

Comparative Analysis of Islamic Higher Education Curriculum and Educational Outcomes in Indonesia and Malaysia: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This study compares the curriculum characteristics and educational outcomes of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) in Indonesia and Malaysia through a Systematic Literature Review following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Literature was collected from Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, Crossref, DOAJ, Google Scholar, and Garuda, resulting in 48 eligible studies published between 2015 and 2025. The findings reveal that Indonesian IHEIs generally adopt a decentralized and flexible curriculum emphasizing interdisciplinary integration between Islamic and contemporary sciences, whereas Malaysian IHEIs implement a more centralized curriculum grounded in the Islamization of knowledge and national quality assurance. These differences shape knowledge integration, curriculum governance, graduate competencies, and institutional responsiveness to globalization. The review further demonstrates that curriculum philosophy and governance are key determinants of educational outcomes. Rather than identifying a superior model, this study highlights the complementary strengths of both systems and recommends balancing institutional innovation, quality assurance, global competitiveness, and Islamic educational values in future curriculum development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) in Indonesia and Malaysia play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of Islamic education in ways that respond to global demands. Although both countries share the common objective of producing graduates who excel academically while maintaining strong religious values, they differ in their approaches to curriculum development. In Indonesia, Islamic education has evolved within a pluralistic and multicultural society, resulting in

curricula that are generally more adaptive to local social and cultural diversity (Haryanto, 2015). In contrast, Malaysia has developed Islamic education within a framework that is more closely aligned with national educational policies and the construction of a national Islamic identity (Ismail S. & Sulaiman, 2022; Susanto, 2015). At the level of Islamic higher education, these differences are reflected in the integration of Islamic values into the curriculum, where Indonesia emphasizes the integration of religious and scientific knowledge, whereas Malaysia adopts a more systematic approach to the Islamization of knowledge (Subhan et al., 2024).

The development of Islamic higher education in the twenty-first century has been increasingly influenced by globalization, digital transformation, and the internationalization of higher education. Islamic higher education institutions are expected to produce graduates who not only possess a strong foundation in Islamic sciences but also demonstrate critical thinking, professional competence, and twenty-first-century skills. In this context, curriculum reform has become a strategic priority for Islamic higher education institutions across the Muslim world (Hajar, 2024). Research examining students' perceptions of curriculum design and employability in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand indicates that curriculum relevance to labor market demands has become a key indicator of higher education quality (Isa et al., 2020). Furthermore, the ongoing development of higher education within the ASEAN region has stimulated greater student mobility and strengthened efforts to establish more competitive academic standards at both regional and global levels (Khalid & Kurowska-Pysz, 2024).

In Indonesia, the development of Islamic education curricula has largely focused on integrating scientific knowledge with Islamic values through religious moderation, character education, and the reinforcement of national identity. The curriculum functions not only as a means of knowledge transmission but also as an instrument for character formation and the promotion of tolerance within a multicultural society (Abdullah, 2017). The promotion of moderate Islamic education has likewise become an essential component of curriculum development, fostering inclusive religious attitudes and responsiveness to social diversity (Akhmadi, 2019). At the same time, Islamic education in Indonesia continues to undergo transformation toward a more integrated educational model that combines academic, moral, and social dimensions in response to contemporary societal changes (Azra, 2019).

Meanwhile, Islamic higher education in Malaysia has developed through the paradigm of the Islamization of knowledge, in which Islamic values constitute the primary foundation for the development of various academic disciplines. This approach seeks to produce graduates who achieve a balanced integration of professional competence and religious commitment. Malaysia's education system also places considerable emphasis on cultivating critical, creative, and innovative thinking through a well-structured national curriculum policy (Hashim, 2014). Moreover, the establishment of professional learning communities within educational institutions has contributed significantly to improving instructional quality and enhancing the effectiveness of curriculum implementation (Khan et al., 2021). These characteristics demonstrate that Islamic higher education in Malaysia is oriented not only toward mastery of Islamic knowledge but also toward the development of global competencies that are relevant to the demands of the contemporary labor market (Mazlan et al., 2025).

Although numerous studies have examined Islamic education in Indonesia and Malaysia, most have focused on curriculum implementation within specific institutions, character education, or instructional management. Comparative research that specifically investigates the relationship between curriculum characteristics and educational outcomes in Islamic higher education institutions across both countries remains relatively limited. Differences in curriculum structure, academic governance, and instructional orientation may lead to distinct educational outcomes (Ismail A. & Nasikhin, 2024; Subhan et al., 2024). Moreover, existing studies have generally been conducted in isolation, providing only fragmented insights into the broader development of Islamic higher education curricula in Indonesia and Malaysia (Raniya et al., 2025). This situation reveals a significant research gap that calls for a systematic synthesis of the existing literature to provide a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum development trends in both countries.

Although previous studies have contributed substantially to understanding Islamic higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia, the existing body of literature remains fragmented in several important respects. Most comparative studies have concentrated on curriculum implementation within individual institutions, curriculum philosophy, or specific educational policies without systematically integrating findings across different institutional contexts. Other studies have examined employability, religious moderation, or knowledge integration separately, making it difficult to develop a comprehensive understanding of how curriculum characteristics shape educational outcomes across both countries. Consequently, current knowledge remains dispersed, limiting the development of broader theoretical explanations regarding the relationship between curriculum governance, curriculum orientation, and graduate competencies within Islamic Higher Education Institutions.

Another limitation of previous research is methodological in nature. Existing comparative studies have predominantly employed qualitative case studies, document analysis, or descriptive comparative approaches focusing on individual universities or national education systems. While these studies provide valuable contextual insights, they rarely synthesize empirical evidence across multiple studies using transparent and reproducible review procedures. As a result, inconsistencies among research findings have not been systematically examined, and broader patterns regarding curriculum development and educational outcomes remain insufficiently understood. This methodological gap highlights the need for a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) capable of synthesizing evidence using explicit selection criteria and thematic analysis.

The urgency of this study is further reinforced by the close relationship between curriculum quality and the quality of graduates produced by Islamic higher education institutions. Previous studies have demonstrated that relevant and adaptive curricula contribute significantly to the enhancement of academic achievement, professional competence, and graduates' readiness to respond to ongoing social and technological changes (Isa et al., 2020). At the same time, emerging issues related to religious moderation, character education, and global competencies require Islamic higher education institutions to continuously evaluate and innovate their curricula (Mukhibat et al., 2024). Therefore, identifying best practices in Islamic higher education curriculum development has become an urgent priority for policymakers, university administrators, and scholars throughout Southeast Asia.

Unlike previous comparative studies, this research does not merely describe differences in curriculum implementation between Indonesia and Malaysia. Instead, it systematically synthesizes empirical evidence to examine how curriculum philosophy, governance structures, knowledge integration, instructional implementation, and educational outcomes are interconnected across Islamic Higher Education Institutions in both countries. By integrating findings from diverse empirical studies, this review moves beyond institution-specific observations and provides a broader comparative perspective that explains the mechanisms through which different curriculum models influence graduate competencies and institutional responsiveness to global educational challenges.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the comparative literature on Islamic Higher Education by proposing an integrated analytical perspective linking curriculum philosophy, curriculum governance, knowledge integration, and educational outcomes. Rather than evaluating which national curriculum model is superior, the review seeks to explain how different governance and curriculum orientations shape graduate competencies within distinct socio-cultural and policy environments. This perspective provides a conceptual foundation for future comparative studies on Islamic Higher Education beyond the contexts of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Based on the identified research gaps, this study addresses the following research questions: RQ1. What are the dominant characteristics of curriculum philosophy and governance in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) in Indonesia and Malaysia?; RQ2. How do Indonesian and Malaysian IHEIs integrate Islamic knowledge with contemporary disciplines through their curriculum models?; RQ3. What educational outcomes, including graduate competencies, employability, character formation, and global readiness, are consistently associated with the curriculum characteristics of IHEIs in both countries?; and RQ4. How do differences in curriculum philosophy, governance, and

knowledge integration explain variations in educational outcomes and institutional responsiveness across Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia?. To answer these questions, this study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following the PRISMA 2020 framework to synthesize empirical evidence from studies published between 2015 and 2025. By integrating findings across diverse institutional contexts, the review develops a comparative explanation of how curriculum philosophy, governance, knowledge integration, and educational outcomes are interconnected within Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia and Malaysia.

2. METHODS

In order to compile empirical data on curriculum features and academic results in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) in Indonesia and Malaysia, this study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). In compliance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) methodology, the review was carried out using the criteria of transparent, systematic, and repeatable literature identification, screening, selection, and synthesis. The SLR approach was selected because previous comparative studies have largely focused on individual institutions or specific curriculum issues, resulting in fragmented findings that provide limited understanding of broader patterns across both countries. By systematically synthesizing existing evidence, this study seeks to develop a comprehensive comparative understanding of curriculum governance, curriculum orientation, knowledge integration, and educational outcomes in Islamic Higher Education.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using seven academic databases that provide extensive coverage of international and regional publications in education and Islamic studies, namely Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, Crossref, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Google Scholar, and Garuda. These databases were selected to ensure comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed international and national publications concerning Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia and Malaysia.

The search process employed combinations of keywords and Boolean operators to maximize retrieval of relevant studies. The primary search string consisted of: ("Islamic Higher Education" OR "Islamic University" OR "Islamic Education") AND (curriculum OR curriculum development OR knowledge integration) AND (Indonesia OR Malaysia). Additional keyword combinations such as *graduate competencies*, *educational outcomes*, *Islamization of knowledge*, *religious moderation*, *higher education governance*, and *curriculum implementation* were also used to identify potentially relevant studies. The literature search was limited to publications published between 2015 and 2025, reflecting the period during which curriculum reform, internationalization, graduate employability, religious moderation, and knowledge integration became dominant themes in Islamic Higher Education research.

Eligibility Criteria

To ensure consistency throughout the review process, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established before article selection. The inclusion criteria comprised: 1) peer-reviewed journal articles; 2) publications written in English or Indonesian; 3) studies published between 2015 and 2025; 4) empirical or review studies examining Islamic Higher Education curricula in Indonesia, Malaysia, or comparative contexts; 5) studies discussing curriculum philosophy, curriculum governance, curriculum implementation, knowledge integration, graduate competencies, employability, character education, or educational outcomes; and 6) articles with accessible full texts.

The exclusion criteria included: 1) conference proceedings, editorials, book reviews, dissertations, and opinion papers; 2) studies focusing exclusively on primary or secondary education; 3) publications lacking sufficient methodological information; 4) duplicate publications retrieved from multiple databases; and 5) studies whose primary focus was unrelated to Islamic Higher Education curriculum.

Study Selection Process

Four consecutive steps that were adopted from the PRISMA framework were used in the study selection process. Duplicate records were eliminated after all records found in the chosen databases were exported into a reference management database. Second, abstracts and titles were examined separately to see if they were pertinent to the goals of the study. Third, full-text publications were assessed using the predetermined eligibility standards. Lastly, research that met every requirement for inclusion was kept for theme synthesis.

To enhance the reliability of the study selection process, the two authors independently assessed the eligibility of all full-text articles using the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Each reviewer conducted an independent evaluation of article relevance, methodological suitability, and alignment with the review objectives. The results of the independent assessments were subsequently compared, and any discrepancies regarding article inclusion were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. This inter-rater agreement procedure strengthened the transparency, consistency, and methodological trustworthiness of the study selection process, resulting in the final inclusion of 48 studies for thematic synthesis.

Throughout the screening process, particular attention was given to studies investigating curriculum development, curriculum governance, knowledge integration, educational outcomes, graduate competencies, curriculum internationalization, and comparative Islamic Higher Education between Indonesia and Malaysia. Figure 1 illustrates the systematic study selection process adapted from the PRISMA 2020 framework, showing the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of studies reviewed in this research.

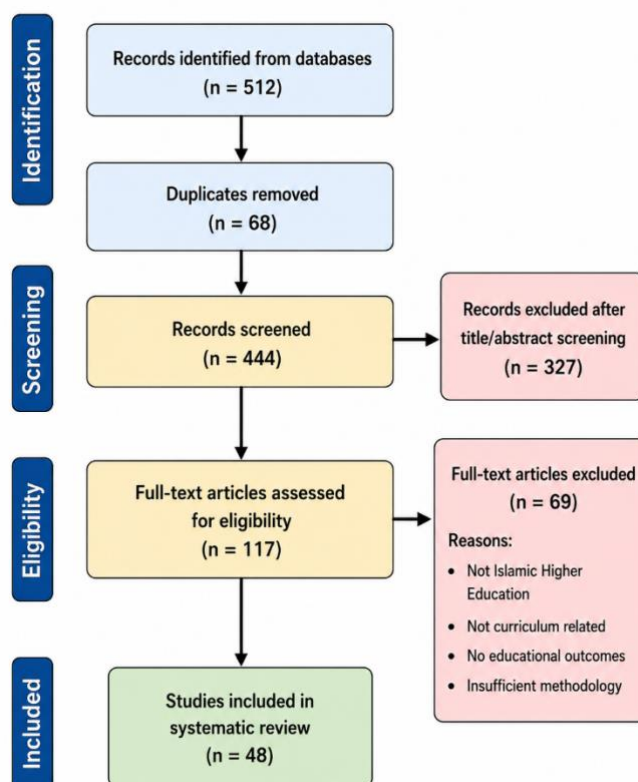


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Study Selection

Quality Assessment

To enhance the credibility of the synthesized findings, all eligible articles underwent methodological quality assessment. Each study was evaluated according to four criteria: 1) clarity of research objectives; 2) appropriateness of research methodology; 3) transparency of data collection and

analysis procedures; and 4) relevance of findings to the present review objectives. Studies demonstrating adequate methodological rigor across these dimensions were included in the final synthesis, whereas publications with insufficient methodological transparency or limited relevance were excluded.

Data Extraction

The following details were taken from every study that qualified: 1) author or authors; 2) publication year; 3) country of study; 4) research design; 5) research topic; 6) curriculum characteristics; 7) curriculum governance; 8) knowledge integration model; 9) educational results; and 10) principal findings. To enable systematic comparison across research carried out in Malaysia and Indonesia, the retrieved data was arranged into comparative evidence tables.

Data Synthesis

Data were synthesized using a thematic synthesis approach. Rather than summarizing studies individually, the findings were integrated into broader analytical themes emerging across the literature. The synthesis process consisted of repeated reading of all eligible studies, coding recurring concepts, grouping similar findings, and constructing higher-level themes explaining similarities and differences between curriculum models in both countries.

The synthesis generated four principal themes: 1) curriculum philosophy and governance; 2) knowledge integration and curriculum implementation; 3) educational outcomes and graduate competencies; and 4) institutional responsiveness to global educational challenges. These themes subsequently served as the analytical framework for comparing curriculum development and educational outcomes in Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Characteristics of Included Studies

Author	Country	Method	Research Focus	Main Findings
Abdullah (2017)	Indonesia	Qualitative	Islamic Higher Education	Integration of Islamic and scientific knowledge
Ali (2020)	Indonesia	Case Study	Curriculum Integration	Science–religion integration model
Isa et al. (2020)	Indonesia–Malaysia–Thailand	Survey	Curriculum and Employability	Curriculum relevance influences employability
Munastiwi (2019)	Indonesia–Malaysia	Comparative	Curriculum Management	Differences in curriculum governance
Subhan et al. (2024)	Indonesia–Malaysia	Comparative	Tawhidic Curriculum	Knowledge integration framework
Mukhibat et al. (2024)	Indonesia	Evaluation	Religious Moderation Curriculum	Curriculum strengthens moderation values
Mazlan et al. (2025)	Malaysia	Qualitative	Integrated Education	Opportunities and challenges of integrated curriculum
Ismail et al. (2024)	Indonesia–Malaysia	Comparative	Undergraduate Curriculum	Differences in curriculum structure
Kamil et al. (2025)	Indonesia–Malaysia	Comparative	Internationalization	Curriculum supports global competitiveness

Helmiati & Arfan (2025)	Malaysia	Policy Analysis	Educational Policy	National policy shapes curriculum development
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Table 1 provides an overview of representative studies included in the systematic review. The selected literature covers various methodological approaches and thematic focuses, enabling a comprehensive comparison of curriculum development and educational outcomes across Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia.

The systematic review synthesized empirical evidence from the selected studies to identify common patterns and differences in Islamic Higher Education curriculum development and educational outcomes in Indonesia and Malaysia. Rather than presenting individual studies separately, the findings were organized into four major themes emerging consistently across the reviewed literature: (1) Curriculum Philosophy and Governance, (2) Knowledge Integration and Curriculum Implementation, (3) Educational Outcomes and Graduate Competencies, and (4) Institutional Responsiveness to Global Educational Challenges. These themes provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how curriculum characteristics influence educational quality and graduate preparedness in both countries.

Five significant study themes that consistently emerged across the evaluated literature were discovered by the thematic synthesis. In order to detect recurrent patterns, similarities, and differences in curriculum creation and educational results between Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia, the evidence was integrated rather than reporting individual study findings separately. The main conclusions compiled from the chosen studies are shown in Table 5.

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings from the Reviewed Studies

Theme	Main Findings	Supporting Studies	Synthesis
Curriculum Philosophy	Indonesian Islamic Higher Education adopts an integrative curriculum combining Islamic sciences and contemporary disciplines, whereas Malaysian institutions emphasize the Islamization of knowledge within a nationally coordinated curriculum framework.	Abdullah (2017); Ali (2020); Subhan et al. (2024); Mazlan et al. (2025)	Both countries share Islamic educational objectives but employ different philosophical approaches to curriculum development.
Curriculum Governance	Indonesia provides greater institutional autonomy, while Malaysia applies stronger national curriculum standardization and quality assurance.	Munastiwi (2019); Ismail et al. (2024); Helmiati & Arfan (2025)	Governance structure significantly influences curriculum flexibility and institutional responsiveness.
Knowledge Integration	Knowledge integration is implemented through interdisciplinary learning, religious moderation, and curriculum innovation in Indonesia, while Malaysia adopts a structured Islamization framework across disciplines.	Ali (2020); Suwendi et al. (2024); Mukhibat et al. (2024); Subhan et al. (2024)	Different integration strategies lead to different curriculum implementation models.

Educational Outcomes	Indonesian graduates tend to demonstrate stronger adaptability, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary competencies, whereas Malaysian graduates show stronger moral character, discipline, and value internalization.	Isa et al. (2020); Hasanah & Faddad (2023); Hashim (2018); Kamil et al. (2025)	Curriculum orientation shapes different graduate competency profiles.
Global Competitiveness	Both countries continue strengthening curriculum internationalization, graduate employability, and competency-based education to respond to globalization.	Khalid & Kurowska-Pysz (2024); Johari & Bangwal (2024); Beneitone & Yarosh (2021); Kamil et al. (2025)	Future curriculum reform should balance institutional flexibility, quality assurance, and global competitiveness while preserving Islamic values.

As presented in Table 2, the reviewed studies consistently indicate that curriculum philosophy, governance, knowledge integration, educational outcomes, and global competitiveness constitute the dominant themes within the literature. These synthesized findings provide the analytical foundation for the subsequent thematic discussion and demonstrate that curriculum development in Islamic Higher Education extends beyond curriculum content to encompass institutional governance, graduate competency development, and responsiveness to contemporary educational challenges.

3.1 Curriculum Philosophy and Governance

The reviewed studies consistently indicate that curriculum philosophy constitutes the primary distinction between Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesian Islamic Higher Education adopts an integrative paradigm that combines Islamic scholarship with contemporary scientific knowledge while encouraging institutional flexibility and responsiveness to local socio-cultural contexts (Abdullah, 2017; Ali, 2020). This philosophy is reflected in curriculum structures that emphasize interdisciplinary learning and knowledge integration as central strategies for addressing contemporary educational challenges. Conversely, Malaysian Islamic Higher Education adopts a curriculum philosophy grounded in the Islamization of knowledge, supported by stronger national coordination and standardized curriculum governance (Mazlan et al., 2025; Subhan et al., 2024).

The synthesized evidence further demonstrates that curriculum governance differs considerably between the two countries. Indonesian institutions generally possess greater autonomy in curriculum development, allowing universities to adapt educational programs according to regional needs, institutional missions, and emerging global developments (Munastiwi, 2019). Malaysian institutions, meanwhile, operate within a more centralized policy framework designed to maintain consistency, quality assurance, and alignment with national educational priorities (Helmiati & Arfan, 2025). Although these governance models differ substantially, both aim to strengthen graduate quality through distinct educational strategies.

Table 3. Thematic Synthesis of Curriculum Philosophy

Theme	Indonesia	Malaysia
Curriculum philosophy	Knowledge integration	Islamization of knowledge
Governance	Decentralized	Centralized
Institutional autonomy	High	Moderate
Curriculum flexibility	High	Moderate
National policy alignment	Moderate	High

3.2 Knowledge Integration and Curriculum Implementation

The literature consistently emphasizes that knowledge integration represents one of the defining characteristics of Islamic Higher Education curriculum development. Indonesian universities increasingly integrate Islamic values into contemporary disciplines through interdisciplinary curriculum models and religious moderation, whereas Malaysian institutions focus more explicitly on embedding Islamic epistemology across academic disciplines within nationally coordinated educational frameworks.

Across both countries, curriculum implementation increasingly incorporates graduate employability, digital competence, and global competitiveness. Nevertheless, differences remain regarding institutional flexibility, with Indonesian universities demonstrating greater curriculum adaptability while Malaysian institutions maintain stronger standardization and quality assurance mechanisms.

Table 4. Knowledge Integration Models

Indonesia	Malaysia
Religious moderation	Islamization
MBKM	National curriculum
Interdisciplinary	Structured curriculum
Local adaptation	National standardization

3.3 Educational Outcomes and Graduate Competencies

The synthesized evidence demonstrates that curriculum differences contribute to distinct educational outcomes. Indonesian Islamic Higher Education generally produces graduates characterized by interdisciplinary competencies, critical thinking, adaptability, and responsiveness to changing labor market demands. In contrast, Malaysian Islamic Higher Education places stronger emphasis on moral integrity, discipline, ethical leadership, and alignment with national educational objectives.

Despite these differences, both curriculum models share common objectives in preparing graduates capable of contributing to society while maintaining Islamic values. Recent literature increasingly suggests that future curriculum development should integrate academic excellence, professional competence, and ethical character to respond effectively to globalization and technological transformation.

Table 5. Comparison of Graduate Competencies

Graduate Competencies	Indonesia	Malaysia
Critical thinking	✓✓✓	✓✓
Adaptability	✓✓✓	✓✓
Moral character	✓✓	✓✓✓
Discipline	✓✓	✓✓✓
Employability	✓✓✓	✓✓
Global competence	✓✓✓	✓✓

3.4 Institutional Responsiveness to Global Challenges

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that globalization has become one of the principal drivers of curriculum transformation within Islamic Higher Education Institutions. Both Indonesia and Malaysia have strengthened curriculum reform to enhance graduate competitiveness through curriculum internationalization, interdisciplinary learning, and competency-based education. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that sustainable curriculum development requires balancing institutional flexibility, national quality assurance, knowledge integration, and graduate employability. These dimensions emerge as common priorities across the reviewed studies and constitute the principal foundation for future Islamic Higher Education curriculum development.

Discussion

The thematic synthesis demonstrates that differences in Islamic Higher Education curricula between Indonesia and Malaysia are not merely technical variations in curriculum design but represent two distinct educational governance models rooted in different historical, socio-political, and philosophical traditions (Fitriani, 2025; Rahim et al., 2009; Saputra et al., 2022). Indonesian Islamic Higher Education has gradually developed an integrative curriculum philosophy that combines Islamic scholarship with contemporary scientific disciplines while providing institutions with relatively greater autonomy to adapt curricula according to local contexts and emerging societal needs (Abdullah, 2017; Ali, 2020; Munastiwi, 2019). In contrast, Malaysian Islamic Higher Education has institutionalized curriculum development through a more centralized governance structure emphasizing the Islamization of knowledge, national educational priorities, and standardized quality assurance mechanisms (Ahmad et al., 2013; N. A. H. Ismail et al., 2017). Rather than indicating superiority of one model over another, these contrasting approaches illustrate different strategies for balancing Islamic educational values with contemporary higher education demands.

The findings further suggest that curriculum governance substantially influences the direction of curriculum innovation. The reviewed evidence indicates that institutional autonomy in Indonesia provides greater opportunities for universities to integrate interdisciplinary learning, religious moderation, digital competencies, and labor market responsiveness into curriculum development (Habibi, 2023; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Suwendi et al., 2024). This flexibility enables institutions to respond more rapidly to regional socioeconomic developments while maintaining Islamic educational values. Conversely, Malaysian Islamic Higher Education demonstrates that stronger national coordination contributes to curriculum consistency, character formation, and institutional quality assurance (Helmianti & Arfan, 2025; Mazlan et al., 2025). These findings indicate that curriculum effectiveness is influenced not only by curriculum content but also by governance arrangements that determine institutional capacity to adapt educational programs.

Another important finding emerging from this review concerns knowledge integration as a defining characteristic of curriculum transformation within Islamic Higher Education. Previous comparative studies frequently describe knowledge integration as a philosophical objective; however, the synthesized evidence suggests that its implementation differs considerably across institutional contexts. Indonesian universities generally operationalize integration through interdisciplinary curriculum design, religious moderation, and the incorporation of contemporary sciences into Islamic studies (Fauzi et al., 2025; Irham, 2025). Malaysian institutions, meanwhile, emphasize Islamization of knowledge as an overarching epistemological framework that guides curriculum development across disciplines (Mazlan et al., 2025; Subhan et al., 2024). These differences demonstrate that curriculum philosophy directly shapes instructional approaches, learning experiences, and ultimately graduate competencies.

The synthesis also reveals that educational outcomes are closely associated with these contrasting curriculum orientations. Studies conducted in Indonesia consistently report graduate competencies emphasizing critical thinking, adaptability, interdisciplinary collaboration, and employability (Annisa & Puspita, 2022; Fitri et al., 2020; Habibi, 2023; Hasanah & Faddad SZ, 2023). These competencies correspond with curriculum structures characterized by institutional flexibility and responsiveness to changing labor market demands. In Malaysia, educational outcomes place stronger emphasis on moral character, discipline, ethical leadership, and national identity while continuing to strengthen graduate competitiveness through curriculum internationalization and quality assurance initiatives (Hashim, 2018; Kamil D. & Irawan, 2025). Consequently, the review suggests that differences in graduate profiles are closely linked to curriculum governance and educational philosophy rather than simply differences in instructional practice.

The present review extends previous comparative research by synthesizing empirical findings across multiple studies rather than examining isolated institutional cases. Earlier studies primarily described curriculum implementation, religious moderation, employability, or knowledge integration

independently (Ismail A. & Nasikhin, 2024; Ngisomudin et al., 2025; Raniya et al., 2025). Through thematic synthesis, this review demonstrates that curriculum philosophy, governance structures, knowledge integration, and educational outcomes constitute an interconnected system influencing institutional responsiveness and graduate preparedness (Biggs et al., 2011; Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006; Krause, 2022). This integrated perspective represents an important conceptual contribution because it explains the mechanisms through which curriculum characteristics shape educational quality across different national contexts instead of merely identifying descriptive differences between Indonesia and Malaysia.

From a comparative perspective, the findings indicate that globalization has encouraged both countries to reform Islamic Higher Education curricula toward competency-based education while preserving Islamic identity. Internationalization, graduate employability, interdisciplinary learning, and digital transformation increasingly emerge as common priorities across the reviewed literature (Johari P. & Bangwal, 2024; Kamil D. & Irawan, 2025; Khalid & Kurowska-Pysz, 2024). Nevertheless, each country responds to these global challenges through different governance strategies. Indonesia emphasizes curriculum adaptability and institutional innovation, whereas Malaysia relies on coordinated national curriculum policies and systematic quality assurance (Lubis, 2017; Wulandari et al., 2025). These contrasting approaches suggest that future curriculum reform should not be viewed as a choice between decentralization and centralization but rather as an effort to establish an appropriate balance between institutional flexibility, national standards, and the preservation of Islamic educational values (Nasir et al., 2024).

The findings also carry important implications for curriculum policy within Islamic Higher Education. The synthesized evidence suggests that effective curriculum development requires integrating three interrelated dimensions: academic excellence, professional competence, and Islamic moral values. Indonesian institutions may further strengthen curriculum quality by expanding international collaboration, graduate employability initiatives, and interdisciplinary learning while preserving institutional flexibility (Hanif & Merraphi, 2026; I. M. Ismail, 2025; Rokhimawan et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Malaysian institutions may enhance curriculum responsiveness by providing greater opportunities for institutional innovation without compromising national quality standards. Strengthening collaboration among universities, policymakers, industry, and religious institutions is therefore essential to ensure that curriculum development remains responsive to global educational transformation while maintaining the ethical foundations of Islamic Higher Education (Beneitone & Yarosh, 2021; Johari P. & Bangwal, 2024; Rohman et al., 2024).

Finally, the thematic synthesis confirms that curriculum development within Islamic Higher Education should be understood as a dynamic interaction among curriculum philosophy, governance, knowledge integration, instructional innovation, and graduate competencies (Harden, 2001). Rather than positioning Indonesia and Malaysia as competing educational models, the evidence demonstrates that both systems offer complementary strengths for addressing contemporary educational challenges. Indonesia provides an example of adaptive curriculum governance capable of responding to diverse societal needs, whereas Malaysia illustrates the advantages of coordinated curriculum development supported by strong national educational policies. Consequently, future comparative research should move beyond identifying structural differences toward examining how these complementary approaches may inform more adaptive, internationally competitive, and value-based curriculum models for Islamic Higher Education.

4. CONCLUSION

This Systematic Literature Review synthesized empirical evidence on curriculum characteristics and educational outcomes in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) in Indonesia and Malaysia. The findings demonstrate that although both countries share the common objective of producing graduates with strong Islamic values and academic competence, they adopt different curriculum philosophies and governance models. Indonesian IHEIs generally implement a more adaptive and

decentralized curriculum emphasizing the integration of Islamic scholarship with contemporary disciplines, interdisciplinary learning, and institutional flexibility. In contrast, Malaysian IHEIs adopt a more centralized curriculum grounded in the Islamization of knowledge, nationally coordinated quality assurance, and character formation. These differences significantly influence curriculum implementation, knowledge integration, graduate competencies, and institutional responsiveness to global educational challenges. Rather than positioning one curriculum model as superior, this review demonstrates that both approaches offer complementary strengths for developing Islamic Higher Education capable of balancing academic excellence, professional competence, and Islamic moral values.

The findings contribute to the comparative literature on Islamic Higher Education by providing an integrated explanation of the relationships among curriculum philosophy, curriculum governance, knowledge integration, and educational outcomes, thereby extending previous studies that predominantly examined these dimensions separately. Practically, the review provides evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and university leaders to strengthen curriculum development through an appropriate balance between institutional innovation, national quality standards, interdisciplinary learning, international competitiveness, and the preservation of Islamic educational values. Nevertheless, this review is limited to peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2025 concerning Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia and Malaysia, excluding grey literature and other regional contexts. Future research should expand comparative investigations to additional Muslim-majority countries and employ complementary evidence synthesis approaches, such as bibliometric analysis or meta-synthesis, to provide a broader understanding of curriculum transformation and graduate competency development within Islamic Higher Education.

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