The Role of Local Communities in Supporting Madrasah Management: A Comparative Study Between Indonesia and Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the role of local communities in supporting madrasah management in Indonesia and Thailand through a comparative approach. Madrasah, as an Islamic-based educational institution, has a strategic role in shaping the character and morals of students. In Indonesia, the integration of madrasahs in the national education system is supported by the government, while in Thailand, local communities play a major role in supporting the sustainability of madrasahs, especially in Muslim minority areas. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method, which analyzes various secondary sources such as journal articles, research reports and policy documents. The results show that local community support includes financial, infrastructure and labor aspects. Differences in social, cultural and political contexts influence the pattern of local community contributions in both countries. In Indonesia, strong government support encourages more systematic management of madrasahs, while in Thailand, local communities have greater autonomy in madrasah management. Despite challenges such as limited resources and suboptimal management, both countries have opportunities to strengthen madrasahs through cross-country collaboration and inclusive education policy development. This research makes an important contribution to the development of Islamic education systems in Southeast Asia, especially in understanding the dynamics of synergy between local communities and faith-based educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Madrasah education, as an Islamic-based educational institution, plays a critical role in shaping the character, values, and morals of students, especially in countries with large Muslim populations across Asia. This is particularly evident in nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and certain regions of Thailand. In Indonesia, madrasah institutions have undergone a significant transformation, evolving into educational establishments that hold equal status alongside other general education institutions. This shift, especially prominent in recent decades following the political reformations of the late 20th century, reflects a broader societal change where local social organizations, such as religious groups and non-governmental organizations, gained a stronger influence on shaping government policies related to education (Nawas et al., 2024).

The Indonesian government has recognized the vital role of madrasahs, leading to an expansion of support for their development in areas such as curriculum, funding, governance, and broader access to educational opportunities for graduates. As a result, madrasahs are legally and practically integrated into the national education system, furthering their acceptance and development in the country's educational landscape (Yusuf et al., 2020). However, this situation is

not identical in other countries. For example, in Thailand, the role and identity of madrasahs present a unique case. Although madrasahs have flourished in Thailand, particularly in the Muslim-majority southern provinces, their development is primarily driven by local communities rather than government intervention. This contrast highlights the different approaches to religious-based education in Southeast Asia, where local communities, despite being a minority, exhibit a higher level of involvement in the support and management of madrasahs (Woodward et al., 2021).

The involvement of local communities is a pivotal factor in the development and continued transformation of madrasahs in both Indonesia and Thailand. This support is not purely based on religious or ideological beliefs; it also encompasses practical aspects such as financial contributions, infrastructure development, human resources, and the incorporation of local cultural wisdom into the education system (Scupin & Joll, 2020). However, it is essential to acknowledge that the cultural, social, and political environments in both Indonesia and Thailand significantly influence the level and form of local community contributions to madrasah management.

Given these dynamics, this research aims to identify and analyze the role of local communities in supporting madrasah management in Indonesia and Thailand through a comparative approach. The primary focus is to examine the similarities and differences in local community involvement, while also exploring the challenges and opportunities presented by these contributions. This comparative analysis will provide valuable insights into the development of inclusive and sustainable Islamic education policies, not only for Indonesia and Thailand but also for the broader Southeast Asian region. Furthermore, by focusing on the synergies between local communities and madrasahs, this study seeks to offer policy recommendations that can enhance the governance and management of madrasahs, promoting more robust and equitable educational frameworks across the region.

In addition to providing a detailed comparison between Indonesia and Thailand, this research will also explore why the patterns of community involvement differ between these two nations. Specifically, it will consider the historical, political, and cultural factors that shape these educational dynamics, including the differing levels of government support, the unique role of local communities, and the broader implications for the sustainability of madrasah education in Southeast Asia. This expanded perspective is expected to contribute significantly to the discourse on Islamic education in the region, offering a deeper understanding of how local communities, in tandem with government policies, can shape the future of madrasah education.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a literature study method to explore the role of local communities in supporting madrasah management in Indonesia and Thailand. The qualitative research method was selected due to its flexibility in capturing the nuanced perspectives and complex dynamics involved in the local community's involvement in madrasah governance. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the subject matter by examining secondary sources such as journal articles, books, government reports, and other policy-related documents.

The literature study method is particularly suited for this research as it enables a comprehensive review of existing studies and sources that provide insights into madrasah management in both countries. Given the limited access to primary data from madrasahs themselves in some areas, a literature review is a practical approach to gathering relevant information and analyzing the current state of knowledge on the topic. By focusing on previously published works, this method offers an effective way to synthesize the existing body of knowledge and identify key patterns, trends, and gaps in the understanding of local community involvement in madrasah management.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study involved searching and selecting both primary and secondary literature sources. Primary literature sources included government policy documents, official reports on educational initiatives, and academic studies that directly address the role of madrasahs in the national education systems of Indonesia and Thailand. These documents

were crucial in understanding the governmental frameworks, policies, and support structures for madrasahs in each country.

Secondary literature sources, such as journal articles, research reports, and analyses by scholars of Islamic education, were also essential in providing broader perspectives on the issue. These sources offered valuable insight into the local community's role in madrasah management, including their contributions in areas such as financial support, infrastructure development, and the integration of local cultural values into the education system. This mix of primary and secondary data sources ensures that the research is grounded in both official policy and grassroots-level practices.

To ensure that the data collected was relevant and comprehensive, a systematic search was conducted using academic databases, government archives, and institutional repositories. The search criteria focused on topics related to Islamic education, madrasah governance, the role of local communities in education, and comparative studies between Indonesia and Thailand. The criteria for selecting sources included their relevance to the research topic, the credibility of the authors or institutions, and the publication date to ensure up-to-date information.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic comparative method. This approach allows for the identification and comparison of key themes across different sources and contexts. Thematic analysis involves organizing the data into distinct categories, such as community support mechanisms, financial contributions, infrastructural support, and human resource development. By categorizing the data, the research was able to examine how these different aspects of local community involvement manifest in both Indonesia and Thailand.

The comparative analysis focuses on identifying similarities and differences in how local communities contribute to the management of madrasahs in both countries. By comparing these themes across the two countries, the research aims to offer insights into the effectiveness of community-based support systems for madrasah education, the role of local resources in sustaining madrasahs, and the potential for cross-country collaboration in Islamic education.

Additionally, the analysis takes into account the socio-political, cultural, and historical contexts of Indonesia and Thailand, exploring how these factors influence the involvement of local communities in madrasah management. This approach helps to contextualize the contributions of local communities within the broader frameworks of national education policies, local governance, and societal expectations.
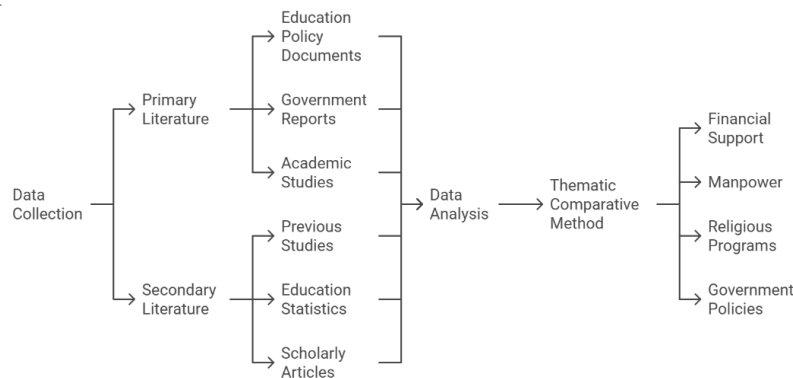
Figure 1: research flow and data analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reveal the significant role of local communities in supporting madrasah management in both Indonesia and Thailand. Despite the differences in governmental involvement, both countries showcase a collaborative model where local communities contribute to

the sustainability and development of madrasahs. The results of this comparative study highlight the importance of local support, particularly in areas such as financial contributions, infrastructure, and human resources.

Madrasah Education System: An Overview

Madrasah education has evolved significantly over the years in both Indonesia and Thailand, but with different trajectories due to the unique cultural, social, and political contexts in each country. In Indonesia, madrasahs have been fully integrated into the national education system, benefiting from government support that includes financial backing, curriculum development, and governance structures. The Indonesian government's involvement in the madrasah system is extensive, which has allowed madrasahs to operate as equal partners in the national education framework. According to government data, Indonesia has a total of 54,330 madrasahs, with over 20,000 institutions providing education from early childhood to tertiary levels, which showcases the significant government commitment to madrasah education (Rahman, 2024).

In contrast, Thailand presents a different situation. Although madrasahs are vital for Muslim communities, particularly in the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Satun, the role of the government is less pronounced. Thai madrasahs primarily rely on local community support for their sustainability. The lack of integration of madrasahs into the national education system is a consequence of the government's secularization policies, which standardize education through national curricula, leaving little room for religious-based education. Despite this, local Muslim communities in southern Thailand have continued to operate madrasahs independently, focusing on the education of religious values and Islamic teachings. These madrasahs are vital for maintaining the cultural and religious identity of the local Muslim population in the face of broader national educational policies (Woodward et al., 2021)..

Local Community Contributions in Indonesia and Thailand

As a country with a majority of Islamic education, Indonesia has a variety of socio-religious organizations (Sebastian & Othman Alkaff, 2024). Muhammadiyah and NU are two mainstreaming religious groups in Indonesia (Arifianto, 2024). These two organizations emerged and were born from below, representing local communities in Indonesia. The role of religious-based local communities has a tradition that tends to shape patterns and models of Islamic religious learning in informal, non-formal, and formal forms (Haddade, et al., 2024). Even if these religious communities are transformed into large organizations with international networks like the two previous organizations, local movements always play an important role in the management and management of education.

The main practices of local communities in supporting madrasahs are communal support, such as fundraising and involvement in the construction and management process. Not a few madrasahs and Islamic schools collaborate and synergize with local communities or religious organizations in the future sustainability of madrasahs. Muhammadiyah in Indonesia has a total of 26,403 Islamic education institutions consisting of 20,233 early childhood education, 6,007 schools at primary and secondary levels, and 163 Islamic universities. This organization has the advantage of good institutional governance and management funds. So Muhammadiyah can be called an Islamic organization that has the largest assets in the world (Rahman, 2024).

In Thailand, local communities play a significant role in maintaining the continuity of madrasahs there (Laeheem, 2018). Some areas with a majority of Thai Muslim communities form collaborative support from various aspects, including infrastructure, funding, development and efforts to procure madrasah teachers and programs. Although the attention of the local community gets a large portion in the management of madrasas, the government's influence in madrasa education policy has standardized in the aspect of general studies and Thai language. The efforts of Thai madrasas to synergize the management of religiously charged madrasa learning with government policies are indeed a challenge (Kiliyamannil, 2023).

Despite the differences in government involvement between the two countries, the synergy between madrasahs and local communities has created a sustainable model of collaboration that has

allowed madrasahs to thrive in both settings. In Indonesia, the support from the government has enabled madrasahs to expand and improve their educational offerings, while in Thailand, the active participation of local communities has ensured that madrasahs continue to operate and serve the educational needs of Muslim children, even in the absence of substantial government backing. This model of collaboration shows that madrasah education can thrive when both governmental and community-level efforts align, each playing a complementary role in ensuring the success of these institutions.

However, there are opportunities to address these challenges and further strengthen the madrasah education systems in both countries. One key opportunity lies in cross-country collaboration, where Indonesia and Thailand can exchange best practices and share insights into managing madrasahs effectively. Indonesia, with its extensive government support for madrasah education, can offer valuable lessons on integrating religious education into the national system, while Thailand's model of local community involvement can provide insights into how madrasahs can operate autonomously and with a strong sense of cultural relevance. Increased support from both the government and local communities in both countries can further enhance madrasah management and ensure that these institutions continue to play a vital role in shaping the next generation of students.

In an effort to improve governance management, madrasahs from Indonesia and Thailand often collaborate between madrasahs, which are generally initiated by the madrasah institution itself or the organization that oversees the madrasahs. From here, the local communities in the two countries although they have quite striking differences, but the patterns and models carried out in the management of madrasahs have some similarities.

A Comparison Between Indonesia and Thailand: Challenges and Opportunities

Although the main trend of madrasa education generally focuses on the idea of the importance of laying the foundations of Islamic teachings, religious ethics and tolerance (Tuntivivat, 2016). This has been the general pattern of madrassas in all Islamic-majority countries such as Indonesia and Islamic minority countries such as Thailand. However, the main focus of this article is on the role of local communities in madrasa management, and it is important not to overlook the local tools and instruments that are often overlooked by madrasa scholars in most places.

Both in Indonesia and Thailand, local communities have always stood out and contributed as the main patrons of madrasahs when the role of the government was minimal (Midam, 2021). Moral and infrastructural support has been shown by local communities as a significant contributive effort, especially in areas with limited resources. This alternative is not to ignore the role of the government, but the initiation and integration of local communities almost completely preceded by various factors such as ideological factors, communal ties, and government limitations.

Nevertheless, compared to Thailand, the government in Indonesia does pay greater attention and support to the development and management of madrasahs (Kosim, et al. 2023). Madrasahs, as educational institutions in their various forms, are part of the long-standing national education system. Quantitatively, 54,330 madrasahs in Indonesia have become a portrait of government involvement in religious-based education such as madrasahs (Rahman, 2024). Although this is also the case in Thailand, the government's support is still limited in some aspects and has not played as big a role as in Indonesia, so the dominant role of the local community is very strategic.
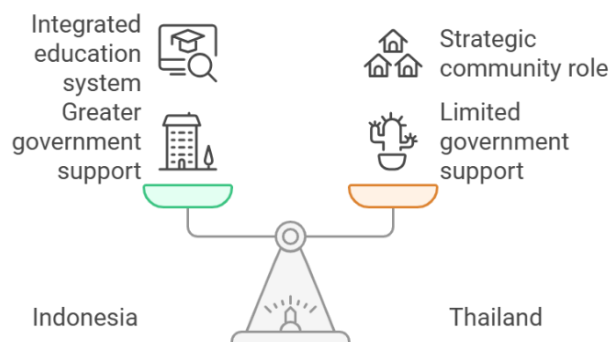
Figure 2: Comparing Government and Community Roles in Madrasah Support

Today, the biggest challenge for local communities and madrasahs is the mutual integration between the two. The madrasah governance and management system must be able to open up opportunities for all elements to support the madrasah to continue to grow. The challenges of resources, funding, infrastructure and competence of teachers or staff provide a tap for madrasahs to seek improvement by collaborating with various partners. Both countries can benefit from cross-country collaboration in the area of madrasah management, sharing best practices and learning from one another's experiences. By promoting mutual understanding and cooperation, Indonesia and Thailand can enhance the role of local communities in supporting madrasahs, ensuring that religious education remains a vital part of the educational landscape in Southeast Asia..

CONCLUSION

The role of local communities in supporting madrasah management is crucial and has proven to be a key factor in the development and sustainability of these institutions, both in Indonesia and Thailand, despite the differing cultural, social, and political landscapes in the two countries. In Indonesia, madrasahs have become an integral part of the national education system, benefiting from substantial government support. This integration has led to madrasahs being treated as equal to other general education institutions, receiving funding, policy backing, and curriculum development that ensures their alignment with national education standards. The Indonesian government's commitment to madrasah education is reflected in the comprehensive system that includes secular and religious studies, with madrasahs playing a central role in providing education to millions of students across the country. Government-funded programs, such as teacher training initiatives and the establishment of quality assurance frameworks, have also facilitated the continued improvement of madrasah education, ensuring that these institutions maintain high standards of education and remain responsive to societal needs.

In contrast, the role of local communities in Thailand is more dominant in the management and development of madrasahs, especially in areas where Muslims make up a minority population. Madrasahs in southern Thailand, particularly in regions like Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Satun, are largely independent of government support and rely heavily on the active involvement of local communities. This dependence is due to the limited government role in religious education, where Thai authorities impose national education policies that focus on secular subjects, often leaving religious education to be handled by local Muslim communities. As a result, local communities in these regions have become the primary stakeholders in managing madrasahs, contributing in multiple ways such as financial support, the construction of educational infrastructure, the provision of qualified teachers, and the integration of local cultural values into the educational curriculum. These communities view madrasahs not only as centers for religious learning but also as vital institutions for preserving their cultural and religious identity.

Local community support in both Indonesia and Thailand goes beyond simple financial aid and infrastructure. In both countries, these communities actively participate in the governance and operational aspects of madrasah management. In Indonesia, religious organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) provide substantial support, helping to maintain the

sustainability of madrasahs through fundraising, volunteer efforts, and contributions to curriculum development. These organizations also support madrasah teacher recruitment and training programs, ensuring that instructors are well-equipped to teach both religious and secular subjects. Similarly, in Thailand, local religious leaders and community groups have taken on the responsibility of ensuring that madrasahs operate effectively, even in the face of limited government intervention. In both countries, local communities also contribute to the integration of local cultural values into the madrasah curriculum, ensuring that the education provided is relevant to the needs of the students and the surrounding community.

This research affirms that the synergy between madrasahs and local communities is fundamental to the sustainability and development of Islamic education in Southeast Asia. The collaborative models seen in both Indonesia and Thailand offer valuable lessons for the broader region, demonstrating that while the role of the government is important, the involvement of local communities is equally crucial in ensuring the long-term success and growth of madrasah education. By fostering closer collaboration between all stakeholders, it is possible to create a more inclusive, sustainable, and effective Islamic education system that can meet the needs of Muslim communities while contributing to the broader educational landscape in Southeast Asia.

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