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Analysis Of Islamic Education Policy In The National Education System Law No. 20 Of 2003 And Its Implications For The Progress Of Islamic Religious Education In Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines Islamic education policy within Indonesia's National Education System Act (Law No. 20 of 2003) and its implications for the development of Islamic education. Using a qualitative library research design and policy analysis framework, the study evaluates key legal provisions, historical policy context, and implementation outcomes. The findings indicate that the Act provides strong normative recognition for madrasahs, pesantren, religious education, and teacher professionalism. However, implementation remains constrained by structural challenges, including disparities in infrastructure, uneven distribution of Islamic education teachers, curriculum overlap, and weak coordination between central and local governments. Empirical data from 2020–2023 reveal a significant policy gap between legislative intent and practical outcomes, particularly regarding access, quality, and governance of Islamic education. These results highlight the need for more integrated policy reforms through enhanced teacher capacity, curriculum harmonization across ministries, needs-based funding, and strengthened multi-level governance to ensure more equitable and sustainable fulfillment of the Act's objectives.

Keywords: Education Policy, National Education System Act, Madrasah, Islamic Religious Education, Quality Standardization

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education holds a strategic position in the history of the development of Indonesian national education. Since pre-independence, education has developed in two major streams: traditional education based on Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and madrasahs, and general education with a secular orientation, inherited from the Dutch colonial era. This dualism has created gaps in curriculum, resources, and institutional legitimacy (Subhan, 2012). Madrasahs and pesantren remain centers of religious and character education, yet they are positioned outside the formal state education system and face pressures from modernization and the expansion of general education.

To integrate these diverse systems, the government issued Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sisdiknas). This law was a significant milestone because, for the first time, the state provided formal recognition, equality, and guaranteed constitutional rights to Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs, diniyah education, and pesantren. Article 17 stipulates the equivalence of MI/MTs with SD/SMP, Article 30 regulates the institutional basis of religious education, Article 12(1a) affirms the right of students to religious education, and Article 37 makes religious subjects mandatory in all educational units (Law Number 20 of 2003).

However, research findings indicate that serious gaps remain between policy norms and implementation in the field. Masnu'ah et al. (2022) found that madrasas still face disparities in funding, infrastructure, and the quality of teaching staff. A similar finding was expressed by Mardhiah et al. (2023), who showed that Islamic Religious Education teacher certification has indeed increased, but its distribution is uneven, particularly between public and small private madrasas. Suryana et al. (2020) added that Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) face identity challenges due to pressures from national standardization, particularly traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) whose curriculum is based on the tradition of the yellow books. As a result, policies intended to strengthen Islamic education have the potential to create a double curriculum burden, learning fatigue, and disparities in quality between regions.

On the other hand, several studies have also demonstrated the positive impact of the implementation of the National Education System Law. Halim (2019) noted that the integration of religious and general knowledge in madrasas enriches learning orientation and improves students' readiness to face the demands of the 21st century. Ristanti et al. (2020) emphasized that the obligation of religious education for all students plays a crucial role in shaping the nation's character. Meanwhile, Mahmudi and Hasan (2020) highlighted the improvement in madrasah

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management following the enactment of the quality standardization policy.

Although numerous studies have discussed the position of Islamic education within the national education system, there remains a gap in research on the following aspects:

1. An in-depth analysis of key articles of the National Education System Law related to Islamic education.
2. A comprehensive evaluation of policy implications for the development, quality, and identity of Islamic education.
3. Mapping the implementation gap (policy gap) based on the latest empirical evidence.

The majority of previous studies have been normative and descriptive in nature, lacking a rigorous policy analysis comparing policy intent and policy outcome. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap. This study aims to:

1. To systematically analyze the Islamic education policy contained in Law No. 20 of 2003.
2. To examine the implications of the implementation of this policy on the progress of Islamic religious education in Indonesia.
3. To identify implementation gaps and challenges that arise in implementing the policy in the field.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic education policy by presenting an analysis based on a policy framework and the latest empirical findings. Practically, this research can serve as a reference for policymakers, madrasah managers, and stakeholders in improving the regulation and governance of Islamic education in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The Concept of Islamic Education

Islamic education is the process of internalizing values, knowledge, and skills based on Islamic teachings to shape individuals who are faithful, pious, and have noble character (Daulay, 2014). The goals of Islamic education are not only cognitive but also encompass spiritual, moral, and social dimensions (Halim, 2019). This differs from secular education, which emphasizes academic and professional aspects.

Throughout Indonesian history, Islamic education has developed through two main models: Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and madrasahs (madrasahs). Pesantrens are more traditional in nature, based on the study of yellow books, while madrasahs represent a modernization of Islamic education with a curriculum that combines religious and general knowledge (Subhan, 2012). This transformation further developed when the state

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began to formally recognize Islamic educational institutions through national policies.

2. National Education Policy and Integration of Islamic Education

Historically, Indonesia's national education policy has tended to be secular, adapted from the colonial system. As a result, Islamic education remains outside the formal system and enjoys limited legitimacy (Suryana et al., 2020). However, post-reform policy developments indicate a paradigm shift towards integrating Islamic education into the national education system.

Several important policies that strengthen the position of Islamic education include:

a. Law No. 20/2003 concerning the National Education System
b. Government Regulation No. 55/2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Education
c. Ministerial Regulation No. 13/2014 concerning Islamic Religious Education

This policy provides the legal basis for recognizing madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools, and diniyah education as part of the national education system (Masnu'ah et al., 2022). According to Mahmudi and Hasan (2020), this policy also encourages improved governance of Islamic education through quality standardization and educator professionalization.

3. National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003 from the Perspective of Islamic Education

Law No. Law No. 20/2003 marked a significant milestone in the renewal of Islamic education in Indonesia. Several articles serve as the legal basis for strengthening Islamic education, including:

a. Article 17 stipulates that MI/MTs are equivalent to SD/SMP.
b. Article 30 regulates the function and form of religious education.
c. Article 12 Paragraph (1a) guarantees the right of students to receive religious education according to their religion.
d. Article 37 establishes religious education as a compulsory subject.
e. Article 42 regulates academic qualifications and teacher certification.

Literature shows that this recognition has a significant impact on the legitimacy, access, and quality of Islamic education (Masnu'ah et al., 2022; Ristanti et al., 2020). However, several researchers note that its implementation still faces challenges in the

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form of disparities in the quality of facilities, teacher distribution, and a dual curriculum burden (Mardhiah et al., 2023; Suryana et al., 2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a literature review, focusing on the analysis of Islamic education policy in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. This approach was chosen because in-depth analysis of regulatory documents, scientific literature, and empirical data is highly relevant to understanding the comprehensive construction of education policy. Creswell (2018) explains that document-based qualitative research is highly effective for examining social phenomena and policies through credible written sources.

The analysis was conducted using a policy analysis framework, encompassing three main dimensions. First, a policy content analysis aimed at an in-depth review of the substance of the articles of the National Education System Law directly related to Islamic education, particularly Article 12 paragraph (1a), Article 17, Article 30, Article 37, and Article 42. This stage is necessary to understand the normative orientation and objectives of the policy as formulated by the lawmakers. Second, a policy context analysis examines the historical, social, and political background behind the enactment of the 2003 National Education System Law. This approach aligns with Haddad and Demsky's (1995) view that education policy cannot be separated from the configuration of power and societal needs during a given period. Third, an analysis of policy implementation and impact is based on the Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) framework, comparing policy objectives with actual outcomes in the implementation of Islamic education in the field.

The data sources for this research consist of primary and secondary data. Primary sources include official documents such as Law Number 20 of 2003, Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Education, and Ministerial Regulation Number 13 of 2014 concerning Islamic

Religious Education. In addition, quantitative data and official reports from the Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools, and teaching staff are also used to strengthen the analysis. Secondary sources include accredited journal articles, scientific books, research reports, and academic publications from experts such as Masnu'ah et al. (2022), Ristanti et al. (2020), Mardhiah et al. (2023), Halim (2019), Subhan (2012), and Suryana et al. (2020). All sources were selected based on relevance, analytical depth, and academic validity.

Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation and literature review.

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Documentation was used to collect and review policy documents, Islamic education statistics, and official reports published by government agencies. Literature review was used to understand theoretical constructs, relevant concepts, and previous research findings. This process was complemented by content extraction techniques, as recommended by Bowen (2009), which identify themes, patterns, and important information within the analyzed documents.

Data analysis was conducted through several stages. First, data reduction was carried out by grouping information according to themes such as access to Islamic education, educator standards, curriculum, and institutional governance. Second, content analysis techniques, as described by Krippendorff (2013), were used to understand the meaning and structure of messages in the regulations studied. Third, comparative thematic analysis was used to compare the intensity of policies and the reality of their implementation, based on empirical data and previous research findings. Fourth, policy gap mapping was conducted to demonstrate the difference between policy formulation and practice in the field. In the final stage, researchers drew conclusions and formulated relevant policy implementations.

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, cross-checking of literature, validation of official government documents, and the creation of an audit trail as part of analytical transparency procedures. This approach adheres to the qualitative validity standards established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), specifically ensuring the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of research data.

RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Analysis of Key Articles of Law No. 20 of 2003

Document analysis of Law No. Law No. 20 of 2003 shows that there are five fundamental articles that directly shape the legal framework for Islamic education in Indonesia: Article 12 paragraph (1a), Article 17, Article 30, Article 37, and Article 42. An examination of these articles is important because each article represents the legislator's policy intent, which must then be compared with policy outcomes in the field through empirical data and previous research findings.

Article 12 paragraph (1a) affirms the constitutional right of every student to receive religious education in accordance with their religion. Normatively, this article requires schools to provide Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers who are appropriate to the students' religious needs. However, empirical findings indicate that this right is not always fulfilled equally. A study by Asy'arie et al. (2024) showed a disparity in the availability of

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Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in various regions, resulting in the implementation of religious education not always optimally shaping students' moral values and social character. Some schools with a high ratio of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are unable to provide adequate learning, so students' rights are practically not met.

Article 17 places madrasahs (MI/MTs) on par with public schools (SD/SMP). Conceptually, this article provides structural legitimacy for madrasahs as national educational institutions. However, studies by Pratama (2024) and Nasrullah & Amril (2025) emphasize that this formal equality has not always been substantively realized. Madrasahs still face limitations in facilities, teacher distribution, and financial support. Islamic Education Statistics (Kemenag, 2021–2023) also show that madrasah growth is dominated by small private madrasahs, meaning equitable quality remains a challenge. Thus, Article 17 provides legal equality but does not provide actual equality in educational services.

Article 30 legitimizes religious education such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), diniyah education (early Islamic education), and other religious education. However, the existence of this article often clashes with the reality that national standards cannot always be fully applied to tradition-based institutions such as traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). A study by Suryana et al. (2020) and Delvia et al. (2025) show that policy modernization often forces Islamic boarding schools to adapt to bureaucratic standards, which in some cases threatens their scientific identity. Islamic boarding schools. This tension is a consequence of integrative policies that do not fully address the diversity of the Islamic education ecosystem.

Article 37 stipulates that religious education is a mandatory component of the primary and secondary curriculum. This norm clearly positions religious education as a core element in shaping the nation's character. However, Saputri & Ningrum (2024) emphasize that the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in both madrasahs and public schools still faces challenges such as limited teaching hours, limited learning support facilities, and teachers' abilities that are not yet fully adapted to the demands of 21st-century competencies. This means that the curricular obligations in this article do not automatically guarantee the quality of religious education implementation in the classroom.

Article 42 regulates academic qualifications and teacher certification as the basis for educator professionalization. Regulatoryly, this article aims to systematically improve

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the quality of Islamic Religious Education teachers through certification and professional training. However, research by Munawir et al. (2025) and Wahyudi et al. (2024) shows that the distribution of certified teachers remains geographically unequal. Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2020–2023) also shows that the majority of certified teachers are concentrated in Java, while the 3T (Underdeveloped, Outlying, and Transmigration) regions lag far behind. Thus, although Article 42 provides a strong framework for professionalization, its implementation faces significant structural challenges.

Overall, an analysis of the articles of Law No. 20/2003 indicates that the normative framework for Islamic education within the National Education System (Sisdiknas) is highly progressive: it recognizes student rights, equates madrasahs (Islamic schools), incorporates Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) into the national system, makes religious education compulsory, and encourages teacher professionalization. However, empirical evidence and recent literature indicate that the success of this regulation is largely determined by implementation capacity at the regional level, funding capacity, teacher quality, and the readiness of Islamic educational institutions to adapt. While the legal norms are at an ideal level, the practice of Islamic education still faces structural obstacles that hinder the optimal achievement of policy objectives.

2. Empirical Development of Islamic Education in Indonesia (2020-2023)

The development of Islamic education in the 2020–2023 period demonstrated significant dynamics in both institutional, student, and teaching staff aspects. This trend can be understood through analysis of official data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), EMIS reports, and open-access research findings examining madrasah transformation and the implementation of Islamic education policies. In general, three striking phenomena emerged: (1) the expansion of the number of madrasahs, particularly private ones; (2) the unequal distribution of Islamic education teachers; and (3) the increase in the number of students not accompanied by equitable distribution of service quality.

a. Growth in the Number of Madrasahs 2020–2023

EMIS data and Islamic Education Statistics show that the number of madrasahs continues to increase, driven by high community participation in the provision of Islamic education. The largest increase was seen in small private madrasahs, demonstrating community enthusiasm and indicating challenges in quality

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standardization.

b. Increase in the Number of Students in Madrasahs

The number of students in madrasahs increased significantly at all levels between 2020 and 2023. This growth was influenced by two main factors: positive public perception of Islamic education and increased opportunities for madrasahs to compete through the integration of general and religious curricula.

c. Unequal Distribution of Islamic Religious Education Teachers and Professionalization

Although the number of certified Islamic Religious Education teachers has increased, their distribution remains highly unequal. The highest concentration is on the island of Java, while the 3T (Uninhabitable and Remote Areas) regions experience a drastic shortage of certified teachers.

d. Empirical Implications for Islamic Education Policy

Based on the three empirical phenomena above, there are policy implications that directly relate to key articles of Law No. 20/2003. These empirical implications for Islamic education policy can be seen in four main aspects. (1) The rapid growth of madrasahs strengthens their position as part of the national education system, but their quality remains uneven across regions. (2) The surge in student numbers indicates increasing public trust in Islamic education, but this increase has not been fully accompanied by adequate facilities and infrastructure. (3) The unequal distribution of certified Islamic Education teachers demonstrates that professionalization as mandated by law has not been achieved evenly, particularly in the 3T (frontier, outermost, and remote) regions. (4) The modernization of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) due to national standardization brings administrative benefits but also creates tensions with the traditional identity of Islamic boarding schools, requiring implementation policies to be more adaptive to institutional characteristics.

In general, the empirical data demonstrates a policy gap between legal norms and the reality of implementation on the ground, which must be further discussed in the policy recommendations section.

3. In-Depth Thematic Analysis

a. Access and Participation (enrollment, equity)

Policy Interpretation: Institutionally, Law No. 20/2003 (Articles 17 and 37) provides a normative basis for access (legalization of madrasahs, Islamic Religious Education

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obligations), but this policy is pro-forma if not accompanied by proactive funding and human resource distribution mechanisms. In other words, the policy intent (formal equality) does not automatically translate into a policy outcome (equality of access to quality) if fiscal transfers, madrasah BOS allocations, and affirmative action mechanisms are not directed to underdeveloped areas (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2023; Susanto, 2020).

Brief Implications & Recommendations: (a) a targeted affirmative action budget program is needed for madrasahs in the 3T provinces; (b) the madrasah BOS allocation mechanism must contain a differential formula that takes into account initial capacity and infrastructure needs; (c) access expansion programs must be monitored not only quantitatively (number of schools/students) but also qualitatively (accreditation, student-teacher ratio,

Library/lab availability). Data and study sources: Ministry of Religious Affairs (EMIS 2022/2023), Pratama (2024), Delvia et al. (2025), Susanto (2020).

b. Quality of Learning and Teacher Professionalism (certification, qualifications, training)

Key findings: The certification program increased the number of certified teachers, but the distribution is uneven across provinces; certified teachers and teachers with bachelor's degrees are concentrated in Java and urban centers, while the 3T (Underdeveloped Regions) lag far behind (Ministry of Religious Affairs, certification dataset). Open studies also found disparities in access to ongoing training and learning support facilities (Wahyudi & Rosdiana, 2024; Munawir et al., 2025). Furthermore, teaching quality is influenced not only by formal certification but also by professional development opportunities, access to digital teaching materials, and teachers' administrative burdens (Mardhiah et al., 2023).

Policy interpretation: Article 42 of the National Education System Law regulates teacher qualifications and certification, which are the normative foundation for professionalism. However, the technical implementation of certification programs (reach, subsidies, timing) and training funding policies are not regulated in as much detail as redistributive mechanisms, making it difficult for teachers in disadvantaged areas to meet requirements and subsequently improve their competencies (Wahyudi & Rosdiana, 2024; Munawir et al., 2025). Therefore, professionalization regulations without policies on access to training and incentives for teacher mobility create a

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capacity trap.

Brief implications & recommendations: (a) design certification and PPG programs that are pro-disadvantaged, e.g., affirmative action for 3T teachers; (b) provide financial and non-financial incentives (PPG scholarships, incentive allowances) to encourage the retention of certified teachers in remote areas; (c) develop an accredited online training platform specifically for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) that adapts to the local context (language, local curriculum, infrastructure limitations). Source and reading materials: EMIS Kemenag (certification), Wahyudi & Rosdiana (2024)

c. Curriculum and Double Burden (religious-general integration, duration, 21st-century competencies)

Key findings: Modern madrasas tend to implement curricula that integrate religious education with general subjects so that graduates have broader academic competencies. However, the side effect is the emergence of a double burden for students and teachers: longer face-to-face hours, overlapping curricula, and the burden of evaluation across two domains (religious and general) (Saputri & Ningrum, 2024; Halim, 2019). Empirical studies also find that integration often takes the form of packaged material (increasing hours) without pedagogical reconstruction that prioritizes 21st-century skills (creativity, critical thinking, digital literacy).

Policy interpretation: Article 37 mandates religious education as part of the national curriculum; this article opens up space for integration, but does not provide for it. Detailed technical guidelines on how to integrate (e.g., thematic models, cross-curricular learning, or reducing hours in other subjects) are lacking. Consequently, implementation often involves adding hours and materials, increasing the risk of learning overload. This issue demands curriculum reformulation that places competency as the unit of analysis, not just class hours (Saputri & Ningrum, 2024; Halim, 2019).

Brief implications and recommendations: (a) Develop a competency-based integrative curriculum model that combines Islamic Religious Education (PAI) objectives and 21st-century cognitive objectives to avoid duplication; (b) Implement a thematic or project-based approach to reduce intensive hours while enhancing cross-disciplinary skills; (c) Pilot the integration model in several representative madrasahs (urban and 3T) to develop adaptive national guidelines. Reading material: Saputri &

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Ningrum (2024)

d. Facilities and Infrastructure and Financing (BOS for Madrasas, Infrastructure Disparity)

Disparity in madrasah facilities and infrastructure remains a significant structural issue, despite government funding schemes such as BOS and BOP. Official data and guidelines, including the 2023 Technical Instructions for the Management of BOP and BOS for Madrasas, indicate that the allocation and use of funds are standardized, but the effectiveness of their utilization depends heavily on the madrasah's managerial capacity in utilizing e-RKAM, EDM, and the ability to prepare infrastructure needs (Directorate General of Islamic Education, 2023). The disparity is evident between state madrasas, which generally have more comprehensive facilities, and smaller private madrasas, particularly in areas outside Java. This disparity has direct implications for the quality of learning, access to laboratories, libraries, learning media, and minimum classroom standards. Therefore, affirmative policies based on regional needs are needed so that BOS becomes more than just a routine operational fund, but also a more strategic instrument for equitable infrastructure distribution.

e. Islamic Boarding School Identity and Standardization (Salaf vs. Modernization)

The formal recognition of Islamic boarding schools through Government Regulation No. 55/2007 has strengthened their position as part of the national education system, but has created tensions between the Salaf tradition and the demands of administrative modernization. Modern Islamic boarding schools tend to more easily meet reporting, accreditation, and curriculum integration standards, thus allowing quicker access to government assistance. Conversely, Salaf Islamic boarding schools, which focus on teaching traditional Islamic texts, have more difficulty adapting to standardization demands due to their distinct institutional characteristics (Delvia et al., 2025). This situation suggests that a one-size-fits-all policy model has the potential to diminish the identity of traditional Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, policies must be based on typological differentiation, acknowledging the diversity of Islamic boarding schools while still providing Support is context-appropriate without demanding excessive homogenization of curriculum or administration.

f. Governance and Administration of Islamic Education (Role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Regional Governments, and the Community)

Governance of Islamic education in Indonesia is multi-level, involving the

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Ministry of Religious Affairs as the primary regulator, regional governments as public service providers, and communities as owners or administrators of institutions. The effectiveness of policy implementation is greatly influenced by the quality of coordination between actors. Governance studies show that weak vertical coordination between the central and regional governments results in slow disbursement of funds, teacher distribution, and administrative services (Sanusi, 2022). Furthermore, the role of the community and foundations is crucial for the sustainability of madrasah operations, especially in regions with limited government budget support. Therefore, ideal governance must be collaborative by strengthening the capacity of the regional Ministry of Religious Affairs, establishing regular coordination with provincial/district governments, and encouraging community participation in the monitoring, evaluation, and quality development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of Law No. 20 of 2003 shows that national education policy has provided a strong normative foundation for strengthening Islamic education through institutional recognition of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), professionalization of educators, mandatory religious education, and equality of educational units. However, empirical evidence shows that implementation outcomes remain inconsistent with the law's mandate. Disparities in access between regions, disparities in the quality of Islamic education teachers, dual curriculum burdens, limited infrastructure, and weak cross-institutional coordination are the main sources of the policy gap.

Structural causes of this discrepancy include bureaucratic fragmentation between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, variations in local government capacity, dependence on the state budget (APBN), weaknesses in internal governance of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools, and uneven distribution of EMIS data quality. These conditions emphasize that the success of Islamic education policy depends not only on regulations but also requires strengthened governance, increased institutional capacity, and affirmative action for structurally weak madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools.

Thus, improving Islamic education in Indonesia requires integrative reforms that include improving teacher competency, strengthening needs-based funding, harmonizing curricula across ministries, and implementing a collaborative governance model capable of bridging the gap

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between the normative objectives of the law and actual conditions on the ground. These reforms are crucial for Islamic education to develop more equitably and contribute optimally to the quality of national education.

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