**Faith, Power, and Policy: Rethinking Islamic Political Dynamics in Shaping Non-Formal Education through Multi-Stakeholder Partnership**

**Ardhana Januar Mahardhani\*1, Hadi Cahyono2, Subangun3, Laela Rosidha4, Shiva Amanda Kirana Kesuma5**

1(Department of Pedagogy, Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, Jalan Budi Utomo 10 Ponorogo, Indonesia, [ardhana@umpo.ac.id](mailto:ardhana@umpo.ac.id))

2(Department of Civic, Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, Jalan Budi Utomo 10 Ponorogo, Indonesia, [hadicahyono@umpo.ac.id](mailto:hadicahyono@umpo.ac.id))

3(Department of Civic, Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, Jalan Budi Utomo 10 Ponorogo, Indonesia, [subangun@umpo.ac.id](mailto:subangun@umpo.ac.id))

4(Department of Pedagogy Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, Jalan Budi Utomo 10 Ponorogo, Indonesia, [rosidhalaela@gmail.com](mailto:rosidhalaela@gmail.com))

5(Permai Penang Learning Center, Pulau Penang, 12 G-2 Jalan Tun Dr.Awang Sg. Nibong Kecil Bayan Lepas, 11900 Penang, Malaysia, [admin@permai.my.id](mailto:admin@permai.my.id))

\*corresponding author (ardhana@umpo.ac.id)

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article examines how multi-stakeholders partnerships in Indonesia and Malaysia are impacted by Islamic political dynamics in the governance of non-formal education. The research uses interviews, document analysis, and limited observation to gather data for a dual case study design using a qualitative comparative approach. The results show that, although policy fragmentation is still a problem, Indonesia's decentralized and pluralistic Islamic political system permits more independent community-based education programs like Islamic boarding school and supplementary Islamic religious school. Malaysia's centralized model, on the other hand, restricts institutional flexibility while enabling more standardized governance of religious education. In order to improve policy design and implementation in the non-formal sector, the study suggests the Islamic Policy Partnership framework, which combines participatory governance with religious legitimacy.* *In order to promote inclusive, sustainable education, this model places a strong emphasis on cooperative governance between the government, Islamic institutions, and civil society. The study comes to the conclusion that creating successful and context-sensitive policy partnerships requires striking a balance between state power and religious autonomy. In order to accomplish national education goals, it suggests implementing hybrid governance models that acknowledge faith-based actors as equal partners.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic Politics, Non-Formal Education, Education Policy, Public-Private Partnership.*

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The increasingly complex dynamics of global politics have made the role of religion in the formation of public policy (including education policy) experience a significant revival. Islamic politics that reflect a power based on faith values ​​will not only be present in the legislative and state ideology realms, but in its implementation has also entered the social policy sector including education. Indonesia and Malaysia as the two countries with the largest Muslim communities in Southeast Asia show that the role of Islamic actors is very visible in shaping the direction of education, especially in the realm of non-formal education.

Non-formal education such as Islamic boarding schools, Islamic madrasahs, tahfidz centers, to guidance studios or community learning centers have an important role in bridging the access gap, supporting lifelong education, and strengthening the religiousness of the Muslim community. Community-based education will be one alternative by integrating classroom learning models, life skills learning, and understanding activities in sustainable development that reach vulnerable communities (Adams et al., 2020). Various participatory activities make the existence of non-formal education one of the bridges of the gap that cannot be resolved only through formal education. However, the sustainability of non-formal education will be influenced by the existence of supportive policies and ongoing collaboration from various stakeholders both domestically and abroad. There are at least four factors that influence the existence of non-formal education sustainability policies, namely the formation of a supportive policy framework from the government, cross-sectoral collaboration, professional development and capacity building, and there is alignment that supports sustainable development (SDGs) (Goncalves & Tilbury, 2024; Grotlüschen et al., 2024; Hayat et al., 2024; Sungsri, 2018).

The importance of the government's role in creating inclusive and flexible policies so that non-formal education is not only temporary, it should be a long-term solution. This policy needs to pay attention to the real needs of the community and create a space for collaboration and cooperation between educational institutions, community groups, and the private sector (Juwita et al., 2024). Thus, non-formal education is not only a complement, but also a transformative force in the national education system.

In addition to these, the concept of innovation offered in the learning approach and program implementation in non-formal education is the key to ensuring the relevance and reach in the implementation of non-formal education. Integration of a transformative approach based on real conditions in the field will certainly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of non-formal education in forming critical awareness and the ability to adapt by students (Harahap et al., 2025).

As in the use of digital media, strengthening facilitator capabilities, and compiling a curriculum based on community needs can be a means of increasing participation that will have a social impact. Based on this, the existence of a straight line between policy conformity, cross-sector collaboration, and innovation designed for sustainable living will certainly be able to become an important foothold in realizing equitable and sustainable education.

This article will explore how the dynamics of Islamic politics shape non-formal education policy through a multi-stakeholder partnership model in Indonesia and Malaysia. Using a comparative qualitative approach, this article will propose a new framework called the Islamic Policy Partnership, a model that integrates religiousness with participatory governance in education.

This article not only addresses the gap in the literature on the relationship between political Islam and non-formal education, but also contributes a new approach that is relevant to the context of modern Muslim countries amidst global challenges such as urbanization, radicalization, and digital disruption. The existence of a strategic partnership between the state and Islamic organizations in education makes it increasingly important to realize an inclusive, empowered, and progressive society.

1. **METHOD**

The research for this article used a multiple case study design and a comparative qualitative approach (Pahleviannur et al., 2022). In two nations—Indonesia and Malaysia—with comparable sociopolitical contexts but distinct institutional approaches, this method was selected to thoroughly examine the role of Islamic politics in the development of non-formal education policies and multi-actor partnership patterns. Large Islamic organizations *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), Muhammadiyah, and other religious community organizations, as well as the Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and non-formal educational institutions, such as Community Learning Activity Centers in Indonesia and Guidance Studio or Indonesia Learning Centers in Malaysia, are the focus of research in both countries.

The study used document analyses, in-depth interviews, and limited participant observation as data collection methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Critical discourse analysis was used to examine how religious narratives and power were shaped in policy documents and public statements; comparative analysis was used to examine the similarities and differences between partnership patterns and the impact of Islamic politics on policies in Indonesia and Malaysia; and thematic analysis focused on the themes of Islamic politics, partnerships, education policies, and the role of community organizations. Naturally, researchers triangulate sources and methods and test the findings' consistency with peer debriefing with experts in Islamic studies and education policy in order to preserve the validity of the data.

**III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Actors in Islamic Politics and Their Influence on State Policy**

In nations with a majority of muslims, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, Islamic political actors are organizations that strategically influence the creation and execution of national policies (Ufen, 2009). These consist of political parties with an Islamic foundation, religious mass organizations, prominent clerics, and Islamic intellectual networks that participate in discussions about public policy. Islamic political power in a democratic setting is based on their moral and symbolic legitimacy in the eyes of muslim society, in addition to their ability to win elections. Because of this, they have a special ability to shape policy, particularly in the areas of social, cultural, and educational issues.

In Indonesia, there are numerous religious organizations and leaders who frequently support Islamic-based educational policies, including both Muhammadiyah and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (Hamami, 2021). Along with informal avenues like the national deliberation forum, religious fatwas, and policy lobbying with pertinent ministries, they employ formal political approaches through parliament. Examples of how Islamic actors can influence education policies to better reflect moderate and community-based Islamic values include the participation of Islamic mass organizations in the creation of the 2013 curriculum policy, the *merdeka belajar* curriculum, and the regulations governing supplementary Islamic religious school (Harahap et al., 2025; Kusumaningrum et al., 2024).

Compared to Indonesia, Malaysia has systemic political power through the existence of state institutions such as the Malaysian Islamic Progress Office, the State Fatwa Council, and religious-based parties that have a strong religious ideological base. They have a big role in designing Islamic education policies, both formal and non-formal, including holding tahfiz certification, recognition of Islamic boarding schools, and the National Islamic Education curriculum. The close relationship between the state and religion in Malaysia makes the position of Islamic political actors in state policy, even with limited space for contestation from independent Islamic groups.

One measure of the extent of political actors' influence is their ability to successfully craft an Islamic policy narrative, which naturally addresses the needs of the class society. The current actors serve as a genuine strategic link between the state and the demands of the modern world. In the field, Islamic political actors consistently offer a genuine narrative that goes beyond normative concerns like morality and Islamic identity. A cooperative policy partnership model founded on faith is created by the mobilization resulting from the implementation of these actors.

The impact of Islamic politics is not always linear in reality. There are instances where the goals of the Muslim community and the appropriateness of the state's vision clash. This is evident in the arguments over ulama certification, digital preaching spaces, and Islamic moderation. Therefore, the intricacy of their cooperative and confrontational strategies in both formal and informal spaces of power must be taken into account when analyzing Islamic political actors in national policy. If handled within a framework of value-based and participatory partnerships, their role in non-formal education could serve as a catalyst for social innovation.

The Existence of Structure in Islamic Politics and the Continuity of Education

Despite having different forms and perspectives, the structures of Islamic political activities in Malaysia and Indonesia are crucial in determining education policy, including in the field of non-formal education. The Islamic political system in Indonesia is more decentralized and pluralistic (Mukrimin, 2023). No single group controls all of the representation of Islam in Indonesia; however, there are a number of significant Islamic organizations, including Muhammadiyah, *Persatuan Islam*, and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) that have sway over policy and education (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). This framework can undoubtedly produce a highly dynamic space for cooperation and contestation during the policy-making process, including in the field of non-formal education like

Meanwhile, for Malaysia, the opposite is true, the existence of an Islamic political structure tends to be centralized and integrated into state institutions. The main role is played by the state in managing religious affairs through institutions such as JAKIM (*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia),* *Majlis Agama Islam Negeri* (MAIN), and *Dewan Fatwa*. Of course, the existence of Islamic political parties such as PAS (*Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*) and UMNO (which has a strong Islamic wing) plays a very important role in compiling and formulating Islamic education policies. Malaysia uses a centralized structure so that there is greater control and standardization of non-formal educational institutions (Tayeb, 2016), such as tahfiz centers, and informal Islamic education programs. Of course, this also reduces the space for participation from independent religious or civil society organizations (Freedman, 2009).

Although they frequently encounter obstacles with regard to funding, state recognition, and legality, Indonesia's Islamic political system gives Islamic mass organizations more freedom to run institutions independently in the context of non-formal education (Hanifah et al., 2020). For instance, Islamic boarding schools have a long history of existing as non-formal, community-based establishments that can endure outside of the official educational system of the state. Although there are still several implementation restrictions, Law No. 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools is an illustration of how the state has been able to recognize and regulate Islamic boarding schools as part of the national education system due to pressure and participation from a pluralistic Islamic political structure (Dinata, 2023; Tobroni et al., 2024; Usman & Widyanto, 2021).

Malaysia, on the other hand, has formalized its regulation and certification of non-formal Islamic education, thereby integrating it into the state structure (Kadir et al., 2022). Supplementary Islamic religious school and tahfiz centers frequently have to adhere to specific curriculum standards and be registered under MAIN supervision. Concerns regarding limited innovation and curriculum independence are also raised, even though this enhances the legitimacy and caliber of education delivery. By providing a community-based approach to Islamic education that is still compliant with national policy directives, some organizations, like *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM) and *Institut Kerja Raya Malaysia* (IKRAM), attempt to close the gap between the autonomy of Islamic movements and adherence to the state system.

The interplay between religion, authority, and educational policy is reflected in both Indonesia's and Malaysia's Islamic political systems. The primary distinction in non-formal education is the level of institutional autonomy and centralization. While Malaysia offers strong policy integration but restricts the flexibility of non-state actors, Indonesia offers a more open but non-standardized partnership model. Designing successful multi-actor partnerships that allow non-formal Islamic education to grow as a component of a competitive, inclusive, and religiously grounded national education system requires an understanding of these Islamic political structures.

Collaboration between Government and Islamic Community Organizations

In Muslim-majority nations like Indonesia and Malaysia, cooperation between the government and Islamic community organizations in the non-formal education sector has grown to be a crucial component of increasing educational access. Islamic community organizations serve as strategic partners in delivering religiously-based education that is in line with local needs, despite the state's limited ability to reach all community groups. This partnership addresses curriculum development, policy formation, and the empowerment of educational human resources in addition to the implementation of educational programs.

This type of cooperation can be observed in Indonesia in the interactions between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and sizable groups like Muhammadiyah and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU). Both oversee thousands of Islamic schools, Islamic boarding schools, and alternative educational establishments that offer instruction to underserved community segments. Gradually, the government has started to acknowledge and assist these institutions through a number of initiatives, including Equivalency Education, Education Operational Assistance (BOP), and religious teacher certification. This partnership demonstrates a more horizontal strategy in which community and state organizations rely on one another to support the country's educational system.

Regulation, long-term funding, and acknowledging the institutional standing of non-formal religious-based education continue to be obstacles, though. Even though the state's recognition of non-formal Islamic education is marked by Law No. 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools, there are still issues with its technical implementation and synchronization with regional regulations. Through public advocacy and policy dialogue forums, Islamic community organizations continue to promote more participatory forms of partnership, not only as program implementers but also as policy makers.

The pattern of cooperation between the government and Islamic mass organizations is more formalized and structured in Malaysia. Organizations like ABIM and IKRAM frequently work on projects to promote Islamic values in society, train tahfiz teachers, and create non-formal Islamic education modules. To make sure that educational standards are in accordance with national policy directives, JAKIM and the State Islamic Religious Council actively cooperate with non-governmental organizations. Through accreditation, participation in policy consultations, and subsidy mechanisms, this collaboration occurs within a more formal partnership framework.

In both Indonesia and Malaysia, collaborations between the state and Islamic mass organizations in non-formal education hold significant promise for advancing educational equality and bolstering religiously based national values. However, a collaboration model that ensures accountability, transparency, and equality of position among actors is required to make sure the partnership is successful and long-lasting. This is why it is so urgent to develop an Islamic Policy Partnership Model that upholds the values of good governance while enabling the inclusive integration of religious values in educational policies.

Centralization in the State and Policy Harmonization

Malaysia is renowned for having a more centralized government system when it comes to handling religious affairs, including formal and informal Islamic education policies. The state has significant control over the accreditation, supervision, and content of Islamic educational institutions through organizations like JAKIM and MAIN. This undoubtedly establishes a unified and consistent framework throughout the states, including in the administration of Islamic boarding schools. Despite some technical variations between states, the harmonization of this policy enables the national standardization of Islamic education quality.

Indonesia, on the other hand, governs non-formal Islamic education using a more decentralized system. The majority of non-formal Islamic education, including Islamic boarding schools, supplementary Islamic religious school, and Al-Qur'an Education (TPQ), is run independently by Islamic community organizations, despite the coordination between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education. Law Number 18 of 2019 is the only law that formally recognizes Islamic boarding schools, but its execution is still heavily reliant on local laws and the ability of Islamic mass organizations. As a result, policy implementation in the field is uneven and policy harmonization between regions is still low.

The government's attempts to create a standardized national curriculum for Islamic education in all institutions, including the non-formal sector, are another example of Malaysia's centralistic nature. The government can create a national curriculum, establish minimum requirements for religious instructors, and only offer subsidies to institutions that are formally registered. In order to guarantee that all students, irrespective of location or type of institution, receive Islamic education that is equal in quality and content, this harmonization is thought to be crucial. Independent Islamic institutions have, however, also criticized this strategy for leaving little opportunity for creativity and adaptability.

The expansion of diverse local innovation models in Islamic-based non-formal education has been made possible by decentralization in Indonesia (Amirrachman et al., 2009; Chotimah et al., 2024); however, this has resulted in policy fragmentation. Due to regional variations in administrative recognition, many Islamic boarding schools and Qur'anic educational institutions lack standardization and proper access to state resources. Poor quality control and regional disparities in educational services are the results of this discord (Neuman & Powers, 2021). The policy harmonization approach in this context is difficult in and of itself, particularly given the large number of state and civil society actors involved.

As a result, the two nations' approaches to centralization and policy harmonization represent different spectrums. While Indonesia provides room for community innovation with the challenge of harmonization and equalizing quality, Malaysia offers a consolidative model with a high degree of harmonization but little flexibility. These distinctions need to be strategically taken into account when creating partnerships for non-formal education policy in order to create contextual policies with guaranteed minimum standards. The integration of values, objectives, and cooperative mechanisms that can fairly and adaptably address local needs is what is meant by policy harmonization, not complete uniformity.

Islamic Policy Partnership: A Recommendation

A conceptual approach called the Islamic Policy Partnership Framework aims to comprehend and strengthen cooperation between Islamic actors and the state in the creation and execution of public policy, particularly in the area of non-formal education. This framework begins with the assumption that, in Muslim societies, the moral and symbolic authority possessed by Islamic leaders and religious organizations, in addition to state authority, is what gives policies legitimacy. Therefore, rather than being merely an administrative addition, the religious dimension must be incorporated into the policy-making process as part of inclusive education governance.

According to this framework, a partnership is a mutually beneficial relationship between three primary entities: communities, Islamic community organizations, and the government. The private sector and donor agencies may also be involved. Every actor plays a distinct role: communities serve as beneficiaries and sources of inspiration, Islamic community organizations serve as service providers and stewards of values, and the government formulates and implements policies. In contrast to hierarchical or transactional structures, this framework highlights the significance of horizontal, participatory collaborative structures.

Three key tenets are also highlighted in the Islamic Policy Partnership framework. First, normative legitimacy, which is the acceptance of religious leaders as equal collaborators rather than inferiors in the formulation of public policy. The second is participatory governance, which guarantees that the state and Islamic mass organizations can communicate, plan together, and evaluate together. The third approach is transformational, which means that non-formal education should be viewed as a tool for socioeconomic empowerment rather than merely a substitute for formal education. Therefore, this collaboration transcends administrative ties and turns into a collaborative endeavor for the advancement of the populace and the country.

This framework can be implemented in practice through a variety of institutional mechanisms, including cooperative funding programs, joint accreditation schemes between the state and community organizations, integrated training models between state teachers and *pesantren* teachers, and joint policy forums. Despite having distinct Islamic political systems, Malaysia and Indonesia both exhibit aspects that fit into this framework. In Malaysia, systemization and state control ensure implementation efficiency, whereas in Indonesia, community strength and the adaptability of community organizations are the primary assets.

Alternative policies that tackle social pluralism issues, the need for religious recognition, and calls for more sustainable and inclusive education governance are offered by the Islamic Policy Partnership framework. In the framework of a contemporary state, this is a way to integrate Islamic values with the ideas of good governance. By recognizing and working with religious actors who have deep societal roots, the state not only improves public services but also increases its political legitimacy. In a global setting, this model can also be used in nations with a majority of Muslims that are looking for a compromise between the goals of political Islam and the secularization of policies.

**iV. CONCLUSION**

Through multi-actor partnership mechanisms, this study demonstrates how Islamic politics significantly influences the course of non-formal education policy. The system's adaptability in Indonesia permits vibrant grassroots collaborations that aren't yet formalized. Malaysia, meanwhile, exhibits solid formal alliances but lacks adaptability and community involvement.

This article presents a novel strategy for overseeing non-formal education in nations with a majority of Muslims by striking a balance between state governance, community involvement, and religious legitimacy using the framework of the Islamic Policy Partnership. This strategy can be modified in the future to accommodate other Muslim nations dealing with comparable issues regarding social participation and educational inclusivity.

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