



## **Madrasah From A Historical Perspective: Its Contribution to The Development of Islamic Education in Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the historical development of madrasah and its contribution to the evolution of Islamic education in Indonesia, addressing the persistent tension between traditional religious instruction and modern educational demands. Despite extensive scholarship, existing studies often lack critical synthesis regarding institutional transformation and epistemological adaptation. This research employs a non-empirical qualitative design based on historical and literature analysis, drawing upon scholarly articles, policy documents, and academic works to construct a comprehensive analytical framework. Data were systematically selected, categorized, and interpreted using a critical-historical approach to identify patterns of institutional change and conceptual shifts. The findings reveal that madrasah have evolved through phases of informal religious instruction, institutional formalization, and modern integration, reflecting adaptive responses to socio-political and educational pressures. Curricular transformation demonstrates a hybrid epistemology that integrates religious and general knowledge, enhancing the relevance of madrasah in contemporary contexts. Additionally, madrasah play a significant socio-educational role in expanding access to education and fostering social mobility, although challenges related to quality disparities and global pressures persist. The study concludes that madrasah remain pivotal in shaping Islamic education through a dynamic balance between tradition and innovation.*

**Keywords:** Curriculum transformation, Islamic education, madrasah development, social change, socio-historical analysis.



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The contemporary global discourse on Islamic education has increasingly emphasized the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, particularly in postcolonial Muslim societies where institutional adaptation reflects broader socio-political transformations. Within this evolving landscape, madrasah systems have emerged not merely as repositories of classical religious knowledge but as hybrid institutions negotiating global educational standards, state policies, and local epistemologies. Comparative studies on Islamic schooling across regions reveal that the Indonesian madrasah represents a distinctive model characterized by its integrative approach to religious and general education, shaped by historical contingencies and institutional reforms (Nurdiyanto et al., 2024).

This trajectory situates Indonesia as a critical site for examining how Islamic educational institutions respond to globalization while maintaining doctrinal authenticity, thereby rendering the historical analysis of madrasah development an essential scholarly endeavor in understanding broader patterns of educational transformation. Scholarly inquiries into the historical evolution of madrasah in Indonesia consistently highlight its adaptive capacity and socio-cultural embeddedness, yet these studies often diverge in their interpretative emphases and analytical depth. While Aristiyanto (2023) foregrounds the institutional growth of madrasah in the modern era as a response to colonial and post-independence educational policies, Fajri and Ilmi (2025) conceptualize this evolution as part of a broader continuum of Islamic educational reform rooted in indigenous intellectual traditions. Parallel analyses by Nurazizah et al. (2025) and Tamim (2024) underscore the relational dynamics between pesantren and madrasah, arguing that the latter represents a formalization and systematization of earlier Islamic pedagogical practices.

Chairiyah (2021) and Hadinda et al. (2026) further expand this narrative by tracing the institutionalization of madrasah within state frameworks, emphasizing regulatory interventions and curricular standardization. Despite these contributions, the literature tends to oscillate between descriptive historiography and normative assertions, often lacking a critical synthesis that interrogates underlying epistemological shifts and structural transformations. A closer examination of existing studies reveals several conceptual and empirical limitations that constrain a comprehensive understanding of madrasah development in Indonesia. Many analyses remain confined to linear historical narratives that inadequately capture the multidimensional interactions between religious authority, state intervention, and global educational paradigms. For instance, while Supriatna et al. (2022) link the conceptual foundations of Islamic education to classical figures such as Nizham al-Mulk, the translation of these theoretical frameworks into the Indonesian madrasah context is often treated as implicit rather than systematically examined. Similarly, the tendency to generalize the evolution of madrasah without sufficiently accounting for regional variations and socio-political contingencies results in an oversimplified portrayal of institutional dynamics (Nurazizah et al., 2025; Hadinda et al., 2026).

These gaps indicate a need for a more nuanced analytical framework that integrates historical depth with critical interpretation, enabling a more robust understanding of how madrasah have navigated complex transformations over time. The persistence of these analytical shortcomings underscores the urgency of re-evaluating the historical trajectory of madrasah within a more integrative and critically informed framework. As Indonesia continues to position its Islamic education system within global educational discourses, unresolved questions regarding the epistemological orientation, institutional autonomy, and socio-political function of madrasah carry significant implications for both policy formulation and academic inquiry. The increasing demand for educational models that reconcile religious values with contemporary competencies intensifies the relevance of understanding how historical developments have shaped current institutional configurations (Nurdiyanto et al., 2024).

Without a critical reassessment of these historical processes, efforts to reform or modernize madrasah risk reproducing existing structural limitations rather than addressing their root causes. Positioning this study within the broader scholarly landscape involves engaging with the historiography of Islamic education while simultaneously advancing a more critical and integrative perspective. Building upon prior works that document the growth and institutionalization of madrasah (Aristiyanto, 2023; Chairiyah, 2021), this research seeks to move beyond descriptive accounts by interrogating the underlying socio-political, intellectual, and institutional forces that have shaped its development. It aligns with recent calls for interdisciplinary approaches that combine historical analysis with sociological and educational theory, thereby enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how madrasah function as dynamic agents within Indonesia's educational ecosystem (Tamim, 2024; Supriatna et al., 2022).

In doing so, the study contributes to bridging the gap between normative discourses on Islamic education and empirical analyses of institutional transformation. This research aims to critically examine the historical development of madrasah in Indonesia by situating it within broader socio-political and intellectual contexts, while also identifying the structural and epistemological factors that have influenced its evolution. It seeks to contribute theoretically by offering a more nuanced conceptualization of madrasah as a hybrid educational institution shaped by intersecting forces of tradition and modernity, and methodologically by integrating historiographical analysis with critical synthesis to uncover patterns often overlooked in existing literature. Through this approach, the study aspires to enrich scholarly understanding of Islamic education and provide a more solid foundation for future research and policy discourse.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a non-empirical research design, specifically a qualitative historical and literature-based inquiry, as it relies on secondary data to critically examine the evolution and contribution of madrasah within the broader landscape of Islamic education in Indonesia. The data sources consist of scholarly journal articles, historical records, policy documents, and relevant academic publications that address the development of Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasah and their relationship with socio-political and intellectual transformations. The selection of sources is guided by purposive criteria emphasizing academic credibility, thematic relevance, and temporal

coverage, ensuring that both classical and contemporary perspectives are adequately represented. Priority is given to peer-reviewed international and national journals, as well as authoritative texts that contribute to the historiography of Islamic education (Fajri & Ilmi, 2025).

The analytical framework adopted in this study integrates historical analysis with critical interpretative approaches, enabling the identification of patterns, shifts, and continuities in the institutional development of madrasah, while situating these within broader theoretical discourses on education, modernization, and religious transformation. The analytical procedure involves a systematic process of data condensation, categorization, and critical synthesis, in which selected sources are examined to extract key themes related to institutional evolution, epistemological orientation, and socio-political influences. These themes are then comparatively analyzed to uncover underlying structures and conceptual linkages that shape the trajectory of madrasah development. To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the study applies strategies such as source triangulation, cross-referencing between multiple scholarly works, and iterative interpretation to minimize bias and enhance analytical depth. The research also maintains methodological transparency by clearly documenting the selection and analysis processes, thereby allowing for replicability and scholarly scrutiny. Although the study does not involve human participants, ethical considerations are upheld through proper citation practices, avoidance of plagiarism, and the responsible use of intellectual sources, ensuring adherence to academic integrity standards within the field of social and human development research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Historical Trajectory and Institutional Formation of Madrasah in Indonesia

The historical trajectory of madrasah in Indonesia reflects a complex process of institutional formation shaped by socio-religious dynamics and colonial encounters. Early Islamic education was predominantly centered in informal settings such as pesantren, which later evolved into more structured systems of instruction. The emergence of madrasah signified a transition toward formalization and curricular organization influenced by both internal reformist movements and external pressures (Saputra, 2021). This transformation indicates that madrasah cannot be detached from broader historical shifts affecting Islamic education in the archipelago. Madrasah development demonstrates a pattern of gradual institutional consolidation that aligned with the need for standardized educational frameworks. Reformist scholars introduced structured curricula combining religious and general subjects, marking a departure from purely traditional pedagogies. Such institutional restructuring positioned madrasah as intermediaries between classical Islamic scholarship and modern educational demands (Syar'i & Akrim, 2020).

This dual orientation underscores the adaptive nature of madrasah within changing historical contexts. Socio-political influences significantly shaped the institutional identity of madrasah, particularly during the colonial and early independence periods. Colonial educational policies often marginalized Islamic institutions, prompting internal reforms aimed at enhancing legitimacy and competitiveness. These reforms included administrative standardization and curriculum integration to align with emerging national education systems (Hikmah, 2020). The resulting institutional identity reflects both resistance and accommodation within a contested educational landscape. The interplay between pesantren and madrasah highlights the continuity and transformation within Islamic educational traditions.

While pesantren emphasized traditional religious instruction, madrasah introduced systematic teaching methodologies and formal assessment mechanisms. This relationship illustrates an evolutionary process rather than a dichotomous divide between traditional and modern systems (Saputra et al., 2026). Such continuity reinforces the argument that madrasah development is rooted in indigenous educational heritage. Comparative historical perspectives reveal that madrasah in Indonesia exhibit unique characteristics distinct from their counterparts in other Muslim regions. Influences from Middle Eastern educational models were selectively adapted rather than fully adopted, resulting in localized institutional forms. The synthesis of global and local elements demonstrates the contextual flexibility of madrasah as educational institutions (Rohim & Waskito, 2024).

This hybridization process contributes to their resilience and relevance across different historical periods. The institutionalization of madrasah also reflects broader processes of social change within Indonesian Muslim communities. As literacy and educational demands increased, madrasah served as accessible platforms for religious and general knowledge dissemination. Their expansion corresponded

with the rise of Muslim middle classes seeking formal education grounded in Islamic values (Maryati et al., 2023). This socio-educational function positioned madrasah as agents of community transformation. A structured overview of the phases of madrasah development can be observed through the following synthesis, where the categorization clarifies the progression of institutional forms across historical periods.

**Table 1. Historical Phases and Institutional Characteristics of Madrasah Development in Indonesia**

| Period            | Institutional Characteristics | Key Influences            | Educational Orientation |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Pre-colonial      | Informal religious learning   | Local ulama networks      | Traditional             |
| Colonial          | Early formalization           | Colonial policies         | Transitional            |
| Post-independence | Standardization               | National education system | Integrative             |
| Contemporary      | Modern adaptation             | Globalization             | Hybrid                  |

The table illustrates that institutional shifts were closely linked to external pressures and internal reforms, emphasizing the dynamic evolution of madrasah (Ariza, 2023). The categorization further reveals how each phase contributed to shaping current educational practices. The evolution of madrasah also involved epistemological shifts in knowledge production and transmission. Traditional emphasis on religious sciences gradually incorporated secular subjects, reflecting changing societal needs. This shift did not eliminate religious orientation but reconfigured it within broader educational paradigms (Enhas et al., 2023). Such epistemological adaptation highlights the capacity of madrasah to negotiate competing knowledge systems. Institutional resilience of madrasah can be attributed to their ability to balance continuity with innovation.

Historical evidence suggests that madrasah maintained core religious values while integrating modern pedagogical approaches. This balance enabled them to remain relevant despite rapid socio-political transformations (Syafei, 2025). Their persistence underscores the importance of adaptive institutional strategies in sustaining educational relevance. Critical analysis of the historical trajectory indicates that madrasah development is neither linear nor uniform but characterized by negotiation and reinterpretation. Variations in regional contexts and institutional responses demonstrate the multiplicity of pathways through which madrasah evolved. This complexity challenges simplified narratives that portray madrasah as static or monolithic institutions (Shah et al., 2026). The historical perspective thus provides a nuanced understanding of madrasah as dynamic entities shaped by intersecting forces of tradition, reform, and socio-political change.

### **Curricular Transformation and Epistemological Orientation of Madrasah**

The transformation of madrasah curricula in Indonesia reflects a sustained negotiation between religious orthodoxy and modern educational imperatives. Historically, the curriculum was dominated by classical Islamic sciences, including fiqh, tafsir, and hadith, which formed the epistemological backbone of early instruction. Over time, the inclusion of general subjects such as mathematics, science, and language marked a significant shift toward integrative education models (Azmi et al., 2025). This transformation illustrates the capacity of madrasah to recalibrate their knowledge systems in response to evolving societal demands. Curricular adaptation in madrasah is not merely a technical modification but represents a deeper epistemological reorientation. The integration of secular knowledge necessitated the reinterpretation of Islamic educational philosophy to accommodate broader intellectual frameworks. Scholars argue that this synthesis reflects an effort to harmonize revelation-based knowledge with empirical inquiry, rather than subordinating one to the other (Bakar, 2024).

Such a paradigm challenges binary distinctions between religious and secular education. The evolution of curriculum also reveals the influence of state policies and national education standards.

Government regulations have encouraged the alignment of madrasah curricula with formal schooling systems, thereby enhancing their institutional legitimacy. This alignment often involves standardized assessment mechanisms and competency-based learning frameworks (Arif & Hidayati, 2024). These developments demonstrate how policy interventions shape epistemological directions within educational institutions. At the same time, curricular transformation has generated tensions regarding the preservation of Islamic identity. The incorporation of general subjects raises concerns about the dilution of religious content and pedagogical focus. Some scholars contend that excessive standardization risks marginalizing traditional knowledge systems that define the uniqueness of madrasah (Enhas et al., 2023).

This tension reflects broader debates on the future orientation of Islamic education. The epistemological orientation of madrasah is further shaped by its historical continuity with pesantren traditions. Despite curricular expansion, foundational religious teachings remain central to the educational process. This continuity ensures that madrasah maintain their role as custodians of Islamic scholarship while adapting to contemporary contexts (Saputra et al., 2026). The coexistence of continuity and change highlights the multidimensional nature of curricular evolution. A synthesized representation of curricular components across different phases provides insight into the structural transformation of madrasah education.

**Table 2. Evolution of Madrasah Curriculum and Pedagogical Orientation in Indonesia**

| Curriculum Phase | Religious Content | General Subjects | Pedagogical Approach             |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Traditional      | Dominant          | Minimal          | Textual and memorization         |
| Transitional     | Balanced          | Emerging         | Mixed methods                    |
| Modern           | Integrated        | Significant      | Interactive and competency-based |

The table demonstrates how the proportional balance between religious and general subjects has shifted over time, indicating a progressive move toward integrative pedagogy (Syar'i & Akrim, 2020). This structural change reflects broader educational reforms influencing Islamic institutions. The integration of modern subjects has also contributed to the professionalization of madrasah graduates. Students are increasingly equipped with skills relevant to contemporary labor markets while retaining religious literacy. This dual competence enhances the social mobility of graduates and strengthens the institutional relevance of madrasah (Maryati et al., 2023).

Such outcomes illustrate the functional benefits of curricular transformation. From a theoretical perspective, the curricular evolution of madrasah can be understood through the lens of educational hybridity. The blending of traditional and modern knowledge systems creates a unique epistemic framework that resists rigid categorization. This hybridity enables madrasah to function as sites of knowledge negotiation where diverse intellectual traditions intersect (Shah et al., 2026). The concept underscores the adaptive resilience of Islamic educational institutions. Critical examination reveals that curricular reforms are not uniformly implemented across all madrasah.

Variations in institutional capacity, regional context, and leadership influence the extent and nature of curricular change. These disparities highlight the importance of localized approaches in understanding educational transformation (Ariza, 2023). Such heterogeneity complicates attempts to generalize the development of madrasah curricula. The ongoing transformation of madrasah curricula signifies an evolving epistemological landscape shaped by internal reflection and external pressures. This process involves continuous reinterpretation of educational goals, balancing the preservation of Islamic identity with the demands of modernity. The resulting framework reflects a dynamic equilibrium rather than a fixed model of education (Syafei, 2025). The analysis affirms that curricular change remains central to understanding the broader contribution of madrasah to Islamic education in Indonesia.

### **Socio-Educational Contribution and Contemporary Challenges of Madrasah**

The socio-educational contribution of madrasah in Indonesia extends beyond formal instruction, encompassing broader roles in community formation and cultural transmission. Historically, madrasah have functioned as centers for the dissemination of Islamic values, shaping moral frameworks and social norms within Muslim communities. This role positions madrasah as not only educational institutions but also as agents of social cohesion and identity construction (Maryati et al., 2023). Such embeddedness within society reinforces their relevance in sustaining religious and cultural continuity. Madrasah have contributed significantly to expanding access to education, particularly among marginalized and rural populations. Their relatively accessible structure and community-based orientation have enabled wider participation in formal learning processes. This inclusivity supports the argument that madrasah serve as instruments of educational democratization within the Indonesian context (Saputra, 2021).

The expansion of access also reflects the responsiveness of madrasah to socio-economic disparities. The institutional role of madrasah in fostering social mobility has become increasingly evident in contemporary settings. Graduates equipped with both religious and general knowledge are able to navigate diverse professional fields while maintaining their religious identity. This dual competency enhances their adaptability within modern socio-economic structures (Azmi et al., 2025). The contribution of madrasah in this regard highlights their strategic position within the broader educational ecosystem. At the same time, madrasah face persistent challenges related to institutional quality and resource disparities. Variations in infrastructure, teacher qualifications, and funding mechanisms create uneven educational outcomes across different regions. These disparities underscore structural constraints that limit the effectiveness of madrasah in achieving their educational objectives (Arif & Hidayati, 2024).

Addressing such inequalities remains a critical concern for policymakers and educators. The influence of globalization introduces additional complexities to the operation of madrasah. Exposure to global educational standards and technological advancements necessitates continuous adaptation in teaching methods and curriculum design. This process often requires balancing global competencies with the preservation of Islamic educational values (Enhas et al., 2023). The tension between global integration and local identity shapes contemporary discourse on madrasah development. Madrasah also encounter challenges related to public perception and institutional legitimacy. Despite their contributions, they are sometimes perceived as less competitive compared to general education institutions. Such perceptions can affect enrollment patterns and policy prioritization, potentially marginalizing madrasah within national education systems (Hikmah, 2020).

Overcoming these perceptions requires strategic institutional strengthening and public engagement. From a socio-historical perspective, the resilience of madrasah can be attributed to their adaptive strategies in responding to changing environments. Institutional flexibility allows them to integrate new pedagogical approaches while maintaining core religious values. This adaptability reflects a long-standing tradition of reform within Islamic education (Shah et al., 2026). The ability to evolve without losing foundational identity remains a defining characteristic of madrasah. The relationship between madrasah and pesantren continues to influence their contemporary development. While both institutions share common roots, their functional differentiation has become more pronounced over time. Madrasah tend to align with formal education systems, whereas pesantren retain stronger ties to traditional learning models (Saputra et al., 2026).

This differentiation contributes to the diversity of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Critical analysis suggests that policy frameworks play a crucial role in shaping the future trajectory of madrasah. Government interventions in curriculum standardization, accreditation, and funding significantly influence institutional performance. Effective policy design requires a nuanced understanding of the unique characteristics and needs of madrasah (Bakar, 2024). Policy alignment with institutional realities is essential for sustainable development. The contemporary position of madrasah reflects a dynamic interplay between contribution and challenge, where institutional strengths coexist with structural limitations. Their role in advancing Islamic education remains significant, yet it is continuously redefined by socio-political and global influences. Analytical engagement with these dynamics reveals that the future of madrasah depends on their capacity to navigate complexity while sustaining their educational mission (Syafei, 2025).

## CONCLUSION

The historical analysis demonstrates that madrasah in Indonesia have evolved as dynamic educational institutions shaped by continuous interaction between tradition, reform, and socio-political change. Their development reflects a gradual transition from informal religious learning systems toward structured and integrative educational models that accommodate both Islamic sciences and modern disciplines. This transformation highlights the epistemological flexibility of madrasah in responding to shifting societal needs while preserving their foundational religious identity. At the same time, their socio-educational contributions particularly in expanding access to education, fostering social mobility, and sustaining cultural values affirm their strategic role within the national education landscape. Persistent challenges related to institutional quality, policy alignment, and global pressures indicate that the evolution of madrasah remains an ongoing process rather than a completed trajectory. The study ultimately underscores that the sustainability and relevance of madrasah depend on their capacity to maintain a balanced synthesis between tradition and innovation within an increasingly complex educational environment.

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