

Advancing Islamic Education in the Bangsamoro Region: The Recognized Islamic Higher Education Institution

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: May 12, 2026 Revised: June 26, 2026 Accepted: June 27, 2026 Keywords: bangsamoro region; higher education; islamic education; madrasah reform	Islamic education in the Philippines struggled to modernize due to its strong emphasis on religious knowledge. The new Bangsamoro autonomy has renewed hopes to strengthen Islamic education through the establishment of the Bangsamoro Kulliyah for Islamic Studies (BKIS). Through a qualitative case study approach, this study explores BKIS's evolving role in advancing Islamic education and how Indonesia's intervention has shaped its institutional direction. Data gathered through guided interviews with key stakeholders, FGDs with faculty and students, and document analysis of curricula, MoUs, and policies. Thematic analysis and data triangulation confirm that BKIS plays a transformative role in reforming BARMM's Islamic education alongside Indonesia's transnational contribution, providing significant support. However, the success of this cooperation hinges on the contextual adaptation of foreign models, the building of local capacity, and the political will to sustain reforms. BKIS thus represents both an innovation hub and a symbol of Bangsamoro identity, bridging global influences with local needs. BKIS served as a testament to the Bangsamoro's continuous efforts to advance Islamic education. This study contributes to the development of Islamic education, particularly in Islamic higher education.
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INTRODUCTION

Islam entered the Philippines around the 14th century through traders, scholars, and rulers such as Tuan Mashaika, Karimul Makhdum, Raja Baginda, and Sharif Kabungsuwan. Their coming marks the rise and existence of madrasah education, which evolved from the Qur'an and Hadith. Madrasah education became a space of resistance to colonial and postcolonial attempts to integrate Muslims into a Westernized education system and Islamization.¹ However, attempts at integration of education policies largely failed to address Muslim alienation and instead deepened conflict.² Islamization continuously flourishes in the Muslim community. This Islamization process reshapes knowledge, politics, economy, and education to align with the Islamic principles of tawhid.

Institutionalizing Islamic education in the region, the madrasah education system was established. These madrasahs are privately sustained with little or no government support.³ Islamic education is supposed to integrate both secular and divine knowledge; however, the Philippines, being a secular state, separates the two, disadvantaging Muslims. The creation of the ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) paved the way for Muslim Filipinos to control their education. The ARMM mandate gave authority to regulate madrasah education, require Arabic instruction, and emphasize cultural identity. However, accreditation and sustainability remained elusive as only 86 of ~2000 traditional madrasahs were accredited nationwide in 2018. Among hindrances, funding is the most serious issue: insufficient budget for salaries, facilities, equipment, and programs hinders government recognition.⁴ The national level regulates the offerings of recognized traditional madrasahs at the primary grade levels. Meanwhile, the UP Institute of Islamic Studies and the King Faisal Center at Mindanao State University (MSU), Marawi, were established for higher education.⁵ These madrasahs are crucial for Muslim youth's moral, religious, and intellectual development. However, gaps between policy design and implementation persist, making the process fragile,⁶ and religious education still lags.⁷

Madrasahs lack adequate infrastructure, including libraries, classrooms, toilets, sports facilities, and learning materials. Poor facilities negatively affect teaching quality and student

¹ Amina Samid, "Filipinler'de İslami Eğitim ve Medrese Okullarının Gelişimi," *International Journal of Political Studies* 8, no. 2 (2022): 35–47, <https://doi.org/10.25272/icps.1139650>.

² Jeffrey Milligan, "Reclaiming an Ideal: The Islamization of Education in Muslim Mindanao," in *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy*, 2nd ed., by Jeffrey Milligan (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2020), 183–213, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-1228-5_6.

³ Saddam Mangondato Solaiman, "Challenges of Madaris Educational System in Educating the Youth in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines," *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2021): 137–144, <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1991.04.01.259>.

⁴ Sahraman Hadji Latif, "Islamic Education: Opportunities and Challenges in Secular Philippine State," *SAINTEKBU: Jurnal Sains dan Teknologi* 7, no. 1 (2014): 70–84.

⁵ M. F. D. A. Putra and M. Roqib, "Islam in Southeast Asia: A Comparative Study of Islamic Education in the Philippines and Thailand," *Al-Tatawur: International Journal of Social Science (TIJOSC)* 3, no. 3 (2025): 41–48, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.61806/al-tatawur.v3i3.65>.

⁶ Marlon Guleng, Razaleigh Kawangit, and Zulkefli Bin Hadji Aini, "Issues on Islamic Education in the Philippines," *Al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic and Contemporary Issues* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.53840/alirsyad.v2i1.22>.

⁷ Rito V. Baring, "Plurality in Unity: Challenges toward Religious Education in the Philippines," *Religious Education* 106, no. 5 (2011): 459–475, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2011.613342>.

outcomes, leading to non-government recognition.⁸ Asatidz in traditional madrasahs are generally competent but lack professional development opportunities such as training, seminars, and continuing education. Many are qualified graduates, locally or abroad, but there is no structured capacity-building system. Moreover, a unified or standardized curriculum is absent across madrasahs. Most curricula are patterned after foreign models without adaptation to the Philippine context. Curriculum challenges are not considered "serious," and the lack of integration limits graduates' relevance and employability.⁹ Many madrasahs remained marginalized by state policies and rejected integration due to fear of assimilation or losing autonomy.¹⁰ This madrasah education status quo makes Islamic education stagnant, backward, and unable to produce competitive graduates.

BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) reforms paved the way for the creation of DGME (Directorate General for Madaris Education), the launching of the first public madrasah, and the Bangsamoro Education Reform and Development Plan (BERDP) 2035.¹¹ The reform strengthened the Muslim Mindanao Autonomy Act No. 164, which served as the basis for the establishment of the Regional Madrasah Graduate Academy (REMACADEMY). The approval of the Bangsamoro Autonomy Act No. 50 of 2023 leads to the establishment of the now-known Bangsamoro Kulliyah for Islamic Studies (BKIS). For decades, the institution has produced great teachers who have successfully passed the teachers' licensure exam, making it an asset to the Bangsamoro. REMAcademy was primarily envisioned to improve madrasah instruction and administration for the local ulama in the Philippines.¹² This institution was established to address the needs, particularly in teaching and classroom management, to strengthen madrasah education in the town.

Reform replaces it with a modern Islamic institution offering undergraduate and graduate programs in Islamic sciences and Arabic. It charges the BKIS with developing specialized curricula and academic programs rooted in the Bangsamoro people's identity, history, culture, and aspirations. Administratively, the law attaches BKIS to the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) and vests governance in a Board of Trustees chaired by the education minister, ensuring direct ministerial oversight. More broadly, the Kulliyah is seen as a vehicle for integrating Islamic education into the formal system and professionalizing Islamic scholarship in BARMM. Legislators emphasize that BKIS must yield "productive citizens of Islamic values and principles" in line with BARMM's commitment to moral governance, and empower Bangsamoro Muslims with knowledge, values, and competencies at home so that students "will no longer need to go to other

⁸ Naima L. Tomas and Saidamin P. Bagolong, "Regulated Elementary Madrasah in the Philippines as Basis for Policy Integration in the Bangsamoro Region," *International Hybrid Conference on Revitalizing Global Economy for Sustainable National Development (IHCERGE-SND)* 3 (2024): 288–296.

⁹ Reflianto et al., "Logic Model Evaluation to Work Oriented Education Program through Joint Madrasah Community," *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan dan Kemasyarakatan* 16, no. 2 (2018): 335–354.

¹⁰ Samid, "Filipinler'de İslami Eğitim ve Medrese Okullarının Gelişimi."

¹¹ Esmaida Andang-Alaiden et al., "Analysis of the Socio-Political Dimension of Madrasah Education Program in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao," *Pancasila International Journal of Applied Social Science* 3, no. 01 (2025): 190–210, <https://doi.org/10.59653/pancasila.v3i01.1379>.

¹² Robert W. Hefner, ed., "Islamic Education in the Philippines: Political Separatism and Religious Program," in *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia*, with Thomas M. McKenna and Esmael A. Abdula (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 205–236.

countries to pursue Islamic studies.¹³

The Philippines looked to Indonesia's madrasa models for inspiration. The 2011 memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Indonesia and the Philippines provides master's and doctoral scholarships for madrasa teachers from Mindanao, and shares Indonesia's MAPK, boarding madrasah, and skills program as reform models. Madrasah Aliyah Special Program, boarding madrasah models, and skills programs were suggested as templates for the Philippines.¹⁴ Indonesia's involvement demonstrates the importance of transnational collaboration in reforming Bangsamoro's Islamic education. Effective reform of Islamic education requires standardized curricula, institutional support, and recognition of Islamic schools as equal partners in national education. Madrasah policies in the Philippines are reactive and fragmented, influenced by peace agreements, and the integration into the national system remains uneven. However, external collaboration has been pivotal in shaping reforms.¹⁵

There is a growing demand for a balanced education that prepares students for peacebuilding and employment.¹⁶ Furthermore, there is also an absence of holistic education frameworks that balance spiritual, cultural, and intellectual growth.¹⁷ Where, in fact, Islamic education can adapt to a new era of society by prioritizing critical and innovative thinking.¹⁸ With the rise of technology and a new government, Islamic education must adapt to innovation to attain the autonomy aim mandated in BOL and BEC. In this context, this study explores how the BKIS serves as a key gateway for the region to advance Islamic education. Moreover, collaboration with Indonesia, known for its strong allegiance, shapes its strategic plans.

The study results contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic education reform in the Bangsamoro regions, as the case illustrates how regional cooperation among Muslim-majority countries can serve as a platform for rebuilding educational institutions that are both culturally authentic and globally relevant. Moreover, this study will provide knowledge about the efforts of the Muslim minority in the Philippines to advance their religious and/or Islamic education while sustaining their economic development. It will also provide the information needed to develop further and strengthen institutional and government efforts to sustain the program's needs and effectiveness.

¹³ Bangsamoro Kulliyah for Islamic Studies Act, Bangsamoro Autonomy Act No. 50, Bangsamoro Transition Authority Parliament Second Regular Session, Bangsamoro Autonomy Act (2022).

¹⁴ Imran Rido, Siti Halimah, and Husni Mubarak, "Analysis of Islamic Education Policy: Philippines Case Study," *TADRIBUNA: Journal of Islamic Education Management* 2, no. 2 (2022): 36–46, <https://doi.org/10.61456/tjiec.v2i2.22>.

¹⁵ Zainal Dimaukom Kulidtod, "Islamic Educational Policies in the Philippines: Its Evolution and Current Problems," *International Research-Based Education Journal* 1, no. 1 (2017): 92–102.

¹⁶ Andang-Alaiden et al., "Analysis of the Socio-Political Dimension of Madrasah Education Program in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao," *Pancasila International Journal of Applied Social Science* 3, no. 01 (2025): 190–210, <https://doi.org/10.59653/pancasila.v3i01.1379>

¹⁷ Alizaman Gamon and Mariam Tagoranao, "The Transformation of Muslim Education in the Philippines: A Revisit," *Al Hikmah International Journal of Islamic Studies and Human Sciences* 5, no. 4 (2022): 108–142, <https://doi.org/10.46722/hikmah.v5i4f>.

¹⁸ Adi Kasman, M. Ikhwan, and Darlis Aziz, "Islamic Education as a Strengthening of Aqidah and Akhlaq in The Society 5.0 Era," *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan dan Kemasyarakatan* 20, no. 2 (2022): 181–189, <https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v20i2.4962>.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilizes an exploratory qualitative case study to examine the current status of Islamic education, particularly the contributions of BKIS and Indonesia's intervention. This method will help examine an in-depth case in a real-life context and engage directly with natural settings and phenomena to collect data.¹⁹ Moreover, this method is best practice for exploring timely cases and for focusing on a specific unit when providing primary evidence.²⁰ This method helps provide a detailed account of how the BKIS and Indonesia's collaboration significantly advanced and shaped Islamic education in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region.²¹

To address the research question, purposive sampling is used to ensure that participants can address queries.²² Participants are chosen to ensure they are reliable resources for describing or explaining the research study objectives. A guided individual interview with key informants was conducted to capture institutional perspectives on policy, leadership, and curricular reform. In addition, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with lecturers to explore instructional practices and faculty experiences regarding Indonesia's educational interventions. While conducting FGDs with four current students to gather insights into their academic journeys, aspirations, and perceptions of opportunities and challenges. Selected participants are well informed about their rights, freedom, and self-determination, and are privileged to participate in the study.²³ When capturing relevant information in a case study, the best practice is to use multiple data collection techniques to capture an in-depth study of the phenomenon.²⁴ Research participants are distributed in the table below:

Table 1. Key Informant's Individual Interview Profile

Informants	Role/Function	Years in service	Gender
K1	Director General of Madaris Education	6	Male
K2	Interim President	4	Male
K3	Islamic Studies Head Program	4	Male
K4	Education Head Program	4	Female

¹⁹ John W. Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 4th ed (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 54.

²⁰ L. R. Gay, Geoffrey E. Mills, and Peter W. Airasian, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications*, 10th ed (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 82.

²¹ Robert Johnson and Larry Christensen, *Educational Research: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Approaches*, 7th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2020), 39.

²² Arya Priya, "Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in Its Application," *Sociological Bulletin* 70, no. 1 (2021): 94–110, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>.

²³ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed (London: New York: Routledge, 2007), 77.

²⁴ Robert Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th Edition (2018), vol. 13 (SAGE Publications, 2018), 48.

Table 2. FGD Participant's Profile

FGD Participants	Role/Function	Years in service/Level	Gender
FT1	Senior Faculty/Lecturer	12	Male
FT2	Faculty/Lecturer	8	Female
FT3	Faculty/Lecturer	5	Female
ST1	Student (Education)	4	Female
ST2	Student (IS)	4	Male
ST3	Student (IS)	3	Female
ST4	Student (Education)	3	Male

To address research concerns, thematic analysis was applied, and data analysis was strengthened through triangulation of diverse responses. Data triangulation is established to ensure that evidence and findings are robust. Data triangulation includes perspectives from diverse participant interviews, FGD, and existing documents.²⁵ Interviews and FGDs were audiotaped during data collection for transcription and coding. Codes were generated from each participant's responses and then aggregated to identify emerging themes. Data were broken down into smaller units and classified based on the research questions.²⁶ Themes were organized to answer the research questions and objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Role of BKIS in Bangsamoro Islamic Education

BKIS as a Pathway to Professionalization

Education has always been central in Islam, with knowledge seen as both a religious duty and a means to shape a pious individual and a strong community.²⁷ Findings reveal that BKIS is widely perceived as a transformative institution bridging traditional madrasah systems and modern higher education. Legislation establishing BKIS describes it as "the first of its kind in the country," a higher-education institute focused on baccalaureate and graduate programs in Islamic studies and Arabic. Administrators highlighted its crucial role in professionalizing Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (ISAL) teachers, enabling graduates to take licensure examinations and pursue careers in government or academia. This reflects the goals of the Bangsamoro Autonomy Act No. 50, to institutionalize specialized higher learning, curriculum innovation, and quality assurance in the Bangsamoro Kulliyah for Islamic Studies. As one administrator noted: "The purpose of BKIS is to produce ISAL teachers who are recognized by the government, unlike traditional madrasah graduates who cannot access public employment" (K1).

Lecturers echoed this, describing BKIS as providing a balanced and recognized education that bridges secular and religious knowledge: "BKIS offers balanced education, secular and Islamic knowledge that the government recognizes" (FT1). On the other hand,

²⁵ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed (London: New York: Routledge, 2007), 67.

²⁶ L. R. Gay, Geoffrey E. Mills, and Peter W. Airasian, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications*, 10th ed (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 51.

²⁷ Sebastian Günther, *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Boston: Brill, 2020), 73.

students affirmed this benefit, contrasting their experience with unrecognized madrasahs: "I graduated from Jamiat Paglat, but the government did not recognize it. BKIS is a stepping stone to higher education and jobs" (ST1).

By aligning with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE), BKIS provides legitimacy to Islamic education graduates who were previously marginalized due to the lack of recognition of traditional madrasah credentials. Scholars like Solaiman also observed that traditional madrasahs in BARMM lack professional recognition due to inadequate facilities, teacher development, and accreditation. BKIS thus addresses this gap by creating an institutional pathway to employability and recognition. Similarly, Islamic education in the Philippines has historically struggled with accreditation and employability under the secular state, and BKIS directly responds to this structural constraint.²⁸ By anchoring madrasah graduates in a formal university framework, BKIS links religious learning to employability, enabling graduates to gain recognized degrees and compete for positions that traditionally required secular qualifications.

Standardization and Curriculum Alignment

Respondents reported that BKIS is central to standardizing Islamic education across BARMM. By developing a structured curriculum and adopting modern pedagogy, participants described BKIS as a model institution that guides traditional madrasah reforms, introducing structured curricula, modern pedagogies, and technology integration. This aligns with the broader discourse on curriculum modernization in Islamic education,²⁹ which emphasizes building public trust and institutional legitimacy through adaptive and standardized curricula. This mirrors Indonesia's example, where successive reforms have bridged *pesantren*/madrasah schools to the national system. In Indonesia, many *pesantrens* were required to adopt general subjects and meet quality standards, and the state decreed that madrasahs have "equal status" with secular schools.

Similarly, respondents who visited Indonesian institutions reported learning about Indonesia's curriculum frameworks, and their Memorandum of Understanding explicitly targets joint curriculum development and exchange of pedagogical best practices. Lecturers reinforced this role by describing BKIS as a model for curriculum standardization and innovation, integrating secular and Islamic subjects while promoting inclusivity for Muslims, Christians, and Indigenous Peoples. As quoted, "BKIS opens education to diverse ethnic groups ... it helps post-conflict youth uplift their status" (FT3). They emphasized that BKIS equips students with 21st-century competencies, alongside strong Islamic values, preparing them to become future leaders and community agents of change. In short, informants saw BKIS as the vehicle for aligning local Islamic curricula with national standards and modern educational norms, much as Indonesia did for its religious schools.

Students affirmed these institutional visions by emphasizing that BKIS offers a more structured curriculum, modern facilities, and government recognition, compared to

²⁸ Hadji Latif, "Islamic Education: Opportunities and Challenges in Secular Philippine State." *SAINTEKBU: Jurnal Sains Dan Teknologi* 7, no. 1 (2014): 70–84.

²⁹ Hasan Baharun et al., "Building Public Trust in Islamic School through Adaptive Curriculum," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v8i1.17163>.

traditional madrasahs. They described their experience as strengthening their religious identity and discipline while simultaneously opening opportunities for higher education and employment. In the BARMM context, BKIS plays this reformist role by offering a reference model for traditional madrasahs, which historically lacked a unified curriculum.³⁰

Balanced Islamic and Secular Education

All groups emphasized that BKIS and related reforms aim for a balanced curriculum that fosters a holistic education, combining revelation-based (Islamic) knowledge with acquired (secular) knowledge. This reflects a longstanding ideal in Muslim education that faith and reason are mutually intertwined. For example, an MBHTE presentation explicitly refers to the ISAL program as "a venue for balanced education," ensuring that Bangsamoro children learn Islamic subjects in public schools alongside the standard curriculum. Informants noted that BKIS's vision is to produce graduates who are both "grounded in faith" and capable of succeeding in the modern world, thus uniting spiritual formation with technical skills. This mirrors Indonesia's pesantren model, which integrates religious and general sciences, making graduates globally competitive.³¹ The need for integration has long been raised in Islamic education literature, as Assegaf et al³² stressed the identity crisis faced by institutions that fail to harmonize tradition with modernity.

The Interim President echoed these perspectives but emphasized that BKIS is still in its infancy, with institutional frameworks such as the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) and permanent staffing not yet in place. Despite these limitations, he articulated BKIS's vision to produce globally competitive and spiritually upright graduates, balancing "revealed" and "acquired" knowledge. According to the key informant, "BKIS will blend Acquired and Revealed knowledge, students are exposed to the community through the ComUniversity program" (K2). Moreover, Lecturers highlighted their post-conflict inclusivity, noting: "BKIS opens education to diverse ethnic groups. It helps post-conflict youth uplift their status" (FT3). Meanwhile, students also connected their education to identity and history: "BKIS awakens students from Bangsamoro struggles and links history with education" (ST4).

Taken together, these findings highlight BKIS's role as a pathway for professionalization, recognition, and employability, while also serving as a model of reform for traditional madrasahs and as a symbol of Bangsamoro identity and social recovery. However, assimilation of madrasah education into the national system is a longstanding issue. The doubt about the government program hinders participation and the avoidance of colonization and liberalization. However, educational liberalization means reforming education to be more dynamic, humanistic, and adaptable to modern times. It does not mean

³⁰ Solaiman, "Challenges of Madaris Educational System in Educating the Youth in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines." *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2021): 137–144, <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1991.04.01.259>.

³¹ Moch Tolchah and Muhammad Arfan Mu'ammarr, "Islamic Education in the Globalization Era; Challenges, Opportunities, and Contribution of Islamic Education in Indonesia," *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews* 7, no. 4 (2019): 1031–1037, <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2019.74141>.

³² Abd. Rachman Assegaf, Husniyatus Salamah Zainiyah, and Muhammad Fahmi, "Curriculum Innovation for the Internationalization of Islamic Education Study Program at Higher Education Institutions in Surabaya, Indonesia," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, (2022), 671–706, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol21.iss3.art3>.

total freedom, but instead aligning reforms with Islamic values while keeping education relevant to global developments.³³ In the era of technology, Islamic education has to evolve. Technology integration in Islamic education is crucial in the 21st century for balancing religious and secular knowledge.³⁴ Madrasah education's non-integration risks them being left behind if ICT adoption remains limited. Technology adoption can bridge gaps between traditional madrasahs and mainstream education systems.

Indonesia's Intervention and Contribution

Curriculum Development and Standardization

Across respondents, Indonesia emerged as a catalyst and "big brother" in shaping the direction of BKIS and Islamic education reform in BARMM. Administrators highlighted the direct involvement of Indonesian experts, such as Dr. Bahrul Hayat, who guided the development of the ISAL curriculum and the Bachelor of Arts in Islamic and Arabic Education (BAIAE) program. Administrators credited Indonesian scholars for laying the foundations of BKIS programs, noting that "Brother Bahrul Hayat crafted and finalized the curriculum, it was patterned after Indonesia" (Director General). The head of the Department of Islamic Studies confirmed that "Pak Bahrul Hayat developed the curriculum and the release of the BKIS PSG institutionalized and standardized it" (K3).

This reflects Indonesia's longstanding trajectory of reforming Islamic higher education, in which IAIN/STAIN institutions have transformed into UINs with integrated curricula. Aliyah et al., "Implementation of Islamic Higher Education Development Management in Indonesia". BARMM looks to these reforms for guidance in creating a contextual yet standardized system. For instance, the Bangsamoro delegation reported that their visit to Indonesia focused on learning an Indonesian "curriculum framework for BKIS" and on methods to integrate Islamic studies into other subjects. This intervention parallels Indonesia's own history: the Indonesian government has long used joint decrees and laws to modernize madrasahs (e.g., by requiring English and science courses). In effect, Indonesia's academic input is helping to standardize Islamic education in BARMM, using a model in which Islam-oriented programs are embedded in formal accreditation and aligned with the national curriculum.

Lecturers described Indonesia's contributions in terms of technical support, benchmarking visits, and pedagogical inspiration. They admired how Indonesian pesantren foster discipline, peace education, and the integration of secular and religious knowledge and values, which they considered essential for the Bangsamoro context. Meanwhile, students recognized the impact of Indonesian collaboration in shaping BKIS's curriculum and teaching methods. They expressed enthusiasm for potential scholarships, exchange programs, and research opportunities in Indonesian institutions, which they saw as opening

³³ Fachruddin Azmi and Muhlison, "Liberalization of Islamic Education," *International Journal of Islamic Education, Research and Multiculturalism (IJIERM)* 3, no. 3 (2022): 172–183, <https://doi.org/10.47006/ijerm.v3i3.91>.

³⁴ Fanidawarti Hamzah, Abdul Hakim Abdullah, and Widad Ma, "Advancing Education through Technology Integration, Innovative Pedagogies and Emerging Trends: A Systematic Literature Review," *Journal of Advanced Research in Applied Sciences and Engineering Technology* 41, no. 1 (2024): 44–63, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37934/araset.41.1.4463>; Kasman, Ikhwan, and Aziz, "Islamic Education as a Strengthening of Aqidah and Akhlaq in The Society 5.0 Era."

global pathways for Bangsamoro youth. As one student said: "There is more emphasis on research, discipline, and modern approaches that Indonesia inspires" (ST3). On the other hand, the Interim president emphasized the partnership's structural and political constraints. While acknowledging Indonesia's contributions, he noted that Philippine laws prevent full-scale adoption of Indonesian systems, requiring careful adaptation to local contexts.

Pesantren and the Integrated-School Model

Interviewees frequently cited Indonesian *pesantrens* and *Sekolah Islam Terpadu* as sources of inspiration for discipline, moral education, and the integration of secular sciences. Literature confirms this: Pesantren is a resilient institution that both preserves Islamic traditions and embraces globalization.³⁵ One administrator observed that "*Pesantren* in Indonesia is very organized, unlike fragmented Qur'an boarding schools in BARMM" (Interim President). They emphasized that Indonesia's pesantren model provided a governance and pedagogical framework for reform. Indonesia's modern *Sekolah Islam Terpadu* combines rigorous secular academics with an explicitly Islamic moral environment. For example, Indonesia has many elite Islamic boarding schools (such as Al-Azhar Jakarta, Nurul Fikri, etc.) that offer high-quality science and math education alongside Qur'ānic studies and character formation. Teachers in these schools maintain a disciplined and pious atmosphere, even as they follow the national syllabus and emphasize modern skills.

Integrated Islamic Schools (*Sekolah Islam Terpadu*) emerged in Indonesia due to dissatisfaction with the national education system.³⁶ This is in response to address its inability to instill strong moral values and integrate religion with modern knowledge. This institution combines the national curriculum with additional Islamic studies and moral training. The Muslim Brotherhood tarbiyya movement strongly influenced the establishment, which envisions nurturing a rabbani generation. With this system, secular subjects are taught while infused with Islamic values rooted in Qur'anic principles. The school operation system applies to either a full-day or boarding school type, allowing intensive religious and moral guidance. Through this system, teachers' vital role is not just to transfer and infuse knowledge but to model Islamic conduct and nurture students spiritually and morally. Schools operate as both alternative education and vehicles of Islamization within Indonesia's democratic framework.

Respondents noted that this model, in which students receive instruction aligned with global standards and Islamic values, has inspired Bangsamoro educators. Lecturers linked this to pedagogical reform as cited "We adopted pesantren practices that are peace, tolerance, and interdisciplinary education" (FT3). The appeal lies in the fact that Bangsamoro schools can be both academically excellent and deeply Islamic. In short, Indonesia's integrated-school movement provided a working example that faith-based schooling need not sacrifice academic quality or moral discipline.

³⁵ Tolchah and Arfan Mu'ammam, "Islamic Education in the Globalization Era; Challenges, Opportunities, and Contribution of Islamic Education in Indonesia." *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews* 7, no. 4 (2019): 1031–1037, <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2019.74141>.

³⁶ Hasan Noorhaidi, "Islamizing Formal Education: Integrated Islamic School and a New Trend in Formal Education Institution in Indonesia.," *Nanyang Technological University* (Singapore), no. 172 (2009), <https://hdl.handle.net/10356/90477>.

Benchmarking Visits and Partnerships

All groups highlighted the role of institutional linkages. As one official explained, the MBHTE/BKIS benchmarking trip to Indonesia in 2025 was designed "to expand cooperation between institutions" through academic exchanges, joint research, curriculum development, and scholarship. Lecturers and students highlighted Indonesia's role as a benchmark: "Our benchmarking visit to Indonesia, with Bahrul Hayyat, guided the development of BKIS programs" (FT1). "Faculty benchmarking in Indonesia, PTIQ MoU shaped new programs, and teachers adopted innovations" (ST1). Indeed, the visit resulted in Memoranda of Understanding with Indonesian universities, such as PTIQ, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, MAN Insan Cendekia, and Universitas Islam Darul Ulum, which specifically mention faculty exchanges and scholarship programs. This resonates with Putra,³⁷ who analyzed how Indonesia became a reference point for Philippine madrasah reforms through MoUs and teacher training exchanges. Such partnerships legitimize the BARMM's reforms internationally and offer technical expertise that is often lacking locally. Through these partnerships, Bangsamoro educators are exposed to Indonesian teaching methods and administrative systems. Already, BARMM has sent students and faculty to Indonesian campuses, thereby introducing Indonesian pedagogical practices and legitimizing BARMM's programs. In summary, Indonesian collaboration – facilitated by formal MOUs – provides BKIS with technical know-how and an international academic network as it develops its own institution.

The findings illustrate Indonesia's role not only in curriculum development and institutional capacity-building, but also in shaping stakeholders' imagination of what Islamic education in BARMM could become. Indonesia's support is both technical and symbolic, positioning it as a key partner in advancing Islamic higher education in the region.

Islamic higher education in Indonesia has continuously adapted through institutional transformation, curriculum modernization, and management reform.³⁸ The system provides a comprehensive model for other Muslim societies seeking to balance tradition and modernity. The leading example of innovation in the madrasah system is the Indonesian Islamic University, which started as Sekolah Tinggi Islam (STI) in Jakarta in 1945. Later, it expanded to PTAIN, IAIN, STAIN, and UIN, showing institutional transformation to meet societal, scientific, and technological demands. The transition was driven by continuous globalization and the need to integrate religious sciences with general sciences.³⁹

Furthermore, it emphasizes the creation of modern Islamic scientists and scholars capable of contributing globally. Meanwhile, Indonesia lags behind its neighbors, such as Malaysia and Singapore, in global competitiveness and educational quality. To compete regionally, Islamic higher education needs structured governance, internationalization, and

³⁷ Roni Putra, "Analysis of Educational Policy and Its Implementation on the Autonomous Territory of the Moro Nation: Challenges and Transformation," *Edusosbum: Journal of Islamic Education and Social Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2023): 67–74, <https://doi.org/10.52366/edusoshum.v3i2.69>.

³⁸ Hikmatul Aliyah et al., "Implementation of Islamic Higher Education Development Management in Indonesia," *Jurnal Manajemen, Kepemimpinan, Dan Supervisi Pendidikan* 8, no. 1 (2023): 175–186, <https://doi.org/10.31851/jmksp.v8i1.10952>.

³⁹ Aliyah et al.; Kasman, Ikhwan, and Aziz, "Islamic Education as a Strengthening of Aqidah and Akhlaq in The Society 5.0 Era."

integration of Islamic values with modern disciplines.⁴⁰

Opportunities and Challenges in Transnational Cooperation

Respondents widely recognized that transnational cooperation with Indonesia presents significant opportunities. Respondents agreed that overseas links offer concrete benefits. Most prominently, access to scholarships, exchanges, and training was mentioned repeatedly, which will provide international exposure and legitimacy.⁴¹ The Indonesian partnerships have already yielded tangible support: the MBHTE reports that nine BARMM students have won full scholarships to study in Indonesia, and more such opportunities are in development. Administrators highlighted the value of such partnerships in lending legitimacy to Islamic education policy in BARMM. Lecturers pointed to opportunities for faculty development and academic exchange. Capacity-building for faculty addresses a longstanding weakness in Philippine madrasahs.⁴²

Meanwhile, students focused on scholarships and global exposure as pathways to employability and international competitiveness.⁴³ Students particularly valued mobility, as evidenced by the following statement: "Partnerships open access to scholarships, academic exchange, and jobs" (ST1). In support, another student emphasizes that, as stated, "Partnerships help students pursue higher education abroad and wider employment" (ST2).

Informants also noted that Bangsamoro teachers can visit Indonesian universities or participate in workshops to learn new teaching strategies and Arabic-language methods. According to her: "Partnerships bring teaching methods, research, technology, and cultural exchange" (FT2). These experiences build capacity: one coordinator noted that Indonesian Islamic universities (such as PTIQ) "support academic exchange" and research collaborations that will strengthen Bangsamoro curricula. Beyond academics, interviewees observed broader benefits of "connectivity": by engaging internationally, BKIS programs gain prestige and are viewed as part of a global Muslim educational community, which in turn encourages young people to consider Islamic scholarship as a viable, modern career path.

At the same time, all groups acknowledged substantial challenges. A pervasive concern is the gap between Indonesia's context and the realities of the Bangsamoro. Indonesia is a resource-rich, Muslim-majority country, whereas the BARMM is a newly autonomous region emerging from conflict, with limited funding and oversight.⁴⁴ Many informants noted that not enough madrasahs have even basic facilities or formal accreditation. For example, official data show that in 2024, only 235 of the over 1,100 madrasahs had active permits to operate, underscoring the chronic under-registration and

⁴⁰ Desmaniar et al., "Towards Sustainable Development of Islamic Higher Education: A Meta-Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 21, no. 3 (2022): 741–770, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol21.iss3.art5>.

⁴¹ Putra, "Analysis of Educational Policy and Its Implementation on the Autonomous Territory of the Moro Nation: Challenges and Transformation."

⁴² Solaiman, "Challenges of Madaris Educational System in Educating the Youth in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines."

⁴³ Reflianto et al., "Logic Model Evaluation to Work-Oriented Education Program through Joint Madrasah Community." *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 16, no. 2 (2018): 335–354

⁴⁴ Hadji Latif, "Islamic Education: Opportunities and Challenges in Secular Philippine State." *SAINTEKBU: Jurnal Sains Dan Teknologi* 7, no. 1 (2014): 70–84.

under-resourcing of these institutions. Several respondents explicitly mentioned "financial, administrative, and structural" obstacles to reform. In practice, this means that simply importing Indonesian models can flounder if Bangsamoro schools lack textbooks, trained teachers, or administrative support.⁴⁵

There is also a degree of institutional resistance: some traditional madrasah leaders worry that emphasis on modern credentials or outside experts might sideline local Islamic traditions, echoing Milligan. Lecturers highlighted resistance from traditional madrasah educators and the difficulty of contextualizing Indonesian models for the Bangsamoro minority-Muslim setting. According to her: "The challenges are resistance, lack of resources, and balancing tradition with modernity" (FT2). Meanwhile, students identified internal issues within BKIS, such as outdated enrolment and grading systems, resource shortages, and faculty professionalism, as barriers that must be addressed before external partnerships can reach their full potential. In terms of likeness to the Indonesian system, students emphasize the comparison between BKIS and Indonesian university status, as quoted: "Challenges include culture and language, government differences, and lack of facilities compared to Indonesia" (ST2 & ST3).

The Interim President added that BKIS's reliance on MBHTE and legal restrictions under Philippine law further limit its capacity to manage partnerships independently. Moreover, administrators flagged political-legal barriers: "We cannot have direct collaboration with MORA of Indonesia due to Government-to-Government restrictions" (K2). Finally, interviewees warned of dependency, stressing that Indonesian approaches must be adapted rather than adopted wholesale. Despite these barriers, participants stressed the importance of contextualization. One student emphasized, "Adapting foreign systems may create errors; reforms must be contextualized" (ST1). In sum, while transnational cooperation brings much-needed expertise and legitimacy, it must be carefully localized to avoid reinforcing inequality or eroding community trust.

These findings demonstrate that while transnational cooperation is opportunity-rich, offering pathways for innovation, global recognition, and capacity-building, it is also fraught with contextual, structural, and political challenges.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that BKIS stands at the forefront of Islamic education reform in BARMM, serving as both a policy solution and an institutional model. By legally establishing a specialized Islamic university, BARMM is institutionalizing the reforms advocates have long described as necessary. As one press release put it, the new Kulliyyah will be "a hub for research, scholarship, and innovation in Islamic education," blending modern methodologies with rich traditions. In essence, BKIS embodies the fusion of faith and learning, reviving the ideal that the Islamization of education means integrating, not segregating, knowledge. It integrates revealed and acquired knowledge, instilling Islamic values while equipping students with modern competencies. This resonates with scholarship on Islamic education that argues religion and science should co-develop. By linking madrasah programs to careers and to a

⁴⁵ Solaiman, "Challenges of Madaris Educational System in Educating the Youth in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines."

recognized university structure, BKIS operationalizes the theme of professionalization identified in the results.

Furthermore, Indonesia plays a catalytic role in advancing Islamic education in BARMM, providing curriculum and pedagogical models, technical expertise, and symbolic inspiration as a regional "big brother." Its involvement, particularly through the guidance of Dr. Bahrul Hayat and partnerships with UIN, PTIQ, and UIII, has been central to curriculum standardization and pedagogical innovation. With Indonesia's partnership and careful contextualization, BKIS has the potential to not only professionalize Islamic education but also to contribute significantly to peacebuilding, identity preservation, and social transformation in the Bangsamoro region. Moreover, transnational cooperation creates critical pathways for innovation, recognition, and global exposure; however, its success depends on overcoming political, structural, and contextual barriers. Long-term sustainability requires contextualization and strengthening of local governance and institutional systems.

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