

## CURRICULUM INSTABILITY AND THE FUTURE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: LESSONS FROM THE DECENTRALIZED EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69552/mumtaz.v6i1.3747>

Received:  
April 17, 2026

Revised:  
May 29, 2026

Accepted:  
June 11, 2026

Published:  
June, 2026

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### Abstract

This study examines curriculum instability and its implications for the future sustainability of Islamic education in Indonesia by comparing educational governance in Indonesia and the United States. The study aims to investigate how centralized curriculum policymaking and recurrent educational reforms influence institutional sustainability, adaptability, and resilience within Islamic educational institutions. This research employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA framework. A total of 77 peer-reviewed publications published between 2019 and 2026 were selected from major academic databases and analyzed using thematic synthesis. The findings indicate that curriculum instability in Indonesia is not merely a pedagogical issue but a structural governance problem characterized by policy discontinuity, centralized decision-making, limited institutional autonomy, and uneven implementation across educational contexts. These conditions create significant challenges for pesantren, madrasahs, and Islamic schools in maintaining educational quality, institutional sustainability, and religious identity. In contrast, the decentralized educational governance system in the United States demonstrates how local autonomy, adaptive policymaking, and contextual flexibility can support curriculum continuity and institutional resilience. The novelty of this study lies in developing a comparative governance framework that integrates curriculum instability, educational decentralization, and Islamic educational transformation within a single analytical perspective. The study contributes to the literature by repositioning curriculum instability as a governance-based challenge and offers policy recommendations for developing adaptive, collaborative, and sustainable Islamic educational governance in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Curriculum Instability; Islamic Education; Educational Governance; Decentralized Education; Curriculum Reform; Comparative Education; Indonesia; United States.*



## Abstrak

*Penelitian ini mengkaji ketidakstabilan kurikulum dan implikasinya terhadap keberlanjutan pendidikan Islam di Indonesia melalui analisis komparatif tata kelola pendidikan antara Indonesia dan Amerika Serikat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana kebijakan kurikulum yang tersentralisasi dan reformasi pendidikan yang berulang memengaruhi keberlanjutan institusi, kemampuan adaptasi, dan ketahanan lembaga pendidikan Islam. Penelitian menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review (SLR) dengan mengikuti kerangka PRISMA. Sebanyak 77 publikasi ilmiah bereputasi yang terbit pada periode 2019–2026 diseleksi dari berbagai basis data akademik dan dianalisis menggunakan sintesis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketidakstabilan kurikulum di Indonesia bukan sekadar persoalan pedagogis, melainkan masalah struktural dalam tata kelola pendidikan yang ditandai oleh diskontinuitas kebijakan, sentralisasi pengambilan keputusan, keterbatasan otonomi lembaga, dan ketimpangan implementasi di berbagai konteks pendidikan. Kondisi tersebut menimbulkan tantangan bagi pesantren, madrasah, dan sekolah Islam dalam menjaga mutu pendidikan, keberlanjutan kelembagaan, serta identitas keislaman. Sebaliknya, sistem tata kelola pendidikan yang terdesentralisasi di Amerika Serikat menunjukkan bahwa otonomi lokal, kebijakan yang adaptif, dan fleksibilitas kontekstual dapat mendukung keberlanjutan kurikulum dan ketahanan institusional. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan kerangka tata kelola komparatif yang mengintegrasikan ketidakstabilan kurikulum, desentralisasi pendidikan, dan transformasi pendidikan Islam dalam satu perspektif analitis. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada penguatan kajian tata kelola pendidikan dengan memosisikan ketidakstabilan kurikulum sebagai tantangan berbasis tata kelola serta menawarkan rekomendasi kebijakan untuk membangun sistem pendidikan Islam yang lebih adaptif, kolaboratif, dan berkelanjutan di Indonesia.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Ketidakstabilan Kurikulum; Pendidikan Islam; Tata Kelola Pendidikan; Desentralisasi Pendidikan; Reformasi Kurikulum; Pendidikan Komparatif; Indonesia; Amerika Serikat.*

## INTRODUCTION

Educational reform has become a central agenda in the twenty-first century as countries seek to respond to technological disruption, globalization, social transformation, and the growing demand for future-oriented competencies. Within this context, curriculum policy functions as a strategic instrument through which governments shape educational direction, national identity formation, and human capital development (Howard et al., 2019; Reimers, 2020; Verger et al., 2019; Indrawati & Kuncoro, 2021). However, curriculum reform that occurs too frequently without long-term policy continuity may generate institutional uncertainty, weaken

adaptation processes, and reduce the sustainability of educational transformation. Such conditions are increasingly evident in Indonesia, where curriculum changes have repeatedly accompanied political transitions and shifts in educational priorities (Puad & Ashton, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2025; Setiawan & Suwandi, 2022).

Over the past decades, Indonesia has implemented several major curriculum reforms, including the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK), the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), the 2013 Curriculum, and, most recently, the Merdeka Curriculum (Arrafii, 2023; Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024; Ndari & Mahmudah, 2023). Although these reforms were introduced to enhance educational quality and align learning with twenty-first-century competencies, scholars have reported persistent challenges related to institutional readiness, pedagogical preparation, and governance sustainability (Nuraini, 2019; Dewi, 2021; Fauzan et al., 2023). Frequent curriculum transitions often create implementation inconsistencies, administrative burdens, and uneven adaptation across educational institutions (Akib et al., 2020; Putra et al., 2022; Karyadi, 2025).

These challenges are closely associated with the structure of educational governance in Indonesia. Although decentralization policies were introduced following the Reformasi era, educational governance remains strongly centralized, particularly in curriculum regulation, assessment systems, and national educational standards (Rahman, 2019; Talitha et al., 2020; Afifuddin et al., 2025). As a result, schools and local educational authorities possess limited autonomy to adapt curriculum frameworks according to contextual needs and institutional capacities (Cornito, 2021; Feiger, 2024). This condition increases the curriculum policy's vulnerability to political change and bureaucratic discontinuity, making educational reform difficult to sustain over the long term (Shaturaev, 2021; Madhakomala et al., 2022).

The implications of curriculum instability become particularly significant within Islamic education. Indonesia possesses one of the largest and most diverse Islamic educational ecosystems in the world, consisting of pesantren, madrasahs, Islamic schools, and Islamic higher education institutions. Beyond their instructional functions, these institutions play important roles in moral formation, cultural transmission, social integration, and community development (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022; Jubba et al., 2022; Kosim et al., 2023). At the same time, Islamic educational institutions are increasingly expected to integrate digital innovation, curriculum modernization, religious moderation, and competency-based learning (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Nuryana, 2022; Salim et al., 2024). Consequently, they must continuously negotiate between compliance with national curriculum policies and

the preservation of religious identity, institutional autonomy, and pedagogical traditions (Rodliyah et al., 2024; Shaturaev, 2021; Kosim et al., 2023).

Previous studies have demonstrated that curriculum instability affects educational effectiveness, teacher professionalism, institutional management, and student learning continuity (Winoto, 2022; Arrafii, 2023; Putra et al., 2022). These challenges are often intensified in Islamic educational institutions, which operate within dual curricular frameworks that combine national educational standards with religious learning traditions (Wakhidah & Erman, 2022; Akib et al., 2020). Consequently, curriculum instability not only influences educational administration but also affects the sustainability of Islamic educational identity and institutional development.

In response to similar challenges, many countries have increasingly adopted decentralized educational governance models that provide greater authority to local governments, districts, and schools in curriculum implementation and educational decision-making (Feiger, 2024; Cornito, 2021). Among these cases, the United States offers a particularly relevant comparative context. The American educational system grants substantial authority to states, districts, and schools in curriculum adaptation, instructional policy, and educational management (Paglayan, 2022; Chen, 2023). This governance arrangement enables educational institutions to respond more flexibly to local needs and contextual challenges while maintaining broader educational objectives (Buckner et al., 2022; Antony-Newman, 2019). Although the United States continues to face issues of inequality and educational stratification (Högberg et al., 2019; Reddick & Ponomariov, 2024), its decentralized governance model provides an important analytical case for understanding how curriculum continuity, institutional autonomy, and adaptive policymaking may strengthen educational resilience (Steiu, 2020; von Renesse & Wegner, 2023; Feiger, 2024; Cornito, 2021).

The selection of the United States as a comparative case is, therefore, methodological rather than normative. This study does not assume that the American model should be replicated in Indonesia. Instead, the United States is used as a contrasting governance case because it represents a highly decentralized educational system, whereas curriculum governance in Indonesia remains predominantly centralized. Such a comparison enables a deeper examination of how different governance structures influence curriculum sustainability, institutional adaptability, and educational resilience.

Despite the growing literature on curriculum reform, educational governance, decentralization, and Islamic education, several gaps remain. First, previous studies generally examine curriculum reform, decentralization, or Islamic education

separately rather than integrating them within a governance-based analytical framework (Dewi, 2021; Kosim et al., 2023; Puad & Ashton, 2023). Second, curriculum instability is commonly discussed as a pedagogical or administrative issue, while its implications as a structural governance challenge affecting the sustainability of Islamic education remain underexplored (Hidayat et al., 2025; Winoto, 2022). Third, existing comparative studies involving Indonesia and the United States predominantly focus on higher education administration and international educational mobility rather than curriculum sustainability and governance resilience (Khoiria, 2026; Tohari, 2024; Yusra et al., 2025). Fourth, limited attention has been given to how Islamic educational institutions negotiate tensions between centralized curriculum policies and the need for institutional autonomy and the preservation of religious identity (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Salim et al., 2024; Rodliyah et al., 2024; Kim & Møbrand, 2019).

Based on these gaps, this study develops a comparative governance framework that connects curriculum instability, educational decentralization, and the future sustainability of Islamic education. The study aims to analyze how centralized curriculum governance influences the sustainability and adaptability of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and to explore what lessons may be drawn from the decentralized educational governance system of the United States.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How does curriculum instability reflect structural governance challenges within the Indonesian educational system? (2) What are the implications of curriculum instability for the sustainability and transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia? (3) What lessons from the decentralized educational governance system in the United States may contribute to the development of more adaptive and sustainable Islamic educational governance in Indonesia?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to comparative education and Islamic education scholarship by repositioning curriculum instability as a governance-based challenge and by proposing a framework for strengthening adaptive, sustainable, and future-oriented Islamic educational governance.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to critically examine curriculum instability and its implications for the future sustainability of Islamic education in Indonesia, through a comparative educational governance perspective that includes Indonesia and the United States. The SLR approach was selected because it enables researchers to systematically identify, evaluate, synthesize, and interpret findings from relevant scholarly studies in a

transparent, rigorous, and replicable manner (Howard et al., 2019; Niedlich et al., 2020; Reimers, 2020). In educational policy and comparative education research, SLR has become an important methodological framework for developing theoretical syntheses, identifying research gaps, and constructing future-oriented conceptual models concerning educational reform and governance transformation (Verger et al., 2019; Rosser, 2023).

This review focused on scholarly discussions concerning curriculum instability, curriculum reform, educational governance, educational decentralization, Islamic education, policy transformation, and comparative educational systems. The objective of the review was to examine how curriculum instability reflects broader governance challenges within Indonesian education and to explore lessons that may be derived from the decentralized educational governance system of the United States.

The review protocol followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework to ensure methodological transparency, rigor, and replicability (Page et al., 2021). The review process consisted of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. PRISMA was selected because it provides internationally recognized guidelines for conducting systematic reviews and for reporting the literature selection process transparently.

The literature search was conducted between January and March 2026 using five major academic databases: Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they provide extensive coverage of peer-reviewed studies related to curriculum studies, educational governance, Islamic education, comparative education, and educational policy. To ensure comprehensive retrieval of relevant literature, the search process employed combinations of keywords and Boolean operators related to curriculum instability, curriculum reform, educational governance, Islamic education, decentralization, and comparative educational systems. The search terms were developed based on the objectives of the study and refined iteratively throughout the identification stage. Table 1 presents the principal keyword combinations used during the literature search process.

**Table 1.** Search Strategy and Keyword Combinations

No.	Search Focus	Keyword Combination
1	Curriculum instability and governance	"curriculum instability" AND "educational governance"
2	Curriculum reform in Indonesia	"curriculum reform in Indonesia" AND "educational governance"
3	Islamic education and curriculum	"Islamic education in Indonesia" AND curriculum
4	Decentralized education and sustainability	"decentralized education system" AND "curriculum sustainability"

5	Comparative education	"comparative education" AND Indonesia AND "United States"
6	Curriculum policy transformation	"curriculum policy change" AND "educational reform"
7	Future-oriented Islamic education	"future of Islamic education" AND governance
8	Decentralization and educational autonomy	"decentralized education" OR decentralization OR "educational autonomy"
9	Islamic educational institutions	"Islamic education" OR pesantren OR madrasah

The retrieved records were subsequently filtered using database-specific criteria, including publication year (2019–2026), peer-reviewed status, English-language publications, and full-text availability. This process ensured that only recent and academically rigorous studies relevant to curriculum governance and Islamic educational transformation were included in the review.

The selection of studies followed predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and quality.

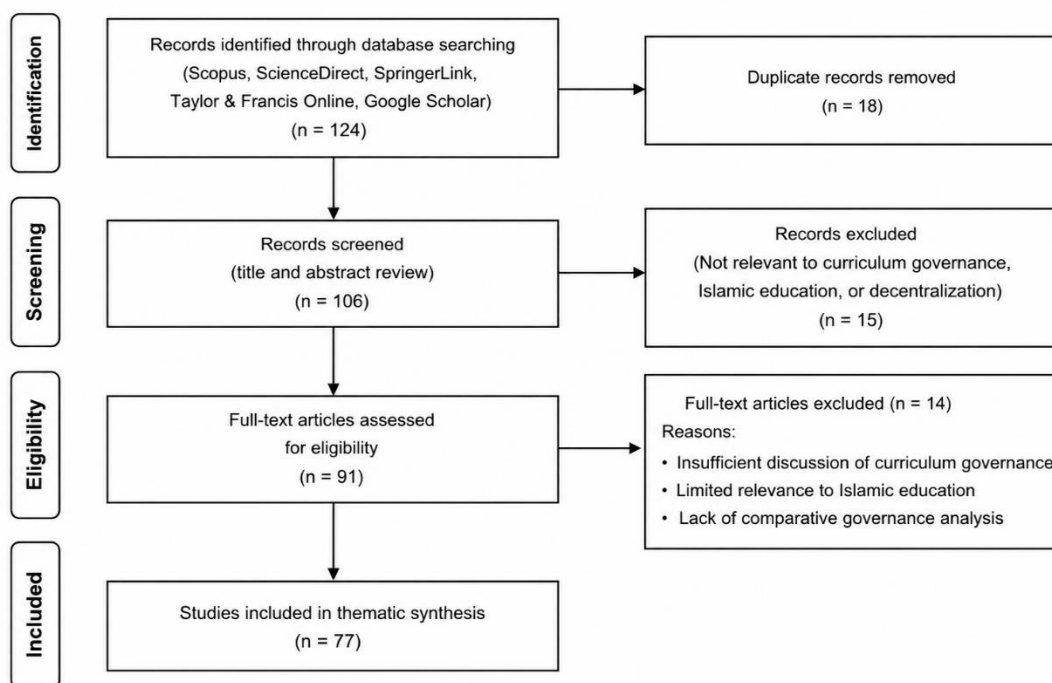
**Table 2.** Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Editorials, book reviews, conference abstracts without full text
Publication Year	2019–2026	Published before 2019
Language	English	Non-English publications
Topic	Curriculum reform, educational governance, decentralization, Islamic education, policy transformation, comparative education	Studies unrelated to curriculum governance or Islamic educational transformation
Context	Indonesia, United States, or comparative educational systems	Irrelevant geographical contexts
Accessibility	Full-text available	Inaccessible full-text publications

The identification stage produced 124 records from the selected databases. All retrieved references were exported into a reference management system and manually checked for duplicates. A total of 18 duplicate records were removed, leaving 106 studies for title and abstract screening. During the screening stage, 15 studies were excluded because they did not address curriculum governance, Islamic education, or educational decentralization. As a result, 91 studies proceeded to full-text eligibility assessment.

The eligibility stage involved a detailed examination of theoretical relevance, methodological rigor, and alignment with the review objectives. Fourteen studies were excluded because they lacked sufficient discussion of curriculum governance, educational sustainability, or comparative educational analysis. Consequently, 77

studies were retained for the final synthesis. The complete selection process is presented in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of the Literature Selection Process

To ensure the credibility of the evidence base, all eligible studies underwent quality appraisal prior to synthesis. The appraisal focused on five criteria: (1) Clarity of research objectives; (2) Appropriateness of methodology; (3) Transparency of data collection procedures; (4) Strength of analytical procedures; and (5) Relevance to curriculum governance and Islamic education.

Each criterion was assessed using a three-point scale (large, moderate, or low quality). Only studies classified as high or moderate quality were retained for thematic synthesis. No low-quality studies were included in the final review.

A structured data extraction form was developed to ensure consistency across studies. For each article, the following information was recorded: author(s), publication year, research context, research objectives, methodology, key findings, governance dimensions, and implications for Islamic education.

The extracted data were subsequently imported into a thematic coding matrix. Open coding was first conducted to identify recurring concepts across studies. Similar codes were then grouped into broader analytical categories through axial coding, followed by selective coding to construct overarching themes relevant to the research objectives.

To enhance analytical reliability, the coding process was conducted iteratively through repeated comparison between extracted findings and thematic categories. Coding consistency was examined by recoding a randomly selected subset of articles after the initial coding process and comparing the results for thematic stability. Any discrepancies were resolved through repeated review of the original studies and refinement of coding definitions. This procedure helped reduce interpretive bias and strengthen the trustworthiness of the thematic synthesis.

The study employed thematic synthesis as the primary analytical technique. Thematic synthesis was selected because it enables the integration of findings derived from diverse research designs while preserving conceptual depth and contextual interpretation (Howard et al., 2019; Niedlich et al., 2020).

The analysis generated six major themes: (1) Curriculum instability in Indonesia; (2) Centralized and decentralized educational governance; (3) Islamic education reform and institutional sustainability; (4) Curriculum policy transformation; (5) Comparative governance between Indonesia and the United States; and (6) Future-oriented educational transformation.

Following thematic coding, interpretive synthesis was conducted to connect empirical findings with broader theoretical discussions concerning governance sustainability, institutional adaptability, policy continuity, and educational resilience (Reimers, 2020; Verger et al., 2019). Source triangulation was also applied by comparing findings from curriculum studies, educational governance research, comparative education scholarship, and Islamic education literature.

Through this integrative analytical process, the review moved beyond descriptive summarization. It developed a comparative governance framework that positions curriculum instability as a structural governance challenge affecting the future sustainability of Islamic education in Indonesia.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **Curriculum Instability and Centralized Educational Governance in Indonesia**

The thematic synthesis identified curriculum instability as a dominant issue across the reviewed literature. The analyzed studies consistently reported that curriculum reform in Indonesia has been characterized by frequent policy changes, including transitions from the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) to the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), the 2013 Curriculum, and the Merdeka Curriculum (Hidayat et al., 2025; Setiawan & Suwandi, 2022; Diprose et al., 2019).

Across the reviewed studies, curriculum instability was associated with three recurring patterns. First, curriculum reform was frequently linked to political and

administrative transitions rather than long-term educational planning (Puad & Ashton, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2025; Karyadi, 2025). Second, educational governance remained predominantly centralized despite the implementation of decentralization policies after the Reformasi era (Rahman, 2019; Talitha et al., 2020; Afifuddin et al., 2025). Third, curriculum implementation often varied across regions due to differences in institutional capacity, teacher readiness, technological infrastructure, and local educational resources (Dewi, 2021; Madhakomala et al., 2022; Sari, 2019).

The synthesis further revealed that curriculum instability generated multiple institutional consequences. Teachers were required to repeatedly modify instructional strategies, learning resources, assessment systems, and administrative procedures in response to curriculum changes (Nuraini, 2019; Putra et al., 2022; Arrafii, 2023). Several studies also reported implementation inconsistencies across schools and regions, particularly in areas with limited institutional support and educational infrastructure (Madhakomala et al., 2022; Sari, 2019).

Another recurring theme concerned the relationship between decentralization and curriculum governance. Although decentralization policies sought to enhance local educational autonomy, the reviewed studies indicated that strategic decisions regarding curriculum design, assessment, and educational standards remained largely centralized (Rahman, 2019; Talitha et al., 2020; Rosser, 2023; Afifuddin et al., 2025). Consequently, local educational institutions possessed limited authority to adapt curriculum frameworks according to contextual needs and institutional conditions.

The thematic synthesis, therefore, identified three major categories related to curriculum instability in Indonesia: (1) policy discontinuity and political influence, (2) centralized governance and limited institutional autonomy, and (3) uneven implementation across educational contexts. These themes emerged consistently across policy studies, curriculum research, governance analyses, and educational reform literature.

**Table 3.** Thematic Synthesis Matrix of Curriculum Instability and Educational Governance in Indonesia

Theme	Representative Studies	Synthesized Evidence
Policy Discontinuity and Political Influence	Hidayat et al. (2025); Karyadi (2025); Setiawan & Suwandi (2022); Puad & Ashton (2023)	Curriculum reforms frequently follow political and administrative transitions, resulting in limited policy continuity.
Centralized Governance	Rahman (2019); Talitha et al. (2020); Rosser (2023); Afifuddin et al. (2025)	Strategic curriculum decisions remain concentrated at the national level despite decentralization policies.

Institutional Adaptation Challenges	Nuraini (2019); Arrafii (2023); Putra et al. (2022)	Teachers and schools experience recurring adjustment demands during curriculum transitions.
Unequal Implementation	Dewi (2021); Madhakomala et al. (2022); Sari (2019)	Curriculum implementation varies according to institutional capacity, infrastructure, and regional resources.
Governance Sustainability	Karyadi (2025); Puad & Ashton (2023); Rosser (2023)	Long-term educational planning is often disrupted by policy shifts and administrative changes.

### The Vulnerability and Transformation of Islamic Education in Indonesia

The thematic synthesis revealed that Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia are experiencing simultaneous processes of institutional vulnerability and educational transformation. Across the reviewed studies, pesantren, madrasahs, Islamic schools, and Islamic higher education institutions were consistently described as operating within dual educational frameworks that combine national curriculum requirements with religious educational traditions (Kosim et al., 2023; Rodliyah et al., 2024). This dual structure requires Islamic educational institutions to continuously respond to curriculum reform while maintaining religious learning objectives and institutional identity.

A recurring theme identified in the literature concerns the impact of curriculum instability on institutional adaptation. Several studies reported that curriculum reforms require Islamic educational institutions to repeatedly revise learning materials, curriculum integration mechanisms, assessment systems, pedagogical approaches, and administrative procedures (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Wakhidah & Erman, 2022). The reviewed studies also documented differences in institutional readiness, indicating that adaptation capacities vary considerably among Islamic educational institutions (Kosim et al., 2023; Ndari & Mahmudah, 2023).

The synthesis further identified tensions between educational modernization and religious continuity. The reviewed literature consistently reported efforts to integrate digital learning, competency-based education, religious moderation programs, and contemporary educational approaches within Islamic educational institutions (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Nuryana, 2022; Fauzi & Kartiko, 2023). At the same time, schools and pesantren continued to emphasize religious values, moral education, character formation, and Islamic learning traditions as central institutional priorities (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022; Salim et al., 2024).

Another major theme concerned institutional sustainability. Several studies indicated that curriculum reform, educational modernization, and governance

changes have direct implications for long-term institutional development and educational continuity (Nuryana, 2022; Kosim et al., 2023; Rodliyah et al., 2024). The reviewed literature frequently highlighted the importance of adaptive governance, curriculum integration, and organizational capacity in supporting educational sustainability within Islamic educational institutions.

The synthesis also revealed disparities in transformation processes across the Islamic educational sector. Institutions with stronger governance systems, technological infrastructure, curriculum management capacity, and professional development opportunities were generally reported to adapt more effectively to educational reforms (Rodliyah et al., 2024; Ndari & Mahmudah, 2023). In contrast, smaller community-based institutions often encountered greater challenges in implementing curriculum changes and educational innovations.

Overall, the reviewed studies identified four dominant themes concerning Islamic education in Indonesia: (1) dual curriculum obligations and institutional adaptation, (2) tensions between modernization and religious continuity, (3) institutional sustainability and governance capacity, and (4) unequal transformation across educational institutions. These themes appeared consistently across studies examining Islamic educational policy, curriculum reform, institutional management, and educational transformation.

**Table 4.** Thematic Synthesis Matrix of the Vulnerability and Transformation of Islamic Education in Indonesia

Theme	Representative Studies	Synthesized Evidence
Dual Curriculum Obligations	Kosim et al. (2023); Rodliyah et al. (2024); Wakhidah & Erman (2022)	Islamic educational institutions operate within both national curriculum requirements and religious educational traditions.
Institutional Adaptation Challenges	Mukhibat et al. (2024); Ndari & Mahmudah (2023); Kosim et al. (2023)	Curriculum reforms require continuous adjustment of learning systems, administration, and curriculum integration.
Modernization and Religious Continuity	Hamami & Nuryana (2022); Salim et al. (2024); Nuryana (2022); Fauzi & Kartiko (2023)	Islamic educational institutions simultaneously pursue educational modernization while maintaining religious identity and values.
Institutional Sustainability	Nuryana (2022); Kosim et al. (2023); Rodliyah et al. (2024)	Governance adaptation, curriculum integration, and organizational capacity are important factors supporting long-term sustainability.
Unequal Educational Transformation	Ndari & Mahmudah (2023); Rodliyah et al. (2024); Fauzan et al. (2023)	Institutional capacity, infrastructure, and governance readiness influence the ability to respond to educational reform.

Religious Moderation and Contemporary Reform	Mukhibat et al. (2024); Salim et al. (2024); Jubba et al. (2022)	Contemporary reforms increasingly integrate religious moderation, character education, and contextual Islamic learning approaches.
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### **Decentralized Educational Governance in the United States**

The thematic synthesis identified decentralized educational governance as one of the most frequently discussed characteristics of the U.S. educational system. Across the reviewed studies, educational authority was consistently described as being distributed among federal institutions, state governments, school districts, and local educational institutions (Feiger, 2024; Paglayan, 2022). This governance arrangement allows substantial local involvement in curriculum implementation, instructional policy, educational management, and institutional decision-making.

The reviewed literature consistently reported that decentralized governance supports institutional flexibility and local responsiveness. Several studies indicated that states and school districts possess significant authority to adapt educational policies according to demographic characteristics, sociocultural contexts, labor market demands, and community needs (Cornito, 2021; Chen, 2023; Buckner et al., 2022). This flexibility was frequently associated with educational institutions' ability to implement locally relevant educational programs and learning strategies.

Another recurring theme concerned educational innovation and institutional adaptability. The reviewed studies documented that educational innovation often emerges through local initiatives, district-level experimentation, and institution-based decision-making rather than through nationwide curriculum replacement (Steiu, 2020; Antony-Newman, 2019). Educational institutions were reported to possess greater opportunities to introduce technological innovations, alternative pedagogical approaches, and flexible learning models in response to changing educational conditions.

The thematic synthesis also identified policy continuity as an important feature of decentralized governance. Several studies reported that educational adaptation frequently occurs through incremental adjustments at state and district levels rather than through comprehensive national restructuring (Feiger, 2024; Cornito, 2021). As a result, educational institutions maintain a relatively stable governance environment while continuing to respond to emerging educational challenges.

At the same time, the reviewed literature highlighted several challenges associated with decentralized governance. Educational inequality emerged as one of the most frequently reported concerns, particularly regarding differences in funding capacity, institutional resources, infrastructure, and educational

opportunities across states and districts (Högberg et al., 2019; Hunter-Johnson, 2022; Reddick & Ponomariov, 2024). Some studies also reported variations in educational quality and access resulting from differing local governance capacities and resource availability.

Overall, the thematic synthesis identified five dominant themes concerning decentralized educational governance in the United States: (1) distributed educational authority, (2) institutional flexibility and local responsiveness, (3) educational innovation and adaptive policymaking, (4) policy continuity through incremental reform, and (5) educational inequality within decentralized systems. These themes consistently appeared across studies examining educational governance, policy development, comparative education, and educational transformation.

**Table 5.** Thematic Synthesis Matrix of Decentralized Educational Governance in the United States

Theme	Representative Studies	Synthesized Evidence
Distributed Educational Authority	Feiger (2024); Paglayan (2022); Chen (2023)	Educational authority is distributed among federal, state, district, and local institutions.
Institutional Flexibility and Local Responsiveness	Cornito (2021); Chen (2023); Buckner et al. (2022)	Schools and districts adapt educational policies according to local needs and contextual conditions.
Educational Innovation and Adaptability	Steiu (2020); Antony-Newman (2019); Reimers (2020)	Educational innovation frequently emerges through local initiatives and institution-level experimentation.
Policy Continuity and Incremental Reform	Feiger (2024); Cornito (2021); Paglayan (2022)	Educational adaptation often occurs through gradual policy adjustments rather than nationwide curriculum replacement.
Community Participation	Antony-Newman (2019); Buckner et al. (2022); Chen (2023)	Decentralized governance encourages greater involvement of local communities and stakeholders.
Educational Inequality	Högberg et al. (2019); Hunter-Johnson (2022); Reddick & Ponomariov (2024)	Differences in resources and governance capacity contribute to unequal educational outcomes across regions.

### Cross-Thematic Synthesis of Governance, Curriculum Sustainability, and Islamic Educational Transformation

The thematic synthesis across all reviewed studies revealed interconnected relationships among curriculum instability, educational governance structures, institutional sustainability, and Islamic educational transformation. Although the reviewed literature originated from different educational contexts and research traditions, several recurring patterns emerged consistently across studies concerning Indonesia and the United States.

The first cross-thematic pattern concerned the relationship between governance structures and curriculum continuity. Studies focusing on Indonesia have frequently reported recurring curriculum reforms, centralized decision-making, and limited institutional autonomy (Rahman, 2019; Talitha et al., 2020; Hidayat et al., 2025; Rosser, 2023). In contrast, studies examining the United States consistently described decentralized governance arrangements characterized by distributed authority, local decision-making, and incremental policy adaptation (Feiger, 2024; Cornito, 2021; Paglayan, 2022). Across the reviewed literature, curriculum continuity appeared closely associated with the degree of institutional flexibility available within educational governance systems.

The second pattern involved institutional adaptation and educational sustainability. Studies on Indonesian educational reform have frequently documented challenges related to curriculum transitions, administrative adjustments, teacher readiness, and uneven implementation across educational institutions (Nuraini, 2019; Putra et al., 2022; Madhakomala et al., 2022; Ndari & Mahmudah, 2023). Meanwhile, studies examining decentralized educational systems highlighted the role of local autonomy, adaptive governance, and context-sensitive policymaking in supporting institutional responsiveness to educational change (Chen, 2023; Buckner et al., 2022; Reimers, 2020). Across both contexts, institutional capacity emerged as a recurring factor associated with educational adaptation.

A third pattern concerned the transformation of Islamic educational institutions. The reviewed literature consistently reported that Islamic education in Indonesia operates within the intersection of national educational policies, religious educational traditions, technological transformation, and contemporary educational reform (Kosim et al., 2023; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Rodliyah et al., 2024; Salim et al., 2024). Across the studies, Islamic educational institutions were described as simultaneously maintaining religious educational continuity while adapting to curriculum reform, digital learning, competency-based education, and broader educational modernization processes.

The synthesis also identified educational inequality as a recurring issue across different governance contexts. In Indonesia, disparities were commonly associated with differences in infrastructure, institutional resources, governance capacity, and readiness for curriculum implementation (Sari, 2019; Dewi, 2021; Madhakomala et al., 2022). Similarly, studies from the United States reported inequalities linked to differences in funding capacity, district resources, and institutional opportunities despite decentralized governance structures (Högberg et al., 2019; Hunter-Johnson, 2022; Reddick & Ponomariov, 2024). These findings indicate that educational

inequality appeared in both centralized and decentralized systems, although the sources and manifestations varied across contexts.

Across all themes, the reviewed studies consistently highlighted five interconnected dimensions: (1) governance structure, (2) curriculum continuity, (3) institutional adaptability, (4) educational sustainability, and (5) educational transformation. These dimensions emerged repeatedly across studies addressing curriculum reform, educational governance, Islamic education, decentralization, and comparative educational systems.

The cross-thematic synthesis, therefore, demonstrates that discussions of curriculum instability, educational governance, and Islamic educational transformation are not isolated issues. Rather, they appear as interconnected dimensions within broader educational change processes examined across the reviewed literature.

**Table 6.** Cross-Thematic Synthesis Matrix of Governance, Curriculum Sustainability, and Islamic Educational Transformation

<b>Cross-Thematic Dimension</b>	<b>Evidence from Indonesian Studies</b>	<b>Evidence from United States Studies</b>	<b>Synthesis Outcome</b>
Governance Structure	Centralized curriculum governance; limited institutional autonomy	Distributed authority across states, districts, and schools	Governance arrangements shape institutional decision-making capacity
Curriculum Continuity	Frequent curriculum reform and policy transitions	Incremental policy adaptation and local curriculum flexibility	Curriculum sustainability is associated with governance stability
Institutional Adaptability	Uneven adaptation due to differences in capacity and resources	Local autonomy supports context-sensitive adaptation	Institutional capacity influences responsiveness to educational change
Educational Sustainability	Challenges related to policy discontinuity and implementation variability	Greater continuity through decentralized governance mechanisms	Sustainability depends on governance and adaptive capacity
Educational Transformation	Modernization of Islamic education through curriculum integration, digital learning, and competency development	Educational innovation through local experimentation and institutional flexibility	Transformation involves balancing continuity and adaptation
Educational Inequality	Regional disparities in infrastructure, resources, and implementation readiness	Differences in funding capacity, district resources, and educational opportunities	Inequality remains a recurring issue across governance contexts

## **Discussion**

### **Curriculum Instability as a Governance Challenge**

The cross-thematic synthesis demonstrates that curriculum instability in Indonesia should be understood as a governance challenge rather than merely a pedagogical or administrative issue. The reviewed studies consistently show that recurring curriculum reforms are closely associated with centralized policymaking, policy discontinuity, and limited institutional autonomy. This finding supports broader educational governance scholarship, which emphasizes that sustainable educational reform requires policy continuity, institutional participation, and adaptive governance mechanisms rather than repeated structural replacement of curriculum frameworks (Verger et al., 2019; Rosser, 2023).

The findings also reveal a persistent contradiction between decentralization discourse and centralized curriculum authority. Although educational decentralization has been formally implemented since the Reformasi era, strategic decisions on curriculum design, assessment systems, and educational standards remain concentrated at the national level (Rahman, 2019; Talitha et al., 2020; Erickson et al., 2021). This condition limits institutional flexibility and reduces schools' capacity to respond to contextual educational needs. Similar concerns have been identified in studies highlighting how excessive centralization constrains innovation, responsiveness, and educational adaptability within diverse educational systems (Azhar et al., 2024; Cornito, 2021; Poedjiastutie, 2019).

From a governance perspective, curriculum instability is a manifestation of policy vulnerability. Rather than functioning as a stable framework guiding long-term educational development, curriculum policy becomes susceptible to political transition and bureaucratic restructuring. This interpretation extends the existing curriculum reform literature by emphasizing the sustainability of governance as a critical condition for educational continuity and institutional resilience.

### **Negotiating Sustainability and Islamic Educational Identity**

The findings further indicate that curriculum instability has particular implications for Islamic educational institutions because they operate within dual educational frameworks that combine national educational standards with religious educational traditions. This institutional position creates a continuous process of negotiation between educational modernization and the preservation of Islamic identity. Previous studies have similarly reported tensions between state educational standardization and the contextual values embedded within Islamic educational institutions (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022; Salim et al., 2024).

However, the present synthesis suggests that these tensions should not be interpreted solely as institutional or pedagogical challenges. Rather, they reflect broader governance arrangements that determine the degree of flexibility available to Islamic educational institutions. The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that pesantren, madrasahs, and Islamic schools require governance environments that enable contextual adaptation while maintaining alignment with national educational objectives (Kosim et al., 2023; Mukhibat et al., 2024).

This finding aligns with recent discussions on Islamic educational transformation, which emphasize adaptive governance, collaborative leadership, and curriculum flexibility as important foundations for institutional sustainability (Arifin, 2026; Baqir et al., 2026; Nurman et al., 2022). Consequently, the future sustainability of Islamic education depends not only on curriculum improvement but also on governance structures that can accommodate institutional diversity, religious identity, and changing educational demands.

### **Lessons from Decentralized Educational Governance**

The comparative evidence derived from the United States provides an important analytical lens for understanding alternative governance arrangements. The findings indicate that decentralized educational governance contributes to institutional flexibility, local responsiveness, policy continuity, and educational innovation by distributing authority across states, districts, and educational institutions (Feiger, 2024; Paglayan, 2022).

The significance of the United States in this study does not lie in presenting an ideal model to be replicated. Rather, it serves as a contrasting governance case that illustrates how different governance structures shape curriculum continuity and institutional adaptability. Educational adaptation in the United States often occurs through local initiatives and incremental policy adjustments rather than through repeated nationwide curriculum replacements (Howard et al., 2019; Niedlich et al., 2020). This observation reinforces governance theories suggesting that sustainable educational systems require a balance between accountability, autonomy, and contextual flexibility.

At the same time, the findings confirm that decentralization is not inherently free from challenges. Studies on the United States continue to report educational inequalities associated with differences in funding capacity, institutional resources, and local governance conditions (Högberg et al., 2019; Reddick & Ponomariov, 2024). Therefore, the comparative lesson emerging from this analysis is not unrestricted decentralization but adaptive decentralization that combines

institutional flexibility with policy coordination and equitable resource distribution (Yusra et al., 2025).

### **Toward Adaptive and Sustainable Islamic Educational Governance**

The synthesis highlights the increasing importance of adaptive governance in responding to educational transformation in the digital era. Contemporary educational systems are expected to integrate digital literacy, student-centered learning, interdisciplinary competencies, ethical education, and technological innovation within sustainable governance frameworks (Reimers, 2020; Samala et al., 2024). These developments create both challenges and opportunities for Islamic educational institutions.

Within the context of Islamic education, governance adaptation should not be equated with the adoption of secular modernization alone. Instead, governance reform should facilitate the integration of technological innovation, educational flexibility, and future-oriented competencies while preserving Islamic moral values and religious identity (Pambudi & Mardati, 2019). This perspective is particularly relevant because Islamic educational institutions occupy a strategic position in balancing educational modernization with ethical and religious formation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to comparative education and Islamic educational governance literature by integrating curriculum instability, governance sustainability, decentralization, and Islamic educational transformation within a single analytical framework. While previous studies frequently examine curriculum reform, educational governance, or Islamic education separately, the present study demonstrates how these dimensions are interconnected through broader governance processes.

The principal contribution of this study lies in repositioning curriculum instability as a governance-based phenomenon that influences institutional adaptability, educational sustainability, and the future development of Islamic education. By connecting evidence from Indonesia and the United States, the study provides a comparative perspective that broadens current discussions concerning curriculum reform and educational governance. This perspective contributes to the development of future-oriented Islamic educational governance models that seek to balance national educational objectives, institutional autonomy, contextual flexibility, and educational sustainability.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that curriculum instability in Indonesia should be understood as a governance-based challenge rather than merely a technical or

pedagogical issue. The thematic synthesis demonstrates that repeated curriculum reforms have been closely associated with policy discontinuity, centralized decision-making, and uneven institutional adaptation. Despite the implementation of decentralization policies, curriculum governance in Indonesia remains largely centralized, limiting institutional flexibility and increasing dependence on political and administrative transitions. As a result, curriculum reform frequently operates through recurring policy replacements rather than through sustainable, adaptive educational development.

The findings further reveal that curriculum instability has significant implications for Islamic educational institutions. Pesantren, madrasahs, and Islamic schools operate within dual educational frameworks that require them to comply with national curriculum requirements while simultaneously preserving religious identity, pedagogical traditions, and contextual Islamic values. Under frequent curriculum change, Islamic educational institutions face ongoing challenges in integrating curricula, adapting institutions, and ensuring long-term sustainability. The review demonstrates that the sustainability of Islamic education is influenced not only by curriculum content but also by governance arrangements that shape institutional autonomy, flexibility, and responsiveness.

The comparative analysis also highlights the relevance of decentralized educational governance as an alternative analytical perspective. Evidence from the United States indicates that distributed educational authority, local decision-making, and incremental policy adaptation can support curriculum continuity, institutional flexibility, and educational resilience. At the same time, the review confirms that decentralization alone does not automatically eliminate educational challenges, particularly inequalities associated with resource distribution and governance capacity. Therefore, the principal lesson emerging from the comparative analysis is not policy transplantation but the importance of adaptive governance that balances national educational coordination with institutional autonomy and contextual responsiveness.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by integrating curriculum instability, educational governance, comparative education, and Islamic educational transformation within a single analytical framework. The study extends previous scholarship by repositioning curriculum instability as a governance-based phenomenon that influences institutional sustainability and educational resilience. This perspective broadens current discussions on curriculum reform by emphasizing the role of governance structures in shaping long-term educational continuity and transformation.

In practice, the findings suggest that future educational reform in Indonesia should place greater emphasis on governance sustainability rather than on repeated nationwide curriculum replacement. Educational policymaking should encourage collaborative governance, strengthen institutional capacity, support teacher professional development, and provide greater opportunities for contextual curriculum adaptation while maintaining national educational coherence. Such efforts are particularly important for Islamic educational institutions that must continuously balance national educational objectives with religious identity and local educational needs.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a Systematic Literature Review and therefore depends on the scope, availability, and quality of existing scholarly publications. Second, the comparative perspective focuses primarily on Indonesia and the United States, without incorporating a wider range of Muslim-majority countries or other decentralized educational systems. Third, the study does not include direct empirical evidence from educational practitioners, policymakers, teachers, or Islamic educational institutions.

Future research may address these limitations through empirical and mixed-method investigations involving pesantren, madrasahs, schools, and educational stakeholders. Comparative studies involving additional countries may also enrich understanding of governance models that support curriculum sustainability. Furthermore, future scholarship should examine how digital transformation, artificial intelligence, educational technology, and adaptive leadership shape the development of sustainable, future-oriented Islamic educational governance.

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