

*International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*  
 Vol. 23, No. 6, pp. 504-523, June 2024  
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.6.23>  
 Received Apr 7, 2024; Revised Jun 17, 2024; Accepted Jun 30, 2024

# Challenges in Islamic Education Curriculum Development: A Comparative Study of Indonesia, Pakistan, and India

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**Abstract.** This study identified the challenges in Islamic education curriculum development in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. By using a paradigmatic interpretive approach, data were obtained from interviews with 15 international students enrolled for the Islamic studies doctoral program in Malaysia; these students were from Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. These students each have more than five years of experience teaching Islamic education subjects in their respective countries. The study found that, in Indonesia, the main challenges in Islamic education curriculum development are integrating the national curriculum with local and global diversity and increasing the accessibility of education for people at all levels of society. The gap between Islamic education patterns in madrasas and public schools should also be addressed. In Pakistan, the main challenge was the accessibility of education, especially in rural areas, and overcoming limited infrastructure and facilities that are the result of the government's low education budget. Complex challenges, such as gender inequality, ethnic discrimination, and political conflict also hamper curriculum development efforts. In India, challenges center on the conflict between Islam and Hinduism; furthermore, disputes over history and religious identity complicate the integration of Islamic values into the broad curriculum. Another significant barrier is shortcomings in the technological expertise of teachers. While the challenges in the

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different countries differ, they share similarities in terms of the complexity of crafting a curriculum that is relevant to technological developments, and the needs of a dynamic job market. This study can contribute to policy-making, so that these three countries can work together to improve and enhance the quality of Islamic education.

**Keywords:** international students; curriculum; Islamic education; Indonesia; Pakistan; India

## 1. Introduction

The challenges faced in developing Islamic education curricula in the world's largest Muslim-populated countries serve as an interesting study topic. Indonesia, Pakistan, and India are today the countries with the largest Muslim populations (Bai, 2023). Indonesia has the largest Muslim population, of 240.62 million (Sukabdi et al., 2023), followed by Pakistan, with a Muslim population of 232.06 million (Jiwani, 2023), and India, with a Muslim population of 208.57 million (Chatterjee et al., 2023). The population distributions in these three countries reflect the complexity and social, cultural, and political diversity of each country, and provide a unique context for Islamic education curriculum development. It is important to understand the challenges of Islamic education curriculum development, in order to adapt to the needs and contexts of local communities (Lubis, 2015). Moreover, curriculum development plays an important role in maintaining the continuity of good quality religious education for millions of Muslims in the region (Mahfud, 2019).

As the three countries with the largest Muslim populations in the world, Indonesia, Pakistan, and India have become the center of attention of researchers studying the state of Islamic education. Daulay and Tobroni (2017), for example, measured the impact of teaching methods used in Islamic education in Indonesia on students' knowledge of religion. They found that the method of teaching religion in Indonesia tended to be old-fashioned, which bored students. Another analysis was conducted by Sikand (2009), who explains that the understanding of Islamic religious materials by middle-class students in India was strongly influenced by teachers' proficiency in technology, and curriculum evaluation. Meanwhile, Akanwa's (2015) research found that government policies that regulate religious curriculum caused more tolerant behavior by students in relation to religious, social, and cultural differences (Ali et al., 2022). However, research comparing the challenges of developing Islamic education curricula in the three countries is lacking. It is important to understand the different cultural and social dynamics at play (Ayuningsih et al., 2020). The perspectives of international students have not been adequately captured in the academic literature, even though their experiences can provide valuable insights that could support curriculum development in their home countries (Akanwa, 2015). Practical gaps in the academic literature related to the challenges of developing an Islamic education curriculum for international students from Indonesia, Pakistan and India should be the focus of future research.

In response to this gap in the literature, the aim of this study was to identify the different challenges of Islamic education curriculum development in Indonesia, Pakistan and India. These three countries were chosen because they each have unique social, cultural and political contexts that influence the approach to and implementation of the Islamic education curriculum (Khalid, 2021). In addition to these countries being home to the largest numbers of Muslims in the world, their differences in geography, history, demography, and the role of religion in society are important factors in understanding the challenges of Islamic education curriculum development in these countries (Kong et al., 2006).

This study decided to use international students as the source of data, because they are the main stakeholders in dealing with cultural and experiential differences in the Islamic education system (Lin & Yi, 1997). This study provides in-depth insights into the dynamics and complexities of Islamic education curriculum development in various multicultural contexts, and makes a valuable contribution to the improvement of Islamic education at the international level.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Approach and Design**

This study investigated the perspectives and experiences of international students from Indonesia, India, and Pakistan, who were studying in Malaysia, to view the challenges of Islamic education curriculum development in their respective countries. The paradigmatic interpretation method was used to understand the subjective viewpoints of students, with the belief that a deeper understanding can be gained through investigating their perspectives (Hyett et al., 2014). A qualitative approach was used to explore how international students interpreted the challenges of Islamic education curriculum development. We selected doctoral students as research participants because they held potential for expressing deep insights and enlightened views that could serve as hypotheses for future research (Pietilä et al., 2020). This research was exploratory in nature, and we applied a case study design to provide insights and describe meanings that could be analyzed as potential hypotheses for further research (Sherry et al., 2010). A case study approach is not tied to causal theoretical models or tested hypotheses, but rather focuses on the emic aspects of a case, thereby enabling researchers to explore the nuances, interpretations, and experiences of informants through the narratives they provide (Baškarada, 2014). This approach facilitated the integration of various nuances, interpretations, and, especially, informants' experiences through their stories.

### **2.2 Participants**

In this study, 15 international doctoral students who were completing their studies at Universiti Malaya, Malaysia, and who had experience teaching in schools in their home countries were involved. They were selected based on several criteria, including teaching experience – more than five years required – and willingness to participate in the study. Although invitations were

distributed to all students (22 in total) via email, only 15 responded positively. The group consisted of eight women and seven men, with ages ranging from 32 to 42 years. All informants were asked to provide informed consent after they had received a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study and their involvement, to ensure ethical compliance. All informants gave their consent to be quoted in this article. Participants' identities are not revealed, and the pseudonyms listed in Table 1 are used in reporting the data (Höhne et al., 2024).

**Table 1: Countries of origin of doctoral students at Universiti Malaya who participated in the study**

| <b>Pseudonyms of informants</b> | <b>Country of origin</b> |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| IN1-IN5                         | Indonesia                |
| PA1-PA5                         | Pakistan                 |
| DA1-DA5                         | India                    |

### 2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected from participants through the Google Meet platform, which was used to conduct interviews. A five-part semi structured interview guide was used to elicit data from informants. Participants were contacted via email and provided with information related to the study, and were invited to join an interview session. After obtaining consent from the informants, a separate Google Meet meeting schedule was developed. A total of three meetings were held with informants; the meetings were recorded and lasted for approximately 60 minutes each. The interview guide included a series of questions aimed at exploring informants' views on the challenges in developing Islamic education curricula in the countries of Indonesia, Pakistan, and India.

The researchers listened carefully to the audio recordings or watched video recordings, and this data were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. During transcription, researchers paid attention to intonation, pauses and emotions that provided additional context to the conversation. After the transcripts are complete, researchers usually make revisions to ensure consistency and completeness of the data. The verified transcripts were analyzed further to identify themes, patterns, and insights relevant to the research objectives.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

In this research, data analysis followed the six steps of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2023). This process includes stages for engagement with the data, coding, and theme development. The researchers were aware of the interconnectedness of the stages and the iterative nature of the analysis. The initial stage involved familiarization with the data and recording of exploratory notes. The data were then systematically coded to identify important words or phrases. These codes became the basis for developing initial themes, which were then expanded upon to ensure accurate

representation. This process involved recording the development of themes and their relationships to the overall data.

The next step involved a careful process of researching the themes and subthemes and retesting them using the raw data. After this stage, our focus was on determining, naming, and agreeing on the most relevant themes. During this process, we endeavored to develop narratives that encompassed key aspects of the available data. These themes continued to be revised iteratively to ensure congruence with our research objectives. The final step involved drafting a report, in which we quote the utterances of informants to illustrate the themes that had been identified (Ní Néill et al., 2023). This approach was adopted with the aim of maintaining the integrity and originality of the narratives submitted by the informants.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Challenges of Islamic Education Curriculum Development in Indonesia

This section discusses the central challenges in the development of Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia, which involved several crucial themes. The first theme is the integration of the national curriculum with the reality of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. The second theme relates to increasing the accessibility of education for all segments of society; and, the third theme discusses balancing education patterns between madrasas and public schools to reduce disparities. The complexity of cultural and social diversity, as well as differences in education infrastructure between urban and rural areas, are determining factors to achievement of the objectives of the Islamic education curriculum. Addressing these challenges affects the formation of an inclusive Islamic identity and ensures equal access to educational opportunities offered by the Islamic education curriculum. If an Islamic education curriculum is integrated carefully, it can be key to addressing social disparities and improving the quality of education in Indonesia.

In one of the interviews, Informant IN1 highlighted the main challenges in developing the Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia. According to this informant, the biggest challenge was integrating the national curriculum with the conditions of cultural, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity that exist in Indonesia. IN1 revealed that creating a curriculum that is sensitive to such diversity is a complex endeavor, and requires a careful approach. IN1 emphasized that, in such a diverse context, the need is to design a curriculum that enables students to understand and appreciate cultural, ethnic, racial, and cultural differences, while maintaining the desired quality of Islamic education. In this context, IN1 underlined the need for an inclusive and holistic approach to designing the Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia, and said,

*We believe that creating a curriculum that is sensitive to such diversity is complex and requires a very careful approach. In such a diverse context, we emphasize the need to design a curriculum that enables students to understand and appreciate these differences, while maintaining the desired quality of Islamic education*

In turn, Informant IN3 explained that challenges facing the development of an Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia also relate the accessibility of education for all levels of society. Based on the experience of this informant, people in West Nusa Tenggara, Papua, and remote islands struggle to access education, because of a lack of transportation, the long distances to schools, and a shortage of qualified educators. These shortcomings have an effect on the level of participation and quality of education in these areas, and create an education gap between urban and rural areas. As expressed by IN3,

*The limited infrastructure and educators in remote areas are the main obstacles in improving access and quality of Islamic education for children in Indonesia.*

These conditions were confirmed by Informant IN4, who referred to several complex factors. One of them is extreme poverty, which hinders access to education for many individuals. In addition, inadequate family support is an important factor that stands in the way of the learning process. The ethnic diversity of the education institution creates challenges for integrating local needs in an equitable curriculum. Learning methods that do not fit the local context also make it difficult to achieve equitable education quality. Informant N4 emphasized that these challenges are rooted in fundamental issues, such as geography, limited access to and inadequate education infrastructure, too few teachers or educators, and sociocultural barriers that need to be addressed as a whole. Informant IN4 explained as follows:

*Extreme poverty, the absence of adequate family support, the diversity of ethnic groups living in administrative units, and learning methods that do not fit the local context are the reasons why it is difficult to realize an equitable quality of education.*

Informant IN2 strengthened the previous argument by explaining that the challenge of integrating the Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia in the face of conditions of cultural, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity is very complex. This informant said,

*The Islamic education curriculum must be able to reflect the universal values of Islam while still accommodating the rich local diversity of cultures and traditions.*

The example of this challenge that was given relates to the teaching of creed material in Islamic schools in areas characterized by diverse religions and beliefs. Conveying the concepts of the Islamic creed without prejudice, and respecting different spiritual beliefs and practices is a dilemma that must be faced by curriculum developers and teachers in the field. However, the reality of religious conflict, such as the Poso, Sampit, and other tragedies, shows the importance of an inclusive approach to overcoming the negative impact of differences in religious identity and understanding. IN2 said,

*The real phenomenon of this challenge can be seen in the teaching of creed material in schools. The teacher is faced with the challenge of conveying the concepts of the Islamic creed, whereas he must still respect the beliefs and spiritual practices of other religions. The failure of teachers to adapt this phenomenon will have an impact on the emergence of religious conflicts such as the Poso, Sampit and other*

*tragedies.*

According to informant IN5, in addition to the problems described by other informants, the visible inequality between the pattern of Islamic education in madrasas and public schools is a serious challenge for the development of Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia. Informant IN5 explained that this difference creates a disparity in the understanding of religion and Islamic science between the two institutions. While madrasas often focus on Islamic religious learning, public schools place more emphasis on a general curriculum that includes the natural and social sciences and humanities. To overcome this challenge, IN5 emphasized the need for synergy between the two types of education institutions, and for a holistic curriculum that integrates religious and scientific aspects in a balanced manner, in order to create a skilled and faithful generation. Informant IN5 explained,

*This difference creates a disparity, madrasas often focus on Islamic religious learning while public schools place more emphasis on natural, social, and humanities sciences. They haven't been able to blend and cohere.*

Informant IN3 responded to the argument of IN5 by explaining that, in their experience, in Indonesia, the subjects of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools and madrasas differ regarding curriculum and learning approaches. IN3 said

*In public schools, PAI subjects are delivered as part of the national curriculum with a focus on a general understanding of the Islamic religion, history, ethics, and worship practices.*

Meanwhile, IN5 emphasized,

*PAI learning in schools is more likely to align the needs of students who have Islamic and non-Islamic religious backgrounds. Meanwhile, in madrasas, PAI becomes an integral part of a more specialized and in-depth curriculum on Islamic teachings, sharia laws, Quranic exegesis, and hadith.*

Madrasas emphasize the formation of a deeper and more practical understanding of religion, so that students can apply Islamic teachings in daily life, and understand religious knowledge with a higher level of proficiency. Informant IN1 explained that these differences have a significant adverse effect. In public schools, this approach can result in a more superficial and less in-depth understanding of religion. In contrast, in madrasas, the PAI approach is more specialized and in-depth, which encourages students to gain a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings and apply its principles in everyday life. These differences can reinforce social and religious divisions, and limit interfaith understanding, which is important in an increasingly pluralistic society. It can also reduce opportunities for students to engage in constructive interfaith dialogue. Therefore, efforts are needed to harmonize PAI learning approaches to promoting deep religious understanding and interfaith tolerance in the midst of diverse communities. IN1 revealed that,

*These differences can reinforce social and religious divisions, as well as limit interfaith understanding that is important in an increasingly pluralistic society. It can also reduce opportunities for students to*

*engage in constructive interfaith dialogue.*

At the end of the discussion session, the informants agreed to provide input regarding the conditions of developing Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia. IN1 referred to several strategic steps to integrate the national curriculum with conditions of cultural, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity. According to IN1,

*Integration is important because Indonesia is rich in diversity, and the curriculum must reflect that to create inclusion.*

To improve the accessibility of education for people at all levels of society, concrete steps need to be taken, such as the provision of infrastructure, teacher training, and financial support. Meanwhile, IN4 explained,

*Education must be a right for all, without exception, so that Indonesia can progress together.*

Achieving this goal would require serious efforts to overcome the disparity between the pattern of Islamic education in madrasas and public schools. IN5, an education researcher, asserted that

*We need to look at fairness in Islamic education, both in madrasas and in public schools, to ensure every child gets equal opportunities to develop."*

Informant IN2 explained that,

*The curriculum should reflect our values of diversity, creating space for all tribes, races, and cultures to grow together.*

Increasing the accessibility of education for all levels of society also needs to be emphasized, by providing adequate education facilities and infrastructure, as well as financial support programs. IN4 highlighted that,

*Education should be a bridge for all, regardless of social or economic status.*

In addition, dedicated efforts are needed to overcome the disparity between Islamic education in madrasas and public schools. IN5 stressed that,

*We need to bridge this gap to create equity in access to education, so that all children have equal opportunities to achieve a bright future.*

Their enthusiasm signifies the sincerity of international students from Indonesia to participate in developing education in their home countries.

### **3.2 Challenges of Islamic Education Curriculum Development in Pakistan**

One of the themes identified by this study is that the development of an Islamic religious education curriculum in Pakistan is faced by challenges relating to the accessibility of education, especially in certain regions. A second theme is that curriculum implementation is hampered by limited infrastructure and facilities, as a result of inadequate government budget for education. These challenges are compounded by other complex issues that permeate the education sector, such as gender inequality, ethnic discrimination, and political conflict. To address these challenges, the Islamic curriculum must be designed with due regard for complex social, cultural and economic contexts, while remaining relevant to the needs of the times.

Furthermore, the curriculum needs to strengthen students' critical and creative skills, so that they can face the challenges of an increasingly globalized age.

Informant PA1 explained that the development of Islamic religious education curricula in Pakistan faces major challenges, especially regarding accessibility, especially in rural areas, which often have limited educational infrastructure. PA2 claimed that,

*This complexity is compounded by conditions in Balochistan, the so-called 'lawless' region at the center of tensions between Pakistan and Iran.*

To add insult to injury, poor accessibility in rural areas, such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan, pose a serious obstacle to delivering the Islamic curriculum equally to the entire population. PA3 mentioned that,

*Factors such as lack of schools, long distances, and limited resources are barriers to effective and inclusive curriculum development efforts.*

These challenges call for strategic measures that include improving education infrastructure, training teachers, and utilizing technology to improve access and quality of Islamic religious education across the country, but especially in rural areas. Informant PA4 explained that the adverse impact of this phenomenon is felt by students and teachers in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit-Baltistan, particularly in the process of learning religion in the classroom. In Balochistan, which PA2 called a 'lawless' region, security is a major obstacle to providing adequate access to education. Students and teachers have to deal with tensions between Pakistan and Iran, which create an unstable learning environment. Difficult security conditions also affect education infrastructure, which make learning facilities vulnerable to damage and limit maintenance. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan, limited education infrastructure in rural areas creates gaps in the delivery of the Islamic curriculum. Too few schools, long distances and limited resources hamper efforts to create an effective and inclusive curriculum further. These difficulties not only hamper the development of students, but also impose an additional burden on teachers, who struggle to provide quality education under difficult conditions. PA4 explained,

*In Balochistan, security is a major obstacle to education with tensions between Pakistan and Iran disrupting the environment. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan, education infrastructure is limited in rural areas, creating gaps in the Islamic curriculum.*

Regarding education budgets, informant PA1 reported that education budgets in Pakistan are smaller than in Indonesia and India; PA1 provided very detailed data:

*Indonesia allocates an education budget of 28.57% greater than Pakistan, which is 3.6% of GDP [gross domestic product], while Pakistan only allocates 2.8% of GDP... comparisons with India also show significant inequality, with India allocating 35.71% of the education budget to 3.8% of GDP, while Pakistan only accounts for 2.8% of GDP.*

This data indicates that Pakistan should consider increasing its budget allocation for education, in order to strengthen the development of Islamic education curriculum and to improve the quality of education in the country. Informant PA2 mentioned the implications of education budget inequality between Pakistan, Indonesia, and India. According to this informant, the allocation of such as small budget to education in Pakistan can have a negative effect on the quality of education and its accessibility for the people. PA1 highlighted the need for increased investment in the education sector, to ensure that the country can compete globally and achieve higher levels of development. The discussion also opened the space for policy considerations to increase the proportion of education budgets in Pakistan, in line with best practices that have been implemented by Indonesia and India to advance their education sectors. PA2 said,

*This situation adversely affects the availability of educational facilities and teacher welfare. This has a direct impact on the low quality of learning in the classroom.*

In contrast to PA1 and PA2, PA5 commented on other issues. PA5 said that the development of the Islamic education curriculum was faced with serious challenges involving issues of gender inequality, ethnic discrimination, and political conflict:

*The issue of gender inequality is reflected in the lack of access and educational opportunities for women, as well as biases in teaching materials and practices that tend to reinforce patriarchal norms.*

Ethnic discrimination is reflected in curricula that tend to prioritize one particular ethnic group or religious view, and ignore the diversity and plurality of Pakistani society. This view was confirmed by PA4, who said,

*political conflicts often affect curriculum content, either through the influence of political groups seeking to manipulate education for the benefit of the authorities.*

In the view of PA4, political conflict is reflected in ideological agendas that create tension in approaches to education.

To address these problems, PA5 proposed an emphasis on a holistic, justice-based approach to education, which involves efforts to ensure that the Islamic education curriculum in the country is not only inclusive, but also promotes gender justice, recognizes and respects diversity in society, and deepens understanding of the values of peace and tolerance. With such an holistic approach, it is hoped that Islamic education in Pakistan can be a vehicle that fosters a deep understanding of universal values, creates an education environment that is just and inclusive, and builds a solid foundation to strengthen tolerance and harmony among diverse communities in the country.

*To the development of Islamic education in Pakistan, the curriculum is not only inclusive, but also promotes gender justice, recognizes and respects diversity in society, and deepens understanding of the values of peace and tolerance. (PA5)*

*At the end of the discussion session, the informants agreed to propose solutions that could advance Islamic education in Pakistan today.*

*They suggested that the Pakistani government take strategic steps to address education challenges, especially in remote areas that have limited accessibility and infrastructure; among their recommendations are the following:*

*The government should increase investment in the education sector by allocating adequate budgets to improve infrastructure and provide adequate facilities in remote areas. (PA1)*

*The Pakistani government should engage the private sector and charities to build schools and provide support facilities such as libraries and laboratories. (PA4)*

*To overcome accessibility limitations, governments can engage technology and provide online learning resources, which are accessible to students in remote areas. (PA2)*

*Curricula should be designed inclusively, include content relevant to local realities and accommodate different levels of ability. (PA3)*

By instituting these measures, the government can improve the accessibility of education, even in areas with limited budget and infrastructure. Informants were optimistic that Pakistani students studying in Malaysia could make valuable contributions to overcoming the challenges of curriculum development in Pakistan. Their exposure to different education approaches, their study abroad experiences, and a deep understanding of the dynamics of global education means that such students can bring new and innovative perspectives that could enrich the educational curriculum in Pakistan. Collaboration between international students and education institutions in Pakistan can lead to new ideas being implemented to improve the quality of education, enrich learning materials, and prepare young Pakistanis to face future challenges comprehensively.

### **3.3 Challenges of Islamic Education Curriculum Development in India**

The findings of this study reveal that India faced a number of challenges in the development of Islamic education curriculum. The first theme identified by the study relates to the conflict between Islam and Hinduism. Historical disputes and religious identity often complicate the integration of Islamic values into the broad curriculum. The second theme is the lack of technological expertise among teachers is a significant obstacle. The third theme is inability to integrate Jnan (knowledge), Pragya (wisdom) and Satya (truth) in the Islamic educational approach, which often resulted in internal tensions in the curriculum development process. Therefore, India needed to address interfaith conflicts, improve the quality of teacher education, and promote an inclusive approach, to achieve a better balance in the Islamic education curriculum.

In the context of Islamic education curriculum development in India, the complexity of the conflict between Islam and Hinduism created significant challenges. Informants DA1, DA4 and DA5 explained as follows:

*Historical disputes and religious identities are often major obstacles to integrating Islamic values into a curriculum that encompasses a multi-religious society. (DA1)*

*Efforts to incorporate Islamic teachings into the curriculum are often faced with strong political, cultural and social resistance, especially in the context of historical tensions between Islam and Hinduism. (DA4)*

*The development of Islamic education curricula in India requires a careful approach to navigate complex conflicts and promote a deeper understanding of religious values within the existing framework of diversity. (DA5)*

These views illustrate that the challenges faced in developing an Islamic education curriculum in India are not only technical, but include political, cultural, and social aspects that needed to be considered holistically. The devastating impact of unfavorable government policies on developing the Islamic education curriculum in India posed serious challenges to the development of Islamic education. Several informants commented in this regard:

*The lack of government funding and attention has led to a lack of resources and infrastructure needed to improve the quality of Islamic education in India. (DA2)*

*Stereotypes and discrimination against Muslim students in the education system also hinder their progress in obtaining quality education. (DA3)*

*Irrelevant Islamic education curriculum and lack of integration with general education content are also issues that need to be seriously addressed. (DA5)*

These views emphasize that a tolerant and inclusive approach to the reform of India's national education curriculum was an urgent need. The challenges of Islamic education curriculum development in India are reflected in tense social conditions and conflicts between Muslim and Hindu communities, as explained by informants:

*Violent incidents and clashes between religious groups are common, such as the one in a state ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in which six people were killed and 50 others seriously injured, indicating that the state of Islamic education in India is facing a critical period. (DA1)*

*Such violent activities are costly, not only in terms of loss of life and physical injuries, but also create social instability that threatens the security and stability of the country. (DA2)*

*In this context, the development of Islamic education curriculum should reflect these challenges by strengthening interfaith understanding, tolerance and dialogue as an integral part of Islamic education in India. (DA3)*

*Special curricula need to be designed to address tensions between religious groups and promote a deeper understanding of the values of diversity and peace in India's multicultural society. (DA5)*

Meanwhile, other challenges relate to several complex aspects, one of which is the lack of technological expertise among teachers, which is a significant obstacle to improving the quality and accessibility of Islamic education. Informants expressed the following views:

*In India, where information and communication technology is increasingly important in the learning process, the lack of understanding and application of technology by teachers can hinder educational progress. (DA3)*

*Lack of training in integrating technology into the curriculum and interactive learning also adds to the digital divide between Islamic education and other education systems. (DA5)*

*Therefore, to overcome this challenge, greater investment in technology training for Islamic teachers, as well as more effective integration of technology in the Islamic education curriculum in India is required. (DA1)*

Thus, better implementation of technology in Islamic education in India requires concerted efforts to improve the understanding and integration of technology by educators.

The challenges of the Islamic education curriculum in India are also connected to the wider conditions related to access and quality of learning after the Covid-19 pandemic. Informant DA2 explained that a survey involving nearly 1,400 schoolchildren by an education organization found that lack of access to and poor quality of learning affected children in rural areas. Only 8% of participants were able to attend online learning regularly, while 37% had no access at all, and almost half of them were unable to read more than a few words. The 17% dropout rate at the secondary school level, as revealed by data from India's Integrated District Education Information System, confirms that this challenge is not limited to Islamic education, but extends across the entire education system in India. As a result, this challenge highlights the need for comprehensive and inclusive solutions to support education in India as a whole, including Islamic education, and to ensure that children have equitable and quality access to education. DA2 said,

*Covid-19 has worsened the quality of Islamic education in India. A survey said only 8% of participants were able to attend online learning regularly, while 37% had no access at all. Almost half of them were unable to read more than a few words. The dropout rate is 17% at the secondary school level."*

Moreover, Informant DA5 explained that the challenge of Islamic education in India lies in the inability to integrate Jnan (knowledge), Pragya (wisdom), and Satya (truth) in curriculum development. Despite efforts to integrate Islamic values into the education system, difficulties have arisen in creating a balance between aspects of scholarship, wisdom, and religious truth in

learning. According to Informant DA3, this difficulty creates internal tensions in the curriculum development process, and efforts to maintain religious integrity often intersect with the need for broad knowledge and inclusive wisdom. A holistic and open approach is needed to address these challenges, and to enable the development of a curriculum that embraces Islamic values while promoting a deep understanding of universal knowledge and wisdom. To address the previously described phenomenon, Informant DA1 proposed that India adopt an inclusive and comprehensive approach to addressing a number of challenges relating to developing an Islamic education curriculum. Given the conflict between Islam and Hinduism, as well as historical disputes and religious identities that often complicate the integration of Islamic values into the broad curriculum, DA1 recommended that the government promotes interfaith dialogue and a deep understanding of the country's cultural and religious diversity. In addition, efforts to improve the technological expertise of teachers are essential to ensure that the Islamic education curriculum can be delivered effectively and relevantly in a modern context. With a holistic approach and coordinated strategy, India can address such challenges and strengthen Islamic education as an integral part of an inclusive and sustainable national education system. Informant DA1 explained,

*It takes interfaith dialogue and a deep understanding of cultural and religious diversity to integrate Islamic values into a broad curriculum.*

In commenting on the importance of the Islamic education curriculum in the Indian context, DA4 emphasized that,

*The Islamic education curriculum in India is not only about religious values, but also about 21st century skills that are relevant to students.*

This opinion was welcomed by several informants:

*Skills such as critical thinking and collaboration are important to promote through Islamic education so that students are ready for future demands. (DA2)*

*The development of digital skills and understanding of global issues should also be a focus in the Islamic education curriculum in India. (DA5)*

*The integration of Islamic education principles in the curriculum can help create equal access to education for all students, in line with the progressive vision of the Indian government. (DA1)*

Thus, the collective views of these experts highlight the importance of progressive and inclusive approaches to the development of Islamic education curriculum in India, to welcome the 21st century.

At the end of the discussion session, international students from India were optimistic that they could advance the Islamic education curriculum in India through the experience and knowledge they had gained in Malaysia. Through exposure to innovative and diverse Islamic education approaches in Malaysia, these Indian students would bring new ideas and teaching methodologies, and a deep understanding of Islamic religious education, to their country. They could be agents of change and could introduce best practices in Islamic

education, enrich academic discussions, and promote cross-cultural tolerance and understanding in Indian society. Through cross-border collaboration, Indian international students in Malaysia could serve as an important bridge for enriching the Islamic education curriculum in India and driving progress in religious and cultural understanding in both countries.

#### 4. Discussion

Islamic education curriculum development in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India is a complex and unique struggle. The challenge includes not only cultural, social and economic diversity, but also demands that the curriculum remains relevant in the face of increasingly globalized dynamics (Musaddad, 2023). In this context, studies that focus specifically on related findings are crucial (Kosim et al., 2023). These efforts would aim to understand the problems that arise, and also to formulate effective solutions for improving the quality and relevance of the Islamic education curriculum in various countries, especially in countries that have a majority Muslim population (Munadi & Alwiyah, 2016).

This study found that the main challenges in Islamic education curriculum development in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India follow similar patterns. In Indonesia, the focus is integrating the national curriculum with cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, and increasing the accessibility of education for people at all levels of society. Pakistan faces challenges of education accessibility, especially in the regions, and limited infrastructure and facilities, because of inadequate education budgets, along with complex issues such as gender inequality and political conflict in education. In India, the conflict between Islam and Hinduism is an obstacle to the integration of Islamic values into the curriculum, along with shortcomings in technological expertise in teachers, and internal tensions in the curriculum development process. Munadi and Alwiyah (2016) indicate that these challenges could have an impact on the formation of an inclusive Islamic identity and equal access to education, and that concrete steps are needed to overcome the complexity of the problems faced by each country. Table 2 provides a comparative analysis of the challenges faced by Indonesia, Pakistan, and India.

**Table 2: Comparative analysis of the challenges faced by Indonesia, Pakistan, and India as informants in Islamic curriculum development, as identified by informants**

| Challenge                       | Indonesia                                                                | Pakistan                                              | India                               |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| National curriculum integration | Integration with cultural, ethnic, racial and religious diversity        |                                                       | Conflict between Islam and Hinduism |
| Education accessibility         | Improving accessibility of education for people at all levels of society | Accessibility of education, especially in the regions |                                     |
| Infrastructure and facilities   |                                                                          | Limited facilities and infrastructure as a result of  |                                     |

|                                           |                                                       |                                                                  |                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                           |                                                       | inadequate education budget                                      |                                                                                       |
| Gender inequality                         |                                                       | Gender inequality in education                                   |                                                                                       |
| Political conflict in education           |                                                       | Political conflict in education                                  |                                                                                       |
| Teacher technology capability             |                                                       |                                                                  | Teachers lacking technological expertise                                              |
| Internal stress in curriculum development |                                                       |                                                                  | Internal tension in the curriculum development process                                |
| Inclusive Islamic identity formation      | Could be affected by diversity integration challenges | Could be affected by accessibility and infrastructure challenges | Could be affected by religious conflicts and teachers lacking technological expertise |

Considering the results of this study in light of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory exposes the importance of social and cultural context in the development of Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. According to Vygotsky, individual learning and cognitive development are strongly influenced by social and cultural interactions (Salas, 2001). In the Indonesian context, efforts to integrate the national curriculum with cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity reflect an acknowledgment of the importance of the social environment in the education process. In Pakistan, the challenges of education accessibility and limited infrastructure show how social and economic factors affect the quality of education. In India, the conflict between Islam and Hinduism and the teachers' lack of technological expertise underscore the significant role of sociocultural and technological dynamics in education development. Thus, Vygotsky would emphasize the need for a contextual and collaborative approach to addressing these challenges to achieve effective and inclusive curriculum development.

The main findings in this study support the argument of Eloquent (2012) that the majority of obstacles to education progress in developing countries relate to limited access to education. This obstacle is exacerbated, according to Mbiti (2016), by infrastructure inequality, which is still a serious problem in education in Indonesia. This is confirmed by Jiwani (2023) regarding the condition of education in India.

This study also found that interreligious conflict has become an obstacle to the development of the Islamic education curriculum. This finding contrasts with that of Khan et al. (2012), that heredity plays a strong role in religious education; therefore, other factors will not disrupt Islamic education. This study found similarities with Ahmed and Salleh's (2016) efforts to strengthen an inclusive Islamic identity in developing an Islamic curriculum, which must be supported by providing equal access to education. In the changing global context, this study illustrates the need for an holistic and sustainable approach

to addressing the challenges of Islamic education curriculum development in various countries.

Based on the findings of this study, the arguments of Rahmat and Yahya (2017) should be considered when the Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia is prepared. These authors emphasize the importance of focusing on diversity to strengthen unity in a culturally and ethnically diverse society. To improve literacy levels in Pakistan, Amjad et al. (2021) highlight the need to increase access to education, especially in rural areas. Meanwhile, in India, Eloquent (2012) emphasizes the importance of minimizing interfaith conflict and improving technological skills to support inclusive social and economic development. By understanding these contexts, research can provide valuable insights that could be useful in formulating effective policies and solutions to address the various education and social issues in these countries.

The challenges faced in Islamic education curriculum development in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India require a holistic approach that considers the local context as a key element. This is the result of a number of challenges, including accessibility of education, infrastructural inequalities and interreligious conflicts, that act as barriers. The importance of strengthening teacher skills and promoting inclusivity in the curriculum appear to be crucial steps to addressing the complexity of these challenges.

Nonetheless, there are similarities in these three countries' efforts to build Islamic education curricula that not only reinforce Islamic identity but also promote equal access to education, which reflect a determination to create an inclusive and equitable educational environment (Famularsih et al., 2022).

This research provides a deep understanding of the need for collaboration between countries and between education communities in addressing the complex challenges that arise in Islamic education curriculum development (Amin et al., 2012). The findings underscore the essence of cross-border cooperation in formulating relevant and inclusive education strategies. In addition, this reflection highlights the urgency of education reform that is responsive to the dynamics of the times, and local values (Yaacob & Emborg, 2008). By involving various parties, both locally and internationally, we can create a more solid education foundation that corresponds with the demands of the times, and enriches local values that serve as the cultural identity of the community.

## 5. Conclusion

The research found that the main challenges in developing Islamic education curriculum in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India are similar. In Indonesia, the focus is on integrating the national curriculum with cultural diversity and improving education accessibility. Pakistan experiences difficulties related to education access and limited infrastructure, and faces complex issues, such as gender inequality and political conflict. In India, conflict between Islam and Hinduism is a hurdle for integrating Islamic values into the curriculum, along

with the inadequate technological expertise of teachers. While there have been efforts to shape an inclusive Islamic identity and achieve equal access to education, concrete steps are needed to address the complexity of the issues faced by each country.

One of the main weaknesses of this study is the lack of emphasis on the role of external factors that may affect the implementation of Islamic education curricula in Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. While the research identified internal challenges faced by each country, such as accessibility issues, gender inequality, political conflicts and the lack of technological expertise of teachers, factors such as government support, community response and wider social dynamics were not discussed in depth. In the future, research should pay more attention to the interaction between internal and external factors, in efforts to develop Islamic education curricula. In addition, a more in-depth analysis of strategies that could be effective in overcoming the challenges is needed, including concrete efforts to improve education infrastructure, enhance the technological expertise of teachers, and strengthen intercultural dialogue to promote inclusivity and equality in Islamic education.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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