

Research Article

Islam in Southeast Asia : A Comparative Study of Islamic Education in the Philippines and Thailand

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Abstract: Not every country has developed in terms of Islamic education. This is one of them because Islam is a minority religion so it affects the progress of the development of Islamic education. Such is the case with Islamic education in the Philippines and Thailand. This paper aims to analyze the entry of Islam into Southeast Asia, namely the Philippines and Thailand, and compare the education systems in the two countries based on aspects of curriculum, educational institutions, and Islamic subjects. This type of research is a literature study with data collection techniques through the process of collecting writings books, articles, or other sources supporting the discussion topic. After the data is collected, the researcher analyzes it based on the content and then draws conclusions. The results showed that Islam entered the Philippines and Thailand because of the process of Islamization. The existence of this process, in both countries began to form an Islamic education system that has its own characteristics. The Philippines implements the K to 12 curriculum with Islamic educational institutions consisting only of madrasah with Islamic subjects, namely Islamic studies. Thailand implemented a 1980 curriculum with educational institutions consisting of Quranic education, madrasah that underwent development into cottages. Islamic subjects are related to reading classical books in Arabic and Malay that have written jawi. These differences reflect how each country integrates Islamic education within a predominantly non-Muslim society, influenced by cultural, political, and historical contexts. Strengthening institutional support and government recognition remains a challenge for advancing Islamic education in both countries.

Keywords: Comparative Study; Curriculum; Islamic Education; Madrasah; Minority Muslims.

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1. Introduction

Based on social phenomena, Islam first emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century AD, where Prophet Muhammad laid the foundation for the introduction of Islam to the people of Mecca. Within just two decades, he was able to spread Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Asia and Africa became the two most dominant regions in this expansion. From this, it can be said that Islam was not only embraced by people in the Middle Eastern region but also spread widely from the African coast to the South Pacific, and from the Siberian steppes to the remote islands of Southeast Asia. (F. Amin and A. A. Rifki, 2018)

Each country has its own unique characteristics; therefore, it is undeniable that differences exist in the structure of Islamic education systems, which have a long historical trajectory. Islamic education developed in parallel with the emergence of Islam itself. Over time, Islam has experienced significant progress, although in certain countries it has fluctuated

or even almost disappeared, as in the case of Spain. The spread of Islam occurred through various means, including Muslims traveling to different regions or countries with the purpose of preaching (da'wah). In addition, trade and other factors also played an important role in the dissemination of Islam (P. Susanto, 2015).

Based on the explanation above, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia. The researcher explores information related to the topic with a specific focus on two countries, namely the Philippines and Thailand. Apart from analyzing the spread of Islam in these two nations, this study also aims to compare their Islamic education systems, particularly with regard to three aspects: curriculum, educational institutions, and Islamic subjects implemented in both the Philippines and Thailand.

2. Proposed Method

This research is a literature study, with data collection carried out through the examination of books, articles, and other sources relevant to the topic under discussion. The books and articles used by the researcher are publications released within the period of 2014–2023 (the last ten years). Once the data were collected, the researcher conducted a selection process to identify materials that were most relevant to the study. The selected data were then analyzed using content analysis techniques, followed by the final step of drawing conclusions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Arrival of Islam in the Philippine

Islam entered the southern regions of the Philippines, particularly the Sulu Archipelago and Mindanao, around the year 1380. The first person believed to have introduced Islam to Sulu was Tuan Mashaika, who is thought to have arrived as early as the 13th century. His descendants later became the core of the Muslim community in Sulu. Another important figure was an Arab scholar named Karimul Makhdum, who came in the latter half of the 14th century. He was warmly welcomed by the Muslim community of Buansa, and his religious activities further strengthened the Islamic community established earlier by Tuan Mashaika.

In the early 15th century, Raja Baginda, a prince from Minangkabau, played a pivotal role in the spread of Islam in Sulu. Historical records recount that upon his arrival, local people initially planned to sink his ship. However, their attitude changed once they realized that Raja Baginda was a Muslim. This illustrates that the process of Islamization had reached a stage where being a Muslim served as a kind of “passport” to acceptance within the community.

Other sources suggest that Raja Baginda arrived in Sulu about ten years after successfully spreading Islam to the Zamboanga and Basilan islands. His efforts eventually influenced Kabungsuwan of Magindanao, a prominent local ruler, to embrace Islam. From there, the religion spread further into Lanao, northern Zamboanga, and other coastal regions. Over time, many coastal areas of the Philippines came under the authority of Muslim leaders known as Datus and Rajas, marking the beginning of Islamic civilization in the region. At this stage, systems of governance and codified law were introduced, such as the *Maguindanao Code of Law (Luwaran)*, which was based on works like *Minhaj*, *Fath al-Qarib al-Intifa*, and *Mirat al-Thullab*. It is also noteworthy that Raja Baginda, in his journeys, introduced political elements into the process of Islamization, even appointing his son-in-law, Syarif Abu Bakar, an Arab scholar, to continue the mission of spreading Islam.

Syarif Abu Bakar represented the second wave of Arab influence in Sulu, arriving around 1450 through Palembang and Brunei. He was appointed by Raja Baginda as a qadi (judge) and imam, and later consolidated political authority, eventually becoming the first Sultan of Sulu. During the first 30 years of his reign, he built mosques and madrasahs and succeeded in converting the Buranun, a highland ethnic group in Sulu.

The spread of Islam in Magindanao and Lanao is commonly associated with Syarif Kabungsuwan, who is believed to have reached Mindanao in the early 16th century. Like Raja Baginda, he was a prince who traveled with his guards and followers. Upon arriving at the Pulangi River, he encountered an established Muslim community, which later developed into Cotabato and Manguindanao (Silangan). The expansion of Islam into Lanao was largely a collaborative effort involving Raja Kabungsuwan and several ruling families from Sulu, Borneo, and Ternate. Meanwhile, Islam reached Luzon through Brunei, where a Bruneian noble family intermarried with Luzon's local nobility.

From these historical accounts, it can be concluded that the Islamization of the Philippines was carried out primarily by scholars and traders, many of whom married local women and established Muslim lineages that formed the foundation of Muslim communities. The role of Muslim political leaders came later, introducing Islamic political systems, education, law, and institutions. Thus, the Islamization process was not confined to ideological and legal aspects but also encompassed education and politics. Furthermore, there was a visible alliance among the ruling families of Sulu, Maguindanao, Lanao, Borneo, and the Maluku Islands, which strengthened the propagation and consolidation of Islam in the Philippines.

3.2. The Condition of the Muslim Community in the Philippine

As previously explained, Islam entered the southern regions of the Philippines, particularly Mindanao and Sulu. Before the arrival of Spanish colonization, these areas were under the rule of the Sultanates of Mindanao and Sulu. The establishment of these sultanates represented a significant step in the political history of the Tausug people in particular and the Moro Muslims in general. Therefore, the condition of Muslims in the Philippines can largely be understood through the situation of the Moro Muslims [3]. During the pre-independence period, the Moro Muslims faced a transition of power from American colonization to the Christian-led Philippine government. Philippine independence did not hold much meaning for the Moro people. Instead, they experienced increasing oppression, especially under the rule of Ferdinand Marcos. Compared to other Philippine presidents from José Rizal to Fidel Ramos, the Marcos era is considered the most repressive period for the Moro Muslims.

This repression led to the formation of the Muslim Independent Movement (MIM) in 1968 and later the Moro Liberation Front (MLF) in 1971, both of which were direct responses to Marcos' political stance. Over time, the MLF evolved into the central body representing the Moro cause but eventually split into two major factions: The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), led by Nurulhaj Misuari, which adopted a nationalist-secular ideology. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), led by Salamat Hashim, a religious scholar and fighter with a purely Islamic ideology, who aimed to establish an Islamic state in the southern Philippines. Eventually, even the MNLF experienced internal divisions, leading to the emergence of the MNLF Reformist Group, led by Dimas Pundato, and the extremist Abu Sayyaf Group, founded by Abdurrazak Janjalani in 1993. These divisions weakened the Moro struggle as a whole and limited their ability to strengthen their position against the Philippine government. More recently, the MILF has become the largest and most influential group, advocating for separation from the Philippines while at the same time expressing willingness to negotiate with the government.

The separationist movements among Muslims in the Philippines were influenced by several key factors:

- a. **Religious Factors:** The forced assimilation into Catholicism became a major driver of Muslim resistance. Many feared that Christianity would lead to the decline of Islam, along with its culture and politics. This was tied to Spanish colonial policies, as Spain did not only aim to expand political and economic control but also to impose Catholicism on the local population.
- b. **Christian Migration to the South:** The government-sponsored migration of Christians from the northern to southern Philippines led to demographic shifts. This migration resulted in Muslims losing their majority status in regions that were historically dominated by them.
- c. **Economic Marginalization:** Discrimination in the economic sector was evident, particularly in land ownership. Agricultural programs initiated by the Philippine government favored Christian settlers, creating conflicts over ancestral lands. Muslims felt that they were deliberately sidelined and dispossessed, as their traditional lands were taken and redistributed to Christian migrants. Consequently, the Muslim community faced widespread discrimination, poverty, and injustice, especially in relation to displacement from their ancestral territories.
- d. **Social Issues:** Broader social challenges in the Philippines also pushed Muslim communities to demand their rights.

3.3. E The Arrival of Islam in Thailand

The arrival of Islam in Thailand, specifically in the Pattani region, is inextricably linked to the broader spread of Islam throughout Southeast Asia. The various efforts to spread the religion across the archipelago are viewed as a continuous process. Early evidence of Islam's arrival in Pattani includes a historical inscription dated February 22, 1387. Further evidence is supported by tombstones found in Champa (dated 1039) and in Pahang, Malaysia (dated 1029), which belonged to an Arab descendant of a saint [4].

The Pattani Kingdom is believed to have been founded around 1390, with its first Muslim king, Ismail Syah, reigning from 1500 to 1530. He is considered the founder of the Islamic Malay Kingdom of Pattani. This kingdom frequently struggled for independence from Siamese influence, with Sultan Midzaffar Syah even attempting to attack the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya. The Islamization of Pattani is often attributed to the missionary activities of the Samudra Pasai Kingdom in Aceh during the 12th and 13th centuries. The first king of Pattani to convert to Islam changed his name to Sultan Ismail Syah.

There are several theories about how Islam arrived and developed in Thailand. One theory suggests that the religion was spread by descendants of the Abbasid Caliphate in the 15th to 16th centuries. Another theory posits that Islam entered Thailand through trade routes in the 10th or 11th century, spread by merchants and Sufis from the Arabian Peninsula and India. A third theory argues that Islam arrived from the Samudra Pasai Kingdom in Aceh around 1028, supported by the discovery of an Arabic-inscribed tombstone in Pekan Pahang. These diverse theories highlight the complex and multifaceted history of Islam's integration into Thai society.

3.4. The condition of the Muslim Community in Thailand

Regarding the condition of Muslims in Thailand, it is important to note that the majority of the Thai population adheres to Buddhism, while only a small portion of the population practices Islam. Despite being a minority, Muslims in Thailand constitute the largest minority group after the Chinese community. The majority of Thai Muslims are concentrated in the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, along with parts of Satun and Songkhla. These areas border Malaysia and are inhabited largely by Malay Muslims, often referred to as *Melayu-Muslim*.

As a minority group, Thai Muslims particularly those in southern Thailand (Pattani) have long faced conflict and challenges. One of the most persistent issues has been the religious and territorial conflict experienced by the Malay Muslim population in Pattani, which has deep roots in ethnic and religious differences. Tensions worsened after the dissolution of the Malay Kingdom, which left the Malay population in southern Thailand politically marginalized and culturally suppressed. During the rule of Prime Minister Pibul Songgram, the Malay Muslims in Pattani became a primary target of forced cultural assimilation policies. These measures sought to integrate the Malay Muslim community into the broader Thai Buddhist identity, undermining their religious and cultural practices. In addition, the Muslim community in southern Thailand has experienced widespread discrimination and human rights violations, including acts of terror, shootings, torture, extrajudicial killings, and land confiscation. These conditions have severely restricted the social and cultural life of the Pattani Muslim community, leaving them in a state of prolonged insecurity and marginalization.

3.5. A Comparative Study of Islamic Education in the Philippines and Thailand

In relation to the comparison of Islamic education in the Philippines and Thailand, the researcher analyzes three key aspects: the curriculum, Islamic educational institutions, and the Islamic subjects provided or implemented in both countries. The following is the researcher's interpretation:

Table 1. Curriculum Aspects Implemented.

<i>Source</i>	Filipina	Thailand
Rakhma Diah Salekha dkk, "Studi Komparasi Pembelajaran Kelas V SD N Sojomerto 01 Kabupaten Batang-Indonesia dan Feu Roosevelt College Inc Marikina Metro Manila-	K to 12 Curriculum	

Filipina”, *Praniti*, Vol. I, No. 2, 2021, hal. 87-91.

Sainab Che’do, *Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam di Ma’had At-Tarbiyah Sasnupatham Shcool Propinsi Patani (Selatan Thailand)* (Skripsi: IAIN Purwokerto, 2019), hal. 55.

1980 Curriculum

Based on table 1, it can be explained that the curriculum implemented in the Philippines adopts the K to 12 Curriculum, while the curriculum implemented in Thailand follows the 1980 Curriculum. The K to 12 Curriculum is a separate learning system in which each subject is delivered independently in every session. This curriculum requires students to complete a minimum of twelve years of education, consisting of six years of elementary education from the age of six to eleven divided into three years of primary level and three years of intermediate level. This is followed by four years of junior secondary school from the age of twelve to fifteen, divided into three years of lower secondary and one year of upper secondary. Finally, students are required to complete two years of senior high school or vocational school from the age of sixteen to seventeen.

- a. Meanwhile, the 1980 Curriculum implemented in Thailand contains several requirements for the completion of the educational process, including. Students must complete both compulsory and elective courses according to the program requirements with a minimum of 66 credits, and every subject must be passed through examination.
- b. Students must take compulsory credits in religious subjects, Arabic, Malay, or other foreign languages.
- c. A total minimum of 66 credits must be completed overall
- d. Students are required to participate in religious activities for at least 80% of the academic year and must fulfill specific objectives set within these activities.

According to the resolutions of the World Congress on Islamic Education, as cited by Hanafi et al., the 1980 Curriculum emphasizes that Islamic education aims to achieve a balanced development of the human personality in a comprehensive manner through the training of intellect, soul, emotions, intelligence, and senses. Thus, Islamic education must develop every aspect of human life spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, and linguistic both individually and collectively, and direct these aspects toward goodness and the attainment of human perfection.

Table 2. Aspects of Educational Institutions.

Country	Source	Educational Institutional
Philippines	Ihsan Sa’dudin & Eka Safitri, “Perkembangan Konsep Pendidikan Bahasa Arab di Asia Tenggara”, <i>Lisanan Arabiya: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab</i> , Vol. 3, No. 2, 2019, hal. 177-191.	Madrasah
	Dedi Mulyasana dkk, <i>Khazanah Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam Dari Wacana Lokal Hingga Tatanan Global</i> (Bandung: Cendekia Press, 2020), hal. 144.	Maktab and Madrasah

Thailand	Dedi Purnomo & Ismail Pane, “Perbandingan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia dan Thailand”, <i>EDUCATE: Journal of Education and Culture</i> , Vol. 1, No. 1, 2023.	Qur’anic Education, Madrasah
	Masduki Duryat dkk, <i>Pendidikan (Islam) dan Logika Interpretasi (Kebijakan, Problem, dan Interpretasi Pendidikan di Indonesia)</i> (Yogyakarta: K-Media, 2017), hal. 182.	Islamic boarding school

Based on Table 2, it can be further explained that, initially, educational institutions in the Philippines consisted of madrasahs and several universities, while in Thailand they consisted of Qur’anic schools, Islamic boarding school, and madrasahs. The madrasahs implemented in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao, did not teach English, the Filipino national language, civic education, or technical skills that could contribute to the economic development of their communities. As a result, madrasahs were considered informal schools by the government, and their graduates were unable to pursue higher education. Over time, however, the Philippine government allowed the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction. In April 1973, in Muslim-majority regions, Philippine law permitted the teaching of religious subjects to students in public schools, provided that it did not interfere with official subjects. Attendance was optional, and the teachers had to be provided by parents or Islamic organizations.

Mulyasana et al. explain that formal educational institutions at the elementary and secondary levels were called maktab and madrasah. At the elementary level, there were six compulsory classes for children aged 6–11 years. In addition, there was optional preschool education, which included kindergarten for children aged 3 or 4, as well as other preparatory courses. At the secondary level, there were four years of high school for the age group of 12–15 years, with elementary education as a prerequisite. At the higher education level, students entered at the age of 16, with universities in the Philippines offering bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral programs across various disciplines.

Two Islamic study centers established as government institutions were the Institute of Islamic Studies at the University of the Philippines (1973) and the King Faisal Center of Arabic and Islamic Studies (1973). Graduates of madrasahs often received scholarships abroad, such as to Al-Azhar University, to pursue higher education. This initiative aimed to produce educated and professional Muslim scholars. In general, the Philippines regarded Islam as playing an important role in society, particularly in fostering relations with other Muslim communities in the fields of politics, economy, society, and culture, such as with Brunei, Sabah, and other islands.

In Thailand, the first form of Islamic education was Qur’anic education, which represented the earliest phase of Islamic religious learning in Southern Thailand [12]. Learning to recite the Qur’an was considered a fundamental obligation for every Muslim. Qur’anic recitation was conducted in mosques and in the homes of teachers who served as places of Qur’an learning. A Islamic boarding school was then positioned as an important educational institution in Southern Thailand. Subsequently, Islamic education in Thailand developed with the emergence of Islamic boarding school institutions. The characteristics of the Islamic boarding school system in Thailand can be described as follows :

- a. The system was influenced by medieval education, where students sat in a circle around the teacher (halaqah)
- b. The learning process did not follow a classical classroom system
- c. Instruction was based on religious texts read in an open halaqah known as balaisah, studied three times a day

- d. Each student sought clarification and commentary from their teacher
- e. Beginner students studied alongside advanced students without classification based on background
- f. There were no examinations or assignments
- g. There was no time limit for study; some students stayed in the Islamic boarding school for up to ten years.

Over time, the Islamic boarding school system underwent transformation into private Islamic schools (madrasahs) that adopted a formal school-based system. Graduates of private Islamic schools (madrasahs) could choose their field of study according to their interests. Those interested in science could continue in that field, while those inclined toward religion and Arabic studies could pursue higher learning in those disciplines. Many graduates of private Islamic schools continued their studies at institutions such as the College of Islamic Studies at Prince of Songkla University, the International Islamic University Malaysia, the University of Karachi in Pakistan, Aligarh Muslim University in India, and others. There were two main factors driving modernization within the Islamic boarding school system in Thailand: first, the demands of progress and changing times, and second, the Thai government's recommendation to incorporate general subjects into Islamic boarding school.

Table 3. Subject Aspects.

Country	Source	Subjects
Philippines	Muhammad Murtadlo, "Islam dan Pendidikan Madrasah di Filipina", <i>Edukasi</i> , Vol. 13, No. 1, 2015, hal. 45-60.	Arabic language, English language, Filipino language, science, mathematics, makabayan, and Islamic studies
Thailand	Masduki Duryat dkk, <i>Pendidikan (Islam) dan Logika Interpretasi (Kebijakan, Problem, dan Interpretasi Pendidikan di Indonesia)</i> (Yogyakarta: K-Media, 2017), hal. 182.	Reading of classical texts in both Arabic and Malay written in Jawi script

Based on Table 3, it can be concluded that the subjects included in the curriculum of the Philippines consist of Arabic, English, Filipino, science, mathematics, makabayan, and Islamic studies. In contrast, in Thailand, the curriculum mainly focuses on the reading of classical texts in both Arabic and Malay using Jawi script. In the Philippines, these subjects were officially introduced in 2004 when the Department of Education adopted DO51, which incorporated the teaching of Arabic language and Islamic values into public schools, particularly in Muslim-majority areas. The Islamic and Arabic language curriculum for public schools was first implemented in the 2005–2006 academic year, and at the same time, madrasahs also began piloting the standardized curriculum known as the Standard Madrasa Curriculum (SMC). In 2005, AusAID provided support to the Department of Education's Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao project, helping to secure government permits to operate (Permit to Operate/PTO) and to implement the SMC. Through these initiatives, the subjects mentioned above began to be formally adopted.

Meanwhile, in Thailand, the Islamic educational field primarily offers instruction through the reading of classical texts in Arabic and Malay written in Jawi. This reflects one of the distinctive characteristics of the pondok education system in Thailand, namely: "No system of education, no fixed syllabus; each professor (tok guru) has his own method of teaching and syllabus".

4. Conclusions

In a country where Muslims are not the majority, such as in the Philippines and Thailand, access to Islamic education is not hindered. Islam spread in these two nations through different historical routes, which in turn shaped their respective educational systems,

particularly in the field of Islamic education. From the perspective of curriculum, the Philippines adopts the K to 12 curriculum, while Thailand follows the 1980 curriculum. In terms of Islamic educational institutions, the Philippines primarily relies on madrasahs, whereas Thailand's system consists of Qur'anic education and *pondok* schools, which later developed into madrasahs. Regarding Islamic subjects, in the Philippines the focus is on Islamic studies, while in Thailand the emphasis is on reading classical texts, both in Arabic and Malay written in Jawi script.

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