a broad spectrum of real-world topics.<sup>12</sup> With advances in online technology, students from all over the world have the opportunity to take part in a virtual learning ecosystem and gain knowledge about the Islamic faith from the comfort of their own homes.

## DISCUSSION

### STATE POLICIES AND THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

Indonesia is a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, and its state policies have sought to promote religious understanding and tolerance, as well as growth and development in the Islamic faith community. To this end, Indonesia has undertaken various measures to support and cultivate Islamic religious organizations and madrasahs (Islamic schools). These measures have included making provisions for government-funded scholarships and grants for Islamic organizations and madrasahs, such as the establishment of the Directorate General of Islamic Education in 1976, which was tasked with issuing funds to Islamic colleges and providing assistance in

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<sup>11</sup> Florian Pohl, "Negotiating Religious and National Identities in Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Education," *Cross Currents*, Vol. 61, Iss. 3 (2011): 399–414. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-3881.2011.00189.x>

<sup>12</sup> Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community." M. Amin Abdullah, "Religion, Science and Culture: An Integrated, Interconnected Paradigm of Science," *al-jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2014): 175–203. <https://aljamiah.or.id/index.php/AJIS/article/view/30>

other matters.<sup>13</sup> Other measures taken to promote and strengthen Islamic organizations and madrasahs include allowing local autonomous religious authorities to issue certificates of qualifications and creating special tax exemptions for religious organizations.<sup>14</sup> These policies have greatly contributed to the growth of the Islamic faith in the country, providing Islamic scholars and students with the resources and support they need to spread and promote their faith.

Since independence in 1945, Indonesia's government has sought to reconcile Islamic values with those of democracy and modernity. Throughout Indonesian history, various state policies have played a significant role in overriding religious ideology and shaping the country's Islamic Studies landscape.<sup>15</sup> For instance, under President Sukarno, Islamic Studies courses were not compulsory in schools, and instead, the government focused more heavily on secular education. To this day, Indonesia's government continues to tightly regulate the teaching of certain Islamic schools of thought, while Indonesian state policies have also promoted the establishment of various religious organizations and madrasahs, which have all played an important role in the propagation of Islam and Islamic Studies.

The Indonesian government has played a key role in influencing the development of Islamic Studies through various state policies and regulations. In the 1950s and 1960s, the government implemented the nationalist ideology of '*khutbah Indonesia*' (Indonesia's Muslim Friday sermon), which aimed to take aspects of Islamic teachings and adapt them to modern Indonesian society. This led to the creation of paramilitary

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<sup>13</sup> Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact, and Prospects for The World Community."

<sup>14</sup> M. Amin Abdullah, "Religion, Science and Culture: An Integrated, Interconnected Paradigm of Science."

<sup>15</sup> Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact, and Prospects for The World Community."



organizations that would indoctrinate youth and promote Islamic principles. In addition, state policies have also promoted the establishment of various religious organizations and madrasahs, which have all played an important role in the propagation of Islam and Islamic Studies.

## **RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AS AGENTS OF ISLAMIC STUDIES IN INDONESIA**

Religious institutions in Indonesia have made significant contributions as agents of Islamic Studies. The religious institutions not only serve as platforms for the spread and promotion of Islamic knowledge but also play a crucial role in facilitating instruction and research on diverse areas of Islam. Moreover, they play a crucial role in offering guidance to the Muslim population in Indonesia regarding things related to their religious beliefs and way of life.

Religious institutions fulfill a crucial function in the dissemination of knowledge of Islam, employing various means such as lectures, seminars, and other educational activities to enlighten individuals about its principles and doctrines. As an illustration, numerous mosques provide educational programs centered around subjects such as the Quran or Hadith. These activities contribute to the enhancement of religious awareness among Indonesians on their respective beliefs and practices, hence fostering improved comprehension and harmony among diverse communities residing within the country's boundaries.

Furthermore, religious institutions serve as centers for scholarly inquiry in the field of Islamic studies, facilitating access to valuable resources such as libraries housing works authored by esteemed scholars from many geographical backgrounds. Additionally, these institutions provide access to periodicals that address contemporary challenges confronting the Muslim community. This facilitates the establishment of a favorable setting wherein researchers can obtain dependable sources to produce scholarly articles or conduct experiments, hence contributing to the

attainment of more precise findings about certain subjects within this domain of inquiry.

Furthermore, religious institutions have exerted a significant influence on the advancement of education, culture, and society by making substantial contributions to both formal and informal modes of learning. Religious institutions, such as *madrasas* (educational institutions focused on Islamic teachings), *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding schools), and UIN or IAIN or STAIN, offer students a conducive setting to acquire knowledge about Islam under the guidance of competent instructors. This form of education can prove advantageous for individuals who aim to enhance their comprehension or engagement with their religious beliefs, concurrently equipping them with practical life competencies that facilitate their adeptness in navigating contemporary society. Religious institutions in Indonesia have not only provided educational avenues but have also served as custodians of traditional values within the society. This is achieved through the transmission of oral histories and cultural practices across generations, primarily through sermons delivered at regular congregational assemblies and special occasions such as the Eid al-Fitr festivities observed during the month of Ramadan. Through this practice, religious institutions aim to maintain the connection of students and young individuals with the fundamental principles of their faith, especially in situations when they reside far from their place of origin or have limitations in accessing alternative sources of knowledge about Islam due to scarce resources in other locations.

Another crucial aspect to consider is the significant role played by religious institutions in influencing the lives of Muslims in Indonesia. These institutions not only provide educational resources and impart moral precepts, but also foster a sense of belonging among their members. The absence of assistance provided by mosques and other religious organizations would provide challenges for communities in maintaining a robust

religious connection, hence impeding the sustainability of traditions that are passed down from one generation to the next.

In short, religious institutions in Indonesia have played a substantial role in advancing scholarly pursuits about Islamic studies, hence facilitating the reconciliation of societal disparities among individuals with diverse religious beliefs and cultural origins within the nation.

## **SCHOLARSHIP NETWORKS IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC STUDIES**

To gain a broader understanding of Islamic studies in Indonesia, it is important to understand the various scholarship networks that have emerged over time. Scholars of Islamic studies often collaborate through informal networks such as conferences, journals, and publications, as well as through formal academic collaborations between institutes and universities. Such networks have played a major role in the dissemination and popularization of Islamic Studies in Indonesia. The networks of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia are composed of individuals and organizations, who typically focus on specific topics and learn from each other in the pursuit of advanced knowledge. Most scholars in Islamic Studies are connected to various Islamic universities, religious organizations, and Islamic societies, where educational activities and courses provide an important platform for disseminating knowledge. Moreover, educational institutions have also played a crucial role in the development of Islamic Studies, as universities provide a platform for students to further their studies, get involved in research projects, and build relationships with leading scholars.

In Indonesian universities, Islamic Studies are generally conducted through the Islamic Faculties, which offer a variety of educational programs and activities relating to the discipline.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact, and Prospects for The World Community."

These faculties typically provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the Islamic faith, including studies on the Quran, Hadiths, and Islamic law. The faculties also offer courses in religious and social studies, as well as courses related to the history, culture, and languages of Islam. These faculties also provide students with the opportunity to major in Islamic Studies, to obtain qualifications to become professional Islamic scholars.<sup>17</sup>

Islamic Studies is an academic field of study that examines and explores aspects of the Islamic faith, its teachings, and its culture. At Indonesian universities, Islamic Studies are mainly offered through their Islamic Faculties – which are devoted to the exploration and discussion of various Islamic topics. The Islamic Faculties provide students with the opportunity to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Islamic faith and its teachings. As part of the program, students study the Quran, Hadiths, and Islamic law. Islamic Faculties also offer courses on religion and social studies, as well as courses related to Islam's history, culture, and languages. Such courses not only offer students a deeper insight into the Islamic faith but also teach them to think critically and understand its history. Additionally, the Islamic Faculties allow students to major in Islamic Studies. By completing the courses and gaining qualifications, graduates can become qualified Islamic scholars.

In the educational programs, Islamic Faculties also host a variety of activities such as lectures, seminars, and conferences. They serve as a platform for learned individuals to discuss and debate Islamic topics. These activities held by the Islamic Faculties are important as they integrate education and deep thinking, allowing open dialogue and discussion of Islamic issues from an informed perspective. Therefore, the Islamic Faculties at Indonesian universities play a pivotal role in educating students about the Islamic faith and its teachings. By providing

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<sup>17</sup> Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact, and Prospects for The World Community."

comprehensive educational programs and running activities, the faculties are helping to ensure that the Islamic faith is better understood by more people.

Finally, Islamic societies and non-profit organizations, such as the Indonesian Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* - MUI), often invest in Islamic education and scholarship, as well as providing Islamic-related services. These organizations work to promote an understanding of Islamic teachings and practices while providing Muslim communities with social, religious, and academic outreach activities. Indonesian Ulama Council, for example, invests in various educational initiatives, such as scholarship schemes, university courses, and publications related to Islamic matters.

Ultimately, the networks of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia are highly interconnected, combining the efforts of multiple entities. The involvement of government institutions, universities, and non-profit organizations have all played an important role in the development of Islamic Studies in Indonesia, providing a platform for advanced knowledge and education.

## CONCLUSION

Islamic Studies in Indonesia has a long history and has been shaped by various factors. State policies, religious institutions, scholarship networks, and educational activities all play a substantial role in influencing the development of Islamic Studies in Indonesia and have been recently driving its development. These elements have all contributed to the advancement of Islamic Studies in Indonesia. Crucially, Islamic Studies in Indonesia has been strongly influenced by various factors such as state policies, religious institutions, scholarship networks, and educational activities.

A combination of historical factors, global influences, and recent progress have enabled a sustained increase in Islamic Studies in Indonesia. State policies, religious institutions,

scholarship networks, and global media have all contributed to its development and advancement.

To sum up, Islamic Studies in Indonesia has been subject to a variety of forces, ranging from state policies to religious institutions and globalization. Media has also been a major factor in the growth of Islamic Studies in Indonesia. All in all, Islamic Studies in Indonesia has seen significant growth due to the influence of a wide range of factors, including state policies, scholarly networks, educational activities, and the influx of globalization and media. Taking all of the above into account, it is clear that Islamic Studies in Indonesia has been strongly shaped by a range of factors such as state policies, religious institutions, scholarship networks, educational activities, and globalization and media. Thus, Islamic Studies in Indonesia has seen considerable growth over the years.

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