



Comparative Analysis of Educational Policies and Systems: A Case Study of Egyptian and Indonesian Higher Educations

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ABSTRACT

Egypt and Indonesia are two countries with the development of Islamic civilization in the region, apart from that they are also synonymous with the lives of their religious communities. The existence of an advanced civilization is caused by good education. With education, society and civilization will develop. One of the signs that Egypt has become a center of civilization is because of the many scientific councils and universities that have developed there, such as Al-Azhar University. Meanwhile, Indonesia shows that there are many Islamic universities scattered around. The aim of this research is to analyze the comparison of higher educational policies and systems in Egypt and Indonesia which are implemented in this modern era. The method used is qualitative research, sample selection through snowball sampling, data collection through interviews, and data validity testing through data triangulation. The results of the research show that the educational policy at Al-Azhar University includes a mandatory Al-Qur'an memorization program for all students, as well as mandatory programs at *Universitas Islam Indonesia* (UII) or the Indonesian Islamic University, namely *pesantren* and *taklim*. The educational system at Al-Azhar University uses a method that focuses on lecturers, there are no class attendance lists, so students are free to study inside or outside the classroom. Meanwhile, at UII, learning focuses on lecturers and students so that class attendance is mandatory. This article contributes to comparing the educational policies and systems of Al-Azhar University and *Universitas Islam Indonesia*, and provides insights to improve the quality of education in Islamic universities.

Keywords: Educational Policy, Educational System, Higher Education, Al-Azhar University, Universitas Islam Indonesia

ABSTRAK

Mesir dan Indonesia merupakan dua negara dengan adanya perkembangan peradaban Islam di wilayah tersebut, selain itu juga identik dengan kehidupan masyarakatnya yang beragama. Adanya peradaban yang maju disebabkan oleh pendidikan yang baik. Dengan pendidikan, masyarakat dan peradaban akan berkembang. Salah satu tanda Mesir menjadi pusat peradaban yakni karena banyaknya majlis ilmu hingga perguruan tinggi yang berkembang di sana, seperti universitas Al-Azhar. Sedangkan Indonesia dengan tandanya banyak perguruan tinggi Islam yang tersebar. Tujuan penelitian ini yakni menganalisis perbandingan kebijakan dan sistem pendidikan perguruan tinggi di Mesir dan Indonesia yang diterapkan pada era modern ini. Dengan metode yang digunakan yakni penelitian kualitatif, pemilihan sampel melalui snowball sampling, pengambilan data melalui wawancara, serta uji validitas data melalui triangulasi data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan pendidikan di Universitas Al-Azhar dengan adanya program wajib hafalan Al-Qur'an bagi seluruh mahasiswa, serta program wajib di Universitas Islam Indonesia yakni pesantren dan taklim. Sistem pendidikan di Universitas Al-Azhar menggunakan metode yang berfokus pada dosen, tidak adanya daftar hadir di kelas, sehingga mahasiswa bebas belajar di dalam atau di luar kelas. Sedangkan di Universitas Islam Indonesia pembelajaran berfokus pada dosen dan mahasiswa sehingga kehadiran di kelas adalah kewajiban. Artikel ini berkontribusi dalam membandingkan kebijakan dan sistem

pendidikan Universitas Al-Azhar dan Universitas Islam Indonesia, serta memberikan wawasan untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan di perguruan tinggi Islam.

Kata Kunci: Kebijakan Pendidikan, Sistem Pendidikan, Perguruan Tinggi, Universitas Al-Azhar, Universitas Islam Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Education fundamentally serves as the most crucial means for individuals to achieve their life goals (Rinjani & Napu, 2022). It is also considered a lifelong need (Junaidi et al., 2022). Education is required by every individual, regardless of time and place. Its value is paramount; without education, human development can be hindered or even stagnate. Through the educational process, individuals have the opportunity to develop a strong personality and contribute positively to communal life. Furthermore, education enhances individuals' capacity to be self-reliant and engage positively with others (Lusiana & Rasyid, 2024). Additionally, lifelong education can significantly impact the development of human civilization in a given context, leading to the emergence of figures and generations that contribute to the advancement and progress of the educational field.

Policy makers and educational administrators significantly influence advancements and developments in education through the formulation and implementation of policies and systems. The educational policies and systems in place have a profound impact on the progress of a nation. A positive effect of such policies includes the enhancement of human resource quality. Educational policies also play a critical role in responding to evolving contexts, including the integration of technology into pedagogical practices and the adaptation of curricula. However, the successful implementation and continual evaluation of these policies are imperative to ensure their sustained positive impact. Educational policy encompasses the decisions and regulations established by authorities, which provide a framework for both leaders and members of society to achieve educational objectives (Masnu'ah et al., 2022). Furthermore, the existence of a well-structured educational system is crucial for fostering national intellectual development, advancing scientific and technological progress while integrating humanitarian values, and promoting sustainable community empowerment (Sunusi & Sunusi, 2023).

This study will analyse the educational policies and systems of Egypt and Indonesia. Egypt, frequently described as the 'Land of a Thousand Minarets' (Iddian, 2021), is distinguished not only by its architectural landmarks and water towers but also by its numerous minarets associated with mosques and churches. Religion exerts a profound influence on daily life in Egypt (Sulaiman et al., 2021), as illustrated by the call to prayer, which not only demarcates the passage of time but also embodies the community's adherence to Islamic principles with grace and compassion. Egypt is renowned for its rich civilization (Dayem et al., 2024), with its ancient cultural heritage vividly represented by monuments such as the Sphinx, obelisks, pyramids, and hieroglyphs (Sipitri et al., 2023). Egypt's historical status as a centre of early world civilization contributes to the particular interest among Indonesian students in pursuing their education there.

In addition to Egypt's historical significance as a centre of early world civilization, several factors contribute to the interest of Indonesian students in pursuing their studies

there. These factors include the availability of numerous *Majlis Talaqqi* (study circles), the provision of free tuition, and relatively low living costs (Iddian, 2021). A prominent institution attracting Indonesian students is Al-Azhar University, which is distinguished as the second oldest higher education institution globally, originally established as a mosque for teaching, learning, and scholarly discourse (Sani, 2021). According to Detik Edu, the current enrolment of Indonesian students at Al-Azhar University has reached 13,000, representing a notable proportion relative to the total student body, as reported by the Grand Sheikh (*Menlu: Kuota Beasiswa Al Azhar Kairo Ditambah Untuk Pelajar RI*, 2024).

Indonesia is a predominantly Islamic nation, with approximately 90% of its population adhering to the Islamic faith (Kurniasih et al., 2022). Despite the dominance of Islam in Indonesian society, there are occasional variations and tensions concerning the interpretation and application of Islamic values and norms in everyday life. Additionally, Indonesia holds a significant position in the development of Islamic civilization within the region. The introduction and proliferation of Islam in Indonesia occurred through various mechanisms such as trade, marriage, and educational exchanges. This is exemplified by the historical presence of several Islamic kingdoms in Indonesia, which have contributed to the broader history of Islamic civilization (Pane, 2023). Within Indonesia's extensive and diverse archipelago, one region of particular scholarly interest is the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Known for its designation as a "student city," Yogyakarta stands out due to its comprehensive educational infrastructure, numerous higher education institutions, relatively low cost of living, and a rich array of cultural and tourist attractions (Haryono, 2009).

Al-Azhar University holds a key role in the advancement and development of the Islamic community, extending its influence beyond Egypt to various countries globally. Since its inception, the university has maintained its status as a premier educational institution, attracting international students, including those from Indonesia (Nuruzzahri, 2022). The institution's curriculum is distinguished by its strong emphasis on religious studies (Sipitri et al., 2023), while also integrating modern sciences to equip graduates with the ability to engage with contemporary cultures and address current challenges (Baidarus & Fithri, 2021). Al-Azhar University employs pedagogical methods akin to those found in other educational settings, notably utilizing the *halaqah* (circular) system, which affords students the flexibility to choose and modify their instructors based on personal preferences (Khairunisa et al., 2023). These distinctive educational policies and methodologies enable Al-Azhar University to stand prominently among other leading higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions in Indonesia have developed unique systems and policies, adapted to the socio-cultural context of the country. The curricula at these institutions exhibit similarities to that of Al-Azhar University, integrating both religious and secular sciences to offer a comprehensive education, balancing spiritual and worldly knowledge (Hasijazh et al., 2023). Indonesian universities employ a range of pedagogical methods, enabling educators to implement diverse instructional strategies and engage students through various learning modalities (Mas'adah, 2019). Consequently, educational success is influenced not only by the quality of faculty but also by students' proactive engagement in seeking supplementary learning resources. Among Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, *Universitas Islam Indonesia* (UII) or the Islamic University of

Indonesia distinguishes itself as a leading institution, situated in Yogyakarta—a city renowned for its educational environment (Republika, 2024). UII's international reputation is further evidenced by its diverse student body, which includes applicants from countries such as Yemen, Thailand, Gambia, Palestine, Liberia, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Nigeria, and Pakistan (Republika, 2020).

Previous research comparing educational systems between countries has predominantly addressed broad comparisons of educational frameworks (Afida et al., 2024; Ihsan & Saleh, 2015; Putra et al., 2023; Sipitri et al., 2023). Nonetheless, there remains a notable research gap specifically regarding comparative analyses of higher education systems. While some studies have explored the education systems of Indonesia and Egypt (Sipitri et al., 2023), these investigations have generally been limited to an overview of all educational levels, from primary through higher education. Given the notable achievements of Al-Azhar University and *Universitas Islam Indonesia*, including their substantial international student populations, there is a pressing need for a more focused examination of the policies and systems at these universities in the contemporary context. This study aims to fill this gap by utilizing insights from informants with direct experience of the policies and systems at these institutions. The anticipated findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the understanding of higher education systems in these regions.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative, with data presented through a descriptive analysis (Susilo, 2022). The theoretical review is based on a diverse array of sources, including books, scholarly articles, and other pertinent materials. Data collection is carried out through semi-structured interviews, where the researcher engages with selected informants. The study utilizes snowball sampling as the sampling technique, a method involving identifying and selecting participants through a chain of referrals from initial informants (Abdussamad, 2021). This approach entails conducting interviews with informants having relevant expertise, with each participant suggesting additional informants for subsequent interviews. The process continues until data saturation is achieved. Subsequently, data validation is conducted by cross-referencing and verifying the information obtained from multiple informants to discern patterns and commonalities within the dataset.

The data collected through the data-gathering process are analyzed using the Miles and Huberman framework for data analysis (Hardani et al., 2020). This process begins with data reduction, which involves systematically organizing and simplifying the data by identifying key themes and pertinent information from interviews and documents. The subsequent stage is data presentation, where the reduced data are structured into descriptive narratives or tables, and categorized based on relevant themes such as educational policies, teaching methods, and compulsory programs. The final stage involves drawing and verifying conclusions by synthesizing the presented data, comparing educational policies and systems across the two universities, and validating the findings through data triangulation from multiple sources to ensure the validity and consistency of the analytical results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Educational Policy

Al-Azhar University provides opportunities for international students to pursue their education in Egypt through two primary pathways: self-financed enrolment and scholarship-based admission. For students opting for the self-financed route, preparation entails covering costs associated with tuition, accommodation (ranging from approximately 300,000 to 400,000 IDR), and daily living expenses, including meals (estimated between 1,000,000 and 1,500,000 IDR). Notably, the only required fee is the annual registration fee, which ranges from approximately 200,000 to 500,000 IDR, as there are no additional tuition fees for coursework. In contrast, students admitted through Al-Azhar University scholarships are exempt from financial concerns, as the scholarship covers all related expenses, including tuition, accommodation, living costs, and a vacation package.

Universitas Islam Indonesia offers opportunities for both domestic and international students to pursue their studies. Admission can be secured through several pathways, including self-financed and scholarship options. Students opting for the self-financed route must account for tuition fees, accommodation expenses (approximately 600,000 IDR per month), and living costs, which range from approximately 600,000 to 1,500,000 IDR. In contrast, students admitted through scholarship programs benefit from varying levels of financial support, depending on the scholarship type. This support may cover only tuition fees or extend to both tuition and accommodation costs. Adequate financial planning is essential for prospective students to mitigate financial challenges and to focus on their academic and spiritual growth during their tenure at both Al-Azhar University and *Universitas Islam Indonesia*.

Al-Azhar University mandates a compulsory Qur'anic memorization program for all enrolled students, encompassing both domestic and international students, the latter often referred to as *wafidab* or newcomers. The requirements for this program vary according to the students' backgrounds. Egyptian students are expected to memorize the entire 30 juz of the Qur'an over the course of their studies, which typically spans approximately four years. In contrast, international students are required to memorize 4 juz. The memorization process is conducted at the students' individual pace, with periodic assessments to evaluate their progress and proficiency in the memorized portions.

In addition to the mandatory Qur'anic memorization program, Al-Azhar University provides specialized Arabic language instruction for incoming students. This provision addresses the disparity between the Modern Standard Arabic typically studied in Indonesia and the Arabic dialect used in Egypt, known as *Arabic Amiyah*. Prior to the commencement of their first academic year, students undergo an Arabic language proficiency assessment, categorizing into seven levels. Students demonstrating proficiency at Level 1 are expected to require approximately one year of language instruction to achieve a suitable level of proficiency. Conversely, those assessed at Level 7 will generally need only a few months of language classes to attain the requisite competency.

At *Universitas Islam Indonesia*, a compulsory program focusing on religious education is implemented for all students. This program, known as *Taklim* and *Pesantren*, encompasses various dimensions of religious instruction. Prior to commencing their coursework, students

are evaluated on their religious knowledge, including Qur'anic recitation and memorization of specific surahs. Based on the assessment outcomes, students are classified into proficiency levels—basic, intermediate, and advanced. These classifications influence the duration and intensity of the *Taklim* program, with students at lower proficiency levels engaging in a more extended program. Additionally, the *Pesantren* component of the program occurs midway through the academic year on a rotational basis among different departments. This one-week program requires students to reside in designated dormitories and provides them with meals throughout the duration.

In addition to their formal on-campus education, Al-Azhar University students participate in a range of off-campus learning activities. The student dormitories and housing facilities in Egypt function not only as residential spaces but also as integral components of the students' educational experiences. These accommodations often include community houses, facilitating activities such as Qur'anic memorization and *kitab* study, thereby enriching the educational process. Such environments are designed to support daily living while also fostering opportunities for independent learning, the development of social skills, and a deeper comprehension of religious values. Furthermore, Egypt's extensive network of *halaqah* and *talaqqi* study circles offers additional avenues for acquiring knowledge through these esteemed scholarly gatherings.

In Yogyakarta, Indonesia, students utilize their residences and boarding houses not only as places for rest but also as environments conducive to experiential and extracurricular learning. These settings facilitate engagement in activities such as online studies and various productive endeavours. Students residing in dormitories partake in religious practices, including study sessions, *kitab* recitations, and Qur'anic memorization. Active participation in these activities contributes to both their religious education and holistic development. The supportive environment of these residential settings enables students to integrate religious values into their daily lives, thereby fostering personal growth throughout their academic tenure in Yogyakarta.

Educational System

At Al-Azhar University, academic departments are categorized into two main groups: *ilmi* and *adabi*. The *ilmi* category encompasses programs focused on general knowledge disciplines beyond religious studies, including fields such as architecture and medicine. Although these programs are primarily oriented towards general knowledge, they may occasionally integrate some elements of religious coursework. In contrast, the *adabi* category includes programs dedicated to religious studies, such as Islamic Shari'ah and Arabic language and literature. Within the Islamic Shari'ah department, students engage in a range of subjects including *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *madhhab fiqh* (school-specific jurisprudence), comparative *fiqh*, contemporary issues in *fiqh*, *nahwu* (syntax), *sharaf* (morphology), *balagha* (rhetoric), *hadith abkam* (jurisprudential hadith), *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), and *tauhid* (theology). The Arabic language and literature program offers specialized coursework in *nahwu*, *sharaf*, *balagha*, literary texts, literary history, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, and related courses.

Similar to Al-Azhar University, *Universitas Islam Indonesia* organizes its academic programs into categories based on general and religious knowledge, though it does not employ specific terminologies for these categories as is practiced at Al-Azhar University.

Programs dedicated to general knowledge at *Universitas Islam Indonesia* include a diverse range of courses such as medicine, economics, law, and psychology, with some religious coursework incorporated as a foundational component. In contrast, programs focused on religious knowledge prioritize religious subjects over general ones. These programs encompass fields such as Islamic education, Islamic economics, and family law. For example, the Islamic education program includes coursework in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *ushul fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), *ulumul Qur'an* (sciences of the Qur'an), Qur'anic and hadith studies, Islamic history, and other relevant courses, all designed to equip students for educational roles in Islamic contexts.

At Al-Azhar University, the teaching methodology predominantly follows a lecturer-centred approach, where professors and textbooks serve as the primary sources of instruction, resembling the teacher-centred learning model common in Indonesia. In this framework, students primarily engage in passive learning by attending lectures and listening to explanations provided by faculty members. A notable characteristic of Al-Azhar's educational system is the lack of a mandatory attendance policy, which affords students the flexibility to attend lectures in person or seek academic guidance from professors outside of formal class sessions. This flexibility is generally applicable to all programs, with the exception of general disciplines that typically adhere to a daily class schedule. The expected duration for completing a degree is approximately four years for *adabi* (religious studies) programs and around five years for *ilmi* (general disciplines) programs, not including any additional language courses.

In contrast to the pedagogical approaches utilized in Egypt, *Universitas Islam Indonesia* (UII) adopts a diverse range of learning materials beyond traditional textbooks, including relevant academic articles. Consequently, the teaching methods at UII are varied and tailored to the preferences of individual instructors within each department. These methods encompass a blend of group discussions, assignments, and lectures delivered by faculty members. UII's instructional approach integrates both teacher-centered and student-centered learning, each constituting approximately 50% of the overall teaching methodology. Attendance is strictly enforced, with attendance rates being weighted more heavily than participation and examination performance. This stringent attendance policy is essential, as it is a requirement for eligibility to sit for exams. The typical duration for completing a degree program at UII is between 4 and 5 years, depending on the specific field of study.

As previously discussed, Al-Azhar University's teaching methodology predominantly utilizes textbooks as the central educational resource. Consequently, assignments such as research papers and presentations are relatively infrequent compared to practices in Indonesian higher education institutions. At Al-Azhar, research papers are typically assigned on an annual basis, with the assessment system primarily relying on examination scores, where papers contribute approximately 20% to the final grade. Additionally, unlike Indonesian institutions that require a final thesis for undergraduate degrees, Al-Azhar University does not mandate a thesis as a graduation requirement. Examinations at Al-Azhar are conducted in a written, closed-book format, including Midterm Examinations (UTS) and Final Examinations (UAS) for *ilmi* (general disciplines) programs each term, while only Final Examinations (UAS) are administered for *adabi* (religious studies) programs. In addition to

written exams, Al-Azhar University also conducts oral examinations covering courses such as the Qur'an and other selected courses.

In contrast to the system employed at Al-Azhar University, *Universitas Islam Indonesia* (UII) incorporates a more diverse array of tasks into its educational framework across nearly all programs. These tasks encompass individual and group research papers, presentations, and various other assignments. A notable component of the graduation requirements at UII is the completion of a final project, with the option to submit a thesis. Alternatively, certain departments offer additional options to meet graduation criteria. For example, students in the Islamic Economics program can choose among three options: writing a thesis, developing a business start-up project, or engaging in community service. The examination system at UII mirrors that of Al-Azhar University, featuring Midterm Examinations (UTS) and Final Examinations (UAS), which may be conducted as either open-book or closed-book assessments. These examinations can be administered in person or virtually, depending on arrangements made between students and faculty.

CONCLUSION

The current educational policy at Al-Azhar University does not impose restrictions on the number of international students permitted to continue their studies at the institution. Prospective students may choose between two funding options: self-financing or applying for an Al-Azhar scholarship, which is distributed through various Islamic educational institutions, including *pesantren*. Additionally, all students are required to participate in a compulsory Qur'anic memorization program. Local students are expected to memorize all 30 juz of the Qur'an, while international students are only required to memorize 4 juz. Furthermore, international students participate in a specialized program that includes Arabic language classes. Prior to commencing their studies, students must undergo a language proficiency assessment, which determines their level of Arabic and the duration of their language instruction. At *Universitas Islam Indonesia* (UII), prospective students also have the option to pursue their studies through self-funding or scholarship opportunities. Moreover, UII mandates a comprehensive religious education program for all students, encompassing both *pesantren* and *taklim* components.

The educational system at Al-Azhar University is structured into two main categories: *ilmi* (general disciplines) and *adabi* (religious disciplines) programs. The pedagogical approach at Al-Azhar University primarily revolves around lecturers utilizing textbooks as the main instructional resources. Consequently, research papers are assigned infrequently, typically once per academic year. A notable aspect of Al-Azhar's educational framework is the absence of a mandatory attendance policy, allowing students the flexibility to either attend lectures or engage in external study sessions. Assessment at Al-Azhar includes Midterm Examinations (UTS) and Final Examinations (UAS), with additional oral examinations that cover subjects such as the Qur'an and other selected courses. Conversely, at *Universitas Islam Indonesia* (UII), academic programs are similarly divided into general and religious disciplines. However, UII's teaching methodology integrates both lecturer-centred and student-centred approaches, resulting in frequent assignments, presentations, and discussions as integral

components of the learning process. Additionally, attendance is rigorously enforced at UII, serving as a critical factor in the eligibility criteria for examinations.

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