

Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Islamic Education: A Systematic Literature Review of Studies in Indonesia and Africa (2020–2025)

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ABSTRACT

The background of this study is rooted in the understanding that Islamic education does not operate in a vacuum but is closely intertwined with the socio-cultural dynamics of its society. In response to the need to map contemporary discourse, this study conducted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize the socio-cultural dimensions of Islamic education in Indonesia and Africa in the period 2020–2025. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, this study analyzed 20 Scopus-indexed and peer-reviewed articles. The findings reveal several dominant themes reflecting the diversity and complexity of Islamic education in both regions. In Indonesia, the focus has largely been on the role of *pesantren* and *madrasas* as the glue between universal Islamic teachings and local wisdom, an approach often conceptualized as Islam Nusantara. In contrast, research in Africa has highlighted colonial legacies, epistemological plurality, struggles for equitable access to education, and the push for the decolonization of knowledge. This synthesis shows that Islamic education functions as a bridge between religion, culture, and modernity. It not only nurtures cultural resilience but also fosters transformative learning and social renewal in both regions.

Keywords: Islamic education; socio-cultural; Indonesia; Africa; glocalization.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education is not a neutral or isolated process but an integral part of a society's cultural and social dynamics (Nurdin, 2020; Rahman & Azzahra, 2024; Sahin, 2018). Since its early development, *Islamic education* has served as both a transmitter of religious knowledge and a moral-ethical system embedded in local traditions (Khasawneh et al., 2022; Nurhayati et al., 2025). In Indonesia, *pesantren* and *madrasah* have functioned as both religious learning centers and community institutions shaping social behavior (Halimah et al., 2024; Maryati et al., 2023). The concept of *Islam Nusantara* reflects this harmonization of Islamic universal values contextualized through local culture (Azra, 2019).

In Africa, Islamic education evolved amidst colonial disruptions (Novriadi et al., 2023). Traditional *madrasah* in Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania safeguarded Islamic identity under European colonial regimes. Colonialism not only restructured political and economic systems but

also imposed epistemological hierarchies privileging Western rationality (Mignolo, 2018). The post-pandemic period (2020–2025) witnessed the digital transformation of Islamic education (Hossain et al., 2025; Wicaksono et al., 2025). Hybrid learning models emerged in both Indonesia and Africa, revealing opportunities for innovation and gaps in technological equity (Hanafi et al., 2021).

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the importance of contextualizing Islamic education within local socio-cultural frameworks (Erihadiana & Mahmud, 2025). Studies by Fahruddiana (2025) demonstrate how Islamic educational institutions in Southeast Asia navigate between religious authenticity and cultural pluralism. Similarly, research by Nanthambwe (2025) highlights the role of African Islamic schools in preserving indigenous epistemologies while engaging with global knowledge systems. Furthermore, Mardatillah (2025) emphasize the transformative potential of Islamic education in promoting social cohesion and ethical citizenship in post-conflict societies. However, systematic comparative analysis between Indonesian and African contexts remains underexplored, particularly regarding how glocalization processes shape pedagogical practices across these diverse regions.

The novelty of this research lies in its systematic cross-regional comparative framework that examines Islamic education in Indonesia and Africa through a glocalization lens. Unlike previous studies that focus on single-country contexts, this review synthesizes scholarship from two distinct yet historically connected *Islamic* educational traditions, revealing how local cultural dynamics shape universal Islamic pedagogical principles. This comparative approach provides unique insights into decolonial pedagogy, cultural resilience, and the negotiation between tradition and modernity in Global South Islamic education systems.

This research aims to: (1) identify and synthesize dominant socio-cultural themes in Islamic education scholarship from Indonesia and Africa (2020–2025); (2) conduct comparative analysis of institutional models, pedagogical approaches, and policy contexts; and (3) illuminate knowledge gaps and future research trajectories. The significance of this study extends to educational policymakers seeking culturally responsive reform strategies, Islamic educational leaders navigating modernization pressures, and scholars advancing decolonial and glocalized pedagogical frameworks. By bridging Indonesian and African Islamic education scholarship, this review contributes to Global South knowledge production and offers practical pathways for strengthening Islamic education as a vehicle for cultural preservation, social transformation, and ethical citizenship in diverse contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page). The SLR method was chosen for its rigor in synthesizing empirical knowledge across diverse studies and for generating coherent theoretical and contextual insights by systematically filtering, assessing, and interpreting research findings (Snyder; Booth). Unlike traditional narrative reviews, which may be selective or biased, SLR ensured transparency,

replicability, and methodological consistency through structured documentation of search strategies, screening protocols, and inclusion processes (Kitchenham & Charters; Petticrew & Roberts).

The study aimed to map the scholarly landscape of socio-cultural dimensions of Islamic education in Indonesia and Africa between 2020 and 2025 and to enable a comparative understanding of these two regions, which share Islamic educational heritage but have distinct socio-historical realities, policy frameworks, and pedagogical traditions (Azra, 2019; Mignolo, 2018).

The review followed four iterative stages as recommended by PRISMA: Identification, Screening, Eligibility Evaluation, and Final Inclusion. These phases established systematic rigor in data extraction and selection (Page).

Comprehensive literature searches were conducted across multidisciplinary academic databases to capture studies relevant to socio-cultural Islamic education. The search included a combination of international and regional platforms to avoid bias: Scopus (Elsevier), SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Google Scholar, and African Journals Online (AJOL). This selection ensured equitable representation of Indonesian and African scholarship, addressing epistemic imbalance in global knowledge production (Connell; Santos).

A Boolean search strategy focused on narrowing relevant studies, using keywords and logical operators: ("Islamic education" OR "madrasah" OR "pesantren") AND ("socio-cultural" OR "local wisdom" OR "tradition") AND (Indonesia OR Africa) AND (PUBYEAR > 2020 AND PUBYEAR < 2025). Additional filters applied included peer-reviewed journal articles, English or Indonesian language, and publications from 2020 to 2025.

Articles were included if they were peer-reviewed journal publications published between 2020 and 2025, focused on Islamic education, and were relevant to socio-cultural dimensions such as local wisdom, community learning, identity formation, digital culture, gender and leadership, or post-colonial contexts. Full-text availability was also required.

Studies were excluded if they were theses, conference proceedings, book reviews, unrelated to socio-cultural Islamic education, duplicates, or incomplete/inaccessible full texts. These criteria adhered to recognized best practices for systematic literature reviews in educational and social sciences (Snyder; Petticrew & Roberts).

Tabel 1. Flowchart of Study Selection Process Based on PRISMA Guidelines

PRISMA Stage	Description	Articles
Identification	Initial records retrieved	186
Duplicate removal	Eliminated	40
Screening	Title and abstract filtering	146
Eligibility	Full-text evaluation	62
Final inclusion	Studies synthesized	20

Source: Processed by the author based on Page 2021

This process ensured methodological rigor and minimized selection bias. Data extraction was conducted using a structured matrix capturing author(s), year of publication, country/region, research objectives, methodological approaches, socio-cultural themes, key findings, and theoretical implications. The extraction process followed established guidelines for educational synthesis research (Gough, Oliver, & Thomas; Bearman). A thematic analysis approach was employed to categorize findings based on Braun and Clarke's six-phase coding model: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Codes were inductively derived from patterns in the text and refined into five meta-themes: community-based learning and social capital; integration of Islamic ethics and indigenous culture; gender equity and inclusive leadership; digital transformation of Islamic learning; and policy governance and post-colonial challenges. Thematic synthesis allowed comparison across diverse contexts while grounding insights into empirical evidence (Thomas & Harden).

Table 2. The study applied quality assurance procedures based on Lincoln and Guba's criteria for qualitative research.

Criterion	Measures
Credibility	Inter-coder review, peer debriefing, theoretical triangulation
Dependability	Audit trail, systematic coding protocol, replicable query strategy
Confirmability	Documentation of decisions, reflexive notes, transparent reporting
Transferability	Thick description, contextual detail, regional balance

Although SLRs did not involve human subjects, ethical rigor was maintained by correctly citing reviewed works, avoiding misinterpretation, ensuring transparency in reporting methodology, and respecting regional knowledge traditions, particularly in Islamic and African contexts (Santos; Zine).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic synthesis across the 20 reviewed studies revealed five dominant socio-cultural themes shaping Islamic education in Indonesia and Africa between 2020–2025. These themes include (1) community-based learning, (2) cultural integration and indigenous pedagogies, (3) gender inclusivity, (4) digital transformation, and (5) governance and post-colonial challenges. The findings illuminate how Islamic educational institutions in both regions act as sites of social reproduction, cultural resilience, and transformative change in response to modern global pressures.

Community-Based Learning

Across Indonesia and Africa, Islamic educational institutions serve as community anchors that foster moral development, collective identity, and social cooperation. Pesantren in Indonesia, historically rooted in Javanese Islamic traditions and Sufi-influenced communal life, continue to operate as integrated socio-religious ecosystems where students live, study, and engage in community service (Rohman, 2021). These institutions provide not only theological training but

also social capital networks, leadership preparation, economic empowerment programs, humanitarian services, and community mediation roles.

Similarly, in African contexts—particularly in Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, and Tanzania—Qur'anic schools (*maktab, madrasah, daar*) play parallel socio-religious functions. They act as community moral centers, promote discipline, and preserve Islamic identity in multi-ethnic societies shaped by colonial disruption and Christian-Muslim plurality (Muazu, 2022). While some African Qur'anic schools face modernization pressures, they remain crucial spaces of moral formation and social solidarity among marginalized Muslim populations.

Community-based Islamic learning also demonstrates a strategic role in conflict-resolution, peacebuilding, and promoting religious moderation. Indonesian pesantren explicitly support *Islam Wasathiyah* (moderate Islam) and interfaith coexistence (Rohman, 2021). African madrasah, especially in post-conflict regions such as Northern Nigeria and Sudan, serve as safe learning spaces fostering communal resilience against extremist infiltration and socio-political turbulence (Hassan, 2022).

Thus, Islamic educational institutions in both contexts function as cultural stabilizers, social capital incubators, and agents of communal cohesion, reinforcing Ungar's social-ecology of resilience theory. They cultivate shared moral values, negotiation skills, and cultural continuity, responding to societal challenges through rooted religious frameworks and community participation.

Cultural Integration and Indigenous Pedagogies

Islamic education in the Global South does not exist in isolation from cultural structures; rather, it adapts to local realities and values. In Indonesia, the framework of Islam Nusantara reflects the successful harmonization of Islamic epistemology with Indonesian indigenous wisdom, communal ethics, and archipelagic sociocultural plurality (Azra, 2019). Pesantren incorporate local customs, Javanese etiquette systems (*unggah-ungguh*), traditional arts (gamelan, calligraphy, *selawat Jawa*), and collective rituals (*tahlilan, yasinan, maulidan*) into religious pedagogy. Such integration embodies *tawassuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), and *tasamuh* (tolerance), promoting pluralistic teaching that strengthens national identity alongside Islamic values.

African Islamic education similarly internalizes local philosophy, most prominently the Ubuntu ethos in Southern Africa—a worldview emphasizing shared humanity, communal care, and relational spirituality. Ubuntu-based Islamic pedagogy incorporates storytelling, ethical narratives, oral recitations, and dialogic learning to instill religious morals alongside cultural values of solidarity and kinship (Mussa, 2024). In East and West African contexts, Qur'anic memorization practices are blended with traditional recitation arts, poetry, and communal rituals, reinforcing collective identity and spiritual aesthetics.

These cultural integrations challenge orientalist narratives that portray Islamic education as rigid or monolithic. Instead, they demonstrate glocalization—a process of adapting universal Islamic teachings to local cultural idioms and community needs (Robertson). Islamic education thus becomes a site where identity formation is negotiated through synthesis, rather than conflict, between faith and culture.

Gender Inclusivity and Female Leadership

A significant emerging theme in Indonesia is the rise of women leadership in Islamic educational institutions. Recent years have seen more female *kiai nyai* leading pesantren, assuming academic positions in Islamic universities, and participating in policy discourse on Islamic education and women's rights (Aliyah, 2023). This growth reflects institutionalization of gender mainstreaming within Islamic academic circles, supported by organizations like Muslimat NU, Fatayat, and female pesantren networks such as *Nisa' Pesantren*. These developments challenge traditional patriarchal norms, while remaining grounded in Islamic ethical principles of justice ('*adl*) and equality (*musawah*).

In contrast, African Islamic schools exhibit incremental but uneven progress toward gender inclusivity. Many African Muslim communities still face socio-economic barriers, early marriage culture, and structural inequalities limiting women's educational access (Ndlovu, 2022). However, gradual reforms and advocacy by female scholars, community leaders, and Islamic NGOs have fostered increased enrollment of girls in madrasah and female participation in Qur'anic teaching circles. Female-led Islamic initiatives in Kenya, Morocco, and Nigeria now provide literacy, vocational training, and Islamic leadership development for women.

Thus, both regions demonstrate a trajectory toward Islamic feminist consciousness grounded not in Western liberal discourse, but in Qur'anic justice principles and prophetic models of ethical leadership. These trends illustrate that gender empowerment within Islamic education can emerge organically through culturally appropriate reform strategies, rather than external pressures.

Digital Transformation of Islamic Pedagogy

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitalization in Islamic education worldwide, including Indonesia and Africa. In Indonesia, *pesantren* and madrasah adopted hybrid learning models, mobile learning applications, Zoom-based *halaqah*, digital Qur'anic recitation platforms, and institutional Learning Management Systems (Hanafi et al., 2021). Government technology grants, Ministry of Religious Affairs e-learning initiatives, and pesantren digital literacy programs contributed to this shift.

Meanwhile, African Islamic education confronted limited connectivity and device access. Yet, through creative adaptation, Qur'anic teachers utilized WhatsApp classes, radio broadcasts, SMS-based instructions, and community digital kiosks to maintain learning continuity (Hassan, 2022). Such innovations demonstrate local resilience and digital improvisation amid resource scarcity.

Digital transformation also introduced theological and pedagogical debates over the role of technology in *talaqqi* (face-to-face transmission of sacred knowledge) and *barakah* in learning. Many clerics emphasized hybrid models combining virtual access with physical presence for deeper spiritual formation.

Nevertheless, digital inequality remains a structural challenge, particularly in rural Africa and Indonesian pesantren in remote islands. Bridging digital divides requires policy interventions, infrastructure expansion, and teacher digital literacy training. The future of Islamic education in both regions will increasingly blend traditional learning ethics with modern digital affordances, forming culturally grounded digital pedagogy models.

Governance and Post-Colonial Educational Challenges

Indiana's Islamic education system benefits from strong state recognition. The Pesantren Education Law No. 18/2019 legitimizes pesantren as part of the national education system, granting institutional autonomy, financial support, and curriculum flexibility rooted in Islamic traditions (Kosim et al., 2023). This legislative milestone signals a state-community partnership model that respects religious heritage while aligning with national development agendas.

In contrast, African Islamic schools continue to navigate post-colonial dualism between Western-modeled secular education systems and traditional Islamic learning structures. Colonial legacies in Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya, and Senegal fostered "knowledge bifurcation" where Islamic institutions were marginalized from state funding and policy frameworks (Mignolo, 2018). This structural disparity contributes to inequality in infrastructure, teacher certification, and curriculum modernization.

Recent reforms attempt reconciliation through Islamic university accreditation initiatives in Morocco, Tunisian Islamic curriculum reforms, and integration programs in Kenya and Ghana. Yet, widespread recognition and equitable resource distribution remain ongoing challenges.

African Islamic institutions increasingly pursue epistemic decolonization, asserting indigenous Islamic knowledge identities against Western epistemological dominance. Meanwhile, Indonesia exemplifies institutionalized tradition, showcasing how religious education can be formally integrated without erasing cultural or theological identity.

Comparative Summary

Table 3. Comparative Summary of Socio-Cultural Dimensions in Islamic Education: Indonesia and Africa (2020-2025)

Aspect	Indonesia	Africa
Institutional Base	<i>Pesantren, Madrasah</i>	Madrasah, Qur'anic Schools
Cultural Model	<i>Islam Nusantara</i>	Ubuntu pedagogy
Gender Equity	Women leadership rising	Uneven access, gradual progress
Digital Learning	Hybrid, policy-supported	Mobile-based, adaptive, community-driven
Governance	Strong national policy support	Post-colonial dualism persists

Source: Thematic synthesis of authors from 20 articles reviewed (2020-2025)

Both regions reflect resilience through religious learning. Indonesia preserves identity via structured state-supported frameworks, while Africa rebuilds through anti-colonial epistemic agency and grassroots innovation. Islamic education in Indonesia and Africa functions as a multidimensional socio-cultural institution where faith, identity, and community life converge. Indonesian Islamic education demonstrates adaptive religiosity, merging tradition with modernization through *Islam Nusantara*, gender mainstreaming, and digital pedagogy. African Islamic institutions exhibit epistemic resistance and cultural resilience, preserving Islamic authenticity amidst post-colonial institutional constraints. These findings reinforce Robertson's glocalization thesis and Mignolo's (2018) decolonial theory. Islamic education in both regions operates as:

1. A guardian of cultural and religious identity
2. A medium of social ethics and communal solidarity
3. A site of intellectual and spiritual empowerment
4. A field of negotiation between tradition and modernity
5. An arena for reclaiming epistemic sovereignty

In doing so, it bridges heritage and contemporary needs while fostering transformative, socially engaged Muslim citizenship.

Conclusion

Islamic education in Indonesia and Africa has served both as a guardian of civilization's memory and as a catalyst for socio-cultural transformation, providing intellectual refuge, moral formation, and spiritual identity preservation. It has shown resilience by adapting to modern challenges—manifested in Indonesia's blend of tradition and modernization within *Islam Nusantara* and Africa's cultural resilience through reviving indigenous pedagogies like Ubuntu to resist colonial legacies. Emerging dimensions such as gender inclusion, digital adaptation, and governance negotiations reinforce Islamic education's role as a bridge between heritage and contemporary realities, faith and culture, and individuals and communities. To sustain this transformative path, future research should explore culturally embedded pedagogies, promote gender-inclusive leadership, develop equitable digital access, and encourage South-South collaboration between Indonesia and Africa. Additionally, advancing an Islamic decolonial curriculum framework will be crucial for strengthening postcolonial education, ensuring that Islamic education remains authentic yet progressive in shaping socially responsible Muslim societies globally.

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