

Transformation of State Religious School Competence: An Analysis of the 1975 Joint Ministerial Decree and Its Implications in Indonesia

Ahmad Salim^{1✉}, Imam Suyuti², Muhammad Gafarurrozi³, Laelatul Badriah⁴, Nik Md. Saiful Azizi bin Nik Abdullah⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Universitas Alma Ata, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

⁶International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation-International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study analyses the transformation of state religious school (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri/MAN) competencies in Indonesia following the 1975 Joint Ministerial Decree. It explores the decree's implications for integrating Islamic values into the national curriculum and its impacts on education quality.

Design/methods/approach – A qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design was used. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with stakeholders, including principals, teachers, and alums from three public religious schools in Yogyakarta. Observations and document analyses complemented the interviews, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the decree's implementation.

Findings – The findings reveal significant variations in implementing the decree across schools. Schools with robust resources and community support effectively integrated the national curriculum with Islamic values, enhancing religious and academic competencies. However, schools with limited resources faced challenges balancing modern academic demands with preserving Islamic identity.

Research implications/limitations – The study underscores the importance of tailored policy implementation, considering local contexts and resource availability. A limitation is that it focuses on a specific geographic region, which may not fully capture national variations.

Originality/value – This research provides original insights into the interplay between Islamic education and modern educational demands in Indonesia. It contributes to the discourse on integrating traditional religious education within contemporary frameworks to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs).

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CONTACT: ✉ ahmadsalimo305@almaata.ac.id

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Introduction

The history of Islamic education in Indonesia has undergone significant transformations since the independence era until today (Fathurrohman et al., 2023). State Islamic high schools—abbreviated as MAN and hereinafter referred to as state religious schools—manifest the state's commitment to developing religious-based education equal to general education. The development of state religious schools reflects the complex dynamics between efforts to maintain traditional Islamic values and the need to adapt to the demands of educational modernization. The existence of state religious schools is clear evidence of how Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, is trying to integrate religious education into a modern and comprehensive national education system (Kirom & Imamiyah, 2021; Iskandar, 2020; Huda, 2020; Mukhibat, 2013; Rohmah et al., 2023).

Previous studies have explored the integration of Islamic values into general education. For instance, Sarkowi (2024) emphasizes the importance of the Ulul Albab integration paradigm in Islamic education to create human resources with a balance of spiritual, emotional, and intellectual values. Moslimany et al. (2024) highlight that integrating traditional Islamic teachings with modern educational practices enhances student engagement and academic performance. However, their study focuses more on curriculum design than policy implementation within local contexts. Similarly, Alia (2020) evaluates the integration of secular and religious sciences at the State Islamic University of Malang, demonstrating the success of incorporating spiritual values into the curriculum.

Meanwhile, Hidayat (2024) underscores the positive impact of integrating Islamic values in thematic learning and extracurricular activities on character development. However, these studies have not explicitly examined the variation in implementing the 1975 Joint Ministerial Decree in state religious schools within local contexts such as Yogyakarta. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by state religious schools in Yogyakarta in implementing this policy, considering the region's unique socio-cultural characteristics.

The Joint Decree of the Three Ministers in 1975 was a historic milestone in Indonesia's evolution of Islamic education. This policy not only regulates the administrative aspects of education but also changes the fundamental paradigm of how Islamic education is positioned in the context of national education. Before this policy was implemented, there was an apparent dichotomy between religious education and general education, where religious schools focused on teaching traditional Islamic sciences with an approach that was relatively separate from the development of modern science. This policy is present as a solution to bridge this gap by integrating the national curriculum into the religious school education system without eliminating its Islamic characteristics (Zein & Zin, 2018; Sabella et al., 2022; Alfarisi & Bakar, 2022; Cahaya et al., 2024; Hanifah, 2018; Asriyani & Qodir, 2016; Darwanto et al., 2024).

Implementing this policy presents its complexity in the religious school education system. Educators must develop teaching methods that can integrate Islamic values with modern scientific concepts (Salim, 2014; Nurdin et al., 2024). This challenge is not only

related to the technical aspects of teaching but also concerns the philosophical issue of combining two knowledge systems often seen as epistemologically different. Teachers in state religious schools must be able to create a synthesis between a deep understanding of religion and mastery of contemporary science while still maintaining the uniqueness of Islamic education, which is the main characteristic of state religious schools (Hanifah, 2018; Daud, 2012; Madhuri, 2021; Wafa & Wardi, 2018; Prasetyo & Bashori, 2021).

This research focuses on three state religious schools in the Yogyakarta area: State Religious School 1 in Bantul, State Religious School 1 in Kulon Progo, and State Religious School 3 in Sleman. The selection of these three schools was based on the consideration that each has unique characteristics in terms of resources, community support, and level of adaptation to the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers policy. The three also represent Yogyakarta's geographical and socio-cultural variations, providing a more comprehensive perspective on how this national policy is implemented in diverse local contexts. Each school faces challenges and opportunities to integrate the national curriculum while maintaining its Islamic identity.

The research methodology used is qualitative with a multiple-site case study approach. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with various stakeholders: principals who provided perspectives on the vision and strategy for implementing the policy, teachers who shared practical experiences in integrating the curriculum, and alums who provided reflections on the long-term impact of the policy on their academic and professional lives. Direct observation of the learning process was conducted to understand how curriculum integration is practised in real classroom situations. Analysis of curriculum documents and school archives was also conducted to understand better the evolution of educational practices in the three schools (Yin, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Miles et al., 2018; Stake, 2013; Bowen, 2009).

The selection of Yogyakarta as the research location is inseparable from its strategic position as an educational city rich in traditional values and open to modernity. These characteristics create an ideal social laboratory to observe how national education policies interact with local dynamics (Nani, 2021; Ali, 2020; Hadi et al., 2018; Putra, 2013; Fitriyanti, 2014; Isha, 2019). Yogyakarta, with its strong Javanese cultural heritage and long history in the development of Islamic education, provides a unique context to understand how state religious schools adapt to the demands of educational modernization while maintaining their traditional values. The interaction between national policies and local conditions produces variations in implementation that are interesting to study in depth (Salsabila, 2024; Mastiyah, 2016; Santoso et al., 2022; Bahri, 2019; Suparta, 2017).

This study explicitly analyses three main aspects of the impact of implementing the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers. First, how does this policy affect students' religious competence, especially in their ability to integrate religious understanding with general knowledge? Second, to what extent does this policy impact the identity of Islamic education in state religious schools, including the challenges of maintaining Islamic characteristics amidst the demands of curriculum modernization (Hairiyah et al., 2022)?

Third, how does this policy affect graduates' higher education and work quality, especially regarding their ability to balance religious values with modern professional demands?

In analyzing the competence of state religious schools in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this study will look at how this curriculum integration policy can contribute to SDG 4 (Quality Education) achievement. Education that integrates general and religious knowledge can improve the quality of education and create graduates who not only master knowledge but also have strong moral and social values by the principles of the SDGs, which emphasize educational equality and improving the quality of learning. By considering the role of state religious schools in realizing inclusive and equitable quality education, this study is expected to provide deeper insight into the contribution of the Islamic education sector to the achievement of the SDGs in Indonesia (Sudrajat et al., 2020; Fahham, 2019; Ibad, 2015; Rahmatullah et al., 2019; Wahyono, 2014).

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of national education policy implementation at the local level. By analyzing the experiences of three state religious schools in Yogyakarta, this study highlights how factors such as resource availability, community support, and institutional capacity influence the success of policy implementation. This understanding is important for evaluating existing policies and formulating future education policies that are more responsive to local needs and conditions. Initial findings show significant variation in policy implementation across the three schools. Schools with more adequate resources and strong community support demonstrated higher levels of success in integrating the national curriculum with religious education. Meanwhile, schools with limited resources faced more significant challenges balancing academic demands with maintaining their Islamic identity. These variations provide valuable insights into critical factors that influence the success of education policy implementation at the school level.

This research report will present these findings systematically, starting with an in-depth analysis of the policy's impact on students' religious competence, continuing with a discussion of its implications for Islamic educational identity in state religious schools, and ending with an evaluation of its impact on the quality of graduates. Each section will integrate empirical data from the field with relevant theoretical analysis to comprehensively understand the complexity of implementing the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers policy in state religious schools.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore an in-depth understanding of implementing innovation in teaching and learning in schools. This approach allows researchers to dive into participants' subjective experiences and understand complex and dynamic educational phenomena that cannot be explained quantitatively. As Creswell (2014) explained, qualitative research emphasizes a deep understanding of individuals in their social contexts, giving researchers space to uncover the meaning contained in educational practices and everyday interactions. Therefore, this

approach is ideal for researching teaching innovations that involve critical thinking and creative approaches in facing educational challenges.

This study was designed with a descriptive approach, which allows researchers to provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied—in this case, the implementation of educational innovation in schools. The descriptive method focuses on describing the processes and conditions in certain situations without manipulating or controlling variables. The primary purpose of this design is to understand how innovation is implemented at various levels in the education system, from policies set by administrators to practices faced by teachers and students. This study relies on qualitative data from in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis related to educational innovation programs.

The subjects of this study consisted of four main groups, namely teachers, students, education managers, and alums who had experience in the observed educational environment. The informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, in which researchers selected individuals who were considered to have relevant knowledge and experience regarding the implementation of educational innovation. The purposive sampling technique is based on the principles of qualitative research, which prioritizes the selection of informants based on specific criteria and their relevance to the studied topic (Suri (2011). These four groups were selected with the hope that they could provide diverse insights regarding the implementation and impact of innovations applied in schools.

Table 1. Number and categories of informants involved

Informant Category	Number of Informants	Information
Teachers	15	Teachers involved in educational innovation programs at schools
Students	20	Students involved in technology-based classes or other innovative approaches
Education Manager	5	Principals, education supervisors, and innovation program management staff
Alumni	5	Alumni who have experience relevant to the innovation being implemented
Total	45	

The teachers involved in this study were selected based on their experience implementing innovation in the teaching and learning process. Most teachers have been involved in technology-based education programs or learning methods emphasizing collaboration and creativity. The students selected studied in classes where technology or innovative learning approaches were implemented. They were asked to share their experiences in dealing with changes in their teachers' learning methods.

Educational administrators, including principals and supervisory staff, were selected to provide perspectives on the policies and decisions that underlie the implementation of innovation in schools. They have an important role in planning, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of the innovation. The alums involved were

selected because of their experience as learners who had experienced conventional teaching methods before the innovation occurred. Their perspectives provide an important retrospective dimension in assessing the changes in teaching and learning and their impact on students after graduation.

The primary data in this study were collected through in-depth interviews with each category of informants. In-depth interviews were chosen because they allowed researchers to gain deeper insight into the experiences and views of participants towards the innovations implemented. Interviews were conducted sequentially, using a flexible guide that focused on relevant topics, such as acceptance of innovation, challenges faced, and perceived benefits. As explained by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), semi-structured interviews allow informants to express their thoughts more freely while providing a clear direction for researchers to explore specific issues.

In addition to interviews, researchers also conducted direct observations in classes involved in the educational innovation program. This observation aims to directly observe how the application of technology or innovative approaches is translated into learning practices. By observing interactions between teachers and students and the classroom dynamics, researchers can obtain more contextual data on how innovations are accepted and applied in daily practice. Observations allow researchers to confirm or respond to findings obtained through interviews while providing a more comprehensive picture of the teaching process.

Documentation studies were also conducted to complement data obtained from interviews and observations. The documents analyzed included lesson plans, teaching materials, program evaluation reports, and policies related to innovative education implemented in schools. Document analysis provides information about the policy context and the goals for implementing the innovation. Merriam & Tisdell (2015) stated that documentation studies help researchers explore the background of the policy and provide additional perspectives that cannot be obtained through interviews or observations alone. The data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation studies were analyzed using Atlas—ti software. Atlas. It was used to organize and code the qualitative data obtained, allowing researchers to find patterns and themes that emerged from the data. Researchers used inductive coding techniques, which allow for the identification of key themes without the need for a pre-existing theoretical framework. This technique helps researchers approach the data with an open mind, looking for patterns that may not have been previously suspected. As Braun & Clarke (2006) explained, inductive coding allows researchers to identify themes that emerge directly from the data and create a more natural understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

To increase the validity and reliability of the findings, this study used data triangulation by combining various data sources, including interviews, observations, and documentation. Data triangulation is an important technique in qualitative research to ensure the credibility and validity of findings. Denzin (2017) explained that triangulation can help confirm findings by connecting data from different sources, thereby increasing the reliability of research results. In addition, the member-checking technique was also applied,

where informants were allowed to check their interview results and provide clarification or additional information to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation. In terms of research ethics, this study adheres to strict ethical principles. Each informant was given clear information about the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and their rights in the study, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. All participants signed an informed consent form that guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of their data. In addition, the researcher ensured that the data collected was stored securely and could only be accessed by authorized parties.

Result and Discussion

1. The Impact of the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers in 1975 on the Religious Competence of Students in State Religious Schools

The Joint Decree of the Three Ministers in 1975 that integrated religious education and general education in state religious schools significantly impacted the curriculum and teaching methods in these schools. Based on interviews with several principals and teachers at State Religious School 1 in Bantul, State Religious School 1 in Kulon Progo, and State Religious School 3 in Sleman, it was found that this policy influenced the way teachers organized and delivered learning materials. For example, a teacher at State Religious School 1 in Bantul stated, "This Joint Decree of the Three Ministers gives us space to combine religious and general learning more holistically. We must ensure that students understand religious lessons textually and how they are applied in everyday life." This statement illustrates how this policy integrates religious education with general education to create a more contextual approach to religious learning. Integrating religious education with general education also aligns with Sardar's view (1985), who stated that Islamic education needs to connect religious knowledge with worldly knowledge to create whole and balanced individuals. Field observations also revealed that this policy was implemented quite well in several state religious schools, such as State Religious School 1 in Kulon Progo. Teachers there admitted to receiving training to link religious lessons with general lessons. One teacher said, "We were given training on integrating Islamic teachings in the context of general science. For example, in biology lessons, we teach the concept of creation by Islamic teachings." Such teaching reflects the efforts of educators to link religious values with scientific knowledge, which is expected to provide students with a deeper understanding of religious teachings that are relevant to their lives.

This integration also aligns with the constructivism theory developed by Piaget (1976) and Vygotsky (1978), which states that knowledge is built through direct experiences relevant to the student's world. Thus, integrated religious learning in general lessons allows students to construct their understanding of Islamic teachings in the context of their broader lives. However, in some areas, such as State Religious School 3 in Sleman, even though this policy was implemented, significant challenges arose due to limited resources in teacher training and available facilities. The principal of State Religious School 3 in Sleman stated, "We have a big challenge in terms of teacher training. Many do not fully understand how to teach this integrated curriculum." This reflects the gap

between schools with better access to training and educational resources and those with limitations. This opinion is based on the theory of resource distribution in education proposed by Coleman (1966), which explains that inequality of resources affects the effectiveness of teaching and the quality of education. Without adequate training support, teachers at State Religious School 3 in Sleman have difficulty implementing the expected curriculum integration, which has implications for students' lack of deep understanding of the material.

The observation results also found that in state religious school 1 in Bantul, which has more facilities and access to teacher training, the integration between religion and general science runs more smoothly. A teacher there explained, "We have been able to create learning that teaches religious knowledge and links it to values that can be applied in everyday life." This shows that the readiness of resources and practical training plays an important role in the success of this policy. On the other hand, in schools with limitations, such as state religious school 3 in Sleman, integrated teaching cannot run as optimally as expected, which causes a gap in students' understanding of the material given.

In this context, the competency-based teaching theory developed by Shulman (1986) can also explain the importance of mastery of the material and the proper teaching methodology in implementing this policy. Shulman argues that effective teaching requires in-depth mastery of the material and the ability to deliver the material in a relevant and easy way for students to understand. Therefore, the quality of teacher training and their readiness to teach an integrated curriculum greatly determine the success of this policy in improving students' religious competence.

The success and challenges in implementing the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers of 1975 in various state religious schools show significant variation, depending on the availability of resources, the quality of teaching, and the support of each school's community. Based on interviews with principals and teachers at State Religious School 1 in Bantul, State Religious School 1 in Kulon Progo, and State Religious School 3 in Sleman, these factors significantly influence the success of implementing this policy. At state religious school 1 in Bantul, for example, this policy was implemented relatively successfully. One State Religious School 1 teacher in Bantul said, "The regular training and support from the school and parents greatly drove our success in implementing this policy. We were able to integrate religious and general lessons well." This suggests that in schools with better resources and strong community support, the implementation of this policy tends to be more successful. At State Religious School 1 in Bantul, regular training for teachers enabled them to understand better and apply the integrated curriculum so that students could gain a more complete and contextual understanding of religious teachings. However, in state religious school 1 in Kulon Progo, despite efforts to implement this policy, challenges in terms of resource availability remain a significant problem. One of the principals there said, "We still find it difficult with the lack of facilities and adequate training for teachers. Although we try to integrate religious lessons with general lessons, sometimes the results are not optimal". This difficulty shows that in schools that face limited resources, both in terms of facilities and teacher training, implementing this policy

tends to experience obstacles. In this case, the theory of resource distribution proposed by Coleman (1966) can explain why some schools are able to implement this policy better than others. This uneven distribution of resources affects the ability of schools to manage and implement the curriculum that has been adjusted to the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers.

On the other hand, in state religious school 3 in Sleman, more significant challenges emerged despite efforts to integrate religious and general curricula. One State Religious School 3 teacher in Sleman said, "We tried our best to implement this policy, but without adequate support, both in terms of teacher training and other resources, we found it difficult." This challenge was further exacerbated by teachers' limited time and capacity to adapt teaching methods to suit the policy. In this context, the theory of competency-based teaching proposed by Shulman (1986) is relevant to explain why, in some schools, this policy was ineffective. Shulman argues that effective teaching requires in-depth mastery of the material and adequate pedagogical skills, which require continuous training and adequate resources. Without adequate training, teachers in State Religious School 3 in Sleman found it difficult to effectively connect religious teachings with general subjects, which resulted in students' limited understanding of the material being taught.

In addition, community support also played an important role in the successful implementation of this policy. In state religious school 1 in Bantul, strong support from parents and the surrounding community facilitated better policy implementation. One state religious school principal in Bantul stated, "We feel fully supported by parents and the community. They understand the importance of integrating religious and general education for the children's future." This support created a conducive educational environment where teachers and students felt encouraged to continue developing their understanding of religious education as relevant to everyday life.

In contrast, limited community support exacerbated the school's challenges in implementing this policy in more isolated schools, such as State Religious School 3 in Sleman. This variation in success underscores the importance of external factors, such as available resources and community support, in determining the effectiveness of education policy implementation. This is in line with resource distribution theory, which emphasizes the importance of equitable distribution of resources in education to ensure good quality education Coleman (1966). In addition, competency-based teaching theory also emphasizes that high-quality teaching can only be achieved if there is adequate training for teachers and strong support from the surrounding community Shulman (1986).

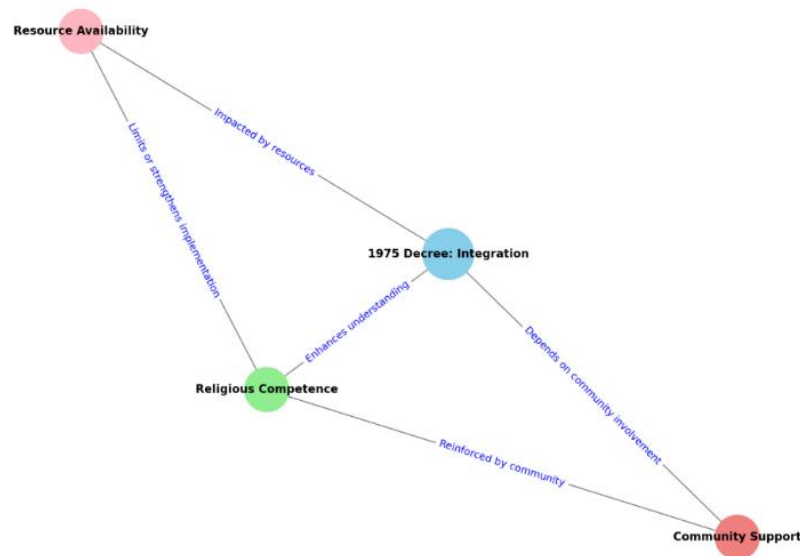


Figure 1. Conceptual Map: Impact of the 1975 Joint Ministerial Decree

The conceptual map in Figure 1 illustrates the impact of the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers of 1975 on religious education in state religious schools, focusing on integration as the central relationship between elements. Identified subthemes include enhancing religious competence through curriculum integration, the role of community support in strengthening successful implementation, and resource availability's influence on the integration quality. The relationships between elements are clarified through line annotations, showing how community support can strengthen religious competence, while resource constraints often act as barriers to policy implementation. This visualization systematically presents the dynamics of qualitative findings, highlighting the interactions between policy, community, and resources in creating integrated education.

2. Policy Implications for the Identity and Quality of Education in State Religious Schools

Implementing the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers in 1975 significantly impacted the identity of Islamic education in state religious schools. This policy, which integrated the religious curriculum with the national curriculum, gave rise to various perceptions regarding its impact on the position of state religious schools in the national education system, especially in maintaining or changing the Islamic characteristics of state religious schools. Based on interviews with several principals and teachers at State Religious School 1 in Bantul, State Religious School 1 in Kulon Progo, and State Religious School 3 in Sleman, there were different views regarding whether this integration strengthened or weakened the Islamic identity of state religious schools. At State Religious School 1 in Bantul, which had more experience implementing this policy, the principal said, "This integration helps us strengthen the Islamic characteristics of state religious schools. By linking religious lessons with general lessons, we can emphasize that Islam is relevant to all aspects of life." This view reflects the optimism that integrating the religious curriculum with general education enriches students' insights and strengthens the position of state religious schools as Islamic educational institutions relevant to the development of the times.

In the view of most parties at State Religious School 1 in Bantul, this integration shows how Islamic education can shape the character of students who have a balance between religious understanding and academic abilities needed to face global challenges. This is in line with the view of Sardar (1985), who emphasized the importance of integrating religious and worldly education in creating whole individuals with an understanding inseparable from their social and cultural context. However, in several other state religious schools, such as state Religious School 3 in Sleman, this policy raises questions about how integrating the national curriculum with religious education can maintain the Islamic characteristics of state religious schools. The principal at State Religious School 3 in Sleman said, "Sometimes we find it difficult to maintain the Islamic identity of students because of the pressure to follow the national curriculum, which tends to focus more on general knowledge." This statement shows the concern that integration with the national curriculum can obscure the role of religion in education at state religious schools. If not carried out carefully, the integration of general and religious curricula can shift the focus on religious education, which should be a priority in state religious schools.

According to the theory of Islamic education, as stated by Nata (2016), education in state religious schools must emphasize the formation of an Islamic character that cannot be separated from students' daily lives. Therefore, this policy can weaken the Islamic characteristics of state religious schools if integration with the general curriculum is carried out without considering the balance between religious values and the need to master worldly knowledge. In this context, the theory of Islamic educational identity developed by Al-Attas (1991) is also relevant in analyzing the impact of this policy. Al-Attas argues that Islamic education must be based on revelation and morals, with the primary goal of forming individuals with noble character. Policies integrating religious education with the general curriculum must emphasize the importance of Islamic characteristics that are the identity of state religious schools. Even though there are adjustments to the national curriculum, Islamic principles remain the primary foundation of the educational process. If this policy reduces the emphasis on Islamic teachings in learning, then this integration can potentially reduce the uniqueness of state religious schools as Islamic educational institutions.

On the other hand, in state religious school 1 in Kulon Progo, although there is anxiety regarding the Islamic identity of state religious schools, this policy has been faced with a more inclusive approach. One of the teachers at the school said, "We try to maintain a balance between religious and general education in a way that does not negate each other but complements each other." This shows that implementing this policy should not be seen as a threat to Islamic identity but rather as an opportunity to enrich students' perspectives on religion and science. In this regard, the theory of integration-based learning, as proposed by Zohar & Marshall (1999), proposes that education that integrates science with religious values can provide a more comprehensive experience for students, which is not only limited to cognitive knowledge but also to moral and spiritual development.

Despite the doubts and challenges in implementing the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers of 1975, this policy shows excellent potential in strengthening Islamic characteristics in state religious schools, provided that its implementation is carried out with full attention to the balance between religious and general education. In this context, the theory of Islamic education and the theory of curriculum integration provide important insights into understanding how this policy can shape the identity of Islamic education that is relevant to today's needs without ignoring the essence of religious teachings that are the core of education in state religious schools.

Evaluation of the competencies of graduates of state religious schools that have been exposed to the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers of 1975 policy shows that there has been quite significant development in the balance between religious values and students' academic abilities, which has a direct impact on their success in continuing their education to university level or entering the workforce. Based on interviews with alums from State Religious School 1 in Bantul, State Religious School 1 in Kulon Progo, and State Religious School 3 in Sleman, as well as observations of the attitudes and skills of students who have graduated, it appears that this policy not only enriches academic knowledge but also facilitates the development of student's character and personal skills holistically. At State Religious School 1 in Bantul, graduates following this policy demonstrate good skills in integrating religious values into their daily lives. One alumnus said, "I feel very helped by the integrated religious teaching in general lessons. I can more easily adapt to academic challenges at university and maintain the principles taught at state religious schools." This statement shows that graduates of State Religious School 1 in Bantul not only master their academic fields well but are also able to integrate the religious values they learned at state religious schools into their social and professional lives.

This shows that this policy has provided a solid foundation for students to develop a balance between academic skills and strengthening Islamic character, allowing them to thrive in the broader environment, such as at university or the workplace. In line with the competency theory developed by Spady (1994), which states that education must prepare students for success in various dimensions of life, graduates of state religious school 1 in Bantul appear to be ready to face an increasingly complex world, with a strong religious foundation and adequate academic abilities.

However, in State Religious School 1 in Kulon Progo, some graduates reported difficulties balancing academic demands and the religious values they learned in the state religious school despite the positive impact of curriculum integration. An alumnus of State Religious School 1 in Kulon Progo said, "Sometimes I feel confused between focusing on general subjects or maintaining the religious teachings that have become part of me. The demands at university are very high, and often I feel I have to put aside some aspects of religion to be able to follow the flow of higher education." From this statement, it is clear that although this policy helps character development, the biggest challenge for graduates of State Religious School 1 in Kulon Progo is adapting to academic demands at university, which tend to be more based on general knowledge.

This indicates an imbalance in the policy's implementation, which impacts graduates who have difficulty finding harmony between the religious values they adhere to and the academic demands they face. This is relevant to the theory of character development put forward by Damon (1988), which emphasizes the importance of holistic identity and character formation to ensure the continuity of balanced personal development. Therefore, although this policy brings benefits, adaptation to the policy needs to be done with a more contextual approach, not to create tension between religious education and general education. In state religious school 3 in Sleman, although this policy was implemented with high enthusiasm, some graduates felt more significant character benefits than academic ability. One alumnus of State Religious School 3 in Sleman said, "In the world of work, I feel more prepared to face social situations because religious education in state religious schools has shaped me into a more disciplined and responsible person. However, from an academic perspective, I still need to catch up in several fields of knowledge."

This feeling reflects that although the religious values taught in state religious schools positively impact character development, there is an academic aspect that is still felt to need further strengthening. This shows that although this policy has a positive impact on the formation of student character, strengthening in the academic aspect, especially in more general subjects, is still needed to ensure that graduates of state religious schools are ready to compete in the world of higher education and the world of work. Gardner's theory of educational development (2006) emphasizes the importance of multiple intelligences and individual skills in various domains, and this policy needs to be continuously adjusted so that graduates excel in moral and spiritual aspects and have qualified intellectual capacity.

Overall, the policy of the Joint Decree of the Three Ministers of 1975 significantly contributed to the development of the competence of graduates of state religious schools, both in academics and in character formation. However, challenges still exist in balancing these two dimensions, and strengthening the academic aspect, especially regarding skills more applicable to work and higher education, is still an important concern. This shows that to create graduates who are truly competent, not only in religion but also in science, continuous efforts are needed to adjust educational policies to accommodate the increasingly diverse needs of students.

Integrating the religious curriculum with the national curriculum in state religious schools has contributed significantly to improving the quality of education by SDG 4. This policy allows students to understand the relevance of Islamic values to modern challenges, creating a balance between religious understanding and academic ability. In practice, implementing this policy has been seen to be effective in producing graduates who are competent in academics and have strong moral character. Previous research has shown that this integration model can foster holistic competencies, which include the development of student's intellectual and spiritual aspects and the strengthening their commitment to continuing education (Asdlori, 2023). Although this policy brings many benefits, there are challenges in maintaining Islamic identity amidst curriculum

modernization. In some state religious schools, integrating the national curriculum with religious education often creates an imbalance, where the emphasis on academic mastery can reduce the focus on religious education. This can weaken students' religious character if not balanced with a well-planned pedagogical approach. Other studies have also found that similar challenges occur in several other religious-based educational institutions, which require innovation in integrating religious values with general education to ensure optimal results (Sa'diyah & Yunizul, 2024).

The impact of this policy on graduate competencies also shows varying results. In some state religious schools, graduates show better readiness to face the challenges of the world of work and higher education thanks to a strong religious foundation combined with academic skills. However, in other state religious schools, the pressure to meet high academic standards often sacrifices the instillation of religious values, creating a gap between moral character and academic achievement. Research shows that an education model that emphasizes the integration of religious and academic values in a balanced manner can produce students with high competencies relevant to the needs of the globalization era (Aziz et al., 2023).

About SDG 4, this curriculum integration policy has made a real contribution to improving the quality of education in state religious schools. By combining religious and general values, this policy not only helps create students who excel academically but also forms students' ethical characters with high morals. This aligns with global efforts to create inclusive and sustainable education, as emphasized in SDG 4 (Meldya et al., 2024). However, to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of this policy, an adaptive approach is needed that considers local and global needs simultaneously.

Conclusion

The 1975 Joint Decree of the Three Ministers, which integrated religious education with general education in state religious schools, has significantly impacted students' religious and academic competencies. In this context, the policy aligns with SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. Implementing this policy provides opportunities for students to develop strong academic skills while deepening their understanding of religious values relevant to everyday life. This study shows that the quality of available resources, such as teacher training and adequate facilities, dramatically influences the success of this policy. Schools with good support, such as in Bantul, can provide integrative learning, combining religious knowledge and general knowledge in a complementary way. In contrast, schools with limited resources face significant challenges in implementing this policy, resulting in suboptimal learning quality and limited students' ability to connect religious values with general knowledge practically.

However, the challenges in implementing this policy also need to be considered, especially regarding the balance between religious and general education. The integration of the two must be carefully maintained so that no dominance of one aspect reduces the quality of learning in both areas. While a focus on general education is important in preparing students for the wider world, ensuring that curriculum integration continues to

strengthen religious competencies should be at the heart of education in state religious schools. In this regard, education policies must be continuously evaluated and adjusted to align with the principles of SDG 4, which emphasizes the importance of equitable and quality education. By improving the quality of teacher training, improving facilities, and facilitating the development of a more inclusive curriculum, state religious schools can continue to support the development of students' religious character while ensuring that they have competitive academic skills at the national and international levels. Ultimately, this integration meets the need for inclusive and equitable education and prepares young people to play an active role in a diverse and evolving society.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

All authors collaboratively conducted this study. Ahmad Salim conceptualized the research, designed the framework, and supervised the project. Imam Suyuti managed data collection, conducted initial analysis, and applied qualitative analysis methods. Muhammad Gafarurrozi supported data collection and interpretation. Laelatul Badriah and Khanifudin handled data collection, and Khanifudin also contributed to manuscript drafting and revision. Nik Md. Saiful Azizi ensured critical revisions and refined the manuscript's intellectual content in English. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The study's findings are supported by data included in the article and supplementary materials. Additional data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon request.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors confirm no conflicts of interest, financial or personal that could have influenced this study.

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