

The Contestation of National and Religious Curricula in Indonesia's Madrasas Since the Passage of the UUSPN

by Dr Ihsan

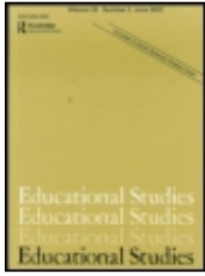
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The contestation of national and religious curricula in indonesia's *madrasas* since the passage of the *uusp*

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1 ABSTRACT

Since Indonesia's implementation of its national curriculum, the country's *madrasas* have faced a significant challenge: conforming with the government's regulations and laws. This has not been limited to observing these policies, but also implementing religious and national curricula simultaneously. Ultimately, these institutions' administrators have chosen predominantly to employ a *pesantren*-based model, which is seen as the ideal solution to their ongoing struggles. This study seeks to understand how *madrasas* competitively implement both national and religious curricula, using a qualitative approach – observation and interviews – to understand how national and religious curricula are implemented. This study finds that, in response to national guidelines, *madrasas* require an institutional basis for proportionally and systematically integrating, synergising, and adopting both the national and religious curricula. It is hoped that, by employing a *pesantren* model and system, *madrasas* can optimally achieve the desired goal: to accommodate the national curriculum without abandoning the religious values that characterise *madrasas*.

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1. Introduction

The integration of Islamic education (*pesantren* and *madrasas*) into the National Education System has required such institutions to combine their religious curricula with the national curriculum, thereby burdening them. Institutions of religious education have been required to revise their curricula; their curricula – once consisting of unique classes with their own specific strengths – have been combined with the national curriculum (Hefni 2012; Umam 2018). This is pursuant to Law No. 2 of 1989 and Law No. 20 of 2003 regarding the National Education System (henceforth UUSPN), as reinforced by Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 35 of 2018 regarding the 2013 Curriculum (Kemendikbud 2018). This is problematic, given that Indonesia has the world's largest Islamic education system, consisting of more than 10,000 *pesantren*, 37,000 *madrasas*, and 5.7 million students (Tolchah and Mu'ammad 2019). Initially, *madrasas* were categorised as subsystems of the national education system; since then, however, they have been incorporated into the national education system, and considered no different than other schools in the system (Baba 2018). At the same time, *madrasas* must continue to

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follow their Islamic education curriculum. Contestation between these systems, thus, is unavoidable, and students experience a dual burden that requires them to dedicate more time to a wider variety of studies.

To date, most studies have investigated madrasas from a management perspective (Iskandar 2017; Muniroh and Muhyadi 2017; Nurul 2018; Salim 2015; Shulhan 2018). Few have applied a curriculum perspective, and those that do have focused more on how madrasas curricula are developed and implemented (Husna and Arifin 2016; Nasir 2009, 2013, 2015; Adyanto 2015; Wekke and Astuti 2017) – especially within a policy framework, such as the 2004 and 2013 curricula (Albantani 2015; Husna and Arifin 2016; Adyanto 2015). As such, further study is necessary to understand the important issue of how national and religious curricula are contested, especially with regards to madrasas' continued efforts to remain institutions of Islamic education that imbue students with quality religious knowledge and serve as *tafaqquh fi aldin* – the preparers of young *da'i* or proselytisers (Sayono, 2001).

This study contributes to the literature by examining how madrasas implement the national curriculum while maintaining their characteristic Islamic value. Departing from the real issues mentioned above, it asks the fundamental question of how madrasas have implemented their national and religious curricula while simultaneously maintaining their essential identity. Madrasas, with their own specific opportunities and challenges, must prepare themselves to overcome challenges and make breakthroughs while complying with all applicable laws and regulations without abandoning their own particular identity.

This study's argument departs from the argument that the UUSPN and subsequent laws regarding education at the elementary, central, and higher level have limited the space and time available for religious education. As a consequence, curricula have changed, reducing the quality of religious learning, compounding the de-ideologization of madrasas, and eroding their specifically Islamic identity. This study recommends that madrasas, as public schools with an Islamic outlook, must maintain themselves as religious institutions and continue to fulfill public expectations. Madrasas must ensure that they continue to cultivate piety and a sense of *tafaqquh fi aldin* amongst Indonesia's Muslims. Further studies should expand their scope, considering tertiary institutions as well as *pesantren* and state religious schools. In this manner, future studies will be able to develop an understanding of other institutions deal with the dual burden of secular and religious learning.

2. Literature review

2.1. Madrasas as Islamic schools

Indonesia is home to the largest Islamic education system in the world, in which thousands of institutions fulfill the educational needs of the country's Muslims. Two main types of school are found in Indonesia: madrasas (Islamic schools) and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) (Parker and Raihani 2011). The country's madrasas were first established during the colonial era, being driven by several factors: efforts to create and implement a national education system; a need for religious education to provide the same opportunities as public education; and Muslims' pride in the Western education system (Istikomah, Fahyuni, and Fauji 2018). The word madrasa is derived from the Arabic

word *darasa*, which means 'to learn', and is the basis of the phrase *al-maudhi al-lati tat'allamu filhi al thullabu* "a place of learning" (Ghani et al. 2020). Madrasas are special institutions dedicated to conveying religious knowledge and traditions to Muslim students (Sikand 2019). Asadullah and Maliki (2018) write that Indonesia's madrasa system is unique, as most madrasas exist outside the state school system, being mostly under the umbrella of the country's two largest Islamic organisations: Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. Nevertheless, these schools are professionally managed and follow a government-determined curriculum, consisting of 13% religious knowledge and 87% non-religious knowledge (Istikomah, Fahyuni, and Fauji 2018).

Indonesia's madrasas, as with its state schools, follow a twelve-year curriculum. It consists of six years of Madrasa Ibtidaiyah (MI, equivalent to elementary school), three years of Madrasa Tsanawiyah (MTs, equivalent to junior high school), and three years of Madrasa Aliyah (MA, equivalent to senior high school) (Zainiyati 2016). Bano (2010) writes that madrasas were developed primarily to teach the Qur'an and the Hadiths (the collected words and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad); as such, students are provided with both religious and non-religious lessons, and must bear a dual burden (Sofanudin et al. 2016). Studying at a madrasa thus has a significant effect on students' personal and intellectual autonomy, though some have argued that such institutions limit their ideological approach to worldly issues and bias them against non-religious perspectives (Hussain and Read 2015). Religious schools and institutions often provide spaces where students can intensively develop their religious identities, which may contrast with their ethnic identity and sometimes results in exclusivism (Amin et al. 2019). In a study of the Qoumi Madrasa in Bangladesh, Bano (2014) found that students tend to specialise in religious affairs and emphasise the role of religious figures, with better knowledge of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition than non-religious subjects.

2.2. National and local (islamic) curriculum

Education scholars argue that curricula contribute significantly to schools' leadership, teachers' professionalism, and learning processes (Zainiyati 2016). At the same time, curricula offer standards that must be observed by all participants: by teachers and schools in planning and implementing the learning process, and by students in achieving certain goals (Nur and Madkur 2014). Since Indonesia's Islamic revolution, as religious schools have advanced rapidly, their curricula have experienced regular evolution and innovation. The Ministry of Religion has made significant efforts to develop Islamic educational institutions, while the Ministry of Education and Culture has offered integrated Islamic schools the opportunity to design curricula that meet national education standards (Hardianto 2019). Today, Islamic schools are expected to balance religious and non-religious subjects, albeit with some modification to reflect a religious perspective (Arvisais and Guidère 2020). Ultimately, schools teach religious lessons – the Qur'an, the Hadiths, the Oneness of God (Tauhid), Islamic worldviews, and Islamic law – in conjunction with mathematics and arithmetic oriented towards religious goals (Zarkasyi 2020).

The curricula followed by educational institutions, both Islamic and public, are two-fold: written and implied (Umar et al. 2012). In public schools, Islam is taught in the national language using written and factual data (pursuant to the written curriculum). At the same time, lessons are taught within specific contexts and value frameworks –

for instance, through the sermons of *kiai* to their students – creating a specific implicit curriculum (Umar et al. 2012). Similar points may be made regarding madrasas and their curricula, which must be adapted in accordance with specific contexts (Nasir 2018). Initially, madrasas and their lessons were dominated by an *al-'ilm al-naqliyah* perspective, with a focus on understanding the Qur'an (exegesis and recitations), the Hadiths, and related sciences (Ushulfiqh, etc.). Over time, especially after the Abbasiyah Caliphate, madrasas expanded to teach philosophy, mathematics, and medicine. Parker and Raihani (2011) write that, in Indonesia, after the passage of UUSPN in 1984/2003, Indonesia's madrasas have increasingly resembled secular schools, albeit with additional religious lessons: (1) *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence); (2) *akidah/akhlak* (values and characters); (3) Hadiths; (4) Islamic history; and (5) Arabic. All such lessons are taught using modern methods and a religious approach.

2.3. State-driven education

Indonesia has the world's largest Islamic education system, consisting of more than 10,000 *pesantren*, 37,000 madrasas, and 5.7 million students (Tolchah and Mu'ammam 2019). After Indonesia's independence, the government began preparing new guidelines and principles for administering the education sector. Under this system, religious schools such as madrasa were administered by the Ministry of Religion, while state schools were managed by the Department of Education and Culture (Qurtuby, Darmadi, and Srimulyani 2013). Parker and Raihani (2011) note that, although madrasas are under the Ministry of Religion, their curricula tend to follow that implemented by the Department of Religion and Culture. Similarly, Yukhong et al. (2019) write that schools and educational institutions seek to transform the behaviours of their students and imbue them with humanitarian and social values, and thus serve as tools for improving society and advancing the public interest. This dualism reflects a broader ideological conflict, one that permeates the government and its efforts to modernise madrasas. Education is blended with politics, thereby advancing the interests of the central government.

The Ministry of Religion has made significant efforts to develop Islamic education in Indonesia, and the Ministry of Education and Culture has provided integrated Islamic schools with the opportunity to design curricula that meet national education standards (Hardianto 2019). Since the passage of Indonesia's UUSPN in 1989 and 2003, madrasas have become similar to secular schools, albeit with additional lessons in matters of *fiqh*, *akidah/akhlak*, the Qur'an, the Hadiths, Islamic history, and the Arabic language. These lessons are divided on a 70–30 basis: 70% non-religious, 30% religious (Tan 2012). Consequently, their curricula are more burdensome for students than those of secular schools (Parker and Raihani 2011). Furthermore, owing to their status as a subsystem of the national education system, madrasas lack an essential identity that distinguishes them from other institutions (Tan 2014). Such government interference has carried over from the centralistic New Order (Siraj 2019), during which time the New Order government sought not to improve Indonesians' quality of life or improve the country's human resources, but to ensure the continued obeisance of the Indonesian people.

Table 1. Fields of Study at MA Qudsiyyah, Kudus.

| No | Field | Lessons/Classes |
|----|--|---|
| 1 | <i>al-'Ulum al-Shari'ah</i> | (a) Qur'anic Exegesis, Exegesis, Qiro'ah, Hadiths, Hadith Mustholah, Tauhid, Akhlak, Mantiq, Aswaja, Fiqh, Ushul Fiqh, and Falak Lugharitma |
| 2 | <i>al-'Ulum al-Lughawiyah</i> | (a) Nahwu – Shorof, Arabic, Balaghoh, Muthola'ah, Qiro'ah (<i>Qiro'ah Sab'ah</i>), Indonesian, English |
| 3 | <i>al-'Ulu>m al-Thaqafah</i> | (a) History, Civics, Economics, Accounting, Trade, Education, Psychiatry, Sociology, Geography, Information Technology |
| 4 | <i>al-'Ulu>m al-Riya>diiyyah</i> | (a) Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology |

3. Method

Madrasas have faced severe challenges since being required to comply with the national curriculum. This study explores the contestation of curricula in madrasas, through which they have sought to maintain their characteristic religious values while simultaneously adhering to national regulations. It seeks to show how religious and national curricula are implemented simultaneously at the MA level in Kudus, as well as the implications of their dynamic contestation at the national and local level.

This study employs a qualitative approach, recognising that social phenomena (no matter their presentation) cannot be separated from their context and setting. Education activities in madrasas, conducted in response to national policies, cannot be separated from their specific aspects and dimensions as institutional objects and subjects. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and a review of pertinent literature. Interviews were conducted with the madrasa leaders and administrators, as well as with teachers and students. Collected data were analysed using the concept of contestation to understand these institutions' simultaneous implementation of national and religious curricula.

4. Results

4.1. Reduced space for religious learning

Several private madrasas, particularly those with a strong religious vision and orientation (*tafaqquh fi al-din Salaf*), firmly distinguish between different types of religious knowledge. MA Qudsiyyah Kudus, for instance, divides its religious materials into four categories: *al-'Ulum al-Shari'ah* (Islamic law), *al-'Ulum al-Lughawiyah* (language), *al-'Ulum al-Thaqafah* (social and cultural sciences), and *al-'Ulum al-Riyadiyyah* (natural sciences). Each of these categories consists of several disciplines. Other madrasas follow the Ministry of Religion, with several additional lessons (as seen in [Table 1](#) below).

Source: compiled by researchers, 2020

The ongoing contestation of religious and national curricula is rooted in Islamic leaders and administrators' dissatisfaction with the Islamic education materials (content standards) and results (competency standards) formulated by the Ministry of Religion, particularly its consequences for students' Islamic knowledge. Data collected by the researchers found that state and private madrasas differ significantly in their understanding and signification of Islam (interview with Kiai Fahrudin, 2017). State madrasas follow

Table 2. Madrasa Aliyah and Local Pesantren.

| NO | MADRASA ALIYAH AND PESANTREN |
|----|---|
| A | MADRASAS WITH PESANTREN CHARACTERISTICS |
| 1 | MA Ma'ahid 1. Pesantren Ma'ahid |
| 2 | MA NU TBS 1. Atthullab 2. MUSYQ 3. Raudlatul Muta'allimin 4. Yanbuul Qur'an Remaja 5. TBS 6. Darut Ta'lim 7. Miftahul Falah |
| 3 | MA QUDSIYYAH 1. Ma'had Qudsiyyah 2. Darul Furqon 3. Darut Ta'lim 4. Manba'ul Ulum, 5. Mazro'atul Ulum 6. Miftahul Falah 7. Riyadus Sholihin 8. Raudlatul Mardiyah 9. Raudlatul Muta'allimin, 10. Raudlatul Thalibin Kerjasan |
| 4 | MA NU Banat (PK) 1. Yanabiul Ulum Warrahmah 2. Nahdlatul Banat lil Ulum 3. Asy'ariyyah 4. Raudlatul Jannah 5. Yanbu'ul Qur'an Putri 6. Raudlatul Muta'allimat 7. Darul Fathonah 8. Almubarok 9. Arofah 10. APIK 11. Dzikril Hakim 12. Raudlatul Ulum 13. Ittihadul Falah 14. Al – Asnawiyyah 15. MUSYQ Putri 16. Sabilur Rosyad 17. Al – Fadlillah |
| 5 | MA Miftahul Falah 1. Al Muhith |
| 6 | MA NU Ibtidaul Falah 1. Al-Huda Al-Fathoniyah 2. Miftahul Huda |

Table 2. Implementation of Islamic Education in Madrasas Resembling *Pesantren*.

| NO | NAME MA | ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND ARABIC | | | | |
|----|-----------------|--|--|--|----------|--|
| | | 1 Qur'an/Hadiths | 2 Akidah/Akhlaq | 3 Fiqh | 4 SKI | 5 Arabic |
| 1 | Ma'ahid | Lughot Qur'an, Ulumul Qur'an, Hadiths, Ahkam, Mustholah Hadist | Akidah/al Iman, Akhlaq | Usul Fiqh, Fiqh | | Nahwu, Shorof |
| 2 | TBS | Exegesis, Hadiths, Qiroah Sab'ah | Tashawuf, Tauhid, Aswaja, NU Identity, Manteq | Usul Fiqh, Local Fiqh | | Nahwu, Balaghoh, Qiroatul Kutub |
| 3 | Qudsiyyah | Qur'anic Exegesis, Exegesis, Qiroah, Hadiths Mustholah Hadiths | Tauhid, Akhlaq, Manteq, Aswaja Doctrine | Local Fiqh, Usul Fiqh, Qowaidul Fiqhiyyah, Falak | | Nahwu Shorof, Arabic, Balaghoh, Muthola'ah |
| 4 | Banat (PK) | Exegesis, Hadiths, Musyafahah | Akhlaq, Kalam, Tauhid, NU Identity, Hujjah Ahlus Sunah, Manteq | Fiqh Amali, Qawaidul Fiqhiyyah | | Mutholaah Kitab, Balaghoh, Arudl |
| 5 | Miftahul Falah | Qur'anic Exegesis, Hadiths, Mustholah Hadiths | Tauhid, Manteq, NU Identity, Akhlaq, Tashawuf, Aswaja | Local Fiqh, Usul Fiqh, Qowaidul Fiqhiyyah | | Nahwu, Balaghoh, Muthola'ah |
| 6 | Darul Ulum | Exegesis, Hadiths, Mustholahul Hadiths | Tauhid, Tasawwuf | Fiqh, Ushul Fiqh, Tarikh Tasyri' | Tarikh | Nahwu, Shorof, Balaghoh, Mutholaah, Mantiq |
| 7 | Ibtida'ul Falah | Exegesis, Exegesis and Hadiths | Tauhid, Tashawuf, NU Identity, Manteq, Civilisation | Local Fiqh, Tasyri', Qowaid, Falak | | Nahwu, Balaghoh, Qiro'atul Kutub |

the Islamic education guidelines, focusing on the Qur'an, Hadiths, Akidah and Akhlaq, Fiqh, Islamic history, and the Arabic language. Private madrasas, meanwhile, attempted to implement the state curriculum, but deemed it ill-suited to maintaining their essential identity. These institutions have revised the state curriculum, adding other lessons deemed relevant to understanding the Qur'an, the Hadiths, and other classical texts. Several madrasas have thus adopted materials and systems that resemble those of *pesantren*. This may be seen in [Table 2](#) below:

Source: compiled by researchers, 2020

In interviews, informants agreed that the “recognition of madrasas in the national education systems was a political strategy that ‘benefited’ Muslims and the madrasa system. As such, the policy’s legitimacy was accepted. In application, however, the curriculum has been revised to maintain madrasas’ identity” (interview, Principal of MAN 2, 2019). Some madrasas have significantly changed, or even totally revised, their competency standards and learning systems, holding that the Ministry of Religion’s standards are too elementary and choosing instead to achieve a deeper understanding of religion (*tafaqquh fi al-din*). For many parents, the ability to read and understand the classical texts (known locally as *kitab kuning*) is a main selling point for madrasas. As such, many madrasas are substantively similar to *pesantren* in their competencies, learning systems, and cultures. It is thus not excessive to say that these madrasas seek to retain their characteristic systems and models (Supaat, 2015).

Source: compiled by researchers, 2020

According to the above table, six institutions in Kudus gauge students’ ability to understand classical texts: (1) MA Qudsiyyah, (2) MA *Tashwiq al Tullab Salafi*, (3) MA Ma’ahid, (4) MA Miftahul Falah, (5) MA NU Banat (for students in the Religion Program), and (6) MA Ibtida’ul Falah To ensure their continued commitment to their vision of *tafaqquh fi al-din*, two of the five madrasas mentioned above refuse to accept students from lower-level schools operated by other foundations. In interviews with teachers, students, alumni, and leaders, it was stated that accepting students from other madrasas (or even from state schools) would reduce overall student performance. Refusing to accept such students, conversely, is perceived as having a positive and tangible effect on institutions’ ability to realise their vision of *tafaqquh fi al din*. Teachers noted the difficulty of ensuring consistency in students’ religious knowledge, even when extra time is allotted, and expressed the view that national examinations, new programs, and students’ tendency to continue to the tertiary level exacerbated the situation. Nevertheless, MA Qudsiyyah remains viewed as best realising the vision of *tafaqquh fi al-din*, and it is favoured by families that desire the best religious education for their children (KH. Fathurrahman, 2017). MA TBS is held in similarly high esteem.

Human resources contribute importantly to the quality of education. *First*, The qualifications and competencies of teachers. Although it is true that the quality of education is also affected by the quality of student input, facilities/infrastructure, and other instrumental factors, these factors all depend on the quality of the learning process, which itself depends heavily on teachers’ competencies and professionalism. No matter the instrumental quality of the input, the output of the learning process is determined heavily by teachers’ abilities. Professional teachers have four competencies: pedagogic, professional, personal, and social. *Second*, the managerial capacity of the madrasa; as with teachers, the individuals involved in the everyday operations of madrasas – including its leaders and supervisors – strongly influence learning outcomes. However, they are often lacking in quality.

4.2. The dislocation of religious education (the loss of religion at school)

As a logical consequence of their inclusion in the national education system, madrasas must comply with all government regulations – including those issued by the Ministry of

Education. As such, the curricula of madrasa aliyah must reflect those of public high schools – as expressed in policy, ‘to have minimal similarities’ (*minimal sama*) – and are often identified as ‘Islamic high schools’. Their main differences are as follows: *First*, in their Islamic education programs, public high schools only offer one type of material, taught by a ‘religion teacher’. Conversely, madrasa aliyah divide their Islamic education programs into four classes: (1) Qur’an/Hadiths, (2) Akidah/Akhlak, (3) Fiqh, and (4) History of Islamic Culture. A fifth class, Arabic, had been included in previous curricula. *Second*, because these materials are divided amongst multiple classes, students require additional lessons. In private institutions, even more classes are included, in accordance with their own visions and missions.

The amount of time allocated for classroom learning in madrasa aliyah is the same as in public high schools: lessons last from 07:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Private madrasas must thus make difficult decisions. Some, such as MA Qudsiyyah, MA TBS, MA Miftahul Falah, MA Ma’ahid, have employed several strategies: (1) reducing the duration and frequency of lessons following the national curriculum, and using the additional time to teach Islam with reference to classical texts; (2) replacing the ministry-issued religious education materials/syllabi with similar materials/syllabi that reference classical texts; (3) not teaching materials that are not tested in the national examinations, and using the additional time to teach Islam with reference to classical texts. Teachers and leaders feel that the materials taught in the national curriculum are too basic, and that they fail to reflect the essence and historical context of madrasa education.

All of the madrasa aliyah in Kudus include additional lessons to provide students with a deeper understanding of Islam, but they differ in their learning models and the intensity of their processes. These differences distinguish madrasas from each other. For instance, some madrasas teach the Qur’an and Hadiths with reference to *Tafsir Jalaalayn* and *Shahih Bukhari*, and supplement these other materials (such as *‘Ulum al-Qur’an* and *‘Ulum al-Hadith*). In this, their lesson plans resemble those of *pesantren*. Others use a simpler approach, teaching the Qur’an only by referencing specific verses or the Hadiths only by using certain ones. They seek to improve the breadth of their Islamic knowledge, albeit without much depth. Teachers simplify material and dictate it to students, seeking primarily to ensure students’ understanding.

4.3. Changing competencies

As stated in Article 31, Paragraph 3, of the 1945 Constitution, “the government shall manage and organize one system of national education, which shall increase the level of spiritual belief, devoutness and moral character in the context of developing the life of the nation and shall be regulated by law”. As such, UUSPN 2003 identifies the national education system as being based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Article 3 of this law emphasises that the national education system must shape students into pious and faithful individuals of noble character, who are healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, responsible, and dedicated citizens, and who reflect this in their attitudes and behaviours. Indeed, the 2013 curriculum holds students’ spiritual competencies in the highest regard. For their part, parents recognise the quality of madrasa education and worry little about its results. They recognise that madrasas can imbue

students with appropriate character and provide them with access to religious extra-curricular activities (Alawiyah 2014).

Second, students are provided with a greater understanding of Islam, which complements their noble character. This reflects the broader body of knowledge that madrasas, as institutions of Islamic education, possess; these include not only *akidah* and philosophy, but also Islamic law, *muamalah* (interpersonal interactions), and *akhlak*. Such knowledge is important, as it provides tangible evidence of their Islamic identity and their status as the leading actors in religious education. Even though madrasas are often identified as “public schools with an Islamic character”, they still have particular responsibilities, competencies, and skills that contribute to (and must be manifested through) student performance.

In state madrasas, there are no differences in the duration, frequency, and materials of lessons. Conversely, there are significant differences between private madrasas, including: (1) additional lessons, especially ones focusing on Islam, with a focus on obtaining a better understanding of the religion, (2) replacing national materials with materials that reference the classical texts commonly used in *pesantren*, (3) adding supplementary materials, including *nahwu*, *shorof*, *balagoh*, *khot*, *insha'*, etc. (4) adding specific materials that reflect their specific vision and mission, such as *mantiq*, *tasawuf*, *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah*, NU Identity, Muhammadiyah identity, etc. This is intended to enrich students' knowledge of Islam as well as shape their religious paradigms. Several private madrasas, such as MA Qudsiyyah, MA TBS, MA Miftahul Falah, and MA Ma'ahid, have become renowned for teaching classical texts. As such, their administrators understand the importance of reinforcing students' understanding of Islam and expanding the scope of their religious education.

5. Discussion

This study has shown that madrasas have attempted to adopt the national curriculum while simultaneously maintaining their own particular character and essence (Wahib 2018; Witanti 2016). Their response to the UUSPN and other government regulations has resulted in contestation between the requirement to implement the national curriculum and the desire to retain their institutional vision and mission. Though commonly identified as “national schools” that have an “Islamic character”, madrasas have implemented various curricula. Some have entirely adopted the public curriculum; others have sought to create balance; and still others have only paid lip service to the national religious education curriculum. Their ability to balance between their specific curricula and the national curriculum depends on the availability of infrastructure, the quality of their human resources (particularly teachers), student input, and other supporting factors (Yahya 2015). Salafi madrasas such as MA Qudsiyyah, MA TBS, MA Ma'ahid, and MA Assalam have the capacity to teach all elements of the national curriculum, while MA Banat, MA Muallimat, MA Ibtidaul Falah, and MA Miftahul Falah have taken a more limited approach.

This study has shown the contestation has occurred as madrasa aliyah have attempted to accommodate the national curriculum. This has enabled them to maintain their own specific identity as institutions of Islamic education capable of providing students with both religious and general knowledge (Bruinessen 1990, 2015). They seek not only to

disseminate knowledge, but also to create a pious and charitable generation filled with pious men and women who follow the tenets of Islam (Bustamam-Ahmad 2015; Supriatna and Ratnaningsih 2017). The sidelining of madrasas before the passage of the UUSPN must not be repeated. At the same time, however, they must not lose their Islamic essence or their ideology, which positions students not as objects but as subjects. This is problematic, given the limited amount of time available and the dual burden borne by students, which have driven madrasas to seek new models.

Several models may be identified: *pesantren*-style madrasas (*madrasah pesantren*, MP), *pesantren*-based madrasas (*madrasah lingkungan pesantren*, MLP), and madrasas with *pesantren* values (*madrasah sistem nilai pesantren*, MNSP). The first, MP, are operationally integrated into *pesantren*, with all elements of the education process taking place in one system that unites teachers and students in a singular program. The second, MLP, enables *pesantren* and *madrasa* administrators to synergise in teaching religious materials. The third model, the MNSP, involves the systemic adoption of *pesantren* cultures, values, and traditions. In this model, the charismatic *kiai* plays a leadership role, the mosque serves as a centre of learning and worship activities, classical texts are used as sources of Islamic knowledge, and dormitories are employed to create a particular social atmosphere – one that is reinforced by integration with the surrounding community (Saekhotin and Anam 2017).

The above-described contestation has shown that, to maintain their status as institutions of education and proselytisation, madrasas must recognise and balance between existing regulations and social realities. They must strengthen their Islamic education programs to ensure that they maintain strong ties with other institutions, particularly *pesantren*, and maintain their essential values (Temyati, Razak, and Salahudin Suyurno 2011). Data has shown that madrasas are strongly influenced by the requirement to comply with the national curriculum, and their students have been required to bear a dual burden. Less time is allotted for materials, as balance must be struck between the national curriculum and the madrasas' specific curriculum. As "public schools with an Islamic character", madrasas must not only be prepared to provide students with general knowledge, but also to imbue them with piety and morality (Pabbajah et al. 2020). Only then can they become alternative institutions capable of mitigating society's fear that religious values are waning, thereby creating a new attachment to Islam and stimulating the rise of a Muslim middle class interested in providing children with quality Islamic education (Azra 2015).

Unlike previous studies, this article has shown that the contestation of religious and national curricula has driven madrasas to turn to *pesantren* models in order to realise their goals. This underscores that madrasas must act dynamically, with a high level of responsibility, to respond to an ever-changing society. Previously, Mastuhu (2017) framed Islamic education as a subset of the national education system, and Azra (2015) understood Islamic schools as imitating the public schools managed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (albeit with greater emphasis on religion). On several occasions, Lukens-Bull understood *pesantren* as institutions that have persevered in Indonesia through continued adaptation to changing contexts (Lukens-Bull 2010; Lukens-Bull and Dhofier 2000).

The contestation of national and religious curricula in madrasas has stimulated the creation of new models, which work to integrate, synergise, and/or adopt different components to facilitate the learning process. The rise of *pesantren*-based madrasas has

theoretical implications, showing that general and religious education can be combined to transform “public schools with an Islamic character” into *pesantren*-based madrasas capable of teaching general materials while still maintaining their specific religious identity. The requirement to fully integrate the national curriculum, and the diverse approaches taken to realise this goal, has resulted in two simultaneous paradigm shifts. *First*, the madrasas have become identified with and subordinated by public schools, even though the concept itself is inherently religious. *Second*, efforts have been made to transform the public’s understanding of religious education, reframing madrasas as *pesantren* and reclaiming the concept.

6. Conclusion

The contestation of national and religious curricula since the passage of the UUSPN in 1989 and 2003 has received diverse responses from Indonesian society, and these specific responses should be investigated further require. Madrasas have developed a *pesantren*-based model as a means of maintaining their own specific identity, thereby navigating the ongoing debate regarding education. Such contestation has occurred because institutions have their own particular concepts and logical arguments, through which they have sought to uphold their religious curricula, adhere to national regulations (including those that require all educational institutions to comply with the national curriculum), and ensure future generations are *tafaqquh fi aldiin*. At the same time, however, it is evident that efforts to balance these distinct curricula remain far from satisfactory. The process has been difficult, and created significant concern amongst leaders, administrators, and educators for the future of religious education. They fear that madrasas will lose their essential character, especially since they are required to teach the entire religious curriculum as well as the entire national curriculum.

Pesantren-based madrasas require an institutional means of implementing national and religious curricula simultaneously. They require a means of proportionally teaching worldly knowledge, both the natural sciences and the social sciences, in conjunction with heavenly knowledge (*al ulum al diin*, i.e. religious knowledge) without violating the UUSPS. Public education consists of two elements – the natural and social sciences – and is often taught using the mechanistic paradigm of modern education. It underscores empirical knowledge, which underpins the natural sciences (mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry) and the social sciences (sociology, anthropology, citizenship, economics, and history). Islamic education, conversely, emphasises religious materials that are far removed from empiricism. Religion does not involve empirical fact, but transcendental knowledge regarding the connection between human beings and God; as God cannot be sensed, this connection cannot be perceived empirically.

This study has focused on the curricular contestation in madrasah aliyah in Kudus, a city along the northern coast of Central Java. However, such contestation is not limited in its substance or operation; it can be found anywhere different priorities exist. This limitation was deliberate. Without restricting the scope of the study, it would be difficult to achieve a comprehensive understanding of relevant facts and data; a smaller scope facilitated the researchers efforts to collect data and classify madrasas based on their implementation of national and religious curricula. This limitation must be recognised by all involved parties and academics, especially those who will further investigate madrasas

and their development of Islamic education in Indonesia. Only then can a comprehensive and contextual understanding of its opportunities and challenges be achieved.

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